

Josephus and Philo on the Rebellion of Korah: Hellenisms not Hellenizations

The quintessentially Greek elements in Josephus's account of Korah's rebellion in *The Jewish Antiquities* (4.11-56)—Moses's eloquence, Korah's demagoguery, the critique of democracy, and the categorization of the incident as a Thucydidean *Stasis*-- have been well-documented, especially in the magisterial work of Louis Feldman. Feldman attributes these hellenizations to Josephus's apologetic goals of stylistic appeal and a positive portrayal of Jews for a Greek and Roman audience. An apologetic motive, however, does not adequately explain Josephus's observation that this was "a sedition, for which we know of no parallel whether among Greeks or barbarians" (trans. Feldman, *Loeb Classical Library*). One reason for this interpretive crux is the classification of hellenic features as hellenizations, which denote an intentionality not necessarily present. Rather than negotiating a conflict between Hellenism and Judaism, Josephus applies already internalized Greek tropes to represent and interpret a biblical event. A comparison with Philo's version of the event (*De Vita Mosis* 2.275-287), also filled with hellenisms (not surprisingly more philosophical than political), indicates multiple possibilities for incorporating Greek elements, thereby further confirming that these Greek aspects need not reflect polemical intent. This reading correlates with more recent work on Josephus such as that of Spilisbury and Mason, who question the reduction of Josephus's *Antiquities* to apologetics but favor instead a hellenized understanding of biblical narratives. Likewise, regarding Hellenism and Judaism more generally, the work of scholars such as Gruen, Barclay, Collins and Rajak transfer the focus from a conflict between Hellenism and Judaism to a more complex and nuanced view of hellenized Jews negotiating identity amidst changing political, social, and cultural contexts. Here,

Hellenism is not a threat nor an aspiration, but an embedded means of identity formation. Thus, drawing on Gruen's suggestion that Jews even portray themselves as superior to Greeks, I argue that Josephus's account of Korah also non-apologetically demonstrates Jewish superiority. The Jews surpass the Greeks in factionalism (*stasis*) and consequently Korah outdoes all in demagoguery and Moses outshines all at resolving factionalism.