

The End of Samson according to Josephus as compared with the Bible, Pseudo-Philo and rabbinic tradition

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Samson, the last of the judges featured in the Book of Judges, came to a dramatically bad end. As one reads in Judg 16,21-31, the hero, having suffered all kinds of physical and verbal abuse at the hands of his captors, the Philistines, contrives to bring death on a multitude of them in his very act of self-destruction.¹ In this essay, I wish to focus on the account of Samson's end given by Josephus in his *Antiquitates judaicae* (hereafter *Ant.*) 5.313b-317.² I undertake this study with three overarching questions in mind: (1) Given the many differences among the ancient witnesses for Judg 16,21-31, i.e. MT (BHS),³ the Codices Alexandrinus (hereafter A) and Vaticanus (hereafter B) and the "Lucianic" (hereafter L) readings of LXX,⁴ the *Vetus Latina* (hereafter *VL*),⁵ the Vulgate (hereafter *Vg.*),⁶ and Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets (hereafter *Tg.*),⁷ with which of these do Josephus' affinities in *Ant.* 5.313b-317 lie? (2) How and with what intent and effect has Josephus adapted the content and wording of his biblical *Vorlage(n)* in relating Samson's end? and (3) How does Josephus' portrayal of that event

¹ On the overall portrait of Samson in Judges 13-16, see Álvarez Barredo, *Iniciativa* 191-328.

² For the text and translation of *Ant.* 5.313b-317 I use Marcus, *Josephus* V 140-143. I have further consulted the text and translation of and notes on this passage in Nodet, *Flavius Josèphe* II 189-190* and the annotated translation of Begg, *Flavius Josephus* 78-79. On Josephus' portrait of Samson overall, see Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation* 461-489 and Roncace, *Portrait*.

³ Judg 16,21-31 is not extant in the Judges fragments recovered at Qumran.

⁴ For the text of A and B Judg 16,21-31 I use Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* I 473-474. For the L readings in this passage I use the apparatus of Brooke / Mclean, *The Old Testament in Greek* I:IV 860-862 (who reproduce B as their main text). For the translation of A and B, see Harlé, *Juges* 222-227. On the characteristics of the above three witnesses for the LXX text of Judges, see Harlé, *Juges* 25-27, and for the LXX portrayal of Samson (with particular attention to the L readings which would preserve the Old Greek of Judges), see Fernández Marcos, *Héros*.

⁵ For the *VL* text of Judg 16,21-31, I use Robert, *Versio* 145-146.

⁶ For the *Vg.* text of Judg 16,21-31, I use Gryson, *Vulgata* 348-349.

⁷ For the targumic text of Judg 16,21-31, I use Sperber, *Bible* 81-82 and for the translation of this Harrington / Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan* 90-91.

compare with its handling in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (hereafter *L.A.B.*) 43.6 (*in fine*)-8⁸ and in rabbinic-tradition⁹

1. Preliminaries

Judg 16,21 (MT) tells of the series of five measures taken by the Philistines against the now shaved and strengthless Samson¹⁰: they seize him, gouge out his eyes, bring him down to Gaza, bind him with bronze (> *VL*) fetters¹¹ and he grinds at the mill in the prison. Josephus markedly reduces this sequence in his rendering in *Ant.* 5.313 (*in fine*): "... they [the Philistines], having put out his eyes (ἐκκόψαντες ... τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς; LXX B: ἐξέκοψαν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς),¹² delivered him over to be led away in chains (δεδεμένον)."¹³ Josephus' non-mention of Samson's mill-work and of "Gaza"

⁸ For the Latin text of this passage, I use Jacobson, Commentary I 64 (Jacobson here reproduces the critical text of Harrington, *Antiquités* I 296) and for the translation Jacobson, Commentary I 64 (this translation is on occasion based on readings others than those adopted by Harrington and reproduced in Jacobson's Latin text). See also Jacobson's annotation on the passage in Commentary II 1000-1002.

⁹ On the portrayal of Samson in this material see Ginzberg, *Legends* IV 47-49; VI 204-209 and Renzer, *Hauptpersonen*.

¹⁰ These measures are the sequel to the preceding story of the interaction between Samson and Delilah (Judg 16,4-20) in which the latter finally ascertains the secret of the former's strength (that strength is contingent on his hair remaining uncut) and gets him shaved. Josephus' parallel to this preceding story is *Ant.* 5.306-313a; Pseudo-Philo retells it in *L.A.B.* 43.5-6.

¹¹ LXX L 16,21 has a plus at this point: "and they [the Philistines] put him [Samson] in prison."

¹² Rabbinic tradition (*b. Soṭah* 9b) represents Samson's blinding as a "measure for measure" punishment for his having let himself be led through his eyes into a forbidden marriage with a Philistine wife (see Judg 14,3).

¹³ The above formulation might be seen as a conflation / compression of the three-part sequence "(the Philistines) seized him ... and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with bronze (> *VL*) fetters" in 16,21. On Josephus' omission of the concluding item of the biblical verse ("and he ground at the mill in the prison"), see Feldman, Josephus's Interpretation 474, who with reference to Moore, *Judges* 357, notes that the omission is likely inspired by a concern for upholding Samson's image in the eyes of Gentile readers, given that such mill-work was a common, degrading punishment inflicted on recalcitrant slaves in the Greco-Roman world. By contrast, rabbinic tradition (*Num. Rab.* 9.24; *b. Soṭah* 10a) gives the item a further, lurid twist, claiming that the verb "grind" (Hebrew גרס) here has a sexual sense, and refers to the captive Samson's being made to impregnate a multitude of Philistine women in the hope that his strength would be passed on to their children. Rabbinic tradition likewise expatiates on another of the particulars cited in 16,21 but omitted

as the place of his imprisonment is paralleled in Pseudo-Philo's (abridged) version of 16,21 in *L.A.B.* 43.6 (*in fine*). On the other hand, that Pseudo-Philonic version features several items (italicized in what follows) not found in either the Bible or Josephus: "*She [Delilah] called the Philistines, and they beat Samson*¹⁴ and blinded him and put him in prison."

The account of Samson's abuse by the Philistines (16,23) is preceded by a brief foreshadowing remark in 16,22: "But the hair of his head [that had been cut in 16,19, causing the loss of his strength] began to grow again after it had been shaved [*VL* lacks the concluding reference to the earlier shaving]." Josephus reproduces this notice at the opening of 5.314: "But in the course of time Samson's locks (ἡ κόμη; LXX AB [ἡ] θριξ τῆς κεφαλῆς) grew." By contrast, Pseudo-Philo lacks any equivalent to it.

2. Samson's Dying Triumph

The story proper of Samson's last great deed (16,23-30) opens in 16,23-24 as the Philistine "lords" assemble for an exultant sacrifice to Dagon their god [Tg.: idol; *VL* prefaces mention of their gods as a further recipient of the sacrifice] whom they then proceed to acclaim twice (16,23b-24) as the one who has handed over their great enemy to them.¹⁵ Josephus (5.314b) eliminates the double acclamation of the pagan deity, even while anticipating the Bible's subsequent place indications: "... and once when the Philistines (Παλαστίνους)¹⁶ were keeping a public festival (ἑορτῆς ... δημοτελοῦς)¹⁷ and their

by Josephus, i.e. Samson's being brought down to Gaza. According to a rabbinic opinion cited in *Num. Rab.* 9.24; *b. Soṭah* 9b; *y. Soṭah* 1.8 Samson was taken to Gaza as his place of final punishment as retribution for his having gone astray with a harlot at Gaza (see *Judg* 16,1).

¹⁴ This Philistine initiative lacks a parallel in 16,21. Jacobson, *Commentary* II 1000-1001 points out, however, that it does an counterpart in LXX B plus in 16,25 where the Philistines are said to "cudgel" Samson once he has been led out of prison.

¹⁵ This sequence reads: "... they said, 'Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.' And when the people saw him [in LXX L this opening phrase of v.24 is preceded by an anticipation of wording drawn from 16,25: they called Samson out of prison and they made sport of him before them], they praised their god [LXX AL and *VL* read gods] for they said, 'Our god [*VL*: gods] has given our enemy into our hand the ravager of our country, who has slain many of us.'"

¹⁶ This is Josephus' standard Greek designation for Samson's adversaries, corresponding to Hebrew פְּלִשְׁתִּים. LXX BL *Judg* 16,21-31 use the more generic term ἀλλόφυλοι; cf. *VL*'s *alieginæ* and Pseudo-Philo's *Allophili*. On the LXX's nomenclature for the "Philistines," see Harlé, *Juges* 56-57.

¹⁷ Josephus' other uses of this phrase are in *Ant.* 2.45; 5.235. It replaces the more specific reference to the Philistines' "great sacrifice to Dagon their god" of 16,23.

lords and chief notables (ἀρχόντων καὶ γνωριμωτάτων)¹⁸ were feasting (εὐωχουμένων)¹⁹ together in one place – a hall with two columns supporting its roof ...²⁰ In Judg 16,25a the Philistines, their “hearts merry,” issue the directive “call Samson [LXX AB add from the prison-house] that he may make sport [LXX παιξάτω] for us.” 16,25b then recounts the execution of this directive: Samson is called out the prison, makes sport before them [so MT, LXX B (ἐπαιζεν)²¹ and Vg. (*ludebat*); in LXX AL (ἐνέπαιζον αὐτῶ) and *VL* (*et deridebant illum*) the Philistines are the subject],²² and is made to stand between the [LXX AL and *VL* add two] pillars. The historian’s rendering (5.314c) conflates this sequence of order and its execution: “... Samson at their summons was led to the banquet (τὸ συμπόσιον),²³ that they might mock at (ἐνυβρίωσιν)²⁴ him over their cups (παρὰ τὸν πότον).”²⁵ Pseudo-

¹⁸ This collocation occurs only here in Josephus. It duplicates the single designation for the Philistine leaders found in 16,23 where MT calls them מַלְכֵי (RSV: “lords”); LXX A employs the Persian loanword σατράπαι (“satraps,” transliterated by *VL* as *satrape*), while LXX B uses the first of Josephus’ two designations.

¹⁹ This term for the Philistines’ activity might be viewed as a concretization of the allusion to their gathering “to rejoice” in 16,23a. Josephus’ omits their attached double acclamation (16,23b-24; see n. 15) of the god Dagon – all mention of whom disappears in his version of the biblical verse, as it does in Pseudo-Philo’s presentation (which lacks a parallel to the whole of 16,23-24 and attaches its rendering of 16,25 directly to its version of 16,21).

²⁰ Josephus anticipates this indication concerning the site of the upcoming event from 16,25.29 (the [two] pillars on which “the house” rests) and 16.28 (the Philistine lords are on “the roof” of the house).

²¹ On this verb and its cognates in the LXX see Harl, *Un groupe*.

²² At this point in its rendering of 16,25b LXX B has a plus, underscoring the Philistines’ mistreatment of Samson, ἐρράπιζον αὐτόν (“and they cudged him”). See n. 14.

²³ Josephus’ inserted reference to this occasion introduces a Greco-Roman touch into his presentation. Also elsewhere he represents biblical characters (anachronistically) participating in “symposia”; see *Ant.* 7.360; 8.137; 9.234; 10.169.

²⁴ Josephus uses the compound verb ἐνυβρίζω six other times: *BJ* 6.128; *Ant.* 1.47,165; 2.129,202; 11.194; 20,117. With the above formulation Josephus turns the direct address command of the Philistines (“Call Samson ...”) of 16,25a into an indirect address version. On this feature of his rewriting of the Bible’s presentation, see Begg, *Account* 12-13, n. 38. Note further that in contrast to the biblical references – where in MT and LXX B 16,25 Samson is twice cited as the one who is to make / does make sport before the Philistines, while in LXX AL and *VL* the subject of the action varies between 16,25a (Samson) and 16,25b (the Philistines; see above) – Josephus refers only to the Philistines’ “mocking” of the hapless Samson, thereby accentuating his victim status.

Philo's (*L.A.B.* 43.7a) compressed rendition of 16,25 is quite similar: "On the day of their banquet (*in die potationis eorum*) they called Samson to mock him (*ut illuderent eum*²⁶)."

The abused, passive Samson of 16,21-25 begins taking a more active role in 16,26 as he tells his attendant to let him feel the pillars of the house (see 16,25b) in order that he might lean against these. Josephus (5.315) prefaces his equivalent with mention of the hero's current state of mind: "And he, *deeming it direr than all his ills to be unable to be avenged* (*ἀμύνασθαι*) *of such insults* (*ὕβριζόμενος*),²⁷ induced the boy (*τὸν παῖδα*)²⁸ who led him by the hand (*χειραγωγούντα*)²⁹ – telling him that *from weariness* (*ὑπὸ κόπου*)³⁰ he needed a stay whereon to rest (*προσαναπαύσασθαι*)³¹ –

²⁵ This allusion to the occasion at which Samson is to provide the entertainment picks up on Josephus' previous references to the Philistines' "feasting together" and their "banquet." The series of indications makes more concrete (and provides a basis for) the allusions to the Philistines' "rejoicing" in 16,23a and their "merry hearts" in 16,25a.

²⁶ This is the reading adopted by Harrington and Jacobson (see n. 8); some manuscripts have *ut illuderet eis*, this making Samson the subject of the action. On the above reading, Pseudo-Philo would align himself with Josephus (see n. 24) in mentioning only a "mocking" of Samson by the Philistines, rather than (also) his active "making sport before them" as in the biblical witnesses.

²⁷ This participle echoes the form ἐνυβρίσωσιν used of the Philistines' "mocking" Samson in 5.314. The echo accentuates the connection between what the Philistines have done to Samson and what he is about to do to them, likewise portraying Samson as a man who cannot be insulted without consequences. Josephus' inserted reference to the hero's concern for "vengeance" here might be inspired by the prayer – which Josephus does not reproduce, see below – attributed to him in 16,28 where he asks God to strengthen him "that I may avenge a single vengeance (LXX AL = MT ἐκδικήσω ἐκδίκησιν μίαν; compare LXX B ἀνταποδώσω ἀνταπόδοσιν μίαν, I will pay a single payment) upon the Philistines for one of my two eyes."

²⁸ LXX AL 16,26 call Samson's attendant τὸ παιδάριον, LXX B τὸν νεανίαν. As he did with the words of the Philistines of 16,23-24, Josephus recasts ("he induced") Samson's direct address directive to the lad in indirect address; see n. 24.

²⁹ This is the same participial form used of Samson's attendant in LXX AL 16,25 (LXX B has τὸν κρατούντα τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ). The verb χειραγαγέω is a Septuagintal creation (Harlé, Juges 224, *ad loc.*) and a *hapax* in Josephus.

³⁰ Josephus supplies Samson with this (alleged) motivation for his request to be brought near the columns.

³¹ In 16,26 (MT) Samson asks that he be allowed to feel the pillars "that I may lean against them" (LXX AL and VL append the notice and the serving boy did so; see n. 33). Josephus elaborates with a reference to the purpose ("rest") of the leaning, this corresponding to Samson's previous mention of his "weariness"; compare the plus

to conduct him close to the columns.”³² Whereas Josephus does reproduce the scene between Samson and the attendant of 16,26, Pseudo-Philo passes over this scene (and the appended notice on the assembled Philistines, 16,27) in order to come directly (43.7b) to the hero’s final prayer (// 16,28).

In the Bible the Samson-attendant exchange of 16,26 is followed by a notice on the Philistine onlookers (16,27), Samson’s prayer (16,28) and grasping of the pillars (16,29) that he brings down upon his assembled tormentors (16,30). Josephus notably modifies and abridges this sequence, omitting, e.g., any utterance by Samson prior to his dying initiative.³³ His version (5.316a) of 16,27-30 reads then: “And when he had come thither,³⁴ flinging all his weight (ἐνσειοθείς)³⁵ upon them,³⁶ he brought down the hall,

at the end of Vg. 16,26 where Samson asks that he may touch the supporting columns in order to lean on these “and rest a bit” (*et paululum requiescam*).

³² Josephus’ version of Samson’s words to his attendant reverses their biblical sequence in which he first makes his request and then appends a motivation for this. In MT and LXX AL 16,25 the request itself runs “let me feel the pillars . . .” while in LXX B Samson says “allow me and I will go and feel the pillars.” Josephus’ formulation of the request stands closer to that of MT LXX AL.

³³ In the biblical account Samson prays twice, first explicitly prior to grasping the pillars (16,29a) in 16,28 (“Then Samson called to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be avenged upon the Philistines for one of my two eyes.’”) and then, more implicitly after taking hold of the pillars in 16,30a (“And Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines.’”). The effect of Josephus’ omission of Samson’s double prayer is to make his dying exploit a matter of his own strength, rather than of divine assistance given in answer to his prayers; on the point, see Feldman, Josephus’s Interpretation 485. By contrast, rabbinic tradition (*Num. Rab.* 9.24; *y. Soṭah* 1.8; *b. Soṭah* 10a) expatiates on elements of Samson’s prayer in 16,28. In particular, the rabbis affirm that the wanton Samson based his plea for divine “remembrance” on the modesty of his conduct during his tenure as Israel’s judge (see *Judg* 15,20; 16,31b). In addition, they see Samson’s appeal for vengeance for (only) “one of his two eyes” as suggesting that the hero is requesting recompense for one of his lost eyes in this world and for the other in the world to come.

³⁴ This transitional notice has a certain counterpart in the LXX AL and VL plus at the end of 16,26 which states that the serving boy acceded to Samson’s request of him; see n. 31.

³⁵ Josephus’ one remaining use of the verb ἐνσειώω is in *BJ* 6.196.

³⁶ Compare 16,29b (“he leaned his weight upon them [the pillars]”). Josephus omits the further details concerning Samson’s initiative given in 16,29a (“and Samson grasped the two middle pillars upon which the house rested”) and 16,29bβ ([Samson leans on the two pillars] “his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other”). He likewise leaves aside the mention of Samson’s

overturning the columns upon three thousand men (ἀνδράσι), who all perished and among them Samson.”³⁷

Pseudo-Philo’s rendition of the sequence 16,27-30 in *L.A.B.* (43.7b-8ac), for its part, stands closer to the biblical account than does Josephus’. In particular, that rendition opens with a two-member utterance by the hero corresponding to his double prayer in 16,28 and 16,30aα.³⁸ Samson’s last words begin in 43.7b with him praying, “Lord God of my fathers, hear me just this once and strengthen me in order that I may die with these Philistines,³⁹ because the sight they took from me was freely given to me by you.”⁴⁰ It then continues (43.7c): “Samson added saying, ‘Go forth, my soul, and do not be sad; die my body, and do not grieve for yourself.’”⁴¹ Thereafter, Pseudo-Philo relates (43.8ac) the initiatives of Samson that bring death on himself and his captors: “He grasped the two pillars of the house [//

“bowing with all his might” of 16,30aβ that follows the citation of his last word – also passed over by Josephus – in 16,30aα (“Let me die with the Philistines”).

³⁷ In recounting Samson’s dying exploit Josephus conflates (and modifies) elements (italicized in what follows) of Judg 16,27 (MT) (“Now the house was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about *three thousand men* and women, who looked on while Samson made sport”) and 16,30b (“*and the house fell upon the lords and upon all who were in it. So the dead whom he slew at his death were more than those whom he had slain during his life*”). Josephus’ version, e.g., omits mention of women onlookers, indicates a lower overall Philistine casualty figure (“only” 3,000 men), and avoids the extravagant claim that Samson killed more Philistines at the moment of his death than he had during his entire lifetime.

³⁸ For the content of the biblical Samson’s prayers, see n. 33. In Judges 16 the prayers are separated by the notice on Samson’s grasping the two pillars in 16,29. Pseudo-Philo keeps the two components of Samson’s dying word together in a continuous sequence. He likewise gives a distinct content to the second of the utterances he attributes to Samson; see above.

³⁹ With this component of Samson’s (initial) prayer (// 16,28) Pseudo-Philo utilizes the content of his subsequent plea in 16,30aα (“let me die with these Philistines”).

⁴⁰ Compare the conclusion to Samson’s (initial) prayer in 16,28: “... that I may be avenged upon the Philistines for one of my two eyes.”

⁴¹ This portion of the Pseudo-Philonic Samson’s prayer lacks a biblical equivalent; on it see Jacobson, *Commentary II* 1002.

16,29a] and shook (*iactavit*) them.⁴² The house collapsed, and killed all who were around it [// 16,30ba]. Their number was 40,000 men and women.”⁴³

3. Sequels

Judg 16,31 rounds off the biblical account of Samson’s death with two additional items: the burial of the hero’s corpse by his family members (v.31a) and his 20-year tenure as judge (v.31b = Judg 15,20). Reversing the source sequence, Josephus reproduces (5.316b) the latter notice first: “*Such was his end, after governing (ἄρξαντα) Israel for twenty years.*”⁴⁴ Thereafter, he pauses to interject an extended epithet (5.317a) for Samson of the sort he provides for many of the leading biblical figures.⁴⁵ This reads:

⁴² Pseudo-Philo’s term for what Samson did with the pillars has an equivalent in LXX L 16,30aβ (δίεσεισεν, “he shook [them with all his might].” Compare MT and LXX A (“he bowed [Greek: ἐκλινεν] with all his might”) and LXX B (he lifted them up [ἐβάσταξεν] with all his might”).

⁴³ Judg 16,30 does not specify the number of Philistines killed. Pseudo-Philo’s figure is much higher than the number of Samson’s potential victims cited in 16,27 (the 3,000 men and women on the roof), although that verse also alludes to the presence of additional persons inside the house itself who would doubtless have died as well when the house collapsed. By contrast, Josephus (5.316) limits the Philistine casualties to 3,000 men, making no mention of women onlookers and victims, as do the Bible and Pseudo-Philo, see above. In his *Quaest. in Judic.* xxii (PG 80: 511), Theodoret of Cyrus avers that when Samson brought down the roof of the “temple of the idols,” he killed 3,000 men along with himself (see Josephus) as well as a “much greater number of women”; see also *Gen. Rab.* 98.14 which states that whereas there were 3,000 Philistines on the roof (so Judg 16,27) who perished, “no one knows how many there were behind them” (who would have died along with Samson as well). Neither Pseudo-Philo nor Josephus reproduces the (extravagant) claim of 16,30bβ about Samson’s killing more Philistines at his death than he had during his lifetime.

⁴⁴ Compare 16,31b: “He had judged (LXX ἐκρινεν) Israel for twenty years.” In his account of the biblical “judges,” Josephus, as here, regularly substitutes other terms for the Bible’s verb “judge” when referring to their leadership activity. Josephus lacks an equivalent to the earlier mention of Samson’s 20-year judgeship in Judg 15,20. Rabbinic tradition (*y. Soṭah* 1.8; *Num. Rab.* 14.9) comments concerning the double biblical mention of Samson’s tenure that the first such reference alludes to the 20 years of Samson’s lifetime during which he ruled over Israel, while the second points to the 20 years following his death during which, due to Samson’s exploits, the Philistines remained in dread of him and Israel had peace.

⁴⁵ On the feature, see Feldman, Josephus’s Interpretation 80-81.

And it is but right to admire the man for his valour (ἀρετῆς), his strength (ἰσχύος)⁴⁶ and the grandeur (μεγαλόφρονος) of his end, as also for the wrath (ὀργῆς)⁴⁷ which he cherished to the last against his enemies.⁴⁸ That he let himself be ensnared by a woman (ὑπὸ γυναικὸς ἀλῶναι) must be imputed to human nature (τῇ φύσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων) which succumbs to sins (ἥττονι ἀμαρτημάτων)⁴⁹; but testimony is due to him for his surpassing excellence (ἀρετῆς)⁵⁰ in all the rest.

Having inserted the foregoing encomium into his reproduction of 16,31, Josephus finally (5.317b) supplies his delayed notice on the burial of Samson (// 16,31a) concerning which he states: “His kinsfolk (οἱ ... συγγενεῖς)⁵¹ then

⁴⁶ “Strength” is a *Leitwort* in Josephus’ presentation of Samson overall; indeed, in *Ant.* 5.285 he (curiously) declares that the hero’s name means “strong” (ἰσχυρόν). See Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation* 465-471.

⁴⁷ In the context of Josephus’ epithet for Samson in 5.317a this term has a positive sense and might be intended as a reminiscence of the opening words of the *Iliad* which speak of the book’s theme as the “wrath” (μῆνιν) of the great hero Achilles. On the other hand the same term is used in the nearer and wider contexts of *Antiquitates* with less positive connotations; see 5.294 (no biblical parallel; Samson’s former wife “scorns him for his wrath” [ὀργῆς] against the Philistines to whom she betrayed the answer to his riddle and 2.141 (in his address to Joseph, Judah, again without a biblical basis, urges him: “make virtue thy counsellor in place of that wrath [ὀργῆς], which mean men take for strength [ἰσχύος, i.e. the *Leitwort* of Josephus’ portrayal of Samson who, according to 5.317b, combined both strength and wrath], having recourse to it not only in great matters only, but in trivial”). On the point, see the remarks of Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation* 471-472 and Roncace, *Another Portrait* 198-199.

⁴⁸ This formulation echoes Josephus’ likewise inserted reference to Samson’s “deeming it direr than all his ills to be unable to be avenged of such insults” in 5.315a. Both sequences highlight the intensity of the hero’s animosity against his Philistine abusers and his determination not to let their mistreatment of him go unrequited.

⁴⁹ With the foregoing parenthetical notice Josephus does introduce a qualification of his concluding praise of Samson. The tone of that allusion to his allowing Delilah to take advantage of his passion for her (see *Judg* 16,4-20// *Ant.* 5.306-313b) nevertheless seems quite indulgent, attributing his doing this to a general human tendency to sin, i.e. as something that could happen to anyone, given humans’ natural proneness to sinfulness.

⁵⁰ This term constitutes an inclusion with the opening of Josephus’ encomium on Samson where he speaks of the admiration due his “valour” (ἀρετῆς).

⁵¹ Josephus’ single designation conflates the mention of “his brothers and all (> LXX B) the house of his father” as those who bury Samson in 16,31a.

took up his body (τὸ σῶμα)⁵² and buried him at Sarasa (Σαρασᾶ), *his native place* (τῆ πατρίδι),⁵³ with his forefathers (μετὰ τῶν συγγενῶν).⁵⁴

As in the case of 16,27-30 (see above), Pseudo-Philo's rendering of 16,31 in *L.A.B.* 43.8de adheres more closely to the Bible's sequence and wording than do Josephus' notices on Samson's burial and tenure. That rendering states: "Samson's brothers and his entire household went down and took him and buried him in the tomb of his father [// 16,31a].⁵⁵ He had judged Israel twenty years [// 16,31b]."⁵⁶

4. Conclusion

At the end of this essay I return to the broader questions I formulated at the beginning in order to summarize my findings regarding them. The first of those questions concerned Josephus' text-critical affinities in *Ant.* 5.313b-317. Given his many abbreviations of source content in this segment as well as his overall paraphrastic handling of the biblical presentation, our study, not surprisingly, yielded rather little of relevance on the matter. In several instances it did, emerge, however, that Josephus aligns himself with the text of LXX AL (and *VL*) against that of LXX B, where MT agrees sometimes

⁵² Josephus compresses the more expansive wording of 16,31aa where the relatives "come down, take him (Samson) and bring him up." Rabbinic tradition (*Gen. Rab.* 98.14) asks how the relatives were able to find Samson's body among all the Philistine dead and responds that the Philistines who fell upon the hero when he overthrew the house rolled off him, this fulfilling Jacob's characterization of Samson's ancestor Dan in Gen 49,17 as a viper that bites the horse's heels "so that his rider falls backward."

⁵³ Judg 16,31aβ has Samson buried "between Zorah (LXX Σαραά) and Eshtaol (LXX Ἐσθαόλ). (In Judg 13,2 "Zorah" is the hometown of Samson's father Manoah.) According to Mez, *Bibel* 18 Josephus' form Σαρασᾶ reflects his (mis-)reading of the consonant ע of the MT place name צַרְעָה as a צ. Schalit, *Namenwörterbuch s.v.* maintains that the form Josephus wrote was rather Σαρά.

⁵⁴ Compare the concluding indication of 16,31a, according to which Samson was buried "in the tomb of his father Manoah."

⁵⁵ Unlike both the Bible and Josephus, Pseudo-Philo gives no indication concerning the locale of Samson's burial.

⁵⁶ In contrast to the dramatic stories told by the Bible, Josephus, and Pseudo-Philo, the "Samaritan Chronicle No. II" simply mentions the fact of "King" Samson's dying without providing any further details; see Macdonald, *Chronicle* 111 (earlier that document introduces Samson as a "military commander" who succeeded King Antiel [i.e. the minor judge Abdon of Judg 12,13-15] and characterizes him as "the last of the kings of the era of Divine Favour; he committed very many mighty acts among the nations, for he smote innumerable of their men"; see *ibid.*, 110).

with the former and sometimes with the latter witness. Thus, e.g., in the line of LXX AL *VL* 16,25 he (5.314b) refers to the Philistines' mocking of Samson, whereas in MT and LXX B it is Samson who "makes sport" before them; see n. 24; cf. also nn. 27,29,32,34.⁵⁷

My study generated more data of interest with regard to my second question on Josephus' rewriting techniques in 5.313b-317 and the distinctiveness of his account of Samson's end that results from their application. Several times, first of all, the historian expands on the biblical presentation; see in particular his insertion concerning Samson's state of mind in making his request of his attendant in 5.315a (compare 16,26) and above all the interjected encomium of 5.317a. Conversely, he compresses the content of, e.g., 16,21 (compare 5.313b: the Philistines' measures against Samson), 23-24 (compare 5.314b: the Philistines' exaltation over their captive), and omits the hero's dying prayers (16,28.31a) completely. In addition, the historian rearranges the biblical sequence: compare 16,27-30 and 5.316a; 16,31 and 5.316b-317.⁵⁸ Finally, he also modifies the Bible's narrative in still other ways, e.g., substituting indirect for direct discourse (see n. 24), introducing a reference to the Philistines' *symposium* (compare the allusion to their hearts being "merry" in 16,25; see n. 23), and having Samson buried "with his forefathers (5.317 *in fine*) rather than "in the tomb of Manoah his father" (so 16,31a).

What then is distinctive about Josephus' version of Samson's end, given his application of the foregoing rewriting techniques to the biblical account? Overall, Josephus effects a certain streamlining of the whole affair via his omission of many source details and repetitions. On the theological level, mention of the pagan god Dagon and the Philistines' double acclamation of him as the one who handed Samson over to them disappears in his rewriting (compare 5.314b and 16,23-24). With a view to Samson's image (and that of his people overall) in the eyes of his intended Greco-Roman readership,⁵⁹

⁵⁷ On the overall question of the text(s) of Judges used by Josephus, see Mez, *Bibel* 80-81; Harlé, *Septante*, and Nodet, *Flavius Josèphe xiv-xv*. All these authors highlight Josephus' affinities with the LXX L witnesses in the Book of Judges, those affinities suggesting that Josephus attests to a "proto-Lucianic" text of the book.

⁵⁸ In the former of the above instances the rearrangement goes together with a marked abbreviation of the biblical content, while in the latter, Josephus expands the source notices on Samson's burial and tenure that he reproduces in reverse order with the inserted encomium on the hero. Here, as often elsewhere, Josephus' rewriting techniques show themselves to be interconnected.

⁵⁹ On cultivated Gentiles as the primary intended audience of the *Antiquitates*, see Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation* 46-49.

the historian likewise modifies and embellishes the Bible's depiction of his end in a variety of ways. Negatively, he passes over the degradation involved in the captive Samson's "grinding at the mill" (16,21; see n. 13), just as he nowhere refer to him as himself "making sport" before the Philistines as all versions of Judg 16,25 do to varying degrees (see n. 24) – his Samson is not an active participant in the mockery he undergoes. More positively, Josephus highlights the personal, innate strength, courage and resolution with which Samson meets his end both by leaving aside the biblical figure's double plea (16,28.30aa) for divine assistance as he overthrows the house and by his interjected allusion to the hero's refusal to die unavenged (5.315a) and his extended inserted encomium on him (5.317a). Thereby, he presents Greco-Roman readers with a Samson whose heroic stature has been considerably enhanced vis-à-vis the Bible's portrayal of him and his end.⁶⁰

My final opening question asked how Josephus' treatment of Samson's end relates to its handling by his (approximate) contemporary Pseudo-Philo and by (later) rabbinic tradition.

With Pseudo-Philo's *L.A.B.* 43.6 (*in fine*)-8 Josephus' rewriting of Judg 16,21-31 in *Ant.* 5.313b-317 displays similarities, but also differences. Neither author, e.g., reproduces the notices of 16,21 on Samson's being taken down to Gaza and grinding at the mill there. Both omit as well the Philistines' double acclamation of their god Dagon (16,23-24) and the claim (16,30bβ) about Samson's killing more Philistines in death than he had in life. They further agree in mentioning only an intended mocking of Samson by the Philistines, rather than (also) the hero's own "making sport" of himself before them (see 16,25 and cf. n. 24). On the other hand, their respective presentations differ in significant respects. Whereas Josephus makes no mention of a final prayer by Samson and thereby accentuates the hero's own strength manifested in his overthrow of the house, Pseudo-Philo, in line with the Bible's own presentation, gives a central place to Samson's appeal to God (and accordingly to the divine assistance that enables him to accomplish his purpose). In addition, Pseudo-Philo, here too like the Bible itself, has no equivalent to Josephus' extended encomium for Samson, in this respect as well showing less concern with highlighting the person of the hero. In further contrast to his fellow post-biblical historian, he hews more closely to the sequence of 16,27-30 and 16,31 than does Josephus in 5.316-317. Finally, Pseudo-Philo supplies a figure (40,000) for the Philistines' casualties

⁶⁰ On the apologetic concern at work in Josephus' procedure here, i.e. to counter contemporary claims about absence among the Jews of great men and figures of military distinction in the Greco-Roman mold, see Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation* 132-133.

that far exceeds the number common to 16,27 and 5.316a, i.e. 3,000. Josephus' version of Samson's has then an array of both communalities with and divergences from Pseudo-Philo's, with now one now the other reproducing the biblical data more "faithfully."⁶¹ By contrast, Josephus evidences no parallels with the developments of the biblical account found in rabbinic tradition, concerning such matters as the hero's being taken to Gaza (see n. 12), his "grinding" there (see n. 13), his prayer (n. 33) and the recovery of his corpse (see n. 52).⁶²

The four and a half paragraphs making up *Ant.* 5.313b-317 are a tiny fragment of Josephus' 20-book history. Still, as I hope has emerged from this essay, even so small a passage does repay the kind of close, comparative study I have endeavored to give it here.

Summary

This essay offers a close reading of Josephus' account (*Ant.* 5.313b-317) of Samson's end in comparison both with the Bible (Judg 16,21-31, as represented by the major ancient witnesses) and with Pseudo-Philo and rabbinic tradition. Vis-à-vis the biblical presentation, Josephus' version, e.g., streamlines matters, while also accentuating the heroic stature of Samson, via an inserted encomium upon him and the omission of Samson's appeals for divine assistance cited in 16,28 and 30ba. With Pseudo-Philo his rewriting evidences both similarities and differences. Both authors, e.g., significantly compress the Bible's narrative. While, however, Josephus downplays the theological dimension of Samson's end, Pseudo-Philo follows the Bible in giving a central place to the hero's plea for God's help. Finally, Josephus' rendition displays no awareness of the various rabbinic developments around the dramatic finale of Samson's life.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag bietet eine detaillierte Darstellung von Josephus' Beschreibung (*Ant.* 5.313b-317) des Ende Samsons im Vergleich mit der Bibel (Ri 16,21-31, wie durch die alten Zeugen belegt), mit Pseudo-Philo und der

⁶¹ On the many similarities and differences between Josephus and Pseudo-Philo over the whole course of their respective rewritings of the Bible, see Feldman, *Prolegomenon* lviii-lxvi.

⁶² As will be noted, most of the rabbinic developments cited above concern biblical items that Josephus simply leaves unutilized. Accordingly, it is not surprising that he lacks parallels to the rabbis' developments of these. On the question of Josephus' relationship to rabbinic tradition overall, see Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation* 65-77 who calls attention to the many points of contact between the historian's presentation and that tradition elsewhere in his writings.

rabbinischen Tradition. Gegenüber der biblischen Darstellung aktualisiert die Version des Josephus den Stoff, indem er z.B. Samson als heroische Gestalt durch die Einfügung eines Enkomion über ihn betont und weiters Samsons Rufe nach göttlicher Unterstützung, die in 16,28 und in 30ba angeführt werden, auslässt. Seine Neuinterpretation besitzt Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede zu Pseudo-Philo. Beide Autoren komprimieren z.B. die biblische Darstellung erheblich. Während jedoch Josephus die theologische Bedeutung von Samsons Ende herunterspielt, folgt Pseudo-Philo der Bibel, wenn er dem Hilfeschrei des Helden nach Gottes Hilfe einen zentralen Platz einräumt. Schließlich zeigt Josephus' Wiedergabe keine Kenntnis der verschiedenen rabbinischen Entfaltungen über das drastischen Endes von Samsons Leben.

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