

ABRAHAM AS CHALDEAN SCIENTIST AND
FATHER OF THE JEWS:
JOSEPHUS, *ANT.* 1.154-168, AND THE GRECO-ROMAN
DISCOURSE ABOUT ASTRONOMY/ASTROLOGY*

BY

ANNETTE YOSHIKO REED
McMaster University

Summary

This article analyzes Josephus' approach to Abraham and astronomy/astrology in *Ant.* 1.154-168. This retelling of Genesis 12 describes Abraham as inferring the one-ness of God from the irregularity of the stars, thereby implying his rejection of "the Chaldean science" for Jewish monotheism. Soon after, however, Josephus posits that the patriarch transmitted astronomy/astrology to Egypt, appealing to the positive connotations of this art for apologetic aims. Towards explaining the tension between these two traditions, I first map the range of early Jewish traditions about Abraham and the stars, and then consider the Hellenistic discourse about astral wisdom as the domain of ancient "barbarian" nations, as it shaped Hellenistic Jewish traditions that celebrate Abraham's astronomical/astrological skill. I conclude with Josephus' own cultural context, proposing that the attitudes towards astronomy/astrology among his Roman contemporaries may help to account for the ambivalence in his characterization of Abraham as both Chaldean scientist and father of the Jews.

* All Greek quotations from Josephus' works are based on Niese's *editio maior*; English translations follow Louis Feldman, *Judean Antiquities 1-4*, vol. 3 of Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, ed., Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2000) with some minor revisions. Earlier versions of this article were presented at Princeton University's Program in the Ancient World Graduate Student Colloquium (October 2, 2000) and in the SBL Josephus Seminar (November 25, 2002); for these opportunities, I would like to thank Ra'anan S. Boustan, Nora Chapman, and Steve Mason. I am grateful for the feedback that I received at both forums, particularly from Fritz Graf and René Bloch at the first, and Shaye J. D. Cohen and Louis Feldman at the second. In addition, I would like to express my appreciation to Joseph Sievers and Florentino García Martínez, as well as my beloved Dove C. Sussman.

Josephus' portrayal of Abraham is hardly a neglected topic. In articles and books spanning over 30 years, Louis Feldman has investigated the images of Abraham in the *Jewish Antiquities*, showing how Josephus uses Hellenistic tropes, models, and literary forms to describe the father of the Jews in terms comprehensible and compelling to a primarily non-Jewish audience.¹ Likewise, both within and beyond the field of Josephan studies, scholars have discussed the special role that this patriarch plays in Josephus' attempts to defend the Jewish nation against the charges of its critics.²

Among many other things, these studies have demonstrated that Josephus' retelling of the Abraham cycle (*Ant.* 1.148-256) provides a particularly fruitful focus for inquiries into the combination of apologetic aims, Hellenistic historiographical models, and early Jewish exegesis that makes *Antiquities* 1-11 much more than either a biblical retelling or an apologetic history. From even a cursory comparison with Second Temple and Rabbinic sources, it is clear that Josephus' expansive paraphrase of Genesis 12-36 stands firmly in the early Jewish tradition of expounding these biblical narratives and celebrating the figure of Abraham as אַבְרָהָם (cp. *Ant.* 1.158: πατήρ ἡμῶν), "the one from whom the Hebrews sprang and to whom they owe their distinctiveness."³ At the same time, this work's explicitly stated aim of explaining Jewish history to non-Jews (esp. *Ant.* 1.5-17) makes it virtually unique among our extant sources for early Jewish approaches to Abraham.⁴

¹ "Abraham the Greek philosopher in Josephus," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 143-56; "Abraham the general in Josephus," in *Nourished with peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in memory of Samuel Sandmel*, eds., F. E. Greenspahn, E. Hilgart, and B. L. Mack (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984); "Josephus as biblical interpreter: The Aqedah," *JQR* 75 (1984-85) 212-52; "Hellenizations in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*: The portrait of Abraham," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, eds. L. Feldman and G. Hata (Detroit: Wayne State, 1987) 133-53; *Josephus's interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1998) 223-89; and, most recently, his detailed commentary on *Ant.* 1.148-256 in *Judean Antiquities 1-4*, 53-100.

² See esp. G. Mayer, "Aspekte des Abrahambildes in der hellenische-jüdischen Literatur," *ET* 32 (1972) 118-27; T. W. Franxman, *Genesis and the "Jewish Antiquities" of Flavius Josephus* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979) 116-69; Paul Spilsbury, *The image of the Jew in Flavius Josephus' paraphrase of the Bible* (TSAJ 69; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 55-74; as well as Samuel Sandmel, *Philo's place in Judaism: A study of conceptions of Abraham in Jewish literature* (New York: Ktav, 1971) 59-76.

³ Spilsbury, *Image*, 56.

⁴ On *Antiquities'* self-presentation as "a treatise for the Greek world," see also *Ant.* 16.174, 20.263, and *Apion* 1.2 on its reception. The assumption that Jewish readers too would read the work comes through most clearly in *Ant.* 4.197. See further Spilsbury, *Image*, 16-22; Gregory Sterling, *Historiography and self-definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts, and apologetic historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) esp. 297-308; Steve Mason, "Introduction to the

Most studies have tended to stress the apologetic function of Josephus' Abraham and to highlight the "hellenizations" in his portrait of the patriarch. There is no doubt that this line of research has proved fruitful. Inquiries into the use of Greco-Roman tropes and models in *Ant.* 1.148-256 by Feldman and others have established that Josephus here uses the father of the Jews to justify the Jewish nation, answering suspicions about this allegedly rebellious, misanthropic, and self-isolating people and asserting its place in world history. When approached from this perspective, *Ant.* 1.148-256 emerges as a rich source for our understanding of the negotiation of Jewish identity by Jews living in the wake of the Jewish War, in a world shaped by Greco-Roman culture and Roman power.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on "hellenizations" can cause us to overlook a more complex set of cultural dynamics. Inasmuch as this focus necessitates a contrast between the Jewish and non-Jewish traditions interwoven within *Ant.* 1.148-256, it can lead us to overstate or even to reify the distinction between first-century Judaism and the Greco-Roman world. Furthermore, the interest in Josephus' apologetic intentions can often distract from the extent to which he himself exemplifies—in much the same way as Diodorus Siculus and Alexander Polyhistor—the reworking, reinterpretation, and redeployment of Hellenistic historiographical sources, tropes, and traditions within a new, increasingly Romanized cultural context.

It is, of course, illuminating to explore the *Antiquities'* resonances with Greek literature from the classical period and to compare Josephus with historians of the Hellenistic age; this first-century author appears to have been conversant with some of the former and sometimes to use the writings of the latter as sources. Yet, perhaps needless to say, "Hellenism" was far from monolithic, and the expansion and consolidation of the Roman imperial power wrought significant changes in the cultural fabric of the Greco-Roman world, no less than in the socio-political circumstances of the Jews.

The present inquiry seeks further to contextualize Josephus' depiction of Abraham within a Greco-Roman cultural context of which Judaism

Judean Antiquities' in *Judean Antiquities 1-4*, xvii-xx, xxxiv. In the case of other Greek-speaking authors who comment on Abraham, such as Artapanus and Pseudo-Eupolemus (on whom see below), the intended audience remains a matter for debate. The other obvious example of a Jewish writer who gears his treatment of this patriarch primarily towards non-Jews is, of course, Paul (esp. Rom 4:1-25; Gal 3:6-14)—although this case raises its own complexities.

remained a distinctive yet integrated part, even after the failure of the first Jewish revolt. Towards this goal, I will approach the retelling of the Abraham cycle within the *Antiquities* from a different direction, by focusing on the function of astronomy/astrology⁵ in *Ant.* 1.154-168.

The topic of astronomy/astrology provides an apt lens through which to examine Josephus' negotiation of Jewish traditions and Greco-Roman values, on the one hand, and of Hellenistic sources and early Roman social realities, on the other. Not only do we find a surprisingly broad range of attitudes towards astronomy/astrology in early Jewish treatments of Abraham,⁶ but there is a notable shift in Greco-Roman perceptions of these practices. In Hellenistic historiography, knowledge about the stars—both “scientific” and divinatory—exemplified the “alien wisdom” that the Greeks borrowed from ancient “barbarian” nations.⁷ After the initial appropriation and subsequent criminalization of astral divination under Augustus (63 BCE-14 CE), its traditional association with non-Greek nations started to take on more negative connotations. When early imperial Roman and Romanized authors begin trying to extricate the “scientific” study of the stars from astral divination (esp. horoscopic astrology), it is often with appeal to the suspiciously foreign origins of the latter, which becomes increasingly assimilated to the category of “magic” (e.g., Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 30.1ff).⁸

In light of these developments, it proves somewhat surprising that Josephus does not refrain from associating Abraham with astronomy/

⁵ By referring to “astronomy/astrology” as a single complex, I mean to stress the fact that the Greek terms ἀστρονομία and ἀστρολογία can both encompass what we call “astronomy” and “astrology.” In light of the modern attitudes towards the latter, it is important to emphasize that the “scientific” and divinatory aspects of the pre-modern study of the stars were often inextricable in both practice and perception. There were, of course, early efforts to distinguish between them (see below on Pliny the Elder), but we should nevertheless be wary of retrojecting our own clear-cut categories upon them; see further Tamara Barton, *Power and knowledge: Astrology, physiognomics, and medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, 1994) esp. 32. I here try to use the terms in isolation only when the distinction is relatively clear—for instance, “astrology” in the sense of horoscopic or celestial divination.

⁶ On perceptions of astronomy/astrology as they relate to the Jewish practice of astrological divination, see James H. Charlesworth, “Jewish astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and early Palestinian synagogues,” *HTR* 70 (1977) 183-200.

⁷ On the broader context, see Arnaldo Momigliano's classic book *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971), which informs the present inquiry throughout.

⁸ This, of course, is a highly simplified and schematized summary of a more complex development. See further Frederick H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman law and politics* (repr. ed.; Chicago: Ares, 1996) 44-162, 232-81; Barton, *Power and knowledge*, 27-62.

astrology.⁹ In fact, the study of the stars plays a significant role in two of the most striking extrabiblical expansions in *Ant.* 1.148-256. The first, *Ant.* 1.154-156, recounts how Abraham, prior to his migration to Canaan (cf. Gen 12.1-9), inferred the truth of monotheism from his observation and contemplation of the irregularity of the celestial bodies and the natural phenomena caused by them. The second, *Ant.* 1.166-168, uses Gen 12.10-20 as an opportunity to propose that Abraham introduced arithmetic and astronomy/astrology to the Egyptians. In both cases, Josephus inserts the theme of astronomy/astrology into the biblical account, exploiting the narrative gaps in Genesis' tale of Abraham's travels in order to stress his philosophical wisdom, his religious genius, and—contrary to the image of the Jews as a people who had contributed nothing to world culture (cp. *Apion* 2.135-136, 146)—his role on the international stage as an active participant in the cross-cultural dissemination of “scientific” knowledge.

These two passages, *Ant.* 1.154-156 and *Ant.* 1.166-168, have often been treated as exemplary of Josephus' overarching efforts to “hellenize” the father of the Jews. On the basis thereof, Feldman proposes that Josephus recasts Abraham in the model of a Greek philosopher, and Spilsbury concludes that “[m]any of the elements in Josephus' portrait of Abraham are little more than attempts to present him as a Hellenistic sage.”¹⁰ In addition, a number of scholars have pointed to the Hellenistic Jewish precedents for Josephus' expanded account of Abraham's Egyptian sojourn (e.g., Artapanus, Pseudo-Eupolemus) and have cited these examples to illustrate his overall indebtedness to Hellenistic Jewish “apologetic historiography.”¹¹

One question that has not been addressed is whether and how Josephus reworks these traditions to reflect the attitudes towards astronomy/astrology current in his own time. This article will explore this possibility by situating *Ant.* 1.154-168 in three contexts. The first section will consider how this passage relates to other, early Jewish traditions about Abraham, Chaldea, and the stars. The second will turn to the place of astronomy/astrology in the “apologetic histories” of the Hellenistic age, both Jewish and non-Jewish; here, my aim will be to compare

⁹ Contrast, for instance, the view of astrologers in *War* 6:288ff.

¹⁰ Feldman, “Abraham the Greek philosopher”; idem, *Josephus' interpretation*, 228-34; Spilsbury, *Image*, 65.

¹¹ I.e., Artapanus, Pseudo-Eupolemus, and an anonymous fragment, as preserved in Eus., *Praep. ev.* 9.17.2-9, 9.18.1-2; see discussion below.

Josephus' appeal to astronomy/astrology with its precedents in Hellenistic Jewish, Egyptian, and Babylonian histories. This will lay the foundation for the third section, in which I will ask whether we can account for his departures from earlier Hellenistic traditions with reference to the discourse about astronomy/astrology in first-century Rome.

In the process, I hope to shed light on two textual issues in *Ant.* 1.154-168: (1) Josephus' motivations for choosing to root Abraham's realizations about the singularity of the Creator in his observation of the *irregularity* of celestial and cosmological phenomena¹² and (2) the relationship between the tale of Abraham's discovery of monotheism in Chaldea (1.154-156) and the account of the patriarch conversing with the "most learned" of the Egyptians and instructing them in arithmetic and astronomy/astrology (1.166-168). The former, I will argue, answers the Stoic defense of astrological divination and the astrological appropriation of Stoic philosophy. As for the latter, I will propose that scholars may have been too quick to dismiss the significance of the topic of monotheism for our understanding of the account of Abraham's discussions with the Egyptian wise-men (esp. 1.166), and I will suggest that the superiority of the Jews' rational monotheism serves as the subtext for *Ant.* 1.154-168 as a whole.

1. *Ant.* 1.154-168 and early Jewish traditions about Abraham and astronomy/astrology

The association of Abraham with astronomy/astrology arises frequently in early Jewish literature.¹³ Its ultimate derivation likely lies in Genesis' assertion of the Chaldean birthplace of the patriarch. In Genesis, Abraham's origins in אֵרֶץ כְּשָׂדִים (Gen 11.28, 31; 15.7) may be meant as an acknowledgement of the Mesopotamian prehistory of the Israelites (cp. Josh 24.2-3), but the land of this patriarch's birth held quite different connotations for later exegetes. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, "Chaldeans" (whether defined in an ethnic sense as inhabitants of Babylonia, or more narrowly as a class of Babylonian priests) were

¹² Among the scholars who have written about this passage, Feldman alone seems to recognize just how striking and unusual it was for a thinker of this time to appeal to the *irregularity* of celestial phenomena (see "Abraham the Greek philosopher," 146-49); for, at this time, the regularity of the stars is not just asserted but assumed.

¹³ For parallels in "pagan" literature, see Jeffrey Siker, "Abraham in Graeco-Roman paganism," *JStJ* 18 (1987) 188-208.

commonly viewed as experts in the astral sciences.¹⁴ Even though the astronomy/astrology of these periods was the product of a new fusion of Babylonian, Egyptian, and Greek elements,¹⁵ it was strongly associated with Babylonia and its priests—to the degree that the Greek Χαλδαίος and the Latin *Chaldaeus* could denote an astrologer of any ethnicity.¹⁶ As a result, the rendering of ארץ כשדים in the Septuagint—τῆ χώρα τῶν Χαλδαίων (LXX Gen 11.28, 31)—could be readily interpreted either as “the land of the Chaldeans” (i.e., Babylonia) or as “the land of the astrologers.” The semantic fields of the Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents had a similar scope, encompassing a class of priests or diviners (see esp. כְּשִׁדִּים/כְּשָׁדִים in Dan 2.2; 2.10; 4.4; 5.7; 5.11). Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that a variety of early Jewish authors sought to explore the exact nature of Abraham’s connection to astronomy/astrology, using biblical exegesis and extrabiblical tales to explain how his expertise in astral divination and/or the “scientific” study of the stars related to his status as the progenitor of the Jewish people.

Consistent with the explicit bans on astral worship and celestial divination in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Deut 4.19; 18.10; Isa 47.13), some exegetes articulated Abraham’s connections with the Chaldean science in wholly negative terms. In both Second Temple and Rabbinic sources, we find traditions about Abraham rejecting the astral wisdom of his native land concurrent with his “conversion” to monotheism, either directly prior to his departure from Mesopotamia (esp. *Jub.* 12.17-18; Philo, *On Abraham* 69-71, *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 3.1) or soon after his arrival in Canaan (see e.g., *LAB* 18.5, BerR 44.12, and *b. Shabb* 156a on Gen 15.5). Both sets of traditions function to exalt his faith in the One God as a revolutionary departure from Mesopotamian beliefs.¹⁷ Moreover, in the former, the association between Abraham

¹⁴ Diodorus, for instance, describes the Chaldeans as those “who have gained a great reputation in astrology and are accustomed to predict future events by a method based on age-old observations” (17.112.2; see also 15.50.3; 17.112.2-6, 116.4; so also Hdt 1.181; Arrianus, *Anabasis* 7.17.1). The prevalence of this view is clear from the fact that Cicero, when making a point about the Chaldeans in Babylonia, must specify that *Chaldaeus* is “a name that they have derived not from their art but their race” (*De div.* 1.1.2)

¹⁵ Otto Neugebauer, *The exact sciences in antiquity* (Providence: Brown UP, 1957) 170, see also 67-68, 86-87, 169-71; also James Evans, *The history and practice of ancient astronomy* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 343; Franz Cumont, *Astrology and religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Putnam, 1912) 9.

¹⁶ Hdt 3.155; Aristotle, *Fragmenta* 35; Geminus 2.5; Philodemus, *Volumina Rhetorica* 1.42; Cicero *De div.* 1.1.2; as well as Cumont’s comments in *Astrology*, 16.

¹⁷ This contrast is perhaps most explicit in 3 *Sib. Or.* 218-228.

and astronomy/astrology is used to assert the patriarch's worthiness of the promises granted to him without explanation in Gen 12.1-9. As with idolatry in the functionally parallel traditions about Abraham's rejection of the religion of his father Terah and/or Nimrod (e.g., *Jub.* 11.16-12.7; *ApocAbr* 1, 3; *BerR* 38.13), astronomy/astrology is here treated as paradigmatic of the "pagan" religion and culture that the father of the Jews abandoned—and, by extension, as symbolic of the polytheistic and/or non-biblical religions that these exegetes encountered in their own daily lives.¹⁸

In other sources, the association of Abraham and astronomy/astrology is framed in different terms, which resonate with different sets of cultural connotations. For instance, a pseudo-Orphic hymn of probable Jewish origin refers to Abraham as "a certain unique man, by descent an offshoot of the Chaldeans . . . knowledgeable about the path of the Star, and the movements of the spheres around the earth, in a circle regularly but each on its own axis" (*apud* Clement, *Misc.* 124).¹⁹ Even more notable for our purposes are the writings of several of the Hellenistic Jewish authors collected in Alexander Polyhistor's *On the Jews*: Artapanus (*apud* Eus., *Praep. ev.* 9.17.2-9), Pseudo-Eupolemus (*apud* Eus., *Praep. ev.* 9.18.1), and an anonymous fragment (*apud* Eus., *Praep. ev.* 9.18.2).²⁰ All of these authors put a positive spin on Abraham's Chaldean origins and his association with astral wisdom, depicting him as the one responsible for first transmitting astral lore from Chaldea to Egypt. Interestingly, their writings thus assume the same valuation of astronomy/astrology as contemporaneous Greek, Egyptian, and Babylonian histories: the notion of this art as an archetype of the "alien wisdom" that the youthful Greeks owe to ancient "barbarian" nations.

When we turn to contextualize *Ant.* 1.154-168 within the Greco-

¹⁸ Just as a number of Jewish traditions, both early and late, identify astral worship as the first type of pagan worship to develop (e.g. *LAB* 4:16), so the origins of astronomy/astrology is commonly associated with the descent of the fallen angels (e.g. 1 Enoch 8:3).

¹⁹ Translation from M. Lafargye, "Orphica," *OTP* 2.799, see further 2.796-801 and Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments of Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 4, *Orphica* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1996), 174-75.

²⁰ On these texts and the issue of their dating and provenance, see J. Freudenthal, *Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhalten jüdischen und samaritanischen Geschichtswerke* (Breslau, 1875) esp. 82-103, 143-74; Sterling, *Historiography*, 167-206; Ben Zion Wacholder, "Pseudo-Eupolemus' two Greek fragments on Abraham," *HUCA* 34 (1963) 83-86; Carl R. Holliday, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish authors*, vol. 1, *Historians* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983) 93-115, 189-243; also Robert Doran, "Pseudo-Eupolemus," *OTP* 2.873-82; John J. Collins, "Artapanus," *OTP* 2.889-903.

Roman discourse about astronomy/astrology, we will return to these themes, discussing in greater detail the relevant non-Jewish and Jewish sources from the Hellenistic era. For our present purposes, what proves significant is the fact that early Jewish attitudes towards astronomy/astrology were not wholly negative. On the contrary, some of Josephus' predecessors seem to have embraced the view of astronomy/astrology as an emblem of extreme antiquity and as an integral part of humankind's scientific progress—such that Abraham's Chaldean origins and astronomical/astrological associations could serve the positive purpose of asserting the place of the Jewish people in world history.

i. *Abraham's inference of monotheism*

In the account of Abraham's departure from Mesopotamia and his sojourn to Egypt in *Ant.* 1.154-168, we find aspects of both of these approaches, combined and intertwined. At the beginning of his account of the patriarch's life, Josephus describes him as "skillful in understanding all things (δεινός ὢν συνεῖναι τε περὶ πάντων) and persuasive to his listeners concerning that which he, without fail, inferred (καὶ πιθανός τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις περὶ τε ὧν εἰκάσειεν οὐ διαμαρτάνων)" (*Ant.* 1.154). The assertion of Abraham's intelligence, persuasiveness, and philosophical propensities serves to set the stage for his recognition of the singularity of God:

Because of this, he also began to have loftier thoughts about virtue than others (φρονεῖν μείζον ἐπ' ἀρετῇ τῶν ἄλλων ἡργόμενος). And, with regard to the conception about the divine that everyone happened to have (καὶ τὴν περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξαν, ἣν ἅπασι συνέβαινεν εἶναι), he determined to innovate and change it (καινίσαι καὶ μεταβαλεῖν ἔγνω). He was therefore the first who dared to declare that God was the sole Creator of everything (πρῶτος οὖν τολμᾷ θεὸν ἀποφήνασθαι δημιουργὸν τῶν ὅλων ἓνα) and that, if other things contribute something to [humankind's] happiness (εὐδαιμονίαν), each one supplies something in accordance with His command and not by virtue of its own strength (*Ant.* 1.154-155).

Consistent with the Greco-Roman fascination with "firsts," Josephus here describes the genesis of Abraham's faith in the One God in terms of his "invention" of monotheism.²¹

²¹ On the Greco-Roman discourse about famous "firsts," see K. Thraede, "Erfinder," *RAC* 5 (1962) 1191-278. On the importance of monotheism throughout the *Antiquities*, Spilsbury, *Image*, 59-61.

Even more striking is the manner in which Josephus' Abraham arrives at this momentous discovery:

And he inferred (εικάζεται) these things from the changes in land and sea that are dependant upon the sun and the moon and all the happenings in heaven (τοῖς γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης παθήμασι τοῖς τε περὶ τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς κατ' οὐρανὸν συμβαίνουσι). For he said that, if they had the power (δυνάμεως), they would have provided for their own orderliness (εὐταξίας). But, since they lack this, it is evident that as many things as they contribute to our increased usefulness they perform not by their own authority (κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν ἐξουσίαν) but in accordance with the power of their commander (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ κελεύοντος ἰσχὺν ὑπουργεῖν), on whom alone it is proper to confer honor and gratitude (*Ant.* 1.155-156).

As in the parallel traditions about Abraham's rejection of idolatry, the conflict between the patriarch's new faith and Mesopotamian religion is posited as the proximate cause—guided, of course, by the will of God (*Ant.* 1.154; cp. Gen 12.1)—for his departure for the Promised Land:

Since, for these reasons, the Chaldeans and other Mesopotamians (Χαλδαίων τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Μεσοποταμιτῶν) fell into discord against him (πρὸς αὐτὸν μετοικεῖν), he decided to emigrate in accordance with the will and assistance of God, and he settled in the land of Canaan (*Ant.* 1.157).

Although traditions about Abraham's rejection of idolatry appear to have been more widespread in early Judaism, we find some precedents for Josephus' appeal to the astral wisdom for which the Chaldeans were so famous. The *Book of Jubilees*, for instance, recounts that Abraham was observing the stars to predict the weather, when he suddenly realized that all celestial phenomena are actually controlled by the One God (*Jub.* 12.16-18). Josephus' choice to articulate Abraham's "conversion" in philosophical terms also recalls a passage from Philo of Alexandria's *On Abraham*:

The Chaldeans exercised themselves most especially with astronomy (ἀστρονομίαν) and attributed all things to the movements of the stars (ταῖς κινήσεσι τῶν ἀστέρων), believing that whatever is in the world is governed by forces encompassed in numbers and numerical proportions (ἀριθμοὶ καὶ ἀριθμῶν ἀναλογία). . . . He [Abraham] grew up with this idea and was a true Chaldean for some time, until—opening the soul's eye from the depth of sleep—he came to behold the pure ray in the place of deep darkness, and he followed that light and perceived what he had not seen before: One who guides and steers the world, presiding over it and managing its affairs (*On Abraham* 69-71; see also *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 3.1).

We find, however, no parallel to Josephus' appeal to the irregularity of cosmological phenomena. Consistent with Jewish traditions celebrating the Creator from His orderly Creation and exhorting humankind to be as steadfast in their paths as the stars (e.g., 1 Enoch 2.1-5.7; *Sifre* Deut 32.11),²² Philo and the author of *Jubilees* assume the regularity of celestial phenomena and base Abraham's discovery of monotheism on this regularity. That these authors thus voice views consistent with the ideas about divinity, the cosmos, and the celestial cycles current in the rest of the Greco-Roman world makes it especially striking that Josephus here departs from them.

Below, I will build on Feldman's suggestion that this "proof" for the singularity of God is meant to answer Stoic determinism,²³ proposing that Josephus' target in *Ant.* 1.155-156 was more specifically the Stoic defense of astrological divination. For now, it suffices to note that Josephus' Abraham arrives at the truth of monotheism through a reversal of the common view of the relationship between God and Nature found *both* in early Jewish tradition *and* in the philosophy and science of the Greeks.

ii. *Abraham's instruction of the Egyptians*

Although *Ant.* 1.155-157 distances Abraham from astronomy/astrology, Josephus' depiction of the patriarch's relationship to this art is hardly univalent. In fact, almost immediately thereafter, in *Ant.* 1.158-159, he asserts the patriarch's skill in the Chaldean science by citing a Babylonian historian:

Berosus mentions our father Abraham, though he does not name him, in the following words: "In the tenth generation after the Flood, there was a certain man among the Chaldeans, just and great and expert in celestial matters" (δίκαιος ἀνὴρ καὶ μέγας καὶ τὰ οὐράνια ἔμπειρος).

Whatever the accuracy of this quotation or the originality of its association with Abraham, its function within Josephus' account remains the same, namely, to stress that even the Chaldeans laud his skill in the sciences that bear their name. Just as Josephus supports his own elevation of

²² I personally only know of one early Jewish source that even speaks of the irregularity of the stars: 1 Enoch 80 in the Enochic *Astronomical Book*. Even there, however, it is assumed that regularity is the natural, divinely-intended state of the cosmos; irregularity is a sign of corruption.

²³ Feldman, "Abraham the Greek philosopher," 146-50.

Abraham with non-Jewish sources, so he here foreshadows the patriarch's role in transmitting astral wisdom to Egypt in *Ant.* 1.166-168.

This comment occasions a handful of other non-Jewish witnesses to Abraham (*Ant.* 1.159), after which Josephus reports his arrival at Canaan, together with "those who had increased in numbers from him" (οἱ ἀπ' ἐκείνου πληθύσαντες).²⁴ From there, Josephus embarks on a retelling of Gen 12.10-20 (*Ant.* 1.161-165), the tale of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt. As in Gen 12.10, the journey is motivated by famine, but Josephus adds another reason, which serves to remind the reader of the patriarch's innovative theological discoveries in Chaldea: Abraham is curious to hear what the Egyptian priests say concerning the gods (ὄν λέγοιεν περὶ θεῶν); and, although he is eager to change their views if his opinion proves true, he is also willing to change his own mind if their arguments prove superior (*Ant.* 1.161). In other words, Josephus' Abraham enters Egypt with an open-minded stance that, as Feldman rightly notes, serves to temper his earlier aim of reforming the ideas concerning God (*Ant.* 1.155), thereby distancing the patriarch from Greco-Roman views of Jewish monotheism as intolerant and of Jewish proselytism as compelled by force.²⁵

In *Ant.* 1.161-165, Josephus remains fairly faithful to the content and arrangement of Gen 12.10-20.²⁶ Like other early Jewish exegetes, he reworks the infamous account of Abraham's "wife-sister" ruse so as to neutralize its potentially negative implications for the character of the patriarch.²⁷ For instance, he justifies Abraham's deceit by stressing Sarah's "notorious" beauty (*Ant.* 1.163; cp. GenApoc 20.1-9), emphasizing the "frenzy (ἐπιμανές) of the Egyptians towards women" (*Ant.*

²⁴ This presumably represents Gen 12.5's reference to "the souls that they acquired in Haran" (MT: וְנַפְשֵׁי אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּדַד; LXX: καὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἣν ἐκτήσαντο ἐν Χαρραν)—a phrase that, interestingly, is interpreted within Rabbinic traditions as proof for Abraham's success at proselytizing (Tg^{Onq} ad Gen 12.5; BerR 39.14). On the overtones of conversion in Josephus' version, see below.

²⁵ Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes towards the Jews in the ancient world* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997) 44-46, 106-118.

²⁶ See further Franxman, *Genesis*, 127-32. Contrast the retelling of this tale in *War* 5.375.

²⁷ I.e., in stark contrast to the pious Abraham of post-biblical Jewish tradition, the Abraham of Gen 12.10-20 appears rather unworthy of the promises that he has just received. In Gen 12.11-13, he initiates the "wife-sister" ruse, in a manner that appears to be wholly oriented to his own benefit. Not only is his stated motivation the fear for his own life (12.12) but his suggestion of the ruse is framed only in terms of Sarah's involvement (12.13a), while the positive result thereof is elaborated only in terms of Abraham's life and welfare (12.13b). Abraham thus appears utterly indifferent to the fate of his wife, enlisting her in a deception in order to preserve and benefit himself.

1.162), and depicting Pharaoh as moved by an “unjust passion” that can only be curbed by divinely-sent plagues (*Ant.* 1.163, contrary to his claims in *Ant.* 1.165; cp. *War* 5.375; Philo, *On Abraham* 98). Just as Pseudo-Eupolemus attributes the discovery of the cause of the plagues to Egyptian diviners (μάντις; *Praep. ev.* 9.17.7), so Egyptian priests (ἱερείς) play an important role in Josephus’ version. When Pharaoh offers sacrifices toward healing the plague, the priests inform him that his sacrifices are futile, since the plagues are caused by the wrath of God (κατὰ μῆνιν θεοῦ τὸ δεινὸν) at his desire to outrage (ὑβρίσαι) the wife of a foreigner (*Ant.* 1.164). Inasmuch as the Pharaoh must consult Sarah herself in order to learn the whole truth about the matter (*Ant.* 1.165; cp. *BerR* 41.2), the Egyptian priests are depicted as limited in their power and knowledge. Nevertheless, the fact that they can discern the cause of the plagues suggests that these Egyptians might—as Abraham suspected—have a greater grasp of the workings of God than did the Chaldeans.²⁸

The precise degree of the Egyptians’ knowledge of divine workings is explored in a lengthy extrabiblical expansion about Abraham’s activities in Egypt, inserted at the conclusion of the paraphrase of Gen 12.10-20. The segue between paraphrase and expansion is marked by changes that smooth the transition. Whereas Gen 12.10-20 ends with Abraham silently facing accusations from Pharaoh (12.18-19), receiving his wife (12.19), and being expelled from the land (12.20), Josephus portrays Pharaoh giving Abraham gifts.²⁹ Consistent with his earlier interest in visiting Egypt, Abraham is then depicted as associating “with the most erudite of the Egyptians (Αἰγυπτίων τοῖς λογιωτάτοις), whereby it happened that his virtue (ἀρετὴν) and reputation (δόξαν) for it became all the more illustrious” (*Ant.* 1.165).

From Abraham’s initial interest in Egyptian concepts about the divine (*Ant.* 1.161) and the Egyptian priests’ ability to discern the real cause of the plagues (*Ant.* 1.164), the reader might expect for Abraham to find here worthy interlocutors with whom to discuss his lofty thoughts

²⁸ Contrast the version in *Genesis Apocryphon*, where the Egyptian magicians, healers, and wise men all attempt to find the source of the plague for two whole years, yet fail (20.19-20)—consistent with the treatment of Egyptian magic in the Torah (e.g., Gen 41.8; 41.24; Ex 7.11-8.19; 9.11).

²⁹ This is the most notable departure from the order of Gen 12.10-20: Abraham’s acquisition of wealth is displaced from the entrance of Sarah into Pharaoh’s household (Gen 12.15) to Pharaoh’s return of Sarah to Abraham. In this, Josephus effectively superimposes the chronology of the parallel tale in Genesis 20 (see esp. 20.14-16) on Gen 12.10-20, in a revision also attested in *Genesis Apocryphon*.

about human virtue and divine singularity. We are told, however, that even the wisest Egyptian hold conflicting views, which the wiser Abraham can easily overturn:

Since the Egyptians took pleasure in various practices (ἔθεσι) and belittled one another's customs (νόμιμα), and therefore had a hostile attitude towards one another, he—by conferring with each of them (συμβαλὼν αὐτῶν ἐκάστοις) and exposing the arguments with regard to their individual views (διαπτύων [=διαπτύσσων] τοὺς λόγους οὓς ἐποιοῦντο περὶ τῶν ἰδίων)—showed that they lacked substance and contained nothing true (κενοῦς καὶ μηδὲν ἔχοντας ἀληθῆς ἀπέφαινε; *Ant.* 1.166-167).³⁰

From these conversations (συνουσίαις), Abraham earns their great admiration and amazement, impressing them as “a most intelligent and skillful man (συνετώτατος καὶ δεινὸς ἀνὴρ), who speaks not only with knowledge but also to persuade (οὐ νοῆσαι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ πείσαι λέγων) concerning that which he undertakes to teach (περὶ ᾧ ἐπιχειρήσειε διδάσκειν).”

The terms used to describe the Egyptians' impressions of Abraham (δεινός, συνετώτατος) and the stress on his skill in successfully persuasive speech recall the account of his discovery of monotheism in *Ant.* 1.154-156, where he is described as “great in understanding concerning everything (δεινὸς ὧν συνεῖναι τε περὶ πάντων) and persuasive (πιθανός) to his listeners.” At the same time, the description of their discussions reminds the reader of his earlier curiosity concerning “what their priests say about gods” and his declared intention to “become their disciple if they were found to be better . . . or convert them to better mind if his thoughts should be better” (*Ant.* 1.161). From the events described in *Ant.* 1.166-167, it seems that the latter is precisely what happened; after all, Abraham convinced the Egyptians through rational argument that their ideas “lacked substance and contained nothing true.” Yet, we find no explicit statement about the issue of monotheism—let alone conversion. Instead, Josephus goes on to assert that Abraham taught the Egyptians about arithmetic (ἀριθμητικός) and astronomy/astrology (ἀστρονομία; some MSS, ἀστρολογία), and the tale of the patriarch's time in Egypt abruptly ends with the assertion that: “Before the arrival of Abraham, the Egyptians were ignorant of these. For these matters

³⁰ This, notably, is not the only place where Josephus critiques the Egyptians for their multiplicity of opinions; see *Ant.* 13.66 and *Apion* 2.66-67. I thank Shayne Cohen for these references.

reached Egypt from the Chaldeans, from whence they came also to the Greeks" (*Ant.* 1.168).

As noted above, Josephus thus integrates a tradition also found in several of the Hellenistic Jewish writings excerpted by Polyhistor. Before exploring the exact relationship between *Ant.* 1.167-68 and its Hellenistic Jewish precedents, however, it is helpful first to consider how this assertion functions within Josephus' version—and, specifically, how it relates to his treatment of Jewish monotheism as rooted in the inversion of astronomical/astrological principles of a pervasive cosmic order.

As Feldman rightly stresses, Josephus peppers his description of Abraham with terms that invoke Greco-Roman ideals of philosophy and wisdom, as exemplified by figures such as Solon.³¹ Yet, insofar as Feldman focuses on the use of Hellenistic models in Josephus' characterization of Abraham, he does not address the narrative effect of the passages pertaining to the patriarch's philosophical prowess. In my view, it is significant that Josephus only describes Abraham in these terms within three passages: *Ant.* 1.154-57, 1.161, and 1.166-168. When read together, they unfold a rather logical progression: from Abraham's inference of monotheism (1.154-157), to his willingness to "test" his theory through debate (1.161), to his success in persuading the wisest Egyptians of the error of their ways (1.166-167). As such, the motif of Abraham as a Greek philosopher seems to serve a specific and clearly delineated purpose, namely, to emphasize the origins of Jewish monotheism in rational and philosophical thought.

This, in turn, raises the question of whether Josephus intends to imply Abraham's *conversion* of any Egyptians. In depicting Abraham as exposing the irrationality of Egyptian customs and laws, Josephus surely exploits the general Greco-Roman distaste for Egyptian religion to exalt Judaism by comparison.³² It is notable, however, that he permits the Egyptians some recognition of Abraham's great wisdom and, even more strikingly, of his persuasiveness. On one level, this choice helps to neutralize the potentially problematic ramifications of the patriarch's apparent expulsion from Chaldea. Lest the reader imagine that Abraham was kicked out from every single place where he promulgated his new philosophy, Josephus implies that his rational monotheism may have

³¹ Feldman, "Abraham the Greek philosopher," 144-45, 151-52.

³² See e.g., the positive comparison of Judaism with Egyptian religion by Tacitus (no friend of the Jews) in *Historia* 5.5.4.

had a more positive reception in Egypt, even as he explicitly describes only his teachings of arithmetic and astronomy.

For Spilsbury, the significance of this issue pivots on the question of “whether Judaism in Josephus’ time is properly understood as a ‘missionary’ religion.”³³ In his view:

The implication of the story is that Abraham’s religion is indeed superior to that of the Egyptians. The picture of Abraham as a “missionary” is modified, however, by the fact that it is arithmetic and the laws of astronomy that Abraham subsequently imparts to the Egyptians (1.167), and not monotheism, as might be expected. Josephus apparently squanders a perfect opportunity to describe the “missionary” nature of Judaism; unless, of course, he did not think of Judaism as a missionary religion at all. Indeed, the *Jewish Antiquities* would seem to suggest that while Josephus was not opposed to proselytism, and could even speak of converts to Judaism with pride, he did not conceive of Judaism as overtly or essentially “missionary.”³⁴

It might be misleading, however, to frame the question in terms that evoke the missions of the early Christian movement, as well as the traditional view that post-70 Judaism took the opposite stance, choosing self-isolation; for, as Feldman notes, “The chief goal of the study of philosophy in antiquity was nothing less than conversion.”³⁵

If Josephus does—as I suspect—deliberately leave open the possibility that Abraham persuaded some Egyptians of the truth of monotheism during the course of their philosophical and scientific discussions, we need not conclude that post-70 Judaism was “missionary” in a sense akin to Christianity. Rather, Josephus’ stress on the rationality of monotheism could perhaps be seen against the background of a Judaism that, even despite the destruction of the Temple, continued to attract the interest of Gentiles.³⁶ This is, in fact, evinced by the very existence of the *Antiquities*. Although Josephus’ apologetics often lead us to focus primarily on those non-Jews who were hostile towards Judaism, it seems highly unlikely that he could have written and published this work at

³³ Spilsbury, *Image*, 58.

³⁴ Spilsbury, *Image*, 64.

³⁵ Feldman, “Abraham the Greek philosopher,” 145.

³⁶ See the treatment of this issue in Paula Fredriksen, “What parting of the ways? Jews, Gentiles, and the ancient Mediterranean city” in *The ways that never parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, eds. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr, 2003) 35-63; also Feldman, *Josephus’ interpretation*, 158-59.

all, if some Roman readers were not already curious enough about the culture, history, and religion of the Jews to read such a lengthy tome about the nation.³⁷

In characterizing Abraham's encounter with the Egyptian wise-men as an exchange of philosophical views, similar to the Egyptian sojourns of eminent Greek philosophers,³⁸ Josephus may thus be offering an ancient precedent for Gentile interest in Jewish monotheism. It seems probable that Josephus here (as elsewhere in the *Antiquities*) refrains from making any explicit statement about proselytism or conversion, due to his sensitivity to "pagan" critiques of the purported Jewish zeal for proselytizing, particularly in the wake of the expulsion of Jews from Rome in 139 BCE and possibly 19 CE.³⁹ Nevertheless, the theme lies implicit in the narrative progression of *Ant.* 1.154-168, as well as in the tacit contrast between the Chaldean and Egyptian reactions to Abraham's new religious ideas.

Furthermore, the nature and scope of philosophy in Josephus' time may not support a strict division between the theological/philosophical ideas that he attributes to Abraham and the "scientific" ones.⁴⁰ Indeed, when Josephus explicitly attributes to Abraham the transmission of astronomical/astrological and mathematical knowledge to the Egyptians, the reader already knows that Abraham's understanding of the celestial cycles is unique; it has been shaped by an innovative view of the relationship between the cosmos and the divine, based on his recognition of a single Creator, from whom the celestial bodies gain the only measure of order and power that they possess. Even in the most positive treatment of astronomy/astrology in *Antiquities'* account of Abraham (i.e., *Ant.* 1.167-168), Josephus may thus subordinate the patriarch's involvement with this science to the monotheism discovered by him and faithfully cultivated by the nation that came forth from him.

2. *Astronomy/astrology and apologetic historiography in the Hellenistic age*

Nevertheless, the positive appeal to astronomy/astrology in *Ant.* 1.167-168 remains significant for our understanding of the image of the Jewish

³⁷ Mason, "Introduction to the *Judean Antiquities*," xvii-xx.

³⁸ Feldman, "Abraham the Greek philosopher," 151-52.

³⁹ See further Feldman, *Josephus' interpretation*, 157-60, and sources cited there on Josephus' "sensitivity to the charge of proselytism."

⁴⁰ Cp. Mason, "Introduction to the *Judean Antiquities*," xxix.

nation that Josephus promotes, by means of Abraham, in *Ant.* 1.154-168. The assertion of Abraham's transmission of this scientific knowledge serves both to stress the antiquity of the Jews vis-à-vis the Greeks and to assert their place in the development of human civilization. Moreover, in the process, Josephus participates in a broader debate concerning the early history of astronomy/astrology, which was tightly tied to the question of the relative antiquity of nations and which, by Josephus' time, had already had a long history in both Greek writings about "barbarians" and "barbarian" writings for Greeks.

i. *Astronomy/astrology and antiquity in Hellenistic historiography*

As is well known, the Hellenistic discourse about "barbarian" nations, the relative antiquity of different cultures, and the early history of astronomy/astrology had deep roots in classical Greek literature. Herodotus, for instance, simultaneously asserts the youth of the Greeks (2.53) and credits the Egyptians with the invention of calendrical and astronomical wisdom (2.4), divination (2.49), and Greek religion (2.49-58), proposing that Egyptian knowledge of divination and religion was mediated to the Greeks by Melampus (2.49).⁴¹ Likewise, in an oft quoted passage from Plato's *Timaeus*, an Egyptian priest tells Solon: "You Hellenes are never anything but children, and there is not an old man among you . . . you are all young, there is no opinion handed down among you which is hoary with age" (*Tim.* 22a-c; cp. *Apion* 1.7-8).⁴² The reason for this loss is significant to note: Plato's Egyptian priest describes an endless cycle of world cataclysms from which only the Egyptians emerged unscathed (22c-e),⁴³ stressing that the accidents of

⁴¹ Most notable, for our present purposes, is Hdt 2.4.1: "But as to human affairs, this was the account in which they all (i.e. the priests at Heliopolis) agreed: the Egyptians, they said, were the first men who reckoned by years and made the year consist of twelve divisions of the seasons. They discovered this from the stars (ἐκ τῶν ἀστέρων); so they said." See further François Hartog, *The mirror of Herodotus: The representation of the Other in the writing of history* (trans., Janet Lloyd; Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1988) 280-81.

⁴² Notably, this bold claim is bounded by strikingly Hellenocentric qualifications: both the ancient Athenians and the Egyptians owe their culture to the divine "culture hero" Athena (*Tim.* 21e; 23d). Moreover, the most ancient Egyptian city, an incredible eight thousand years old (23e), knows itself to be a thousand years younger than the original foundation of Athens (23d). Technically speaking, the Athenians retain the ultimate priority of origins in both antiquity and wisdom, whereas the Egyptians are only allowed to claim prestige from a practical perspective, due to their preservation of ancient traditions long ago lost to the Greeks.

⁴³ On the "Great Year" and other theories of cosmic periodicity, see e.g. R. van

geography caused the Greeks, like all other nations, to lose their knowledge in each progressive disaster (23a-c). Only the history of Egypt is marked by continuity, due to its fortuitous climate, and hence “the traditions preserved here are the most ancient” (22e).⁴⁴ In lauding the Egyptian knowledge of divination and medicine with reference to their study of the cosmos and divinity, Plato’s priest appears to assume a commonsensical rationale that later non-Greeks would eagerly adopt in their claims to have discovered astronomy/astrology: longevity nurtures knowledge of practices whose efficacy depends on accurate, long-term observations of patterns of cause-and-effect.⁴⁵ And, if only the passage of time enables a people learn such things, then the young Greeks—however precociously learned in other spheres of expertise—are at the mercy of ancient “barbarian” nations for knowledge of things like the cycles of the stars.⁴⁶

Just as ethnography’s first great flowering answered the conquests of Persia with mysterious foreigners constructed for Greek consumption, so the conquests of Alexander of Macedon would foster an interest in “universal histories” that could make sense of the newly enlarged cultural

den Broek, *The myth of the Phoenix, according to classical and early Christian traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 67-112; Louis Feldman, “Hellenizations in Josephus’ portrayal of man’s decline,” in *Religions in antiquity: Festschrift for E. R. Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 351-52, on this concept in *Ant.* 1.106.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hdt 2.6-27, 35; also Ptolemy 1.62.6-64.8. The association of cultural achievements with the climactic zones of particular nations would also have an interesting *Nachleben* in Christian historiography; see William Adler, *Time immemorial: Archaic history and its sources in Christian chronography from Julius Africanus to George Syncellus* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989) 122-25.

⁴⁵ This, for instance, is assumed in Josephus’ account of antediluvian history, in which he states that God allowed these early humans to live such long lives in part to advance their knowledge in astronomy and geometry, because “they could have predicted nothing with certainty had they not lived for 600 years, that being the complete period of the Great Year” (*Ant.* 1.106; see Feldman, “Josephus’ commentary on Genesis,” *JQR* [1985] 127-28, and for a discussion of the cyclical view of history implied in this passage, idem, “Hellenizations in Josephus’ portrayal of man’s decline,” 351-52).

⁴⁶ Interestingly, Plato’s tale of the Egyptian priest also anticipates one of the most effective Greek responses to this argument: even as he dedicates much space to this story, Plato communicates this information at a maximally distant remove from first-person reportage; Critias attributes the tale to an unidentified old man, who recounts what Egyptian priests said to Solon (*Tim.* 21b-c; 22b). In the end, the reader is left with the impression that the topic of human history in eras of extreme antiquity still remains shrouded in uncertainty. This attitude is precisely the one that Josephus would later contest, complaining that the Greeks still view history-writing about the distant past (defined as all events prior to the Trojan War) as valuable only for entertainment or pedagogically-motivated speculation, not as “history” in the sense of records with verifiable accuracy; see Adler, *Time immemorial*, 15-18, 107-10, and references there.

landscape of the Greco-Roman world.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, we have few extant examples written from the Greek perspective.⁴⁸ However, due to their usefulness for Josephus himself as well as later Christian authors,⁴⁹ we do have some evidence for the discourse generated in response, namely, the composition of “apologetic histories” by aristocrats from newly conquered nations, vying for Hellenistic prestige.⁵⁰ Most significant are the writings of Berossus and Manetho, both written in Greek by native priests under the patronage of Hellenistic monarchs in the third century BCE. From the surviving fragments of their histories, it seems that both sought to correct the mistakes of Greek ethnographers,⁵¹ even as they exploited the trope of the wise and ancient “other” in Greek ethnography to stress the antiquity of their own nations and their unique contributions to world culture. Central to the latter was the assertion of their nations’ longevity with regard to the institution of kingship and the keeping of written records. Even as these authors adopted Hellenistic historiographical models, they appealed to the ancient chronicles of their own cultures to question Greek claims over the domain of history-writing and to counter Greek notions of the distant past as an era shrouded in uncertainty and recorded only in myths.⁵²

The claims to ancient wisdom made by Berossus are illustrative of the uniquely Hellenistic political context that shaped the discourse about the relative antiquity of “barbarian” nations. Dedicated to the Seleucid monarch Antiochus I (324-261 BCE), his *Babyloniaca* proposes that humankind originally lived like animals, until the “culture-bringer” Oannes emerged from the sea. This fish-like being taught to the Babylonians

⁴⁷ See Sterling, *Historiography*, 20-58, esp. on Hecataeus of Abdera.

⁴⁸ Our sources abound with references to universal histories written from the Greek point-of-view (esp., Diodorus’s survey in 1.3.1-5; also Josephus’ list in *Apion* 1.15-18), but few are now extant, apart from small excerpts in the works of later historians; perhaps most lamentable is the loss of the fourth century BCE history of Ephorus, mentioned by both Polybius and Diodorus as the very first universal historian. For instance, it is intriguing that, when Diodorus informs his reader that “the first peoples whom we shall discuss will be the barbarians,” he stresses that this is “not because we consider them to be earlier than the Greeks, as *Ephorus has said*” (1.9.5).

⁴⁹ On the reception-history of Berossus and Manetho, see Adler, *Time immemorial*, 20-42.

⁵⁰ Sterling, *Historiography*, 59-91; also Arthur Droge, *Homer or Moses: Early Christian interpretations of the history of culture* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989) 4-8.

⁵¹ Indeed, Manetho is said to have written an entire book against Herodotus; see further Sterling, *Historiography*, 127; Verbrugge and Wickersham, *Berossus and Manetho*, 100-1.

⁵² See discussion in Adler, *Time immemorial*, 24-25.

“the knowledge of letters and sciences and arts of all types . . . how to found cities, establish temples, introduce laws and measure land . . . seeds and the gathering of fruit and . . . everything which is connected with the civilized life” (Sync. 29.11-16).⁵³ In other words, human civilization here results from a supernatural revelation that is given only to the Babylonians, such that the rest of world received these arts only second-hand from them.⁵⁴

For our understanding of the depiction of Abraham in *Ant.* 1.154-168, what proves significant is that Berossus helped to solidify the Chaldeans’ reputation for astral wisdom and to establish the Babylonian reputation for the greatest longevity in keeping records of celestial cycles (Sync. 390). Towards answering Egypt’s claim to a continuous record of history that spans all the cyclical cataclysms which effaced the records of the rest of the world, Berossus even explains how the Chaldeans’ astronomical/astrological records could survive the “Great Flood” because of their inscription on baked clay tablets (Sync. 53-56).⁵⁵ With regard to the association of Chaldeans with astronomical/astrological wisdom, the figure of Berossus himself was no less influential. Not only did he compose a number of astrological treatises,⁵⁶ but he was later celebrated as the paradigmatic non-Greek astrologer, who helped spread this wisdom throughout the Hellenistic world.⁵⁷

⁵³ The comprehensiveness of this intervention is underlined by Berossus’ assertion that “from the time of Oannes . . . nothing further has been discovered” (Sync. 29.16).

⁵⁴ Sterling, *Historiography*, 115-16; Adler, *Time immemorial*, 25-26. For points of contacts with earlier Mesopotamian cosmogonies, chronicles, and king-lists, see Verbrugge and Wickersham, *Berosus and Manetho*, 15-24.

⁵⁵ Variations on this trope can be found in Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Jewish sources. Note Pliny’s statement that “Epigenes declares that among the Babylonians for 720,000 years observations of the heavenly bodies were inscribed on baked tiles, and he is a weighty author among the best, such as Berossus and Critodemus” (*Nat. hist.* 7.61.57), as well as Chaeremon’s variation on this theme (on which see below). Interestingly, the author of *Jubilees* adopts its structure and inverts its valuation, using this motif to explain how the fallen angels’ astrological and “magical” teachings survived to corrupt antediluvian humanity (*Jub.* 8:3-4). By contrast, Josephus simply transposes this account into a biblical key, proposing that the long-lived humans of the antediluvian era inscribed their scientific findings in astronomy and geometry on “two pillars, one of brick and one of stone” (*Ant.* 1.68-70), whereby it survived the Flood.

⁵⁶ See citations and references to the teachings of Berossus in Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones* 3.29.1; Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 7.193; *Commentariorum in Aratum Reliquiae* 142-43; Palchus 135; Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 9.2.1-2; Actius, *de Placitis Reliquiae*, 2.25.12, 2.28.1, 2.29.2; Cleomedes, *de Motu Circulari Corporum Caelestium* 2.4.

⁵⁷ See *Apion*, 1.129; Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 7.123; Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 9.6.2 (also 9.2.1). Also interesting is the tradition that Berossus was the father of the Babylonian Sibyl (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 10.12.9; Pseudo-Justin, *To the Gentiles*, 37; *Suda* on “Delphic Sibyl”).

His younger Egyptian contemporary, Manetho, seems similarly to have built on the idealized image of Egypt fostered by Greek authors such as Herodotus and Hecataeus in order to stress its paramount antiquity.⁵⁸ Although none of the (albeit scant) surviving fragments from Manetho's own work mention astronomy/astrology, it is notable that a number of Greek and Latin authors allude to the rivalry between Egypt and Babylonia over the invention of the astral sciences. Moreover, treatises on astrological themes were later attributed to Manetho.⁵⁹ The *Book of Sothis*, for instance, answers the claims of the *Babyloniaca* by promoting Thoth-Hermes⁶⁰ as the authentic Egyptian equivalent to the allegedly spurious Oannes and by proposing that Manetho himself translated his revelations from the inscriptions preserved on *stelae*. The traditions surrounding Manetho would thus provide important precedents for the defense of Egyptian skill in the study of the stars against the Chaldeans, influencing the Stoic Chaeremon's polemic against Berossus, on the one hand, and the Hermetic astrologers' claims to continuity with ancient Egyptian wisdom, on the other.⁶¹

The concerns of these historians will no doubt sound familiar to the reader acquainted with Josephus' *Against Apion*. Not only is Josephus one of our most important sources for the writings of these authors, but his defense of the Jews builds on the precedents set by both—particularly with regard to the superiority of “oriental” record-keeping to the historiography of the arrogant, upstart Greeks (see e.g. *Apion* 1.6-7). Furthermore, his approach to Abraham's origins in Chaldea and his sojourn in Egypt appears to have been influenced by the images of those nations promoted by Berossus and Manetho, respectively. Both the Egyptians and Babylonians held beliefs and practices that were foreign to Greeks but were widely respected for their antiquity and often acknowledged as sources for Greek culture (*Apion* 1.8, 14; cp. Hdt 2.2, 4, 50-51; Pausanias 4.32.4); as such, they provided an ideal model for Josephus to argue for a similar respect for the Jews.⁶²

Although *Ant.* 1.167-168 can be read as a midrashic expansion on Gen 12.10-20, it must also be understood in this context, as one among many theories about how astral wisdom was first disseminated through-

⁵⁸ Sterling, *Historiography*, 127-33.

⁵⁹ E.g., *Apotelesmatikika*; *Book of Sothis*. See Verbrugge and Wickersham, *Berossus and Manetho*, 102; Adler, *Time immemorial*, 30.

⁶⁰ On Thoth, Hermes, and Hermes Trigeistus, see Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A historical approach to the late pagan mind* (Cambridge, 1986) 22-31.

⁶¹ See Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 67-68, 91-94.

⁶² Feldman, “Abraham the Greek philosopher,” 154.

out the world. For instance, Diodorus Siculus—likely following Hecataeus or another Hellenistic precursor—asserts that “Egypt is the country where mythology places the origin of the gods [and] where the earliest observations of the stars are said to have been made” (1.9.6; also 1.81.4-5),⁶³ and he dismisses Babylonian claims as derivative by quoting an Egyptian tradition that the Babylonian astrologers (τοὺς ἐν Βαβυλῶνι Χαλδαίους) immigrated from Egypt and only “enjoy the fame (τὴν δόξαν) that they have for their astrology (ἀστρολογία) because they learned that science from the priests of Egypt” (1.81.6).⁶⁴ Josephus, however, chooses to side with Berossus and the Babylonians, consistent with his persistent concern to counter the widespread assumption that the Jews were merely an off-shoot of the Egyptians.⁶⁵ Pointing to Abraham’s Chaldean origins, he uses the patriarch to usurp both the wisdom and the antiquity of Egypt for the Jews.

By inserting Abraham into the genealogy of astronomical/astrological knowledge, he also answers the theory suggested by Chaeremon.⁶⁶ In an excerpt preserved by Michael Psellus, this Egyptian Stoic and astrologer recounts how the Nile once flooded, causing the Egyptians to lose their astronomical/astrological records and forcing them to turn to the Chaldeans for aid. According to Chaeremon, the Chaldeans deliberately gave the Egyptians false information so that they would be forever dependant on them for astrological wisdom, after which the Egyptians took the precaution of inscribing their records on baked bricks.⁶⁷ By contrast, Josephus proposes that the Egyptians received Chaldean wisdom from a third party, Abraham—who, moreover, shared this knowledge freely and generously.⁶⁸ The Jews, then, are depicted as superior to the

⁶³ Likewise, when describing Egyptian influence on Greek thinkers (1.96.1-9), he attributes the transmission of this knowledge to the Greeks to Oenopides, a pupil of Plato, whom he describes as having spend some time studying with Egyptian priests and astrologers (ἀστρολόγοι; 1.98.3-4).

⁶⁴ Contrast Diodorus’ comments on the Chaldeans in 2.30.2; 2.31.9. See below on Diodorus’ relatively dismissive approach to these and other comments in his Hellenistic sources concerning the debate over “barbarian” antiquity.

⁶⁵ On the idea that Jewish culture is derived from Egypt, see e.g. Diodorus 1.28.2-3; Celsus in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.2.24 as derived from pagan traditions about the Exodus. By contrast, Josephus cites Egyptian sources to prove the antiquity of the Jews (*Apion* 1.69-104). Note that he also cites the Chaldeans in this manner (*Apion* 1.128-160).

⁶⁶ Notably, Josephus cites Chaeremon’s history of Egypt in *Apion* 1.288-292.

⁶⁷ See fragment 2 in P. W. van der Horst, *Chaeremon: Egyptian priest and Stoic philosopher* (Leiden: Brill, 1984) 8-13, and discussion in Adler, *Time immemorial*, 60-61.

⁶⁸ On Josephus’ stress on “Abraham’s unselfishness in sharing his scientific knowledge with the Egyptians,” see Feldman, “Abraham the Greek philosopher,” 154.

Egyptians with regard to the antiquity of their science and as more virtuous than the Babylonians, due to their willingness to share it.

ii. *Hellenistic Jewish traditions about Abraham and astronomy/astrology*

Josephus, of course, was not the first Jew to interpret Abraham's journeys in terms of the early history of astronomy/astrology, nor the first to retell biblical history in Greek using Hellenistic literary genres. As we have already seen, some Jewish authors living under Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule addressed the same issues as their Egyptian and Babylonian counterparts, casting biblical history in terms that were comprehensible to a non-Jewish audience as well as attractive to Jews who wished to locate their nation within the increasingly cosmopolitan context of the wider Hellenistic world.⁶⁹ As with their Egyptian/Ptolemaic and Babylonian/Seleucid counterparts, these Jewish appeals to Hellenistic ideals of "barbarian" antiquity cannot be dismissed either as the apologetic justification of the merits of the Jews to outsiders or as the playful adoption of new Hellenistic models to express nationalistic pride.⁷⁰ Rather, it also bespeaks their active participation in a uniquely Hellenistic discourse fostered by the political rivalry between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms—between which both Palestinian and Alexandrian Jews found themselves precariously balanced, amidst the shifting configurations of their power relations, throughout the Hellenistic period.

Here too, astronomy/astrology was assumed to be the ultimate criterion of antiquity, since only the oldest nation(s) possessed continuous records from the many centuries needed to observe celestial cycles and to discern their correspondences with events on earth (cp. *Ant.* 1.106). Just as the debate over whether Egypt or Babylon deserved the priority of cultural origins was often waged over astronomy/astrology, so three of the Hellenistic Jewish historians preserved by Polyhistor make similar claims for the Jews, proposing—as would Josephus after them—that Abraham was involved in disseminating knowledge of this science throughout the known world.

The versions in Artapanus (*Praep. ev.* 9.18.1) and an anonymous his-

⁶⁹ E.g., Gruen, "Jewish legends," 72-88.

⁷⁰ Gruen, for instance, seems to interpret these options as an "either/or" dichotomy (e.g. *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* [Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1998], 151); see the more nuanced treatment of John J. Collins in *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 29-63.

torian (*Praep. ev.* 9.18.2) seem to assume some development of the motif, insofar as they omit the occasion for Abraham's journey to Egypt (i.e., Gen 12.10). The anonymous fragment proposes that Abraham was related to the Giants (cf. Gen 6.4),⁷¹ implying that this is how he learned the ἀστρολογικός that he thenceforth transmitted to both the Phoenicians and Egyptians. Artapanus depicts Abraham as teaching Pharaoh ἀστρολογία, then remaining in Egypt for twenty years, before returning to "the regions of Syria."⁷²

Pseudo-Eupolemus offers the most detailed account and is the most self-conscious about his own involvement in an international debate.⁷³ After asserting that Abraham himself "discovered both astrology and the Chaldean [art] (τὴν ἀστρολογίαν καὶ Χαλδαϊκὴν [sc. τέχνην] εὐρεῖν)" (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.3), he recounts how Abraham traveled from Chaldea to Phoenicia (= Canaan; Gen 12.1) and taught the Phoenicians "the movements of the sun and moon" (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.5). Like Josephus, he prefaces his comments about Abraham's instruction of the Egyptians with a retelling of Gen 12.10-19 (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.6-7). He notes that Abraham dwelt in Heliopolis, where he introduced the Egyptian priests "to astrology and other such things (ἀστρολογίαν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ), saying that he and the Babylonians had discovered these things" (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.8)—although Pseudo-Eupolemus then specifies that "the original discovery he traced back to Enoch, saying that this man Enoch, not the Egyptians, had discovered astrology first" (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.8).

To underline this assertion, he cites two other traditions about the origins of astrology, recording first what "the Babylonians say" and then what "the Greeks say." The Babylonian account stresses the antiquity of the Babylonians overagainst the Egyptians and makes efforts to align Babylonian historical traditions with Greek mythology.⁷⁴ Although

⁷¹ Compare *Jub* 8.1-4, which also associates astrological knowledge with the Giants of Gen 6.4.

⁷² Interestingly, for Artapanus, the tale serves an aetiological function, insofar as Abraham is said to have left behind the very first members of the Egyptian Jewish community.

⁷³ Following Freudenthal (*Alexander Polyhistor*, 82-103), many scholars have speculated about the Samaritan origins of this author, citing the reference to Mt. Gerizim in *Praep. ev.* 9.17.5 (e.g. Sterling, *Historiography*, 187-90). The evidence, however intriguing, remains inconclusive; see esp. the doubts raised by Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 146-50.

⁷⁴ I.e., the Babylonians' Belus (= Chronos) was the father of Canaan, the ancestor of the Phoenicians, and Canaan had two sons: Cush (= Asbolus), the ancestor of the Ethiopians, and Mizraim, the ancestor of the Egyptians (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.9; cp. the genealogy in Gen 10, where Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan are all sons of Ham). On Pseudo-Eupolemus' possible familiarity with Berossus' history, see Sterling, *Historiography*, 201-2.

there is no explicit reference to astrology or any other type of τέχνην, implicit in this genealogy is the assertion that all Egyptian knowledge ultimately derives from the wisdom of the more ancient Babylonians (cf. Diodorus 1.81.6). By contrast, the Greek account appeals to the mythological past: “The Greeks say that Atlas discovered astrology.”⁷⁵ To this, Pseudo-Eupolemus responds by asserting first that “Atlas and Enoch are the same” (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.9), then adding that: “to Enoch was born a son, Methuselah, who learned all things through the help of the angels of God, and thus we gained our knowledge” (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.9).

Here, euhemeristic interpretations of foreign gods serve to correlate Greek and Babylonian traditions with biblical history, thereby undermining all other claims to ultimate originality and antiquity—and, as with Josephus, particularly those of the Egyptians. According to Pseudo-Eupolemus, the Greeks are forced to appeal to mythology to explain the origin of astrology, but their mythological figures are actually historical figures whose lives are recorded in the scriptures of the Jews. By contrast, the Babylonians possess historical records about the ancient times that generally corroborate Jewish Scripture and, moreover, correctly assert their own antiquity in comparison to the Egyptians. However, the entire Babylonian-Egyptian debate concerns an era that is relatively recent, compared with the antediluvian origins of the Jews and their record-keeping. As such, Pseudo-Eupolemus goes much further than Josephus later would, (1) stressing that the Jews’ knowledge of astrology originated even earlier than the Babylonians (and implicitly also: Egyptians and Greeks), with the antediluvian Enoch and his son Methuselah,⁷⁶ and (2) granting Abraham some role in the *discovery* of this art, in addition to its transmission.

Josephus was clearly familiar with the works of both Manetho and Berossus. Did he also know the writings of Artapanus, Pseudo-Eupolemus, and/or the author of the anonymous fragment in *Praep. ev.* 9.18.2? Ben Zion Wacholder is content to explain their common traditions about Abraham’s astronomical/astrological teachings as the result of independent borrowing from a broader body of shared oral lore.⁷⁷ The

⁷⁵ Note the entry on astrology in Pliny’s long list of “culture-heroes”: “Atlas son of Libya [invented] astrology—but some say the Egyptians and still others, the Assyrians” (*Nat. hist.* 7.61.57).

⁷⁶ We may find some reflex of this tradition in Josephus’ depiction of the progeny of Seth as those who discovered “science of the heavenly bodies and their orderly array (σοφίαν τε τὴν περὶ τὰ οὐράνια καὶ τὴν τοῦτων διακόσμησιν),” due to their long history of peace and prosperity (*Ant.* 1.69-70).

⁷⁷ Wacholder, “Pseudo-Eupolemus’ two Greek fragments,” 103.

parallels in content, however, are striking (both here and elsewhere). Moreover, there may be reasons to believe that Josephus knew Polyhistor's collection of excerpts *On the Jews*. Noting that Josephus explicitly cites the Miletan historian's anthological history of the Chaldeans as his source for the works of Cleodemus Malchus (*Ant.* 1.239-241), Gregory Sterling has argued that he also knew his compilation of sources about the Jews but simply used portions thereof without stating their exact origin.⁷⁸ As Sterling notes, this theory plausibly accounts for the many parallels between the *Antiquities* and the specific traditions preserved by Polyhistor, while also helping to explain Josephus' reference to three of the other historians in this collection (i.e., Demetrius, Philo the Elder, and Eupolemus in *Apion* 1.218), as well as his apparent assumption that these are Greek authors.⁷⁹

If Sterling is correct, then Josephus' departures from these earlier tales about Abraham prove particularly telling. In contrast to Pseudo-Eupolemus (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.3), Josephus refrains from positing that Abraham discovered astronomy/astrology and from using this science to prove the Jews' unique connection to the heavenly realm. Unlike these earlier authors, Josephus also adds arithmetic (*ἀριθμητικὸς*) to the patriarch's curriculum, possibly suggesting some effort to stress the "scientific" character of his teachings. In addition, the comparison highlights the degree to which Josephus actually downplays Abraham's association with the astral sciences of his native land. Whereas the Hellenistic Jewish historians assume a positive view of astronomy/astrology throughout, Josephus makes efforts to subordinate Abraham's astral wisdom to his discovery of monotheism.

3. *The discourse about astronomy/astrology in the late Republic and early Roman Empire*

It may be possible to account for these departures by considering the changes in Greco-Roman perceptions of astronomy/astrology in the centuries between Berossus and Josephus. In the literature of the late Republic and early imperial Rome, we can discern three trends: (1) a tendency to downplay the scientific contributions of "barbarian" nations and to promote instead a universalized, progress-oriented account of

⁷⁸ Sterling, *Historiography*, 282-84.

⁷⁹ Sterling's argument is strengthened by the fact that Clement of Alexandria would later mention the same three authors together, in a passage more obviously dependant upon Polyhistor (*Strom.* 1.21.141.105); see *Historiography*, 284.

the origins of human civilization, (2) a rise in the prominence of astrological divination in Roman culture, which began during the transition from the Republic to the Empire and which was followed by the marginalization and criminalization of this type of divination (beginning ca. 11 CE), and (3) the resultant efforts, at least on the part of some prominent Roman authors, to extricate the “scientific” study of the stars from astrological divination.

Inasmuch as the Roman cultural context of *Ant.* 1.154-168 has, to my knowledge, never been explored in detail, I will here progress by surveying the approaches to the early history of astronomy/astrology in three representative sources—Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliotheca* (ca. 30 BCE), Marcus Manilius’ *Astronomica* (before 14 CE), and Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* (ca. 77 CE). In this, my aim will be to illuminate Josephus’ reworking of Hellenistic Jewish traditions, with reference to the different ways in which each of these authors simultaneously integrates and departs from earlier Hellenistic traditions about the astral sciences and archaic history.⁸⁰

i. Astral science and archaic history in Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliotheca*

The first trend is already apparent in the *Bibliotheca* of Diodorus Siculus. Above, we cited this work as a source for earlier Hellenistic traditions about astronomy/astrology and the antiquity of “barbarian” nations. Although the *Bibliotheca* is often approached as merely a mine for Hellenistic historiographical traditions, Diodorus himself proves no less significant for our understanding of Josephus in general and *Ant.* 1.154-168 in particular, insofar as he exemplifies the self-conscious redeployment of these and other Hellenistic traditions within a new, Roman cultural context.

At the beginning of his work, Diodorus proudly claims that his comprehensive research was only been made possible by the emergence of Rome as a true world power, lauding “the supremacy of this city, a supremacy so powerful that it extends to the bounds of the civilized world” (1.4.3). Inasmuch as his universal history aims to locate the rise

⁸⁰ I have selected these specific authors because they discuss the early history of astronomy/astrology. For our evidence for Roman attitudes towards astrological divination more generally, see the survey of sources in Cramer, *Astrology*, 44-80, 146-162. Of particular interest is the ambivalence towards this art among Josephus’ immediate contemporaries (pp. 154-62). English translations of Diodorus, Manilius, and Pliny follow the Loeb editions.

of Rome within the prehistory of the vast empire in which its citizens now find themselves, his project of gathering the traditions of different nations into a single human history (see 1.3.2-3) mirrors Rome's own claims to encompass a diverse range of varied cultures under the roof of one Empire. Accordingly, he sometimes seems frustrated with his Hellenistic sources for their preoccupation with issues such as the relative antiquity of particular "barbarian" nations;⁸¹ for, indeed, it seems that such questions had simply become less relevant with the rise of Roman power (see esp. 1.9.3-5). Diodorus' efforts to grapple with the continued relevance of his sources within an early Roman context can be seen in the ways that he selects, arranges, reworks, and even undermines them. For instance, he effectively dismisses Egyptian and Babylonian claims to have preserved thousands of years of historical records by adopting a distinctly Greek notion of the dividing line between pre-history (Books I-VI) and history (Books VII-XL); the arrangement of his volumes embodies the view that—even though ancient legends are important to record and myths can contain shadows of the truth—verifiable history only begins with the Trojan War (cf. *Apion* 1.11-14).⁸²

Furthermore, he prefaces his anthology of ancient traditions in Books I-VI with a universalistic account of the earliest stage in human development that runs counter to the particularistic claims that he subsequently records.⁸³ Diodorus here depicts early human history as a gradual process of progress from beast-like origins (1.8). Contrary to the competing claims of any specific nation (1.9.3-4), he stresses that there was no single Ur-group; humans popped up in clusters at the same time over "every part of the inhabited world" (1.8.4). Moreover, he depicts these primordial people as lacking in any knowledge of civilized skills until motivated by Necessity to invent them (1.8.1-9), thereby ensuring that no one culture can claim priority over the others with regard to the origins of civilization.

For our understanding of *Ant.* 1.154-68, the example of Diodorus thus proves illuminating in two ways. First, despite the different concerns of Diodorus and Josephus, it is important to note that both engage in

⁸¹ Note, for example, Diodorus' dismissive treatment of Chaldean astrologers in 2.31.1.

⁸² Diodorus explicitly warns his reader that "we do not attempt to fix with any strictness the limits of those [periods] before the Trojan War, since no trustworthy chronological table covering them has come into our hands" (1.4.6).

⁸³ On the relationship between Diodorus and Lucretius, see A. Burton, *Diodorus Siculus. Book I: A commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 47-50; Sue Blundell, *The origins of civilization in Greek and Roman thought* (London: Croom Helm, 1986) 190-97.

much the same task, reworking Hellenistic traditions and sources to fit a new socio-political situation. Secondly, the *Bibliotheca* appears to attest a growing distrust of “barbarian” claims to antiquity among Roman authors.⁸⁴ This trend may help to explain why Josephus spends relatively little time dwelling on Abraham’s role in transmitting Chaldean science to Egypt, even despite this motif’s apt fit with his apologetic aims.

ii. *Astrology, imperialism, and Stoicism in Manilius’ Astronomicon*

Another possible factor was the changing political, social, and legal status of astrologers and astrological divination in early imperial Rome. Under Augustus, astrological divination had emerged as an alternative to traditional Roman divination, due largely to its political usefulness as a tool for imperial propaganda.⁸⁵ A certain fascination with astrology is evident in Augustan literature, as suggested by the frequent use of astrological and horoscopic metaphors, references to catasterism, and the garbing of old seers in new astrological guises.⁸⁶ The prominence and prestige that astrology initially gained under imperial patronage is reflected in the poetry of Marcus Manilius, whose *Astronomicon* claims its inspiration in the reign of Augustus. Not only does Manilius extol the divinized emperor as the ruler of an earthly realm whose orderly arrangement approximates the exalted heavens, but he thanks Augustus for the era of peace that has allowed him the leisure for such lofty pursuits as astrological poetry (1.7-11).⁸⁷

For our purposes, it is notable that Manilius prefaces his astrological endeavors with a short history of the origins of astrology. His account combines four (typically distinct) themes from earlier treatments of the origins of human civilization: (1) the revelation of arts by divine culture-heroes, (2) the role of Nature in facilitating human progress, (3) the development of sciences by barbarian nations of extreme antiquity, and (4) the slow process by which animalistic humanity forged themselves into civilized beings by discovering knowledge under the pressure of Necessity (1.42). In the process, Manilius offers two different

⁸⁴ On Christian attitudes towards this issue, see Adler, *Time immemorial*, 18-42 passim.

⁸⁵ Barton, *Power and knowledge*, 40-45; Cramer, *Astrology*, 44-80.

⁸⁶ Barton, *Power and knowledge*, 47-50.

⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, this political praise has a horoscopic counterpart: Consistent with Augustus’ own numismatic propaganda, Manilius asserts that Capricorn, alone of all the zodiacal signs, “turns his gaze upon himself—for what greater sign can he ever marvel at, since it was he that shone propitiously upon Augustus’ birth?” (2.507-9).

accounts of the origins of astrology, which rework Hellenistic historiographical traditions in different ways.

The combination of the first three tropes proceeds rather fluidly from the divine impetus for human interest in the stars (#1) to Nature's encouragement of the political stability needed to discern celestial patterns (#2) to the first institutionalization of monarchy and priesthood in unnamed nations "beneath the eastern sky" (#3), climaxing with the development of systematic astrology. According to this aetiology, astrology owes its ultimate genesis to Mercury (= Hermes), the "first founder of this great and holy science," through whom humankind "gained a deeper knowledge of the sky: the constellations, the names and courses of the signs, their importance and influence" (1.25-37). He then notes that Nature too played her part, qualifying his appeal to revelation by integrating a trope from rationalizing interpretations of early human history.

The reference to Nature occasions his description of how the study of the stars first flourished under the patronage of kings who "civilized beast-like peoples under the eastern sky" (1.43)—an account that evokes the Hellenistic association of astrological wisdom with ancient "barbarian" nations. Reminiscent of Egyptian, Babylonian, and Jewish claims to "scientific" wisdom and extreme antiquity, the discovery of astrology is here associated with the earliest institution of kingship (1.43) and the resultant history of stability and continuity, which spanned the innumerable quantity of years needed for the observation and recording of entire celestial cycles (1.54-65). Moreover, these discoveries are attributed to the pious priests in charge of official sacrifices (1.45-50): "These were the men who founded our noble science and were the first by their art to discern the destinies dependent upon the wandering stars." When seen in its broader context, however, what is striking is the anonymity of this ancient "eastern" nation. By sidestepping the question of the exact ethnic origin of astrology, Manilius retains for astrology the fabulously mysterious overtones of a "barbarian" past, while simultaneously distancing contemporary astrological practice from any specific nationalistic connotations or any unseemly debates over the relative antiquity of nations.⁸⁸

Manilius' addition of a second aetiology (#4 above)⁸⁹ appears to reflect a tension between the need to conform to more traditional

⁸⁸ Especially striking is his attempt to distance Hermes' association with astrology from Egyptian claims.

⁸⁹ The transition is somewhat awkward, achieved by a sudden "flashback" to pre-civilized humanity (1.66: "Before their times, humans lived in ignorance").

understandings of the origins of astrology (i.e. as a divine gift from Mercury/Hermes; as a science which came to the Greeks and Romans from the East) and the desire to participate in the contemporary Roman discourse about the earliest stages of human culture by writers such as Lucretius.⁹⁰ Manilius here presents a similar, progress-oriented view of human history,⁹¹ but he is unique in articulating this progress in terms of the evolving human relationship with the stars. For instance, when Manilius seeks to express the irrationality that once clouded the human mind, he invokes the starry heavens, describing pre-civilized humans as “spellbound upon the new dawn, now mourning as if the stars had been lost, now joyful at their rebirth, and ignorant as to how to explain by their true causes the varying length of day and shifting time of night and the shadows changing as the sun is now far, now near” (1.67-72). It is with pride in human achievement that he then recounts how:

They learned the tongues of the birds, to interpret the meaning of entrails, to charm serpents, to invoke the shades and move the depths of Acheron, to turn day to night and night to day. By effort human ingenuity learned to conquer all! Nor did it end its labors until Reason had scaled the heavens and pierced through to its deepest nature of things and seen the causes of all its existence! (90-95).⁹²

The practice of divination here represents an intermediate step towards the more exalted goal of astrology. Projecting the nascent distinction between divinatory interpretation of celestial omens and systematic astrological prediction onto the axis of human rational evolution, Manilius describes how the human mind then mastered the puzzles of the sky: scientific observation of Nature, according to Manilius, “freed human minds from wondering at portents by wresting from Jupiter his bolts and power of thunder and ascribing to the winds the noise and to the clouds the flame” (105-8). This development occasions the exalted climax of Manilius’ account:

After Reason had referred these several happenings to their true causes, it ventured beyond the atmosphere to seek knowledge of the neighbor-

⁹⁰ I.e. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 771-1457; George Boas and Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Primitivism and related ideas in antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997) 222-42.

⁹¹ For other examples, see Boas and Lovejoy, *Primitivism*, 192-221, 368-88; Blundell, *Origins of civilization*, 165-200.

⁹² Cp. Diodorus’ description of Chaldean astrologers, whom he also credits with skills in other types of divination: both “by the flight of birds” and from “dreams and portents” (2.29.3).

ing vastness of heaven and comprehend the sky as a whole; it determined the shapes and names of the signs, and discovered what cycles they experience according to fixed law, and that all things moved to the will and disposition of heaven, as the constellations by their varied array assign different destinies (106-112).

Here, astrology is privileged as the very apex of human civilization. Although both divination and astrology are portrayed in wholly positive terms, Manilius speaks to the developments of his day, explaining the growing popularity of horoscopic astrology overagainst traditional Roman divination by appealing to the trajectory of progress that has shaped human history since the dawn of civilization.⁹³

For our purposes, it is also significant that the *Astronomicon*—our earliest extant astronomical/astrological work in Latin—embodies the marriage between Stoicism and astrological divination.⁹⁴ In the first century BCE and first century CE, many prominent astrologers (e.g., Manilius, Chaeremon) were also Stoics,⁹⁵ and a number of influential Stoics (esp. Posidonius) defended astrological divination on philosophical grounds.⁹⁶ Inasmuch as this philosophical stamp of approval seems to have facilitated the positive reception of astrology among Roman elites,⁹⁷ it also became a locus for polemics against the Stoics themselves (e.g. Cicero, *De div.* 2.42.88).

Astrology's heightened prestige and the increased potency of the astrologers' influence, both over emperors and in the sphere of public opinion, was accompanied by new anxieties about its power to sway the populace, prompting imperial legislation intended to impose control on this powerful yet pliable form of divination. In 11 CE, the aged Augustus issued an empire-wide edict prohibiting astrological consultations about his death and also private astrology.⁹⁸ Between 33 BCE and

⁹³ Blundell, *Origins of civilization*, 198.

⁹⁴ Cramer traces this connection back to Zeno's own interest in astronomy, on the one hand, and Cleanthes' understanding of the stars as "interpreters of cosmic rationalism, on the other; see further *Astrology*, 50-52.

⁹⁵ On the place of the doctrine of "sympathy" and other Stoic ideas in the astrology of this time, see Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 102-4, 110.

⁹⁶ See, e.g., Quintus' comments in Cicero, *De div.* 1.117-118. Cicero, moreover, asserts that the Stoics defended nearly every sort of divination (*De div.* 1.3.6) and states that he knows of only one Stoic—Panaetius—who *did not* defend astrology in particular (*De div.* 2.42.88)!

⁹⁷ So Barton, *Power and knowledge*, 37-38.

⁹⁸ Whereas the former illustrates the inextricable link (both positive and negative) between the judgment of astrology's merits and its value for maintaining imperial power,

93 CE, astrologers were frequently exiled from Rome, and they were often suspected of involvement in political intrigues or in fomenting rebellion.⁹⁹ Notably, it appears to have been in this context that astrology became increasingly associated with “magic” by some Romans.¹⁰⁰

This concept of astrology—as a politically destabilizing force and as a powerful tool for (mis)leading the masses—is one to which Josephus appeals in his *Jewish War*, when he recounts the fascination with celestial portents and the misinterpretations thereof, that contribute to the outbreak of the Jewish revolt against Rome (*War* 6.288ff). Together with the growing distrust of Egyptian and Babylonian claims to extreme antiquity, the marginalization and criminalization of astrologers may account for Josephus’ attempts to downplay Abraham’s connections with the “Chaldean science,” even as he retains the most useful elements of the Hellenistic Jewish and Babylonian traditions about the patriarch’s involvement with it.

For our understanding of *Ant.* 1.154-168, it also proves significant that Stoicism still served as the main basis for the defense of astrology, as with other forms of divination. As noted above, Feldman has proposed that the description of Abraham’s inference of monotheism in *Ant.* 1.155-156 inverts Stoic beliefs about the orderliness of the divine cosmos. In support, he cites H. A. Wolfson’s observation that Philo depicts the Chaldeans as prototypes of the Stoics.¹⁰¹ Feldman thus explains Josephus’ motivation for his anti-Stoic “proof” for monotheism by speculating that:

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.¹⁰²

the latter evokes the heightened suspicion of civic disloyalty that accompanied the displacement of other religious rituals (magic, divination, sorcery, mystery rites) from a public context into the service of private interests, hidden in the safety of secrecy. See further Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman order: Treason, unrest, and alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966) 129-30. On the Augustan edit of 11 CE and its use in later legal cases, see Cramer, *Astrology*, 248-75.

⁹⁹ See e.g., Tacitus, *Histories*, 1.22; Cramer, *Astrology*, 233-48; MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman order*, 132-34.

¹⁰⁰ Fritz Graf, *Magic in the ancient world* (trans. Franklin Philip; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997) 54; e.g. Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.27, 2.32, 12.22; cf. Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 9.

¹⁰¹ H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1947) 1.176-77, 1.329, 2.78, esp. with regard to Philo, *Migration of Abraham* 32.179.

¹⁰² Feldman, “Abraham the Greek philosopher,” 147-48.

Yet, the above summary makes clear that Philo and Josephus had good reason to conflate Chaldeans and Stoics; in light of the close ties between Stoicism and astrological divination in the first century BCE and first century CE, the depiction of these ancient, archetypal astrologers in the image of the philosophical defenders of astrological divination would have likely struck their readers as far from arbitrary. Consequently, Josephus' choice to invert Stoic theories about the relationship between the cosmos and the divine may be rooted, not in theological concerns about the power of God, so much as socio-cultural ones: even if Josephus wishes to retain Abraham's association with astronomy/astrology as a means of asserting the Jewish contribution to world culture, it would surely not benefit the Jews to depict their progenitor as a Chaldean, in the astrological sense of the term. For, in first-century Rome, the connotations thereof encompassed precisely those features that Josephus seeks to downplay in his depictions of the Jewish nation: these specialists were socially marginal, suspiciously secretive, and suspect for their role in sparking rebellions against the Empire.¹⁰³

iii. *Astrology, magic, and astronomy in Pliny's Natural History*

Attention to Josephus' early Roman context may also help us to understand the specific ways in which he reworks Hellenistic Jewish traditions about Abraham as teaching astral wisdom to the Egyptians (*Ant.* 1.167-68). As noted above, authors like Diodorus and Manilius had already begun to downplay the place of Egypt and Babylonia in the development of astronomy/astrology, as well as Greek wisdom more broadly. The Hellenistic discourse about "barbarian" antiquity, "alien wisdom," and astronomy/astrology is subverted, to an even greater degree, in Pliny's famous account of the emergence of magic in *Nat. hist.* 30.

Here, Pliny conflates astrological divination into the category of "magic" (30.2), which he denounces as the "most fraudulent of arts (*fraudentissima artium*)" (30.1):

¹⁰³ Intriguing is Valerius Maximus's comment on the expulsion of Jews from Rome, which follows directly after his comment on the expulsion of astrologers (*Chaldaei*) in 139 BCE (nos. 147a-b in Menachem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 1, *From Herodotus to Plutarch* [Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974] 357-60). It is tempting to see here some direct association between Jews and astrologers, not least because it would provide us with an even more concrete reason for Josephus' reticence to associate Abraham with astrology. Unfortunately, the source only draws an explicit link between the two insofar as they were both expelled by Cornelius Hispalus and even gives different reasons for their respective expulsions. I am grateful to Shaye Cohen for bringing this passage to my attention.

No one will doubt that it (i.e., magic) first arose from medicine (*e medicina*), and that, professing to promote health, it insidiously advanced under the disguise of a higher and holier healing art (*altiorum sanctorumque medicinam*). To the most seductive and welcome promises, it then added the powers of religion (*vires religionis*), about which even today the human race remains quite in the dark. After again meeting with success, it made a further addition of astrology (*artes mathematicas*), because there is no one who is not eager to learn his destiny, or who does not believe that the truest account of it is that gained by watching the sky (*Nat. hist.* 30.2).¹⁰⁴

Pliny then locates the spread of this tripartite magic within the political history of the world. Although rooted in early Greek perceptions of the *μῶρος*, this Roman aetiology of magic also resonates with Hellenistic traditions about the astronomical/astrological wisdom of Egypt and Babylon. In contrast to the Hellenistic traditions to which even Manilius and Diodorus pay service, Pliny forcefully asserts the recent (and wholly human) origins of these practices, declaring that: “Without doubt, it arose in Persia with Zoroaster; on this our authorities are agreed” (*Nat. his.* 30.3). After recording two opinions that locate Zoroaster in an era of almost unimaginable antiquity,¹⁰⁵ he endorses the view of those inquirers who suggest that *another* Zoroaster lived shortly before Xerxes’ invasion of Greece (30.8; cf. 30.3). Not only does this multiplication of Zoroasters effectively shed doubt upon the alleged antiquity of magic, but Pliny goes on to stress that its transmission in the distant past must remain vague since “there is no line of distinguished or continuous successors” (30.5). According to Pliny, the history of magic can only be confidently discussed in terms of the earliest magician whose writings still survive. He grants this title to Osthanes, who “accompanied Xerxes in his invasion of Greece and sowed what I may call the seeds of this

¹⁰⁴ Pliny’s taxonomic description of magic as a category that encompasses distinct practices poignantly mirrors the historical process of abstractification and accretion that constituted the concept itself (see further Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman magic,” 229–30.). His inclusion of medicine and religion narratively replicates the early Greek delineation of the “magician” in polemics by physicians and philosophers, but also resonates with the persistence of ambivalent attitudes towards these domains, as most evident in the suspicion towards root-cutting and pharmacology and the questionable status of mystery rites and other private religious rituals. Notably, there is here no reference to divination (cf. 30.14). Rather, to evoke magic’s exploitation of human curiosity about the future, astrology has become emblematic.

¹⁰⁵ I.e., Eudoxus and Aristotle propose that this sage lived six thousand years before the death of Plato (30.3), whereas Hermodorus dates his life to five thousand years before the Trojan War (30.4).

monstrous craft, infecting the whole world by the way at every stage of their travels.”

In effect, Pliny equates the threat of magic with the threat of foreign invasion and cultural contamination. He underscores his imperialist model for the dissemination of magic by positing a second historical impetus for its spread; there was “a second Osthanes” who traveled throughout the world with Alexander the Great, promoting the magical arts (30.11). The political ramifications are striking: magic’s invasion of the world is depicted as both the negative equivalent and the tacit justification for the spread of another power, namely, Rome. Indeed, Pliny no sooner marvels that “so universal is the cult of magic throughout the world,” than he promptly assures his reader: “it is beyond calculation how great is the debt owed to the Romans, who swept away the monstrous rites” (30.13).

Interestingly, the opposition magic/foreign and non-magic/Roman is here used to critique Greek culture, establishing their guilt through association with the “barbarian” world. If magic was spread first by Xerxes and then by Alexander, then this corrupting art lies concealed in both the hellenization of “barbarians” and the orientalization of the Greeks. In Pliny’s view, the Greeks resisted Xerxes’ military invasions, only to embrace the invisible enemy that marched together with him: the cultural invasion of Zoroaster’s deceptive arts (30.8-9). In short, Pliny adopts the structure of Hellenistic traditions about the youthful Greeks gaining wisdom from the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, and Jews but radically reverses the valuation thereof.¹⁰⁶

For our purposes, it is also notable that Pliny tries to separate the “scientific” and “magical” components of both medicine and astronomy/astrology (see esp. 30.10-11). Inasmuch as he makes a special effort to distinguish “legitimate” medicine from the “lies of the magicians” and to purify medicine from magical associations (cp. 29.4-11), his vociferous denunciations of astrology likely answer the growing popularity of astrological medicine (see 29.5),¹⁰⁷ as well as the conflation of astrologers and physicians in the minds of many Romans.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Likewise, the celebrated traditions about Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, and Plato traveling to Egypt to learn ancient wisdom are here negatively described as “exile” (30.9).

¹⁰⁷ Barton, *Power and Knowledge*, 91, 173-74, 179-80; Pederson, “Some astronomical topics in Pliny,” 165-66.

¹⁰⁸ I.e., due to their shared claims of expertise in the practice of prognosis. See G. E. R. Lloyd, *The revolutions of wisdom* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1987) 39-43.

As such, the example of Pliny may help to explain another of Josephus' departures from Hellenistic Jewish accounts of Abraham's teachings of astral wisdom, namely, his precise choice of topics. As noted above, Artapanus depicts Abraham as teaching Pharaoh ἀστρολογία (*Praep. ev.* 9.18.1), and the anonymous fragment states that Abraham transmitted ἀστρολογικός to both the Phoenicians and Egyptians (*Praep. ev.* 9.18.2). Pseudo-Eupolemus claims that Abraham "discovered both astrology and the Chaldean [art] (τὴν ἀστρολογίαν καὶ Χαλδαϊκὴν [sc. τέχνην] εὐρεῖν)" (*Praep. ev.* 9.17.3) and then states that he introduced ἀστρολογία καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ to the Egyptians (9.17.8). In *Ant.* 1.167, however, Josephus recounts Abraham's teachings first of ἀριθμητικός and then of ἀστρονομία.¹⁰⁹ As Feldman notes, this pairing may reflect an understanding of astronomy as a subset of mathematics (e.g., Quintilian, *De. Inst. Or.* 1.10.46ff).¹¹⁰ In light of the disdain towards astrological divination among authors like Pliny (so also Juvenal 7.1ff; Tacitus, *Histories* 1.22), one wonders if this choice might have also been motivated by an attempt to stress the "scientific"—as opposed to divinatory or "magical"—character of the teachings of the Chaldean father of the Jews.

4. Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that Josephus articulates Greco-Roman ideals by means of earlier Jewish traditions, even as he adapts the latter to reflect the values (both Jewish and non-Jewish) of his own time. What, then, can the place of astronomy/astrology in *Ant.* 1.154-168 tell us about Josephus' appeal to Abraham as an exemplar of the Jews?

It is possible that Josephus here answers "pagan" preconceptions about the Jews by means of their progenitor Abraham. When Apion accuses this nation of never having produced a single remarkable man (θαυμαστοὺς ἄνδρας), he cites as possible examples (1) an inventor of arts (τεχνῶν τιῶν εὐρετὰς) and (2) one who transmits wisdom (σοφίᾳ διαφέροντας; *Apion* 2.135). In *Ant.* 1.154-68, Abraham seems to embody precisely these things; not only is he the first to infer the truth of monotheism, but he helps to carry "scientific" knowledge throughout the world.

¹⁰⁹ In this regard, it may also be significant that some MSS (although a clear minority) here read ἀστρολογία; I thank Shaye Cohen for bringing this to my attention.

¹¹⁰ Feldman, "Abraham the Greek philosopher," 154.

However, consistent with the ambivalence towards astronomy/astrology both in the history of Jewish exegesis of Genesis 12-36 and in the Roman culture of Josephus' time, knowledge about the stars here plays a double role. On the one hand, astronomy/astrology is used to express Abraham's place within the world at large, as a "scientist," teacher, and traveler who gains fame among the Babylonians and who exerts a formative influence on the intellectual traditions of the Egyptians and the Greeks. On the other hand, however, the understanding of the celestial cycles that is used to defend astrological divination is dismissed as inferior to monotheism, for which history is indebted to Abraham and his incisive intellect.

Although Josephus' Abraham is thus laudable by the standards of the Greco-Roman culture, he does not lose his distinctive "Jewish-ness." In *Ant.* 1.154-68, this comes through most clearly, in my view, in Josephus' treatment of the relationship between monotheism and astronomy/astrology. Within the biblical text, Abraham's departure for the Promised Land sounds the keynote of Israel's chosenness (Gen 11.28-12.9; cp. Neh 9.7-8), evoking a symbolic break with "the nations" that later exegetes would concretize into extrabiblical legends about his rejection of his father's idolatry, polytheism, and/or astrology. By contrast, as we have seen, Hellenistic Jewish historians like Pseudo-Eupolemus and Artapanus adopt a different stance towards the traditional "others" of early Jewish history: they make positive appeal to this patriarch's Chaldean origins, and in attempting to appropriate for the Jews the antiquity of Egyptian wisdom, they also conjure a different Egypt—not the paradigmatically despotic kingdom of the Book of Exodus but the idealized Diasporaic milieu of flourishing Jewish communities under Ptolemaic rule.¹¹¹ Likewise, they approach the story of Abraham's sojourn in that land (Gen 12.10-20), not as a prefigurement of the later enslavement of his progeny, but rather as the occasion for the transmission of Chaldean wisdom to Egypt. In other words, the attempt to co-opt the "scientific" prestige of Egypt and Babylonia has resulted in a radical re-reading of Genesis 12-36, oriented not to the patriarch's entry into the Promised Land but rather to his own origin outside of it and his departures from it.

¹¹¹ See John J. Collins, "Reinventing Exodus: Exegesis and legend in Hellenistic Egypt," in *For a later generation: The transformation of tradition in Israel, early Judaism, and early Christianity*, eds., Randall Argall, Beverly Bow, and Rodney Werline (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000) 53-62; Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 55-72.

In a sense, Josephus takes the best of both approaches. He affirms the active participation of Abraham (and, by extension, the Jews) in the cosmopolitan culture of the eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern world, even as he stresses the uniqueness of both the nation-founder and his nation. Josephus retains the motif of Abraham as Chaldean “scientist,” inasmuch as it serves to emblemize the antiquity of the Jews, to secure their place in world history, and to testify to their contribution to human culture—as well as to counter Egyptian accounts that dismiss the Jews as derivative from the Egyptians. But, in the process of dissociating Abraham from the negative connotations surrounding the astrologer in Roman culture, Josephus simultaneously attenuates the patriarch’s connection to his Chaldean origins. Just as Josephus’ ambivalence towards astronomy/astrology serves to temper his apologetic appeal to this art, so the patriarch’s role in transmitting astral wisdom is decisively subordinated to his “discovery” of monotheism—here presented as the true contribution of the Jews to world culture.