

A Comparative Study of the Writings about the First Jewish War by Josephus and Tacitus

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Abstract: Part of the significance of historical research is to find out the truth in history. But it is not an easy thing to define what historical truth is. This paper tries to answer the question by a comparative study of the narratives on the First Jewish War by the historians Tacitus and Josephus, whose writings about the first Jewish War are the only primary sources we have. Three aspects of their writings are examined in the discussion: their different, sometimes totally opposite accounts of the ancient Jewish history; of the crises in prewar Roman-Jewish relations and the causes of the war; and of what Titus actually did on the event of the burning of the Jerusalem Temple. The author of this paper argues in conclusion that we can hardly reach our research purposes if we simply aim at finding out who is the liar unless we have a careful examination and an objective interpretation about what are behind their “lies”. The paper also stresses that any historical events have to be interpreted within the historical context and historians understood through their specific positions if we wish to get closer to the historical truth.

Key words: Josephus, Tacitus, the First Jewish War, comparative study