

FROM PHILO TO AREIMANIOS:  
JEWISH TRADITIONS AND INTELLECTUAL PROFILES  
IN FIRST – THIRD CENTURY ALEXANDRIA IN  
THE LIGHT OF THE *APOCRYPHON OF JOHN*

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Before delving into the main subject of this study, two preliminary points must be addressed right at the outset, even if I cannot fully demonstrate them for lack of space. The two are interrelated and function as the necessary presuppositions and the historical framing of the following textual analysis.

First, I work under the assumption that the *Apocryphon of John* (= *AJ*) is a thoroughly Christian text in all its redactional phases,<sup>1</sup> originally written in Greek and reworked at least once in Alexandria between the half of the 2nd and the first decades of the 3rd century CE.<sup>2</sup> Additional observations by Roelof Van den Broek, Ismo Dunderberg, and David Brakke do support the hypothesis of locating *AJ* in the “workshop” of Alexandrian theology between Philo and Origen.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tardieu 1984, 38. 42-3. 46-7; Logan 1991, 54-5; 1996, 22. 29-35; King 2006, 2-3. 16. 23-4. Barc – Funk 2012, 27-37, treat the short version of *AJ* as the synthesis of a triple cultural heritage — philosophical, Jewish, and Christian — addressed to a public that masters the interpretation of Christian texts, such as the Synoptic Gospels, Paul’s letters, and the Gospel of John.

<sup>2</sup> Simonetti 1997, 12-5. 22-4; only implicitly Waldstein 2001, 99-101; King 2006, 9-17. Even Logan 1996, 21-2. 29-30. 41; 2012, 139, assumes that the original myth soon travelled from Antioch in Syria to Alexandria, sometime in the course of the long compositional history that resulted in the text(s) of *AJ* we possess. In his survey of Nag Hammadi texts of alleged Alexandrian origin, Jakab 2001, 77-83, does not discuss *AJ*. Barc – Funk 2012, 37-40, propose to date the short version of *AJ* in the early 30s of the 2nd century, but offer no hypothesis for its provenance. For two radically skeptical opinions about the historical possibility of locating ‘Gnostic’ writings in 2nd century Alexandria, see Fürst 2007, 94-6, and Löhr 2013, 417-8.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Van den Broek 1986; Dunderberg 2008, 49-52; Brakke 2010, 99-105. Lang 2008, 37-43, offers a concise survey of past and ongoing research on Christian groups in 2nd century Alexandria.

Secondly, though disappearing for a long time from our documentation and from “official” history after 117 CE, the multifaceted Alexandrian Jewish community still stands as the historically most probable cradle of the Jesus movement in all its forms and streams: people, ideas, writings, debates, and conflicts originating in and radiating from it continued to have an impact on the life and thoughts of Jesus’ followers throughout the 2nd century and until the beginnings of the 3rd, as is witnessed by Origen.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, between 117 and 337, only 44 papyri make allusions to Jews, a very small number indeed compared to the almost 300 documenting their life during the first one hundred and fifty years of Roman rule in Egypt. Numbers cannot be contested. Yet *per se* this impressive reduction merely implies that the Jewish community disappeared from our documentation after the last revolt, evidently because it lost its social, economical, and political weight, but it surely had not been completely annihilated. Rather, both Origen’s contacts with a *Hebraios* (see *Princ.* 1.3.4 and 4.3.14; *Comm. Ps.* 1; *Comm. Jo.* 1.215; *Hom. Jer.* 20.2; *Philoc.* 27.7) and the numbers he gives of Jews who had converted to the Jesus movement, assuming that they reflect even to a small part Alexandrian *realia* (*Comm. Jo.* 1.7), point to the persistence of a lively cultural exchange between Jews and “Christians,” a tie which probably had never been severed.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the informants and teachers whom Origen consulted might have been “Jewish-Christians,” as they are often labelled, and not merely “Jews” does not alter the picture, as the former definition is to be understood as practically synonymous with the historically more accurate one of “Jesus followers of Jewish origin” — which is exactly what Origen himself appears to have in mind when referring to them (cf. *Fr. Ezech.* 9.7; *Hom. Jer.* 20.2; *Comm. Rom.* 10.7).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For this whole question I rely on the nuanced assessments by Van den Broek 1990, 102-3, 108-15; Sgherri 2000, 200-2; Pearson 2003 and 2007b, 98-101, here 99-100; Tilly 2008, 56-7; Harker 2012, 283-4, 286; Dorival – Naiweld 2013, 121-6.

<sup>5</sup> For a far more pessimistic evaluation of numbers and the historical situation, see Jakab 2001, 33-4.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of the use of such a label with respect to Origen’s Hebrew savant in Dorival – Naiweld 2013, 124-5, 136 and Dorival in this volume. Pesce 2011, 189-97, offers a critique of the broader category of “Jewish Christianity” as an heuristically equivocal tool.

## WHO IS WHO? JOHN AND AREIMANIOS THE PHARISEE

Just like every tale worth this name, our story begins by introducing the hero, John son of Zebedee, as he faces the crisis which sets the plot in motion. This crisis takes the form of a personal encounter with John's nemesis, Areimanios the Pharisee:<sup>7</sup>

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2. 1. Now it happened one of those days, when John, the brother of James — they are the sons of Zebedee — had gone up to the temple, that a Pharisee named Arimanius approached him 2. and said to him: “Where is your master, whom you used to follow?” 3. And he said to him: “He has gone again to the place from which he came.” 4. The Pharisee said to him: “With deception did this Nazarene deceive you, and he filled your ears with [lies], and closed [your hearts, 5. and] turned you [from] the traditions of your [fathers].”

2. 1. [And] it happened [one day], when John, [the brother] of James — they are the sons of Zebedee — had gone up to the temple, that a Pharisee named Arimanius [approached] him 2. [and] said to him: “[Where] is your master, [whom] you used to follow?” 3. And I [said] to him: “He has gone to the [place] from which he [came].” 4. The Pharisee [said to him: “With deception did this Nazarene] deceive you, and he filled [your ears with lies], and closed [your hearts, 5. (and) turned you] from the traditions [of your fathers].”

In order to comprehend what the name Areimanios could actually evoke to the mind of 2nd century educated readers, may it suffice to quote a few lines from Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 369d-370c:

This is the view of the majority and of the wisest; for some believe that there are two gods who are rivals, as it were, in art, the one being the creator of good, the other of evil; others call the better of these god and his rival a daemon, as, for example, Zoroaster the Magician, who lived, so they record, five thousand years before the siege of Troy. He used to call the one Horomazes and the other Areimanius, and showed also that the former was especially akin, among objects of perception, to light, and the latter, on the contrary, to darkness and ignorance [...]. Horomazes is born from the purest light and Areimanius from darkness, and they are at war with one another. The former (Horomazes) created six gods, the first being god of good will, the second god of

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from *AJ* follow the English translation in Waldstein – Wisse 1995 and the numbering system devised by King 2006.

truth, the third god of good order, and the others gods of wisdom and wealth, the sixth being the creator of pleasure in beautiful things. The other (Areimanios) created an equal number as rivals to these. (trans. Griffiths 1970, 191-3)<sup>8</sup>

The Pharisee is immediately associated with darkness and ignorance and their “divine” source, his name being the key to his true identity and his encounter with John resolving itself into an almost “ontological” clash of radically opposite figures, values, and factions, both human and more than human.<sup>9</sup> Given such a characterization, there is no need to wonder that Areimanios’ charges will ultimately be countered by the revelation of Jesus himself, which echoes the former and thus utters the final and decisive word on who really was hardened and ignorant (*AJ* 25.19-20).

Areimanios’ allegations find a climax in the accusation of turning away from the ancestral traditions of Israel. Such accusation, be it further specified as abandoning, subverting, innovating, violating or transgressing the latter, met with a lasting fortune in Hebrew literary tradition, as it was leveled against targets of any sort and provenance thought to pose a threat to “true” Jewish identity. Just to name a few, taken from a literary source of the last decade of the first century CE (93/94): priests, influential families and commoners siding with Antiochus Epiphanes and opposing the Maccabean party (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.240-241, 286 and 13.2, 4), Herod the Great (15.267, 281), Jews rebelling to Roman power (18.9), Anilaeus, a Jewish military leader in Parthian Mesopotamia (18.340). Furthermore, on the one hand, the accusation belongs to the polemical repertoire exploited by

<sup>8</sup> Καὶ δοκεῖ τοῦτο τοῖς πλείστοις καὶ σοφωτάτοις· νομίζουσι γὰρ οἱ μὲν θεοὺς εἶναι δύο καθάπερ ἀντιτέχνους, τὸν μὲν ἀγαθῶν, τὸν δὲ φαύλων δημιουργόν· οἱ δὲ τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἀμείνονα θεόν, τὸν δ’ ἕτερον δαίμονα καλοῦσιν, ὥσπερ Ζωροάστρης ὁ μάγος, ὃν πεντακισχιλίους ἔτεσι τῶν Τρωικῶν γεγονέναι πρεσβύτερον ἰστοροῦσιν. οὗτος οὖν ἐκάλει τὸν μὲν Ὠρομάζην, τὸν δ’ Ἀρειμάνιον· καὶ προσαπεφαίνετο τὸν μὲν εὐκείναι φωτὶ μάλιστα τῶν αἰσθητῶν, τὸν δ’ ἔμπαλιν σκότῳ καὶ ἀγνοίᾳ [...]. ὁ μὲν Ὠρομάζης ἐκ τοῦ καθαρωτάτου φάους ὁ δ’ Ἀρειμάνιος ἐκ τοῦ ζόφου γεγονώς πολεμοῦσιν ἀλλήλοισι· καὶ ὁ μὲν ἐξ θεοῦ ἐποίησε, τὸν μὲν πρῶτον εὐνομίας, τὸν δὲ δευτέρον ἀληθείας, τὸν δὲ τρίτον εὐνομίας, τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν τὸν μὲν σοφίας, τὸν δὲ πλούτου, τὸν δὲ τῶν ἐπὶ τοῖς καλοῖς ἡδέων δημιουργόν· ὁ δὲ τούτοις ὥσπερ ἀντιτέχνους ἴσους τὸν ἀριθμόν. See also Diog. Laert. 1.8.8, who quotes Aristotle.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Plisch 2012, 66-7. For different interpretations of the Pharisee’s name, see Dubois 2012, 109.

other Jews, at least according to early Christian writings (see Matt 15:2, and Acts 6:12-14; 18:12-15; 21:21,28; 25:7-8); on the other hand, Paul himself does not hesitate to remind his addressees of his former incomparable zeal for “the traditions of the fathers” (πατρικαὶ παραδόσεις: Gal 1:14; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.297 and 17.41), acting as an irreprehensible *Ioudaios* and Pharisee and persecutor of groups of Jesus followers: that probably means that, in Paul’s eyes, the latter were not so zealous and irreprehensible as Israelites should have been (Phil 2:5-6). Such an accusation clearly functions as a cliché or a stereotype, rhetorically oversimplifying, juxtaposing and standardizing complex historical situations, blurring nuances and differences. Therefore, it aims to come to terms with and to regulate diversity, otherness, and conflict (*i.e.* to discredit and delegitimize whomsoever has not made the “right” choice and does not belong to “us”). Nevertheless, as generalizing as clichés may and must be, they reflect real concerns and provide us with historically valuable information, as far as the context in which they surface from time to time is correctly highlighted in its specificity or even singularity.<sup>10</sup>

As for the above listed examples, the cliché gives us a glimpse of the reactions to and critical evaluation of the spread of pro-Hellenic positions among Jews at the outbreak of and during the Maccabean revolt;<sup>11</sup> Herod’s Hellenistic and cosmopolitan “euergetism” (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.268-276 and 16.136-141); economic, social, and religious discomfort of large strata of the Jewish population under Herodian and Roman rule, leading to several riots (15.299-306; 16.141; 17.149-167, 206-208, 213-218, 271-285; 18.1-10); Anilaeus’ marriage with a non Jewish woman, the widow of a Parthian general (18.344); Jesus’ debates with Pharisees on purity and other legal matters; dissesents, not to say open conflicts, arising between Jesus’ followers and other Jews on the role of Law and Temple in defining Jewish identity, on preaching and following Jesus as the Messiah, on Gentiles entering

<sup>10</sup> Arcari 2013, 71 (with literature) writes: “[...] il fenomeno della creazione di stereotipi, spesso conseguenza del meccanismo semplificante, è fattore fondamentale nella creazione di un discorso polemico che voglia imporsi con autorità nell’ambito di collettività più o meno ampie; è inevitabile che la stessa autorità di quelle collettività si costruisca in competizione ad altre autorità (di solito non definite come tali all’interno del gruppo rivale) avvertite come devianti.”

<sup>11</sup> On this whole question, see Hengel 2001, 543-619.

Israel's covenant without circumcision and observance of Jewish customs, not even of the prescriptions affecting *gerim*.<sup>12</sup>

Turning back to the literary context of *AJ*'s opening scene, we can point out that the whole of Jesus' epiphany and monologue presupposes and is intended to meet Areimanios' objections: in the course of his long revelation the resurrected master counters the Pharisee's arguments and dispels John's doubts by framing both into a grand "theogonical" and cosmological narrative assembling Greek philosophical ideas and Egyptian as well as Jewish mythological traditions (cp. *AJ* 2.2-13, with 3.14-18 and 27.1-4). In so doing, Jesus mocks the latter, and discards a strictly literal understanding of some passages from the book of Genesis, distancing himself from one specific type of exegetical approach to Jewish sacred writings (cf. especially *AJ* 2.4 with 21.3-7 and 25.17-20; see also 14.1-5, 8-14; 21.12-16, 20-21; 24.23-24). Therefore, what seems to be at stake, both as a threat to a different understanding of the Jewish way of life and identity and as a cultural option in need of being legitimated by a revelation of the celestial Jesus, is an effort to read Jewish scriptures in the light of a religious hermeneutics merging the message of the Jesus movement with Middle-Platonic ideas and "rationalistic" criticism of ancient mythological narratives, Jewish exegetical methods, non canonical traditions, and Greco-Egyptian myth-making.<sup>13</sup>

That being said, our query still has no answer: who is Areimanios supposed to stand for? Whose positions is he supposed to represent? M. Tardieu proposed to identify John's literary opponent with historical "Jewish Christians" and Christians, as it is likely that the text refers back to debates originating in the first Christian communities of Palestine.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, B. Barc opted for an identification with post-Yavne rabbis, heirs of the Pharisaic movement, promoting a new biblical hermeneutic in radical rupture with that of the Second Temple Period which so deeply influenced *AJ*.<sup>15</sup> In my opinion, *tertium datur*, a third way is actually possible: it rests on the historical probability that

<sup>12</sup> See Gianotto 2013, 37-53.

<sup>13</sup> See Pleše 2006; Tripaldi 2012; Meyer 2013. Logan's picture (2012, 139-41, 147) concurs with my observations.

<sup>14</sup> Tardieu 1984, 36-8.

<sup>15</sup> Barc – Funk 2012, 30. 40. 184.

*AJ* is a literary product of Alexandrian “Christianity” and on some allusions in Philo’s writings.

#### GODLESS JEWS AS “APOSTATES” IN FIRST CENTURY ALEXANDRIA

Philo alludes several times to a group — or groups? — of anonymous figures who might be rightly termed deviant in his eyes. I do not aim to comment on each one of the passages mentioning these opponents, as R. Goulet and M. Niehoff have already provided a fine analysis.<sup>16</sup> For my part, I wish to recapitulate and highlight several characteristic features of this / these group(s), its / their ideology, and exegetical practice, which all match with the profile I sketched above of the later redactors of *AJ*, as they promoted their own cultural effort.

*Exsecr.* 162 and *Mos.* 1.31 are quite generic and address the deviants respectively as scoring their ancestral customs and transgressing the laws. *Exsecr.* 162 goes on charging the “others” of exchanging monotheism for polytheistic “atheism” and investigating human-made myths rather than divine truth. In *Mos.* 1.31 Philo ventures to account for the deviant behavior of his opponents as a result of their tendency to assimilate to the broader Alexandrian Graeco-Roman environment.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Goulet 2005, 72-8, and Niehoff 2012, 77-92. Some useful remarks already in Pearson 1990, 20-1, who rightly stresses the importance of finding in Philo “some clear examples of polemics directed against specifically ‘Gnostic’ theologoumena” for the “unearthing” of the historical and ideological links between Alexandrian Judaism and groups of Jesus followers, whether “Gnostics” or not. For some additional, explored and “unearthed” continuities, see Pearson 2007b, 100-1. 108-10, and Prinziavalli 2015, 76-8.

<sup>17</sup> *Exsecr.* 162: Τὰς μὲν οὖν ἀρὰς καὶ τιμωρίας, ἃς ὑπομένειν ἄξιον τοὺς τῶν ἱερῶν νόμων δικαιοσύνης καὶ εὐσεβείας ὑπερορῶντας καὶ ταῖς πολυθείας δόξαις ὑπαχθέντας, ὧν ἀθεότης τὸ τέλος, λήθη τῆς συγγενοῦς καὶ πατρίου διδασκαλίας, ἣν ἐκ πρώτης ἡλικίας ἐπαιδεύθησαν τὴν τοῦ ἐνόου φύσιν τὸν ἀνωπύτω νομίζειν θεόν, ᾧ δεῖ μόνῳ προσκεκληρῶσθαι τοὺς ἀπλαστον ἀλήθειαν ἀντιπεπλασμένων μύθων μεταδιώκοντας, οὐδὲν ὑποστειλάμενος δεδήλωκα; *Mos.* 1,31: Καὶ ταῦτα ὁρῶντες αἰεὶ γινόμενα καὶ σαφῶς εἰδότες ἡμῶς ὑπερόπται μὲν οἰκείων καὶ φίλων εἰσί, νόμους δὲ παραβαίνουσι, καθ’ οὓς ἐγενήθησαν καὶ ἐτράφησαν, ἔθνη δὲ πάτρια, οἷς μέμψις οὐδεμία πρόσεστι δικαία, κινουσὶν ἐκδεδιγτημένοι καὶ διὰ τὴν τῶν παρόντων ἀποδοχὴν οὐδενὸς ἔτι τῶν ἀρχαίων μνήμην λαμβάνουσιν. On gymnasial activities as part of the Hellenistic parental care meeting with Philo’s approval, see *Spec.* 2.229-230. Cf. also p.Lond. 1912, transmitting the letter of the emperor Claudius to the Alexandrians (41 CE) about Jews forcing their way into the gymnasium (ll. 92-93).

The next two texts go into greater detail and help to refine the picture. *Migr.* 89–90 sketches the portrait of certain Jewish exegetes living on their own, who are fond of allegory to such a degree that they disregard and discard any literal meaning in the Hebrew scriptures. In so doing, they contest and disrupt the actual observance of ritual laws (*Migr.* 91–94 lists festivals, Sabbath, circumcision, Temple cult), as well as social and ethnic bonds.<sup>18</sup> In *Conf.* 2–14, Philo attacks colleagues who openly dislike their ancestral tradition, laws and the biblical μυθῶδες (cf. *Conf.* 9) and levels philosophical and “scientific” criticism against them: they seem to apply a comparative approach in dealing with ancient mythological traditions. Biblical narratives such as the story of the Tower of Babel are not exempted. Rather, they are considered as laughable as comparable “pagan” myths.<sup>19</sup> According to these Jewish exegetes, even the idea of justice underlying God’s actions, that is, Providence itself, as highlighted in the Biblical account, is to be questioned, as enacting mistaken, misguided and pointless punishments.<sup>20</sup> On these premises, the Genesis narrative is re-interpreted and its meaning re-written from within. Philo’s diagnosis sounds repetitive: truth is bid farewell, the path to “atheism” and myths is now open.

This last text deserves it to be quoted in full:

*Conf.* 2–4. 6. 9–10. 12. 13–14

Those who are discontented at the constitution under which their fathers have lived, being always eager to blame and to accuse the laws,

<sup>18</sup> Εἰσὶ γὰρ τινες οἱ τοὺς ῥητοὺς νόμους σύμβολα νοητῶν πραγμάτων ὑπολαμβάνοντες τὰ μὲν ἄγαν ἠκριβώσαν, τῶν δὲ ῥαθύμως ὀλιγόρησαν· οὐς μεμψαίμην ἂν ἔγωγε τῆς εὐχερείας· ἔδει γὰρ ἀμφοτέρων ἐπιμεληθῆναι, ζητήσεώς τε τῶν ἀφανῶν ἀκριβεστέρας καὶ ταμείας τῶν φανερῶν ἀνεπιλήπτου. νυνὶ δ’ ὥσπερ ἐν ἐρημίᾳ καθ’ ἑαυτοὺς μόνου ζῶντες ἢ ἀσώματα ψυχὰι γεγονότες καὶ μήτε πόλιν μήτε κώμην μήτ’ οἰκίαν μήτε συνόλως θιάσον ἀνθρώπων εἰδότες, τὰ δοκοῦντα τοῖς πολλοῖς ὑπερκύψαντες τὴν ἀλήθειαν γυμνὴν αὐτὴν ἐφ’ ἑαυτῆς ἐρευνῶσιν· οὐς ὁ ἱερός λόγος διδάσκει χρηστῆς ὑπολήψεως πεφροντικέναι καὶ μηδὲν τῶν ἐν τοῖς ἔθουσι λύειν, ἀ θεσπέσιοι καὶ μείζους ἄνδρες ἢ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ὤρισαν.

<sup>19</sup> For this and other possible instances, see Niehoff 2012, 87–94.

<sup>20</sup> Incidentally it is worth noting that Philo probably wrote his *De Providentia* to refute the arguments of his nephew Tiberius Alexander, who, according to Josephus (*Ant.* 20.100), τοῖς [...] πατριόις οὐκ ἐνέμεινεν [...] ἔθειν (!). One may also compare the puzzlement of some others about biblical texts depicting the God of Israel as indulging in passions like repentance and anger (*Deus* 21–22, 52). More passages of interest from Philo’s works are quoted and commented on by Pearson 1990, 21–5.



being impious men, use these and similar instances as foundations for their impiety, saying, "Are ye even now speaking boastfully concerning your precepts, as if they contained the rules of truth itself? For, behold, the books which you called the sacred scriptures do also contain fables, at which you are accustomed to laugh, when you hear others relating to them." And what is the use of devoting our leisure to collecting the fables interspersed in so many places throughout the history of the giving of the law, as if we had special leisure for the consideration of calumnies, and as if it were not better to attend merely to what is under our hands and before us? Certainly, this one fable resembles that which is composed about the Aloadae, who the greatest and most glorious of all poets, Homer, says, had in contemplation to heap the three loftiest mountains on one another, and to build them into one mass, hoping that by these means there would be a road for them, as they desirous to mount up to heaven, and that by these mountains it would be easy for them to be raised to the height of the sky. [...] And there is also another story akin to this, related by the devisers of fables, concerning the sameness of language existing among animals [...]. But he who brings this account nearer to the truth, has distinguished between the rational and irrational animals, so that he testifies that identity of language belongs to men alone: and this also, as they say, is a fabulous story. And indeed they affirm, that the separation of language into an infinite variety of dialects, which Moses calls the confusion of tongues, was effected as a remedy for sins, in order that men might not be able to cooperate in common for deeds of wickedness through understanding one another; and that they might not, when they were in a manner deprived of all means of communication with one another, be able with united energies to apply themselves to the same actions. But this precaution does not appear to have turned out of any use [...]; so that a community of language is an advantageous thing rather than an injurious one: since, even at the present day, nothing contributes so greatly to the safety and protection of the people of each country, and particularly of the natives, as their being of one language. [...] Why, then, did God remove sameness of language from among men as a cause of evils, when it seems it should rather have been established as a most useful thing? Those, then, who put these things together, and cavil at them, and raise malicious objections, will be easily refuted separately by those who can produce ready solutions of all such questions as arise from the plain words of the law, arguing in a spirit far from contentious, and not encountering them by sophisms drawn from any other source, but following the connection of natural consequences, which does not permit them to stumble, but which easily puts aside any impediments that

arise, so that the course of their arguments proceeds without any interruption or mishap. (trans. Jonge 1997, 234-5)<sup>21</sup>

All in all, behind the cliché the following overall picture begins to unfold: Philo addresses positions of other “historical” Jews.<sup>22</sup> Whether or not they actually constituted one single group or were just individuals with analogous opinions that were targeted as a group, is harder to tell in each and every case.<sup>23</sup> However, Philo evidently considers these

<sup>21</sup> Οἱ μὲν δυσχεραίνοντες τῇ πατρίῳ πολιτείᾳ, ψόγον καὶ κατηγορίαν αἰεὶ τῶν νόμων μελετῶντες, τούτοις καὶ τοῖς παραπλησίοις ὡς ἂν ἐπιβάθραις τῆς ἀθεότητος αὐτῶν, οἱ δυσσεβεῖς, χρῶνται φάσκοντες· ἔτι νῦν σεμνηγορεῖτε περὶ τῶν διατεταγμένων ὡς τοὺς ἀληθείας κανόνας αὐτῆς περιεχόντων; ἰδοὺ γὰρ αἱ ἱεραὶ λεγόμεναι βίβλοι παρ’ ὑμῖν καὶ μύθους περιέχουσιν, ἐφ’ οἷς εἰώθατε γελᾶν, ὅταν ἄλλων διεξιόντων ἀκούητε. καίτοι τί δεῖ τοὺς πολλαχῶθι τῆς νομοθεσίας ἐσπαρμένους ἀναλέγεσθαι ὥσπερ σχολῆν ἄγοντας καὶ ἐνευκαιροῦντας διαβολαῖς, ἀλλ’ οὐ μόνον τῶν ἐν χερσὶ καὶ παρὰ πόδας ὑπομιμνήσκεις; εἰς μὲν οὖν ἔστιν ὁ εὐκὼς τῷ συντεθέντι ἐπὶ τῶν Ἀλκωιδῶν, οὗς ὁ μέγιστος καὶ δοκιμώτατος τῶν ποιητῶν Ὀμηρος διανοηθῆναί φησι τρία τὰ περιμῆχιστα τῶν ὄρων ἐπιφορῆσαι καὶ ἐπιχῶσαι ἐλπίσαντας τὴν εἰς οὐρανὸν ὁδὸν τοῖς ἀνέρχεσθαι βουλομένοις εὐμαρῆ διὰ τούτων ἔσσεσθαι πρὸς αἰθέριον ὕψος ἀρθέντων· [...]. ἕτερος δὲ τις συγγενῆς τούτῳ περὶ τῆς τῶν ζῶων ὁμοφωνίας πρὸς μυθοπλαστῶν ἀναγράφεται· [...] ὁ δ’ ἐγγυτέρω τᾶλθηθοῦς προσάγων τὸν λόγον τὰ ἄλογα τῶν λογικῶν διέζευξεν, ὡς ἀνθρώποις μόνους μαρτυρῆσαι τὸ ὁμόφωνον. ἔστι δέ, ὡς γέ φασι, καὶ τοῦτο μυθῶδες, καὶ μὴ τὴν γε φωνῆς εἰς μυρίας διαλέκτων ἰδέας τομῆν, ἣν καλεῖ γλώττης σύγχυσιν, ἐπὶ θεραπεῖα λέγουσιν ἀμαρτημάτων συμβῆναι, ὡς μηκέτ’ ἀλλήλων ἀκροώμενοι κοινῇ συναδικῶσιν, ἀλλὰ τρόπον τινα [ἄλλοι] ἀλλήλοις κεκωφωμένοι ††† κατὰ συμπράξεις ἐγγχεροῦσι τοῖς αὐτοῖς. τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἐπ’ ὠφελεία φαίνεται συμβῆναι [...]. ὥστε λυσιτελεῖς μᾶλλον ἢ βλαβερὸν εἶναι τὴν ἐν διαλέκτοις κοινωνίαν, ἐπεὶ καὶ μέχρι νῦν οἱ καθ’ ἐκάστην χώραν, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν αὐτοχθόνων, δι’ οὐδὲν οὕτως ὡς διὰ τὸ ὁμόγλωσσον ἀπαθεῖς κακῶν διατελοῦσι. [...] τί οὖν ὡς κακῶν αἴτιον τὸ ὁμόγλωττον ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἠφάνιζε, δέον ὡς ὠφελιμώτατον ἰδρῦσθαι; τοὺς δὴ ταῦτα συντιθέντας καὶ κακοτεχνοῦντας ἰδίᾳ μὲν διελέγξουσιν οἱ τὰς προχείρους ἀποδόσεις τῶν αἰεὶ ζητουμένων ἐκ τῆς φανεραῆς τῶν νόμων γραφῆς ἀφιλονείκως ταμειυόμενοι, οὐκ ἀντισοφίζόμενοι ποθεν, ἀλλ’ ἐπόμενοι τῷ τῆς ἀκολουθίας εἰρμῷ προσπταῖεν οὐκ ἐῶντι, ἀλλὰ κἄν, εἴ τινα ἐμποδῶν εἴη, βραδίως ἀναστέλλοντι, ὅπως αἱ τῶν λόγων διέξοδοι γίνωνται ἄπταιστοι.

<sup>22</sup> On this point, I agree with Feldman 1993, 74-7; Hengel 2001, 335-48. 615-9, and Niehoff 2012, 77-9, against Radice 1988, 498 n. 7. Goulet 2005, 59-60. 77-8, advocates a more nuanced position.

<sup>23</sup> Feldman 1993, 74-7, and Niehoff 2012, 78 n. 4, reckon with two different groups, literalists and allegorists, and critical exegetes and allegorists, respectively; Hengel 2001, 615, refers more vaguely to multifaceted critics spread among educated and Hellenized Alexandrian Jews; Goulet 2005, 60. 72-7, presupposes the identity of the two fronts.

adversaries as an integral part of one and the same wider tendency to disregard, betray and abandon Israel's traditions; or to use a more objective and neutral formula: not to conform to his understanding of the latter. In this sense, his discussion in *Conf.* 2–14 sheds more light on the vague allusions in *Exsecr.* 162–163, where the recurring contrastive couplets, Truth / myths and One God / polytheism, *i.e.* atheism, are left unspecified.

As already hinted at, not only do Philo's reproaches of abandoning and dismantling laws, customs and traditions passed on by the fathers and the holiest men in Israel's history correspond almost literally to Areimanios' accusations, but also the intellectual profile of Philo's opponents seems to match with *AJ*'s worldview: both Philo's adversaries and the author(s) of *AJ* indulge in mocking the plain text and a literal exegesis of the book of Genesis as nonsense, and favor an allegorical interpretation instead;<sup>24</sup> both refuse to equate providence and justice with the goal of the God of the Hebrew scriptures;<sup>25</sup> both compare and juxtapose different mythological traditions. Given the common Alexandrian milieu of Philo's opponents and *AJ*, these parallels support the conclusion that the latter is probably to be considered as reflecting a more recent development of the former.

<sup>24</sup> As odd as it may sound, the hyper-literal reading of the text pointed out by Barc 2007; 2012, 30-2, as crucial in the exegetical practice of *AJ*'s authors is the main correlate of this. The whole exegetical activity of an allegorist such as Origen clearly testifies to such interconnection.

<sup>25</sup> Or as Denzey Lewis 2013, 52, puts it, hinting at the philosophical and exegetical debate which accounts for such positions and summarizing *AJ*'s solution: "The authors of the *ApJn* and *Orig. Wld* adapted the *prima providentia* of the Middle Platonism to a hypostasized divine Pronoia in order to reinterpret the events in sacred history where one could question the opacity of divine intent [...]. These authors likely responded to other interpreters of Biblical history who used the story of Genesis to discount both the inherent goodness and divinity of humankind as well as, ultimately, the beneficent and (*sic!*) 'providence' of God. The Valentinian teacher Ptolemy made this point explicitly [in ]his *Letter to Flora*: people who assign creation to an evil being, he asserted, are unintelligent and do not recognize the creator's providence (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33.3.6). According to Hippolytus, the so-called Naassenes, too, responded to unknown opponents when they averred that no one — not even the players in the theater — spoke or acted without the guidance of providence (*Ref.* 5.9.7). These authors offered in place of 'cosmic pessimism' an understanding of sacred history in which 'evil' [...] only set the stage for higher Providence to intervene and awaken humans from their enslavement."

One last point: I wonder whether Philo's mention of *πολύθεοι δόξαι* ("polytheistic opinions") in *Exsecr.* 162 actually relates to some sort of brutal and "heterodox" adjustment of Yahwism into a stratified (Middle-) Platonic theological scheme, where YHWH, the God of Israel, takes the role of the second God or Demiurge, father of the astral gods and the visible world (cf. the exegesis of Isa 6 proposed by an anonymous Hebrew savant and Jesus follower as recorded in Origen, *Princ.* 1.3.4 and 4.3.14, with Numenius, *fr.* 13 Des Places, and Calcidius, *In Tim.* 103.1-9, 212.21–213.1 Waszink).<sup>26</sup> If this were the case, it might be not far wrong to argue for such polemical reference to "polytheistic opinions" as a historical, albeit indirect, trace of that "curious turbulent eddy in the broad stream of Jewish Platonizing thought," whose existence was argued for by M. Waldstein on the basis, among others, of *AJ's* theology.<sup>27</sup> Philo's "orthodox" theory of the Powers and Names of the Supreme Being (see *Leg.* 3.79-82) could be assumed to represent a more balanced and moderate position, and would thus constitute the basic common frame of Philo's, his opponents' and *AJ's* world-view.<sup>28</sup>

#### LADY WISDOM, THE ANOINTING OF THE SON AND THE TWO SPIRITS, OR: HOW TO READ PHILO ONE CENTURY LATER?

Before I try to draw any conclusions, a final comparison with other passages by "the Jewish philosopher" must be made about such a common frame of reference.

<sup>26</sup> Texts and commentary in Quispel 2000a, 152-6.

<sup>27</sup> Waldstein 1997, 178-87 (quotation 178). Cf. also Pearson 1991, 457-61. 466, and Drecoll's insightful discussion of the "quick shift theory" (2013, 151-61).

<sup>28</sup> Several useful remarks in Dillon 2010, 198-203. 206-7. 411, and in Barker 1992, 114-32, who sees in Philo's correspondence of God and El and the Logos and El's son YHWH an intellectual effort "to express in alien terms the essence of his own religion, with all its angelic beings and elaborate temple symbolism" (131). It goes without saying that I employ the adjectives "orthodox," "heterodox," brutal, balanced and moderate from Philo's own point of view and not as "objective" and heuristically valuable categories. On ancient Judaism as a less strictly "monotheistic" religious system than is usually assumed, see the model advocated by Schäfer 2002, with the historical data discussed by Friedheim 2006; Merlo 2009, 38-41. 43-8. 82. 88. 111-21, and Litwa 2011, 231-45. I have deliberately avoided any reference to later Jewish mystical literature: see the *caveats* and the reservations expressed by Herrmann 2013 about adducing such texts as evidence for a supposed pre-Christian "Jewish Binitarianism."

The motif of the birth and anointing of the Son in *AJ* has its literary and traditio-historical background in the idea that the *Logos* is begotten by a father (God) and a mother (Wisdom), as attested in Alexandrian Wisdom speculations from Philo to Origen (cf. *AJ* 7.1-10, with Philo, *Fug.* 109–110, and Origen, *Princ.* 1.2.9, and *Comm. Jo.* 1.191-195). Once again, the passage deserves to be quoted in full:

*Fug.* 109–110

For Moses says (Lev 21:11) that he (*scil.* the divine *Logos*) cannot be defiled neither in respect of his father, that is, the mind, nor his mother, that is, the external sense; because, I imagine, he has received imperishable and wholly pure parents, God being his father, who is also the father of all things, and wisdom being his mother, by means of whom the universe arrived at creation; and also because he is anointed with oil, by which I mean that the principal part of him is illuminated with a light like the beams of the sun, so as to be thought worthy to be clothed with garments. (trans. Jonge 1997, 331)<sup>29</sup>

One is tempted to add this passage to the catalogue of parallels between Philo and *AJ* listed by Z. Pleše (*Leg.* 2.1-3; *Fug.* 197–198; *Spec.* 1.13-15), as it perfectly exemplifies his argument about Philo and *AJ* deploying “the same analogies, often in similar clusters or ‘blends’.”<sup>30</sup> As Pleše writes, “an in-depth literary and philosophical comparison of Philo’s corpus and the *Apocryphon of John* remains a *desideratum*.” This task cannot be undertaken here. However, I wish to move on from the theologonical section and offer one more small

<sup>29</sup> Ούτε γὰρ ἐπὶ πατρὶ, τῷ νῶ, οὔτε ἐπὶ μητρὶ, τῇ αἰσθήσει, φησὶν αὐτὸν Μωυσῆς δύνασθαι μαινεσθαι, διότι, οἶμαι, γονέων ἀφθάρτων καὶ καθαρωτάτων ἔλαχεν, πατρὸς μὲν θεοῦ, ὃς καὶ τῶν συμπάντων ἐστὶ πατήρ, μητρὸς δὲ σοφίας, δι’ ἧς τὰ ἔλα ἦλθεν εἰς γένεσιν· καὶ διότι τὴν κεφαλὴν κέχρισται ἐλαίῳ, λέγω δὲ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν φωτὶ αὐγοειδεῖ περιλάμπεται, ὡς ἀξιοχρεως ἐνδύσασθαι τὰ ἱμάτια νομισθῆναι.

<sup>30</sup> Pleše 2012, 131 n. 23. Cf. 133: “[...] the *Apocryphon of John* is a typical product of the *Zeitgeist* and the common tendency of its literati to blur the boundaries between the discursive modes of philosophy and religion. What sets this text apart from other contemporary revelatory accounts (Platonist, Hermetic, ‘Chaldean’) is a marked predilection for the ‘hybrid’ diction of Jewish Wisdom literature and its particular amalgamation of analogical metaphors and philosophical concepts. [...] The whole semantic repertoire informing the Savior’s discourse of procession has already been deployed, often in the same clusters or ‘blends’, in Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Philo of Alexandria, as we have seen, also operates within the same conceptual and linguistic framework.”

contribution to such an enterprise by focusing on a passage in *AJ* which develops the theory of the two Spirits in terms that specifically evoke Philo's language:<sup>31</sup>

Philo, *QE* 1.23 (in Exod 12:23c)

But as for the deeper meaning, this must be said. Into every soul at its very birth there enter two powers, the salutary and the destructive. If the salutary one is victorious and prevails, the opposite one is too weak to see. And if the latter prevails, no profit at all or little is obtained from the salutary one. [...] But the nation is a mixture of both (these powers), from which the heavens and the entire world as a whole have received this mixture. Now, sometimes the evil becomes greater in this mixture, and hence (all creatures) live in torment, harm, ignominy, contention, battle and bodily illness together with all the other things in human life, as in the whole world, so in man. And this mixture is in both the wicked man and the wise man, but not in the same way. For the souls of foolish men have the unbounded and destructive rather than the powerful and salutary (power), and it is full of misery when it dwells with earthly creatures. But the prudent and noble (soul) rather receives the powerful and salutary (power) and, on the contrary, possesses in itself good fortune and happiness, being carried around with the heaven because of kinship with it. (trans. Marcus 1961, 32-34)<sup>32</sup>

NHC III,1 23,15-18

15. For the power enters into every man, for without it they would not be able to stand. 16. After the man is born, then the Spirit of Life is brought to the counterfeit Spirits. 17. Now, when the Spirit of Life comes, since it is strong, it will strengthen the soul, which is the power, and the soul will not be led astray into evil. 18. The one into whom the counterfeit Spirit enters will be drawn by him and will be led astray.

BG 8502,2 23,15-18

15. For the power enters into every man, for without it they would not be able to stand. 16. And after the soul is born, then the Spirit of Life is brought to it. 17. Thus, when this strong Spirit of Life has come, it will strengthen the power, namely, the soul, and the soul will not go astray into evil. 18. But those into whom the counterfeit Spirit enters will be drawn by him and will be led astray.

NHC II,1 23,15-18

15. For the power will descend on every man, for without it no one can stand. 16. And after they are born, then, when the Spirit of Life increases, 17. the power will

<sup>31</sup> Pleše 2012, 131 n. 23. See, however, the comparative analysis by Pearson (1984b, 322-39) on Philo's and *AJ*'s anthropologies, and some additional useful remarks by Simon (1964<sup>2</sup>, 340-50) and Quispel (2000a, 150-6).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. the Latin translation of the Armenian text, itself a translation from the Greek (Terian 1992, 100-2): *Verum ad mentem illud dicendum est. In cunctas animas in ipsa nativitate advenientes ingrediuntur duae simul virtutes, salutifera et damnifica. Si prima superans obtineat, debilis redditur contraria ad aliquid sibi providendum; sin autem secunda obtineat, nihil, vel exiguum omnino lucrum a salutifera acquiritur. [...] Verum genus temperatum est ex ambobus, a quibus et caelum universusque mundus hoc sumpserunt temperamentum. Quando vero redundet mixtio mali, hinc vivitur afflictionibus, damnis, vilitate (vel contemptu), rixa, bellis, infirmitate corporis,*

go and strengthen that soul, and nothing will lead it astray in works of evil. 18. But those on whom the counterfeit Spirit descends will be drawn by him and will be led astray.

I leave aside the many exegetical issues these few lines in *AJ* pose, first of all, their translation and the evaluation of the changes they underwent in the course of the textual transmission.<sup>33</sup> The motif of the Two Spirits permeating these four passages is not exclusive to *AJ* and Philo, but has enjoyed a lasting fortune in Jewish and early Christian literature, the *loci classici* being *Community Rule* 3.13–4.26 and *Herm. Mand.* 11.<sup>34</sup> However, I wish to focus on two formal features that link together *QE* and *AJ*, despite the obvious differences in the language and ideology. The corresponding temporal notation “at its very birth (Terian 1992, 100: *in ipsa nativitate*)” // “after the soul is / men are born” serves as a common introduction to the theme; in both texts the dialectic between the two Spirits is deployed as a rhetoric of force. I think it is at least worth asking whether these links may be counted among the “clusters or blends” shared by Philo and *AJ*, as argued by Pleše and Pearson.

The occurrence of such clusters does not necessarily imply that the author(s) of *AJ* consulted a collection of Philo’s works and systematically selected passages from it. It is possible that all the features and details in *AJ* which can with a certain degree of confidence be traced back to Philo’s works were “already imprinted in the ‘social memory’ of early Christians when” *AJ* was composed and then reworked.<sup>35</sup>

*simul autem caeterisque adversitatibus humanarum rerum, sicut in mundo universo, sic et in homine. Haec itaque mixtura communis est improbo, et sapienti, sed non simili (vel eodem) modo: quoniam insipientis anima plus habet de immensa illa damnifica quam de potente salutifera, nam misere cohabitatrix (vel congenita) fuit cum terrestribus: at modestus plus admittens de potente et salutifera, contra quoque possidet in se fortunam ac felicitatem, circumlatus una cum caelo iuxta ad illud cognationem.*

<sup>33</sup> For the translation and interpretation of this passage, see the solutions and critical observations offered by King 2006, 70-1; Layton 2007, 48; Barc 2012, 154-5 and 311.

<sup>34</sup> Short commentary in Simon 1983, 348-50.

<sup>35</sup> I am partly quoting and partly paraphrasing Dunderberg 2013, 93.

Insofar, they do help us to locate *AJ*'s redaction(s) in a social and cultural milieu where Philo's treatises were transmitted, read, and discussed, and the questions he addressed, as well as the solutions he proposed, right down to the formulations he used, were constantly re-actualized and framed into a new historical and literary scenario marked by ongoing religious change.<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The author of *AJ* "recalls," records and rewrites the birth of his group as taking place after a dispute between two Jews going up to the Temple, one a follower of Jesus, the other a Pharisee. In the course of time, as the process of transmission of the work went on, no redactor felt the need substantially to change or to add anything to this narrative frame. At first sight, the accusation the Pharisee levels at John seems to be nothing else but a mere literary cliché widely documented in Jewish and "Christian" writings. A closer reading of some passages in Philo's writings has shown that such accusations were firmly rooted in the life of the Jewish community in Alexandria. Moreover, traces of the reception of "the Jewish philosopher" can be easily detected in *AJ* and point to his influence on Christian writers. They corroborate at the same time the hypothesis of some kind of "genetic" link between social and intellectual ferments agitating in the Jewish community of Alexandria in the first century and exegetical and cultural practices that were promoted later by the emerging Jesus movement.<sup>37</sup>

What was at stake and what the author(s) and possibly the group behind *AJ* always seem to have been reflecting upon by preserving the narrative frame of this revelation of Jesus, is the very same relation Alexandrian Jews had with the holy places, religious practices and sacred writings they had inherited. Or in other words, how they tried

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Luisier 2006, 542-8 and 552-5 on *Trim. Prot.*

<sup>37</sup> See already Pearson 1986a, 148-51, and Quispel 2000a, 150-6; 2000b, 244-52. By "genetic" link I do not obviously mean a linear "trajectory" leading necessarily from Philo's opponents to *AJ*'s author(s). So rightly Pearson 1990, 182, and more generally Herrmann 2013, 86-7, and Drecoll 2013, 161-3. See also the next note.



to create a specific identity and profile “in the by now mature perspective of a Hellenistic or Jewish-Hellenistic religiosity;”<sup>38</sup> that is, as argued by B. Pearson, how to remain faithful to their ancestral, but still fluid religious tradition in a new and up-to-date way, capable of bearing changes, challenges and pressures of their social and cultural environment. I think it is better to avoid such words as “bankruptcy,” “protest,” “revolt,” or “revolution,” since in those days there was no official or “true” Judaism to fight and subvert, only competing views on how to define oneself and live as a *Ioudaios*. Furthermore, “Jewish” and “Christian” should not be conceived of as mutually exclusive categories or as rigid and static labels functioning as separate pieces in a redactional jigsaw puzzle.<sup>39</sup> Rather, *AJ* must have originated “in a grey area where exact and well defined borders between clearly demarcated Jewish and clearly demarcated Christian people did not exist.”<sup>40</sup>

Spreading amongst the better educated “Hellenized” Jews in Alexandria,<sup>41</sup> and aiming at meeting their intellectual needs and standards, certain groups within the Jesus movement might actually seen this as

a chance to get out of the aporia with which Judaism had long been struggling, by asserting a new God in relation to old religious traditions, or, in mythological terms, a God unknown to the ignorant and abusing cosmic powers, among whom could possibly also be numbered the old Jewish God.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Tripaldi 2011, 91 n. 38: “nella prospettiva ormai matura di una religiosità ellenistica o giudaico-ellenistica,” following Pesce 2001, 59-65. For an overview of Egyptian Jewry’s widely diverging attitudes towards the Temple and priesthood, the synagogue, sacrifices, prayers and Torah, see now Leonhardt-Balzer 2012; Hacham 2012; Tuval 2012. No wonder that such attitudes often match that of early Christian groups on the Temple cult as examined by Frey 2012, 449-88.

<sup>39</sup> Pearson 1984a, 478-80; 1986b, 34-5; 1990, 26-8; 2007a, 131-3; similarly, Logan 2012, 139, and Meyer 2013, 230. Cf. Schimanowski 2006, 117-39, and the chapter on Philo in Van Nuffelen 2011, 200-16, aptly entitled “Philo of Alexandria. Challenging Graeco-Roman culture.” Marksches 2013, 21-4, rightly advocates a less dualistic “Kern und Schale”-oriented model for describing and interpreting cultural interactions between “Gnostic” groups and their environment.

<sup>40</sup> Drecoll 2013, 162.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. already Van den Broek 1990, 106-8.

<sup>42</sup> Magris 2011, 84: “una possibilità per uscire dall’aporia nella quale il giudaismo andava da tempo dibattendosi affermando un Dio nuovo rispetto alla tradizione religiosa precedente, o in termini mitologici un Dio sconosciuto alle potenze

As increasing numbers of non-Jewish adherents were attracted with the sole request to worship the one God without keeping to a strict observance of Torah, the formation of religious groups interpreting Jewish conceptions according to world-views, values and practices of non-Jewish cultures, must have rapidly intensified within the Jewish community of Alexandria. As a result, Jewish elements in Jesus' message that were thought to be irrelevant disappeared, thereby relocating the founder's teachings within the religious systems of the "Gentiles."<sup>43</sup> *AJ*'s author(s) and possibly the group around it belong to this context as an integral part of that religion which Mauro Pesce calls Christianity in its own right. Just as Pesce posits it for Justin Martyr, *AJ*'s author(s) reoriented two separate traditions such as are the Biblical prophetic and the Greek philosophical one (and, in *AJ*'s case, we might add, Wisdom and non canonical Jewish traditions, as well as Egyptian and Greek mythologies [D.T.]) and attempted to "reify their identity as 'Christians'" (read: 'the unshakable race' in *AJ* [D.T.]), given that they "live in a *multicultural milieu*." They both aim at helping "Christians" to assimilate to Graeco-Roman culture without losing "their own acknowledged distinctiveness," and at preventing them from being absorbed into Jewish praxis. They need therefore "to reinterpret Jewish and Christian traditions (and Egyptian and Greek mythology [D.T.]) in a philosophical sense," demonstrating at the same time that "Jewish tradition reinterpreted in a Christian way is far superior to Graeco-Roman tradition."<sup>44</sup> *AJ*'s

cosmiche ignoranti e prevaricatrici fra le quali anche il vecchio Dio ebraico poteva eventualmente essere annoverato," summarizing his overall picture, 67-83. On allegory as a way of bringing older traditions into new historical and religious orbits, see Wright III 2015, 280-3.

<sup>43</sup> I am paraphrasing and adapting Pesce 2011, 215-6.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Pesce 2011, 208: Justin Martyr "a) opera un 'riorientamento' di tradizioni separate come sono quella giudaica profetica e quella filosofica greca e b) reifica la sua identità di 'cristiano,' stante che vive in un *multicultural milieu*. Vuole fare assorbire i cristiani nella cultura greco-romana con una propria differenza riconosciuta e vuole nello stesso tempo impedire l'assorbimento dei cristiani all'interno della cultura giudaica. Da un lato, deve interpretare in senso filosofico la tradizione giudaica e quella cristiana. Dall'altro, deve mostrare che la tradizione giudaica interpretata cristianamente è superiore a quella greco-romana." See also Pleše 2012, 135, focusing specifically on *AJ*: "In short, all master narratives of Greek and Jewish cultures are flawed, incomplete, and in need of a thorough revision. This kind of transformative integration of Greek philosophy and Jewish scriptural and exegetical traditions can best be

literary form, the secret revelation dialogue between the divine teacher and the disciple, witnesses to these demands and the resulting attempt to meet them; as J. Assmann wrote almost a decade ago,

die Fiktion göttlicher Verfasserschaft antwortet auf das Problem, die rapiden und grundlegenden Wandlungen religiöser Erkenntnis, Erfahrung und Sensibilität und das daraus erwachsende Bedürfnis nach religiösem Sinn in Einklang zu bringen mit der Überzeugung, dass nur das im Medium der rituellen Schriftlichkeit seit Urzeiten (*i.e.* in *AJ* obviously to be understood as Ur<sprungs>zeiten [D.T.]) Gespeicherte einen Anspruch auf Wahrheit erheben darf. Wahrheit heißt natürlich in diesem Fall kultische, sakramentale Wirksamkeit, 'verklärende,' zu-einem-Lichtgeistmachende (*i.e.* for *AJ*, transforming human beings into descendants of Seth / Christs / members of the immovable race / seed and images of the Perfect Man [D.T.])<sup>45</sup> erleuchtende Kraft. Das Sinnbedürfnis verlangt den modernen Text. [...] Das Wahrheits- oder Wirksamkeitsbedürfnis verlangt den heiligen Text, bei dem es nicht auf menschliches Verstehen, sondern göttliches Angesprochenwerden ankommt.<sup>46</sup>

This conclusion obviously is not intended as the final answer to the question of the essence and origin of Gnosticism, if ever such an answer can be offered.<sup>47</sup> It just wants to be a fair and scientifically falsifiable attempt at reconstructing the relationship between "Jews" and Jesus' followers — no matter if these were Jews or not — in 2nd and 3rd century Alexandria, as an historian imagines it by looking through the lens of *AJ*'s rhetoric, trying to catch a glimpse of it in spite of the work's stereotyping and distorting effect.

explained by acculturative yet polemical tendencies within the second-century Christianity." That is exactly what annoyed Porphyry when he heard of "Gnostic" criticism of Plato's metaphysics (*Vit. Plot.* 16.5-9). In its outlines, the reconstruction proposal by Smith II 2004, 232-52, is largely comparable and compatible with mine, notwithstanding his excessive reliance on heresiological reports, the persistent reification of categories such as Judaism, Christianity, Jewish Christianity, Gnosticism, and my personal mistrust of terms and expressions such as the alienation and compromising of "traditional Jewish (and Christian) verities" (248).

<sup>45</sup> See Williams 1985, 122-40. 172-9. 190-4; Sevrin 1986, 14-47. 276-80; Logan 1996, 31-2.

<sup>46</sup> Assmann 2004, 162.

<sup>47</sup> I share the skepticism of King 2006, 5-19. 218-36; Brakke 2010, 1-28; Magris 2011, 13-25.

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