

Carson Bay: Biblical Heroes and Classical Culture in Christian Late Antiquity. The Historiography, Exemplarity, and Anti-Judaism of Pseudo-Hegesippus. Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press 2023. XIV, 437 p., 2 tables. £ 90.00/\$ 120.00. ISBN: 978-1-009-26856-1.

Carson Bay has produced a fine study of a text that is clearly yet to receive the scholarly attention it deserves, the *De Excidio* of Pseudo-Hegesippus, “a Latin Christian rewrite of Flavius Josephus’ earlier Greek work, the *Jewish War*,” (p. 1) written in the later fourth century. Bay makes manifest the riches that the *De Excidio* has to offer scholars interested in “the reception of the Bible, the combination of Christian and classical culture, and the rhetorical fabric of anti-Jewish discourse in late antiquity” (p. 3). To my knowledge this is the first review of Bay’s monograph. As such I offer short synopses of each chapter, followed by some analysis of its many highlights before concluding with a few minor criticisms.

In the Introduction (pp. 1–16) Bay sets out the scope and agenda of his study, including by showing the complexity and importance of Jewish exemplarity in the *De Excidio* and asserting its membership of the genre of classical historiography, chronologically represented as stretching from Herodotus to Ammianus. The many similarities between the *De Excidio* and this earlier non-Christian historiographical tradition confirm Bay’s assessment, even if ultimately, it is its distinctly Christianizing take on classical historiography that makes it unique (something which every critic is now under pressure to find in the text that they are studying). In the introduction Bay has a lot to do, but he sets about his task nicely, educating the non-Pseudo-Hegesippus specialist (of which there must be many) about the text’s reliance on speeches, which are considered convenient historical fictions even as he outlines the theoretical and methodological impetuses that inform his approach, ranging from Umberto Eco’s model reader to Jane Chaplin’s study of exemplarity in Livy.¹

1 U. Eco: *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington, IN 1984 (*Advances in Semiotics*); J. D. Chaplin: *Livy’s Use of Exempla*. In: B. Mineo (ed.): *A Companion to Livy*. Chichester et al. 2015 (*Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World*), pp. 102–113.

In Chapter 1 (“On the Destruction of Jerusalem: Christian, Classical, Biblical, Josephan,” pp. 17–69) Bay expands on the brief introduction of the text, providing the reader with what they need to know about the *De Excidio* to appreciate the chapters that follow. Bay avoids speculating regarding the author’s identity, leaving the Pseudo where it is. From pp. 18–21 Bay lists Eucherius of Lyon as the first author to cite from the *De Excidio*, and in so doing provides a *terminum ante quem* to go with the potential *terminus post quem* of Prudentian and Claudianic allusions found in the text. Some initial criticism notwithstanding, Bay ultimately prefers Albert Atwood Bell’s suggestion that “*De Excidio* emerged in the wake of and in response to the Emperor Julian’s abortive attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple in 363 CE” (p. 22). Quite, but one wonders whether this wake was momentary, or whether it lingered well into the late fourth century and beyond, in Rufinus of Aquileia’s extension of Eusebius’ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and the Greek ecclesiastical historiographers of the fifth century who followed Rufinus’ lead. Discussion of the likely provenance, manuscript tradition, scholarly editions and translations, segues well into a more detailed discussion of the contents of the *De Excidio* itself, its reception history and use of sources, including its extensive use of Josephus’ *Jewish War* which as Bay notes, is clearly its most frequent source. In the remainder of the chapter Bay expands on some of the themes that he briefly touched on in the introduction, as he outlines to the reader the analytical moves that he intends to make, including thinking through how the model reader would respond to the text, its major themes and theology, contribution to the genre of historiography and use of exemplarity. There is a lot of material here – between the introduction and first chapter just shy of seventy pages – but apart from the occasional feeling that there are some redundancies between the introduction and opening chapter, by and large it seems absolutely necessary for Bay to introduce the reader sufficiently to his text and approach.

Chapter 2 (“Hebrew versus Jew: Identity and Differentiation in *De Excidio*,” pp. 70–97) makes a valuable contribution to recent interest in the distinction that late antique Christians looked to draw between Jews/Judeans and Hebrews for their own polemical purposes. In the *De Excidio*, *Iudaens* occurs hundreds of times but *Hebraeus* only twenty-four times (p. 71). Despite the occasional lack of consistency in how the *De Excidio* uses these terms, Bay’s analysis is here convincing. In short, the text respects *Hebraei* but is far less positively inclined towards *Iudaei*. With the close reading of many illustrative

passages complete, Bay then places this distinction in a broader historical and intellectual context. Perhaps this context may have been more useful if it came first, but the end result is probably the same.

Chapter 3 (“Abraham, Ethnography, Exemplarity, and Oratory at *De Excidio* 5.41.2 and 5.53.1,” pp. 98–126) explores two pivotal scenes in the *De Excidio*, specifically Titus’ speech following a woman, who is besieged to the point of starvation, loses her mind, and promptly commits infanticide, and Eleazar ben Yair’s speech as the leader of Jewish resistance awaiting the Roman army at the top of Masada. Bay’s analyses in both cases are cogent. I wonder if more might have been said about how Pseudo-Hegesippus focalises detailed knowledge of Judaeo-Christian scriptures through Titus’ *oratio directa*. Equally could Maria’s killing of her own son be part of a wider effort to allege that this was a Judean practice (cf. dicta Malc. 56, Macr. Sat. 2.4.11). A real strength of this chapter is the connections that Bay draws between Pseudo-Hegesippus’ use of ethnographies and paired speeches with comparable uses in Livy. Analytical moves like this support the overall claim in the introduction that the *De Excidio* should be thought of as being a(n albeit distinct) member of the genre of classical historiography.

Chapter 4 (“Exemplarity and National Decline at *De Excidio* 5.2.1,” pp. 127–156) is a focused study on the author’s own address to Jerusalem, and as Bay points out, by extension, to the Jews. Perhaps as Bay is more focused on showing how the *De Excidio* is classical historiography, the connection between 5.2.1 and oratory is left unstated. The invocation of the five heroes from the Hebrew Bible, namely Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David and Elisha, who each express their dismay at the situation Jerusalem is in during the year 70 CE, could have been usefully extended by more specific consideration of the rhetorical use of prosopopoeia. Perhaps this absence speaks to the complexity of Bay’s task given he is routinely forced to consider classical literature, late antique Christianity, biblical exemplarity, and the history of Judaism, and the themes and tropes of the text itself. Bay does well however to show how the narrative of national decline is bound up in the same agenda explored in Chapter 2 where the more ancient Hebrews are consistently presented in better terms than those Pseudo-Hegesippus uses for the Judeans while connecting Pseudo-Hegesippus’ “stark anti-Judaism” (p. 147) to similar examples in John Chrysostom and Ambrose, both of whom also used biblical exempla extensively in an effort to make their point.

Chapter 5 (“Jewish and Christian Martyrdom at *De Excidio* 3.2 and 5.22,” pp. 157–184) explores two distinct moments in the text: the first is the only mention of martyrs and the second the only explicit mention of Christians. The first at 5.22 is a speech that Pseudo-Hegesippus creates without drawing on a specific source or precedent. Bay kindly provides his translation of the text so that readers might familiarise themselves with what is said before the analysis begins. This is very useful, but it would have been far better if Bay also included the Latin that he is translating. The book is long – so this may have been a consideration – but I think it unlikely that every reader is going to dust off or download the CSEL edition. This is a particular oversight given Bay’s analysis is often very (and usefully) detailed.

Chapter 6 (“King David as Christian-Classical *Exemplum* in Pseudo-Hegesippus,” pp. 185–218) argues that the *De Excidio*’s exemplary use of David – the exemplum most often cited by the text – is a marked departure from the “allegorized, typologized, theologized, Christologized David usual within late antique Christianity” (p. 185). To make this broader point Bay routinely compares Pseudo-Hegesippus’ depiction of David to others, and in so doing, shows how its various uses of David might be thought of in distinct terms. Ultimately for Bay, it is not so much how David is represented that sets Pseudo-Hegesippus apart from the Christian use of David, but how he is not, as Pseudo-Hegesippus eschews the use of David to develop “narrativizations of sin that end up exposing piety” (p. 216). As Bay notes (pp. 217–218) this chapter is methodologically quite different from the other chapters, and as such, I wonder if this might appeal more to the scholar more interested specifically in David’s use of an exemplum than the concerns raised throughout the remainder of the book.

Chapter 7 (“Elisha, Disaster, and Extended Exemplarity in *De Excidio*,” pp. 219–240) continues the focus on exempla by exploring how Pseudo-Hegesippus’ Elisha extends his depiction in Josephus by drawing on a wide range of source material. Usefully Bay draws clear connections between Chapters 6 and 7, including by developing the concept of extended exemplarity to shed light on the sustained, consecutive use of stories relating to a specific exemplum. To make this case Bay moves carefully from the biblical exempla of David and Elisha to a comparison with the Roman use of extended exempla, such as Horatius Cocles, Cloelia, and Mucius Scaevola. The success of these interpretative moves underpins Bay’s broader claim that the

De Excidio might usefully be thought of as being part of the genre of classical historiography.

Chapter 8 (“A Classical World of Biblical *Exempla*: Suicide and Patriotism in *De Excidio* 3.16–17,” pp. 241–268) shifts focus from specific exempla to two important themes in the speeches that are exchanged between Josephus and his Judean comrades at Jotapata. This chapter, perhaps more than most, engages in a careful, sustained comparative reading between the *De Excidio* and Josephus, its major source. Bay clearly shows that there is greater depth in Pseudo-Hegesippus’ versions, especially as it relates to “the moral and theological implications of suicide” (pp. 249–250). From a presentation point of view it is a times disappointing that Bay chose not to reproduce the Latin for ease of reference, especially given his frequent, close engagement with the text. At pp. 250–254 Bay inserts his English translation of *De Excidio* 3.17.1. This is a long (long) passage, and I wonder if Bay could have made this more accessible and engaging if he had chosen instead to analyse it step-by-step. Again Bay is successful in showing how Pseudo-Hegesippus’ use of exempla resonates with comparable examples drawn from classical historiography.

Chapter 9 (“A Christian World of Hebrew *Exempla*: War and Faith in *De Excidio* 5.15–16,” pp. 269–317) analyses the intense concentration of exempla in two of Josephus’ speeches, presented by Pseudo-Hegesippus back-to-back at *De Excidio* 5.15–16. The argument of this chapter is somewhat similar to the previous chapter, and the presentation similar (again we are given many pages of text, some ten in total, in English translation without the accompanying Latin). To some extent one wonders if Bay felt that he needed to cover all of the most important parts of the text – and hence included this chapter – even if its novelty is limited to increasing the aggregate of some of Bay’s claims that other chapters have already made well.

The Conclusion (pp. 318–326) is lucidly written and does a fine job of bringing the whole together while also pointing forward towards some of the implications of Bay’s findings. Two appendices (“Old Testament *Exempla* in *De Excidio*, A–Z,” pp. 327–334) and (“Pseudo-Hegesippus’ Sources,” pp. 335–374) follow. The first lists the sections of Pseudo-Hegesippus in order and then notes the major corresponding sources that informed the respective section. Both are detailed. A bibliography (pp. 375–401) is followed by a source index (pp. 402–426) which lists the sources in alphabetical order, but ends up offering far more than may simple be found in Appen-

dix 2. Presumably, given the overlap, Bay offered the source index in addition to Appendix 2 in anticipation of the reader whose real interest lies in Pseudo-Hegesippus' use of specific sources, rather than the reader interested in the *De Excidio's* narrative inspirations (principally Josephus). The volume ends with a general index (pp. 427–437).

Bay has a lot to do, and does most of it well, but at times one wonders a little bit if a shorter, more focused volume, or perhaps even two focused volumes might have been a better way to go. I can see this book receiving real interest from scholars interested in late antique Christianity, the western reception of Josephus, and the depiction of Jews, perhaps even scholars of exemplarity, but will scholars of classical historiography accept the *De Excidio*? Even if they do – as Bay's monograph clearly shows that they ought – I cannot help but wonder why Bay gravitates towards comparing the generic traits of the *De Excidio* to Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* and not the chronologically adjacent *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus, whose contribution to this story about a classical historiographical text written in the West in the late fourth century is limited to a handful of casual references (four), far less than Livy's (sixteen).

Bay is working on a complete translation of the *De Excidio*. This will surely open up the text to more readers, but I would hope that this translation has the Latin *verso* and English *recto*. Given that much of Bay's analysis is a close reading of Pseudo-Hegesippus' Latin it is inconvenient that the Latin text is never quoted at any length, even as Bay quotes long passages of the *De Excidio* in English, often for pages at a time.

In sum, this is a fine scholarly achievement and a welcome addition to the renewed interest in late antique historiography that has much to offer a wide range of scholars. It deserves to be widely read, and hopefully will be the start of a much-needed resurgence of interest in Pseudo-Hegesippus' remarkable *De Excidio*.

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