

BOOK REVIEW

Military Service and the Integration of Jews into the Roman Empire. By RAÚL GONZÁLEZ-SALINERO. Leiden, NL: Brill, 2022. Pp. 222. Hardback, \$105.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-50675-6.

The subject of Jewish military service in the armies of Rome is still hotly debated, with many retaining the erroneous notion that Jews did not enlist. Numerous of them also claim that if any Jews served, they must have been Jews who were impious or had abandoned their forefathers' faith completely. Accordingly, the debate in the last two decades was usually focused on whether Jews served or not. A book on Jewish service was non-existent, and each publication was either focused on a single item or text, or presented the available evidence that the author of the article was aware of. This usually amounted to the same evidence presented by others. Raúl González-Salineró is one of the few who have lately noticed that there is more material than what was previously perceived, enough even to compile a whole book. The book at the center of this review is the outcome of his endeavour, and as the first attempt of this kind, it warrants a special and prolonged discussion.

The book starts with an introduction. It first explains that there are many people who still believe that Jews did not serve, which justifies a reply, then continues to debate the diversity and complexity of ancient Judaism. This part of the book suffers from several problems that can be seen throughout the book, as it is a bit disorganised. Puzzlingly enough, while the author intends to encompass as much of the available evidence as he could find (enough to justify a book), he is especially reserved, saying "It would be unwise to unhesitatingly accept the notion that, as Jean Juster argued, Jewish military service in the Empire had become commonplace" (7). More surprisingly, the author never defines in the introduction, or elsewhere, what the book is trying to achieve and what are his research questions. Consequently, the reader must assume that the title of the book, *Military Service and the Integration of Jews into the Roman Empire*, is an indication of its main themes. Yet, that does not seem to be a reasonable solution as the book never tackles the subject of Jewish integration in the Empire.

The first chapter deals with Jewish service in non-Jewish armies before the

period of Roman hegemony, including service in the armies of Assyria, Persia, Egypt and the Hellenistic kingdoms. This debate in the context of Jewish service in the armies of Rome is welcome and even essential. The author refers to a few of my articles several times, even using a quote of mine as the summary of the chapter, and I express to him my gratitude for that. However, there are still some problems in this chapter that are repeated later on in the form of inaccuracies and incorrect citations. For example, the author confuses my opinion and the opinions and suggestions of past scholars, claiming: "Haggai Olshanetsky believes that this Biblical passage hints to the existence of Jewish recruits to Pharaonic Egypt. According to this author, the Biblical restriction on the number of horses a Jewish king could own arose from a wish to avoid exchanging Jewish troops for Egyptian horses ..." (8). Instead, it was actually "...P. Korgrun's interpretation of Deuteronomy 17:16 ..." (8), whom González-Salineró mentions one line before, who raised this possibility. It is even more puzzling because González-Salineró also cites Porten's book on Elephantine, and so should have been aware that Porten suggested that the restriction on the number of horses a Jewish king could own was due to King Manasseh sending troops to Egypt in exchange for horses.¹ Other scholars have raised similar suggestions, so that this cannot be attributed to me alone. Similarly, regarding the Israelites' service in the armies of Assyria, he writes that both chariot and cavalry units were absorbed (8). Yet, it is entirely unclear to what extent cavalry was used by the Kingdom of Israel, as they probably preferred and mainly relied on chariots until the very end of the kingdom. There are also other mistakes, and although several mistakes might happen in a work as large as this, it seems that the number of problems is more numerous than expected.

The second chapter, titled "Jewish Exemptions from Military Service in the Late Republic and the Augustan Principate," is the first to deal with Jewish service in the armies of Rome. It starts with a sort of introduction to Roman recruitment of foreigners and Roman intervention in the eastern Mediterranean (26-29), but this part is disjointed and confusing, especially for those who are unfamiliar with the subject. Then, the chapter turns to deal with Judaeen troops assisting Rome (30-32) and only later does the chapter deal with the exemptions from military service received by certain Jews, that eventually encompasses only half of this short chapter.

¹ Porten, Bezael, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 12.

Even though the exemptions were given in a time of civil war, when the need for manpower was especially critical, González-Saliner does not try to fully explain the *raison d'être* for them or for granting them. This is despite being fully aware of the situation, as he clearly points out: "It is certainly significant that such apparently counter-intuitive decisions would have been adopted in such a context of armed conflict and political instability ..." (32). He rightfully claims that those who were not exempt were recruited, and that after these exemptions there were several years without any such occurrence. However, without engaging in any significant debate or discussion, he immediately claims later on that "...Dolabella, the Caesarean governor of Syria, wrested Asia from the grip of legate C. Trebonius and extended the former military exemption to Jews without Roman citizenship ..." (34), a statement I believe to be inaccurate. An elaboration of and discussion on how he came to this conclusion might have brought González-Saliner to a different one. Such an outcome might have occurred if the texts had been presented in chronological order, putting this exemption in a different context in light of Caesar's decree issued four years earlier.

The third chapter, titled "Jewish Soldiers in the Roman Army during the High Empire," is the longest one in the book encompassing 60 pages, i.e., almost half of the book's main body. After dealing with the forced Jewish recruitment in the city of Rome in the year 19 CE, González-Saliner provides an introduction to the kingdoms of the Herodian dynasty. This introduction is well done, but the order of the chapter and the book are a bit peculiar, and a clearer chronological order would have made the book more accessible to a wider public. The chapter then moves on briefly to deal with the Herodian Troopers of Zamaris who later served Rome in the 2nd century CE, only to go back and discuss both the Herodian dynasty troops who joined the Jewish rebels in the First Jewish Revolt in the 1st century CE and the Jews who supported Rome during said revolt. Despite this awkward structure, it must be noted that it is a vital chapter that brings forth numerous inscriptions that may attest to Jewish soldiers, which has not been included in the academic debate before. Furthermore, in this chapter and the following one, a few stark problems emerge. One of these is the almost complete lack of modern secondary literary sources in Hebrew. Albeit many Hebrew articles and books have been translated into English, there are numerous others that have not, and their contents would have enriched some of the debates and improved this book. One of the only Hebrew secondary sources cited is one of mine from 2018, but unfortunately he cites it incorrectly and possibly misunderstood it. Usually, I

would not mention such a thing in a review, but this problem is significant. For example, on pages 65-68 the author deals with the inscription of “Germanos [son] of Isak [Isakios] the Palmyrene.” González-Salineró mentions that, because of his tunic and belt, he is definitely a soldier. Alas, in my article, which he incorrectly cites (he mentions page 14 instead of 18), I note that this is not the only option as the figure could represent a Venator.² Moreover, González-Salineró misses other Hebrew articles from the last fifty years that were relevant to his research, including some that have dealt with this inscription.

The fourth chapter, “During the Later Roman Empire,” brings forth the most robust and diverse evidence for Jewish military service in the armies of Rome, although it is much shorter than the previous chapter. It neatly deals with numerous pieces of evidence, which were either never mentioned before in the main discussions regarding such service or had received minor attention. Yet, it is peculiar that only at the end of the book, on page 114, does the author decide to start examining the reasons why the military profession was attractive, including reasons such as the abundant benefits the soldiers received. This debate is essential for dealing with and understanding Jewish military service. Henceforth, the book would have gained from having this discussion earlier, possibly as part of a short introduction to the Roman army at the beginning.

In addition to the main body of the book and its conclusions, this book contains three appendices. The first is very important to the subject and deals with “Violence and the Use of Arms on Sabbath.” Together with the dietary laws, the Sabbath was considered a primary obstacle for Jewish military service. The debate on this topic is excellent, and it is a shame that it was put in an appendix and not as a chapter or a sub-chapter at the beginning of the book, especially since it perfectly explains why the Jewish religion did not prevent Jewish military service. Each of the two other appendices deals with an inscription that was not mentioned in the main text. The first, “The Inscription of Rufinus the Soldier, from the Via Appia Pignatelli Catacomb (Rome),” tries to prove that the deceased was a Jewish veteran. The other deals with Flavia Optata’s grave in Concordia, and once more shows that Optata’s husband did not serve in a Jewish unit and that

² Olshanetsky, Haggai, “The Jewish Soldiers of Titus and His Successors, the Roman Emperors,” *Hayo Haya* 12 (2018): 18; in 2021 I published two articles in English with a longer debate on the subject: Olshanetsky, Haggai, “Do We Have Archaeological Evidence for Jewish Gladiators?,” *Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology* 8/3 (2021): 63-66; Olshanetsky, Haggai, “In the Service of the Empire: Continuity of Jewish Military Service in the Armies of Rome,” *Sapiens Ubique Civis* 2 (2021): 144-145.

this former reading was incorrect. This conclusion had already been presented by Speidel in 1996,³ yet his article is often overlooked. Lately, more publications re-emphasize the importance of Speidel's reading, and so this re-emphasis is important.⁴

In the book, González-Salineró is at his best when he deals with inscriptions, like the one of "L. Maecius Archon" on pages 76-79, showing his skills as an outstanding epigrapher. Thus, it is unfortunate to see how the disorganisation of the book and its general problems detract from its best parts. All in all, this book is the most comprehensive research on Jewish military service in the armies of Rome, and "quantity has a quality all its own." Furthermore, the book does crucial work in detecting and bringing forth a lot of material that was missed and is absent in the debates on Jewish service. Therefore, this is one of the most important publications on the matter to date and a must in the library of every university. However, articles from the last year that were not available to González-Salineró, before amendments to his manuscript were already forbidden, show that there is much more to debate and explore on the matter. And so, it seems that this book is not yet the final word, nor the final book, to be written on the subject.

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3 Speidel, Michael P., "Raising New Units for the Late Roman Army: 'Auxilia Palatina,'" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 50 (1996):164-165.

4 Two of the latest are: Eck, Werner, "Die – fast – unsichtbare jüdische Diaspora im Westen des Imperium Romanum vor der Spätanzike," in *Torah, Temple, Land: Constructions of Judaism in Antiquity*, ed. Jens Schröter, Markus Witte and Verena Lepper (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 248-49; Olshanetsky, Haggai, "In the Service of the Empire," 147-149 (cited above).

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