

Did Josephus write 4 Maccabees? Reconstructing the authorship debate through editions of the text

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Abstract: In today's scholarship, no one would question the fact that the author of 4 Maccabees is unknown. However, for many centuries the work was believed to have been written by Flavius Josephus. This article investigates when exactly in the long reception history of this text, and for what reasons, it was first suggested that the Jewish historian could not be its author. Furthermore, it explores how long it took for this view to become the consensus among scholars and other readers of Josephus. By analysing paratexts of editions of 4 Maccabees and other sources from the 16th to the 20th century, this article establishes that Hugo Grotius was most likely the first to argue in print against the text's authenticity, which makes it probable that 4 Maccabees was first considered spurious in the milieu of Protestant late humanism. Moreover, this article also shows that despite this relatively early scepticism, it took until the beginning of the 20th century for the idea of unknown authorship to be generally accepted by all editors and translators of Josephus.

1 Introduction

In 1932, the German-Jewish novelist Lion Feuchtwanger (1884–1958) published what would be the first of a series of three novels based on the life of Flavius Josephus. At the beginning of this first volume, Feuchtwanger describes how Josephus, newly arrived in Rome, sets out to become a famous writer. Parallels with Feuchtwanger's own beginnings as an ambitious young author in early 20th century Munich are difficult to overlook.¹

Highly motivated, Feuchtwanger's protagonist thus begins putting pen to paper, even though his knowledge of Latin and Greek is shaky:

This article is based on a paper given at an event in May 2024 to mark the retirement of Prof. Dr. Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich. It is, therefore, dedicated to her and her contribution to Classics in Bern and beyond. All translations from the Latin in this article are my own. I am grateful to the anonymous reader of *Judaica* and to Dr. Sam Kennerley for their valuable comments.

¹ For a modern introduction to Feuchtwanger's Josephus trilogy and the many autobiographical elements in it, see Köpke, 'Lion Feuchtwangers Josephus'.

[Josephus] prepared with infinite care his 'History of the Maccabees'. He was not ashamed to con like a schoolboy Latin and Greek grammar.²

A few months later, Josephus' debut was finished and Feuchtwanger has him present it to Rome's literary scene:

He read his book to a select circle of young literary men. They congratulated him. He sent the manuscript to the publisher Claudius Reginus. Reginus declared at once that he would undertake its publication.³

Josephus' *History of the Maccabees*, which in Feuchtwanger's novel causes such excitement in Rome's intellectual circles, is based on 4 Maccabees, a text that for many centuries had been ascribed to the Jewish historian.⁴ However, it is now generally recognised – and indeed had already been widely accepted in Feuchtwanger's day – that 4 Maccabees is not a genuine work of Josephus, but rather erroneously attributed to him.

At the end of this article, I will return to the question of why Feuchtwanger attributed this text to Josephus. This is not least because answering this question demands that I resolve a few others first. To start with, when, in the long history of the transmission and reception of the works of Josephus, did it first become clear that 4 Maccabees could not have been written by the Jewish historian? Second, what were the arguments that changed scholars' minds regarding the authorship of this text? Next, in which period and in which intellectual milieu were these arguments first articulated? And finally, what was the effect of this new conviction on the many editions and translations of Josephus that were appearing all over Europe?

As 4 Maccabees has been edited, read and discussed over many centuries, it is impossible to exhaustively cover the entire history of its scholarly reception within the confines of a short article. I shall thus contain myself to the debate about its authorship in the paratexts of printed Greek, Latin, and select vernacular editions of Josephus from the Renaissance to the early 20th century. As supporting evidence, I will also draw on some other printed materials, especially literary histories from the 17th and 18th century. By contrast, manuscript sources, particularly the unpublished correspondence of early modern scholars, cannot yet be analysed systematically due to the restraints imposed by patchy cataloguing. The intention of this brief contribution is therefore to establish the general timeline and most important phases of the long debate about Josephus' authorship of 4 Maccabees, and so to stimulate further archival research into its results.

² English translation quoted from Feuchtwanger, *Josephus: A Historical Romance*, 84. Lion Feuchtwanger, *Der jüdische Krieg. Roman*, 87: '[Josephus] bereitete mit unendlicher Gewissenhaftigkeit seine "Geschichte der Makkabäer" vor. Verschmähte es nicht, wie ein Schuljunge lateinische und griechische Grammatik zu treiben.'

³ Feuchtwanger, *Josephus: A Historical Romance*, 87. Feuchtwanger, *Der jüdische Krieg. Roman*, 81: 'Er las sein Makkabäerbuch einem ausgesuchten Kreis junger Literaten vor. Man beglückwünschte ihn. Er schickte es dem Verleger Claudius Regin. Der erklärte sogleich, er übernehme die Veröffentlichung.'

⁴ On Feuchtwanger's fictionalised version of 4 Maccabees, see section 7 of this article.

2 The Greek and Latin transmission of 4 Maccabees

To start then with the text of 4 Maccabees itself. 4 Maccabees tells the story of several Jewish individuals, most prominently the priest Eleazar and a Jewish mother alongside her seven sons, who refused to give up their Jewish customs and beliefs when pressured to do so by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV (c. 215–164 BCE). As a consequence of their refusal, they were, one after the other, brutally tortured to death.⁵

The story of 4 Maccabees is based on a short episode from 2 Maccabees (2 Macc: 6–7), a deuterocanonical book of the Bible that tells of the Jewish resistance against Seleucid rulers in greater breadth. 4 Maccabees takes a brief section from its *Vorlage* and embellishes it with much rhetorical and philosophical flourish: it opens with the stoically-inspired thesis that reason always wins over the body's emotions. This proposition is then proven by a detailed and gory account of the ordeal suffered by these Jewish martyrs who would not let physical pain break their pious determination.⁶

4 Maccabees was written in sophisticated Greek, most likely in the first or early second century CE. The author is unknown, but it becomes evident from the work's content and style that he (or, rather less likely, she) must have been educated in one of the centres of Hellenistic Jewish culture, most likely Antioch.⁷ The Greek text of 4 Maccabees has come down to us in more than seventy Septuagint manuscripts, some of them, such as the *Codex Sinaiticus*, belonging to the earliest Bible manuscripts that are still extant.⁸ In addition to this, the text frequently features in Greek *menologia*, that is collections of saints' lives arranged according to their feast days.⁹ However, the text is very rarely transmitted among Greek manuscripts of Josephus, and when it is, these manuscripts are of a relatively late date.¹⁰

Like most of the genuine writings of Josephus, 4 Maccabees was translated into Latin at some point in Late Antiquity. This Latin version came to be known as the *Passio Sanctorum Maccabaeorum*, a relatively free and clearly Christianising paraphrase of the Greek original.¹¹ The *Passio* survives in 39 manuscripts, but is not included in any of the manuscripts which contain the highly popular Latin translations of Josephus.¹²

⁵ The literature on 4 Maccabees is of course vast. For modern introductions, see e.g. DeSilva, *4 Maccabees*; Salvesen, 'Deuterocanonical and Apocryphal Books,' 394; Hiebert, 'Makkabaion IV / Das vierte Buch der Makkabäer'.

⁶ On the rhetorical and philosophical character of 4 Maccabees, see e.g. DeSilva, *4 Maccabees*, XXIII; Klauck, 'Makkabaion IV: Das Vierte Buch der Makkabäer,' 1448; Witulski, *Das vierte Makkabäerbuch*.

⁷ For a profile of the author and potential dates, see e.g. Breitenstein, *Beobachtungen zu Sprache, Stil und Gedankengut des Vierten Makkabäerbuchs*, esp. 174; DeSilva, *4 Maccabees*, XI–XVII.

⁸ For a very thorough analysis of the transmission of 4 Maccabees in Greek, Latin, Syriac and several other ancient languages, see Hiebert et al., '4 Maccabees'.

⁹ Hiebert et al., '4 Maccabees,' 189.

¹⁰ Freudenthal, *Die Flavius Josephus beigelegte Schrift*, 120. Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition*, 19; 24 only lists two Greek Josephus codices as containing 4 Maccabees: Lipsiensis gr. 37 (11th century) and Laurentianus 69.20 (14th century).

¹¹ For an edition of the Latin version of 4 Maccabees, see Dörrie, *Passio SS. Maccabaeorum*.

¹² For a list of manuscripts containing the *passio*, see Dörrie, *Passio SS. Maccabaeorum*, 2f. For a list of all known manuscripts of the Latin Josephus, see Lukas, *Josephus Latinus*, 118–28.

Unlike 1 and 2 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees was never considered a canonical book by any Christian Church. Nevertheless, it became a part of many Greek Bible manuscripts, most commonly under the title *Μακκαβαίων δ'* ('4th Book of Maccabees').¹³ Church Fathers in both East and West also held the work in high regard, and it is with these early Christian authors that we first observe the attribution of the text to Josephus. The earliest known instance is a passage of Eusebius' *Church History* (*Hist. eccl.* 3.10.6), where this Church Father not only names Josephus as the author of 4 Maccabees, but also gives its alternative title as *Περὶ αὐτοκράτορος λογισμοῦ* ('On the Rule of Reason').¹⁴

Following Eusebius, Jerome also listed 4 Maccabees as one of Josephus' works in his *De viris illustribus* (*De vir. ill.* 13). Here he gives the same Greek title as Eusebius, adding that this work is written in a particularly elegant style (*valde elegans*).¹⁵ Coming from one of the most important authorities of the Western Church, this reference became extremely influential for the Latin tradition of the text. From this point onwards, for many centuries there could be no doubt that Josephus was indeed the author of 4 Maccabees.

3 Erasmus and the attribution of 4 Maccabees to Josephus in early prints

As with the genuine works of Josephus, 4 Maccabees was first printed in its late antique Latin version several years before the Greek original. It first appeared in Cologne in 1517 or 1518, as part of a collection of several texts on the Maccabean martyrs.¹⁶ This collection had been commissioned by Helias Marcaeus (1460s–1527), the rector and confessor of a convent of Benedictine nuns where the relicts of the Maccabean martyrs were preserved. Marcaeus gave an enormous boost to the cult of the Maccabean martyrs in Cologne.¹⁷

The editor of the Latin version of 4 Maccabees was none other than Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1469–1536) who, in his dedication to Marcaeus, stated that he had had no Greek manuscripts at hand when preparing the text for publication.¹⁸ This might be the reason why he took many liberties in his emendation, essentially producing a paraphrase of a paraphrase.¹⁹ Interestingly, at no point did Erasmus question the fact that Josephus

¹³ For the various titles given in the manuscripts, see Hiebert et al., '4 Maccabees,' 187.

¹⁴ A further attribution of 4 Maccabees to Josephus is found in the fragments of the Church historian Philostorgius (Phot. Philost. 1.1). Probably influenced by the statements of these ecclesiastical writers, Greek Bible manuscripts sometimes also give Josephus as the author, see Hiebert et al., '4 Maccabees,' 187.

¹⁵ Jerome also names Josephus as the author of 4 Maccabees in *adv. Pelag.* 2.6: *Josephus Machabaeorum scriptor historiae* ('Josephus, the author of the *History of the Maccabees*').

¹⁶ Erasmus, *De imperatrice ratione*.

¹⁷ On Marcaeus, see Molitor, 'Elias Marcaeus'. On his importance for the veneration of the Maccabean martyrs in Cologne, see Collins, 'The Renaissance of the Maccabees'.

¹⁸ Erasmus, *De imperatrice ratione*, f. [A1v] = Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, no. 842, 4–6: *Nunc quum Graecus codex ad manum non erat, e Latinis Graeca coniectans mutavi nonnulla, sed non admodum multa*. ('As I did not have a Greek codex at hand, I emended some things, but not much, by guessing the Greek from the Latin'). On this edition, see also Collins, 'The Renaissance of the Maccabees,' esp. 228–34.

¹⁹ For Erasmus' changes and additions, see Dörrie, *Passio SS. Maccabaeorum*, 5f.

was the author of this text. On the contrary, he saw the work's rhetorical style as proof for Josephus' own boasts about his excellent education:

*Non falso de se praedicat Josephus sese in Graecanici sermonis facultate usque ad eloquentiae miraculum processisse, quod sane vel ex hoc libello perspicuum erat.*²⁰

Not without reason Josephus states of himself that, in his command of the Greek language, he had reached a miraculous level of eloquence, which becomes clear even from this small book.

Erasmus often had a good nose for pseudepigraphic writings.²¹ In the case of 4 Maccabees, however, the Dutch humanist showed no such scepticism, presumably because he saw no reason to distrust the information from Jerome, whose judgment regarding the elegant style of the work he also quotes in his preface.²² A further reason why Erasmus did not detect any stylistic oddities might be the above mentioned fact that he had no Greek manuscript at hand when editing the text.

However, in 1526 the original Greek was printed for the first time in a Strasbourg edition of the Septuagint, and later reprinted in the *editio princeps* of the Greek Josephus (1544).²³ Nonetheless, the new availability in print of both the Latin and the Greek version of 4 Maccabees did not at first lead to any doubts about Josephus' authorship. Rather ironically, it achieved the opposite: soon after the Latin and the Greek version of this text had been published, humanist editors of the works of Josephus started incorporating them into their editions. As a result, the transmission of 4 Maccabees and of the genuine works of Josephus – which, as shown above, had been largely independent of one another throughout the whole of antiquity and the Middle Ages – now became closely tied together for the first time. From the 16th to the late 19th century, 4 Maccabees would indeed remain an integral part of almost all editions of Josephus, whether in Greek²⁴, Latin²⁵ or in the vernacular languages.²⁶

²⁰ Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, no. 842, 6–8. Erasmus is probably thinking of *AJ* 20.263. It is also possible that he had the following statement of Jerome in mind (*Hier. Ep.* 70.3): *Iosephus [...] tanta saecularium profert testimonia, ut mihi miraculum subeat, quomodo uir Hebraeus et ab infantia sacris litteris eruditus cunctam Graecorum bibliothecam euoluerit.* ('Josephus [...] gives so many quotes from secular authors that it seems a miracle to me how a Jew, trained in Scripture from early childhood on, could also read through a whole library of Greek literature').

²¹ Probably most famously, Erasmus was the first to argue in print that the letters between Seneca and Paul are a forgery, see Hine, 'Seneca and Paul,' 32. On Erasmus' hunt for pseudepigrapha in the letters of Jerome, see Pabel, *Herculean Labours*, 153–62.

²² Allen, *Opus epistolarum*, no. 842, 10–12: *Proinde diuus Hieronymus hoc opusculum peculiari elogio valde elegans [...] vocat.* ('This is why blessed Jerome calls this little work [...] with particular praise "very elegant"').

²³ Köpfel, *Divinae scripturae veteris novaeque omnia*; Froben, *Iosephi opera omnia*, 955–67.

²⁴ On early reprints of the Greek text of 4 Maccabees from the Strasbourg Septuagint, see Freudenthal, *Die dem Flavius Josephus beigelegte Schrift*, 129.

²⁵ Erasmus' Latin version of 4 Maccabees was first added to the works of Josephus in Cervicornus, *Flavii Iosephi Hebraei opera*, 541–54.

²⁶ The first vernacular edition of Josephus to contain 4 Maccabees was the German translation by Caspar Hedio. Hedio, *Iosephuß Teutsch*, f. 180r–190r.

4 First doubts about Josephus' authorship in the early 17th century

Yet this is not to say that 4 Maccabees was also considered a genuine work of Josephus up until the late 19th century. The first editor of Josephus' works who explicitly expressed doubts about his authorship of this text was the Leipzig theologian Thomas Ittig (1643–1710).²⁷ In the preface to his Greco-Latin edition from 1691 he remarked on 4 Maccabees:

*Superest tractatus de imperio rationis, seu panegyricus in Maccabaeos, si modo is Josephum autorem habeat, quod eruditorum multos negare Gulielmus Cave observavit.*²⁸

It remains to discuss the treatise *On the Rule of Reason*, also known as the panegyric on the Maccabees, if Josephus really is its author, which, as William Cave has observed, many learned men deny.

While not categorically denying that Josephus wrote 4 Maccabees, Ittig was as such reluctant to ascribe the work to Josephus with certainty. As the reason for his hesitation, Ittig referred to the English clergyman and scholar William Cave (1637–1713), who in 1688 had published an influential literary history of ecclesiastical writers.²⁹ In this monumental reference work, Cave had indeed noted that many scholars now thought 4 Maccabees to be spurious. He did however not mention any reasons, nor did he name anyone who had put forward these doubts.³⁰ Who, then, were the *eruditi* mentioned by Ittig and Cave who had questioned Josephus' authorship?

As far as I know, the earliest printed statement to doubt the traditional attribution of 4 Maccabees to Josephus is found in the works of the famous Dutch humanist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). Today best known as a founding father of international law, Grotius was more famous among his contemporaries as a theologian and commentator on the Bible.³¹ In his commentary on Luke (1641), Grotius explained that the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31) could, in rhetorical terms, be categorised as a hypotyposis, that is a particularly vivid description. To give an example of this figure of speech, he writes:

*Talis ὑποτύπωσις [...] est illa de Eleazaro, eius uxore et septem filiis [...] apud Josephum, virum sane disertum quisquis ille fuit: Historiarum enim scriptorem hunc esse non puto.*³²

²⁷ On Ittig, see Lechler, 'Ittig, Thomas'.

²⁸ Ittig, *Flavii Josephi opera*, f. b 3r.

²⁹ On Cave's biography, see Wright, *William Cave (1637–1713)*, 19–75. Ittig and Cave exchanged letters, which, however, unfortunately have been 'misplaced'. Wright, *William Cave (1637–1713)*, 175.

³⁰ Cave, *Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum historia literaria*, 22: *Josephi tamen esse negant ex eruditis quamplurimi* ('the majority of scholars, however, say that it is not by Josephus').

³¹ On Grotius as a Bible commentator, see de Jonge, 'Grotius as an Interpreter of the Bible'; O'Donovan, 'Theological Writings,' 349f.

³² Grotius, *Annotationes in libros Evangeliorum*, 762. Grotius also expresses doubts about Josephus' authorship of 4 Maccabees in his (posthumously published) commentary on 3 Maccabees, see Grotius, *Annotata ad Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 3, 469: *sermo ille de septem fratribus et matre sub Antiocho ad mortem cruciatu, qui Iosephi*

An example for such a hypotyposis is [...] the story of Eleazar, his wife and the seven sons [...] that we find in Josephus – an eloquent man, whoever he was. For I do not believe that he was the historian.

Like Ittig, Grotius also formulated his doubts with a certain caution, but he nevertheless seems convinced that Josephus was not the author of the treatise in question. To explain why the text is transmitted under the name of Josephus, Grotius suggests that another Josephus – a common name in our author's time – had written 4 Maccabees, and that these two distinct but homonymous persons had erroneously melted into one at some stage in literary history.

The fact that Grotius expressed his doubts in a passing remark in his commentary on Luke suggests that he considered it neither particularly spectacular nor controversial. It is as such unlikely that he was the first scholar to express doubts about Josephus' authorship of 4 Maccabees, and was instead simply the first to air these doubts in a printed work that would be very widely read in the following centuries. Indeed, what is more significant than chronological precedence is that this earliest known statement of doubt was made by a representative of Protestant late-humanist philology.

Trained at the University of Leiden by Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609) and Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), Grotius had imbibed the historical criticism with which scholars of this generation had questioned the transmission and authorship of both pagan and Christian texts.³³ Besides his comments on Josephus, Grotius' contact with this new critical attitude is discernible in his Bible commentaries, in which he doubted the traditional authorship of several parts of the New Testament.³⁴

Yet despite emerging reservations about Josephus' authorship in the first half of the 17th century, the notion that he had not written 4 Maccabees was still far from becoming the *communis opinio*, even among scholars who had worked closely with the text. Such continued acceptance of the consensus view is best shown in the 1672 Greek edition and new Latin translation of 4 Maccabees by the French Dominican François Combefis (1605–1679).³⁵ In his preface and notes, Combefis repeatedly scolds Erasmus for the liberties he had taken with his paraphrase. He also highlights some historical mistakes that the author of 4 Maccabees had committed, all of which indicate that he had closely analysed the transmission and content of the text.³⁶ Nevertheless, Combefis nowhere

operibus annecti solet ('this sermon, which is often attached to the works of Josephus, about the seven brothers and their mother who were all tortured to death under Antiochus').

³³ van Miert, *The Emancipation of Biblical Philology*, 40–43.

³⁴ de Jonge, 'Grotius as an Interpreter of the Bible,' 64; O'Donovan, 'Theological Writings,' 350.

³⁵ Combefis, *auctuarium novissimum*, vol. 1, 1–25.

³⁶ For example, 4 Macc 3:20 calls Seleucus IV 'Nicanor' when he was in fact called 'Philopator'; see on this DeSilva, 4 Maccabees, 112. On this blunder, Combefis comments: *Malim antiquum librarii errorem existimare quam Iosephi festinationem. [...] Mirum certe sic vicinum auctorem ita in his caecutisse; nec desunt alia quibus aut non attigit Iosephus Scripturae sensum aut eius festinando non meminit* ('I'd prefer to think that this is a mistake by a scribe rather than Josephus' carelessness. [...] It is certainly curious that an author who was so close to the events was so blind in these things; there are also other cases where Josephus did not quite catch the sense of the Holy Scripture or where he did not remember it in his haste.'), see Combefis, *auctuarium*

expresses doubt about the authorship of this work, indeed without hesitation referred to it as ‘this excellent little work by Josephus’ (*hanc egregiam Iosephi lucubrationem*).³⁷ In a similar vein, the French Conseiller d’État and *homme de lettres* Robert Arnauld d’Andilly (1589–1674) criticised Erasmus’ version of 4 Maccabees in his influential 1667–8 French translation of Josephus, but at no point questioned Josephus’ authorship of this work.³⁸

However, towards the end of the 17th century, the dissenting voices were indeed becoming louder, especially – even if not exclusively – among Protestant scholars. John Lowth (1660–1732), an English clergyman and Bible commentator, believed that the last paragraphs of 4 Maccabees were not by Josephus but by some ‘little rhetorician or sophist’.³⁹ Thomas Gale (1635–1702), the Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge, thought that the whole work clearly differed from the rest of Josephus’ oeuvre in diction and style, and that it sometimes factually contradicted his other writings.⁴⁰ The French Benedictine and Bible commentator Antoine Augustin Calmet (1672–1757) questioned Josephus’ authorship with very similar arguments,⁴¹ while the great German bibliographer Johann Albert Fabricius (1668–1736) quoted the above mentioned statement by Hugo Grotius in his entry on Josephus.⁴² It is not surprising therefore that both John Hudson (1662–1719) and Sigebert Haverkamp (1684–1742), the editors of the two Greco-Latin editions of the 18th century, also declared that they thought the work to be spurious.⁴³ But like Ittig before them, they still retained the text of 4 Maccabees in their editions of Josephus despite their reservations about its attribution to him.

novissimum, vol. 1, 22.

³⁷ Combefis, *auctuarium novissimum*, vol. 1, 21.

³⁸ Arnauld, *Histoire de la Guerre des Juifs*, f. ã IIIr–v.

³⁹ *Quae sequuntur Iosephi non esse, sed rhetoruli alicuius aut sophistae existimat [...]* Lowthius. The statement is printed in Haverkamp, *Flavii Iosephi opera omnia*, vol. 2, 519. That the end of 4 Maccabees contained some spurious material had also been pointed out by the Oxford scholar John Lloyd (1558?–1603) who had collated the Strasbourg text against a manuscript from New College, Oxford, and then published a new edition with translation, see Lloyd, *Flavii Iosephi de Maccabaeis*, [41f.]: *Quod autem in fine veteris translationis [sic] habetur [...] tantum abest ut Iosephi sit, ut nihil fingi potuerit aut alienius aut repugnantius* (‘what we find at the end of the old translation [...] is so far from being written by Josephus that one could not think of anything more incongruous or more contradictory’).

⁴⁰ Gale’s opinion is printed in the 2nd edition of Cave’s literary history, see Cave, *Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum historia literaria*. Editio novissima, 35: *Nec dictio nec phrasis Iosephi est; im<m>o ei in quibusdam auctor contradicit. [...] Inde drama illud scripsisse aliquem Judaeo-Christianum censet idem vir summus*. (‘Neither diction nor style belong to Josephus; in fact, the author contradicts him in certain passages. [...] For this reason, the same learned man [i.e. Gale] thinks that this drama was written by some Judeo-Christian author’).

⁴¹ Calmet, *Commentaire littéral*, 469f.

⁴² Fabricius, *Bibliotheca Graeca*, vol. 4, 241.

⁴³ Anthony Hall (1679–1723), who posthumously published John Hudson’s Josephus edition, writes in the preface: *De Iosepho sic fere censuit Hudsonius: [...] non esse auctorem Maccabaici* (‘Hudson held roughly the following opinions about Josephus: [...] that he was not the author of *The History of the Maccabees*’), Hudson, *Flavii Iosephi opera omnia*, vol. 1, b2r. Sigebert Haverkamp does not declare 4 Maccabees spurious in his own words, but he reprints both Hall’s preface with Hudson’s statement and the critical entry in Fabricius’ *Bibliotheca Graeca*, see Haverkamp, *Flavii Iosephi opera omnia*, vol. 2, f. I*2r; vol. 2, 63.

5 William Whiston and the opinion of the ‘truly learned’ (late 17th and 18th century)

The case was different with William Whiston (1667–1752), author of an English translation of the Jewish historian’s works that was tellingly entitled *The Genuine Works of Josephus*. As the first editor of Josephus since the early 16th century, Whiston refrained from publishing 4 Maccabees with the rest of Josephus’ works.

Whiston was a peculiar character in the Age of Science. A gifted mathematician, he was Isaac Newton’s successor as Professor of Mathematics at Trinity College, Cambridge. However, because of his open anti-Trinitarianism, he was forced to resign his chair in 1710, and from then on earned his living as an independent scholar.⁴⁴ His last and most enduring work was his new English translation of Josephus, first printed in London in 1737. It was an enormous success, becoming the standard translation of Josephus for several centuries in the English-speaking world and earning a place beside the Bible in many pious households.⁴⁵

In the introduction to Whiston’s translation we find, for the first time, an extensive discussion about the authenticity of 4 Maccabees by an editor of Josephus. Whiston began justifying his exclusion of this work as follows:

I have omitted here what is in the other Editions of Josephus; I mean the Discourse about the Maccabees. [...] This has been sometimes inserted into the Greek Bibles; and is commended by Eusebius, and Jerom themselves, as an elegant performance; and that as the genuine work of our Josephus also. It seems to me not to deserve any such character: nor can it, I think, with the least probability be ascribed to our Josephus; unless as a Declamation when he was a schoolboy.⁴⁶

Whiston then proceeds to give five major reasons why he considered 4 Maccabees to be spurious. First, the work seemed to him to be ‘juvenile’ and ‘entirely unworthy of Josephus’. Second, he noted that this text is ‘no where cited or referred to in Josephus’ other works’. Third, he drew attention to the fact that the work was based on the Hellenistic Jewish historian Jason of Cyrene or on 2 Maccabees, both of which Josephus evidently did not use. Fourth, he highlighted that there are several discrepancies between 4 Maccabees on one hand and the Bible and Josephus’ genuine works on the other. Finally, he argued that ‘none of the truly learned, that I now find, do believe it to be genuine’.⁴⁷ To explain how this text found its way into the Josephan corpus, Whiston

⁴⁴ On Whiston’s biography, see Farrell, *William Whiston*; Force, *William Whiston*.

⁴⁵ Bentwich, *Josephus*, 254. Schreckenberg lists over 130 reprints of Whiston’s translation, see Schreckenberg, *Bibliographie zu Flavius Josephus*, 43f. On Whiston as a translator of Josephus, see Hata, ‘Robert Traill’; Feingold, ‘A Rake’s Progress’; Hata, ‘A Note on English Translations of Josephus’.

⁴⁶ Whiston, *The Genuine Works of Josephus*, [1022].

⁴⁷ Whiston, *The Genuine Works of Josephus*, [1022].

explicitly referred to Grotius' hypothesis that someone named Josephus might have authored 4 Maccabees, but who was not, however, the famous historian.⁴⁸

As noted earlier, Whiston's one-page note on 4 Maccabees was the first and so the longest discussion of the authenticity of this work in any paratext of a Josephus edition. Over the course of the following centuries, the arguments against Josephan authorship it contained would be continuously refined, but in essence they did not change a great deal. Despite the comparative length of Whiston's explanation, he only briefly enumerated the various arguments against Josephan authorship rather than expanding on them. This suggests that he presumed that these points were generally known to, and largely accepted by, his contemporary scholars. He was, therefore, not so much trying to present a radically new view on 4 Maccabees. Rather, he was justifying his editorial decision to the readership of his English translation which, it can be presumed, was generally less familiar with the scholarly discussion concerning 4 Maccabees and would have been disappointed not to find this work in a new translation of Josephus.

Somewhat surprisingly, when it came to the question of the authenticity of the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum*, Whiston took a very different attitude from the one he had taken towards 4 Maccabees. Although one might have expected him to have applied a comparable philological criticism to this famous passage, Whiston considered this highly-debated mention of Jesus in book 18 of the *Antiquities* as authentic beyond any doubt. In fact, he went so far as to claim that Josephus himself had become an Ebionite Christian before writing the *Jewish Antiquities*.⁴⁹ Moreover, he also attempted to prove that the Christian work *Περὶ τοῦ παντός*, which was sometimes also attributed to Josephus, was indeed a homily that Josephus had publicly delivered as the 'Catholick Christian bishop of Jerusalem'.⁵⁰

What do we make of Whiston's very different scholarly views in seemingly comparable cases? The likely explanation is that with 4 Maccabees, it did not matter much to the Christian cause whether or not the text was really by Josephus. The edifying message of these Jewish martyrs remains valid regardless of the text's true author. Things were, however, different with the *Testimonium Flavianum*: for a religious radical, as Whiston certainly was, it mattered enormously whether Josephus really had provided an extrabiblical confirmation of Christ's existence or whether it was only a later Christian interpolation. For this reason he employed all his philological and historical acumen to try to prove that this passage in Josephus' *Antiquities* was indeed genuine. In the case of

⁴⁸ Whiston, *The Genuine Works of Josephus*, [1022]: 'Possibly his own name might be Josephus, as Grotius supposes.'

⁴⁹ Whiston expresses this view in an essay entitled 'Dissertation I: The testimonies of Josephus vindicated' which was prepended to his translation, see Whiston, *The Genuine Works of Josephus*, IV–XXX. For a thorough discussion of Whiston's attitude towards the *Testimonium Flavianum*, see Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 143–48.

⁵⁰ This theory is proposed in another prepended essay entitled 'Dissertation VI: To prove that this Fragment or Extract out of an homily concerning Hades, belongs to Josephus, the Jewish historian, and was by him preached or written when he was bishop of Jerusalem, about the end of Trajan', see Whiston, *The Genuine Works of Josephus*, C–CVIII.

4 Maccabees, on the other hand, he was open to his contemporaries' good arguments against Josephus' authorship and – true to his radical nature and his independent thinking – consequentially removed the text from his new translation.

6 Scholarly progress versus old habits (19th – early 20th century)

The modern scholarship on 4 Maccabees began with Jakob Freudenthal (1839–1907), a historian of philosophy and religion at the University of Breslau. In his study *Die Flavius Josephus beigelegte Schrift über die Herrschaft der Vernunft*, published in 1869, Freudenthal thoroughly analysed the transmission, the structure and the content of 4 Maccabees according to the methods of 19th-century historical criticism, therefore laying the foundations for all further philological, historical and theological work on this text.⁵¹ Regarding the question of authorship, he remarked:

to lose only one word on the pseudonymity of this work seems unnecessary, after all that has already been said, and since Hugo Grotius no less has pronounced the judgment of damnation over it.⁵²

For Freudenthal, therefore, the case was essentially closed even before he refined some of the arguments against Josephus' authorship. Benedikt Niese (1849–1910), the scholar who published the critical edition of the Greek Josephus (1887–95) that is the standard to this day, seems to have felt the same way. As the first editor of a Greek or Latin Josephus since the early 16th century, he excluded 4 Maccabees from the Josephan corpus.⁵³ Similarly, when discussing 4 Maccabees in his influential *Antike Kunstprosa* (1898), Eduard Norden (1868–1941) referred to its author as 'Ps.-Iosephos' without ever feeling the need to tackle the authorship question.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, old habits die hard. Samuel Naber (1828–1913), a Dutch philologist who produced the Teubner edition of Josephus that appeared around the same time as Niese's *editio*, decided to retain 4 Maccabees.⁵⁵ While Naber most likely made this editorial decision exclusively for the sake of tradition, a small number of scholars and translators

⁵¹ Freudenthal, *Die Flavius Josephus beigelegte Schrift*. On Freudenthal's life and scholarly output, see *Lexikon der deutsch-jüdischen Autoren*, vol. 7, 437–41. On his relevance for the study of 4 Maccabees, see Breitenstein, *Beobachtungen zu Sprache, Stil und Gedankengut des Vierten Makkabäerbuchs*, 9.

⁵² Freudenthal, *Die Flavius Josephus beigelegte Schrift*, 113: 'Ueber die Pseudonymität unseres Buches auch nur noch ein Wort zu sagen, nach Allem, was hierüber geschrieben ist, seitdem kein Geringerer als Hugo Grotius das Verdammungsurtheil ihr gesprochen hat, scheint überflüssig zu sein.'

⁵³ Nowhere in his preface does Niese comment on his reasons for omitting 4 Maccabees. That he considered it spurious becomes apparent from other publications, see Niese, 'Der jüdische Historiker Josephus,' 236: '[4 Maccabees] kann unter keinen Umständen von Josephus verfasst sein' ('4 Maccabees can under no circumstances have been written by Josephus'). The Greek or Graeco-Latin editions of Oberthür (1782–85), Richter (1826–27), Dindorf (1845–46) and Bekker (1855–56) all still contain 4 Maccabees.

⁵⁴ Norden, *Kunstprosa*, 416–20.

⁵⁵ Naber does not explicitly say that he considers the work spurious but he is so critical of its style and content that it must be presumed; cf. what he states in the preface (vol. 6, III): *sequitur ineptum opusculum de Maccabeis [...]; sed pauci credo totum libellum perlegent, in quo ne mica quidem salis inest*. ('What follows is the silly little

in the late 19th century continued to wonder whether the work was indeed spurious. Heinrich Clementz (1859–1946), a physician and author of a highly popular German translation of Josephus, wrote in the preface to his new rendition of 4 Maccabees (first published in 1901):

In a clever dissertation, Freudenthal has given us the almost complete proof that Josephus cannot have been the author of this treatise. I say: almost.⁵⁶

Clementz then goes on to argue, citing a handful of likeminded scholars, that the differences in style and content between 4 Maccabees and other works considered more authentic might be explained by its having been a kind of sermon by Josephus to fellow Jews rather than to a pagan audience.⁵⁷ However, Clementz himself appears to have been aware that this line of argument was tenuous, as he ends his paragraph on the authenticity of 4 Maccabees with the note:

I shall, therefore, leave the question open [...] and add this treatise to the writings of Josephus for the reason that for centuries it had been adorned with his name and that it is contained in most editions of his works.⁵⁸

This statement is emblematic for the delaying effect of tradition in debates about the authorship of ancient texts. Once a work – be it through the manuscript tradition, an ancient authority, or both – has been attributed to an author, it takes a long time even for the best arguments to break this connection. In our case, although a string of cogent philological reasons against Josephus' authorship had been put forward by the end of the 17th century, two hundred years later some scholars and translators clung to the slim possibility that it might in fact be one of Josephus' works, based, as Clementz' example shows, not so much on counterarguments, but on the sheer power of tradition.

work on the Maccabees [...]; but I believe few will read this little book in its entirety, which contains not even a trace of whit.') Schreckenberg, *Bibliographie zu Flavius Josephus*, 115 comments on Naber's editorial decision: 'Die Aufnahme des 4. Makkabaerbuches [...] ist ein Rückschritt gegenüber Niese, der erstmalig dieses Stück Pseudo-Josephus aus den *opera Josephi* eliminierte.' ('Including 4 Maccabees [...] is a step backwards from Niese who first eliminated this bit of Pseudo-Josephus from the *opera Josephi*').

⁵⁶ Clementz, *Des Flavius Josephus kleinere Schriften*, 207: 'Freudenthal [hat] in einer geistreichen Untersuchung den fast völligen Nachweis erbracht, dass Josephus der Verfasser der Abhandlung nicht sein könne. Ich sage: fast.'

⁵⁷ Clementz particularly refers to Heinrich Paret who in his own German translation of Josephus from 1855–56 offers a comparatively long defence of the work's authenticity and, among other things, states: Paret, *Des Flavius Josephus Werke*, vol. 1, 27f.: 'So ist es sehr wohl möglich, dass wir in dieser Arbeit etwa eine Jugendarbeit des Josephus vor uns haben, und ihn, wie sonst nur zu Griechen und Römern, hier auch einmal im Kreise der Juden selbst auf eine mehr esoterische Weise reden hören.' ('It is very well possible that with this work [i.e. 4 Maccabees] we have before us a youth work of Josephus and that we hear him, who usually only speaks to Greeks and Romans, for once speaking to fellow Jews in a more esoteric way').

⁵⁸ Clementz, *Des Flavius Josephus kleinere Schriften*, 207: 'Ich will also die Frage [...] offen lassen und die Abhandlung schon um dessentwillen den Schriften des Josephus anreihen, weil sie Jahrhunderte hindurch mit seinem klangvollen Namen geziert war und in den meisten Textausgaben seiner Werke enthalten ist.'

7 Lion Feuchtwanger's novelistic approach to the debate

With the state of the scholarly debate at the beginning of the 20th century in mind, we can now return to Lion Feuchtwanger and the question why he, too, made Josephus the author of 4 Maccabees. Given his thorough knowledge of Josephus, Feuchtwanger was almost certainly aware that most scholars rejected this view. His familiarity with Josephan scholarship is not only apparent in his trilogy, but also in his private library which contained many works by and on this author.⁵⁹

Towards the end of the first volume of Feuchtwanger's trilogy, his protagonist has moved to Alexandria where he is courting a young Egyptian woman named Dorion. However, she is initially unimpressed by her suitor and his writing. Feuchtwanger describes an encounter between them in the following way:

Dorion puckered her lips, smiled, then burst into laughter, her high, shrill, malicious laughter. From all that she had heard of Hebrew books, she said, she had little use for them [...]. She had asked someone to read a passage from his book on the Maccabees to her. She was sorry, but it seemed to her empty, sounding phrases.⁶⁰

Josephus' reaction to this harsh critique is then described as follows:

Josephus himself had a few days before disclaimed his book on the Maccabees quite violently. But now he found her criticism impertinent and silly, and it annoyed him.⁶¹

In Feuchtwanger's novel, we thus find a surprising version of events: Josephus himself denies his authorship of his 'book on the Maccabees'. It is important to note that Feuchtwanger took considerable liberty with the imagined content of this work. While it is undoubtedly inspired by the actual 4 Maccabees, it also deviates from it on several significant points. Most strikingly, the fictionalised version of Josephus' *History of the*

⁵⁹ Feuchtwanger's private library is preserved in the Special Collections of the University of Southern California. Even though we have to presume that Feuchtwanger lost many books in the process of emigration, the collection still contains many important editions and translations of Josephus, from Froben's Greek *editio princeps* (shelfmark FEUCHT DML 206; BM177.J67 1544) to the then state-of-the-art French translation under the direction of Théodore Reinach (FEUCHT DML 206; DS116.J84 1900); he also owned, e.g., *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (VILLA-AURO; DS115.9.J6 T5 1929) by Henry St. John Thackeray, one of the leading Josephus scholars of the early 20th century. On Josephus in Feuchtwanger's library, see also Schneidawind, *Schicksale und ihre Bücher*, 105f.

⁶⁰ Feuchtwanger, *Josephus: A Historical Romance*, 339. Feuchtwanger, *Der jüdische Krieg. Roman*, 300: 'Das Mädchen Dorion krümmte die Lippen, lächelte, lachte laut heraus, ein hohes, schepperndes, bösesartiges Lachen. Was sie von hebräischen Büchern kenne, erklärte sie, damit könne sie wenig anfangen; es sei voll von törichtem Aberglauben. [...] Sie habe sich aus seinem Makkabäerbuch vorlesen lassen. Sie bedaure, es seien leere, tönende Worte.'

⁶¹ Feuchtwanger, *Josephus: A Historical Romance*, 339. Feuchtwanger, *Der jüdische Krieg. Roman*, 300: 'Josef selber hatte in letzter Zeit das Makkabäerbuch nach Kräften verleugnet. Jetzt fand er ihr Urteil dreist und albern, es verdroß ihn.'

Maccabees is presented as containing the deeds of Judas Maccabaeus, who is never mentioned in the actual 4 Maccabees.⁶² Moreover, it is characterised as ‘a novel revival of the heroic epic’, a description hardly befitting the content and style of 4 Maccabees.⁶³

Feuchtwanger took these liberties because he wanted this *History of the Maccabees* to be a symbol of his protagonist’s radical early thinking, a product from a time when he was still a convinced Jewish nationalist and a fierce opponent of Rome. For this reason, the fictionalised version of 4 Maccabees is presented by Feuchtwanger as a kind of Zionist glorification of the Maccabean past.⁶⁴ In the novel, the problematic nature of this work is pointed out by Justus of Tiberias, another Jewish historian and Josephus’ great rival. In a private conversation with Josephus, Justus remarks on the *History of the Maccabees*:

I know [...] that you have written the classical account of our war of freedom; you’re the Jewish Titus Livius. [...]; but when our Avengers of Israel [i.e. a group of Jewish freedom fighters] in Jerusalem read your history of Judas Maccabaeus the blood rushes to their heads and they look around for their swords. Do you consider this desirable?⁶⁵

This critique by Justus of Tiberias eventually has an effect on Feuchtwanger’s protagonist. Over the course of the novel, Josephus undergoes a slow but profound change of mentality. The former Judean freedom fighter gradually becomes a part of the Roman elite and eventually even a close friend of the Caesar Titus. The Jewish nationalist turns cosmopolitan, shifting between two opposing ideological positions between which Feuchtwanger and many of his Jewish contemporaries were also torn in the early 20th century.⁶⁶ The more Feuchtwanger’s Josephus integrates into the internationalist world of Rome, the more his radical debut becomes an embarrassment to the young and ambitious author. It is chiefly for this reason, therefore, that he eventually starts ‘quite violently’ denying the authorship of this work.

Almost in passing, Feuchtwanger, therefore, offers a clever and original aetiology for the confusion surrounding Josephus’ authorship of 4 Maccabees, which implies that both sides of the debate were in some ways correct. In this account, Josephus was indeed the author of 4 Maccabees. But ironically, he also was the first to deny it, and this denial was,

⁶² See e.g. Feuchtwanger, *Josephus: A Historical Romance*, 91f.

⁶³ Feuchtwanger, *Josephus: A Historical Romance*, 87.

⁶⁴ On the intense reception of the Maccabean revolt in the Zionist movement, see e.g. Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, 32f.

⁶⁵ Feuchtwanger, *Josephus: A Historical Romance*, 91f. *Der jüdische Krieg. Roman*, 84f.: ‘Sie haben die klassische Darstellung unserer Freiheitskriege geschrieben, Sie sind der jüdische Titus Livius. [...] Wenn aber unsere “Rächer Israels” in Jerusalem Ihre Geschichte des Juda Makkabi lesen, dann bekommen sie heiße Augen und schauen nach ihren Waffen. Halten Sie das für wünschenswert?’.

⁶⁶ On the concept of cosmopolitanism in Feuchtwanger’s trilogy, see Shoham, ‘Kosmopolitismus und jüdische Nationalität’; Gelbin, ‘Nomadic Cosmopolitanism’.

we are meant to infer, the source from which the confusion regarding his authorship of this text subsequently arose.⁶⁷

8 Conclusion

This article has examined editions and translations of 4 Maccabees in a four-hundred year period from the time of Erasmus to the early 20th century, and has attempted to answer two central questions: (1) when was the attribution of this work to Josephus first called into question, and (2) how long did it take for these arguments to become generally accepted by editors and translators of this text?

It has been shown that Hugo Grotius was, as far as is now known, the first to doubt Josephus' authorship in print, namely in his commentary on the Gospels from 1641. However, as I have argued, this does not necessarily mean that the Dutch humanist was the first to question this attribution. Instead, it is highly likely that this view was held more widely in the *respublica litteraria* of the late 16th and early 17th century, a period in the history of classical and biblical scholarship when many traditional attributions were seriously challenged for the first time.

Ever since the final third of the 17th century, scepticism regarding Josephus' authorship appeared frequently in scholarly publications. The case was somewhat different with vernacular translations, for while some translators acknowledged in their prefaces that leading scholars now rejected Josephus as the author of this text, they were often reluctant to accept such arguments. As the example of Clementz's late-19th century German translation has demonstrated, the reason for this was mainly the unwillingness to give up a traditional attribution that had been widely accepted since the days of Eusebius and Jerome.

The notable exception to this rule was William Whiston, who in his highly-popular English rendition not only argued against Josephan authorship of 4 Maccabees, but also excluded the text from the edition. In doing so, he went further than any other editor and translator of Josephus between the 16th and the late 19th century. It was not until the very end of the 1800s that, influenced by the studies on 4 Maccabees by Jacob Freudenthal and other exponents of 19th-century historical criticism, this text finally began to disappear from new editions and translations of the Jewish historian.

After the beginning of the 20th century, there were no more serious attempts to claim 4 Maccabees as a part of the *opera Josephi*. Quite tellingly, when Clementz's German translation of the smaller works of Josephus was reissued in 2005, his rendition of 4 Maccabees was dropped from the edition.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Later in the novel, Feuchtwanger takes his literary play with the pseudepigrapha among the works of Josephus even one step further: as a counterpart to the *History of the Maccabees*, Feuchtwanger also makes Josephus the author of a *Psalm of the Citizen of the World*, which has no foundation whatsoever in the transmission of Josephus. See Feuchtwanger, *Josephus: A Historical Romance*, 311f.; Feuchtwanger, *Der jüdische Krieg. Roman*, 275f.

⁶⁸ Clementz, *Kleinere Schriften. Neu gesetzte und überarb. Ausgabe*.

Still, the question has never entirely ceased to haunt scholars' minds. In 1992, David Williams revisited the problem with a novel approach, namely from the field of computational stylometry. Applying statistical methods, he compared word frequencies, word patterns, and other stylistic features in samples from the unquestionably authentic works of Josephus with the text of 4 Maccabees.⁶⁹ The result reached by Williams sounds rather definitive: according to his calculations, the possibility that Josephus was the author of 4 Maccabees is one in nine thousand trillion (1:9,000,000,000,000,000,000,000).⁷⁰ If there was any doubt after all the arguments against Josephan authorship proposed by Grotius, Whiston, Freudenthal and others, these odds certainly make another good case to finally put the debate to rest.

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⁶⁹ Williams, *Stylometric Authorship Studies*.

⁷⁰ Williams, *Stylometric Authorship Studies*, 132.

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