PART THREE

III. Four Test Cases

III. A. Josephus, Aliturus and Poppea Sabina

Poppea Sabina, Nero's empress, has long been regarded as a God-fearer (Θεοσεβής) of the Jewish religion and proof of both the extent of the diaspora[1] and the near triumph of Judaism over the Roman Empire.[2] But academic fashions change and now both these concepts of the political and religious near-triumph of Judaism and the existence of religious converts in Nero's court can no longer provide an explanation for the intriguing role that Poppea has played in the history of Roman Palestine and the life of Josephus. What has not yet been done is to look at the events surrounding Poppea through the lens of her cultural context - ancient Mediterranean society - and see her in the role that all members of the elite class were cast - the role of patron, the possessor of clients.

When examining an event that involves a member of the Roman upper classes it must be kept in mind that patronage was central to the way these individuals desired to present themselves to the world:

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[1]See, for example, Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, New York, 1979, 12, and F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958, 139-141.

[2]This line of reasoning can be seen in Feldman's analysis: "Jewish missionary activities...were well on their way to converting the Roman Empire to a Jewish or semi-Jewish state." Luis H. Feldman, "Flavius Josephus Revisited: the Man, His Writings, and His Significance," *ANRW* Vol. II, New York, 1984, 785.

> the Roman noble felt himself almost naked without an entourage of dependents, which he expanded to the best of his ability, and who acted as the visible symbol of his social standing.[3]

Knowing this enables us to draw some conclusions on the social motivations behind their actions in the context of patron-client relations. Poppea Sabina's interaction with Josephus is one such situation. An awareness of the dynamics of patron-client interaction significantly alters our understanding of what Josephus was trying to communicate in the narratives that feature Poppea. In this section we will apply the model of patron-client relations to Josephus' encounter with Poppea Sabina and compare the results of this modelling process to the conclusions reached by others through their approach to the text. This section will demonstrate the necessity of the patron-client model for a cross-cultural understanding of ancient texts which carry implicit and explicit alien social concerns.

III. A. 1. Indications of Patronage in the Roman Embassy (V 13-16)

When Josephus was twenty-six (63 C.E.) he was selected to travel to Rome[4] to secure the release of two priests who had been sent there "to render an account to Caesar" (V 13). These priests must have been rich enough to deserve a trial in Rome rather than in the provinces.[5] This

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[3]Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire," *Patronage in Ancient Society*, London-New York: Routledge, 1989, 64.

[4]Although there were several embassies from Judaea to Rome prior to the revolt, Josephus' embassy cannot be identified with any of the events reported in AJ or BJ (Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society*, London: Duckworth, 1983, 39).

[5]Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 139. On embassies to the emperor, see Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, London: Duckworth, 1977, 375-385.

type of arrest and rescue was "evidently common" by this time and was a result of endemic and violent factional struggle within the Jewish aristocracy.[6] After surviving a shipwreck in the Adriatic Josephus then:

> formed a friendship with Aliturus, an actor who was a special favourite of Nero and of Jewish origin. Through him I was introduced to Poppea, Caesar's consort, and took the earliest opportunity of soliciting her aid to secure the liberation of the priests. Having, besides this favour, received large gifts from Poppea, I returned to my own country (V 16).

When this passage is read in light of our model we can see four implicit indications of patron-client relations embedded within the text. These indications are: (1) a friendship is formed; (2) this friend provides an introduction to the Imperial household; (3) aid is sought; (4) a favour and gifts are given. Expressed in terms of patron-client relations, this episode portrays a prospective client with a vital need who (1) therefore approaches a broker who in turn (2) mediates contact with a holder of first order resources. This introduction sets the stage for the prospective client to attempt to initiate a vertical dyadic contract (patron-client relation) by (3) asking for something otherwise inaccessible. The client successfully engages the patron and (4) there is a flow of generalized reciprocity (which, to modern eyes, looks like Josephus received something for nothing). These elements of the episode and the model are compared below in Diagram 5.

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[6]Goodman, *Ruling* 139. Cohen, *Josephus* 61-62, unnecessarily maintains that the priests were sent to Rome on charges of anti-Roman activity. In doing so he fails take into account the obvious possibility that they were sent to Rome purely as a result of factional fighting within the largely pro-Roman (collaborative) ruling class.

Diagram 5

Patron-Client Dynamics Within the Embassy to Rome

TEXT	MODEL	CONFIRMATION
Goal: Liberation of Priests	Vital Need	Josephus/Client Lower Status
Friendship with Aliturus	Broker Contacted	Strategic Contact
Introduction to Poppea Sabina	Broker Mediates Contact Between Potential Client and Potential Patron	Proximity Established
Aid Solicited	Non Market-Accessible Resource Requested	Poppea/Patron Higher Status
Favour and Gifts Granted	Material-for-Immaterial Exchange	Generalized Reciprocity

Note that this episode has all three invariable factors of the model; unequal status, proximity and generalized reciprocity. Now we will take a closer look at the players in this episode and analyze how their roles are in fact indicative of patron-client relations.

III. A. 2. Aliturus the Broker

Josephus had a very specific task before him, to gain entrance into Nero's court and there petition for the release of two priests. Thus, upon his arrival in Italy, Josephus' first move was to form a friendship with one of the Emperor's friends, Aliturus, "a special favourite of Nero" (V 16). This is a clear indication that he began to engage the social institution of patronage.

In these circumstances the usual way to approach the Emperor was through his 'handlers' who were themselves clients of the Imperial household. These brokers mediated contact with their powerful patrons by selectively granting or denying petitioners an audience with the patron:

> Access to the Emperor was through his inner court, and this his flunkies controlled. So one cannot assume who is powerful at any given point. One had to find out. Power might lodge with improbable officials, if these were well placed within the communications network.[7]

Clearly, Josephus was in the right place at the right time when he met Aliturus, who was well placed in the communication network of the Imperial household.

Josephus describes Aliturus as a broker when he notes his position as a "special favourite of Nero" (V 16) who introduces him to Poppea. Aliturus was not merely one of Nero's many clients but a special favourite. This would suggest to a Mediterranean reader that Aliturus was in a position to mediate access to Nero's court. It is also culturally significant that Josephus tells his readers he formed a friendship with Aliturus. As patronage was a dominate mode of interaction it was thus the power and influence of one's friends that brought success in the Graeco-Roman world: "In the struggle for life success depends in reality upon the ability ... to

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[7]Carney, *Shape* 62.

attract the favour of the powerful".[8] This was typically done indirectly through ones friends. Of course, what better way to gain a favour than through a special favourite of the Imperial household. Here Josephus is explicitly telling his readers that he had success because he had an influential friend.

Friendship in the ancient Mediterranean always involved a reciprocal exchange of goods and/or services.[9] We are not told what Josephus did for Aliturus but it is very probable that the introduction to Poppea was part of a reciprocal exchange which occurred as a result of their friendship. Aliturus' Jewish background may well have been the key factor which allowed Josephus to engage him first as a friend and then as a broker to Poppea.

III. A. 3. Poppea Sabina the Patron

We have already established that as a member of the Roman nobility, Poppea Sabina's social personality was cast in terms of a patron. As Nero's Empress, this would have been both how she was perceived and would have wanted to be perceived. Thus there is no mystery as to why Josephus would have approached her, or why she would entertain an audience with him.

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[8]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate* 34. As with many aspects of patron-client dynamics, this is true both of Graeco-Roman society and the modern Mediterranean. Compare Pitt-Rivers, *Fate* 34, with Richard Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 13-14.

[9]For the importance of *amicus* and *amicitia* (friends and friendship), see Saller, *Personal* 11-15. Saller notes that among Romans, friendship was fundamentally instrumental in nature because of the "underdevelopment of rational, impersonal institutions for the provision of services" *Personal* 14-15. As both the material environment and the social script of patron-client relations were largely uniform throughout the early empire, it is thus highly likely that the utilitarian nature of friendship and its role in patron-client relations were comparable phenomena between the elite classes of Rome and the elite members of her colonies. At the centres of power and resources everyone played the same game.

That Poppea would have seen a colonial elite such as Josephus as a desirable client is not beyond speculation. It is significant that under the principate the emperor and his household took over the role of exercising personal patronage outside of Rome.[10] Furthermore, the position of Imperial women required the support of a broad base of clients.[11] There is also an abundance of evidence which attest to the granting of offices, honours and verdicts by the wives of Emperors.[12] The granting of such posts is a clear manifestation of patronage. Through such favours Poppea created a group of clients who were in her debt and from whom she could require service at any point in the future. This was the essential function of patronage in Josephus' world.

As with any member of the aristocracy, both Poppea's power and prestige increased with each new client she gained. Josephus represented an opportunity to gain yet one more client. Furthermore, by the time of Josephus' visit she already had a number of clients in Roman Palestine (see Appendix III - *Other Clients of Poppea Sabina*).

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[10]David Braund, "Function and Dysfunction: Personal Patronage in Roman Imperialism," *Patronage in Ancient Society*, London-New York: Routledge, 1989, 151. The provincial elite as brokers of Imperial resources and control became increasingly significant as the political expansion of the early empire outran the organizational capacity of the emperor's household (Johnson and Dandeker, "Patronage," 238).

[11]Patronage appears to have been exercised by Imperial women under Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius and Caracalla, (see Saller, *Personal* 65). Poppea systematically removed every obstacle that prevented her rise to power beside Nero - including Nero's own mother, Agrippina, and wife, Octavia. It is not unreasonable to speculate that she subsequently used her considerable wealth to strengthen her position in Rome and increase her supporters throughout the empire. On the life of Poppea see, Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty*, London: Batsford, 1984.

[12]Saller, *Personal* 65-66.

Yet one may ask why Poppea should give gifts to Josephus while Josephus does not mention what he did in return for Poppea.[13] Again, this can be explained with reference to patronage. As the exchange that occurs within a patron-client relation is generalized reciprocity, Josephus was not obligated to return value for value: "the patron's economic *beneficia* were often repaid by increased social prestige".[14] Thus it would be ethnocentric to assume that Josephus' mention of the gifts was merely a function of vanity and unrealistic. Furthermore, the act of generous gift giving had significant social consequences for both patron and client. Josephus was obligated by the gifts to publicize Poppea's favour and gifts.[15] This would have served to increase her honour and prestige among the Jewish elite. Also, public knowledge of the gifts would have increased Josephus' prestige as a client of a powerful patron who came to the aid of Jewish priests. Both patron and client gain social status.

III. A. 4. A Response to Intuitive Analysis

Poppea's grant of the release of the two priests is usually explained on the basis that she was a 'Judaizer,' or a 'friend of Judaism'. E. Mary Smallwood has effectively dismissed any such

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[13]Generosity is one of the characteristics of a good benefactor; Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field*, Missouri: Clayton, 1982, 323-336.

[14]Saller, *Personal* 126. The lack of direct empirical evidence that there was in fact a reciprocal (and generalized) exchange between Josephus and Poppea is mirrored in a wider lack of empirical evidence of reciprocal exchange relations between patrons and clients in Rome. Johnson and Dandeker note that the lack of direct evidence is overcome once the focus moves from a relational to a system level of analysis: "At the system level the empirical issue is not the existence of one-to-one exchanges over the short term but the existence and operation of a complex network of vertical and cross-cutting ties which have wider integrative and social control functions than those identified through the discrete reciprocations of single patrons and clients" ("Patronage," 225).

[15]Saller, *Personal* 127.

explanations but then is only able to explain Poppea's release of the priests as an isolated act of kindness:

> Poppea may have secured the release of the priests merely on the grounds that they had already been in custody for the last four years, which was quite long enough.[16]

Yet our analysis suggests that much more was at work then simply kindness. In Smallwood's explanation the concept of "kindness" is clearly being used ethnocentrically. It must be kept in mind that nothing was done by the elite without the expectation of future reciprocity and there could be no baser action than ingratitude and failure to reciprocate.[17] Therefore we cannot simply compare the favour of an elite Roman to an act of modern kindness.

In contrast to our social-scientific analysis of the Embassy to Rome stands Loius H. Feldman's interpretation of what the gifts from Poppea signified:

> We may wonder why the Emperor should have given Josephus gifts when it was Josephus who sought a favour from him. The only answer that makes sense is that Josephus promised to try to defuse the revolution that was starting in Judea. The mention of the gifts would be self incriminating, and we may guess that Josephus had to admit receiving them because the matter was so well known.[18]

In the light of the role of a Roman patron it is no longer mystifying that Josephus should receive gifts from a member of the Imperial household. Neither can the Jewish revolt of 66 C.E. be

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[16]E. Mary Smallwood, "The Alleged Jewish Tendencies of Poppaea Sabina," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 10 (1959) 329-335. Smallwood's explanation is really no different from G.A. Williamson's which has Poppea being "impressed" by Josephus' appeals (G.A. Williamson, *The World of Josephus*, London, 1964, 141). Both explanations ignore the factors of interpersonal contact that made the Graeco-Roman world quite unlike ours.

[17]Saller, *Personal* 14. Malina, "Patron and Client" 5, also notes that "all gifts implied obligations and were made with strings attached".

[18]Feldman, "Flavius," 782. It is difficult to see why Feldman attributes the gifts to Nero and not, as Josephus relates, to Poppea. Perhaps this is because he did not understand how Poppea herself mediated Imperial resources.

used as an explanation as it was still at least two years away (Poppea died in 65 C.E.).[19] In the absence of an explicit model of patron-client relations, the analysis is reduced to speculation and ethnocentric judgements (i.e., gifts from a high status patron as "incriminating"). Feldman also assumes that it would be incriminating for Josephus to be seen cooperating with the Romans. But the Jewish aristocracy had long ago been compromised and willingly mediated Imperial control over the colony of Roman Palestine:

> Control of a subject society has often been exercised through an already-existing indigenous class or dominant aristocracy. The imperial regime compromised members of such a society by giving them a serious economic stake in the imperial system of domination.[20]

Thus Josephus had nothing to hide as a client of Poppea. Quite to the contrary, it may have been her patronage, and Josephus' subsequent gain of social status, which made it possible for him to be found in the company of the Jerusalem elite and gain an appointment as general at the outbreak of the rebellion a few years later. The embassy cannot be rendered understandable without first seeing it from the perspective of its author. The only way this embassy to Rome can be made to make any sense is when it is read in the light of its implicit cultural concern - patronage.

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[19]Josephus' embassy to Rome took place in 64 C.E., but the outbreak of the revolt was not until mid 66, (Rajak, *Josephus*, 39 and BJ 2.315).

[20]Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987, 9. See also David M. Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution: 6-74 C.E., A Political History Based on the Writings of Josephus*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.

III. A. 5. Summary

When we read the account of the Roman Embassy from the perspective of the Graeco-Roman cultural script of patron-client relations, one can see that Josephus followed the characteristic pattern of engaging a patron. He first locates a broker of the Imperial household - Aliturus - and engages his friendship, probably on the basis of their common ethnicity. The purpose of this friendship was to gain an introduction to Poppea who was already known to have other Jewish clients. Poppea then bestows a favour upon Josephus, thus making him one more of her clients.[21] The Empress, in keeping with the characteristic behaviour of a powerful patron, also gives "large gifts" to Josephus. These "gifts" further strengthened her support among the Jewish aristocracy by effectively giving Josephus the resources to build his own group of clients whose loyalty would then be indirectly secured by Poppea.[22] This redistribution of resources from centre to periphery is the main aspect and function of patronage as a networked system and takes P.A. Brunt's explanation of imperial-colonial elite "affinity" within the Roman empire one step further:

> At every stage in Rome's history the aristocrats who ruled at Rome found it most natural to support men like themselves elsewhere. Community of interests and sentiments made it easier to admit them into their own circle.[23]

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[21]It is surprising that Harold W. Attridge could find reason to claim that Josephus does not record the outcome of his embassy. The context of patronage certainly serves to indicate that "this favour" of Poppea's is in fact the liberation of the priests (V 16), see Attridge, "Josephus," 186.

[22]For an analysis of the strategic role of favours and gifts granted by members of imperial households to their clients, see "Reciprocity and Social Cohesion," in Saller, *Personal* 69-78.

[23]P.A. Brunt, "The Romanization of the Local Ruling Classes in the Roman Empire," *Assimilation et résistance à la culture gréco-romaine dans le monde ancien*, Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1976, 169.

Josephus returns to Jerusalem having secured the liberation of the priests and having gained a powerful patron (a most important resource) and increased social status among his peers. The social significance of such Imperial patronage in Josephus' career should not be underestimated. Consider that Agrippa I rose from destitution to greatness entirely through personal contacts in Italy.[24] The ex-High Priest Jonathan b. Ananus likewise used a friendship with a member of Claudius' Imperial household to strengthen his position within the Judaean political landscape.[25]

There is insufficient reason to dismiss Josephus' embassy to Rome as a mere invention when the episode demonstrates such first hand knowledge of how access to the Imperial court was gained. The account is certainly plausible according to both the known behaviour of Poppea Sabina (and elite Roman patrons in general) and it also fits the social pattern that such an embassy could be expected to follow.[26] In approaching Poppea through Aliturus, Josephus followed the most culturally logical course of action. Consider Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's question as to how important patronage was for political success:

> How effectively could any individual or group gain access to the resources controlled by the Roman state (of whatever sort, judgement, privilege, status, power, money) except through personal links of patronage?[27]

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[24]On the career of Agrippa I, see Daniel R. Schwartz, *Agrippa I: The Last King of Judaea*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1990.

[25]Goodman, *Ruling* 148.

[26]Cohen, *Josephus* 61, casts doubt upon the probability of the embassy because Josephus was only a "young man". Yet Josephus' social status as a member of the Jewish aristocracy would have been a far more compelling reason for his selection for such an embassy than his age would have been an impedance. Indeed, how "young" is 26 in antiquity for members of the elite classes (consider that public careers of the Roman aristocracy began in their late teens, cf., Lily Ross Taylor, "Nobles, Clients, and Personal Armies," *Friends, Followers and Factions*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, 179-192)?

[27]Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire," *Patronage in Ancient Society*, London-New York: Routledge, 1989, 78.

Josephus' account makes too much 'sociological sense' to be dismissed in the absence of strong warrants.[28]

This analysis of Poppea Sabina allows us to see her in the light of cultural categories relevant to her social climate and thereby reach a fuller understanding of her role within the life and writings of Josephus. Josephus' description of her reflects the social personalities that were significant to him; patrons, brokers, friends, and it reflects the significant social scripts of his environment; friendship, introductions and favours. Yet she continues to be interpreted in categories that are significant to modern historians, her religious affiliation and its significance for the rise of early Christianity. Clearly, the latter treatment reflects the agenda of modern scholars and ignores what Josephus considered to be of first importance. When the alien social concerns which are reflected in ancient texts are overlooked then there is a tendency to dismiss as invention anything which fails to conform to our own experience.

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[28]It is significant that Josephus was in fact able to operate at the highest level of Roman culture, the imperial household, with relative ease. That Josephus knew how to penetrate the centre of the Roman empire suggests that elite Jews shared in patron-client relations a common cultural script with elite Romans. I would suggest that it was almost entirely within the context of this shared cultural script that the two societies are seen to interact with each other. Here they share, if not the same language, then a similar dialect (cf., John Rich, "Patronage and Interstate Relations in the Roman Republic," *Patronage in Ancient Society*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, 117-135; and Braund, ["Function and Dysfunction," 137-52], who notes that "Patronage was a principle channel by means of which foreign and provincial administration were conducted" [139]). For an introduction to client relationships in Roman foreign policy and the role of the Roman aristocracy, see, E. Badian, *Foreign Clientelae: 264-70 B.C.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.