PART ONE

Contexts

CHAPTER ONE

A FAMOUS AND UNKNOWN WAR

> Ambition sighed: she found it vain to trust
> The faithless column and the crumbling bust, . . .
> Convinced, she now contracts her vast design,
> And all her triumphs shrink into a Coin.
> A narrow orb each crowded conquest keeps,
> Beneath her palm here sad Judaea weeps.
>
> Alexander Pope, *To Mr. Addison,*
> *Occasioned by his Dialogues on Medals* ll.19–26

Of all the scents, the balsam is the best. The only land to which it has been given is Judaea, where formerly it grew in two gardens. . . . This tree was displayed to the city [of Rome] by the *imperators* Vespasian and Titus. . . . This tree is now enslaved, and pays tribute along with the nation to which it belongs. . . . The Judaeans used to vent their fury on this tree, just as on their own lives. The Romans defended it against them, and battles were fought on behalf of a tree!
Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 12.111–13

A provincial revolt in Roman Judaea and the campaign that suppressed it in A.D. 67–70[1] received unprecedented publicity. The modest achievements of Vespasian and Titus in Judaea came at an unusually dangerous period for the capital. In the domestic turbulence that followed Nero's suicide (June 68), their claim to have conquered a foreign enemy gave them unique *bona fides* as men capable of uniting Rome in peace. Their supporters promoted this

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[1] Although we usually date the revolt from 66 to 73 or 74 (the fall of Masada), for Flavian Rome the war began with the Flavians' arrival (spring 67) and ended with Jerusalem's fall in September 70.

narrative with tireless energy. In the eighteenth century still, Alexander Pope could assume his readers' familiarity with the coins issued to celebrate Jerusalem's defeat: *Iudaea Capta!*

The Flavians and their backers left no stone unused in publicity. But was any of this meant to help people understand what had happened over there? Soon after he arrived in Rome, Pliny's younger contemporary Flavius Josephus began complaining about an inverted fame-to-ignorance ratio: so much fuss, so little truth (*War* 1.1–8). The remaining chapters of this book will explore what lay beneath the fuss: what really happened in the war. In this first chapter we need to understand the fuss itself. It began in Josephus' day and has continued well into modern times.

The outcome of the Judaean-Roman war affected the course of Western history in three quite different ways. Jewish responses were the most complex, because the loss of mother-city and temple required the reshaping of Judaean culture with a vitality that would enable its survival, eventually as *Juda-ism*, through the centuries ahead.[2] In Rome, the Flavians' exploitation of success in Judaea was critical to the establishment of their regime, which laid the foundation for a peaceful succession through the second century. Most consequentially, early Christian groups quickly assimilated Jerusalem's fall into their self-understanding and self-representation. Of these three directions of impact, Jerusalem's destruction was of course felt most keenly by Jews, but they did not celebrate and propagate it. We shall focus here on the two groups that did.

1. FLAVIANS DEFEAT THE EASTERN MENACE! FAME ESTABLISHED

There used to be a monumental arch in Rome's greatest entertainment facility, the Circus Maximus, southwest of the Palatine Hill and Forum. If a ninth-century visitor copied it accurately, it honoured the emperor Titus (ruled A.D. 79–81) in the following terms:

> The Roman Senate and People:
>   for the *Imperator* Titus Caesar Vespasian Augustus, son of the Deified Vespasian,
>   *Pontifex Maximus*, with *tribunicia potestas* for the tenth time, *imperator* for the seventeenth, Consul for the eighth, *pater patriae*, their *princeps*,
>   Because on the advice and counsel of his father, and under his auspices, he subdued the nation of the Judaeans (*gentem Iudaeorum domuit*). The city of Jerusalem, either attacked in futility or left entirely untried by all the leaders, kings, or nations before him, *he* destroyed (*urbem Hierusolymam . . . delevit*).[3]

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[2] On the rabbis and the temple, see Cohn 2012. On Titus, see e.g. *b. Gitt.* 56b.
[3] *CIL* 6.944. As I write, Tommaso Leoni (York University Toronto) is completing a PhD dissertation on this arch. In the meantime see Ciancio Rossetto 2000: 1.108–9.

Every informed person knew that the last lines were nonsense. To speak only of Roman conquerors: Pompey the Great besieged and occupied Jerusalem in 63 B.C. A generation later (37 B.C.) Gaius Sosius, Syria's governor under Marc Antony, repeated the exercise to remove Jerusalem from the Parthian sphere and install King Herod. Both generals received triumphal processions, memorialized on a marble record in the Roman Forum, fragments of which survive.[4] Pompey's abundant coins featured Judaea's submission alongside that of other nations in Syria, and Antony's coins proudly co-opted Sosius' victory.[5] Those were only the *Roman* conquerors. Half a millennium earlier, the neo-Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Jerusalem, and between 586 and 63 B.C. Jerusalem had passed to Persian, Ptolemaic, and Seleucid imperial powers before Rome's. Titus was very far, then, from being Jerusalem's first conqueror. Yet he was still being feted as such in the 90s: "By war he destroyed the fierce tribes of Palestine!" (Silius Italicus 605–606).

Overdone rhetoric was hardly rare when it came to emperors' achievements. A lost arch created for Claudius boasted of his British campaign (A.D. 43): "[H]e first brought the barbarian peoples across the Ocean under the authority [or sway, *indicio*] of the Roman people."[6] Writing just before that triumph, Pomponius Mela professed joy at *finally* being able to describe Britain accurately: "Look: the greatest of emperors is opening up what for so long lay closed, the conqueror of nations that were previously not only ungovernable but indeed *were unknown*!"[7] But Britain's tribes had been clients of Rome for decades before Claudius,[8] and Pomponius' accuracy was not noticeably improved by Claudius' invasion. Then again, Silius Italicus flatters Vespasian as the first to open up "unknown" areas of Britain (597–98), while Tacitus claims that his father-in-law was the first to subdue Britain properly (*Agr.* 10). The model emperor Augustus had set the pace for such exaggerated claims to primacy: "The Pannonian peoples, whom before I was first citizen the army of the Roman had people never approached, were conquered . . ." (*RG* 30).[9]

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[4] In the *fasti triumphales*. See Degrassi 1954: 108 for Pompey's triumph (61 B.C.), 110 for Sosius' (34 B.C.). In Pompey's case time has effaced the wording, but the context makes his record clear. For cautions in using the *fasti* generally, see Beard 2007: 61–80.
[5] See Hendin 2010: 404–5.   [6] Barrett 1991: 12.
[7] 3.49: *quippe tamdiu clausam aperit ecce principum maximus, nec indo-mitarum modo ante se verum ignotarum quoque gentium victor.* Romer (1998: 2–3) proposes a pun on Claudius' name in the participle of *claudo* (*clausam*): "closed."
[8] See Strabo 4.5.3; several decades earlier, recounting relations with Rome after Julius Caesar's British small conquests (55 B.C.), celebrating the wealth that has flowed in trade duties from what is "virtually Roman property."
[9] The Pannonians were an Illyrian (Balkan) tribe, and Illyria had been among Rome's first concerns in its eastward expansion. Although the Pannonii were somewhat inland, south of the Danube in the Sava and Drava river valleys (toward Budapest), the Romans had engaged them militarily from the late second century B.C., and the governor of Macedonia may have encountered them when he fought in the region between 75 and 73 B.C. (see *OCD*[3] "Pannonia").

People cannot remember everything, and Rome's residents were accustomed to giving rhetoric a wide berth. It is not shocking that the Senate of the 70s would invite the populace to imagine Titus' Jerusalem victory as unprecedented. It only hurt if one thought about it.

In the absence of modern-style media, Rome's leaders had three principal means for advertising their achievements:[10] a magnificent procession for the home constituency (senators and people); the construction of public monuments, arches, statues, temples, and public facilities, ostensibly funded from the new wealth generated by the foreign conquest; and an empire-wide distribution of coins. Literary propaganda was also possible, but lengthy historical narratives were not well suited to that task, being open to varied and uncontrollable interpretations and risking mischief on the part of clever authors or audiences.[11] For the simple points that needed making, spectacles of overwhelming impact, along with images and brief statements on stone and coin-metal, were most reliable.[12]

Even before Jerusalem's fall, the Flavians and their supporters began exploiting all three media. Monuments and celebratory coinage they took to with an energy matching that of predecessors who had actually conquered large new territories. Building and minting coins required no evidence from the conquered territory. These were zones of free creativity; the Flavians could craft any imagery that suited them. Only the triumph, in principle, required material from the conquered territory. In the second century B.C. Polybius, a long-time Greek resident of Rome, explained triumphs as occasions on which "the vivid representation of the deeds of the generals, accomplished by their hard labours, is brought to the citizens by way of this spectacle" (Polybius 6.15.8). Consuls who had made conquests in far-off lands demonstrated their achievements by placing before Rome's populace the captured royals, soldiers, weapons, and piles of wealth that were now at their fellow-citizens' disposal. In theory, success justified such display. Mary Beard wryly comments, however: "The triumph was about display and success – the success of display no less than the display of success."[13]

Triumphs in context: foreign conquest versus civil war

In the passage just cited, Polybius was explaining the Republican Senate's power to award triumphs. By the time of this ninth emperor, however,

[10] See Hart 1952; Hölscher 2006; Vasta 2007.
[11] Stover 2012 interprets Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* as a reconfiguration of familiar myth in the service of the new regime. Convincing though the study is, it illustrates the complexity of interpreting literary texts: Stover must argue even for a Vespasianic date. On the perils of interpreting texts under autocracies, see Rudich 1993, 1997.
[12] E.g., Favro 1996, 2005; Galinsky 1996; Wallace-Hadrill 2005: 78–81; Beacham 2005.
[13] Beard 2007: 31.

experience had taught senators that it was in their interest to enable each new autocrat. The formal role senators retained in awarding triumphs took the edge off the perception of autocracy, leaving the senators crumbs of status in a mutually beneficial back-scratch. The august chamber still had to vote the honours, and a curmudgeon or two could get away with grumbling about it *in camera*, as long as the monarch's requirements were met.

As soon as it was clear that Vespasian's forces had defeated those of Vitellius (December 69), and months before the commander would arrive personally in Rome, a Senate wearied by years of civil turmoil eagerly recognized his supremacy by issuing a *Law concerning the Imperium of Vespasian* (*lex de imperio Vespasiani*).[14] This was a series of ostensible "permissions," which amount to *carte blanche*: Whatever the dear leader does, says, thinks, orders, or has done is valid and excellent. One of the few specific privileges granted Vespasian in this document was the right "to extend and move forward the boundaries of the *pomerium*" whenever he should see fit.[15] The *pomerium* was Rome's sacred boundary, the delimited zone creating a *templum* in which auspices – reading omens from the flight of birds – could legitimately be taken.[16] It was marked by small inscribed stones, or *cippi*. Altering it did not affect the city's walls, but given the importance of augury (taking auspices) to Rome's public life, being one of the few men ever permitted to extend the sacred boundary was a huge honour for Vespasian. This right was extended to a conqueror as a local miniature representation of his expansion of Rome's power (*imperium*) abroad through the capture of foreign territory.[17] Triumph and extension of the *pomerium* were thus a natural pair. They had most recently been granted to Claudius for Britain, and the grant to Vespasian cites Claudius as most relevant precedent. That is particularly fitting also because Vespasian had played a pivotal role as legionary commander in Claudius' invasion. Now the protégé was receiving the honour for provincial Judaea's (still-imminent) "conquest."[18]

[14] *CIL* 6.930. For the date see Hellems 1902: 2; Levick 1999: 85–86.

[15] This bronze-tablet inscription, which is missing text at the beginning and may be the second of two parts, was discovered in fourteenth-century Rome. It is published as *CIL* 6.930 (among other places); English translations are in Hellems 1902: 3–6; Sherk 1988 no. 82.

[16] Aulus Gellius 13.14; Platner and Ashby 1929: *s.v.* "Pomerium."

[17] Tacitus is speaking of Claudius when he says that, by ancient custom (though one hardly used before), "to those who expand the *imperium* it is given to extend the limits of the city" (*Ann.* 12.23). Cf. Aulus Gellius in 13.14.3: "[T]hey had the right to enlarge the *pomerium* who had increased the [space of] the Roman people *with land taken from enemies*."

[18] Some scholars have linked the *pomerium* grant to another achievement, apparently because a connection with (already provincial) Judaea would stretch credulity. Levick (1999) is hesitant even to connect *the triumph* with Judaea for that reason ("*Probably* the suppression of the Jewish revolt was the main theme," p. 71, emphasis mine). As justification for the *pomerium* grant, she proposes "Q. Petillius Cerialis' campaigns in Britain" (p. 71) and "[s]uccesses, probably those that continued Claudius' work in Britain" (p. 130). Because Levick agrees with the standard dating of the *lex* to early 70 (pp. 85–86), before those successes, she seems to

Several discovered *cippi* show that Vespasian exercised this privilege in A.D. 75, the same year in which he dedicated the Temple of Peace, also largely in celebration of Judaea (below).[19]

On hearing of Jerusalem's eventual fall to Titus (September A.D. 70), the Senate went farther and authorized commemorative arches in anticipation of the two men's arrivals and the extravaganzas to follow.[20] These arches have disappeared with time, although a decorated arch depicted inside the southern relief panel of the standing Arch of Titus, built a decade later (Fig. 1), may be one of them.[21]

The arches, triumph, and *pomerium* grant show the Senate's collusion in the pretence that suppression of a provincial disturbance could be reckoned a new foreign conquest.[22] Roman tradition was clear about what constituted a proper war (*bellum iustum*). A special college of priests, the *fetiales*, had the principal task of making treaties and declarations of war, both of which were possible only with foreign peoples not already part of Rome's empire.[23] In spite of Josephus' incidental remark that Vespasian landed in Syria when "war had been declared" (*War* 7.46), it seems impossible to imagine this fetial process having been conducted in the case of Judaea, which had been part of Roman Syria since Pompey's famed conquests.[24]

Scholars' efforts to find a loophole for the Flavians by suggesting that Judaea had become effectively independent, and the Flavians "had reconquered a small rebellious province,"[25] founder on the definition of *Judaea*. If there had been a province of Judaea before the Flavians, its capital would have been

mean that the Senate made the grant as a wild card, interpreting the word "as/when he saw fit" (*censebit*) to include both justification and timing. But the right seems to assume a one-time extension (Why would the Senate say: for any pretext you like, but *once only*?), and Vespasian's grant is compared with Claudius', which was based on alleged conquest. Irrational though it may be, the centrality of the Judaean victory for the Flavians is overwhelmingly attested. Cf. Newton 1902: 5.

[19] See Newton 1902: 4–5.   [20] Dio 65/66.7.2 (Epitome).
[21] So Kleiner 1990: 130. Its upper decoration, with two triumphal chariots and a figure on horseback, matches Josephus' description of the later joint triumph, with young Domitian alongside (*War* 7.152). Or perhaps it was the standing Triumphal Gate. See the discussion in Davies 2004: 184–85 n. 30. See Pfanner 1983: plates 54–56 for gate detail. An engraving by P. S. Bartoli showing the detail still visible ca. 1685 is at http://bellori.sns.it/bellori//TOC_1.html (= Bartoli and Bellori 1685: *Arco di Tito, Pompa Trionfale* plate 5).
[22] Mommsen 1894: 5.538–39 ("such an inevitable victory over a tiny, long-subjected people," my translation); Mattern 1999: 191–94; Millar 2005: 102; Goodman 2007: 438–44.
[23] Wiedemann 1986 assesses the college's functions to the late Republic. See Augustus *RG* 7.3 for his membership, and Dio 50.4.4–5 with Suetonius, *Aug.* 31, as context for his revival of many old rituals and priesthoods.
[24] Josephus' language perhaps reflects the fact that the Flavians had declared this a *war* when they became involved. The unsystematic nature of such language is clear from *War* 2.284, which dates *the beginning of the war* to Artemisius/Iyyar in the spring of 66, two months before even Cestius' tribune visited and reported on the city's peaceful disposition (Chapter 5).
[25] Levick 1999: 71; cf. 2: "Judaea was still in revolt."
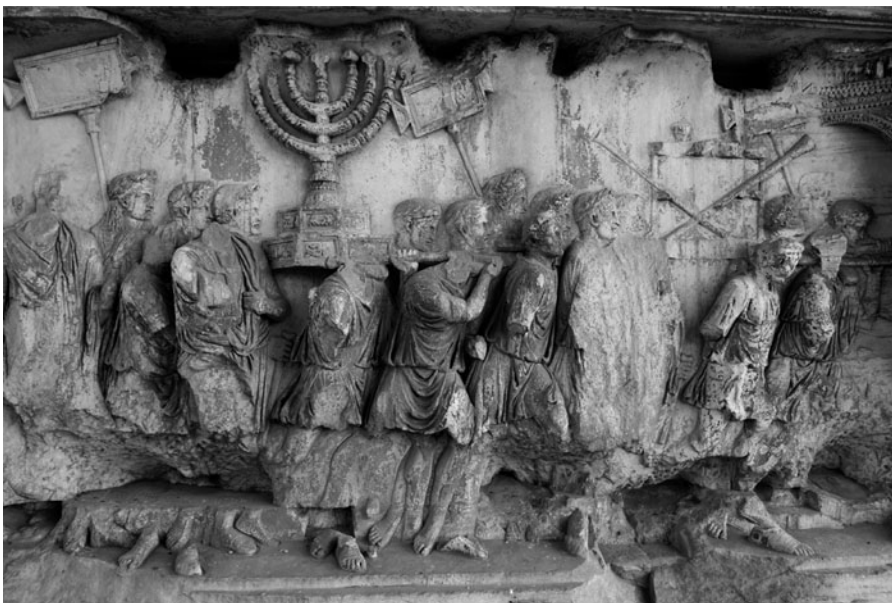
FIGURE 1. Spoils relief in the south panel as it looks today. Courtesy of the Arch of Titus Digital Restoration Project, Director Professor Steven Fine. Note the arch being entered to the right.

coastal Caesarea, and it would have included Samaria, western Galilee, and some of the coastal plain. During the Flavian conflict, however, those regions remained steadfastly loyal. The Judaea in question, evidently, was the ethnic hinterland of Jerusalem and not a formal province (Chapter 4). On any account the Flavians were engaged in political malarkey. But malarkey was the order of the day in political life. How much has changed in that respect, readers may decide.

Many questions about Roman triumphs remain uncertain, and no ancient guide survives. The processions we hear about are described in vague and contradictory ways, usually by writers remote from the events.[26] If we assumed a coherent system, we might well ask: What did someone *do* to earn a triumph? But evidence from the Republic shows that senators debated the merits of each case, sometimes denying a triumph even to a great conqueror because of political conditions, or changing their minds, or forcing the man to choose between a triumph and a consulship, or offering a compromise that fell short of a full triumph.[27] The criteria that some scholars have proposed are

[26] Beard 2007 (e.g., 57–58, 72–106) gleefully dismantles common perceptions. On the remoteness of our accounts see Itgenshorst 2005: 13–41.

[27] Pelikan Pittenger 2008. Livy 22.21 describes the denial of a triumph to M. Claudius Marcellus, a great hero who had triumphed twice, personally killed an enemy chief, and (211 B.C.) taken much of Sicily from Carthaginian sympathizers (cf. Plutarch, *Marc.* 21–22). Livy 28.9 describes a compromise: A joint triumph was awarded to deserving generals, but only

merely cobbled together from those debates over particular cases, but already in the Republic it is easy to find exceptions to any imagined rules.[28] Even the eminent Cicero could not contrive a triumph for himself.[29] Under the Empire, autocratic rulers basically did as they pleased, although to be sure they must have weighed considerations of prestige, seemliness, and political need – or what they could get away with – in consultation with advisors.

The Imperial triumph seems to have retained faint overtones of a boundary-crossing purification ritual. In Republican times the event had supposedly welcomed back citizens-in-arms from wild territory abroad to the world of order inside Rome's sacred boundary.[30] Purification may sound primitive, but a modern military analyst laments the absence of such rituals today. It is important, he maintains, "to purify the warriors or soldiers so as to help their transition back from a situation in which almost anything was permitted to one in which a great many things are not."[31] If the purificatory idea still applied to the armies of the early Empire, however, it could have done so only abstractly. The legions that had fought in Judaea, for instance, did not "return" to Rome, but were ordered back to their bases on the empire's northern and eastern frontiers.[32] Overtones of purification may have retained important symbolic meaning for the commanders themselves and a token parade force, signifying that the bloodshed was over.

The components of the triumph most famous from historical dramas (red-painted faces, a slave reminding the general to remember his humanity) are among the elements most open to doubt. We can say, at least, that it was

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one was permitted to ride in the chariot. Even Pompey was turned down at first by the Dictator Sulla, who later yielded to the young man's intimidation (Plutarch, *Pomp.* 14).

[28] For a neat list see Zaho 2004: 14 ("specific qualifications had been laid down: a just war . . . originally sanctioned and declared as a war . . . must have killed at least five thousand . . . must return with prisoners and trophies . . . war must have been brought to a complete end"). For demolition see Beard 2007: 200–14.

[29] Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 15.1–6 describes the rhetorical dance between a proud man obliquely requesting a triumph and the upright Cato the Younger obliquely denying it.

[30] So the second-century Festus, *Lexicon* (epit. Paulus), "Laureati" (p. 104 L) with Laqueur 1909; Ehlers 1939: 495–96. A Republican rule required that returning generals not cross the *pomerium* until they had gone through the ritual (Plutarch, *Pomp.* 44.1). Pliny reports (disagreeing) the notion that the triumph's laurel wreaths were chosen "for fumigation and purification after the slaughter of the enemy" (*Nat.* 15.135); cf. Laqueur 1909: 226–36; Warde Fowler 1913: 49–51; Zaho 2004: 13–14. Bonfante Warren (1970: 49) thinks the triumph developed from a purification ritual to a "purely honorific ceremony" focused on the *auctoritas* of the victor. Versnel (1970: 152–63) rejects the purification model, asking why only those victorious in war would have needed purifying. He sees the triumph as an entry-rite evolved from Greek ceremonies for welcoming home victorious athletes; cf. Künzl 1988: 42–44. Beard (2007: 246–47, 332–33), without discounting purificatory overtones, proposes that the ritual had come to mean many things at once. Esler (1995: 239–58) emphasizes the honour–shame dialectic that played out in a triumph, with useful observations on the Flavian event.

[31] van Creveld 2008: 161.   [32] Josephus, *War* 7.5, 18–19, 117.