

Overstepping Laws, Transgressing Borders: Political Boundaries in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*

Now free of most allegations of being a “translation” (in the stricter sense) of the Hebrew Scripture into Greek, Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* is being analyzed as an interpretation of Judaism levelled at a likely Roman audience (den Hollander 2014; Edmondson, Mason, Rives 2005; Feldman 1999). Josephus's interpretation often led to interpolation, including some notable additions to the Deuteronomy 19:14 and 27:17 laws prohibiting the movement of boundary markers. Josephus presents the law thus:

Ὅρους γῆς μὴ ἐξέστω κινεῖν **μήτε οἰκείας μήτ' ἀλλοτρίας πρὸς οὓς ἐστὶν ὑμῖν εἰρήνη**, φυλαττέσθω δ' ὡσπερ θεοῦ ψῆφον βεβαίαν **εἰς αἰῶνα κειμένην ἀναιρεῖν**, ὡς **πολέμων ἐντεῦθεν καὶ στάσεων γινομένων** ἐκ τοῦ πλεονεκτοῦντας προσωτέρω χωρεῖν βούλεσθαι τῶν ὄρων: **μὴ γὰρ μακρὰν εἶναι τοῦ καὶ τοὺς νόμους ὑπερβαίνειν τοὺς τὸν ὄρον μετακινούντας.**

Let it not be allowed to move the markers of land, **neither of others with whom we are at peace**, but guard from lifting them up as if they were a decision firmly **set by God to remain throughout the ages**, for from this willingness of the greedy to reach beyond their boundaries **comes war and sedition; there is a thin line between overstepping the law and transgressing borders.** (JA 4.225)

The highlighted portions emphasize the major points of Josephus's account not included in Deuteronomy. Greengus (2011) collected the rabbinic commentary and alternative Semitic laws on boundaries, none of which seem to confirm or inform, respectively, Josephus's additions.

Josephus makes no claims to neutrality when discussing borders (a recent examination within Vonder Breugge 2016), and is no stranger to manipulation of physical boundaries for political or linguistic force. Take, for example his insistence on Judaea lacking a sea boundary in *Against Apion* 1.60 when suggesting a purity of the people, separated from foreign trade, but emphasizing the sea towns in *JA* 5.81 as a fair allotment and in *Jewish Wars* 3.409 as a sign of a flourishing country (on this particular example, see Shahar 2003).

Jewish Antiquities in particular creates new dimensions of respect for foreign boundaries and a correlation between breaking boundaries and war. When considering that the audience for this work likely consists of the recent conquerors of Judaea, at least two interpretations of 4.225 become possible: Josephus is representing the Judaeans as a people not *intrinsically* rebellious (an *apologia* approach), but respectful of laws and lawful boundaries and wary of war, or (considering the εἰς αἰῶνα, perpetuity of the land) that the Judaeans, if again self-governed, would not encroach or expand into other Roman borders, being uninterested in colonization or punishable overreach.

Josephus pointedly connects physical possession of land with ἐλευθερία at moments of the Judaeans' assumption of the land (*JA* 3.300) and the Roman subjugation (*JA* 14.77). Whether for exculpatory or practicable means (such as subtly petitioning for a return to the semi-autonomous province of Judaea), Josephus imagines and renders for a Roman audience the boundaries of Judaea as simultaneously immutable and revoked, unassailable and assailed.

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