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THE LIVES OF ABRAHAM: SEEING ABRAHAM THROUGH THE EYES OF SECOND-TEMPLE JEWS

Taylor Halverson

***Abstract:** During the Second-Temple Period, Jews remembered and reimagined the story of Abraham to address their own immediate historical and cultural concerns. By exploring these reimaginings, we learn more about the faith and interests of later Jews who looked to their forefather for inspiration and guidance on how to live in a world of change, opportunity, and challenge. Second Temple Jewish writers included in this article are Artapanus, the author of Jubilees; Pseudo-Eupolemus, the author of Genesis Apocryphon; Philo, and Josephus. Abraham was resurrected in these texts, but with the body and soul of the later author, Josephus; these authors live on in the guise of Abraham.*

Abraham is one of the prime characters in the book of Genesis. His faith, piety, righteousness, and hospitality are well known. But he was of course a multifaceted character, as attested by episodes of duplicity, military fortitude, and familial concessions. Centuries later, the character of Abraham gained new life during the Hellenistic/Roman age¹ as the Jewish and Greek worlds came into greater contact with each other.

Methodology

This paper highlights samples of the diversity of Jewish thought and cultural experience throughout the Hellenistic/Roman age by following several “lives of Abraham” over the course of three hundred years, while I explore the manifestations of the figure of Abraham in various texts,

1. In this paper I use this term to refer to the period c. 200 BC – AD 100.

geographical locales, and at various times.² Each group infused new life into Abraham as they manipulated his character to suit their own purposes, thus telling us more about the creators of this new life than truly representing the historical Abraham. This methodological approach is inspired by the book *Lives of Indian Images* by Richard Davis.³ In his work he argues that cultural contours of Indian history and experience could be accessed by examining the lives of cult images across time and space. What is the rationale for using a methodology originally applied to immutable cult images and statues of India to investigate the complex world of Judaism in the Hellenistic/Roman period through the figure of Abraham? Like sacred images set in stone that are not easily defaced or changed without a necessary change that affects the significance of that image, the figure of Abraham was laid down near immutably in the biblical text. Thus the stories of Abraham in the Bible share many of the features and characteristics of sacred images. It was fashioned by an original sculptor and endued with meaning by the originators or the receivers of the image. However, the original is not to be tampered with, amended, diminished, or changed, even though new images based on the original can be produced, and they in turn can be endued with meaning, thus reinvigorating the original cycle. The original image is not easily defaced or changed without seriously undermining its significance or authority. Hence the best option for adapting the original image is to create new images or to reinterpret the meaning of the original image, in either case on the basis of present circumstances.

By analogy, the Abraham stories as found in Genesis 12-25 play the role of an original image, imbued with significance that in its canonical form was not to be defaced, mutilated, amended, or diminished. However, it could legitimately inspire new manifestations of itself, or even similar renditions, that play upon details not readily apparent in the original. Additionally, creating a new image similar to that of the original could empower the new creator with normative power not unlike what the first originators held. Since we cannot exhaustively

2. This paper is not meant to be exhaustive but rather selective and representative. I seek to offer a taste, not an entire meal. I review only the memories of Abraham as found in Artapanus, *Jubilees*, Pseudo-Eupolemus, *Genesis Apocryphon*, Philo, and Josephus. Other memories of Abraham that could expand beyond the discussion in this paper include the New Testament, Jewish Midrash and the Talmud, *Testament of Abraham*, and *Apocalypse of Abraham*. For a thorough collection of ancient stories about Abraham, see John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

3. Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

search out all known Abraham manifestations in the Hellenistic/Roman age, this study is confined to a handful of Jewish Abraham stories related to his migrations out of Mesopotamia into Canaan, then into Egypt, and finally in his return to Canaan.

The Biblical Account of Abraham's Migrations

In total, only thirty biblical verses discuss Abraham's life in Mesopotamia and the experiences of his migration to Canaan, Egypt, and then back to Canaan. Let us briefly review the scenes from those thirty verses.

The canonical story begins in Genesis 11:26, where Terah becomes a father to Abraham. Next, Abraham's brothers Haran and Nahor are named; Haran dies in Ur of the Chaldees, and the two remaining brothers then marry. Abraham marries Sarah, and Nahor marries Milcah, the daughter of Haran. The narrative then explains that Terah takes Abraham, Lot, and Sarah out of Ur to go to the land of Canaan. On the way they settle in Haran, where Terah dies.

Next, God commands Abraham to go unto Canaan. Obedient to the command, Abraham comes to Shechem, and then to Bethel, bringing Lot, Sarah, their possessions and the persons "they had acquired in Haran" (Genesis 12:5). Later they move toward the Negev and then go down into Egypt because of a famine. In order to save his life, Abraham requests that Sarah claim she is his sister. When they enter Egypt the officials praise her to the Pharaoh, who takes Sarah into his house. God deals well with Abraham, blessing him with material blessings of all kinds. But the Pharaoh and his household are afflicted with plagues. Pharaoh calls for Abraham, to demand an explanation and upon discovering that Sarah is Abraham's wife, he sends them out of the land of Egypt with the words "Now behold your wife, take, go!" (Genesis 12:20). With that, Abraham leaves Egypt and returns to the land of Canaan, taking his wife and all that he possesses.

This terse Genesis narrative is the immutable image that inspired many new lives of Abraham during the Hellenistic/Roman period. We will shortly see that some authors were consistent with the original image, while others crafted an image with lengthy expositions of new details and features that more fully define Abraham in ways not apparent in the original text (image). Let us now explore the images of Abraham as set down in his "biographies" of the Hellenistic/Roman age.

Artapanus

One of the earliest “biographies” of Abraham is found in the fragmentary writings of a Jewish author named Artapanus, as preserved in the writings of Christian fathers Eusebius and Clement.⁴ Dates for the writing have proposed between 250 BC and 50 BC,⁵ though some scholars suggest a tenable date of 200 BC.⁶ The brief section referring to Abraham’s time in Egypt amounts to only a few lines. However, the rest of the extant fragments, which deal with Joseph and Moses, lead us to believe that Artapanus lived in Egypt and was part of the cultural milieu of Greek society in Egypt because the fragments bear resemblance to other Greek literary genres popular during that time. Thus we have an Egyptian Jew who unabashedly combines Greek literary forms and Jewish scriptures.⁷

Artapanus claims that Abraham “came to Egypt with all his household to the Egyptian king Pharethothes, and taught him astrology, that he remained there twenty years and then departed again for the regions of Syria.”⁸ In this short fragment, key additional details beyond the original biblical story give us an interval for Abraham’s Egyptian sojourn as well as testimony that Abraham brought culture in the form of astrology to Egypt. Perhaps Artapanus was responding to the cultural campaign, instigated by some Greek and Egyptian intellectuals,⁹ that the Jews were culturally and historically inferior to the aforementioned

4. James H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with a Supplement* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981).

5. Eusebius indicates that he found the writings in the work of Alexander Polyhistor, who compiled and preserved Jewish writings sometime during the first century BC. Thus we know that the writings of Artapanus must be earlier than the time of Alexander Polyhistor.

6. J. J. Collins, “Artapanus,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:890–91. Collins cites three reasons, though not conclusive, to date Artapanus c.200 BC: (1) veiled reference to worship of Dionysus, (2) mention of the disease elephantiasis, (3) and mention that farmers participated in the Egyptian army. Each of these features has historical reference points in Egypt c. 200 BC. This of course would most likely place Artapanus in Egypt as well.

7. Albert-Marie Denis, *Introduction aux Pseudepigraphes Grecs d’Ancien Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970).

8. Collins, “Artapanus,” 2:897.

9. Manetho is an example of one, though his account is reported to us secondhand, and thus suspicion will always remain as to how reliably it preserves Manetho’s attitudes. See Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), 1:62–86.

groups. Suggesting that Abraham brought culture to the ancient Egyptians is tantamount to saying that in reality the Jews were an older and more venerable culture because it was their ancestors who taught the Egyptians. It was also a way of undercutting Greek superiority, because some writers claimed that the Greeks originated in the land of Egypt, thus making them inferior to native Egyptians, who were inferior to the Jews.¹⁰ Artapanus likely was writing for a Jewish audience acquainted with and appreciative of Greek literary forms and aware of the battle for cultural and antiquital superiority. For Artapanus, Abraham serves a mediating role between Greek culture and Jewish tradition as well as an aggressive role in the fight for cultural superiority. None of these features are found in the original image and life of Abraham preserved in the biblical account.

Jubilees

Not many decades after Artapanus, and likely in the homeland of the Jews, an anonymous author penned the text of *Jubilees*. Some people have called the text *The Little Genesis*,¹¹ because it is essentially a rewrite of Genesis.¹² Additionally, the text claims that it contains the words of the Lord revealed unto Moses during the forty days he was on Mount Sinai, following the pattern of other apocalyptic writings in which a prophet is brought into the presence of an angel (or God) and shown a revelation. Thus others have called this book *Apocalypse of Moses*.¹³ However, both names are misleading in that the book itself is structured on a strict Jubilee calendar system, that of seven-year periods corresponding to a week, and eras of 7 x 7 years corresponding to a Jubilee.¹⁴ Additionally,

10. See Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 20-43 (specifically pp. 26-27). In this text, Hecataeus of Abdera claims that when a pestilence arose in Egypt, the Egyptians thought to expel the foreigners. "At once, therefore, the aliens were driven from the country, and the most outstanding and active among them banded together and, as some say were cast ashore in Greece and certain regions; their leaders were notable men, chief among them being Danaus and Cadmus."

11. For example, the title page of R.H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005). However, Charles was simply following the title style found in many Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Hebrew versions of the text.

12. It is written in a strong biblical style, following the sequence of events from Genesis 1 to Exodus 12.

13. O.S. Wintermute, *The Book of Jubilees in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:41.

14. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees*.

the oldest texts carry a different title.¹⁵ This text probably originated shortly after the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids, perhaps c. 160–152 BC, in Hasidim/proto-Essene circles.¹⁶

Jubilees describes Abraham as a precocious young lad in Chaldea who at age fourteen is taught writing, one of the tokens of culture.¹⁷ During this tender age, Abraham becomes aware of apostasy throughout the land, as manifested by the people seeking after images and becoming polluted. He rejects the idolatry of his father and instead prays to God the Creator to save him from “pollution and scorn.”¹⁸ The migration stories of Abraham in the Bible preserve none of this additional information. Perhaps the author of *Jubilees* used the figure of Abraham to promote rejection of things Greek, such as idol worship and pollutions. If the author of *Jubilees* was of the Hasidim¹⁹/proto-Essene movement in Palestine c. 160–152 BC, then rejection of idol worship and pollution would simply echo ideals espoused in the Maccabean revolt,²⁰ in light of the decree to sacrifice pigs on Jewish altars as well as the Greek establishment of a pagan altar in the Jerusalem temple (“the Abomination of Desolations”)²¹ alongside the Jewish altar as signs of idol worship and pollution.²² Additionally, that *Jubilees* depicts Abraham praying to avoid

15. The text itself offers the following title: “*This is The Account of the Division of Days of the Law and the Testimony for Annual Observance according to their Weeks (of years) and their Jubilees throughout all the Years of the World.*” Wintermute, *Jubilees*, 2:52.

16. James C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 207–85. See also Wintermute’s introduction to *Jubilees*, 44.

17. A well-known literary motif of that period was to mention the precocious intellectual nature of a lad who later became prominent. See the examples of Epicurus in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 10:14; Samuel the prophet in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray and Ralph Marcus (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5:348; Josephus in *The Life*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1.8–9; and Moses in Philo, *Life of Moses*, trans. F. H. Colson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1:21.

18. *Jubilees* 11:14–17.

19. We remember that the Hasidic Jews of the time both supported the revolt (1 Macc. 2:42ff) as well as felt the fury of Greek attacks (see 1 Macc. 2:29–41).

20. See Matthias’s speech in 1 Maccabees 2:19–22 in the context of being compelled to make unlawful sacrifice.

21. See Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; 1 Macc. 1:54; 2 Macc. 8:17.

22. The word *pollution* is used in various contexts in ancient Palestine. For example, Josephus recounts Pharaoh Amenophis’s troubling apparitions following

“scorn” may suggest some of the intra-Jewish cultural and religious conflicts aflame during the Hasmonean period.²³

Another instance of creative license employed by *Jubilees* through the figure of Abraham is a midrashic exposition of Genesis 15:11, where Abraham drives away the carnivorous birds that attack his sacrifice.²⁴ In *Jubilees*, Abraham’s successful deterring of ravenous birds all occurs in a context prior to his first migration. In the story, crows sent by the evil angel Mastema have plagued the land of Chaldees since the early years of Terah. They eat the seeds as soon as the people sow. However, young Abraham’s successful defense of the seed against the encroaching crows earns him great reputation among the people. Perhaps *Jubilees* uses these stories of Abraham for two reasons. First, *Jubilees* may have been influenced by the culture war between Greek and Jewish superiority (particularly fierce in the writings out of Alexandria) which contributed to the pro-Jewish stance that the Jews were the originators of culture, or at least their ancestors had culture before the Greeks did. However, *Jubilees* does not dress Abraham in Greek cultural values, such as being an astronomer, scientist, or philosopher.²⁵ Another possible way

the destruction of the sacred temple of Isis. Pharaoh’s scribe advised him that “if he purged Egypt of its contaminated [polluted] population, he might cease to be alarmed.” See Josephus, *Against Apion*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 281. Josephus’s use of the term *pollutions* probably refers to plagues, as it was a common motif in the ancient literature of the cultural wars between Greeks and Jews that the Egyptians expelled all the leprous and plague-afflicted individuals from Egypt, among whom the race of the Jews was found. A closer contextual example occurs in the book of Acts 15:20: “But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.” Though at least 200 years removed from *Jubilees* and written by a Jewish Christian, this passage nonetheless expresses the idea that “pollution” and idol worship were conceptually connected.

23. So we see that the Hasidim zealously fought alongside the sons of Matthias to strike “down sinners in their anger and renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety” (1 Macc. 2:44). This verse makes it clear that not all the Jews supported the revolt. Hence, we can expect that political, cultural and religious divisions remained even after the successful triumphs of the Hasmoneans established Jewish independence, during which time the *Book of Jubilees* was most likely penned. That no high priest was appointed for nearly a decade after the Hasmoneans came to power likely indicates that they had not gained sufficient support among all the Jews in Palestine to take such a political step.

24. This takes place in *Jubilees* 11:18–22.

25. Compare this against the way that Artapanus, Pseudo-Eupolemus, and Josephus all portray Abraham as a scientist, philosopher, or astrologer/astronomer.

to understand this story is that Abraham is the prototype of a faithful Jew (most likely a *Hasid*) who guards the seed (*Torah*, religious heritage, Jewish homeland) from foreign domination or intrusion.

The next part of the story describes how Abraham teaches culture to the Chaldeans. This indeed does put Abraham on a high plane because he is the founder of the most basic form of culture known to civilized nations — agriculture.²⁶ Again, this may be *Jubilees*'s way of responding to the culture war between the Greeks and the Jews but doing so in non-Greek ways, for the author of *Jubilees* was most likely zealous for the *Torah*, according to the way the Hasidim are described in 1 Maccabees 2.

As the account in *Jubilees* continues, Abraham calls his father to repent of idol worship. However, Terah apparently cannot heed the righteous counsel without incurring the wrath of the populace upon his head, for he had been appointed as a minister to the idols.²⁷ Terah commands Abraham to remain silent on the issue. It is not until his brothers become angry over Abraham's stance against idol worship that he follows Terah's command.

Though silent, Abraham still believes firmly in his message. In the year that Abraham turns sixty, he arises in the night and sets fire to the house of idols. His brother Haran attempts to salvage the idols from the inferno, but he is consumed in the flames. What is strange about this passage is that there is no explanation for Abraham's actions. True, the motivation to do away with idol worship has already been established in preceding lines, where he calls his family to repentance, but the account is bereft of any ameliorating explanation as to why Abraham, the exemplar of piety and culture, would undertake such a disastrous scheme, which resulted in the death of his brother.

After a good deal of detailed background, almost none of which is found in the biblical account, *Jubilees* finally reaches the point of migration. Terah and the rest of the family (minus Haran) move on toward Lebanon and Canaan. En route they sojourn in the city of Haran for fourteen years. During this sojourn, Abraham contemplates the night sky and comes to realize that all the heavenly creations are the

Clearly, different Jews had different tolerance thresholds for adopting Greek cultural values.

26. The ironic feature is that the biblical image of Abraham portrays him living a Bedouin lifestyle, the opposite image of the culture bearer we see in *Jubilees* and other ancient texts.

27. Some of the ancient Jewish traditions portray Terah as a maker and vender of idols (see *Apocalypse of Abraham*, chap. 2).

work of the Lord. This pivotal moment marks Abraham's full conversion to the doctrine of monotheism: there is no god but God. In this moment of soul-changing recognition of the truth, Abraham prays to God for direction and guidance. God reveals to Abraham that his posterity will be blessed and that he will be given a blessed land of promise.

What is remarkable about the way that *Jubilees* makes use of Abraham and Abrahamic stories is that unlike other Jewish authors who had predilections for Greek culture or who had no problems with syncretism²⁸ and who even affirmed the goodness and legitimacy of astrology/astronomy, *Jubilees* indicates that Abraham forsook it all. Furthermore, in the next chapter of *Jubilees*, when Abraham reaches Egypt, no mention whatsoever is made about Abraham's teaching astrology, astronomy, science, culture, or philosophy to the Egyptians. In fact, the text of *Jubilees* is sparser in its report of what occurred in Egypt than is the Genesis account. *Jubilees* does not even mention that Abraham and Sarah claim to be siblings. Simply put, Pharaoh just takes Sarah from Abraham without context or pretext.

Jubilees has for several reasons used the Abraham stories in this way. First, *Jubilees* affirms that Abraham was fully immersed in the manifestations of a laudable culture; Abraham was an astronomer, thus answering the contention of any Greek writer that the Jews had no ancient or praiseworthy ancestors. However, *Jubilees* also undercut this Greek form of legitimacy. Instead of affirming that Abraham was the astronomer *par excellence*, as other Jewish writers claimed, *Jubilees* uses astronomy as a springboard for Abraham to gain true revelation that there is no God besides God. In other words, Abraham ultimately rejects his culture (at least what the Greek-cultured individuals accepted as a normative culture) in order to have true knowledge of God, and worship and commune with God. This is a clever tactic by *Jubilees* to make use of Greek conventions long enough to establish Jewish cultural superiority. but then undercut Greek legitimacy by having Abraham reject a manifestly Greek value of being an astronomer or astrologer.

Another story that *Jubilees* creates and inserts into the migrations of Abraham is an account of God opening the mouth and ears of Abraham in the language of Hebrew — the language of creation and of Adam before the fall. From this marvelous epiphany, Abraham is then able to copy his father's books and study from them. All this evokes several themes important during the Hasmonean period to a Hasidic Jew who was zealous for the law. First, Hebrew is the sacred language — the language of God.

28. Cf. Artapanus, Josephus, and Pseudo-Eupolemus.

Whoever wishes to study God's holy word must do so in Hebrew. It should not be surprising that the *Book of Jubilees* was written in Hebrew. Second, those zealous for the law came to know the law by copying the sacred books and then studying from them.²⁹ Again, we see that the *Book of Jubilees* has made use of the figure of Abraham to create normative values in an era of Judaism that already had a normative, yet immutable canon.

The last topic for discussion concerning *Jubilees's* use of Abraham is the account of Abraham in Egypt. I have already mentioned several things that *Jubilees* left out of the story in comparison to the biblical account. Now let us examine what *Jubilees* added to the story. After *Jubilees* describes Pharaoh taking Sarah, a passing comment appears: "And Tanis of Egypt was built then, seven years after Hebron" (*Jubilees* 13:12). Reading this statement in context is somewhat baffling; not that the grammar is difficult to understand, rather the statement serves no immediate or obvious purpose in the pericope of the story. So why does *Jubilees* make this passing comment? It is another way of asserting Jewish antiquity within the parameters of sacred time. Hebron is one of the ancestral cities of the Jews; it had been home to Abraham for some time in his sojourns throughout the land of Canaan. Additionally, *Jubilees* states that Hebron was built seven years before Tanis; and seven is the number of completion and perfection that holds a status of sacred authority over many other numbers. All these features indicate that Hebron was more ancient and sacred than Tanis, as defined within the parameters of sacred time. What may interest us here is that some traditions equate Tanis with a city the Hebrews built for the Egyptians under slave labor. Asserting that Tanis was built just seven years after Hebron leaves no time for the Israelites to have been in Egypt long enough to build a venerable Egyptian city through forced labor. Perhaps *Jubilees* rewrote the past, essentially effacing the evidence (at least based on the biblical account) that the Jews were once slaves to the Egyptians.

Pseudo-Eupolemus

There has been much debate as to who actually composed the fragmentary texts now listed under the heading *Pseudo-Eupolemus*.³⁰ However, R. Doran makes a convincing argument (contra Walters,

29. These same themes and ideas can also be applied to the Essenes, who most likely comprised most of the individuals living in Qumran, who received their start in the Hasidim of the Hasmonean era.

30. These fragments are preserved in Eusebius's *Preparatio Evangelica* 9.17.2–9 and 9.18.2.

Wacholder, and Denis) in his introduction to Pseudo-Eupolemus that the first fragment of Pseudo-Eupolemus should in reality be attributed to Eupolemus himself.³¹ This being the case, then Eupolemus was a Jewish writer during the Hasmonean age from a priestly family that no doubt was acquainted with Greek and Greek culture. In fact, there is reason to believe that Eupolemus the writer is to be identified with Eupolemus the ambassador for Judas Maccabeus to the Roman court, as mentioned in 1 Maccabees 8:17-32 and 2 Maccabees 4:11.³² If these arguments are valid, we can date the writings of Pseudo-Eupolemus to c. 158 BC. Taking these preceding comments as a framework from which to understand this work, I will now focus my attention how Pseudo-Eupolemus uses the figure of Abraham.³³

Pseudo-Eupolemus's writings are marked with cultural syncretisms. Abraham is portrayed as one who "excelled all in nobility and wisdom; he sought and obtained the knowledge of astrology and the Chaldean craft, and pleased God because he eagerly sought to be reverent."³⁴ Whereas *Jubilees* uses astrology as a means for Abraham to come to know the true God and then subsequently reject astrology, Pseudo-Eupolemus claims that the Abraham figure is one who pleases God by seeking reverence in the midst of scholarly and cultural pursuits. There is no contradiction in blending values from various cultures. Rather, Abraham is the model for how a Jew can properly partake of other cultures and yet remain within God's good graces. In fact, it is possible to read this line as suggesting that Abraham pleased God because he sought the knowledge of the Chaldean sciences. If the author of Pseudo-Eupolemus is truly Eupolemus, a Jewish priest serving as ambassador to the Romans for the Hasmonean government, it is quite telling that the Maccabean revolt and its supporters were not uncompromising in rejecting Greek culture. Rather, this text suggests in the guise of Abraham that it is possible to adopt foreign cultures while also affirming Jewish heritage.

Pseudo-Eupolemus also uses Abraham as a culture bearer not unlike the manifestations in Artapanus and perhaps responding to the

31. R. Doran, "Pseudo-Eupolemus" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:873-78. For the contrary perspective see Denis, *Introduction aux Pseudepigraphes Grecs D'Ancien Testament*, 261-62.

32. F. Fallon, "Eupolemus" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 861-63.

33. It is worth noting that all the fragments attributed to the so called Pseudo-Eupolemus deal with Abraham.

34. Doran, "Pseudo-Eupolemus," 880.

same social pressures that worked upon both Artapanus and *Jubilees*. Pseudo-Eupolemus claims that God commanded Abraham to dwell among the Phoenicians, a detail quite absent from the biblical account and most other Jewish witnesses that use the figure of Abraham. While there, Abraham pleases the Phoenician king just as he pleases God, “by teaching the Phoenicians the cycles of the sun and moon, *and everything else as well*.”³⁵ These comments truly elevate the status and prestige of the Jewish ancestral father by claiming that the Phoenicians learned everything from Abraham. Moreover, the argument can be made that God sent Abraham to the Phoenicians for that very purpose — to instruct the Phoenicians. This was a way to legitimize Jewish belief in their cultural superiority because it was commonly accepted in the Hellenistic/Roman period that the Phoenicians invented the alphabet and that the Greeks borrowed from the Phoenicians. An alphabet is of course the basis for a writing system, and a writing system is the basis for all scholarly and intellectual activity, which from a Greek perspective is one of the greatest manifestations of a nation’s cultural foundation. In essence, then, all of the best of Greek culture would ultimately derive from Abraham, who, according to Pseudo-Eupolemus, was simply seeking to please God. The author of *Jubilees* most likely would have strongly objected to this portrayal of Abraham — the portrayal that one could please God by diligently seeking the knowledge and sciences of the gentiles (“the Chaldean craft,” as it is called in Pseudo-Eupolemus).

Next, the account of Pseudo-Eupolemus of Abraham going to Egypt essentially follows the biblical migration story. Pseudo-Eupolemus does not back down from the biblical account of Abraham claiming Sarah as a sister.³⁶ The author of the text says in the most matter-of-fact terms, “The king of the Egyptians married Abraham’s wife, since Abraham had said that she was his sister.”³⁷ When the plagues come upon Pharaoh’s house, Pseudo-Eupolemus has no qualms about recording that Egyptian diviners discover the problem, and based on their disclosure, Pharaoh returns Sarah to Abraham. Other Jews would rewrite this type of story as the foreign diviners being inept.³⁸ Perhaps Pseudo-Eupolemus’s

35. Ibid., emphasis added.

36. Other authors avoid mention of it altogether (*Jubilees*) or put the responsibility upon God (*Genesis Apocryphon* via a dream to Abraham).

37. Doran, “Pseudo-Eupolemus,” 881.

38. See *Genesis Apocryphon*. The plot line of this type of narrative (found in Esther, Judith, Ahiqar, Tobit, Daniel, and the Joseph novella) is as follows: a Jew of low status living in a foreign land; a problem in the court of the king, which foreign diviners are unable to solve; a king calling up the Jew who successfully

own experiences with foreign courts convinced him that honorable individuals everywhere could learn truth in a variety of ways. So in the end, Pseudo-Eupolemus is willing to make certain surface cultural concessions, because all roads lead back to Jewish origins with Abraham.

Even though Pseudo-Eupolemus makes a concession in the foreign court that other Jewish writers would not compromise, Pseudo-Eupolemus immediately describes Abraham's scholarly interactions with the Egyptian priests in the holy city of Heliopolis. Lest he not include in his survey of ancient civilizations known for their antiquity and their culture, Pseudo-Eupolemus appropriates Egyptian antiquity through Abraham by claiming that he taught the Egyptians "astrology and other sciences."³⁹ Again we see that Eupolemus has no qualms about affirming the legitimacy of astrology and its compatibility with Jewish culture. In summary, Pseudo-Eupolemus uses the Abraham figure to promote the marriage of learning and Jewish piety, while also affirming the antiquity and cultural originality of the Jewish nation.

Genesis Apocryphon

Genesis Apocryphon is very Jewish in its use of Abraham; it is saturated with biblical language. There are no hints or traits of Greek culture or ideas. We should not be surprised at this, since this text comes from the Qumran community. So intent were the Essenes to preserve and transmit a pure Jewish way of life that they fled from the main population centers of Palestine where Greek culture (or corrupt Jewish culture) held power.⁴⁰ The text bears some resemblance to the *Book of Jubilees*⁴¹ and

solves the problem; the Jew then being raised from his lowly position and granted great honors in the court of the foreign king.

39. Doran, "Pseudo-Eupolemus," 881.

40. It is clear in 1 & 2 Maccabees that intra-Jewish power struggles abounded before, during, and after the Maccabean revolt. Once the Hasmoneans came to power and took upon themselves the high priestly roles, it appears that many Jews (particularly those from the Hasidim movement) who saw this as an act of great wickedness left the immediate area of Palestine and formed a counter community near the Dead Sea, where they could practice the purity of Jewish faith without the corrupting influence of Greek culture or unlawful applications of Jewish power.

41. Some have argued that this is an Essene document, since it comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls cache. And if it is Essene, then it is perhaps related to the Hasidim movement discussed in 1 & 2 Maccabees that produced the *Book of Jubilees*. The *Genesis Apocryphon* and *Jubilees* have many striking similarities, and for this reason many have suggested that the authors shared a similar tradition.

was most likely written between 50 BC and AD 50.⁴² It does not share the sacred time structure of *Jubilees*, but it does borrow conventions of dating, such as transmitting the idea that Abraham was in Egypt for five years before Sarah was taken from him.

Like *Jubilees*, *Genesis Apocryphon* creates an image of Abraham redolent of biblical rather than Greek influence. I suggest that the author of *Genesis Apocryphon* crafted this type of Abrahamic image as a counter movement to growing Greek-Jewish syncretism in the land of Palestine.⁴³ However, the author of *Genesis Apocryphon* was just as willing to modify and embellish his account, just as the other authors were doing. However, he was not willing to do so in a syncretistic fashion. I will now consider several examples of how *Genesis Apocryphon* embellished the image of Abraham through biblical ideals.

In column XIX, we find that Abraham and Sarah have come to Egypt due to a famine in the land of Canaan. En route, Abraham had a dream warning him that the Egyptians would seek Sarah. They devised a plan to claim that the couple were siblings so that their lives would be spared. In contrast to some authors who skip entirely over the wife-sister deceit (cf. *Jubilees* 13:10–15), the *Genesis Apocryphon* confronts the issue, yet enhances the image of Abraham with a two-edge sword.⁴⁴ First, Abraham dreams and can interpret dreams. From a biblical perspective, this is a highly laudable trait. Second, dreams come from God, and so Abraham's resolve to claim that Sarah and he are siblings can be attributed to God instead of to duplicity on the part of Abraham.

Another example of the way in which the author of *Genesis Apocryphon* embellishes the Abraham account with biblical themes is the story of Pharaoh's servants coming to Abraham for Sarah.⁴⁵ In the story, Abraham is portrayed as the hospitable and gracious host. This perspective is simply an enhancement of the image of Abraham depicted in Genesis 18. What is interesting about this story is that Abraham is

42. Joseph Fitzmyer, S. J., *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I: A Commentary* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 14–17.

43. Cf. Artapanus and Pseudo-Eupolemus, who use the Abraham figure in a syncretistic light. The latter was most likely a contemporary with the original group of Hasidim who fled Palestine for the Dead Sea region.

44. For a compelling study of the "Wife-Sister" motif in the Pearl of Great Price, *Jubilees*, and the *Genesis Apocryphon*, see Thomas W. MacKay "Abraham in Egypt: A Collection of Evidence for the Case of the Missing Wife," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 4 (1970): 429–51.

45. *Genesis Apocryphon* XIX.23–27 in Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I*, 53.

depicted as interacting with foreigners not in philosophical dialectic, but rather in a fashion of Jewish heritage, reading to them the words of the *Book of Enoch*. Instead of learning philosophical truths, the father of the Jews teaches the foreigners the truths of God from ancient sacred writings of Jewish prophets.

The servants of Pharaoh return to report on Sarah's unequalled beauty, including words of praise reminiscent of the erotic love poetry of the Song of Solomon.⁴⁶ As soon as Sarah is taken into the Pharaoh's harem, Abraham turns to the Lord in mighty prayer, requesting that Pharaoh not be able to defile his wife. God answers his prayers, and Pharaoh and his household are afflicted with an evil spirit for two years. Pharaoh sends for all of the Egyptian wise men, but they too become afflicted. And so Pharaoh sends his servant to Abraham with the request that Abraham lay hands upon him to heal him from the dread disease. But Pharaoh's servant is instead met by Lot, Abraham's nephew and adopted son. Much like the biblical story of Elisha and the Syrian captain Naaman,⁴⁷ Abraham is portrayed as a great prophet of God who will speak to foreigners through an intermediary. This suggests that Abraham is a man of high stature and prominence, for he has his servants (in this case Lot) be his delegate. Abraham agreed to Pharaoh's request with the condition that Pharaoh return Sarah. Accomplishing what the great wise men of Egypt could not, Abraham heals the Pharaoh by laying hands upon his head and praying to God that the plague be removed.

Genesis Apocryphon does some of the same things with Abraham that other Jewish literature at this time were doing — namely claiming that Abraham was a noble and virtuous progenitor of the Jewish nation who is to be lauded and imitated in his life style. However, *Genesis Apocryphon* takes an approach different from that of the other Jewish authors, who were willing to let Greek language or ideas manifestly

46. "How splendid and beautiful the form of her face ... and how soft the hair of her head; how lovely are her eyes and how pleasant is her nose and all the radiance of her face; how lovely is her breast and how beautiful is all her whiteness! Her arms, how beautiful! And her hands, how perfect! And how attractive all the appearance of her hands! How lovely are her palms, and how long and dainty all the fingers of her hands. Her feet, how beautiful! How perfect are her legs! There are no virgins or brides who enter a bridal chamber more beautiful than she. Indeed, her beauty surpasses that of all women; her beauty is high above all of them. Yet with all this beauty there is much wisdom in her; and whatever she has is lovely." *Genesis Apocryphon* XX.2–8 in Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I*, 55.

47. Cf. 2 Kings 5.

enter their texts. *Genesis Apocryphon* found a way to accomplish the same cultural goal through Abraham (that the Jewish nation is ancient and honorable) but did so in purely biblically saturated language. As *Genesis Apocryphon* explains, Abraham becomes the savior and healer of a foreign king, who solves the crisis in the foreign court just as other faithful Jews did in the stories of Judith, Tobit, Ahiqar, Daniel, Esther, and the Joseph novella.

Philo

Extensive writings of Philo have been preserved over the centuries. Two of them (“On Abraham,” “On the Migration of Abraham”)⁴⁸ well express Philo’s unique way of crafting the Abraham image in light of his life’s experiences and personal philosophy. Philo was born a Jew into the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria c. 20 BC and lived to the middle of the first century AD. Alexandria was the seat of learning, philosophy, and culture in the Greek and Roman worlds for many years, and so when Philo came upon the scene, he had full access to the best of Greek learning, an opportunity partly derived from the status of his prominent and wealthy family as well as his geographic locale. He of course was also a devout Jew. To the extent that we wish to truly understand Philo, we must know both his Greek culture and his Jewish culture.⁴⁹ Allegorical interpretation is the mainstay of Philo’s approach to scripture, and thus Abraham becomes a pawn in the hands of Philo for his allegorical devices.⁵⁰ Let us first consider the image of Abraham crafted by Philo in “On the Migration of Abraham”; then we will turn our attention to “On Abraham”

On the Migration of Abraham. Philo uses Abraham’s physical migration from Mesopotamia to the Promised Land as the vehicle by which he can explicate his allegorizing philosophy. After quoting God’s command that Abraham migrate (Genesis 12:1), Philo explains this methodology:

God, wishing to purify the soul of man, first of all gives it an impulse towards complete salvation, namely, a change of abode, so as to quit the three regions of the body, the outward sense and speech according to

48. The translations of these passages will be taken from *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

49. E. R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962), 1-10.

50. Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 17-28.

utterance; for his country is the emblem of the body, and his kindred are the symbol of the outward sense, and his father's house of speech.⁵¹

Thus Abraham is representative of the soul that flees from the world, that it might be purified and saved in God. In fact, this representation of Abraham is used simply as a starting point for Philo to engage in extensive scriptural commentary on the way the Bible teaches humanity to let the soul become free from the flesh and bondage of this world.⁵²

On Abraham. In this treatise Philo continues his allegorizing methods, repeating some of the same ideas about Abraham found in his earlier treatise while greatly expanding the allegorical understanding of other key events in the life of Abraham.⁵³ Let us consider a few examples. Philo asserts that Abraham is a symbol of that virtue which derives from instruction (*Torah*). So for Philo, Abraham is a symbol used to teach and express the Greek value of virtue in the context of Jewish piety and heritage. Philo later suggests that Abraham “set out on an expedition to a foreign country in his soul even before he started with his body, his regard for mortal things being overpowered by his love for heavenly things.”⁵⁴ This may be a play on what we find in *Apocalypse of Abraham*,⁵⁵ where Abraham becomes converted to the truth that idols are false gods. His soul had taken the inward journey from his home country of “idol worship” to a foreign yet Promised Land, a journey toward knowing the true God. In *Apocalypse of Abraham*, only after Abraham took this inward journey of the soul did God command him to take the physical journey to the Promised Land.

Philo disgraces the Chaldeans through talk of their impious philosophy and useless astrology. Thus the suggestion that Abraham rejected the Chaldeans, the philosophy of the Chaldeans, and the notion that creation itself was a god, an underlying assumption of astrology.⁵⁶ This correlates well with what we find in *Jubilees* 12:16ff. Both *Jubilees* and Philo discuss the

51. See Philo, “On the Migration of Abraham,” in *The Works of Philo*, 253.

52. Ibid. Philo parts from discussing Abraham and doesn't return again to discuss the migration of Abraham until after a lengthy digression of some one hundred and twenty paragraphs.

53. Ibid. Philo again explains his interpretive methodology at the beginning of this treatise. He lets the order of the biblical stories influence the sequential order by which he allegorizes the stories in his recounting of the Bible.

54. Philo, “On Abraham,” in *The Works of Philo*, 417.

55. R. Rubinkiewicz, *Apocalypse of Abraham in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

56. Philo, “On Abraham,” in *The Works of Philo*, 419. In other words, if the heavenly bodies and their arrangements define life and guide life, then they become

concept that creation is not God but only points to God. *Jubilees* explains that Abraham came to realize that looking to the stars was not the way to find God. This realization compels Abraham to know God through prayer. He explains why it was essential that Abraham leave Chaldea and reject the false philosophy of astrology. As soon as Abraham “left” the land of the Chaldees (rejected their doctrines), God appeared to him. In other words, God is not visible to those who adhere to false doctrines.

Philo eventually brings his migrating Abraham to Egypt.⁵⁷ As in other Jewish writers, the story follows the normal plot lines, along with the creative embellishments of the individual author who shares the story. Here are the features that Philo does *not* include in his account of the Abraham in Egypt story: claims by Abraham that he and Sarah were siblings; Pharaoh’s returning Sarah to Abraham and the increased prestige and wealth of Abraham. On the other hand, Philo adds several features to the story: He claims that Pharaoh gave no heed to the laws of decency, morality, or modesty, because he wanted to defile Sarah, thus deceiving everyone by saying that he wanted to marry her. And so God sent plagues upon both Pharaoh and his household, because they consented to let Pharaoh do this evil and unlawful thing to Sarah. Perhaps this was a quiet way for Philo to give political advice to gentile leaders of his day to not persecute the Jews.⁵⁸ When no resource of succor remained, Sarah took protection in God through mighty prayer.⁵⁹ Where was Abraham? Philo describes Abraham as being impotent in the face of more powerful political leaders. Perhaps this depiction indicates how Jews felt from time to time in Alexandria when they endured pogroms.⁶⁰

Philo summarizes the events of Abraham in Egypt with the following moral: God, by protecting this marriage, ensured the offspring of “the most God-loving of all nations — and one which appears to me to have received the offices of priesthood and prophecy on behalf of the whole human race.”⁶¹

God, rather than a pointing to God, who is the creator of all things. Philo believes that the created order is to point to God, not to take the place of God or act as God.

57. Ibid.

58. For an extensive discussion of Philo’s political ideals and advice, see E. R. Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

59. Contrast this with *Genesis Apocryphon*, which claims that it was Abraham’s mighty prayer of faith that saved Sarah, and nothing is mentioned of her piety.

60. Philo himself appears to have led an embassy to Emperor Gaius (ruled AD 37-41) to help resolve the social disputes between Jews, Greeks and Egyptians in Alexandria. See Philo, “On the Embassy to Gaius,” in *The Works of Philo*.

61. Philo, “On Abraham,” in *The Works of Philo*, 419.

What is significant about this last phrase is that Philo, who had so fully partaken of the Greek culture available to him in the Greek Hellenistic city of Alexandria, where priesthood and prophecy were known among cultures other than the Jews — and indeed, some of the great philosophers were esteemed as priests and prophets, Philo nevertheless claims that the Jewish nation held the prerogative and was the pinnacle of priesthood and prophecy for the Jewish nation. In other words, he claims for his own heritage what the Greeks could have argued for their own. Even though he was a full partaker of Greek culture, he was firmly committed to Judaism, even to the point of placing the Jews above and before all other groups. In this regard, Philo has simply followed the pattern of other Jewish writers who raise Abraham to prominence in his world.

Josephus

Josephus's massive writings have been preserved for us over many centuries via Christians who saw in Josephus an authentic, living witness to the reality of Jesus Christ.⁶² Josephus was a descendent of Maccabean rulers, through whom he had both royal and priestly lineage.⁶³ He was a precocious lad, a knowledgeable student of the Torah;⁶⁴ his intellectual curiosity drove him to explore the various Judaisms available during his time, from which he chose the religious stance of Pharisaism.⁶⁵ At the young age of thirty he became the Jewish military general over the Jews in the Galilee region, fighting against the Romans.⁶⁶ Yet at a propitious moment he surrendered (defected?)⁶⁷ to the Romans, and prophesied to Vespasian that he would become the emperor⁶⁸; and when that came true, he was accorded great imperial favors. One of these favors allowed Josephus to spend most of his remaining life engaged in scholarly pursuits, such as rewriting the Hebrew Bible for a culture of Greeks,⁶⁹ as well as jumping into the fray of scholarly debate over issues both new and old, but particularly the debate over the supposed antiquity of the

62. Josephus's "authentic" testimony is of course in question for various reasons that space prevents dealing with here.

63. Josephus, *The Life*, 1.1.

64. *Ibid.*, 1.2.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*, 1.7ff.

67. Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 3.8.1-8.

68. *Ibid.*, 3.8.9.

69. Written that Greeks might find it "worthy of attention." Josephus, preface to *Jewish Antiquities*.

Jews. From this scholarly/cultural dialectic he produced a book called *The Antiquities of the Jews*, published c. AD 90.

What is significant but not surprising is that Josephus does not portray Abraham exactly as the Bible suggests. Rather, Josephus crafts an image of Abraham who serves as an emissary for the values and ideals that Josephus deems of greatest importance to him and would most likely be pleasing to his audience. One of the first descriptions Josephus offers of Abraham upon arriving in the Promised Land is that he “was a man of ready intelligence [great sagacity].”⁷⁰ Josephus may derive some of his information concerning Abraham from the image portrayed in the writings of Pseudo-Eupolemus, who also claims that Abraham “excelled all in nobility and wisdom.”⁷¹ After documenting Abraham’s great sagacity, Josephus goes on to say that Abraham had great capacity

[to persuade] his hearers, and not [be] mistaken in his inferences. Hence he began to have more lofty conceptions of virtue than the rest of mankind, and determined to reform and change the ideas universally current concerning God. He was thus the first boldly to declare that God, the creator of the universe, is one, and that, if any other being contributed aught to man’s welfare, each did so by His command and not in virtue of its own inherent power. This he inferred from the changes to which land and sea are subject, from the course of sun and moon, and from all the celestial phenomena; for, he argued, were these bodies endowed with power, they would have provided for their own regularity.⁷²

Several key features of Josephus’s image of Abraham bear investigation. I will begin near the end of the quote and work backwards. Josephus affirms that Abraham was versed in the science of astrology, and it was this knowledge that led him to worship the one true God, and the reason why he was ejected from the land of Chaldees. Perhaps Josephus held before himself the image of Abraham crafted by Pseudo-Eupolemus or *Jubilees* when he set out to use Abraham for his own purposes, for both of these authors claim that Abraham was led to God through astrology. Josephus also claims that Abraham was a man of great virtue beyond that of all other people. Furthermore, Abraham uses this high notion of virtue to persuade all others to change their opinions

70. Ibid., 1.7.1.

71. Doran, “Pseudo-Eupolemus,” 880.

72. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 1.7.1.

about God (I will point out momentarily that this statement serves as one of the reasons why Abraham was in Egypt). Abraham is for Josephus a missionary-type, forwarding the knowledge of the one true God. He is a persuasive speaker to be emulated by all; and his powerful opinions should be adopted, since he is not likely to err. The biblical account has only the most miniscule indication that Abraham ever engaged in persuasion, particularly for the purpose of missionary work to convert others to the true worship of the One God.⁷³ If we more closely examine the way that Josephus describes other Jewish prophets, we begin to realize that Josephus's Abraham is an image of Josephus himself. For example, in describing Moses's interaction with the Israelites at Elim in the parched desert, Josephus says that Moses avoided annihilation by using a persuasive argument as to why they should not kill him.⁷⁴ This is entirely absent from the biblical account (Exodus 15:27-16:3); however, it is closely related to Josephus's personal experience as a general in the Galilee, where he had to use a powerful argument to persuade the Jews not to kill him.⁷⁵

These accounts clearly show Josephus's predilection for the art of persuasion. For Josephus, a leader's duty is to persuade a group to accept higher notions of virtue. Hence Josephus uses biblical heroes to express his values, and Abraham becomes one of those tools for promoting what he values.

It is in Abraham's migration to and sojourn in Egypt that we see much of Josephus's reshaping of the Abraham image to be in line with Greek life.

Some time later, Canaan being in the grip of a famine, Abraham, hearing of the prosperity of the Egyptians, was of a mind to visit them, alike to profit by their abundance and to hear what their priests said about the gods; intending, if he found their doctrine more excellent than his own, to conform to it, or else to convert them to a better mind should his own beliefs prove superior.⁷⁶

73. The only words of the Abraham accounts in the Bible that I can find that would lead one to see Abraham as a missionary figure is Genesis 12:5, which reads in the KJV, "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, *and the souls that they had gotten in Haran*; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."

74. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 3.1.3-5.

75. Ibid., *The Life*, 6.27-29.

76. Ibid., *Jewish Antiquities*, 1.8.1.

Abraham is here portrayed as one who seeks great knowledge and intelligence, much like the ideal Platonic philosopher-king⁷⁷ we see in the *Letter of Aristeas*.⁷⁸ He seeks to know the truth and is not dogmatic or ignorantly zealous in religious fanaticism, which may lead to mobocracy.⁷⁹ He is willing to hear and learn the truth. If it is better truth than what he has, he accepts it; if not, he will teach the truths that God has already granted him. Describing Abraham's search for better notions about God through philosophical discourse probably says more about Josephus's cultural paradigm than the historical reality that Abraham was conversant in Greek forms of dialogic, by which truth is attained by seeking the "best" argument. All these characteristics accorded to Abraham were those valued by Josephus and his Greek-cultured audience.

According to Josephus, after Pharaoh discovers that the woman he has taken is indeed Abraham's wife, she is returned to Abraham with the explanation that Pharaoh had sought Sarah, thinking she was Abraham's sister, because Pharaoh "had wished to contract a marriage alliance [with Abraham by marrying her]."⁸⁰ Pharaoh then offers to Abraham "abundant riches, and Abraham consorted with the most learned of the Egyptians, whence his virtue and reputation became still more conspicuous."⁸¹ Such a statement answers Josephus's critical interlocutors who claimed that no respectable individuals have come from the Jewish nations.⁸² Herein, according to Josephus, the Jewish nation has a virtuous ancestor who taught science and wisdom to the most ancient of nations, the Egyptians. Again, we see that Josephus's image of Abraham is used to answer the Greek intellectual critics:

Seeing that the Egyptians were addicted to a variety of different customs and disparaged one another's practices and were consequently at enmity with one another, Abraham conferred with each party and, exposing the arguments which they adduced in favour of their particular views, demonstrated that they were idle and contained nothing true. Thus gaining their

77. L. H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 547.

78. R. J. H. Shutt, *Letter of Aristeas in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:12-34.

79. Feldman, *Studies*, 553.

80. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 1.8.1.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Apion was one of the foremost critics to whom Josephus responded, composing a lengthy work of rebuttal called *Contra Apion*. For Apion's views on the Jews, see Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 389-416.

admiration at these meetings as a man of extreme sagacity, gifted not only with high intelligence but with power to convince his hearers on any subject which he undertook to teach.⁸³

In this passage Josephus crafts Abraham in a way reminiscent of what we find in the *Letter of Aristeas* in terms of being capable of philosophizing on any subject with great wisdom and sagacity. Thus Abraham becomes, in Greek terms, a worthy and honorable individual. Not only this, but Abraham is a powerful and persuasive thinker, skills desired by Josephus⁸⁴ and praised by his Greek audience.

Next we see that Josephus continues to fashion an image of Abraham that compares to those images we saw in Artapanus and Pseudo-Eupolemus⁸⁵ — Abraham is the bearer of culture to an ancient civilization. In this case, Abraham brings math and science to the Egyptians as he sojourns with them under the politeness of the king.

He introduced them to arithmetic and transmitted to them the laws of astronomy. For before the coming of Abraham the Egyptians were ignorant of these sciences, which thus travelled from the Chaldeans into Egypt, whence they passed to the Greeks.⁸⁶

Josephus makes it clear that the Egyptians did not have this knowledge (culture/science) before Abraham came into the land. Furthermore, his critical Greek interlocutors lose the debate over cultural superiority, because the Jews not only have in Abraham a most venerable ancestor, the Greeks also derived their learning from the Egyptians through Abraham. Thus we see that Josephus forged a new life of Abraham through his personal experiences with Greek-Jewish cultural interaction.

Conclusions

From my survey of Jewish literature during the Hellenistic/Roman period, it becomes clear that Abraham was alive and well. He was the device by which his authors express their own lives. Indeed, Abraham was resurrected in these texts but with the body and soul of a new author — authors who live on in the guise of Abraham. Though Abraham's original life, as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, was the genesis for these creative adaptations, exploring the new biographies helps us see the complex and

83. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 1.8.2.

84. Josephus needed all his powers of persuasion when dealing with the Jewish mobocracy who desired to kill him. Josephus, *The Life*, vv. 6.27-29.

85. This explicit culture-bearer figure is absent in *Genesis Apocryphon*.

86. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 1.8.2.

multifaceted Jewish world of the Hellenistic/Roman era. There is no doubt that an extended study of other Abraham “biographies” created through the centuries would richly inform us of the world and values of those who also employ Abraham’s image for ever new and changing circumstances.

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