ABRAHAM THE GREEK PHILOSOPHER IN JOSEPHUS

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To refute an Apion who had accused the Jews of having produced no inventors or sages (Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.135) or an Apollonius Molon who had maligned the Jews (*CA* 2.148) as having contributed no useful invention to civilization, Josephus contends (*CA* 2.136) that the famous men produced by the Jews, "familiar to readers of my *Antiquities*," are entitled to rank with the highest.

It is here proposed to examine an example of Josephus' apologetic technique, as seen in his portrayal of Abraham, the ideal statesman, possessing skill in persuasion, the power of logical deduction, and scientific knowledge. As will be seen, Josephus' Abraham, in contrast to rabbinic and other portrayals of him, is presented as distinctly original in his sophisticated inversion of the teleological argument for the existence of G-d, in his broad-mindedness, including a willingness to be converted if defeated in argument, and in his unselfishness in sharing his scientific knowledge with Egyptian philosophers and scientists. It is the Greeks who emerge (*CA* 1.7–8) as relative newcomers to civilization, "dating, so to speak, from yesterday or the day before," whereas it is Abraham who is the teacher of the Egyptians and Chaldaeans, to whom, in turn, the Greek philosophers and scientists had turned for their inspiration.[1]

That the major goal of Josephus' apologetic in the *Antiquities* is to answer non-Jewish criticisms of his people is clear from the proem, where he specifically states (1.5) that he undertook the *Antiquities* in the belief that "all the Greeks" would find it worthy of attention and

[1] For another example of Josephus' reworking of the Bible see my essay, "Hellenizations in Josephus' Portrayal of Man's Decline," in J. Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden 1968) 336–53.

where he asks two questions (1.9), first, whether there was a basis in Jewish tradition for imparting knowledge of Judaism to non-Jews, and secondly, whether Greeks were indeed curious to learn about Jewish history. He answers both questions in the affirmative by citing the story of the Septuagint, which, according to the tradition which Josephus accepted, had been composed for the non-Jewish king Ptolemy Philadelphus. Indeed, it is clear throughout the *Antiquities* that Josephus is addressing, at least in large part, a non-Jewish audience. For example, he states (2.177), in obvious answer to anti-Semitic charges, that he would gladly omit the list of uncouth names of Jacob's descendants who had gone to Egypt were he not eager to refute the assertion that the Jews were descended from Egyptians. Again, he argues (3.265–68) that Moses could hardly have been a leper (as argued, for example, by Manetho, *CA* 1.279) in view of the laws that he promulgated on leprosy.

In his portrayal of Abraham, Josephus stresses those qualities which would particularly appeal to a non-Jewish audience. Thus one of the qualities of the ideal statesman, as we see in Thucydides' portrayal of his ideal, Pericles (2.60), is the ability to persuade. As Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, 1355A21 ff.) puts it, "Those speaking the truth and doing so justly have an obligation to be persuasive."[2] Just as, in extra-Biblical passages, Josephus speaks of Moses' divinely-given gift of persuasion in addresses to the masses (4.328), obtained chiefly through his command of his passions, and of Joshua's skill (5.118) in expressing his ideas clearly to the multitude, so at the very start of his account of Abraham, Josephus (1.154) presents him as skilled in logic and persuasion, a kind of Jewish Pericles.[3] Abraham is (1.154–55) a man gifted in intelligence

[2] Cf. Isocrates, *Nicocles* 5 ff., reproduced in *Antidosis* 253 ff., who sees in speech the basis of civilization. So also Cicero, *De oratore* 1.30 ff. Cicero (*De oratore* 1.83, 3.65) remarks that oratory was a "virtue" of the good man. In antiquity the mark of a cultured man was whether he had studied rhetoric and philosophy. On the importance of the art of eloquence in ancient higher education see H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (trans. by G. Lamb, New York 1956) 194.

[3] Moses, too, it is interesting to note, is presented by Josephus as a kind of Pericles. Thus, just as Pericles is depicted by Thucydides as not being appreciated by the Athenians despite all his efforts in their behalf, so Moses is unappreciated by the Israelites despite his toil for them. Again, to parallel the embezzlement charge against Pericles (Plato, *Gorgias* 516A) Josephus elaborates the point (4.46) that Moses did not accept a present from a single Israelite to pervert justice.

(δεινὸς ὢν συνιέναι, i.e. clever in understanding[4]) on all matters, persuasive (πιθανός) with his hearers (τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις, a word used especially of students who listen to lectures in the philosophical schools[5]) and not mistaken in his inferences (περί τε ὧν εἰκάσειεν οὐ διαμαρτάνων). It is because of these gifts that Abraham is said by Josephus to have arrived at more lofty conceptions (φρονεῖν μεῖζον[6]) of virtue than other men and to have abandoned the falsehood of current theological ideas.

The chief goal of the study of philosophy in antiquity was nothing less than conversion.[7] In his description of how Abraham instructed the Egyptians (1.167), Josephus stresses Abraham's intellectual gifts and skill in persuasion. Thus he is said to have gained the Egyptians' admiration as a man of the highest intelligence (συνετώτατος), gifted (δεινός) not only with intelligence (νοῆσαι), as he had already previously described him (1.154), but with the power to convince anyone on whatever subject he chose to teach. Abraham's sons (1.238), in a phrase identical with that used of Abraham (1.154), are likewise, in an extra-Biblical addition, termed gifted in intelligence (δεινοὶ συνιέναι).[8]

The first and most prominent example of Abraham's power of logical deduction cited by Josephus is his proof of monotheism (1.156). As Ginzberg[9] has remarked, the Apocalypse of Abraham

[4] Note the similar phrase, φρονεῖν . . . δεινόν, applied by Teiresias to Oedipus (Soph. *OT* 316).

[5] See *LSJ* s.v. ἀκροάομαι, 1.2.

[6] Note the same words (φρονείτω μεῖζον) applied by Creon to his son Haemon (Soph. *Ant.* 768).

[7] So Marrou (above, note 2) 206, and A. D. Nock, *Conversion, the Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford 1933) 164–86.

[8] The same gift of intelligence (δεινοὶ συνιέναι), it may be noted, is likewise ascribed to Jacob's sons (2.7); and in another passage (2.205), Josephus describes the Egyptian sacred scribes as possessing skill (δεινοί) in accurately predicting the future. Other personages in his narrative to whom Josephus ascribes the gift of intelligence are Abner (7.31: δεινὸν ὄντα συνιδεῖν πράγματα—skilled in understanding political matters); Solomon (8.143: δεινὸν ὄντα καὶ συνετόν—gifted and intelligent); and Daniel (10.237: σοφὸς ἀνὴρ καὶ δεινὸς εὑρεῖν τὰ ἀμήχανα—a wise man, skilled in discovering the impossible). The same quality is ascribed to Ptolemy Philadelphus (12.63), who is termed gifted in understanding the nature of all sorts of matters (δεινὸς δὲ ὢν συνιδεῖν πραγμάτων παντοδαπῶν φύσιν).

[9] L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia 1925) 5.210, note 16; and 217–18, note 49.

(chapter 7), Jubilees (12.17), and the rabbinic sources (*Genesis Rabbah* 39)[10] stress the fact that Abraham arrived at the idea of monotheism through his own reasoning about the heavenly bodies and their creator who directed them. In the rabbinic sources Abraham arrives at his proof by observing how the elements subdue one another (water subdues fire and in turn is subdued by earth, which is dried up by the sun, which is obscured by clouds, etc., so that finally only G-d, who made all these elements and heavenly bodies, is worthy of worship). The fact that in Josephus also Abraham uses reason in arriving at his proof for the existence of G-d and that he likewise argues that there must be a Supreme Being to control the phenomena of nature is significant because most of the legends found in rabbinic midrashim are not incorporated in Josephus.

It is even more significant, however, that Josephus' proof is in the form of the proofs for the existence of G-d promulgated by the Greek philosophic schools, notably the Stoics, but going back to Anaxagoras, who first presented the teleological argument that the orderly state of the universe manifests a design perfected by the rational power of an infinite mind.[11] G-d, says Josephus' Abraham, using a favorite word of Plato and Philo,[12] is the creator (δημιουργόν) of the universe (τῶν ὅλων) and is one; if any other being contributes (συντελεῖ) to man's well-being (εὐδαιμονίαν), he does so by His command rather than by his own inherent power. What is further distinctive about Josephus' statement is that Abraham inferred (εἴκαζε) this not from the fact that each element is subdued by another element but rather from the *irregularities* of the heavenly bodies. His sophisticated argument is that if these bodies had been endowed with independent power (δυνάμεως), they would have provided (προνοῆσαι: a favorite Stoic word, cf. Epictetus 2.14.11) for their own uniformity (εὐταξία:

[10] See the citations in S. Rappaport, *Agada und Exegese bei Flavius Josephus* (Frankfurt 1930) 15, no. 65; and in B. Beer, *Leben Abrahams nach Auffassung der jüdischen Sage* (Leipzig 1859) 102, note 30.

[11] For Plato's teleological argument see *Laws* 10.886A; for Aristotle see Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. phys.* 1.22. Cf. W. Theiler, *Zur Geschichte der teleologischen Naturbetrachtung bis auf Aristoteles*[2] (Berlin 1965) 4; A. S. Pease, "Caeli Enarrant," *HTR* 34 (1941) 163–64; and W. Jaeger, *Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford 1947) 155–64.

[12] Cf. *LSJ* and H. Leisegang, ed. Philo (Berlin 1926) 7, s.v. δημιουργός.

another favorite Stoic word[13]); since they lack this quality, one must suppose a commander (*τοῦ κελεύοντος*: another favorite Stoic image[14]) who directs them, and that when they work together (*συνεργοῦσι*) for man's benefit (*χρησιμώτερον*),[15] they do so not by virtue of their own authority but through the power of G-d.

Whence did Josephus derive his version of this proof for G-d's existence? A thorough check of ancient proofs for the existence of G-d indicates that Josephus is the only figure in the history of ancient philosophy who changed the Platonic (*Laws* 12.966E) and Stoic argument for the existence of G-d as based upon the regularity of celestial phenomena into an argument based upon certain irregularities observed in these phenomena. The standard commentaries and books about Josephus, however, we may note, all omit mention of the originality of this argument on the part of Josephus.

Among the four arguments for the existence of G-d presented by Cleanthes the Stoic, as cited by Balbus the Stoic in Cicero (*N.D.* 2.14–15), the third is from unusual phenomena in the sublunar world, such as storms, plagues, earthquakes, comets, and unnatural animal and human prodigies; while the fourth, and according to Balbus the weightiest reason, is from the regularity of movement of the celestial bodies, which must presuppose a divine Intelligence, who, in language reminiscent of Josephus' commander, presides over these bodies and is obeyed (*qui praesit et cui pareatur*). Josephus was apparently dissatisfied with the Stoic view of G-d as a kind of prisoner within His own system, acting by necessity, and wished to prove the Jewish view that G-d is an absolutely incorporeal being endowed with free will. Philo, who repeats the teleological argument of the Stoics (*Leg. alleg.* 3.32.97–99, *Spec. leg.* 1.6.33–35) apparently thought it unnecessary to change this argument, since he made G-d's freedom of will clear in other ways. That it is the Stoics whom Josephus is here combating is hinted at by the reference to the Chaldaeans in the section immediately after the

[13] Cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. phys.* 1.26, who notes the proof of G-d's existence which some (*ἔνιοι*, presumably the Stoics) have offered from the orderly movement of the heavenly bodies (*εὔτακτον τῶν οὐρανίων κίνησιν*).

[14] Cf. Epictetus, *Ench.* 7.

[15] So also the Stoic Balbus in Cicero, *N.D.* 2.15, speaks of the usefulness (*utilitatem*) of the sun, moon, and stars. Lactantius (*Inst.* 1.2.5) likewise speaks of the arrangement and usefulness (*dispositione et utilitate*) of heavenly bodies as proof of providential guidance.

one containing Abraham's proof for G-d's existence. As Wolfson[16] notes, the Chaldaeans, whom Josephus describes as opposed to Abraham's views, are in Philo prototypes of the Stoics.

It should be noted, however, that the Stoic arguments in Cleanthes (*ap.* Cicero, *N.D.* 2.13–15) for the existence of G-d are not presented as *proofs*, but rather as historical or, we might say, anthropological data as to how primitive man arrived at his conception of G-d. The belief, remarks Cleanthes, in G-d is said to be universal; and Cleanthes then lists four reasons why this belief arose and developed, including the fact that men were terrorized by such phenomena as thunder and earthquakes and were impressed by the uniformity in the movement of the heavens. That this is not in fact a proof for the existence of G-d is to be seen from Lucretius' similar anthropological description as to the origin of the belief in the gods (5.1183–87). Lucretius, who, of course, emphatically rejects the notion that the gods control the phenomena of the heavens, nonetheless records that people noticed the orderly succession of the heavenly bodies and of the seasons and assigned them to the gods. Josephus, however, presents Abraham as an innovator, not only in his conception of G-d as one, but also as deliberately *proving* His providential nature.

It would seem strange that Josephus should have originated this rather sophisticated argument for G-d's existence from the irregularity of heavenly phenomena, since he hardly seems to be a philosopher by temperament. To be sure, at the very end of the *Antiquities* (20.268) Josephus declares his intention of composing a work in four books on the opinions held by the Jews concerning G-d and His

[16] H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, Mass. 1947) 1.176–77, 1.329, and 2.78, citing Philo, *Migr. Abr.* 32. 179, which attributes to the Chaldaeans certain conceptions of G-d which are definitely Stoic, as F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo* (Cambridge, Mass. 1929) 1.478, likewise comment. It is common enough for Philo to attribute to Biblical characters certain views or antecedents of views of Greek philosophers; thus, for example (*Post. Caini* 11.35), the view that the human mind is the measure of all things is ascribed to Protagoras as an offspring of Cain's madness. Wolfson (1.167–71) likewise shows how, under the guise of "champions of the mind" and "champions of the senses," Philo (*Leg. alleg.* 3.25.81 and *Spec. leg.* 1.61–62.334, 337) ascribes the same Protagorean doctrine to the Moabites and the Ammonites and hence treats them allegorically as symbolizing this view. I am indebted for several points in connection with this paper to Professor Wolfson, who informs me, *per litt.*, that in his as yet unpublished second volume of *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, he has a full-length discussion of this Stoic argument for the existence of G-d.

essence (*περὶ θεοῦ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ*), in which he might have discussed such philosophic questions as this. Unfortunately, either this work was never composed or it was lost.[17] More simply, we may say that Josephus has taken Cleanthes' third argument from the irregularity of sublunar phenomena and extended it to the heavens themselves.[18] Josephus was apparently the first to do so, and Abraham is thus depicted as a philosophic innovator.[19]

[17] H. Petersen, "Real and Alleged Literary Projects of Josephus," *AJP* 79 (1958) 263–65, argues that this work is *Contra Apionem*, where (2.180, 188–92, 197) he discusses the nature of G-d; but, as I have noted in my Loeb edition of Josephus (Cambridge, Mass. 1965) on *AJ* 20.268, the discussion in *Contra Apionem* is brief and is surely not the central theme of that work, whereas Josephus tells us here that the work is to be about these subjects.

[18] A. S. Pease, *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum Libri Tres* (Cambridge, Mass. 1958) 2.582 (*ad* 2.14), remarks that eclipses are strangely omitted from the list of examples cited by Cleanthes for his third argument, despite their notoriously terrifying character; but that there is no significance in this omission may be seen from the fact that approximately a century after Josephus, Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. phys.* 1.24) does include them in noting the retort of Democritus, the forerunner of the Epicureans (cf. Cicero, *N.D.* 1.120), to those philosophers, whom he does not name but who are presumably regarded as the forerunners of the Stoics (as seems clear from the arguments of Lactantius, *Div. inst.* 7.3 [=*P.L.* 6.745B], who is here reflecting Stoic arguments [see H. A. Wolfson, "Patristic Arguments against the Eternity of the World," *HTR* 59 (1966) 362–63] against "Epicurus or Democritus") and who declared, from the marvelous events in the world —notably thunderings, lightnings, collisions of stars, eclipses, etc.—that the gods were the authors of these phenomena. Thackeray, in his note on Josephus, *AJ* 1.156 (Loeb translation, Cambridge, Mass. 1930), cites, as examples of irregularity that Josephus might have had in mind, the varying hours of sunrise and sunset and the phases of the moon. But these are visible phenomena which come under the category of Cleanthes' third argument, not his fourth. An example of irregularities would be the fact that some spheres move from east to west, while others move from west to east.

[19] Alternatively, we may say that Josephus has taken Cleanthes' fourth argument and includes exceptions as part of the teleological system. Cleanthes' third proof is not found among those offered by the Church Fathers, presumably because it was acknowledged to be not really a proof at all but only a matter of historical or anthropological data as to the origin of religion. The fourth argument is often found in the Church Fathers, as Wolfson illustrates in his forthcoming second volume of *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*. The argument from irregularity in the movements of the celestial bodies is to be found in the third-century Christian Lactantius (*Div. inst.* 7.3 [=*P.L.* 6.745B–46A]), who draws upon Cleanthes' arguments in Cicero's *De natura deorum* to disprove the view of the eternity of the universe. Lactantius here argues that if the world were eternal it would have no *ratio*, but since there is a plan in the courses of the stars and of the heavenly bodies, "which is uniform even in variety itself" (*aequalis in ipsa varietate*), the world did not always exist. Cf. the discussion of Lactantius' arguments against the eternity of the world in H. A. Wolfson (above, note 18) 361–63. Whether Lactantius derived this notion of uniformity even in the variety of the courses of the heavenly bodies from Josephus, whom he does not mention, is, of

Philo's Abraham (*Abraham* 71 ff.)[20] is a philosophic innovator in another respect, namely, in inferring the existence of G-d, not from the observation of the courses of the heavenly bodies, but by the analogy that just as there exists a mind in man so there must be one in the universe.

To be sure, the picture of Abraham the wise man is hardly original with Josephus, since we read in Pseudo-Eupolemus (724 F1, 3) that Abraham surpassed all other men in wisdom; but the details appear to be Josephus' own. Josephus places additional stress on his picture of Abraham the astronomer and logician by stating not merely, as does the Bible (Gen. 12:1), that he left Chaldaea because G-d had bidden him to go to Canaan (1.154), but also that he left because of opposition (στασιασάντων) to the inferences which he drew from his scientific and philosophic opinions (both reasons are found in Judith 5:7–8, as noted by Rappaport).[21] The rabbis, as well as Pseudo-Philo (*Biblical Antiquities* 6.3 ff.), to be sure, have many accounts of persecutions,[22] including his being cast into a fiery furnace, suffered by Abraham in Chaldaea because of his faith; and Josephus himself later (1.281) remarks that Abraham had been driven out of Mesopotamia by his kinsfolk (συγγενῶν); but Josephus puts the stress on the objection of his contemporaries to the scientific and philosophic background of that faith rather than on a mere test of the faith itself.[23]

course, highly problematical; and it is quite conceivable that his source is a Stoic work which has since been lost and which may have been available to Josephus also.

Josephus' argument from irregularities in celestial phenomena to show that G-d acts freely by will and design and not by necessity entered the mainstream of philosophy; cf. H. A. Wolfson, "Halevi and Maimonides on Design, Chance, and Necessity," *Proc. of the Amer. Acad. for Jewish Res.* 11 (1941) 119–30, who notes the use of this argument in Islam by Ghazalit and in Judaism by Judah Halevi and Maimonides. The argument is likewise found in Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles* 3.64, *Amplius, Eorum.*

[20] See S. Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study in Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature* (Cincinnati 1956) 181, nôte 228.

[21] Rappaport (above, note 10) 15, no. 67. Josephus, as Rappaport 16, no. 67, remarks, felt the contradiction in these two motives for Abraham's migration to Canaan, for he says (1.157): "It was in fact owing to these opinions that the Chaldaeans and the other peoples of Mesopotamia rose against him, and he, thinking fit to emigrate, at the will and with the aid of G-d, settled in the land of Canaan."

[22] See citations in Rappaport (above, note 10) 102, note 81.

[23] One should accordingly modify Rappaport's statement ([above, note 10] 102, note 83) that Josephus wished to make both Noah and Abraham martyrs of their faith, and that in this he agreed with the rabbinic Agada.

One of the recurrent characteristics of the pre-Socratic philosophers, as viewed in Hellenistic times, is that they visited Egypt to become acquainted with Egyptian science and other esoteric lore and to engage in discussions with Egyptian wise men.[24] As Schalit has put it,[25] Abraham's journey to Egypt in Josephus describes the entrance of the head of a school of Hellenistic philosophy to dispute with the head of a rival school. In the Biblical account (Gen. 12:10) the sole reason for Abraham's journey to Egypt is to escape the famine in Canaan; Josephus (1.161), in characteristic fashion, gives this reason but also adds that he sought to become a student (ἀκροάτης—like ἀκροωμένοις 1.154, as noted above, used of becoming a disciple in the philosophic schools) of Egyptian priests in matters of theology.[26] In the spirit of Hellenistic philosophic disputations and especially since the Jews in Hellenistic times were sometimes accused of being provincial and narrow-minded —above all by such leading Stoics as Posidonius and Apollonius Molon,[27] who must have seen in the Jews dangerous and often successful rivals to their missionary propaganda[28]—Abraham is said to be ready

[24] In the Bible (I Kings 5:10), reference is made to the wisdom of Egypt which is surpassed only by Solomon's wisdom; and the rabbis (*Numbers Rabbah* 19.3) expand on this by recounting the incident of the Pharaoh Necho's unsuccessful attempt to outwit Solomon. But there is nothing in rabbinic lore of a journey to Egypt to imbibe Egyptian wisdom. John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*[4] (London 1945) 15 ff., together with most historians of Greek philosophy, discounts the idea that the Greeks borrowed their philosophy from the Egyptians, contending that Herodotus would not have omitted it if he had known it, since it would have confirmed his own view that Greek religion and culture went back to Egyptian origins. Plato, who was awed by the antiquity of the Egyptians (*Rep.* 435E and *Timaeus* 22A), implies that they had no gift for philosophy, "which is ascribed chiefly to our own part of the world," and that, in contrast with the Greeks, they were especially noted for their love of money (*Rep.* 435E).

[25] A. Schalit, trans. of Josephus' *Antiquities* into Hebrew (Jerusalem 1944) introd. lxx.

[26] In this Josephus makes Abraham parallel to Pythagoras, who, according to Aristoxenus (fr. 13 Wehrli), traveled to Egypt and, according to Isocrates (*Busiris* 28), became a disciple of the priests there, studying their sacrifices and cult practices and later introducing their philosophy to the Greeks. To be sure, Isocrates later (12.33) in effect admits that this tale was invented; but that it was accepted as true is indicated by a certain Antiphon (*ap.* Diog. Laer. 8.3), who tells how Pythagoras learned the secrets, especially the mathematical secrets, of the Egyptian priests. Indeed, according to Iamblichus, *Vita Pyth.* 11, Pythagoras spent twenty-two years in Egypt. See K. von Fritz, "Pythagoras," *RE* 47 (Stuttgart 1963) 180–86; and J. A. Philip, *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism* (Toronto 1966) 189–91.

[27] *Ap.* Jos. *CA* 2.79, 2.145–50.

[28] Cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.142–43; Juv. 14.96–106; Tac. *Hist.* 5.5.

to adopt (*κατακολουθήσει*[29]) the Egyptian priests' doctrines if he finds them superior to his own (1.161),[30] or, if he should win the debate, to convert (*μετακοσμήσειν*—rearrange, modify) them to his beliefs. For, as we see for example in the case of the contact of Apollonius, Josephus' contemporary, with the Magi, the Indians, and the Egyptians (*ap.* Philostratus, *VA* 1.26, 3.16 ff., and 6.10 ff.), the Hellenistic wise man visits foreigners, both to learn from them and to teach them. Josephus (*CA* 1.176–82) similarly tells of a learned Jew who came to visit Aristotle in Asia Minor to converse with him and to test his learning, but, in the end, imparted to Aristotle something of his own. The only comparable passage in the Talmud is the one telling of Joshua ben Hananiah's contest with the Athenian sages (*Bekhorot* 8b), in which both parties agreed that the one who was defeated should be left entirely at the mercy of the victor; but there the contest is apparently not for the sake of conversion but for the sake of physically annihilating the opponent.

The rabbis, like Josephus, speak of Abraham as a missionary,[31] but there is no philosophical setting in the Hellenistic style of real debate, including a willingness to be converted if defeated in argument; instead the picture is of a dogmatic missionary proceeding systematically to make converts. Again, according to Josephus, after Pharaoh discovers the identity of Abraham (1.165), he consorts (or, according to a variant reading, is given permission to consort) with the most learned (*τοῖς λογιωτάτοις*, "possessed of reason," "intellectual") of the Egyptians, as a result of which his excellence (*ἀρετήν*) and reputation (*δόξαν*), like those of Solon, who similarly is said to have visited Egypt (Plato, *Timaeus* 21E), become more manifest (*ἐπιφανεστέραν*). Thus the conclusion of the episode of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt is not, as in the Bible—with the stress on the narrative aspect—their hasty dismissal by Pharaoh or, as in the Genesis Apocryphon (col. 20)—in a passage reminiscent of the conclusion of the Sarah-Abimelech episode, and stressing G-d's role—Abraham's prayer to G-d to remove the

[29] Cf. Philodemus, *Volumina rhetorica* 2.146 (Sudhaus).

[30] This episode has no parallel in any other account of Abraham, according to A. Schorr, trans. Jos. *AJ* (Jerusalem 1940) 31. Apparently, says Schorr, Josephus is expounding Gen. 12:13; but that passage has no connection with Josephus' account.

[31] See citations in Ginzberg (above, note 9) 5.220, note 61.

plague from Pharaoh; but, as Abraham's Egyptian excursion had begun, with the stress on Abraham the scientist and philosopher in converse with the Egyptians. Thus, at the conclusion of his visit to Egypt, we are shown Abraham, in the fashion of a Hellenistic philosopher reminiscent of Cotta the neo-Academic in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, exposing[32] (διαπτύσσων—literally, "opening and spreading out, unfolding") the arguments which they present in support of their view and demonstrating (ἀπέφαινε) that these arguments are without foundation (κενούς, "empty, idle, ineffectual") and devoid of truth (μηδὲν ἔχοντας ἀληθές).[33] Unlike the Genesis Apocryphon, which (col. 19, lines 26–27) speaks both of Abraham's instruction of the Egyptians and a lavish banquet given for him by the Egyptian nobles, Josephus focuses attention solely on Abraham the philosopher and teacher and omits all mention of a banquet.

The picture given by Josephus (1.167; a similar portrayal is to be found in 1.154) of Abraham in his conversations (συνουσίαις, "social intercourse, communion") with the Egyptians is that of an extremely intelligent (συνετώτατος), well-educated Hellenistic gentleman, particularly gifted (δεινός) in the very areas most cultivated by the Hellenistic Greeks, namely, logic, philosophy, rhetoric, and science. In his ability to convince his hearers on any subject which he undertook to teach, Abraham passes the ultimate test of the Hellenistic and Roman student of rhetoric. It is true that the rabbinic midrashim also know of disputations carried on by Abraham, but these are, characteristically, not with other philosophers but with his father Terah and with Nimrod (*Genesis Rabbah* 38.13). Again, Abraham's powers of persuasion are likewise celebrated by the rabbis, though likewise it is not in disputations with other philosophers but with visitors to his tent whom Abraham seeks to convert to monotheism (*Genesis Rabbah* 39.14).

[32] Reading διαπτύσσων (Thackeray's emendation in his *Lexicon to Josephus* [Paris 1934] 2.158, s.v.). The manuscript reading διαπτύων would mean "spitting upon," and seems altogether out of character with the picture of Abraham being presented by Josephus.

[33] There may be a parallel to this aspect of Abraham in the Genesis Apocryphon (col. 19, line 24), which speaks of three Egyptian nobles and of goodness, wisdom, and truth (though it is not clear whether these are Abraham's or their qualities). Abraham proclaims his words before them, perhaps, we may conjecture, pointing out their errors. But the Apocryphon lacks the Hellenistic flavor of Josephus, for there is no picture of Abraham conferring with each philosophic sect of the Egyptians and of coming to convince or be convinced.

In line with the Hellenistic emphasis on science[34]—both Plato and Isocrates, the leaders of the two chief opposing schools of education in the fourth century, had emphasized the importance of mathematics not only for its practical value but also as a training for sharpening the mind[35]—Josephus presents Abraham as the one who taught the Egyptians the very sciences for which they later became so famous. He graciously gives (*χαρίζεται*) them of his knowledge of arithmetic and transmits to them his lore about astronomy, a science of which the Egyptians had previously been ignorant and which was to become the most popular of the four branches of mathematics in Hellenistic times[36] —the one that aroused the most curiosity because of the practical importance of astrology. Hence it is Abraham's unselfishness in sharing his scientific knowledge with the Egyptians which, according to Josephus, is responsible for Greek knowledge of these fields, since the Greeks, in turn, borrowed from the Egyptians. Artapanus, long before Josephus (*ap.* Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 9.18) had declared that Abraham had taught Pharaoh astrology;[37] but in Josephus it is not Pharaoh but the Egyptian philosophers and scientists whom Abraham instructs, and, far from hoarding his knowledge, and with an internationalist scholarly outlook, he shares it cheerfully and freely with his fellow-philosophers and scientists.[38] The rabbis also depict Abraham as knowledgeable in astronomy,[39] but is not until a late Midrash, Sepher Yuchasin,[40] that Abraham is mentioned as teaching mathematical sciences in Egypt of which there had previously been no knowledge. There is, moreover, a rabbinic tradition (*Sanhedrin* 91a)[41] that Abraham bequeathed to the sons of his concubines the secrets of the unhallowed arts, that is,

[34] Cf. Marrou (above, note 2) 176–85.

[35] Marrou (above, note 2) 73, 83.

[36] Marrou (above, note 2) 182.

[37] J. Freudenthal, *Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhaltenen Reste judäischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke* (Breslau 1875) 169, notes that the form of the name Pharaothes, which Josephus prefers to Pharao, comes closest to Artapanus' spelling, as found in the best MSS. J and B. Pseudo-Eupolemus (724 F1) likewise speaks of Abraham, as well as Enoch, as the inventors of the sciences.

[38] The ninth century Syncellus, *Chronogr.* (ed. Bon. 1.591) says that Abraham instructed the Egyptians in calendar-reckoning, whence the Greeks later derived this art (cited by Beer [above, note 10] 207, note 978).

[39] For citations see Rappaport (above, note 10) 16–17, no. 69.

[40] Cited by Rappaport (above note 10) 102, note 85.

[41] See Ginzberg (above, note 9) 5.265, note 313.

knowledge of sorcery and black magic; but there the picture is not of Abraham the philosopher in converse with fellow-philosophers and scientists, but of Abraham the magician. Most of the rabbis, moreover, look askance at Abraham's proficiency in astronomy (or astrology), and note that it was astrology that misled him into believing that he would beget no children.[42]

A similar picture to that of Abraham as inventor of sciences is also found with regard to Moses. Thus Eupolemus (*ap.* Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 9.39) says that Moses was a wise man who invented writing.

The picture in the Bible (Genesis 15:5) of Abraham being told by G-d to look at the heavens and to count the stars, since his offspring will be as numerous as they, together with the general view (Jos. *AJ* 1.168) that the Chaldaeans, among whom Abraham was born, were the originators of the science of astronomy and astrology, gives rise to the picture of Abraham as the astronomer par excellence. Josephus (1.158), in one of the few places where he cites a source other than the Bible for these early books, notes that Berosus, the Babylonian historian, refers to Abraham[43] as versed in celestial lore (τὰ οὐράνια ἔμπειρος). The early Greek philosophers, notably Thales, are depicted as well versed in science, especially astronomy, and Abraham conforms to this model. To be sure, this aspect of Abraham is not original with Josephus, for we find it in Pseudo-Eupolemus, who declares (724 F1, 3) that Abraham discovered astrology and Chaldaean science,[44] and that Abraham taught the Phoenicians (724 F1, 4) about the movements of the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies.[45] But it is Josephus' adoption of this portrayal of Abraham as a scientist with an inter-

[42] See passages cited by Ginzberg (above, note 9) 5.227, note 108.

[43] Josephus himself (1.158) states that Berosus did not refer to Abraham by name; and, as B. Z. Wacholder, "Pseudo-Eupolemus' Two Greek Fragments on the Life of Abraham," *Hebrew Union Coll. Annual* 34 (1963) 102, comments, there is no reason to believe that the passage quoted by Josephus necessarily alluded to Abraham.

[44] Freudenthal (above, note 37) 94, followed by Wacholder (above, note 43) 102, asserts that Pseudo-Eupolemus' description of Abraham is so close a paraphrase of Berosus' statement as quoted by Josephus that there can be no doubt that Pseudo-Eupolemus borrowed it from him. But the very element in common is the assertion that Abraham was versed in astronomy, and Pseudo-Eupolemus might well have independently arrived at such a view from the association of Abraham with Chaldaea.

[45] As Wacholder (above, note 43) 102, comments, while Abraham's piety is not neglected by Pseudo-Eupolemus, the emphasis is on his scientific contributions. The same, we may add, might well be said about Josephus' portrayal of Abraham.

nationalist scholarly outlook which is of importance, for it shows that he, like Pseudo-Eupolemus,[46] sought an appeal to his Greek readers by conforming with the scientific spirit of the Hellenistic Age. Philo, it is interesting to note, grants Abraham's knowledge of astronomy, but in an effort to make of him a purer philosopher, he asserts (*De Abr.* 68–71)[47] that in leaving Chaldaea he departed from his absorption with the visible world and entered the contemplation of the invisible and the intelligible world. Again, while some of the rabbinic sources have regard for Abraham's greatness as an astrologer, most of them state that G-d counseled Abraham to give up his interest in astrology.[48] The importance of astronomy to Josephus is obvious, however, for even in his discussion (1.105–7) of the early patriarchs such as Noah he adds to the Biblical narrative by saying that they were permitted to live long lives not only because they were beloved by G-d and because of their diet and their merits, but also to give them an opportunity to develop in their knowledge of astronomy and geometry, "for they could have predicted nothing with certainty had they not lived for 600 years, that being the complete period of the great year."

The fact that Josephus cites (1.158–60) Berosus, Hecataeus of Abdera, and Nicolas of Damascus as authorities for information about Abraham, and, in particular, the fact that he takes pains to note (1.159) that Hecataeus composed an entire book about him, shows the importance of Abraham to Josephus. In his systematic examination of conceptions of Abraham in Jewish literature, Sandmel[49] has argued that Josephus' account lacks any striking, unified, or coherent conception, that it is little more than a pedestrian recapitulation of the Bible, devoid of insight and assessment. On the contrary, Josephus, for apologetic reasons, presents his Abraham, like his Moses, as a typical national hero, such as was popular in Hellenistic times,[50] with emphasis on his qualities as a philosopher and scientist, and no less, as we hope to show elsewhere, on his qualities as a general and as a romantic hero.

[46] Wacholder (above, note 43) 102–3.

[47] Cf. Sandmel (above, note 20) 144.

[48] See rabbinic passages cited by Wacholder (above, note 43) 103, note 130, who concludes that the belief concerning Abraham's mastery of astrology was a major motif of Jewish folklore.

[49] Sandmel (above, note 20) 75.

[50] Cf. M. Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford 1938).