



CAIAPHAS IN CONTEXT

The writings of Flavius Josephus (37 to c. 100 c.e.) are the principal literary sources of information about the high priesthood in the Second Temple period up to and including the first Jewish revolt against Rome. This is not to say that Josephus tells the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Indeed, with regard to the high priesthood, as with many other matters, the historian's own concerns are not difficult to discern. Of priestly heritage himself, Josephus has a generally positive view of the high priesthood.¹ For him the high priesthood and the Temple are the heart and soul of Judaism.² Aaron, the first high priest, is introduced with great fanfare (*Ant.* 3.151–92); he and his successors are charged with transmitting Moses' teachings intact from generation to generation.³ Not all priests are revered, however. Onias II (*Ant.* 12.158) and the later Hasmonean high priests (*Ant.* 13.300–19, 431–32) serve as proof of the thesis of *The Antiquities of the Jews* that violation of Jewish law leads to disaster.⁴ In some instances *The Jewish War* and the *Antiquities* give different evaluations of the same high priest. For example *The Jewish War* describes Ananus (Annas) II as a moderate and virtuous man (2.648–51; 4.15–17), whereas *Antiquities* 20.199 describes him as a rash and impetuous leader. These changes reflect the different literary and rhetorical aims of these works,⁵ but also Josephus's effort to understand the role of the priesthood before and during the revolt, as well as to justify his own behavior.

Josephus provides a considerable amount of detail about some high priests, such as the aforementioned Ananus II, the youngest son of Annas (*Ant.* 20.197, 203; *War* 2.563, 648–53), and next to no detail about many, including Caiaphas. Nevertheless from his treatises it is easily possible to piece together a chronology of the high priesthood and to learn something of the political and social pressures upon that institution.⁶

Despite the fact that Josephus shaped his narratives according to his own literary and ideological concerns, there seems to be no basis on which to doubt the overall accuracy of his references to Caiaphas. Perhaps for Josephus, Caiaphas's career was unremarkable, or at least unrelated to the historian's intense interest in the Hasmonean era and in the period leading up to the revolt.⁷ Nevertheless he provides an enormous service to those who seek the historical Caiaphas, by situating this high priest in a plausible chronology and historical context. Indeed Josephus provides what are perhaps the most important facts about Caiaphas: that he was appointed by the governor Gratus in 18 C.E., remained throughout Pilate's governorship (26–36), and was removed by Vitellius, the legate of Syria, in 36 or 37 C.E.

CAIAPHAS'S APPOINTMENT AS HIGH PRIEST

Josephus reports the following concerning Caiaphas's appointment to the office of high priest:

Caesar's successor in authority was the third emperor, Tiberius Nero, the son of his wife Julia. He dispatched Valerius Gratus to succeed Annus Rufus as procurator over the Jews. Gratus deposed Ananus from his sacred office, and proclaimed Ishmael, the son of Phabi, high priest. Not long afterwards he removed him also and appointed in his stead Eleazar, the son of the high priest Ananus. A year later he deposed him also and entrusted the office of high priest to Simon, the son of Camith. The last-mentioned held this position for not more than a year and was succeeded by Joseph, who was called Caiaphas. After these acts Gratus retired to Rome, having stayed eleven years in Judaea. It was Pontius Pilate who came as his successor. (*Ant.* 18.33–35)

This report suggests a date of 18 C.E. for the appointment.⁸

RELATIONSHIP WITH PILATE

One of the puzzling aspects of Caiaphas's tenure is that Pilate did not replace him with his own appointee when he succeeded Gratus as governor in 26 C.E. Some have suggested that Annas, Caiaphas's father-in-law, offered Pilate financial inducements in order to keep Caiaphas in office until Annas's own son was ready for the high priesthood,⁹ or that Caiaphas himself may have done so.¹⁰ While it is not inconceivable that money may have changed hands in order to ensure Caiaphas's ongoing tenure under Pilate, there is no evidence for this conjecture.

Daniel Schwartz has a more detailed explanation for Caiaphas's long tenure. In Schwartz's view the narrative structure of *Antiquities* 18 suggests a gap between the end of Gratus's service and the timing of Pilate's arrival in Judaea.

Between the years 17 and 29, Vitellius Germanicus was touring the East in order to resolve a number of problems that had arisen in client kingdoms, such as the Syrian and Judaeen complaints about oppressive taxes (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.42.5). Schwartz argues that Vitellius sent Gratus back to Rome so that Tiberius could conduct a full review of the situation. If the result of this review was to appoint a new governor, there may have been a gap of several months between Gratus's departure and the arrival of his replacement. In support of this theory, Schwartz notes that while Tacitus records only complaints about taxes, it is possible that the residents of Judaea would also have objected to Gratus's high-handed practice of appointing and deposing high priests on an annual basis (*Ant.* 18.34–35). Schwartz suggests that either Vitellius or Tiberius attempted to assuage the Judaeans by removing Gratus and then denying his successor, Pontius Pilate, the right to appoint a new high priest. This scenario would account for the length of Caiaphas's appointment, in contrast with the short tenures of Gratus's four previous appointees.¹¹

Most scholars, however, attribute Caiaphas's continuation throughout Pilate's governorship to the high priest's effectiveness.¹² In this view Caiaphas's long tenure reflects Pilate's satisfaction with him and his sense that Caiaphas was "a man who could be relied on to support Roman interests and who could command some respect among the people."¹³ As Borg and Crossan put it, "We must presume that the Romans and Caiaphas worked well together. It is not necessary to demonize either Caiaphas or Pilate, but it would seem that, even from the viewpoint of Roman imperial rule, they collaborated not wisely but too well."¹⁴ In the absence of any first-century sources that describe a direct encounter between the high priest and the Roman governor, this conclusion remains speculative.

REMOVAL FROM OFFICE

Josephus mentions Caiaphas again only when he is removed from his position. After a full discussion of the high-priestly vestments, the historian comments approvingly that

Vitellius, on reaching Judaea, went up to Jerusalem, where the Jews were celebrating their traditional feast called the Passover. Having been received in magnificent fashion, Vitellius remitted to the inhabitants of the city all taxes on the sale of agricultural produce and agreed that the vestments of the high priest and all his ornaments should be kept in the temple in custody of the priests, as had been their privilege before. . . . After he had bestowed these benefits upon the nation, he removed from his sacred office the high priest Joseph surnamed Caiaphas, and appointed in his stead Jonathan, son of

Ananus the high priest. Then he set out on the journey back to Antioch. (*Ant.* 18.90–95)

There is some confusion as to whether Caiaphas was removed in 36 or 37 C.E. The problem arises because Josephus records that Vitellius made two visits to Jerusalem, one at Passover after he dismissed Pilate (*Ant.* 18.90–95) and another at a different, unnamed festival, during which time he stayed for three days and then deposed Caiaphas's successor, the high priest Jonathan (*Ant.* 18.120–24). Smallwood argues that Josephus confused two separate occasions. She agrees that Vitellius likely made two separate visits to Jerusalem, but that the first visit did not occur on a festival. On this first occasion, in late 36 or early 37, he heard the Jews' request for control of the high-priestly vestments, wrote to the emperor about this matter, and dismissed Caiaphas from his position. The second visit took place at the Passover, in April 37, during which he dismissed the high priest Jonathan and granted the request for the return of the vestments to the high priest's control. If Smallwood is correct, Caiaphas would have been deposed late in 36 or early in 37.¹⁵

CAIAPHAS'S CAREER AND PERSONAL LIFE

Virtually nothing is known about the private and professional life of Joseph son of Caiaphas.¹⁶ An apocryphal text mentions a daughter, but there is no evidence to support this.¹⁷ The ossuary on which his name is engraved contained not only the bones of an older man but also those of an adult woman, two infants, and two children. It is possible that these were family members, perhaps his wife, his unmarried daughter, and his children or grandchildren.¹⁸ It has also been suggested that Caiaphas had a younger brother named Elionaeus son of Cantheras who, according to Mishnah Parah 3:5, was called "Elio'eynai the son of Qayaf" and nicknamed "HaQof," meaning, perhaps, "monkey" or "ape."¹⁹ These conjectures remain speculative.²⁰

If the evidence foils attempts at a detailed biography, the simple knowledge that Caiaphas was high priest can provide some insights into his lifestyle and daily activities. From the biblical period to the destruction of the second Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E., the high priest's life was highly structured in accordance with precepts set forth in the Hebrew scriptures. The Hebrew Bible therefore can be used as a basis for imagining what Caiaphas would have done on a day-to-day basis, what sort of person he would have married, and how he would have dressed while performing his duties.

The High Priest and Covenant

Josephus's political interest notwithstanding, the primary role of the high priest was cultic and spiritual. The numerous and highly detailed rules governing the

high priest's life make sense only in the context of Israel's self-understanding as a people in covenantal relationship with God and of the role of the high priest in maintaining that relationship. According to Hebrew scriptures, it was God who initiated this relationship by making a set of promises to Abram (renamed Abraham in Gen. 17:5) and commanding him to set out for an unknown land: "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (Gen. 12:1–3).

The covenantal relationship between God and Israel was a contract that required commitment and devotion from both parties. According to the terms of this contract, Israel was to obey and worship God, and God was to preserve and protect Israel. In the book of Exodus, God gives Moses the following message to convey to the Israelites: "Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (19:5–6). In this context obedience meant living by the commandments that, according to the Exodus narrative, were given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai and recorded in the Pentateuch.

These laws included an elaborate system of animal and plant sacrifices, which were to be the means by which Israelites worshiped God. It should be noted that animal and plant sacrifice was a feature of religious worship throughout the ancient Near East, as well as in classical Greece and Rome. Strange as this mode of worship may seem now, Israel was by no means unique in this regard.²¹

The biblical books record the establishment of a priestly class, whose responsibility it was to administer and carry out this system, and at the head of this priestly class was the high priest. The sacrifices were performed in the portable tabernacle that the Israelites took with them as they wandered in the desert from Egypt to Israel.²² After the Israelites were established in Canaan, sacrifices were carried out in temples specifically dedicated to this purpose. Over the course of time, the Hebrew Bible records, the sacrificial system became centered on a single, magnificent temple situated in Jerusalem, as befitted a single, all-powerful God.²³

Although Israel's covenant with God bound her to obedience, it was recognized from the outset that, people being what they are, perfect compliance with the divine will was an ideal that could never be achieved. To accommodate human imperfection within the covenantal relationship with God, Israelite practice and belief provided processes of repentance and atonement that were enacted as required for individuals and on an annual basis for the entire people.

Lifestyle

His daily involvement in the activities of the Temple demanded of the high priest a higher level of ritual purity than of other priests, who in turn were subject to more stringent regulations than the general public. The high priest had to marry an Israelite. He was not to dishevel his hair or tear his vestments; approach a corpse, even that of his mother or father; or marry a nonvirgin, thereby ruling out marriage to a widow, divorced woman, or prostitute (Lev. 21:10–20). Nor could the high priest be blemished in any way (Lev. 21:17). Thus excluded was “one who is blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles” (21:18–20).

If these rules remained in place in the first century C.E., it is likely that Caiaphas adhered well enough to the purity laws to which his position bound him and generally lived his life as expected of a high priest. Had this not been the case, Josephus would probably have shown more interest in him, as he does those high priests who deviated from the proper path.²⁴ It is also likely that his physical appearance was unremarkable; at the very least, and contrary to his later visual portraits, Caiaphas probably had no visible blemishes or disabilities.²⁵ Nothing about Caiaphas’s wife is known, except that she was the daughter of the former high priest Annas, who is identified in John 18:13 as Caiaphas’s father-in-law. This pedigree identifies her as a woman of the right sort of background to be a high-priestly consort.

Cultic Responsibilities

The high priest had a broad range of duties related to the Temple and the sacrificial system, but by far the most important was his crucial role in the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) rituals, and particularly his entrance into the Holy of Holies. The exalted nature of this moment cannot be overstated, for the Holy of Holies was the one place from which all humans were forbidden at all times, except for the high priest on this one day each year. The high priest’s role is described in Leviticus 16:1–30, in which God sets out the rules and regulations of Yom Kippur for Moses’ brother, Aaron, the first high priest to carry out sacrifices in the Tabernacle. These rituals were later transferred to the Temple in Jerusalem.²⁶

After carrying out a number of initial sacrifices of atonement on behalf of himself and his household, the high priest was to set two goats at the entrance of the “tent of meeting.” He was then to cast lots on the two goats, one for the Lord and one for “Azazel.” The goat dedicated to God was to be offered as a sin offering. The other was to be “presented alive before the LORD to make atonement

over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel” (16:10). He was then to slaughter a bull, take a censer of coals of fire and two handfuls of incense, and bring them inside the Holy of Holies. He would put the incense on the fire “that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the covenant, or he will die. He shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times” (16:13–14).

The high priest then turned his attention to the goats that had earlier been set aside at the entrance to the Tabernacle or Temple. The goat “for the Lord,” that is, the sin offering for the people, was slaughtered and its blood brought inside the curtain to be sprinkled upon the mercy seat. Some of the bull’s blood and some of this goat’s blood was then put on each of the horns of the altar. Afterward the high priest presented the “scape goat.” He placed both of his hands on the goat’s head and confessed the “iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions”; the goat was then sent away into the wilderness bearing the sins of the people (16:20–22). At the conclusion of this dramatic ceremony, the high priest removed the special linen vestments worn for the previous steps of the ritual, bathed in water, donned his usual vestments, and then offered some concluding sacrifices of atonement for himself and for the people (16:23–24).

In addition to atoning on behalf of the nation on Yom Kippur, the high priest officiated at the sacrifices that followed a priestly consecration, including his own (Lev. 9); he sacrificed a meal offering in the mornings and evenings, on behalf of himself and the entire priesthood (Lev. 6:14–15) and participated in the ceremony of the burning of the Red Heifer (used for purification after touching a corpse; see Num. 19:1–20). According to Josephus, the high priest customarily officiated on Sabbaths, feasts of the new moon, and at the three pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (*Ant.* 15.408).²⁷ Absent evidence to the contrary, it is safe to assume that Caiaphas carried out his sacerdotal duties in a respectable and unremarkable way.

Political Responsibilities

In addition to his cultic functions, the high priest had a number of political and administrative responsibilities, such as collecting taxes, administering local affairs, and presiding over the council, or Sanhedrin, that governed Jewish civil affairs.²⁸ The nature, composition, and responsibilities of the Sanhedrin in the first century are extraordinarily difficult to determine. The Gospels refer to an assembly or council, *synedrion*, of chief priests, elders, and others (for example Mark 15:1 and parallels), but whether they understood its inner workings and legal jurisdiction is uncertain.²⁹ Josephus uses the term *synedrion* to refer to a

council or court of law (*Ant.* 14.167, 15.173, 20.200; *Life* 62). Rabbinic literature contains numerous references to a large or superior court (*bet din hagadol*; Mishnah Sotah 1:4, 9:1; Mishnah Gittin 6:7; Mishnah Sanhedrin 11:2, 4; Mishnah Horayot 1:5), but it is not clear whether these rabbinic descriptions pertain to the first-century council.³⁰ One of the key problems pertinent to the life story of Jesus is the lack of clarity as to the council's jurisdiction in capital offenses. In John 18:31 the Jews tell Pilate: "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." Yet Acts 7:54–8:2 depicts the trial and execution, by stoning, of Stephen. No firm conclusion can be drawn, as evidence can be summoned in support of either position.³¹ Nevertheless it is likely that Caiaphas had significant political roles, at least internal to the Jewish community.

High-Priestly Problems

By virtue of his position as the highest cultic official, the high priest held a considerable amount of power and prestige in the eyes of many, if not all, of those who were under his jurisdiction. By the time of Caiaphas, however, changing circumstances and politics had also changed the high priest's role, both in relationship to the people and in relationship to Rome. These changes were reflected in two issues: the process of choosing the high priest and control over the high-priestly vestments.

Choosing the high priest. In theory the high priesthood was a hereditary position. The Hebrew scriptures describe the biblical high priests as the descendants of Aaron (see, for example, 1 Chron. 6:3–15). This tradition cannot be verified historically, as there is evidence to suggest that in the period of the monarchy the high priest may have been a royal appointee.³² In 586 B.C.E. the Babylonians, under Nebuchadrezzar, conquered the kingdom of Judah and destroyed Solomon's Temple. But with the return of the exiles some seventy years later, the building of a second Temple began in Jerusalem, and the sacrifices and related institutions were resumed.³³ In the absence of a monarchy, the Temple became the nation's most important institution, and the high priest took on the political role, and attendant honor, that had previously belonged to the king.³⁴

The postexilic high priests traced their ancestry to Zadok, appointed as chief priest at Jerusalem by Solomon (1 Kings 2:35), who in turn was thought to be a descendant of Eleazar, the son of Aaron (1 Chron. 6:50–53). With the advent of the Hasmonean monarchy (143–37 B.C.E.), however, the prestige of the high priesthood began to dwindle. The fact that some of the Hasmonean kings also took on the role of high priest compromised the integrity of the high priesthood in the eyes of many; departure from the principle of dynastic succession tarnished its aura of sanctity and diminished its cultic authority. When Queen

Salome Alexandra died in 67 B.C.E., a bitter civil war broke out between her two sons, Aristobulus and Hyrcanus. As the elder son, Hyrcanus was the heir to the crown and the high priesthood. His removal from power by his brother, Aristobulus, provided an excuse for the Roman general Pompey to intervene and conquer Jerusalem, under the guise of restoring the kingdom to its rightful heir. Pompey, however, stripped Hyrcanus of the monarchy and left him solely as high priest.³⁵

In 63 B.C.E. Judaea became a vassal state of Rome. For some decades thereafter, the Hasmonean rulers remained in place, but with the collapse of the Hasmonean kingdom and Rome's appointment of Herod as king in 40 B.C.E., the choice of high priest according to nonbiblical criteria continued unabated. From 37 to his death in 4 B.C.E., it was Herod who appointed the high priests; his son, Archelaus, took on this task for a decade or so. In 6 C.E. Rome created the province of Judaea, thereby subjecting Judaea to direct Roman rule rather than operating through a client king such as Herod. From 6 C.E. until 41 C.E., the high priest was a Roman appointee, chosen either by the legate of Syria or his subordinate, the governor of Judaea.³⁶

Although the hereditary basis of the high priesthood was no longer in effect, family connections and influence were not irrelevant to the choice of high priest. Josephus suggests that the high priesthood was largely restricted to certain Sadducean families, those of Boethus and Annas; a number of other high priests came from the families of Phabi and Camithus.³⁷ After 41 the high priest was appointed by King Agrippa I and his successors, until the revolt, when the rebels symbolically elected Phannias son of Samuel as high priest. Whether he in fact served in the Temple is not known. The high priesthood came to an end with the Temple's destruction during the revolt of 66–73 C.E.³⁸

The prestige of the high priesthood changed along with the political fortunes of Judaea and the manner of his appointment. The disruption of the dynastic line prompted concerns about the legitimacy of the Hasmonean and Roman-era high priests, perhaps including Caiaphas himself. The departure from the hereditary lineage may also have been a factor in the establishment of the Qumran community in the Hasmonean period, and its persistence until Rome quashed the Jewish revolt.³⁹ Nevertheless the fact that the high priest continued to oversee the sacrificial cult and to enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement spoke to his ongoing role in the cultic life of the people of Israel and in their covenantal relationship with the one God of Israel.

The high priest's vestments. Although the priests performed their ritual duties barefoot, they were required to wear special vestments when carrying out their official duties. These vestments comprised a tunic, a sash, head covering, and

breeches (Exod. 28:40–42). In addition to these items, the high-priestly vestments included four garments: a robe, the “ephod,” a breastplate, and a crown, whose appearance, colors, and materials are described in detail in Exodus 28:1–43 and again in Exodus 39:1–31. The vestments were colorful and elaborate. The sleeveless robe was purple and hemmed with blue, purple, and scarlet tassels shaped like pomegranates alternating with small bells that presumably chimed with every step. The ephod was a vest fastened with an onyx stone at each shoulder; these stones were engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The breastplate was covered with twelve gems, each bearing the name of one of the twelve tribes. Fastened onto the breastplate was a pouch containing the Urim and Thummim (instruments of divination). The crown was a gold plate inscribed with the phrase “Holy unto God.” The crown was attached to the head covering so that it rested on the high priest’s forehead. These were the vestments that the high priest wore to carry out his special duties throughout the year; on the Day of Atonement, the high priest wore a special set of plain linen vestments (Lev. 16:4).⁴⁰ The vestments were not merely an adornment but an instrument essential to the high-priestly role. The names of the twelve tribes suggest the high priest’s pan-Israel role; the Urim and Thummim symbolize his direct line to the divine, allowing him to mediate the covenantal relationship between God and Israel.

The central role of the vestments for the high priest’s performance of his cultic obligations turned their control into an issue in the Herodian and Roman periods. Whoever controlled the vestments also subjugated the high priest, who could not perform his cultic role without these special garments. Here is Josephus’s account of the vexed vestment issue:

At that time the vestments were stored in Antonia—there is a stronghold of that name—for the following reason. One of the priests, Hyrcanus, the first of many by that name, had constructed a large house near the temple and lived there most of the time. As custodian of the vestments, for to him alone was conceded the right to put them on, he kept them laid away there, whenever he put on his ordinary clothes in order to go down to the city. His sons and their children also followed the same practice. When Herod became king, he made lavish repairs to this building, which was conveniently situated, and being a friend of Antony, he called it Antonia. He retained the vestments there just as he had found them, believing that for this reason the people would never rise in insurrection against him. Herod’s successor as king, his son Archelaus, acted similarly. After him, when Romans took over the government, they retained control of the High Priest’s vestments and kept them in a stone building, where they were under the seal both of the

priests and of the custodians of the treasury and where the warden of the guard lighted the lamp day by day. Seven days before each festival the vestments were delivered to the priests by the warden. After they had been purified, the High Priest wore them; then after the first day of the festival he put them back again in the building where they were laid away before. This was the procedure at the three festivals each year and on the fast day. (*Ant.* 18. 91–95)

Josephus wrote approvingly of the change wrought by Vitellius, commenting that the legate “was guided by our law in dealing with the vestments, and instructed the warden not to meddle with the question of where they were to be stored or when they should be used” (*Ant.* 18. 95).

The vestments remained under Jewish control until the death of Agrippa I in 44. The Roman procurator Fadus then demanded that the vestments be returned to Roman custody. The Jews petitioned the emperor Claudius, who granted their request and gave the authority over the vestments to Herod of Chalcis, the son of Agrippa I. With this also came the right to appoint the high priests. The vestments remained in Jewish hands until the revolt.⁴¹

It is unlikely that the Herodian and Roman leadership intended to impede the conduct of the sacrificial cult or to prevent the pilgrimage festivals from taking place. After all it was Roman policy to allow subjects to observe their ancestral customs. Paul Winter speculates that the vestments were worn by the high priest not only for religious purposes but also when the Sanhedrin met. If so, those who had custody of the vestments would necessarily have had prior warning and knowledge of when these meetings were to take place.⁴² This is rather speculative, but whatever the specific reason, it appears that their symbolic significance was so great that control over the vestments also signified control over the high priest and, by extension, over the nation as a whole.

None of the first-century sources describe Caiaphas’s garments; whether the robe that he tore during the council’s interrogation of Jesus (according to the Passion narratives of Matthew and Mark) were his formal vestments is not known. Nevertheless it is reasonable to surmise that he wore the garments appropriate to his cultic duties. Josephus’s account makes it clear that Caiaphas’s vestments were under Roman lock and key and that he required Roman permission for their use. Whether he was irritated by this required gesture of subservience or simply accepted it is not known.

DEATH

Josephus does not reveal how or when Caiaphas’s death took place. Apocryphal sources invent a gruesome death for him, as befitting their view of him as

a deicide.⁴³ If the ossuary inscribed with his name did indeed contain the bones of the high priest and his family, and if all of them died at the same time, it is possible that their deaths were due to an infectious disease that swept through two or three generations of this family. Even the rich and powerful would have been powerless to defend themselves against such a disease. This is entirely speculative, however.

CONCLUSION

Josephus's lack of interest in Caiaphas is regrettable for historians and others interested in this high priest, but at least one may surmise that the information that he does provide cannot be dismissed on the grounds of tendentiousness. While uninformative about the details of Caiaphas's life, Josephus's comments are crucial for placing the high priest in his historical and political context. As high priest from 18 until 36 or 37, Caiaphas had a longer tenure by far than any other high priest in the Second Temple period. Ananias son of Nedebeaus comes a distant second, at eleven years (48–59 C.E.); most others were high priests for only a year or two. Caiaphas's long tenure is particularly noteworthy as it spanned the terms of two governors, Gratus and Pilate; a change in high priest normally accompanied a change in Roman governor, except in this one case. Second, and equally important, are Caiaphas's family connections. As a Roman appointee he clearly did not inherit the high-priestly mantle from his father, but it is worth noting that as the son-in-law of Annas, high priest in the period 6–15 C.E., Caiaphas belonged to a distinguished family that included five other high priests of his generation: his five brothers-in-law, the sons of Ananus (Eleazar, 16–17 C.E.; Jonathan, 36 or 37 C.E.; Theophilus, 36–41 C.E.; Matthias, 42–43 C.E.; Annas II, 62 C.E.). Being a member of a prominent high-priestly family likely did not hurt his position. It is also interesting to note that the vestments were under Roman jurisdiction during his tenure; this point emphasizes the power differential between Caiaphas and the Roman governor.

The information from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Jewish literature about the covenantal and cultic role of the high priest, his lifestyle, and his vestments helps us to imagine what Caiaphas's personal and professional life may have been like. By default it seems indisputable that he fulfilled the prerequisites of the high priesthood, that he presided over the council, that he entered the Holy of Holies annually on Yom Kippur, and that he enjoyed the respect of many, though not all, of the people of Israel by virtue of his office and perhaps also of his person.

Were Josephus and the ossuary the only sources on Caiaphas, this high priest would have disappeared into obscurity along with the rest of his colleagues. After all, how many people outside the guild of scholars of Second Temple Judaism have heard of Ishmael son of Phabi (15–16 C.E.; *Ant.* 18.34), or Jesus son of Damnaeus (62–63/4?; *Ant.* 20.203, 213)? Caiaphas's notoriety and the long history of his representation arise not from his role in Josephus's *Antiquities* but from the part he plays in the Gospels' dramatic accounts of Jesus' final days.