



The Antiquities of the Jews: Volume I (Books I - X) (Volume 1)

Flavius Josephus

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Antiquities of the Jews, also Judean Antiquities is a twenty-volume historiographical work composed by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in the thirteenth year of the reign of Roman emperor Flavius Domitian which was around AD 93 or 94. This work, along with Josephus's other major work, The Jewish War (De Bello Iudaico), provides valuable background material to historians wishing to understand 1st-century AD Judaism and the early Christian period.[In the preface of Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus provides his motivation for composing such a large work. He writes: Now I have undertaken the present work, as thinking it will appear to all the Greeks worthy of their study; for it will contain all our antiquities, and the constitution of our government, as interpreted out of the Hebrew Scriptures Josephan scholar, Louis Feldman, highlights several of the misconceptions about the Jewish people that were being circulated in Josephus' time. In particular, the Jews were thought to lack great historical figures and a credible history of their people. They were also accused of harboring hostility toward non-Jews, and were thought to be generally lacking in loyalty, respect for authority, and charity. With these harsh accusations against the Jews fluttering about the Roman empire, Josephus, formerly Joseph ben Matthias, set out to provide a Hellenized version of the Jewish history. Such a work is often called an "apologia," as it pleads the case of a group of people or set of beliefs to a larger audience. In order to accomplish this goal, Josephus omitted certain accounts in the Jewish narrative and even added a Hellenistic "glaze" to his work. For example, the "Song of the Sea" sung by Moses and the people of Israel after their deliverance at the Red Sea is completely omitted in Josephus' text. He does mention, however, that Moses composed a song to God in hexameter—a rather unusual (and Greek) metrical scheme for an ancient Hebrew. Josephus also writes that Abraham taught science to the Egyptians, who in turn taught the Greeks, and that Moses set up a senatorial priestly aristocracy, which like Rome resisted monarchy. Thus, in an attempt to make the Jewish history more palatable to his Greco-Roman audience, the great figures of the biblical stories are presented as ideal philosopher-leaders.

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