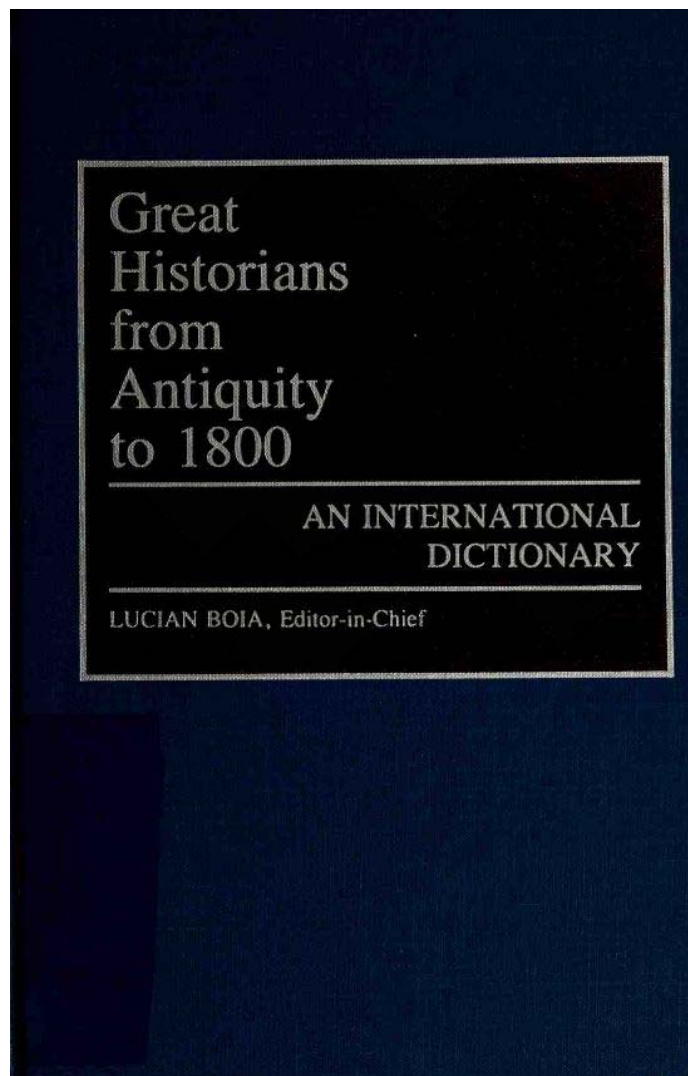


“Josephus, Flavius,” in Lucian Boia, ed.,  
*Great Historians from Antiquity to 1800*  
(New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), pp. 297-298.

(images below captured from Internet Archive)



## *Great Historians: Jewish*

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**JOSEPHUS, Flavius** (Jerusalem, c. A.D. 38–Rome? c. A.D. 100), Jewish historian. Josephus' writings are unquestionably the most important source for the history of the Jews during the turbulent years of the first century A.D. Josephus lived among Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes and thus possessed firsthand knowledge of the three main Jewish sects of the period. He was well educated and knew Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Josephus was intimately involved in the events he related; he served as an emissary of the Jews to Rome (A.D. 64) and as commander in Galilee during the Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 66–67). After the war he settled in Rome, became a citizen, and, under the patronage of the emperors, wrote his vast corpus of material. All of his extant writings are in Greek and were intended mainly for the non-Jewish world of the Roman Empire. Josephus' first book was *The Jewish War* (c. A.D. 78), presenting in great detail the aforementioned revolt. Although certain biases may be detected, the account is generally credible and is remarkable for its drawing on the author's personal participation and observation of the events described. Josephus' next work, his longest, was *Jewish Antiquities* (c. A.D. 94), chronicling the history of Judaism, from God's creation of the world to the author's own period. As such, much of this work parallels the Bible, which naturally served as a prime source. Other sources include various Hellenistic writers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and haggadic traditions that very often resurface in later rabbinic collections. Josephus' last two books, both much shorter than the first two, were written as retorts to other writers. *Life* (c. A.D. 94), which appeared as an appendix to *Jewish Antiquities*, is an autobiography that responds to the accusation of Justus of Tiberias that the historian was anti-Roman. *Against Apion* (c. A.D. 98) refutes the anti-Jewish rhetoric of Apion of Alexandria and upholds Judaism as a morally and ethically superior religion. Collectively, these works make Josephus the most important Jewish historian of the premodern era. Without him our knowledge of the first century B.C. to first century A.D. period of Jewish history would be extremely poor. Ironically, however, Josephus had little impact on later generations of Jews. First, many of his coreligionists considered him a traitor and pro-Roman. Second, his books are in Greek, a language that only a few Jews continued to use after the Greco-Roman period. (Actually, *The Jewish*

War appeared first in Aramaic, but this original was soon lost.) Fortunately, his writings were preserved by the Church, which considered them a valuable source on the epoch that produced nascent Christianity.

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# Great Historians from Antiquity to 1800

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