

Joshua as Hebrew Hero of Late Antique Christian Historiography: *Iesu Naue* in Pseudo-Hegesippus (*De Excidio Hierosolymitano*)

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Introduction

Zev Farber's recent book, *Images of Joshua in Bible and Their Reception*, has established the state of the art for approaching the reception, understanding, portrayal, and transformation of Joshua qua biblical figure within later traditions.¹ One of these traditions is that of Christian late antiquity. Farber's survey shows that the usual way late ancient Christians apprehended Joshua was as a type of Christ, an allegorical foreshadowing, or if not at least as a model informing specifically Christian behavior and church order. This paper examines a different kind of Joshua from late antiquity, a more classical model where Joshua is portrayed as an ancient military general and divinely sanctioned national leader. Through an analysis of Joshua in the late fourth century Latin text called *On the Destruction of Jerusalem (De Excidio Hierosolymitano*, attributed to an anonymous "Pseudo-Hegesippus"), we come to appreciate a new facet of the late antique Christian historiographical imagination and at the same time gain a distinctive perspective on Joshua as biblical personality resembling classical *exemplum*.

The Christological Joshua of Late Antique Christianity

Farber's summary of Joshua as a topic within ancient Christian texts tells a story of movement from relative obscurity to a place of some prominence and back again. The earliest Christian authors, the writers of the New Testament, "took little or no interest in Joshua."² Thereafter,

¹ Farber 2016, 276–365.

² Farber 2016, 275, in agreement with de Vos 2010. Cf. Acts 7:45; Hebrews 4:8; 11:30. Significantly, the latter passage mentions the walls of Jericho falling "by faith" yet does not mention Joshua by name, although this passage emerges in a famous list of heroes from the Hebrew Bible. Apparently "Joshua is a problematic figure in the eyes of the author" (281). See the alternative perspective in Whitfield 2013; cf. Ousnworth 2012.

certain interpretive trends find Joshua gaining increasing significance within a developing Christology, one which reaches its apogee with Origen.³ Then, in later antiquity, Joshua recedes again into relative marginality. This rise-and-fall narrative of Joshua’s popularity among extant early Christian authors suggests that his rhetorical value among early Christians was largely apologetic, tied to a theological typology that found a prophetic precursor of Jesus Christ in the son of Nun. Farber summarizes:

Joshua and Jesus had the same name. Although it took some time before “Christian” exegetes determined how to make use of this coincidence, eventually a robust Joshua-Jesus typology was created, in which Joshua becomes a prefiguration of Jesus. The typology has its beginning in polemical writing, peaks in the *Homilies* of Origen, and then tapers off. Later exegetes show markedly less interest in Joshua.⁴

One concludes from Farber’s presentation that the fortunes of Joshua’s literary *Nachleben* followed the contours of the rise and subsequent (semi-) fall of allegorical exegesis among early Christians, a trend which of course had its heyday with Origen.

The list of ancient Christian authors who speak of Joshua as a type of Christ—that is, nearly all ancient Christian authors who mention him—is long, as Farber’s survey shows. Yet, for all this, the ways in which various authors deal with Joshua as type brooks some diversity. A number of authors fixated upon Joshua’s/Jesus’s shared name: Clement of Alexandria explains in his *Paedagogus* (1.7.61) how “the name Iesu predicted in the Law was a painting in shadows of the Lord” (σκιαγραφία γὰρ ἦν τοῦ κυρίου τὸ ὄνομα τὸ Ἰησοῦ προκηρυσσόμενον ἐν νόμῳ).⁵ Likewise, many capitalized upon the string of successes characterizing Joshua’s

³ Farber traces the progression from the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, and Tertullian’s *Adversus Iudaeos* to Origen’s *Homilies on Joshua* (2016, 285–322).

⁴ Farber 2016, 275, whose subsequent survey of this typology’s development derives in part from the earlier compendium of Daniélou 1960, 229–43.

⁵ From Farber 2016, 324; see also in this vein the *Epistle of Barnabas* 12.8–9; Justin *Dialogue* 75.2–3; 106.3; 113.1–4; 132.1; Irenaeus *On the Apostolic Preaching* 27; Tertullian *Adversus Iudaeos* 9.20–25; Origen *Homilies on Joshua* 1.1; Aphrahat *Demonstrations* 17.11 (“On the Messiah”); Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.3.1–5; *Demonstratio Evangelica* 4.7.1–6; Hilary of Poitiers *Tractatus Mysteriorum* 2; Cyril of Jerusalem *Catecheses* 10.11; Jerome *Epistle* 53; Augustine *Contra Faustum* 12.31.

military campaign as way of retroactively foreshadowing the future triumphs of Christ. Joshua became a precursor of the Christ who came to fight and conquer, and thus ‘the land’ (of Canaan) which Joshua had mythically captured for Israel came to stand for the eternal salvation claimed by Christ for Christians. The signal moments from Joshua’s military career became transvalued into allegorical victories embodying Jesus Christ’s ultimate victory.⁶ In this way the biblical Joshua really became quite ‘Christian.’⁷

We should remember here that biblical heroes like Joshua were not restricted to textual afterlives within Christian late antiquity. They also figured in art, architecture, epigraphy, and other forms of popular media and culture. Therefore we should not restrict our imaginary concerning Joshua’s reception within late ancient Christianity to writings only. One example in which Joshua’s legacy may have ‘jumped’ from textual to material culture is in the enigmatic early Christian symbol of the fish. Robert Eisler, Gedaliahu Stroumsa, and more recently Farber have discussed how one way of understanding Joshua’s name in Aramaic (Joshua bar Nun) is not only as the patronymic “son of Nun” but also as “son of the fish”⁸ (see Figure 1).

⁶ Prominently episodes like that of the defeat of Amalek at Rephidim from Exodus 17, which many authors augmented—in the biblical story Moses’ keeping his hands raised effects victory for Joshua, whereas his dropping them in fatigue causes the Israelites to give way—by saying that when Moses did this he “made the form of a cross” (ποίησθι τύπον σταυροῦ) while standing atop shields: *Epistle of Barnabas* 12.2, in line with Justin *Dialogue* 131.4–5, Tertullian *Adversus Iudaeos* 10.10, Cyprian of Carthage *Testimonia* 2.21, Prudentius *Cathemerinon Liber* 12.169–80 (cf. Justin *Dialogue* 90.4–5, 91.3; Origen *Homilies on Joshua* 1.1; Aphrahat *Demonstrations* 11.12 [“On Circumcision”]; Ephrem *Commentary on Exodus* 17.2; Theodoret of Cyrrihus *Questions on the Octateuch* Exod #34); or the levelling of Jericho from Joshua 6, discussed by Tertullian *Adversus Iudaeos* 4.8, who argues against Jewish Sabbath laws by saying that Joshua razed Jericho on the Sabbath (cf. Aphrahat *Demonstrations* 13.12 [“On the Sabbath”]; 21.11 [“On Persecution”]; Ps-Macarius *Homily* 50); or the time the “sun stood still” to allow Joshua to continue exterminating the Amorites at Gibeon (Josh 10:13), noted in Justin’s *Dialogue* (113.4; 132.1); Origen *Homilies on Joshua* 1.5; Aphrahat *Demonstrations* 21.11 (“On Persecution”). This allegory comes to a head with Origen, as Farber 2016 shows, epitomized in a passage like *Homilies on Joshua* 1.7, where the nations (*gentes*) of the ancient land of Canaan (Canaanites, Perizzites, Jebusites) become “kinds of vices” (*gentes vitiorum*) with which the Christian soul struggles.

⁷ Another scene cited involves the ‘second circumcision’ instituted by Joshua in Joshua 5: see, e.g., Justin *Dialogue* 113.6–7, Lactantius *Divine Institutes* 4.17, Zeno of Verona *Sermon* 1.17, and Farber 2016, 321–22. See also Hippolytus of Rome *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, who mentions the circumcision but appears to circumvent the association between Joshua and Jesus (Farber 2016, 358).

⁸ Farber 2016, 310–12; Stroumsa 1992; Eisler 1921, who at 171n1 cites 1 Chron 7:20–27 and, noting the *ben Nun* / “son of a fish” correlation, states that “this is beyond doubt the ultimate reason why Jesus the Nazarene is called the ‘Fish’ in the early Christian mystery language,” citing also the numerology of the names *Iēsous* (= 888) and *Jehōshua ben-Nun* (= 555). Elsewhere Eisler posits an equally fanciful theory about Joshua’s mysterious father “Nun (= Fish)” whereby “The *Messiah ben Nun* (= *Ichthys*) may therefore well have been conceived also as a reincarnation of this mythic hero, who had suffered for the deliverance of his oppressed nation” (253n1).



Figure 1: Funerary Stele of Licinia Amias, 3rd century CE, marble. Museo Nazionale Romano, Epigraphy Collection 67646. Public Domain (photo by Maria-Lan Nguyen). = *ICUR* II, 4246 / *ILCV* 1611B. Inscription: *D() M() / IXΘYC ZΩNTΩN / LICINIAE AMIATI BE/NEMERENTI VIXIT /-----* (“D ... M ... / Fish of the Living [possibly ‘living fish’] / [for] Licinia Amias, well-deserving [person], [who] lived ...”). This is often cited as an early exemplar of the Christian fish symbol.

Such an etymology, known among Christians from the second century,⁹ also crops up in rabbinic Judaism in late antiquity: a midrash from *Genesis Rabbah* mentions it explicitly.¹⁰ The traditional explanation of the early Christian IXΘΥΣ, proffered by Augustine, attributes it to an oracular acrostic: Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτὴρ (“Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”).¹¹ But many scholars have seen the acrostic as a result of the symbol, not its cause.¹² It is therefore

⁹ Quasten 2003.

¹⁰ *Genesis Rabbah* 98.16: “He who his name is **as the name of the fish**, his son will bring them into the land [of Israel], **Nun – his son Yehosha**,” quoted in Benarroch 2017, 58 (see 57–59), citing the edition of Theodor-Albeck 1965. See further Ginzberg 1909-1938, 841–42 and, interestingly, Holzer 2020, 25–26.

¹¹ Augustine *City of God* 18.23; *Syballine Oracles* 8.150–217; Farber 2016, 311.

¹² Farber 2016, 311, citing Dölger 1922; Cumont 1916; Scheffelowitz 1911.

possible that Joshua, the famous Hebrew military general, stands behind one of early Christianity's more mysterious material manifestations. But whether or not this is the case, the mere possibility nods to the fact that biblical *exempla* like Joshua held places in the late ancient Christian imagination whose expressions went beyond the textual realm, an idea to which we will return further below.

Returning for now to textual matters: one observation to be gleaned from Farber's survey is that Joshua's fates among Christians was often beholden to the particular questions in which certain authors were interested—often explicitly exegetical and theological or doctrinal in nature—and to the literary genres which typically supported the answering of such questions. Thus Joshua usually emerges in discussions of Christ typology, or at least in discussions of ecclesial doctrine or ritual that take interest in citing that typology. Yet this was not always the case. Scholarship on early Christian treatments of Joshua rightly paints a picture in which the overwhelmingly predominant trend was to see Joshua as prefiguring realities later revealed in Jesus Christ, in which Joshua's significance was largely theological. Such usage of Joshua was the early Christian norm, but it was not a hard and fast rule. Sometimes Joshua appears in (con)texts from late antiquity where Christ-typology is nowhere in view; in one such text, Joshua's significance is not largely theological, but rather historiographical. This text, a late fourth-century Latin work called *On the Destruction of Jerusalem (De Excidio Hierosolymitano)*, also known as 'Pseudo-Hegesippus,' presents a fairly exceptional depiction of Joshua son of Nun. In it Joshua is a historical figure, a military man, and is remembered solely on these terms. This is not to say, however, that Joshua in *De Excidio* has no significance which the modern reader would call 'religious,' or that his portrayal there excludes common Christian theological understandings. It is to say, however, that examining Joshua in this somewhat unusual text may expand our ability as modern scholars to envision the contours and limits of the Christian historiographical imagination in late antiquity. At the same time, we find

a distinctive angle from which to view the reception of Joshua within late antique Christianity, and of course we learn things about *De Excidio*, a markedly understudied text, in the process.

Joshua as Warrior & Military Historiography in Pseudo-Hegesippus

The text colloquially dubbed *On the Destruction of Jerusalem* (*De Excidio Hierosolymitano*, sometimes *De Excidio Urbis Hierosolymitanae*) is a text unlike most other early Christian historiography in that it concerns itself with military history and the conventions of classical historiography (as opposed to the church history or Christian chronicle developed by Eusebius).¹³ The text has been largely ignored for several reasons, chief among which is the fact that *De Excidio* rewrites Flavius Josephus' seven-book, Greek *Jewish War* into a five-book, Latin Christian work.¹⁴ For this reason it has generally been viewed, implicitly or explicitly, as basically derivative. But the work is actually quite original, and its vocabulary, rhetoric, use of sources (classical, biblical, Jewish, Christian), and other features are worthy of study. One particularly noteworthy aspect of the work concerns its treatment of the heroes of the Jewish Scriptures: in various passages in the work, usually character speeches,¹⁵ Ps-Hegesippus creates ornate patchworks of argument in which sundry ancient Hebrew *exempla* are marshaled in service of a particular speaker's main points. Scholars have recognized that in so doing Ps-Hegesippus engages with the distinctive Roman cultural practice of exemplarity, and *exempla* and exemplarity in *De Excidio* have recently become serious avenues of inquiry.¹⁶ A study of *De Excidio*'s treatment of the biblical Joshua fits well within this research trajectory.

¹³ Bay 2021a; 2020a; 2020b; 2018; Pollard 2015; Somenzi 2009; Sehmeyer 2009, 196, 202–203, 219–21, 293n64; Estève 1987; Bell 1987. The critical text is that of Ussani 1932; Ussani's Latin text is cited here throughout, and all translations therefrom are my own.

¹⁴ Thus the work has been treated most commonly (by far) within discussions of the reception and tradition of Josephus within early Christianity: Bay 2021c; Levenson & Martin 2016, 323–25, 334; 2014, 4; Leoni 2016, 309–10; 2006, 483–85; Inowlocki 2016, 357–58, 363; Kletter 2016, 371–84; and, foundationally, Schreckenberg 1992, 71–73; 1972, 56–58; 1968, 107, 144–45, 173, 214.

¹⁵ These speeches were the object of Bell 1977, which has become a foundational study for *De Excidio*.

¹⁶ Bay 2021a; 2020b; 2018; Somenzi 2009; Sehmeyer 2009, 196, 202–203, 219–21, 293n64. Foundational for the study of Roman exemplarity are now Langlands 2018 complementing Roller 2018, with bibliographies and many earlier studies standing behind each book.

This section surveys, contextualizes, and analyzes *De Excidio*'s treatment of Joshua vis-à-vis the other treatments to be found in extant texts from late antiquity, surveyed briefly in the section above. Such comparative treatment is a prerequisite for understanding what is important in *De Excidio*, for its similarities to and differences from other late antique treatments of Joshua constitute by definition its distinctiveness and unusual or usual features. In order for such a comparative study to be fruitful, we should say something briefly about the fundamental data pertaining to that text. Albert Bell's dating of *De Excidio* on several grounds to c. 370-375 CE has been almost uniformly accepted by subsequent scholarship.¹⁷ His suggestion that Ps-Hegesippus seems to have written in the wake of Julian's abortive attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple is compelling, and has proved perennially intriguing to scholars.¹⁸ The authorship of *De Excidio* is unknown: 'Pseudo-Hegesippus' is a pseudonymous placeholder, the author having come to be identified at some point with the 2nd-century, Greek writing Hegesippus who was a source for Eusebius. Several author identities have been posited, most prominently Ambrose of Milan, whose putative authorship of *De Excidio* has been an object of scholarly contention for over a century;¹⁹ to be sure, a comparison between the language,

¹⁷ Bell 1987, 350 for a succinct discussion; see also Bay 2018, 42–44; Bell 1977, 3, 214. The earliest ms dates from the sixth century (Codex Ambrosianus C 105 inf., Ussani's "M," which is actually a fusion of this ms and a slightly letter ms in an inferior hand), and a definite *terminus ante quem* comes from its mention in Eucherius of Lyons' *De situ Hierusolomitanae* (CCL 175: 240–41), and maybe also in Augustine (Bell 1977, 214). A *terminus post quem* of c. 330 CE is gleaned from the fact that *De Excidio* 3.5.2 mentions Constantinople as the center of the Christian world. Further, Bell uses Ps-Heg's mention of *Britannia redacta* at *De Excidio* 2.9.1 and 5.15.1 to guess that the text postdates the campaign of Theodosius the Elder to reestablish Roman hegemony in the North (Britain) in 367-368 CE; Peter Van Nuffelen has several times expressed to me his ambivalence at this argument, and thus see now Van Hoof & Van Nuffelen 2020, 78; finally, Bell reads *De Excidio*'s several optimistic panegyrics of Roman hegemony (*De Excidio* 2.9; 5.46) as testaments to the fact that the author knew not of the late fourth century Germanic incursions or the disaster at Adrianople in 378 CE. Thus, while the date is somewhat conjectural in terms of solid data, the range of possible dates is not great. For an argument for a somewhat earlier date based upon a questionable reading of *De Excidio* 5.15, where Josephus in a rhetorical speech (hence the questionability) refers to a time when Palestine was governed by various leaders, i.e. pre-358 CE, see Callu 1987, 136.

¹⁸ Bell 1987, 350; originally 1977, 3 *et alibi*; the idea is picked up routinely, e.g. by Bay 2018, 43–44; Somenzi 2009, 153–57; Chapman 2009, 319–31; Irshai 2000, 145n94. The authoritative work on Julian's attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple and the Christian bruhaha that this sparked is Levenson 2004; 1980. One should also now consult Finkelstein 2018, however.

¹⁹ Feldman 1984, 41 notes that "One of scholarship's favorite indoor sports, especially at the turn of the century, had been to guess the identity of the author of Hegesippus." Feldman then provides a helpful annotated bibliography of the literature up to that point, though does not record Bell's important suggestions of authorship. In general, the most arguments in support of Ambrosian authorship are Somenzi 2009 (albeit moderately); Lumpe

phrasing, and thematic emphasis of *De Excidio* and the corpus of Ambrose indicates that the two traditions have a great deal in common and probably occupied the same social, cultural, and historical milieu.²⁰ This has been argued well and recently by Chiara Somenzi (2009), in the only published monograph on *De Excidio* to date. Nevertheless, this attribution remains uncertain to say the least, as it likely was already in late antiquity.²¹ Thus, despite authors who have been suggested—Ambrose, Ambrosiaster (pseudo-Ambrose), Isaac the Jew, Nummius Aemilianus Dexter, Evagrius of Antioch—*De Excidio* remains an anonymous text.²²

The provenance of *De Excidio* is, like its date and authorship, imprecisely known. Bay (2019) has recently revived the argument of Bell (1987; 1977) that the text came from Antioch, though traditionally an Italian provenance has been assumed.²³ Spain has also been suggested as a place of writing, given *De Excidio*'s early reception there, witnessed by Isidore of Seville, Alvarus, and the author of the *Liber scintillarum*.²⁴ Today, *De Excidio*'s provenance is unknown, though Antioch seems its most probable place of writing, as will be suggested below.

With this snapshot of *De Excidio* as text in view, we may proceed to examine its use of the biblical figure of Joshua. Over the last two books of *De Excidio* (Books 4 & 5), Ps-Hegesippus mentions Joshua in three separate passages of respectively unique character. Each

1968; Dwyer 1931; Landgraf 1902; important attempts to dispute or invalidate this position are Mras 1961; 1960, xxxiii; McCormick 1935; Morin 1914/1919; Scholz 1909; Vogel 1881.

²⁰ The Ambrose debate in fact caused the two books (published CUA dissertations) which have been written on Ps-Heg's Latin vocabulary and syntax, Dwyer 1931 and McCormick 1935, to frame their largely unrelated studies as evidence for (Dwyer) or against (McCormick) Ambrosian authorship.

²¹ The earliest mss of *De Excidio*, Codex Ambrosianus C 105 inf. ("M") and Codex Cassellanus theol. fol. 65, are both from late antiquity (arguably both from the 6th century CE), and neither confirm authorship (though, to be fair, the beginning portion of *De Excidio* is missing in M). Moreover, two other pre-10th century mss of *De Excidio*, Codex Augiensis 82 and Codex Sangallensis 626 (both 9th century, probably from the same *Vorlage*), may suggest an authorship related to a certain Cyprianus, whose poem appears in both mss; see Pollard 2015 and Gitner forthcoming. Finally, Cassiodorus in his *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning* 1.17.1 mentions a Latin translation of Josephus' "Jewish Captivity" (i.e. *Jewish War*), which he says is ascribed variously to Jerome, Ambrose, and Rufinus; scholars often wonder if this could be *De Excidio*, though Cassiodorus mentions the work as having seven books like the *Jewish War*, not five like *De Excidio*.

²² Bell 1977, 31–33 argues for Evagrius of Antioch. Isaac the Jew was suggested/supported by Wittig 1906. Morin 1914/1919 argues for Jerome's friend Dexter, the son of a Spanish bishop, proconsul of Asia, and praetorian prefect in 395.

²³ See further Raimondi 2011; Somenzi 2009.

²⁴ This argument was made by Traube 1884, and noted in Bell 1977, 25.

passage cites or alludes to the storyline of Joshua 6, where the Israelites famously felled the walls of Jericho, not with weapons, but by marching around it and making music, and two of the passages also have other traditional episodes in view. Together, these passages betray an author interested in Joshua, yet not in his theological/typological significance.

The first passage comes in *De Excidio* 4.17 at the beginning of a geographical excursus on the environs of Jericho, more or less a paraphrase of Josephus' *Jewish War* 4.459–75.

Introducing this locale, Ps-Hegesippus says:

Est etiam iuxta Hiericho urbem fons abundans atque idem uberius ad potum, pinguior ad irrigandum, quem Iesus Naue natione Hebraeus manu ualidus primum genti eripuit Chananaeorum.

For there is an abundant spring near the city of Jericho which is quite profitable for drinking and is rich for irrigation—this city which Joshua Naue, a Hebrew by birth, first seized with a strong hand from the race of the Canaanites.

De Excidio 4.17.1 (ed. Ussani 1932, 267)²⁵

Several features of this passage suggest that Ps-Hegesippus here approaches Joshua not as a practitioner of Christian theology or even as a biblical exegete but like a classical historian.

First, the passage anticipates a lengthy topographic digression along the lines of what one finds in earlier Greek and Latin historiography and texts like Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*.²⁶

That Ps-Hegesippus is drawing his description from an earlier source renders him quite at home

²⁵ This is the critical text used throughout this essay; English translations are all my own.

²⁶ And indeed, Pliny's two mentions of Jericho (*Natural History* 5.15.70; 8.9.45) comport with the Josephus/Ps-Heg account. Geography and topography were endemic features of ancient historiography, and after "Herodotus set the standard by including in his *Histories* extended descriptions of regions under Persian domination such as Egypt, India and Scythia," such "digressions became an important feature of later historical surveys, for examples, those by Thucydides, Polybius, Sallust and Tacitus" (Dueck 2012, 8). *De Excidio* betrays a strong interest in this traditional trope, as noted by Traina 2015, 58; sometimes Ps-Heg draws on Tacitus in his geographical asides: Bloch 2002, 190–92. Cf. Ps-Heg's *ekphrasis* on Antioch at *De Excidio* 3.5.2, treated in Bay 2019, 103–109.

within the ancient historiographical tradition.²⁷ Second, Ps-Hegesippus' use of the Latin terms *natio* and *gens*, alongside the ethnic moniker *Hebraeus*, speaks to a general interest in ethnography, something which Ps-Hegesippus evinces throughout *De Excidio*.²⁸ Joshua is one of only two biblical figures whom Ps-Hegesippus individually identifies as *Hebraeus*—the other is King David.²⁹ This is linked to Jericho as a historical site with a sequence of inhabitants, which gives this passage a rather Herodotean feel. Third, and most important for our purposes, we should note how Joshua is here memorialized: as Israel's conquering general who "ripped" (*eripuit*) Jericho away from the Canaanites "with a strong hand" (*manu ualidus*). This passage suggests that Ps-Hegesippus' interest in Joshua—historical, martial, linked to geography and ethnography—aligns with what we would expect to see among earlier Greek and Latin historians; theology is nowhere in view. As we will see, such a portrayal is programmatic for *De Excidio*'s treatment of Joshua.

The mention of Joshua at *De Excidio* 4.17.1 is the only mention of his name in the work with a parallel in its Josephan source-text; the other two mentions are original to Ps-Hegesippus. First, near the beginning of Book 5, Ps-Hegesippus rescripts a short address that Josephus himself as author/narrator made to Jerusalem (and its inhabitants) in *Jewish War* 5.19–20. Josephus' address, in itself "striking" according to John Marincola,³⁰ is a rather short speech lamenting Jerusalem's sad state; Ps-Hegesippus' version of the speech in *De Excidio* 5.2 is an extremely long diatribe against Jerusalem and the Jews which arguably epitomizes

²⁷ Bell 1977, 14 makes the very apt parallel between the two pairs Polybius & Livy and Josephus & Ps-Hegesippus, each a pair of historians where the later, Latin-writing author draws heavily upon the earlier Greek work, yet freely expands upon and changes his source text where desired.

²⁸ See the initial foray in Bay 2021b. Ps-Heg's ethnic identification of Joshua roughly corresponds to Josephus' introduction of him in the parallel/source passages as Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναυῆ παῖς στρατηγὸς Ἑβραίων (*War* 4.459). Ἑβραῖος is a rare term in Josephus' *Jewish War* (appearing seven times in total), whereas Ps-Heg uses the Latin *Hebraeus/Hebraei* exactly two dozen times.

²⁹ *De Excidio* 5.9.1. A very strange, but related curiosity in *De Excidio* comes with its apparent identification of Hannibal of Carthage as a *Hebraeus* in a speech given by Titus in 5.31.2.

³⁰ Marincola 1997, 168.

the anti-Jewish historiographical outlook of *De Excidio* as a work.³¹ This speech recounts in detail the sins and sufferings of Jerusalem and the Jewish people, concluding in the last line of *De Excidio* 5.2.1 that the destruction of 70 CE was due to the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus and that it was, unlike previous destructions, permanent and irreversible.³² Here, however, we are interested in the beginning of the address.

In the first lines of *De Excidio* 5.2, the narrator speaks in the second person to Jerusalem and by proxy the Jews whom it represents, asking how Jerusalem has come to this point (i.e., in retrospect, the precipice of its destructions by the Romans in 70 CE).³³ Thereafter, Ps-Hegesippus summons five heroes from the Hebrew Bible, bidding them each “arise” (with *exsurge* or *suscitare*) to witness the sorry plight of their Jewish descendants. The overall impact of this august cohort of famous figures—Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David, Elisha—is to highlight the spectacle and tragedy of Jerusalem’s destruction and to illustrate the decline of the Jews from a once-great people (the Hebrews/Israelites) into nothing.³⁴ In each case, the narrator remembers several of the high points from each biblical hero’s career and contrasts the Israel of their times with the first-century Jews who are in the process of being conquered by the Romans, and by themselves. His summoning (or ‘conjuring’)³⁵ of Joshua reads thus:

³¹ So Bay 2018. The address in Josephus comprises 75 Greek words; the ‘parallel’ (indeed, massively evolved and changed) passage in *De Excidio* 5.2.1–2 contains 1,350 Latin words, having ballooned to exactly 18 times the length of Josephus’ address word-for-word and taking up six full pages in the critical edition (Ussani 1932, 295–301).

³² Bay 2018, 292–93. On the anti-Jewish rhetoric of *De Excidio*, see Bay 2019, 116–19; Somenzi 2009, 151–82 (with a good short assessment by Alciati 2011, 360); Estève 1987, 451–58; Schreckenberg 1982, 310–11.

³³ The first line of *De Excidio* 5.2.1 reads: “How have you been deceived, o city, by your people, to whom once you appeared glorious; how have you been conquered by your own forces, and your own hands have been turned against you, you who used to win victories without armies and used to strike the enemy without any battle taking place, when angels would contend on your behalf and the waves of the sea would fight for you along with clefts in the earth and thunder from heaven?” (*Quomodo decepta es, ciuitas, populis tuis, quibus quondam uidebaris beata, quomodo expugnata es tuis armis atque in te conuersae sunt manus tuae, quae solebas sine armis uincere sine ullo proelio hostem ferire, cum pro te angeli dimicarent et militarent tibi fluctus maris, terrae hiatus, caeli fragores?*).

³⁴ In general on this passage see now Bay 2020b.

³⁵ The infinitive/imperative *suscitare*, which Ps-Heg uses to summon up Joshua, David, and Elisha at *De Excidio* 5.2.1 (using *exsurge* for Moses and Aaron), developed from meaning “to rouse from sleep” in Plautus, Varro, and Cicero (e.g.) to meaning “raise from the dead” in Lactantius, Ambrose, Augustine, and here in Ps-Heg, according to Dwyer 1931, 40. Dwyer classes it with other “words which originally had a very general or extensive meaning applicable to many related objects or actions. In the process of time these words came to be used in a particular or restricted sense applicable to one specific object or action” (31).

Suscitare et tu, Iesu Naue, qui muros inexpugnabiles Hiericho sacerdotibus tuba canentibus conplanasti, et uide populum, cui exteros subiecisti, nunc eundem subiectum opprimi.

“You too rise up, Joshua Naue, who levelled the impenetrable walls at Jericho by means of priests playing the trumpet, and behold the people to whom you subjugated foreigners, now itself subjected to oppression.”

De Excidio 5.2.1 (ed. Ussani 1932, 295–96)

In the previously examined passage, Ps-Hegesippus inevitably mentioned Joshua’s triumph at Jericho because that passage was explicitly about Jericho, and because his source-text also mentioned Joshua in introducing that locale. Here, however, we come to see that the Jericho episode from Joshua 6 is actually for Ps-Hegesippus a or the defining moment of Joshua’s legacy. Of all the feats Joshua performs in the biblical record, the Jericho story functions as emblematic for Joshua’s reputation: it was he who cleansed the ‘promised land’ of its native-inhabitants-become-‘foreigners’ (*exteri*) on behalf of the Israelite *populus*. Moreover, once again we see that the Joshua of *De Excidio* is depicted as a persona of military historiography. Any typological or theological association with Jesus is completely absent.

The final mention of Joshua in *De Excidio* comports well with the first two passages in which he appears. But this final passage tells us more, both about how Joshua could function rhetorically for Ps-Hegesippus and about the ways in which Ps-Hegesippus understood Joshua’s historical significance; as it turns out, Ps-Hegesippus’ appreciation for Joshua extends beyond the destruction-of-Jericho pericope.

De Excidio 5.15–16 constitute two back-to-back speeches given by Josephus, at Titus’ behest, to his countrymen holed up within the walls of a besieged Jerusalem. These speeches correspond to those recorded in Josephus’ *Jewish War* 5.363–419.³⁶ Josephus speaks in his

³⁶ It is actually more like one speech interrupted shortly in the middle with some curses, threats, and thrown objects directed at Josephus by his Jewish comrades from behind the walls of Jerusalem.

native tongue and a spear's throw from the walls, which turns out to be a good thing because his Jewish addressees hurl spears at him for his efforts (5.15.1). Ps-Hegesippus' versions of these speeches are much lengthier than those found in Josephus' own *Jewish War* and, more importantly, they constitute together the densest collection of biblical *exempla* collocated in any one place within all of *De Excidio* (by far).³⁷ Ps-Hegesippus turns Josephus' rather short speeches into lengthy sequences of biblical heroes and stories, weaving these together into a complex argument for surrender to Rome rather than continued resistance. In the second speech, that of *De Excidio* 5.16.1, Ps-Hegesippus has Josephus wax eloquent on the war-time lessons to be learned from the Jewish past. Chief among these is the observation that the Jews' ancient ancestors were not accustomed to succeeding militarily and politically by undertaking conventional warfare, but rather by relying upon the protective power of almighty God, with whom they had a covenant. The rhetorical question crystallizing Josephus' point runs like this:

Non talibus uincere armis solebatis. Quando enim in hasta et gladio fuit Hebraeorum uictoria? Recordamini unde orti et a quibus sitis profecti, quomodo patres uestri hostes suos uicerint.

“You have not been in the habit of prevailing with such weapons. For when was the victory of the Hebrews found in shield and sword? Remind me whence you sprang forth and out of what circumstances you emerged, and how your forefathers conquered their enemies.”

De Excidio 5.16.1 (ed. Ussani 1932, 323)

Josephus' argument is one the author himself voices when addressing Jerusalem/the Jews at the beginning of *De Excidio* 5.2.1, the passage cited just previously: namely, the ancient Israelites used to fight and win their battles without weapons (*vincere sine armis*),³⁸ the implication being that the fact that the first-century Jews had resorted to fighting with *hasta et*

³⁷ Bell 1977, 77, 201–203.

³⁸ The idea of “vittoria senza armi” is one that Somenzi 2009, 110–15 theorizes and uses to link Ambrose and *De Excidio*.

gladium shows how far the apple has fallen from the tree.³⁹ The upshot of Josephus' speech in *De Excidio* 5.16.1 is that the resisting Jews should lay down their arms in light of the examples set by their forefathers.

Within this oratorical matrix of exemplarity, Ps-Hegesippus has Josephus mention Moses and the miraculous Israelite Exodus from Egypt. Next he comes to Joshua:

Didicit haec arma, quae sunt non carnalia sed fortia deo, Moysi discipulus atque successor idem Iesus Naue, qui imitator et subpar magistri Iordanis aquas conuertit retrorsum idemque cum inexpugnabiles Hiericho urbis muros uideret, sacerdotes tuba canere iussit iubilare populum. Quo facto repente cecidere muri atque exusta ciuitas est et omnes necati, nisi quos Raab bonae meretricis fides a memoratae urbis excidio defendit.

Joshua Naue, the same as the disciple and successor of Moses, learned of these arms, which are not of the flesh but are mighty in God; he, as an imitator and colleague of his master, turned back the waters of the Jordan, and the same man, when he beheld the impenetrable walls of the city of Jericho, commanded the priests to play their trumpets and the people to rejoice. When this was done, the walls fell immediately and the city's population was destroyed and all [who were in it] were killed, except those whom the faith of Rahab, the worthy prostitute, preserved from the destruction of that famous city.

De Excidio 5.16.1 (ed. Ussani 1932, 325)

Here Ps-Hegesippus goes beyond his earlier mentions of Joshua by actually describing the fall of Jericho and in adding the note about Rahab's exemption from that extermination (Joshua 2:1–21, 6:17–25). Ps-Hegesippus complements this with an earlier episode from Joshua 3, where the waters of the Jordan River stop so that the Israelites can enter the promised land of

³⁹ The first sentence of *De Excidio* 5.2.1 tells Jerusalem: "...you used to conquer without arms and strike the enemy with no battle taking place" (*solebas sine armis uincere sine ullo proelio hostem ferire*). Elsewhere in 5.16.1, the passage in which Joshua here appears, Ps-Heg will have Josephus draw from the story of the Ark of the Covenant's capture by the Philistines and miraculous return in 1 Samuel 5–6 the moral that "... arms cannot conquer without piety, but piety conquers without arms" (*sine religione arma non uincant et religionem sine armis uincere*). The idea of 'winning' *sine armis* also emerges in 5.15.1 concerning the matriarch Sarah's rescue.

Canaan on dry ground (signaling divine protection and book-ending the Israelites' forty-year wilderness wanderings, which began, famously, with the dry crossing of the Red Sea). More important still, Ps-Hegesippus infuses his portrayal of Joshua with the ethical theme that permeates Josephus' speech in *De Excidio* 5.16, namely reliance upon God and the necessity of *fides*. Shortly hereafter in the same speech, Josephus mentions Joshua one last time, just after recapitulating the essence of his argument; I include this preface in the quotation:

Liquet igitur plurimos patrum duces cum minime proeliarentur uictoriam adeptos, alios quoque bello superiores fuisse, quibus consulentibus bellandi ius oraculo permissum foret. Denique uictus Amalech sed cum Moyses manus leuaret, uicit Iesus Naue cum solem statueret, uicit et Gedeon cum in aqua dimicatueros probasset, Samson etiam cum adhuc intaminatum crinem seruaret, uicit et Samuel, sed cum adiutorem lapidem figere proposuisset.

“Therefore this makes clear that many leaders of the fathers achieved victory when they hardly engaged in battle, and that others were superior in war, those to whom, while they were deliberating, the right to wage war was permitted by an oracle. Indeed, Amalek was conquered when Moses but raised his hands, Joshua Naue conquered when the sun stood still, and Gideon conquered after he had tested his combatants with water, and even Samson [conquered] when he preserved his hair untouched, and Samuel conquered, but only when he had thought to establish a stone [for his] Helper.”

De Excidio 5.16.1 (ed. Ussani 1932, 327)

I include these mentions of Gideon, Samson, and Samuel at the end of this quote to illustrate the grouping and sequentializing nature of the speech in *De Excidio* 5.16. In terms of what this final passage tells us about Joshua, we see that here Ps-Hegesippus expands his horizons farther still. Not only do we find mention of the scene from Joshua 10 where “the sun stood still” (10:13) as Joshua fought against the Amorites, but also of the time when Amalek was conquered (*victus*) in Exodus 17:8–16. This indirectly alludes to Joshua, for while Moses was

the one who held up his hands during that engagement (17:11–12), Joshua led the fighting (17:10,13). Framed against the historical-military ‘rule’ that Josephus states first in this passage, Joshua appears as an apt *exemplum* from among the *duces patrum* who embodies the second type of role model—those to whom *ius bellandi* was granted (*permissus*) by way of *oraculum*—but certainly not the first (those who ‘hardly fought at all,’ *proeliare minime*). In *De Excidio*, Joshua is a violent, military man; he is a ‘winner’ (*vicit*).

Overall, the above survey reveals a Joshua in *De Excidio* which in many ways does not conform to the norms of late ancient Christianity. On the one hand, to be sure, Ps-Hegesippus recalls those episodes for which Joshua was most famous and which ancient Christian writers loved to cite: like his contemporaries Paulinus of Nola and Gregory of Nyssa, Ps-Hegesippus attributes to Joshua the miracle at the Jordan River;⁴⁰ like most Christian authors who ever mention Joshua, Ps-Hegesippus recalls the Jericho story, and this more than once;⁴¹ along with numerous other later Latin writers, Ps-Hegesippus takes care to mention Rahab;⁴² and Ps-Hegesippus shares with many ancient Christian authors the notion that Amalek’s defeat (Exodus 17) and the sun standing still (Joshua 10) are important witnesses to divine backing within Joshua’s career.⁴³ More than this, Ps-Hegesippus even attaches themes to these stories which were common in his day: like Paulinus of Nola, Ps-Hegesippus frames Joshua within a Christianized discussion of spiritual warfare;⁴⁴ like many Christian authors following the lead

⁴⁰ Paulinus of Nola *Poem* 27.511; Gregory of Nyssa *The Life of Gregory the Wonderworker* 7.55.

⁴¹ See Franke 2005, 32–41. Noteworthy comparanda include Paulinus of Nola *Poem* 16.29; Maximus of Turin *Sermon* 93.2; 94.2; Cassiodorus *Exposition of the Psalms* 80.4.

⁴² Gregory of Elvira *Origen’s Tractates on the Books of Holy Scripture* 12; Jerome *Homilies on the Psalms* 18; Augustine *Against Lying* 15.31–32; Theodoret of Cyrillus *On Divine Providence* 10.49; Cassiodorus *Exposition of the Psalms* 86.4; cf. Origen *Homilies on Joshua* 1.4; Caesarius of Arles *Sermon* 115.2; Cyril of Jerusalem *Catechetical Lectures* 2.9. Perhaps the most apt parallel to *De Excidio* here, though, is John Chrysostom *Homilies on Repentance and Almsgiving* 7.5.16–17, who cites Rahab’s “faith” vis-à-vis Hebrews 11:31.

⁴³ On the **former** see Lienhard 2001, 91–93; Justin Martyr *Dialogue* 90; Ambrose *Letter* 7.33 puzzlingly implies that it was Joshua holding up Moses’ hands; on the latter see Ambrose *De Officiis* 1.40.205; 2.20.99 (mentioning the Jordan River and sun-standing-still miracles); John Chrysostom *On the Epistle to the Hebrews* 27.6; Augustine *Confessions* 11.23.30; *City of God* 21.8.

⁴⁴ Paulinus of Nola *Poem* 26.99–114; *De Excidio* 5.16.1. The latter, remarkably, puts a number of allusions to New Testament passages into the mouth of Josephus, the narrative speaker, and turns the speech into a manifesto of spiritual warfare, quoting or alluding to 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Ephesians 6:10–17, and 2 Corinthians 10:1–6, all

of Hebrews 11:31 (and James 2:25), Ps-Hegesippus emphasizes faith as the operative principle behind Rahab's daring actions at *De Excidio* 5.16.1. However, unlike any of these authors, Ps-Hegesippus never equates or correlates Joshua and his later namesake, Jesus (Christ). He shares with other Christian authors a general historical memory concerning biblical narrative, but he is not involved in the same Christological and typological games when it comes to Joshua.

The only late antique Christian literature which *De Excidio* seems to resemble in avoiding the Christological commonplaces associated with Joshua are the texts of several Syrian authors dealt with toward the end of Farber's chapter on early Christian Joshua(s). Farber identifies the Syriac works of Aphrahat and Ephrem and the Greek texts of Gregory Nazianzen and Pseudo-Macarius as all demonstrating notable ignorance and/or apathy towards Joshua's nominal and prefigural connections to Christ.⁴⁵ Though this seems truer of some of these authors than others, they do appear as a group less typologically- and allegorically-oriented than the rest of the late antique tradition.⁴⁶ It is tempting to see in this commonality a shared loyalty to a more historically-oriented biblical interpretive outlook akin to what has often been called the 'literalist' or 'Antiochene' exegetical school.⁴⁷ Perhaps *De Excidio*'s affinity to this group's apparent interpretive habits signals indirect evidence, once again, of an Antiochene provenance.⁴⁸ *De Excidio* bears particularly notable similarities to Ephrem's *Commentary on Exodus* 17.2, which includes Joshua in a purely historical treatment of the

in service of arguing that *religio*, *fides*, and *oratio* (prayer) have been the most effective means of fighting battles for God's people throughout history.

⁴⁵ Farber 2016, 346–65. Farber classes post-Origenian authors in terms of "moderate" and "light" usage of his the typological interpretations Origen codified, and these authors appear in the end of the "light" section.

⁴⁶ In fact, Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* 11.12 ("On Circumcision"), 17.11 ("On the Messiah"), 21.11 ("On Persecution") are, for example, quite typological; at the very least, Aphrahat invests in a heavy theological parallelization.

⁴⁷ Lössl 2019, 177–79; see further Young 2003; 1997, 161–85. The idea of a literalist, historicist, 'Antiochene' school of biblical interpretation in contrast to an allegorical, mystical/spiritual, 'Alexandrian' school within early Christianity common framework in modern scholarship, though not unproblematic: in theory, "as well as in practice, the Antiochene school of interpretation has more in common with Origen than it does with modern, historical-critical exegesis" according to Stanglin 2018.

⁴⁸ Bay 2019, 110.

encounter with Amalek (albeit within a theological framework),⁴⁹ and Ps-Macarius' fiftieth *Homily*, which surveys Joshua's military career—hitting the same episodes as does Ps-Hegesippus—without any tinge of allegorization.⁵⁰ But even among these authors with whom Ps-Hegesippus shares a markedly historical (i.e. non-mystical) perspective, the latter deserves consideration in its own right as a text that resembles Sallust or Thucydides (or Josephus) more than any of the authors or genres mentioned above. Joshua's appearance within *De Excidio* situates him within a piece of historiography proper, and this is important for our understanding of his portrayal there.

Historiography, Christianity, & Exemplarity in Late Antiquity

Beyond *De Excidio*'s non-typological and fundamentally historiographical (thus noteworthy) treatment of Joshua son of Nun, the analysis above can lead us to some fruitful conclusions at a broader level, particularly as regards the practice of historiography and the discourse of exemplarity as they coalesced within Christianity in late antiquity.

Scholarship on Christian historiography in late antiquity is itself in need of some rather important alterations.⁵¹ For present purposes, it must be appreciated that late antique Christianity did not witness the effective birth of Christian historiography only in the form of the intensively theological and ecclesial generic forms of church history and Christian world chronicle, but also in more classically-oriented historical writing. *De Excidio* fits solidly in the latter category: it is 'Classical/Christian historiography.'⁵² As such, its primary narrative focus is on military, geographical, political, and historical events and causes, i.e. on *res gestae*.⁵³

⁴⁹ Farber 2016, 360–61.

⁵⁰ Farber 2016, 363: "The image of Joshua here, even at the moment of his greatest miracle [Jericho], is that of a mere human guided totally by the divine."

⁵¹ First and foremost see the extensive recent bibliography of Peter van Nuffelen.

⁵² Bay 2021a; 2020b; 2018; Somenzi 2009; Sehmeyer 2009, 196, 202–203, 219–21, 293n64; Bell 1987; 1980; 1977.

⁵³ See *De Excidio* Prol. 1.

Given this context, it becomes far less surprising that Joshua appears in *De Excidio* the way that he does: as a historical military leader emblematic of national success (and divine blessing) among the Jews' Israelite ancestors and devoid of any typological significance. In *De Excidio*, Joshua is treated as a fundamentally historical figure, and the contexts in which he appears therein—topographical *ekphrasis* and rhetorical speeches—reinforce this impression. What this prompts us to reconsider is the ways in which Christians could understand the significance of a biblical personality like Joshua in late antiquity. Farber's survey shows that, by far, the most common Christian approach to Joshua in antiquity involved an allegorical association of Joshua and Jesus; even those writers who effectively ignored this typology (for Farber, later Syrian authors) seem usually to have used Joshua as a tool for addressing items of 'in-group' significance particular to the Christian community: ascetic values, biblical interpretation and exposition, Christian persecution. Ps-Hegesippus breaks away from this tradition. As with his portrayal of so many biblical figures, his depiction of Joshua stands apart from much other late ancient Christian literature by the larger literary context in which it appears.

The Joshua of *De Excidio* is a figure whose presentation would have been intelligible to any ancient reader, Christian or no: he was an ancient, successful military leader who sacked and re-founded cities, subdued foreigners, and won battles for his people, all under the auspices of divine sanction and blessing. Moreover, he appears within a piece of literature that does not 'look' as distinctively Christian as so much other ancient Christian writing: the vocabulary, narrative style, and rhetorical conventions of *De Excidio*, along with the bulk of its content, resemble more the *Res Gestae* of Ps-Hegesippus' contemporary Ammianus Marcellinus (also from Antioch) than the homilies, commentaries, apologetics (including world chronicles), hagiographies, church histories, heresiologies, theological tractates, and doctrinal statements that make of the majority of late ancient Christian literature. My argument in this is not that the non-Christian reader could or would have picked up *De Excidio* and gleaned a 'secular'

picture of the biblical Joshua—after all, he is only mentioned three times within this sizeable work. Rather, my claim is that the portrayal of Joshua offered by *De Excidio* suggests that ancient Christian readers could have come to think about Joshua (and other biblical heroes like him) in terms which do not fit well the modern scholarly paradigm of late antique Christianity. That is, I argue that *De Excidio* implies the possibility that some ancient Christians could have thought about Joshua in a way that resembles how ancient Romans might have thought about Romulus (who also founded a city) or Greeks about Achilles (who also assailed city walls) far more than how the historical church has come to envision its canonical heroes.

The reason I think this a possibility is that the continual recasting, reframing, and thus reconstruction of paradigmatic figures of the past (*exempla*) had become a staple of Roman culture,⁵⁴ and was something that the Christian heirs of the Roman Empire arguably inherited from their cultural predecessors. The latter is something that scholarship has only just begun to appreciate and expound.⁵⁵ If this is so, we have to take seriously the possibility that a text like *De Excidio* could, in presenting a biblical *exemplum* usually understood in typological or at least theological terms but presented in a way and in a context that is thoroughly historical and non-typological, paint a picture of Joshua in the late ancient mind quite different from what had by that point become the norm, at least for many. This is not to say, of course, that Joshua as type or allegorical symbol and Joshua as historical military leader are two mutually exclusive depictions: indeed, even for the most allegorical of interpreters the historical Joshua will have come first, and never completely disappeared. What we are talking about, I suppose, is a matter of emphasis rather than essence. I am not arguing that some ancient Christians saw Joshua as *only* a historical general and as *not* theologically significant, though this is possible. Instead, the question is more like: “what came into a Christian author’s, reader’s, thinker’s mind in late

⁵⁴ On the idea of cultural *exempla* as ‘sites’ of negotiating ethics, meaning, identity see Langlands 2018. On the process of exemplarity as part and parcel of the rhetoric of historiography, see Roller 2018.

⁵⁵ Bay 2021b; 2020b; Ployd 2020; Renard 2020; Petitfils 2016; Van Nuffelen 2009; Reed 2009.

antiquity when that person heard the name ‘Joshua, son of Nun?’” Would a person’s first impression have been that of Christological precursor or ancient warrior? My contention is that a text like *De Excidio*, unlike most Christian texts from late antiquity, suggests that the latter was sometimes the case. This does not mean that readers of *De Excidio* might not have recognized a Christologized, theologized Joshua, but only that they were not as readers of that text presented with such an interpretive option. Other texts, most quintessentially Origen’s *Homilies on Joshua*—translated from Greek to Latin by Rufinus ca. 400-404 CE,⁵⁶ and thus a Latin interpretation of Joshua essentially contemporary with Ps-Hegesippus—present the figure of Joshua in such a way that the reader would hardly be able to gain a picture of a purely (or mostly) historical figure therefrom; Joshua is presented as part of an allegorical package. In this way, *De Excidio*’s presentation of Joshua is more descriptive and less interpretive than many other ancient Christian portrayals. For Ps-Hegesippus, Joshua is an ancient warrior, nothing more.

By turning here again to the material culture of late antiquity, we can identify an artistic parallel to the textual reality outlined above. Consider first the two following mosaics from the Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, dating from between 432 and 440 CE. These portrayals, containing scenes from the Book of Joshua, stood alongside some forty-two other Old Testament scenes when first commissioned by Pope Sixtus III (twenty-seven are still extant).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ See Bruce 2002.

⁵⁷ See Krautheimer 1961.



Figure 2: Scene from the Book of Joshua, 432-440 CE, mosaic (anonymous, commissioned by Pope Sixtus III). Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Photo from Web Gallery of Art (wga.hu), Emil Krén and Daniel Marx, 29 November 2020.

In these two mosaics we find three related-yet-distinct scenes: in order of appearance, these are 1a) the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River with the Ark of the Covenant from Joshua 3 above 1b) Joshua's sending of his spies to Jericho from Joshua 2 (Figure 2) and 2a) the miraculous felling of Jericho's walls above circling priests playing horns and carrying the Ark of the Covenant from Joshua 6 (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Scene from the Book of Joshua, 432-440 CE, mosaic (anonymous, commissioned by Pope Sixtus III). Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Photo from Web Gallery of Art (wga.hu), Emil Krén and Daniel Marx, 29 November 2020.

Already significant as some of the most extensive and realistic ancient artistic portrayals of biblical stories, these particular mosaics are helpful here because they show how the late ancient Christian mind could envision Joshua as a historical figure sans typological interference. The scenes depicted are historical scenes and Joshua appears as a historical figure carrying implements of war “expressed with the aid of traditional Roman pictorial syntax.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Nees 2002, 90.

Like other scenes depicted within the basilica's artistic program, which include Joshua's stopping the sun to defeat the five kings of the Amorites at Gibeon from Joshua 10 and Moses' arm-raising victory over the Amalekites from Exodus 17, the two mosaics above show Hebrew heroes as they "win victories over their enemies by invoking the power of God."⁵⁹ In this way these biblical figures were to appear as forerunners of the pope, who also laid claim to such prerogative of divine conquest in a way.

The above scenes are to my mind the pictorial equivalent to the portrayal of Joshua in *De Excidio*. They show Joshua as an *exemplum* of traditional virtue: Joshua looks like a brave military commander resembling Alexander the Great, and his accoutrement does not include a halo, a symbol of the cross, or any other Christological marker so far as I can tell. Indeed, we do not see a halo until the scene, also depicted in this mosaic series (Figure 4), when Joshua meets the mysterious man from Joshua 5:13–15 who claims to be "the commander of the army of the LORD" (5:14a). (Nor is it a given what the halo there signifies.)

⁵⁹ Nees 2002, 90.



Figure 4: Scene from the Book of Joshua, 432-440 CE, mosaic (anonymous, commissioned by Pope Sixtus III). Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Photo from Web Gallery of Art (wga.hu), Emil Krén and Daniel Marx, 29 November 2020.

This scene there sits above another episode from the Book of Joshua, that in which Rahab lets the Hebrew spies down out of the city of Jericho with a rope (Joshua 2:15).

Despite Joshua's classical/historical portrayal in these mosaics, one may arguably read Christ typology within the basilica's larger artistic context. Margaret Miles has discussed how "as the eye passes along the nave and reaches the mosaics of the triumphal arch, Melchizedek, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Christ all become types and foreshadowings of the Christ whose

advent appears on the arch.”⁶⁰ If Miles’ comments are meant to refer to the above-displayed mosaics, however, one must concede that Joshua’s prefiguration of Christ is something that must be read into these depictions, drawing either upon broader artistic or interpretive frameworks; it cannot be deduced from the artworks themselves.

Just as a purely historical portrayal of Joshua, like the one we find in *De Excidio*, is a relative rarity in late antiquity, so also the mosaics above are special in their depiction: they picture ancient military conquest, not Christian allegory or theology.⁶¹ (Indeed, visual portrayal of Joshua in general is rare in antiquity, appearing only from the later fourth century onward according to Robin Jensen.⁶²) This suggests that on multiple levels and as communicated via multiple media,⁶³ the exemplary figure of Joshua operated with multivalence in Christian late antiquity. On the one hand, he was most often discussed and construed as a type of Christ; on the other, he was occasionally depicted as a historical warrior, a hero of Hebrew antiquity and doer of divinely successful exploits. Thus, *De Excidio* contributes some texture to what I would call the late antique Christian historiographical imagination: the capacity and propensity to imagine historical figures and events as a cultural practice (I understand history always and only to be a construct of the human imagination, individual and collective).⁶⁴ What *De Excidio*, perhaps along with a few other texts and works of art, shows us is that Joshua could be for late antique Christians what a Romulus or Scipio Africanus might have been to ancient Romans, or what an Alexander the Great might have been to Hellenophiles. Normally in the late antique Christian mind, Joshua son of Nun was a theological construct, a type of Christ; but other times he was simply a Hebrew hero.

⁶⁰ Miles 1993, 159, citing Spain 1979, 524.

⁶¹ Also, both these mosaics and the portrayals of Joshua in *De Excidio* exist within larger textual or artistic constructs of meaning that purveys a certain brand of anti-Jewish Christian triumphalism within which the ancient Hebrews become tools for establishing Christian legitimacy, dominance, and divine sanction; see Miles 1993.

⁶² Jensen 2000, 65.

⁶³ On the increasing significance of visual culture in Christian thought and discourse into and through late antiquity, see Miles 1985.

⁶⁴ By referring to ‘cultural practice’ I mean that such historical imagining could have variegated utility and thus could ‘do’ a number of different things for the late ancient thinker or writer.

Conclusion

The significance of the argument made above has several different levels. At the level of *De Excidio* as text, we learn through the example of Joshua that Ps-Hegesippus has a tendency to portray biblical figures in the manner of classical *exempla*: the heroes of the Hebrew Bible are historical personalities whose highlighted feats are largely military and ‘secular’ in the sense that they would be immediately intelligible to any late antique reader, Christian or not. Ps-Hegesippus’ portrayal of Joshua is something one might expect from ancient historiography in general. *De Excidio* parts company with the lion’s share of late ancient Christian literature and reveals its own idiosyncratic literary-rhetorical stripes as a conceptually hybrid Christian/Classical kind of historiography. In this way *De Excidio* has more in common with the Greco-Roman historiographical tradition than it does with Eusebius and the wider cohort of late antique Christian historians.⁶⁵

More broadly, what we have learned about *De Excidio* and its portrayal of Joshua can be extended to make larger statements about Christianity in late antiquity. Inasmuch as *De Excidio* as text is representative of the ways in which certain late antique Christians could and probably did think, we must adapt our understanding of the late ancient Christian historiographical imagination to include the capacity to brook a fully, perhaps even exclusively, *historical* understanding of the heroes of their ‘Old Testament.’ This does not mean that every reader of *De Excidio* thought of Joshua in non-allegorical/typological/Christological terms; indeed, at least two manuscripts of *De Excidio* shows that later copyists did identify Ps-Hegesippus’ Joshua a Christ-figure: Codex Augiensis 82 does this by writing Joshua’s name

⁶⁵ As a salient example in the present context, compare Ps-Heg’s classicized Joshua to the Christologized Joshua of Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 1.2.11–12; but cf. 1.6.5). In fact, most of the church historians had no occasion to mention Joshua (so Sozomen, Socrates, Theodoret, also Orosius), but where he does show up he appears in ecclesial, as opposed to classical, relief: e.g., as an explicitly ecclesial *exemplum* of Christian boldness (Evagrius Scholasticus *Hist. Eccl.* 2.10).

with the unmistakable Greek *nomen sacrum* Ιῆς at *De Excidio* 5.2.1 (in fact, in Figure 5 two *nomina sacra* are underlined in red: that of Joshua (Ιῆς) and David (δδ), the two of the five biblical figures mentioned in *De Excidio* 5.2.1 here thus represented).⁶⁶

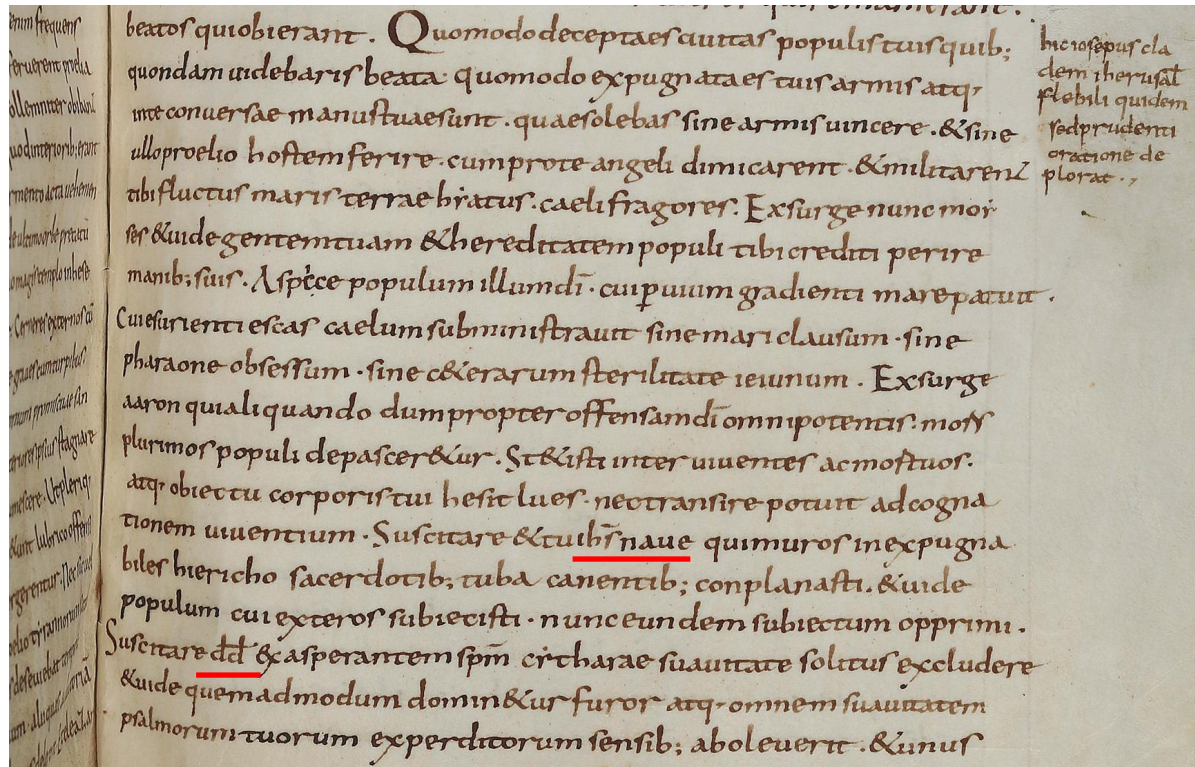


Figure 5: Codex Augiensis 82 (9th century), fol. 99r. Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe, Germany. Parchment, 154 folia, 32.3 x 21.1 cm. Digitized 2016 (accessed 29 November 2020). Text: *Ioseppi (Hegesippi) de bello Iudaico libri V [i.e. De Excidio] 5.2.1.*

The same phenomenon appears in the sister manuscript to Codex Augiensis 82: Codex Sangallensis 626 (these mss share a common *Vorlage*, or one is an apograph of the other):

⁶⁶ The other mention of Joshua in this manuscript, at *De Excidio* 4.17.1 (fol. 90r), simply reads *hiesus naue*. Interestingly, this ms does not contain the mention of Joshua at *De Excidio* 5.16.1 because it omits the passage completely. At fol. 107v the ms jumps from a discussion of David (sans *nomen sacrum*) in the middle of 5.15.1 (... *cui Salomon inposuit.*) to the middle of 5.18.2 (... *inposuit. Quippe qui non multo post...*), omitting all the intervening text and doing so with no annotation or mark in the ms whatsoever (the omitted section amounts to some 3117 Latin words in Ussani's critical edition, and thus constitutes a massive, and mysterious, lacuna). This manuscript's sister ms, Codex Sangallensis 626, contains the same striking omission; but, unlike Aug. 82, Sang. 626 uses the *nomen sacrum* for David (δδ) – twice – just before the beginning of this lacuna (ms p. 270).

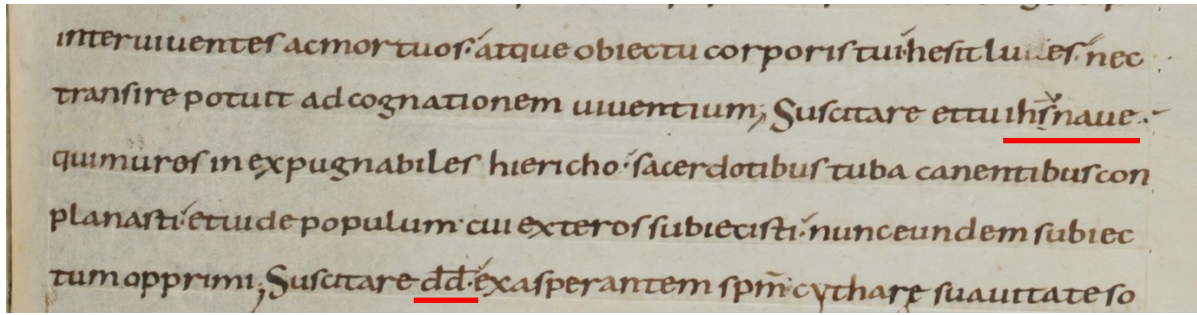


Figure 6: Codex Sangallensis 626 (9th century), ms p. 247. Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen, Switzerland. Parchment, 314 pages, 35 x 25 cm. Digitized 2005 (accessed 29 November 2020). Text: *Bellum Iudaicum libri V* [i.e. *De Excidio*] 5.2.1.

At least two ninth-century scribes, therefore, overtly identified Joshua in *De Excidio* 5.2.1 with Christ via the use of the *nomen sacrum*, despite the lack of any such identification in the text. But the points made above regarding Joshua in *De Excidio* still stand; this just shows that a text's portrayal of an *exemplum* need not be definitive for its reader or socio-historical moment.

I am not arguing that *De Excidio* represents a 'school of thought' per se, one that saw Joshua as first and foremost historical (though it might). Rather, I suggest that *De Excidio* evidences certain ways of thinking that might anticipate, or even exist alongside allegorical interpretations of Hebrew heroes, ways that have much more in common with late ancient pagans and their inherited practices of Roman exemplarity than with the Christian tradition as established by authors like Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Origen. The Joshua of *De Excidio* is a figure whose exemplary portrayal would have been recognizable across Mediterranean antiquity: a military leader who sacked cities, expelled foreigners, and received miraculous divine sanction (and whose legacy had already been cemented in earlier tradition). Such a portrayal of Joshua by no means forestalls allegorical understanding, but it hardly encourages it. It thus represents a different way of thinking about Joshua which may or may not be mixed with more theological or typological ways of thinking in any given text, piece of art, reading community, etc. Such mixing is common—in fact, we might call it the rule; but in *De Excidio*, no such mixing occurs. Thus, a less typological way of apprehending the biblical Joshua was at least an option for Christians in late antiquity.

At the broadest level, this examination of Joshua in *De Excidio* points to a way of thinking about and dealing with historical figures within late antique Christianity that resembles classical (Greco-Roman) antiquity as much or more than what scholars usually imagine as characterizing ancient Christianity. Ps-Hegesippus' construal of Joshua as ancient *exemplum* betrays a facet of the historiographical imagination within late ancient Christianity which avoided theological fixations in preference for more traditional Roman values when portraying the heroes of the Hebrew Bible. *De Excidio* is a far more 'classical' text, and Joshua a far more 'classical' character within it, than one expects to find within late ancient Christian literature and the reception of Joshua the son of Nun therein.

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