



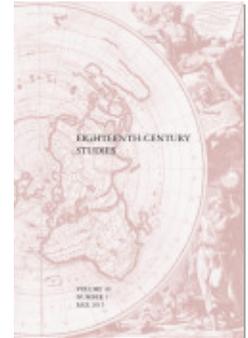
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A RAKE'S PROGRESS: WILLIAM WHISTON READS JOSEPHUS

Mordechai Feingold

William Whiston celebrated his sixty-seventh birthday on Monday, 9 December 1734. As if to solemnize the occasion, he entered his study and began translating the works of Josephus. The decision to undertake the translation was far from spontaneous. As early as 16 March 1733 Whiston had advertised the imminent publication of two dissertations on the Jewish historian, intended to serve as “preparatory to a New Version of Josephus in English.”¹ Still, the date is suggestive for elucidating the motivation of the translation. In the previous month Whiston’s youngest son, John, had been made free of the Merchant’s Taylor Company, having completed his apprenticeship with the bookseller Fletcher Gyles. Setting up shop in Fleet Street, John would become William’s sole publisher, and the translation, I submit, was intended to secure an immediate best seller—which would both ensure the future well-being of John’s business and alleviate William’s chronic financial difficulties.

It proved a shrewd, if risky, move. There undoubtedly existed an avid demand for Josephus’s works, but it seemed as though Sir Roger L’Estrange’s English translation (first published in 1692) had successfully cornered the market. Indeed, the tenth edition (or reprint) poured off the press just as Whiston announced his intention to produce a rival translation. Moreover, the obscure John Court was concurrently seeing into print yet another translation, which—like Whiston’s projected translation, but unlike L’Estrange’s—had been advertised as based on the Greek original.² The Whistons undoubtedly considered the new competitive environment propitious, and the new vogue of serial publication—to which the publishers of

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both L'Estrange and Court's versions had resorted—further emboldened them. In mid-February 1735, Whiston published *Proposals for printing by subscription, the genuine works of Flavius Josephus*, wherein he committed himself to issuing twelve sheets every month, starting in May. According to the records of William Bower—the printer, who also printed the fifth edition of L'Estrange's edition—no fewer than 5000 copies of the proposal were printed between February and November 1735. Whiston aggressively distributed the proposal among potential patrons and friends. William Warburton informed William Stukeley on 31 May 1735 that he had received a copy from Whiston. "I shall make it my business," he added, "to promote his subscription all I can." Whiston himself recalled waiting on Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, to hand-deliver the proposal and drum up support.³

The first installment appeared as promised on 3 May. Subsequent installments followed, with one exception, on schedule. Initially, however, public response proved sluggish. So much so, in fact, that upon publishing the fourteenth installment in July 1736, Whiston found it necessary to prod delinquent subscribers to remit their dues—at the same time urging well-wishers to pledge support:

finding that he has not yet obtain'd Subscriptions enough to pay Paper and Print for the whole Impression, [Whiston] desires all curious and inquisitive Persons, who have a Mind to encourage this Work, but have not yet subscrib'd, to do it as soon as they conveniently can; and wishes such as send for the 14 Numbers, but have only paid their first Payment, to send their second Payment at the same time.

The shortfall seemingly prompted Whiston to announce his retirement to the country for several months, "where he hopes nearly to finish his Translation; and altho' his Absence will hinder his Publication of the three next Numbers in August, September and October, yet is he and the Press so forward, that he hopes to publish two Numbers in each following Month till the Whole be publish'd." True to his word, Whiston advertised on 9 November the publication of the fifteenth and sixteenth installments, further promising "to publish two such Numbers together on the first Saturdays in December, January and February ensuing, which will nearly compleat the whole Work."⁴

The book ultimately proved longer than expected—314 sheets instead of the projected 280—and printing was completed in July 1737. The edition comprised one thousand copies: two hundred fifty of large paper, five hundred of medium paper, and two hundred fifty of small paper. The advertised price for the entire book (in sheets) was set, respectively, at £2.2s; £1.11s. 6d; and £1.6s. Six months later, the translation was again advertised as if "this day published," and again on 30 January 1739 as "lately published," though with a higher price tag: £2.10s; £1.16s; and £1.10s. On 21 May 1739 Whiston urged those subscribers who had failed to pick up their copies to do so immediately, as the impression was almost sold out. Finally, in February 1740, Whiston advertised the publication of a new printing, while cautioning again some original subscribers to send for their copies, lest "they will be disposed of."⁵ It is noteworthy that John Whiston employed at least one commercial agent, John Frederick Fritsch, who issued several copies as "Printed for the Author"—an imprint "listing twenty retailers, some of whom may have had a minor investment in the enterprise."⁶ Or not.

Either way, by the second half of the eighteenth century, Whiston's translation became the most popular edition of Josephus's works in the English-speaking world—remaining so for well over two hundred years, with more than three hundred editions printed.⁷ Despite its importance, however, Whiston's biographers accord scant attention to it, perhaps because research into the early-modern reception of Josephus had scarcely begun.⁸ Thanks to the work of Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg we are now better equipped to understand the centrality of Joseph Scaliger and Isaac Casaubon in establishing Josephus as an indispensable source for the antiquity of the Jews, as well as for early Christianity.⁹ More recent work, carried out under the auspices of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, promises when published to add considerably to their pioneering work.

My paper seeks to assess the protracted and eccentric manner by which Whiston became Josephus's champion. His motivation differed markedly from that informing most contemporaries. Consumed as he had always been with a desire to demonstrate a complete correlation between Old and New Testament prophecies, Whiston convinced himself that whenever such correlation appeared lacking, it was owing to the corruption of Masoretic text of Scriptures by the Jews. He therefore set his sights on "restoring" the text of the Old Testament through an idiosyncratic reading of Josephus—who, he believed, relied on original copies of the Bible before they were corrupted. In such a way, Josephus's works joined other "ancient testimonies" through which Whiston sought to restore "primitive Christianity" to its former glory.¹⁰

By his own testimony, Whiston completed the estimated eight hundred thousand-word translation on 6 January 1737, just shy of twenty-five months since embarking on it—an average of 1050 words a day. Early on, the pace must have been considerably faster, in view of the need to translate, print, and proofread thirty-one thousand words every month. Small wonder, then, that even such a prolific and facile author as Whiston found the task grueling: contrary to his habit, no other work of his appeared in 1735, and only four ephemeral works were published the following year—two of which pertained to the lecture courses Whiston felt obliged to deliver in order to raise money.

Commercial motivation aside, Whiston certainly had a considerable intellectual investment in Josephus. "I had frequently perused *Josephus* in the original, and prepared the Preliminary Dissertations, and the Notes" before turning to the translation, he disclosed. A fuller testimony to his veneration of Josephus was made in a brief self-serving essay that Andrew Reid, editor of *The Present State of the Republick of Letters*, permitted Whiston to insert into his monthly publication. Josephus had "never yet been treated in our Language as he deserved," Whiston asserted, "but there is all imaginable Reason to hope that Opprobrium will now be removed," and that his version would "be worthy of the great Original." A "Person of the finest Genius and Abilities, of the most unblemished Honour and Integrity," everything Josephus published "was received with Applause, and deserved it. Some of the most judicious Criticks have esteemed him equal to the best of the heathen Historians, but *Scaliger* absolutely pronounces him superior to all, whether *Greek* or *Latins* both in Knowledge and Fidelity." For just this reason, Whiston concluded:

The Works of such a Man are a Treasure that ought to be had in universal Estimation. They should be adopted by every Tongue and every People. Such as draw them out of the Coffers of the *Litterati* (their Libraries and Studies) where for many Centuries they have lain like outlandish Gold, of intrinsick Value but unpassable; and turning them, as it were, into current Coin, disperse them amongst, and thereby enrich the Community, should be regarded as publick Benefactors, especially, if in new minting them, they mix them with no base Alloy, but tho' they alter the Species, retain their primitive Lustre and Purity.¹¹

Such professed esteem, however, had been rather slow in maturing. In fact, before the late 1710s Whiston rarely availed himself of Josephus's works, primarily because the chronology informing *Jewish Antiquities* differed considerably from the Masoretic chronology to which Whiston had committed himself and which also informed his millennial beliefs. Whiston articulated his sentiments on the matter already in his first publication, *A New Theory of the Earth* (1696). Insofar as postdiluvian time reckoning was concerned, he wrote, "I follow the most Reverend and Learned Archbishop *Usher's* Chronology, deriv'd from the *Hebrew Verity*, without taking notice of what Years the *Samaritan* and *Septuagint* have added thereto." These were "*added without reason, and are contrary to the Truth*" and, consequently, ought not be considered. The determination to safeguard the integrity of the Masoretic chronology also led Whiston to claim that the antediluvian year had been ten days shorter than the postdiluvian year—a "hypothesis" he found to be not only "very agreeable to the History of the Deluge in the *Hebrew* it self," but "absolutely necessary to reconcile the Text as we have it from the same *Hebrew* verity, with that Translation which the *Septuagint*, and from them *Josephus*, give us thereof."¹² At this stage, the far larger discrepancy between the Masoretic and Septuagint chronologies scarcely troubled him.

Six years later Whiston reiterated his conviction. "The Hebrew Text of the Old Testament, being the Original it self, is as reasonably to be allow'd our most authentic Guide in the Chronology of the Old Testament." Such fidelity to Masoretic reckoning, in turn, permitted him to follow Josephus in the chronology of the New Testament. There, the latter had proven himself most trustworthy, as he did in his historical narrative more generally. For example, the continuance of the weekly alteration of the Jewish priests was rendered "very *probable* from the Scripture, and the constant Tradition of the *Jews*: but *certain* from the express Testimony of *Josephus*, an unexceptionable Witness; he being of the first Order of them himself."¹³

In 1713, Whiston found it necessary to pay closer attention to the incongruity between the several chronological systems. The occasion was Anthony Collins's charge in *A Discourse of Free-thinking* that such discrepancies weakened Christianity. Not at all, Whiston rebutted, thereupon tentatively formulating the outlines of a theory that would soon become his trademark:

'tis not certain that in the first Century there was any such Difference at all between them; nor indeed very often of mighty Consequence thereto, which of their present different Chronologies or Readings we follow. In reality I think the Causes of the present Differences between those Copies, are not yet sufficiently discover'd, and several Observations necessary

thereto, have been hitherto omitted by the Learned. Only so far I venture to give my own Thoughts, that those Differences were not, generally speaking, original; nay that they were not so in the Days of *Philo* and *Josephus*; that the then agreeing Copies were truly quoted in the first Ages of the Gospel; that the Occasions of the present Differences seem generally owing to the scattered State of the Jews after the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and before the Days of *Origen*; and that the more we can recover of the Hebrew or Samaritan Text and Greek Copies, as they were in the first Century, in these disagreeing Places, the less Difficulties shall we have upon us, and the more exact will the Citations of Christ, his Apostles and the first Christians appear to be.¹⁴

Collins also attempted to claim Josephus—"the most antient uninspir'd evidence now remaining for the authority of the canon of the Old Testament"—for the camp of freethinkers. He deemed Josephus to be "the most learned and polite author the *Jews* ever had," and his *Jewish Antiquities* "not much inferiour in stile, order, and perspicuity, to the best of the *Grecian* or *Roman* histories"—if only he could find "a better subject, than such an *Illiterate, barbarous, and ridiculous people*." For evidence concerning Josephus's freethinking, Collins relied on John Willes's dissertation on Josephus, published as a preface to the 1702 edition of L'Estrange's translation. Having seen his Messiah [Vespasian] die without "doing any thing for the *Jews*, or answering the *Characters* given him by the *Prophets*," Willes stated, Josephus appears to have "chang'd his Opinion, and to be grown very loose in his Sentiments about the *Mysteries of Religion*, a great *Latitudinarian*, and chiefly addicted to the general Opinions of the excellency of Vertue and Goodness . . . without any Religious esteem of such things as had been reveal'd to the *Jews* by *Moses* and the *Prophets*." Evidently, Collins summarized, Josephus was "a Man of *free thought*, and a *lover of virtue*." Whiston demurred, albeit cautiously, suggesting that it did not appear that Josephus actually repudiated "those Sacred Records he so admirably vindicated against *Apion*;" he merely "endeavour'd to shew a sort of seemingly fair Indifferency and Compliance with the Greeks and Romans in his Accounts, in order to the procuring their better Reception among them."¹⁵

The publication in 1714 of *The Cause of the Deluge Demonstrated* attests to Whiston's continued adherence to Masoretic chronology. But by the end of the decade a reversal had taken place—so much so, in fact, that he felt compelled to account for it in his memoirs. In his *Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament* (1702), he admitted, "I entirely Followed" the Masoretic text and its chronology, taking them "to be the most authentick." Upon "farther enquiry," he completely changed his mind, "and fully satisfied [himself] that the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, as well as *Josephus*'s copy of the *Hebrew*, together with the *Septuagint* Version, and the most authentick records of heathen antiquity, agree in a chronology that lengthens the interval since the deluge about 580 Years."¹⁶ Whiston forbore elaborating on what prompted this reversal, but a key contributing factor, I submit, was vindictiveness, his target being Sir Isaac Newton.

By his own account, Whiston first met Newton in 1694, boasting that Newton had personally handpicked him to serve as his successor as Lucasian professor of mathematics, and that he had enjoyed "a large portion of [Newton's] favour for twenty years together." He left the precise nature of such "favour" vague. Careful reading of the evidence, however, suggests a more complicated story. Whiston

undoubtedly proved himself an early and staunch supporter of Newtonian science. In fact, he established his entire scientific career on demonstrating and propagating Newtonian science. Nevertheless, Whiston turned violently against Newton's chronology, and not necessarily for evidentiary reasons. He resented Newton's unwillingness to support him in two conflicts which took place in the early 1710s. First the Heads of House at Cambridge University expelled Whiston from the Lucasian Professorship of Mathematics for publishing a heretical book and refusing to retract his opinions. Second, ecclesiastical authorities persecuted him for his public advocacy of Antitrinitarianism.¹⁷ Nor did Newton lift a finger to help Whiston to establish himself as scientific lecturer in London. Whiston obviously failed to realize that Newton's displeasure owed itself to Whiston's thinly veiled public pronouncements that implicated Newton in his religious beliefs. Nor did Newton appreciate Whiston's growing Millenarian fervor, to be discussed below.¹⁸

Be that as it may, nearly four decades after the events, Whiston still vented his rage, as he had been doing tirelessly ever since the great man died in 1727. Newton, he thundered in his *Memoirs*, "is one of the greatest instances that ever was, [of] how weak, how very weak, the greatest of mortal men may be in some things, though they be beyond all men in others; and how prodigiously inclination, even in such men, can overbear the contrary superior evidence"—Newton's chronology, in particular, "proved no better than a *sagacious* romance." Retrospectively, he also imagined their falling out to be the result of his independent frame of mind: "perceiving that I could not do as his other darling friends did, that is, learn of him, without contradicting him, when I differed in opinion from him, he could not, in his old age, bear such contradiction; and so he was afraid of me the last thirteen years of his life." Whiston therefore determined, or so he claimed, not to publish his confutation of Newton's chronology during the latter's life-time, "because I knew his temper so well . . . I should have expected it would have killed him."¹⁹

Whiston's tendentious rewriting of history masquerades the fact that, if anyone, it was he who feared Newton. Regardless, as much as their estrangement helped trigger his rejection of Masoretic chronology, Whiston's growing awareness of the great potential inherent in Josephus's works for advancing his own propagandist goals—doctrinal as well as prophetic—also proved instrumental to his abandonment of Masoretic chronology. He first invoked Josephus in 1715 to substantiate his claim regarding the genuineness of the Sibylline Oracles. On one occasion he waxed eloquent on how the heathens, the early Christians, and Josephus all "so frequently cited" the Oracles, "and so generally esteem'd [them] as divinely inspired." Elsewhere he asserted, "*Josephus the Jew* does, for certain, . . . directly cite these *Sibylline* Oracles as ancient, and of Authority for the Confirmation of some Branches of Sacred History. Nay he leaves room for Suspicion that he elsewhere directly stiles them *Sacred Books* also." As was his wont, Whiston dissembled. Josephus referred to the Sibyls explicitly only once, as Whiston himself admitted when citing—via Alexander Polyhistor—a story pertaining to the building of the Tower of Babel. But Josephus neither imputed antiquity nor ascribed authoritativeness to them, "for the Confirmation of some Branches of Sacred History." Nevertheless, for Whiston the mere mention of the Sibyl sufficed to include Josephus among "ancient Testimonies" for the Oracles' authenticity.²⁰

Equally conclusive for Whiston was the congruity between the prophecy, recorded by Tacitus and Suetonius, that from Judea would come forth the men destined to rule the world and Josephus's analogous account: "What most of all . . . encourag'd the *Jews* to undertake the War, was an Oracle, of a doubtful Interpretation, which was found in the *sacred Books*; that some who should arise from their Country, at that Time, should obtain the Empire of the World." Whiston proceeded to relate the prophecy to "principal Clauses in the genuine *Sibylline Oracles*," concluding it all but certain that the testimonies of the Roman historians indicated that the Oracles were "generally esteem'd by the Heathens . . . as Ancient, Genuine and of no less than Divine Authority among them." Vis-à-vis Josephus, he dissembled again. "I do not absolutely deny" that the Jews might have found such an opinion in Scripture, he wrote, "though it cannot be proved that they did then understand or apply any particular Prophecy to that Time and Occasion." Nor was it "very clear" to him that Josephus "meant *Jewish* and not *Gentile* Oracle in this Place."²¹

Whiston's new conception of Scripture integrity and chronology appeared in 1722. All existing copies of the Old Testament, he now contended, both Hebrew and Greek, differed significantly from the genuine versions that existed during the time of Christ and the Apostles. The divergence was owing to the maliciousness of the Jews who, starting in the second century CE, began deliberately corrupting the Masoretic as well as Septuagint versions of Scripture, in order to confound Christianity. Masoretic chronology and especially postdiluvian chronology "has been grossly altered." In contrast, the Samaritan Pentateuch—that "inestimable Treasure of the Christian Church"—was "generally a faithful and uncorrupt Copy" of genuine Hebrew and Greek versions of the Pentateuch, and remained so even in its present form. Whiston conferred equal credibility on Josephus, "the famous *Jewish* Historian, contemporary with the Apostles of our Saviour, [who] always made use of the *Hebrew* Copies of the *Old Testament*, and not of the *Septuagint* Version, in his *Antiquities*." Whiston portrayed Josephus as an indispensable witness for confirming the verity of the New Testament, "with its Citations and Contents, so far as his Works are concern'd also." In addition to "the great Light and Atestation he affords to a thousand things mentioned in the New Testament," Josephus furnished "considerable Testimony to the Fidelity and Accuracy of the Writers of the New Testament, even in their Citations from the Old." Insofar as the Old Testament was concerned, Josephus's book "will be a Sort of a Standard to compare all our later Copies by"—and, in particular, the historical books of Scripture as well as the Book of Daniel.²²

Josephus's purported reliance on the genuine version of the Hebrew Old Testament appeared to Whiston self-evident. For a start, numerous errors and absurdities that marred Masoretic copies were absent in *Jewish Antiquities*. For example, 1 Samuel 17:4 described Goliath as having a height of "six cubits and a span" or nearly twelve feet which, to Whiston, seemed "almost incredible." Josephus, in contrast, furnished the more believable figure of "four cubits and a span"—or about eight feet—"which very probably is the true Reading, and the other Copies corrupted." Similarly, 1 Samuel 13:1 reads that Saul "was one Year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two Years over Israel." The first part of the verse is obviously impossible, Whiston noted, while the second is contradicted

both by the very “History of his Reign,” and by Josephus’s undoubtedly correct figure of forty years. Whiston further privileged Josephus’s reckoning of the duration of Solomon’s reign—eighty years—above the forty years allotted him by the Masoretic copy (1 Kings 11:42 and 2 Chr. 9:30).²³

The last two examples exemplify what Whiston cherished above all else in Josephus: his “genuine Chronology.” It diverged from Masoretic and Septuagint chronologies, but “almost always” conformed to the reckonings of the Samaritan Pentateuch. According to the Masoretic version, for example, Abraham was born 292 years after the Deluge—an interval simply “too short for the historical Facts belonging thereto,” Whiston determined, opting instead for Josephus’s 892 years. Conversely, whereas the Hebrew Bible assigned 430 years to the Israelites’ sojourn in Egypt, Josephus ascribed half of that time, and properly so, thought Whiston.²⁴ Significantly, however, while Whiston reckoned Josephus’s date for the Creation to be 4698 BCE, “upon the joint Consideration” of all existing chronologies he settled on 4483 BCE.²⁵

I shall return to the chronology later. First, however, I should like to draw attention to the manner in which Josephus’s authority could be invoked for the systematic “correction” of Scripture. Consider Whiston’s change of heart regarding the canonicity of the Apocryphal Book of Esdras. In his *Essay on the Apostolical Constitutions* (1711), he recalled in his *Memoirs*, he had described “the fourth book of *Esdras*, as a spurious book, written in a fictitious manner,” probably by a converted Jew, c. 100 CE. However, thanks to Francis Lee’s researches and his own analysis, Whiston became convinced of its genuineness: “what is most of all remarkable here, is that this Apocryphal *Esdras* is for certain that sacred Book which alone *Josephus the Jew* made use of in *Hebrew*, in the very Days of the Apostles”—which proves “that this Book alone was originally in the Jewish Bible.”²⁶ The content of *Jewish Antiquities* further convinced him that the existing copy of the Book of Nehemiah was not “so perfect and regular” as it had been during Josephus’s time, that the Jews had deliberately excised portions of the Book of Esther, and that the order and division of the Books of Ezekiel and Daniel had been altered.²⁷ Further to note, since not even a hint could be found in Josephus’s works to suggest that the characters of the Hebrew Bible in his day differed from the ancient ones, Whiston concluded that the shift from the original Samaritan letters to Aramaic letters was not done by Ezra, as the Jews claimed, but took place during the second century, as part of their concerted effort to corrupt Scripture.²⁸

The cause for this radical alteration of Scripture was obvious to Whiston: the Jews felt it necessary to readjust the genuine Scripture chronology in order to render the so-called Elijah prophecy applicable to the circumstances of their false Jewish Messiah, Bar Cokhva. According to the prophecy, the world would exist for six thousand years: two thousand years of emptiness, two thousand years under the Law, and two thousand years under the Messiah. Since the first period was completed with Abraham’s birth, the second needed to be fulfilled with Bar Cokhva’s birth. Thus, the Jews purposely shortened Scripture chronology “to support the Pretensions of that Impostor.” The culprits, Whiston charged—following the Cisterian monk Paul Pezron, among others—were the celebrated Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph (c. 40–137 CE), with the collusion of his disciple Aquila of Sinope and his associate Onkelos, who translated the Pentateuch into Aramaic. The three, so the

argument went, perpetrated the corruption of Scripture, introduced the subversive Aramaic paraphrases, and substituted the Aramaic letters for the Samaritan ones.²⁹

Whiston dated completing the composition of the *Essay* to 16 May 1718. However, contrary to his habit to publish his works as soon as the ink dried, he hesitated. Perhaps he was not fully secure in the accuracy of his new chronological scheme. By his own account, he entreated Samuel Clarke to solicit Newton's "Opinion and Corrections" of the *Chronological Table* that he ultimately published in 1721, but to no avail. Whiston claimed in 1728—having at that point read and confuted Newton's *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms*—to have realized from the start that Newton "went upon Foundations so vastly different, [and] that I should probably have received little Advantage from his Perusal."³⁰ Once again Whiston proved himself disingenuous; he knew full well, and for quite some time, the grounds upon which Newton's *Chronology* rested. He may well have sought for the great man's blessings, or at least an opportunity to debate his system with Newton. Consequently, the rebuff rankled. Whiston retaliated immediately by inserting into an appendix he prepared for the *Essay* a refutation of a key component of Newton's chronology (albeit without naming him), identifying Sesostris as "the Pharaoh who perished in the Red Sea" in 1531 BCE—some 575 years earlier than the date assigned by Newton to Sesostris's death (956 BCE).³¹

Whiston's *Chronological Table* was published in mid-August 1721; the *Essay* followed on 13 February 1722, less than a month after Whiston finished writing the appendix.³² Thereafter, Josephus became a recurring weapon in Whiston's repertoire, as for example in his 1723 attempt to remove the *Song of Songs* from the Old Testament canon. He embarked on the mission in order to further substantiate his claim that the ancient Jews had never interpreted Scripture in a mystical or allegorical manner prior to the destruction of the Temple. As early as 1708, Whiston boasted, he had confuted the notion that Scripture prophecies included double or mystical meaning, and the same held true for "Scripture *Histories*." And since nothing in the *Song of Songs* concerns "*Morality or Virtue, God or Religion, the Messiah or his Kingdom,*" it evidently lacked a meaningful literal sense upon which a true allegorical interpretation could be established. Hence, even though King Solomon authored the book, it should be removed from the canon, lest it harm Jews and Christians alike. Unlike either *Proverbs* and the *Book of Wisdom*, which Solomon wrote in his younger years—chaste, prudent, and pious—the *Song of Songs* was written during his dotage, "when he was govern'd and enslav'd by his numerous Wives and Concubines," many of whom were idolaters.³³

Josephus served as key witness. As noted earlier, it was Josephus who furnished Whiston with the evidence for the lengthy duration of Solomon's reign, necessary for validating his dotage. More importantly, Whiston maintained, the complete absence of allegorical interpretations from Josephus's works makes it clear that the Jews began resorting to such interpretations only later. Therefore it stood to reason that the reception of the *Song of Songs*—"which entirely and confessedly depends on the Allegorical Method of Interpretation, and that alone"—postdated the destruction of the Temple. "What is most of all remarkable," Whiston gushed, was that Josephus not only "tacitly *disown*[ed]" the authority of the book "by never citing or alluding" to it, but he "directly and explicitly" rejected it by omitting the *Song of Songs* from the catalogue of Old Testament books included in *Against*

Apion. Since Josephus was the undisputed “Witness to the *Jewish Canon before the Destruction of Jerusalem*”—albeit not afterwards—such an omission served as “the main Foundation for the Exclusion of this Book.”³⁴

In 1724, Whiston invoked Josephus’s authority again, this time for establishing the sacrosanctity of the Book of Daniel. “*Josephus assures us,*” he wrote, that it “was one of those most sacred Books of the *Jews*, written before the Reign of *Artaxerxes*, the Son of *Xerxes*, and with which no later Books, how authentick or excellent soever, ought to be compar’d; and in which no Alterations were ever made.”³⁵ Whiston made the assertion as part of his rebuttal of *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, in which Anthony Collins pilloried Whiston’s earlier writings and the *Essay* in particular. Whiston published a shorter response earlier that year where, inter alia, he sought to rebut Collins’s imputation that the famous *Testimonium Flavianum*—Josephus’s alleged account of Jesus’s life and crucifixion—had been a Christian interpolation. Here Whiston summarized an extended attempt he had made in the *Essay* to refute such an allegation. The style of the *Testimonium*, he argued, “is so very agreeable” to Josephus’s genuine style that no one but he could have written it. Not satisfied with stylistic congruity, Whiston contended that Justin Martyr must have referred to the *Testimonium* when affirming to Trypho that the Jews knew about Christ’s Resurrection—as the prophets foretold—since “there is no other ancient *Jewish* Testimony now extant, which is so agreeable to what *Justin* here affirms of them, as is this of *Josephus*.” Even more significant for Whiston was the fact that Josephus, who “had mightily read and considered the Book of *Daniel*,” understood the Seventy Weeks prophecy—as well as the prophecy concerning the “Stone cut out of the mountain” (Daniel 2:34)—precisely “as our Lord applied it.” “All which Things put together imply,” Whiston concluded, that when writing *Jewish Antiquities* Josephus “had a strong Suspicion, if not an inward Belief that *Jesus of Nazareth* was the true Messiah: especially if we still farther consider, what a noble Character he gives of *John the Baptist* . . . and of *James the Just* . . . in other more unquestionable Passages” of the book. If anyone had been guilty of an interpolation, he even suggested, it were the “wicked” Jews. Given their willful corruption of Scripture, surely “there will be Reason to suspect, that they have sometimes done the same with their own Historian, *Josephus*”—especially with the *Testimonium*.³⁶

By 1722, then, Whiston appears to have reached the conclusion that Josephus’s authority would carry greater weight if he could be made a Christian. He may well have thought that doing so would lend greater credibility to the authenticity of the *Testimonium Flavianum*—after all, a Christian would have obviously included details regarding Jesus’s miracles and crucifixion and, consequently, no interpolation would be required—and that Josephus’s unique testimony of events in Judea during the first century CE could also be given a propitious Christian slant. Be that as it may, Whiston’s theorizing on the matter continued to evolve. In 1728 he suggested that the sympathetic manner in which Josephus referred to John the Baptist, James the Just, and Jesus himself—“whose fulfilling the Prophecies, whose numerous Miracles and whose Resurrection he fully acknowledges”—made it “plain” that “in his own private Opinion, [Josephus] was no other than a *Nazarene* or *Ebionite* Christian,” one who esteemed Jesus as a Messiah, though denying his divinity, and who continued to observe Mosaic law.³⁷ Six years later, Whiston

devoted two dissertations to Josephus. The first vindicated more fully the *Testimonium*; the second asserted that the Old Testament copy Josephus used was none other than "that which was collected by Nehemiah." Ironically, Whiston chose to preface his enumeration of proofs for the genuineness of the *Testimonium* by citing "the sentiments of perhaps the most learned Person and the most competent Judge that ever was, as to the Authority of *Josephus*," namely Joseph Scaliger. The great scholar did, indeed, hold Josephus in high esteem, but he was also among the first to dismiss the *Testimonium* as manifestly a Christian interpolation.³⁸

At the conclusion of the second dissertation, Whiston felt it necessary to determine an approximate date for Josephus's conversion to Ebionite Christianity. It could not have been before the completion of *Jewish Wars* in 75 CE, he thought, for Christianity is nowhere mentioned there. However, the great progress Christianity made among the Greek and Romans, among whom Josephus now lived, "might very naturally excite in him a great Curiosity to make an exact Enquiry into it, and into the Miracles that supported it. The effect of which would naturally be his Conviction of their Truth, and his Conversion to *Christianity*." Furthermore, Whiston continued spinning, the failure of Vespasian and Titus to accomplish Josephus's messianic expectations "must naturally make him cast his Eyes elsewhere. And since any Deliverance from the *Romans* could now be only hoped for from the *Jews Messiah*," he logically began considering whether such a Messiah had already appeared. Hence, the conversion followed Titus's death in 81 CE. The composition of *Jewish Antiquities* required close deliberation of Scripture prophecies and, "naturally," Josephus became "inquisitive into their Completion. The Effect of which would also naturally be his Conviction that *Jesus* was to be acknowledged by those Characters to be the true *Messias*."³⁹

In 1737 Whiston went further still to solidify Josephus's Christian identity. He attributed to him the authorship of *Exhortation to the Greeks, concerning Hades, and the Resurrection of the Dead*. Basing his argument on the "many and plain *internal characters*" that "almost inforce us to believe this extract . . . to be the genuine work" of Josephus—as well as on the presence of Josephus's name on ancient manuscripts of the work—Whiston confidently asserted the exhortation to be "no other than a Homily of *Josephus's*, when he was Bishop of *Jerusalem*." He proceeded to embellish this startling new addition to Josephus's biography. In this version of the narrative, following the death of his patrons—Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian—Josephus returned to Jerusalem, probably after the ascension of Trajan to the throne. And since Whiston had already established that Josephus was "a *Nazarene* or *Ebionite Christian* long before this time, . . . what can we suppose, but that he must join" his brethren there, "and might very probably accept of the bishoprick of *Jerusalem* among them also." For evidence Whiston turned to Eusebius's list of the fifteen "Hebrew" bishops of Jerusalem, claiming that the fourteenth on the list, "Joseph," was simply a misprint for Josephus.⁴⁰

It should be clear by now that Whiston was far from being a disinterested scholar. For nearly half a century he had been consumed by the conviction that the millennium was at hand and that the precision of his synchronization of Scripture prophecies with their eventual historical fulfillments had surpassed all previous explanations. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that he considered himself something of a prophet; certainly contemporaries perceived him as

such. Newton, for one, appears to have had Whiston in mind when reprimanding the “folly of Interpreters” who attempted “to fortell times and things . . . as if God designed to make them Prophets.” Reacting to what he considered to be a reprimand, Whiston retorted that in his *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and . . . St. John*, Newton had proven himself to desire to be no less of a prophet.⁴¹ Whiston was equally convinced that he had acquired a singular comprehension of Scripture chronology, joined with an exact discernment of the genuine canon of the Old and New Testaments and of associated sacred writing of the Apostolic age that his contemporaries failed to appreciate. So convinced was he, in fact, that he regimented his life in accordance with his understanding of the daily routine of early Christians. Indeed, when Edmond Halley chided him for fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays—following “the old rule of *Christians*”—by quipping that Whiston had “a pope in [his] belly,” the latter rejoined with some vehemence, “had it not been for the rise now and then of a *Luther*, and a *Whiston*, [Halley] would himself have gone down on his knees” in invocation of Catholic saints.⁴²

Whiston’s evangelical frame of mind radically impaired his judgment in reading ancient texts—Josephus or anyone else. Unlike Scaliger and Casaubon, for example, who found Josephus an invaluable and unique source for the elucidation of the totality of first century Judeo-Hellenistic culture, Whiston regarded him strictly in instrumentalist terms: how could Josephus help him rewrite Scripture to suit his purpose? Or help substantiate his preconceived notions regarding the character and history of early Christianity? Or authenticate the sacredness of texts available to them? Or validate Scripture chronology? “Pure” scholarship, and “objectivity” were not just irrelevant to his agenda, but patently injurious. As early as 1709, Samuel Parker marveled at Whiston’s single-mindedness. In a review of *Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies*, he noted that when confronted with an inconvenient Biblical text, Whiston simply discounted it, stating he was “well assur’d that this was not the primitive reading of this Text.” Several months later, upon commenting on another book by Whiston, Parker articulated his frustration: “To what purpose you dispute with Mr. *Whiston* about What is in Scripture, when he runs out such a further length of Scepticism, as to make it a Doubt What is Scripture? how many, not only Parts, but BOOKS, of the Old Canon are quite lost and extinct? and how many are yet to be Added to those still Extant and Receiv’d?” Small wonder, then, that Whiston failed to see the irony in his accusing Newton of impartiality and inability to yield to “contrary superior evidence.”⁴³

NOTES

1. This is a revised version of a lecture delivered at Oxford in June 2014 as part of the Oxford seminar on “the Reception of Josephus in the Early Modern Period,” and I wish to thank Joanna Weinberg for inviting me to speak. I also wish to thank Carol Magun, as well as two anonymous referees for their helpful comments. *London Evening Post*, 16–19 Feb. 1734.

2. R. M. Wiles, *Serial Publication in England before 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1957), 117–19.

3. *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John Nichols, 8 vols. (London, 1817–58), 2:31; William Whiston, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. William Whiston* (London, 1753), 216; Keith Maslen and John Lancaster, eds. *The Bowyer Ledgers* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1991), 188.

4. *Daily Post*, 7 Jul. 1736; *Daily Post*, 9 Nov. 1736.
5. *Daily Gazetteer*, 9 Mar. 1738; *Daily Gazetteer*, 30 Jan. 1739; *Daily Post*, 21 May 1739.
6. Wiles, *Serial Publication in England*, 138–39.
7. Stephen D. Snobelen, “William Whiston: Natural philosopher, prophet, primitive Christian,” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Cambridge, 2000), i [second pagination].
8. Maureen Farrell, *William Whiston* (New York: Arno Press, 1981); James E. Force, *Whilium Whiston: Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985).
9. Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger. A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship. II. Historical Chronology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, “I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue”: Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2011).
10. David B. Ruderman, “Restoring the ‘True Text’ of the Old Testament: William Whiston and His Critics, Johann Carpzov and Moses Marcus,” in *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 51–60; Adam Shear, “William Whiston’s Judeo-Christianity: Millenarianism and Christian Zionism in Early Enlightenment England,” in *Philosemitism in History*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 93–110.
11. *The Present State of the Republick of Letters*, vol. 15 (May 1735), 398–400.
12. William Whiston, *A New Theory of the Earth* (London, 1696), 123, 151. See also William Whiston, *A Vindication of the New Theory of the Earth from the Exceptions of Mr. Keill and Others* (London, 1698), sig. A4^v.
13. William Whiston, *A Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament, and of the Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (Cambridge, 1702), 2–3, A3^v, 156. Titus’s destruction of Jerusalem, he noted elsewhere, had been rendered famous by “their Authentick Historian *Josephus*.” William Whiston, *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies* (Cambridge, 1708), 213.
14. William Whiston, *Reflexions on an Anonymous Pamphlet, Entitled, a Discourse of Free Thinking* (London, 1713), 22–23.
15. Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* (London, 1713), 131–32, 134, referring to Josephus, *Works*, trans. by Roger L’Estrange (London, 1702), 3; Whiston, *Reflexions*, 42–43.
16. William Whiston, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. William Whiston* (London, 1753), 114.
17. For Whiston’s heterodox opinions, and tribulations, see Eamonn Duffy, “‘Whiston’s Affair’: The Trials of a Primitive Christian 1709–1714,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27, no. 2 (1976): 129–150; Stephen D. Snobelen, “Suffering for Primitive Christianity: William Whiston and Toleration in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Scepticisme, Clandestinité et Libre Pensée*, ed. Miguel Benitez, James Dybikowski, and Gianni Paganini (Paris: Champion, 2002), 269–98.
18. For a fuller discussion of Whiston’s relations with Newton, see Jed Z. Buchwald and Mordechai Feingold, *Newton and the Origin of Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013), 332–52.
19. Whiston, *Memoirs*, 34–35, 250–51.
20. William Whiston, *A Vindication of the Sibylline Oracles* (London, 1715), 44–45, 48–49, 73, 76, 80, 82; *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (London, 1737), 12.
21. Whiston, *A Vindication of the Sibylline Oracles*, 64–67.
22. William Whiston, *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament; and for Vindicating the Citations made thence in the New Testament* (London, 1722), 49, 164, 291–22, 329–30.
23. Whiston, *Essay*, 73, 30; Josephus, *Works* (1737), 173, 192, 251.
24. Whiston, *Essay*, 195, 24, 203–4, 62; Josephus, *Works* (1737), 14, 61.

25. Whiston, *Essay*, 203–4, 214. The longer chronology of the Septuagint he dismissed as an interpolation: 116–23.
26. Whiston, *Memoirs*, 168–69; Whiston, *Essay*, 52–53.
27. Whiston, *Essay*, 54–55, 81–84.
28. *Ibid.*, 154–55. For a fuller discussion of Whiston and Lee, see Alastair Hamilton, *The Apocryphal Apocalypse: The Reception of the Second Book of Esdras (4 Ezra) from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 262–79.
29. Whiston, *Essay*, 226–27, 268–70.
30. William Whiston, *Historical memoirs of the life of Dr. Samuel Clarke*. (London, 1730), 76.
31. Whiston, *Essay*, cxxxix–clxii [second pagination]. For a fuller account, see Buchwald and Feingold, *Newton and the Origin of Civilization*.
32. *Post Boy*, 12–15 Aug. 1721; *Evening Post*, 24–26 Aug. 1721; Whiston, *Essay*, cclvi [second pagination].
33. William Whiston, *A Supplement to Mr. Whiston's late Essay, Towards Restoring the true Text of the Old Testament* (London, 1723), 7, 13–14, 23.
34. Whiston, *Supplement*, 21–28, 42–43; Josephus, *Works* (1737), 979.
35. William Whiston, *The Literal Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies. Being a full Answer to a late Discourse, Of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London, 1724), 50.
36. Whiston, *Essay*, 272–73, 279–80; Josephus, *Works* (1737), 350–51, 575, 580.
37. William Whiston, *A collection of authentick records belonging to the Old and New Testament*, 2 vols. (London, 1727–8), 2:959–60. For the Nazarenes, or early Jewish followers of Christ, see Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988). For early eighteenth-century debates over the sect and its relation to antitrinitarianism, see Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: the Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992); John Toland, *Nazarenus*, ed. Justin Champion (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999).
38. William Whiston, *Six Dissertations* (London, 1734), 1–132, quotations on 2; Josephus, *Works* (1737), iii–iv. For Scaliger's estimation of the *Testimonium*, see H. J. de Jonge, "Joseph Scaliger's Historical Criticism of the New Testament," *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996): 176–93.
39. Whiston, *Six Dissertations*, 129–32.
40. William Whiston, *An Extract out of Josephus's Exhortation to the Greeks, concerning Hades, and the Resurrection of the Dead* (London, 1737), 21–38. For Eusebius's list, see Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, 2 vols. (Washington: Catholic Univ. of America, 1953), 1:212.
41. Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1733), 251–52; Whiston, *Six Dissertations*, 329–30.
42. Whiston, *Memoirs*, 207–8.
43. Samuel Parker, *Censura Temporum* (London, 1709), 22, 613–14; Whiston, *Memoirs*, 35.