



The Construction and Subversion of Patriarchal Perfection: Abraham and Exemplarity in Philo, Josephus, and the *Testament of Abraham**

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Abstract

In dialogue with recent research on the Roman discourse of exemplarity, this article explores representations of Abraham in selected sources from the first and early second centuries C.E. In the first part of the article, references to the patriarch in the writings of Philo and Josephus are considered in light of the transformation of Greek ideas about *exempla* by Roman authors like Polybius, Livy, and Valerius Maximus. In the second part, the inversion of Abraham's exemplarity in the *Testament of Abraham* is investigated in relation to the treatment of famous figures in the *Apocolocyntosis* and in Juvenal's 10th *Satire*. By juxtaposing the use of *exempla* in contemporaneous Roman and Jewish writings, the article explores their parallel reflections on the power of the past and shows how Romans and Jews alike appropriated of elements of Greek culture for the articulation of new expressions of local pride, ethnic specificity, and cultural resistance.

Keywords

exempla, Philo of Alexandria, Flavius Josephus, *Testament of Abraham*, Hellenization, Judaism and Roman culture

*) This article is dedicated to Hindy Najman, as a small token of all that I have learned from our conversations. For the idea for this inquiry, I am also indebted to discussions with Cam Grey. An earlier version was presented in the Hellenistic Judaism section of the SBL Annual Meeting in November 2007. The present form benefited much from the questions raised in that forum, particularly by Erich Gruen and Tessa Rajak, as well as from suggestions made by Eibert Tigchelaar and anonymous readers at *JSJ*. Thanks also to Benjamin Fleming and Michael Pregill for further feedback. This research was supported by the Dalck and Rose Feith Family Fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies.

In the modern West, the assumption of the exemplarity of the biblical past has perhaps become so naturalized that it is almost invisible. It is often taken for granted, for instance, that a certain group of ancient Israelite writings bears the status of "Scripture," and that Jews and Christians can cull from them lessons about their own lives and times. It is similarly presumed, even apart from explanation, that Israel's ancestors are worthy of imitation and emulation.¹ Accordingly, the Abraham of modern memory is not only the Abraham of Genesis; he is not only a man who lied that his wife was his sister (Gen 12:10-20; 20:2-5), sired a son with her maidservant (16:1-4), and expelled that child when his wife protested (16:5-6). He is rather and primarily a patriarch—the progenitor of multiple religions, the embodiment of monotheism, and a paragon of faith and righteousness.²

In this article, I would like to reflect on what I see as an interesting moment in the prehistory of the naturalization of this notion. James Kugel

¹ Perhaps most famous among modern reflections on Abraham's exemplarity is Søren Kierkegaard's 1843 *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941). Recent examples include Lenn Goodman, *God of Abraham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Howard J. Curzer, "Abraham, the Faithless Moral Superhero," *Philosophy and Literature* 31 (2007): 344-61. In contemporary North American culture, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim beliefs in the exemplarity of Abraham/Ibrahim are often cited as a basis for interfaith dialogue; e.g., Bradford E. Hinze and Irfan A. Omar, eds., *Heirs of Abraham: The Future of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Relations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005). The patriarch has also become a focus for critiques of the Western tradition; e.g., Carol L. Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); cf. Jon D. Levenson, "Abusing Abraham: Traditions, Religious Histories, and Modern Misinterpretations," *Judaism* 47 (1998): 259-77.

² On the process by which Abraham was thus interpreted, see esp. Jon D. Levenson, "The Conversion of Abraham to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman; JSJSup 83; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 3-40. On Abraham in the New Testament and premodern Christian literature, also Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, *Paul, Monotheism and the People of God: The Significance of Abraham Traditions for Early Judaism and Christianity* (JSNTSup 273; London: T&T Clark, 2004); Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville: Westminster, 1991); Jerome Baschet, "Medieval Abraham: Between Fleshly Patriarch and Divine Father," *Modern Language Notes* 108 (1993): 738-58. For medieval Islamic traditions, see Reuven Firestone, "Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice (*al-dhabih* [Qur'an 37:99-113]): Issues in Qur'anic Exegesis," *JSS* 89 (1989): 95-131; idem, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); Shosh Ben-Ari, "The Stories about Abraham in Islam: A Geographical Approach," *Arabica* 54 (2007): 526-53.

has suggested that the Second Temple period was marked by a progressively reified nostalgia, expressed through the elevation and exegesis of the scriptures that describe the patriarchal and pre-exilic past.³ Most of the surviving literature of Second Temple Judaism is framed as reflection on this past, whether through interpretation of the writings that increasingly came to embody it, or through the production of new works, penned in the names of sages of old.⁴ For this, arguably, the assumption of exemplarity proved pivotal. In Second Temple Jewish sources, stories about Israel's ancestors are not merely records that chronicle past events. Rather, patriarchs become paradigms.⁵

In research on Hellenistic Judaism, in particular, this phenomenon has often been explained as an apologetic impulse—the construction of Jewish culture-heroes to rival Greek ones and/or the consolidation of heritage in the face of Hellenism.⁶ In this article, I would like to approach the issue from a slightly different direction. In dialogue with recent work on

³ James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4-14.

⁴ E.g., Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren, eds., *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997); Erich Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), esp. 246-91; Hindy Najman, "How Should We Contextualize Pseudepigrapha? Imitation and Emulation in 4Ezra," in *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez* (ed. Anthony Hilhorst et al.; JSJSup 122; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 529-36; Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Pseudepigraphy, Authorship and the Reception of 'the Bible' in Late Antiquity," in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11-13 October 2006* (ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 467-90.

⁵ Kugel, for instances, points to the view, common among early Jewish and Christian exegetes, that biblical figures could be "held up as models of conduct, their stories regarded as a guide given to later human beings for the leading of their own lives"; *Traditions of the Bible*, 16.

⁶ Examples that pertain to Abraham include Samuel Sandmel, "Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature, Part II," *HUCA* 26 (1955): 151-332, esp. 176-77, 197, 311; Louis H. Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher in Josephus," *TAPA* 99 (1968): 143-56; idem, "Hellenizations in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*: The Portrait of Abraham," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohai Hata; Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1987), 133-53; idem, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 223-89; Günter Mayer, "Aspekte des Abrahambildes in der hellenistisch-jüdischen Literatur," *EvT* 32 (1972): 118-27; Thomas W. Franxman, *Genesis and the "Jewish Antiquities" of Flavius Josephus* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979), 116-69; Paul Spilsbury, *The Image of the Jew in Flavius Josephus' Paraphrase of the Bible* (TSAJ 69; Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), 55-74.

the Roman discourse of exemplarity, I will ask how Hellenistic ideas about *exempla* were absorbed, reapplied, and subverted *both* by Romans *and* by Jews, particularly in the wake of Roman expansion in the centuries around the turn of the Common Era.

As my focus, I will consider three portraits of the patriarch Abraham, who is arguably the exemplary exemplar of Jewish culture.⁷ I will begin with the works of Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus, two Jews writing in Greek in the first century C.E. A consideration of the place of *exempla* in Hellenistic education and Roman historiography will hopefully aid us in shedding a fresh perspective on the much-discussed topic of their treatments of Abraham. Comparison with contemporaneous Roman writings might then help us to make some sense of what is otherwise a puzzling case of the subversion of patriarchal perfection, namely, the *Testament of Abraham*.

Of course, Abraham is treated as exemplary already in earlier Jewish sources.⁸ In choosing to focus on Philo, Josephus, and the *Testament of Abraham*, however, I have been guided by a concern for situating first- and early second-century sources in relation to concurrent trends in Roman culture. My overarching aim, in other words, is to investigate whether and how these specific articulations of Abraham's exemplarity relate to their particular cultural and historical contexts. In the period of the late Repub-

⁷ Samuel Sandmel, for instance, notes that "[t]he patriarch serves authors of non-canonical literature and limited parts of the New Testament (Synoptic Gospels, Paul, and James) as the exemplar of that which the writer is arguing for. To see what the writer makes of Abraham is often to see most clearly what the writer is trying to say"; "Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature, Part I," *HUCA* 25 (1954): 237. On Moses as an exemplary figure see Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (JSJSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

⁸ For pentateuchal precedents, see Exod 2:24; 3:6, 15-16; 4:5; 6:3, 8; 32:13; 33:1; Lev 26:42; Num 32:11; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-50* (trans. J. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 24-28, 41-54. For Second Temple Jewish traditions see sources cited above as well as Ben Zion Wacholder, "Pseudo-Eupolemus' Two Greek Fragments on Abraham," *HUCA* 34 (1963): 83-113; George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Abraham the Convert: A Jewish Tradition and Its Use by the Apostle Paul," in *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible*, 151-75; Craig A. Evans, "Abraham in the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Man of Faith and Failure," in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation* (ed. Peter W. Flint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 149-58; Adolfo D. Roitman, "The Traditions about Abraham's Early Life in the Book of Judith (5:6-9)," in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone* (ed. Esther G. Chazon et al.; JSJSup 89; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 73-87; Bradley C. Gregory, "Abraham as the Jewish Ideal: Exegetical Traditions in Sirach 44:19-21," *CBQ* 70 (2008): 66-81.

lic and early Empire, Roman indebtedness to and anxiety about Greek culture were shaped by political and social factors that differ from those that shaped Jewish attitudes towards the same shared cultural context and heritage.⁹ Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of the two may help us to move beyond the all-too-common appeals to an undifferentiated “Greco-Roman” culture in research on early Judaism, contributing to more integrative perspectives on the dynamics of Hellenization and to more nuanced assessments of its various effects on Jewish literary production.¹⁰ Towards this goal, the present article thus uses exemplarity as a “test-case” for experimenting with the contextualization of first- and second-century Jewish sources in triangulation with Hellenistic culture and its reception by Romans.

1. Exemplarity and *Paideia*

Already in ancient Greek literature, we find an understanding of stories about the past as *exempla* to be used in the pedagogical inculcation of virtue. In this, the writings of Homer held a place perhaps not dissimilar to that of the Torah/Pentateuch in Second Temple Judaism. From the recitation and memorization of Homeric verses, it was hoped that students would be inspired toward imitation.¹¹ Despite the protestations of Plato and other philosophers, this ethicizing interpretation of Homer shaped his

⁹ On Roman attitudes towards Greeks and Hellenistic culture see the essays on “Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance” in *HSCP* 97 (1995), esp. Albert Henrichs, “Graecia Capta: Roman Views of Greek Culture” (pp. 243-61); and on the social and political context, Kathryn Lomas, “The Greeks in the West and the Hellenization of Italy,” in *The Greek World* (ed. Anton Powell; London: Routledge, 1995), 347-67.

¹⁰ See further Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Erich S. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Paul Cartledge, Peter Garnsey, and Erich S. Gruen, eds., *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History and Historiography* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 26; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); J. Edmondson, S. Mason, and J. Rives, eds., *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹ E.g., Lycurgus, *Against Leocrates* 102: “The poets, depicting life itself, select the noblest actions and so, through argument and demonstration, convert men’s hearts... These are the lines, gentlemen, to which your forefathers listened and such are the deeds which they emulated”; English translation from J. O. Burt, ed. and trans., *Minor Attic Orators*, vol. 2, *Lycurgus, Dinarchus, Demades, Hyperides* (LCL 395; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

reception into the Hellenistic age and beyond.¹² Those who protested, moreover, tended to critique the mythic content rather than the pedagogical and persuasive power of the method.¹³ Hence, orators like Isocrates simply drew their *exempla* from other sources, often choosing history over myth.¹⁴ Accordingly, this notion of the past—as an endlessly productive source for ethical guidance—appears to have shaped, not just childhood education, rhetorical training, and Homeric interpretation, but also the literary genres of history and biography. What these diverse discourses shared, arguably, was the practice of teaching by example and the understanding of the past as a source for paradigms.

The use of *exempla* was similarly common in the Roman education and oratory of the late Republic and early Empire.¹⁵ In early Roman historiography, appeals to *exempla* are comparably less frequent and less explicit.¹⁶

¹² Perhaps most famous are Plato's comments in books II, III, and X of the *Republic*. See further Henri-I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (trans. George Lamb; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), esp. 46-47, 71-72, 162-64; J. Tate, "'Imitation' in Plato's Republic," *CQ* 22 (1928): 16-23; Stephen Halliwell, "The Subjection of Muthos to Logos: Plato's Citations of the Poets," *CQ* 50 (2000): 94-112; Clive Skidmore, *Practical Ethics for Roman Gentlemen: The Work of Valerius Maximus* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), 3-12.

¹³ Different categories of *exempla* are distinguished already by Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.20.2. For a handy summary of passages pertaining to *exempla* in Greek and Roman oratory, see "Appendix A" in Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11 in Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988).

¹⁴ Skidmore, *Practical Ethics*, 7-9. That Isocrates affirms the importance of *exempla* is clear from his comments in *Antidosis* 277: "he will select from all the actions of men which bear upon his subject those cases (ὑπόθεσιν) which are the most illustrious and the most edifying, and habituating himself to contemplate and appraise them (συνεθιζόμενος θεωρεῖν καὶ δοκιμάζειν), he will feel their influence not only in the preparation of a given discourse but in all the actions of his life"; English translation from George Norlin, ed. and trans., *Isocrates*, vol. 2 (LCL 229; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹⁵ Marrou, *History of Education*, 272, 285; Skidmore, *Practical Ethics*, 15-20; Teresa J. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 144-49. For the appeal to *exempla* in the public sphere, see Irene Oppermann, *Zur Funktion historischer Beispiele in Ciceros Briefen* (Münich: Saur, 2000); Franz Bücher, *Verargumentierte Geschichte: Exempla Romana im politischen Diskurs der späten römischen Republik* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2006).

¹⁶ Roger Blockley makes this point when considering the increased use of *exempla* by later historians; "Ammianus Marcellinus' Use of Exempla," *Florilegium* 13 (1994): 53-64 at 54. That the writings of earlier historians were nonetheless shaped by a broader discourse of exemplarity, however, is richly illustrated in Matthew B. Roller, "Exemplarity in Roman Culture: The Cases of Horatius Cocles and Cloelia," *CP* 99 (2004): 1-56, with particular

Nevertheless, it seems that historians often wrote with the self-conscious aim of providing paradigms for proper and improper action, presuming an understanding of the past as a source for models to emulate and avoid. Livy (ca. 59 B.C.E.-17 C.E.), for instance, thus prefaces his *History of Rome* with the following statement:

For in the study of history it is especially improving and beneficial to contemplate examples of every kind of behavior set out on a clear monument (*omnis te exempli documenta in illustri posita monumento*). From it you can extract for yourself and your commonwealth both what is worthy of imitation (*quod imitere*) and what you should avoid because it is rotten from start to finish. (Livy, *History of Rome, praef.* 10, trans. Chaplin)¹⁷

Likewise, Polybius (ca. 200-118 B.C.E.) insists that “inasmuch as it is more possible to emulate and to imitate (ζηλωσαι καὶ μιμήσασθαι) living men than lifeless buildings, so much more important for the improvement (ἐπανόρθωσιν) of a reader is it to learn about the former” (*Histories* X 21).¹⁸

This is perhaps not surprising inasmuch as the use of *exempla* in Roman education and oratory seems to have been distinguished from its Greek precedents by a preference for figures and events from the historical past.¹⁹ For our purposes, it is also notable that Roman appeals to *exempla* privileged Roman heroes over Greek ones, particularly as models for *virtus*.²⁰

reference to Polybius and Livy. With regard to Livy, Jane D. Chaplin similarly notes that, even apart from the various explicit appeals to *exempla*, “his narrative constantly depicts people scrutinizing and using historical knowledge” and “people choosing to imitate avoid what they find in history”; *Livy’s Exemplary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁷ See further Chaplin, *Livy’s Exemplary History*, 1-31.

¹⁸ Note, however, the comparison of Polybius’ approach with earlier historiographical tradition in Frank W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 32-65, esp. 49-50.

¹⁹ Marrou, *History of Education*, 251; Skidmore, *Practical Ethics*, 13-15. With regard to the reasons for this, Skidmore speculates: “Greek poetry had achieved its exalted position because for a long period it was the only form of literature from which examples could be taken. The same conditions did not apply at Rome, where Greek ideas of poetic instruction and the relatively new medium of prose historiography were introduced within a short space of time” (p. 13).

²⁰ E.g., Cicero, *De or.* III 137; Valerius Maximus I 6; II 10. One might compare the approach of Second Temple Jewish authors who similarly appealed to biblical figures, sometimes drawing explicit comparisons with ancient sages, gods, or heroes of the Greeks; on this phenomenon see esp. Arthur Droge, *Homer or Moses: Early Christian Interpretations*

Even as Roman ideas about the persuasive and pedagogical power of *exempla* were significantly shaped by the adoption of Greek language, education, and literature,²¹ the discourse of exemplarity was simultaneously used to assert a distinctively Roman identity—articulated (whether tacitly or explicitly) in terms of its superiority to the very Greek models used to promote it.

From the writings of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.), it is clear that at least some first-century Jews shared the assumptions about exemplarity inculcated by Hellenistic education. With their Roman contemporaries, they also shared the challenge of appropriating this cross-cultural discourse for culturally distinctive aims. Perhaps the most striking case is Philo's treatise *On Abraham*. That Philo here reads the Torah/Pentateuch through the lens of Hellenistic understandings of *exempla* is suggested by his explanation for its arrangement. The lawgiver Moses, he suggests, chose to begin his work with stories, rather than laws, precisely because the men described in these stories are embodiments of Torah:

Since it is necessary, to carry out our examination of the Law in regular sequence, let us postpone consideration of particular laws, which are, so to speak, "images" (ὡς ἂν εἰκόνων), and examine first those which are more general and may be called the "archetypes" (ὡς ἂν ἀρχετύπους). These are such men as lived good and blameless lives, whose virtues (ἀρετάς) stand permanently recorded in the most holy scriptures, not merely to sound their praises, but as an instruction to the reader (ὕπερ τοῦ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας προτρέψασθαι) and as an inducement to him to aspire to the same (καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ὅμοιον ζῆλον ἀγαγεῖν); for in these men we have laws endowed with life and reason, and Moses extolled them for two reasons. First, he wishes to show that the enacted ordinances are not inconsistent with Nature; and secondly that those who wish to live in accordance with laws as they stand have no difficult task, seeing that the first generation before any at all of the particular statutes was set in writing followed the unwritten law with perfect ease, so that one might say that the enacted laws are nothing else than memorials of the life of the ancients (ὑπομνήματα εἶναι βίου τῶν παλαιῶν) preserving

of the *History of Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), 12-48. John J. Collins, in fact, suggests that "a significant segment of Hellenistic Judaism . . . found its identity in the often fantastic stories of ancestral heroes who outshone the best of the Greeks, Babylonians, and Egyptians"; *From Athens to Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 63.

²¹ Marrou, *History of Education*, 242-313.

to a later generation their actual words and deeds. (Philo, *Abr.* 3-5; trans. Colson, LCL)

The specific commandments in the Torah are, in Philo's presentation, "images" of the "archetypes" set out by righteous men like Adam, Enoch, Noah, and preeminently Abraham.²² Moreover, Philo here introduces their stories by stressing that their virtues have been recorded precisely because of their value as models for readers to emulate.²³ When Philo goes on to tell the story of Abraham, then, it is as an *exemplum*—in this case, specifically of the adoption of "zeal for piety (εὐσεβείας... ζηλωτής), the highest and greatest of virtues (ἀρετῆς τῆς ἀνωτάτω καὶ μεγίστης)" (*Abr.* 60). Philo, as Alan Mendelson has shown, thus places Israel's ancestors "at the center of an education system which places a premium on imitation," and he presents Abraham, in particular, as "a model for the acquisition of virtue."²⁴

In effect, Philo's treatment of Abraham as a model for emulation is achieved through the attribution to Moses of an authorial intent comparable to that attributed to Homer in Hellenistic tradition, wherein the poet was re-imagined as a moralist who dressed didactic lessons in mythical garb.²⁵

²² For a comparison with the approach to Abraham and the Torah in *Jubilees* and the classical rabbinic literature, see Levenson, "Conversion of Abraham," 26-28.

²³ Philo makes a similar point in *Som.* 1.52: "The information that Terah left the land of Chaldea and migrated to Haran... is given us not with the object that we may learn, as from a writer of history, that certain people became emigrants, leaving the land of their ancestors... but that a lesson well suited to humankind and of great service to human life may not be neglected."

²⁴ Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1982), 62-65.

²⁵ Burton L. Mack, for instance, suggests that Philo "regarded all of Moses' writings to be crafted according to canons of rhetorical composition"; "Decoding the Scripture: Philo and the Rules of Rhetoric," in *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel* (ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn, Earle Hilgert, and Burton L. Mack; Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 84. On this view of Moses as "author," compare Aristobulus in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 8.10.4, and see discussion in Burton L. Mack, "Under the Shadow of Moses: Authorship and Authority in Hellenistic Judaism," *SBLSP* 21 (1982): 299-318; Naomi Janowitz, "The Rhetoric of Translation: Three Early Perspectives on Translating Torah," *HTR* 84 (1991): 129-40, esp. 138-39 on Philo; Najman, *Seconding Sinai*, esp. 70-107; David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 95-110 on the place of the writings of Homer in Hellenistic education and pp. 253-72 on the use of the Torah as the basis for "Hellenistic-style anti-Hellenistic curriculum" in Jewish culture.

Whether or not Philo's writings bear the marks of any specific Hellenistic rhetorical tropes such as *chreia*, his approach to Abraham is thus predicated on a view of the past that he shares both with his Hellenistic predecessors and with his Roman contemporaries.²⁶

In Philo's re-reading, Genesis is thus reconceived as a collection of *exempla*, akin to Livy's *History of Rome* or the *Memorable Words and Deeds* of Valerius Maximus—albeit surpassing them as truth surpasses mere entertainment. In *Mos.* 2.48, for instance, Philo stresses that Moses did not “make it his business to leave behind for posterity records of ancient deeds for the pleasant but un-improving entertainment that they give.”²⁷ If it is possible to glimpse here an implicit critique of non-Jewish *exempla* as mere fodder for amusement,²⁸ then we find a poignant parallel in the writings of Valerius Maximus (fl. 14-37 C.E.). Although Valerius Maximus includes non-Roman *exempla* in his *Memorable Words and Deeds*, he stresses that they are provided for the sake of entertainment; he presents Roman *exempla*, by contrast, as models with value for moral edification (e.g., I 6; II 10).²⁹

Moreover, in the writings of both Philo and Valerius Maximus, the adoption of Hellenistic modes of encountering the past is framed as an expression of native traditions. Modern scholars may contextualize the *Memorable Words and Deeds* in terms of Hellenistic understandings of exemplarity,³⁰ but Valerius Maximus represents his own literary practice of compiling *exempla* as an extension of ancient Roman tradition. In fact, he

²⁶ On the question of Philo's use of specific tropes of Hellenistic rhetoric see Mack, “Decoding,” 82-115; Thomas Conley, “Philo's Use of Topoi,” in *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria: A Commentary on the “De Gigantibus” and “Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis”* (ed. David Winston and John Dillon; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 181-88; idem, “Philo's Rhetoric: Argumentation and Style,” *ANRW* 2.21.1 (1984): 243-71; J. Cazeaux, *La Trame et la Chaîne: Ou les structures littéraires et l'exégèse dans cinq des traités de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 517-43; M. Alexandre, “Rhetorical Hermeneutics in Philo's Commentary of Scripture,” *Logo: Revista de Retórica y Teoría de la Comunicación* 1.1 (2001): 29-41.

²⁷ Mendelson, *Secular Education*, 63.

²⁸ It is unclear whether Philo here means to critique non-Jewish appeals to the non-Jewish past as well as non-Jewish and Jewish notions of the Torah as merely a collection of legends. It is intriguing, however, that his comments resonate with the Roman practice of recounting the deeds of great men and reading from collections of *exempla* at banquets (on which see Skidmore, *Practical Ethics*, 111-12).

²⁹ Skidmore, *Practical Ethics*, 89-92.

³⁰ E.g., Skidmore, *Practical Ethics*, 3-12 and *passim*.

even goes so far as to contrast the Roman use of *exempla* with Hellenistic *paideia*:

The elders used to declaim at banquets the recorded achievements of their ancestors in song to the sound of the flute, to make young men more eager to imitate them... What Greek learning, what philosophical school, what foreign courses of study could I prefer to this Roman instruction? (Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Words and Deeds* II 10, trans. Skidmore)

Scholarship on Philo has long noted a similar tension in his writings. When discussing his statements about allegory in *On the Contemplative Life*, for example, Hindy Najman observes that “[a]lthough Philo’s method of allegorical interpretation is clearly akin to the methods of contemporaneous Greek and Roman interpreters of Homer, Philo claims that the method is part of Jewish heritage.”³¹ In one sense, then, the discourse of exemplarity itself exemplifies the complex cultural dynamics of Hellenization—a shared discourse in the eastern Mediterranean world, wherein elements of Greek culture were creatively appropriated for the articulation of new expressions of local pride, ethnic specificity, and cultural resistance.

2. Exemplarity and Persuasion

In the writings of Josephus (ca. 37-100 C.E.), Abraham also emerges as a paradigmatic figure. Although explicit appeal to Abraham as *exemplum* is absent from his narrative account of the patriarch’s life in the *Judaean Antiquities* (1.148-256),³² it does arise when the patriarch is cited in other contexts (2.212-216; *J.W.* 5.375). Notably, this pattern is consistent with the genre conventions of narrative prose history in Roman literary culture of the time. Above, we considered the appeal to the past as a source for paradigms in Livy’s *History of Rome*. There too, however, explicit appeals to *exempla* are only sometimes found in the narrative accounts of historical

³¹ Najman, *Seconding Sinai*, 134; so too David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 73-126.

³² The contrast with Philo’s explicit elevation of Abraham may help to account for Sandmel’s otherwise puzzling conclusion that Abraham “is not a crucial figure to Josephus” but “simply one of many biblical characters”; “Philo’s Place,” 196. For a point-by-point refutation of Sandmel’s assessment, see Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation*, 223-26. Notably, Sandmel focuses almost wholly on Josephus’ telling of the tale of Abraham in *Ant.* 1.148-256, not taking into account the other traditions examined below.

events. Rather, as Jane Chaplin has observed, “by far the most frequent context for an *exemplum* is within a speech, either direct or indirect, where the speaker extracts meaning from history and attempts to persuade others of his interpretation.”³³ Much the same, as we shall see, can be said for Josephus’ treatment of Abraham.

Just as his Roman contemporaries painted the Roman past in a manner ripe for re-use in the present, so Josephus appears to retell the story of Abraham’s life in *Ant.* 1.148-256 so as to enhance those elements most apt for emulation by his fellow Jews. Louis Feldman has amply demonstrated how Josephus elevates Abraham and downplays events that might reflect negatively on his character.³⁴ Moreover, the characterization of Abraham in *Ant.* 1.148-256 can be correlated with statements that Josephus elsewhere makes about the Jewish people, as Paul Spilsbury has also shown; the striking parallels between them suggest that “Josephus’ Abraham is the picture or model of ‘the Jew’ he is commending to his readers.”³⁵

When retelling the life of this patriarch in *Ant.* 1.148-256 (cf. Gen 12-36), Josephus extends some elements of the characterization of Abraham found in Genesis, such as righteousness, generosity, and justice.³⁶ Yet, at the same time, he also recasts Abraham as an embodiment of Hellenistic values.³⁷ Perhaps most striking in this regard is the depiction of Abraham in the style of a Greek philosopher.³⁸ Josephus describes the patriarch, for instance, as “skillful in understanding all things (δαιμόνιος ὄν συνεῖναι τε περὶ πάντων) and persuasive to his listeners concerning that which he, without fail, inferred (καὶ πιθανὸς τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις περὶ τε ὧν εἰκάσειεν οὐ διαμαρτάνων)” (*Ant.* 1.154),³⁹ and he depicts him as arriving at the truth of monotheism through rational inference, based on the observation

³³ Chaplin, *Livy’s Exemplary History*, 3.

³⁴ For a summary of the findings of his numerous articles on the topic, see Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation*, 223-89.

³⁵ Spilsbury, *Image of the Jew*, 62.

³⁶ Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation*, 238-49.

³⁷ Feldman, “Hellenizations,” 133-53.

³⁸ Feldman, “Abraham the Greek Philosopher,” 143-56; see also Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Abraham as Chaldean Scientist and Father of the Jews: Josephus, *Ant.* 1.154-168, and the Greco-Roman Discourse about Astronomy/Astrology,” *JSJ* 35 (2004): 119-58.

³⁹ Translation here and below follows Louis H. Feldman, trans., *Judean Antiquities 1-4* (Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary 3; Leiden: Brill, 1999). All proper names, however, have here been standardized to their common English forms.

of Nature (*Ant.* 1.155-156).⁴⁰ As a result, the tale of Sarah's sojourn in the house of Pharaoh in *Ant.* 1.161-168 differs strikingly from its counterpart in Genesis (12:10-20); here, the tale is transformed into an opportunity to depict Abraham in conversation with Egyptian wise-men, teaching them astronomical and mathematical wisdom and engaging in theological debate.⁴¹

For our understanding of Josephus' relationship to the Roman discourse of exemplarity, his other references to Abraham may prove even more telling. It is in *Ant.* 2.212-216 and *J.W.* 5.375 that his understanding of the patriarch as a model for emulation is made clear. Consistent with the appeal to *exempla* in Roman historiography, these appeals to Abraham as *exemplum* occur in speeches attributed in direct speech to characters in the historical narrative, rather than in the narrative proper.

The first reference appears in the context of Josephus' account of the life of Amram, father of Moses.⁴² The reader is here told that Amram felt discouraged by Egyptian domination (*Ant.* 2.210) and prayed to God to take pity on the Hebrews because of their piety (2.111). In response, God appeared to him in a dream:⁴³

God, having pity on him [i.e., Amram] and impressed with his supplication, appeared to him in his sleep and urged him not to despair about the future and said that He held their piety in His memory (τὴν τε εὐσέβειαν αὐτῶν ἔλεγε διὰ μνήμης ἔχειν) and would always bestow a reward for it, having already granted to their ancestors to become such a multitude from a few. He recalled that Abraham, who had set out alone from Mesopotamia to Canaan, was blessed both in other respects and in the fact that his wife, who had formerly been barren, afterwards, in accordance with His will, had become fertile, and that he had fathered sons and bequeathed to Ishmael and his descendants the land of the Arabians, and Trogloditis to his descendants from Keturah, and Canaan to Isaac. (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.212-213; trans. Feldman)

⁴⁰ Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher," 146-49.

⁴¹ I discuss this passage in relation to similar traditions in the writings of Artapanus (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.17.2-9) and Pseudo-Eupolemus (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.18.1; cf. 9.18.2) in "Abraham as Chaldean Scientist," 119-58. On the retelling of this same tale in *J.W.* 5.375, see below.

⁴² On this characterization of Amram and its relationship to biblical and early Jewish traditions about the figure, see Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Moses," *JQR* 82 (1992): 285-328, esp. 294, 298-302.

⁴³ See further Robert K. Gnuse, *Dreams and Dream-Reports in the Writings of Josephus: A Traditio-Historical Approach* (AGJU 36; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 206-24.

Although this particular event has no pentateuchal counterpart, Josephus' account recalls the appeal to Abraham at the beginning of Exodus: when the Hebrews are distressed, God remembers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and this memory prompts His intervention to save their descendants (Exod 2:24-25). Elsewhere in biblical literature, we also find references to God retelling the story of Abraham in a manner oriented towards His own deeds on the patriarch's behalf, so as to inspire his descendants towards proper action (e.g., Josh 24:2-3; Isa 51:2).

Following the above-quoted narrative description of Amram's dream, the text shifts into direct speech to describe the divine appeal to Abraham's exemplarity:

“As many deeds of bravery as he performed in war with my aid,” He said (ὅσα τε πολυμῶν κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν, φησί, συμμαχίαν ἠνδραγάθησε), “you would seem to be impious (ἀσεβεῖς) if you did not hold in memory (μὴ διὰ μνήμης ἔχοντες).” (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.214; trans. Feldman)

In the mouth of God is here placed a speech lauding the courageous acts performed by Abraham in war (cf. Gen 14:14-16; *Ant.* 1.176-78) and stressing that Amram would be impious to forget the deeds of his ancestor. The subsequent narrative, moreover, suggests its persuasive power: Amram was convinced to trust in God, and he acted accordingly (esp. 2.219-223).⁴⁴

Based on his analysis of the depiction of Horatius as an exemplary figure in the histories of Polybius (VI 54-55) and Livy (II 9-10), Matthew Roller has identified four key elements in the Roman discourse of exemplarity:

1. An *action* held to consequential for the Roman community at large, and admitting of ethical categorization—that is, regarded as embodying (or conspicuously failing to embody) crucial social values;
2. An *audience* of eyewitnesses who observe this action, place it in a suitable ethical category (e.g., *virtus* or *pietas* or *gratia*), and judge it “good” or “bad” in that category;
3. *Commemoration* of the deed;
4. Finally, *imitation*: any spectator to such deed, whether primary or secondary, is enjoined to strive to replicate or to surpass the deed himself, to

⁴⁴ Feldman suggests that Amram's resultant trust in God also serves to enhance Moses' status as an exemplary figure akin to the ancestors of Rome; “Josephus' Portrait of Moses, Part III,” *JQR* 83 (1993): 301-30, esp. 302-3.

win similar renown or cultural capital—or, for negative examples, to avoid replicating an infamous deed.⁴⁵

Reading *Ant.* 2.212-216 in this context, we might note how Josephus here extends his earlier depiction of Abraham as a paragon of piety (εὐσέβεια; *Ant.* 2.196) by recounting the patriarch's brave deeds and trust in God's guidance of his life. For this, the primary audience is God, and commemoration consists of God's own memory of Abraham and His injunction for Amram too to remember.

In effect, Josephus here describes God as marshalling the memory of Abraham to provide a positive model for Amram to emulate—just as Josephus simultaneously points his readers to Amram as an example of a man from the past, in whom piety was inculcated through the imitation of a pious ancestor. Amram is elevated insofar as he is depicted as responding properly to the discourse of exemplarity and inasmuch as he replicates Abraham's piety through his own actions. In a manner resonant both with biblical tradition and with the Roman discourse of exemplarity, Josephus depicts Abraham as an *exemplum* by means of the narrative evocation of (1) his brave deeds; (2) the divine witness to them; (3) their later recounting and remembrance; and (4) the response of a listener (in this case, Amram) who hears, remembers, and imitates. Just as Amram's memory and emulation helps to bridge the gap between the patriarchal past and the reader's present, so Josephus' own act of writing constitutes an act of connecting past and present as well. Tacit is the suggestion that the pious Jews of Josephus' own time are those who remember and emulate Abraham and Amram alike.⁴⁶

The four-fold pattern outlined by Roller may also prove helpful for drawing out the meanings and ramifications of Josephus' reference to Abraham in the *Judaean War*. This reference occurs in the course of Josephus' account of the speech that he himself delivered to discourage his fellow Jews from resisting Rome (5.362-419).⁴⁷ Josephus-the-historian

⁴⁵ Roller, "Exemplarity," 4-5 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁶ Steve Mason, for instance, points to the occurrence of the term εὐσέβεια in Josephus' descriptions of both Abraham and Amram (and, later, Joshua, Boaz, David, and Solomon as well), and he stresses the broader context and significance of the term: "For Josephus, then, εὐσέβεια is a one-word summary of the whole Jewish system of religion"; *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees: A Composition-Critical Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 86.

⁴⁷ For an attempt to read the appeal to *exempla* in this speech in light of the influence of Greco-Roman rhetoric on Second Temple Jewish oratory, see Lawrence Wills, "The Form

here describes how Josephus-the-historical-character failed to persuade his compatriots by other means and thus made appeal to heroes of the past:

While Josephus was making this exhortation to the Jews, many of them jested upon him from the wall, and many reproached him... When he could not himself persuade them by such open good advice, he betook himself to the histories belonging to their own nation, and he cried out aloud, "O miserable creatures! Are you so unmindful of those who used to assist you, that you will fight by your weapons and by your hands against the Romans? When did we ever conquer any other nation by such means? When was it that God, who is the Creator of the Jewish people, did not avenge them when they had been injured?... Will not you call to mind the prodigious things done for your forefathers and this holy place, and how great enemies of yours were by Him subdued under you? I even tremble myself in declaring the works of God before your ears, that are unworthy to hear them; however, hearken to me, so that you may be informed how you fight not only against the Romans but against God Himself. (Josephus, *J.W.* 5.375; trans. Whiston)

It is in this context that Josephus recounts how he appealed to Abraham as an *exemplum* of pacifism and pious trust in God:

In old times there was one Neco, king of Egypt, who was also called Pharaoh; he came with a prodigious army of soldiers, and seized queen Sarah, the mother of our nation. What did Abraham our progenitor then do? Did he defend himself from this injurious person by war, although he had 318 captains under him and an immense army under each of them? Indeed he deemed them to be no number at all without God's assistance, and only spread out his hands towards this holy place, which you have now polluted, and reckoned upon Him as upon His invincible supporter, instead of his own army. Was not our queen sent back, without any defilement, to her husband, the very

of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *HTR* 77 (1984): 277-99, esp. 295-98; cf. C. Clifton Black, "The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon: A Response to Lawrence Wills," *HTR* 81 (1988): 1-18. In my view, it may be short-sighted only to search for cases in which the speeches imbedded in Second Temple Jewish narratives fit the ideal types prescribed in Greek and Roman rhetorical manuals, not least because of the resultant problem of determining whether and how our authors might have had direct access to such manuals. It may be more fitting (at least with respect to Josephus) to consider parallels with the historiographical representation of speeches and to explore the meaning of their commonalities with reference to the uses of the past in Roman public discourse as well as the contours of its power in the common discursive space occupied by elite Romans and Jews in first-century Rome.

next evening? And all while the king of Egypt fled away, adoring this place which you have defiled by shedding the blood of your own countrymen; and he also trembled at those visions which he saw in the night season and bestowed both silver and gold on the Hebrews, as on a people beloved by God. (Josephus, *J.W.* 5.375, trans. Whiston; cf. Gen 12:10-20)

Abraham, he reminds the rebels, responded to the theft of Sarah by placing his trust in God. Although he had “318 captains under him,” each with an “immense army,” the patriarch did not respond by military means. Rather, he faced Jerusalem and prayed. So too, argues Josephus, should the Jewish rebels lay down their arms and trust their fates in divine will and justice. The rebels, however, were not convinced: they kept fighting, and thus were Jerusalem and its Temple destroyed (*J.W.* 6.118-266).

In this passage, the twinned character of the historiographical appeal to *exempla* is highlighted by Josephus’ double role: as an historical figure who used past paradigms for the sake of persuasion and as the historian who records the speech and its reception for posterity. In the speech, the action in question is Abraham’s choice of peace over war, as already commemorated (it is implied) in “the histories belonging to their own nation.” This action is recalled by Josephus—the-historical-character for the sake of persuasion. The listeners in the narrative world of the *Judaean War* do not choose to emulate Abraham—and the results are disastrous. Here, the character of Josephus thus becomes an *exemplum* in his own right, as do those who heard his speech in Jerusalem. The former’s surrender to the Romans (3.351-354) is thus recast for the reader as an act of imitating Abraham’s pacifism.⁴⁸ The latter, by contrast, become negative *exempla* of pointless resistance, distrust in God, and refusal to remember and emulate the virtuous heroes of the Jewish past.⁴⁹ The implication is that Jewish readers should pattern themselves on Abraham and Josephus and should avoid being like the rebels—and, moreover, that Roman readers should see

⁴⁸) That Josephus presents this as the traditional and proper *Jewish* response is made explicit in key points in the speech in *J.W.* 5.362-419; see e.g. 5.390, 399-400. As Shaye J. D. Cohen has observed: “The very act of rebellion is here considered a rebellion against God . . . Josephus says that warfare by Jews is sacrilegious. Jews win victories by pleasing the Lord, not by relying on their weapons”; “Josephus, Jeremiah, and Polybius,” *History and Theory* 21 (1982): 366-81 at 376.

⁴⁹) Inasmuch as proper imitation of ancestral deeds is here equated with piety, it is notable that Josephus elsewhere emphasizes the impious acts of the Jewish rebels (e.g., *J.W.* 4.386-389; 6.285-286).

Abraham and Josephus, rather than the rebels, as representative of the Jewish people and the traditional Jewish way of life.⁵⁰

Whereas the account of Abraham's life in the first book of the *Antiquities* follows Genesis rather closely, we thus find more flexibility in the appeal to Abraham in *Ant.* 2.212-216 and *J. W.* 5.375. One notable element in these passages is the pointed appeal to the patriarch's military prowess.⁵¹ God's statements to Amram in the former stress Abraham's "deeds of bravery . . . in war," and Josephus' appeal in the latter includes an enumeration of Abraham's troops and a militarization of the tale of Sarah's sojourn in the house of Pharaoh. This, notably, fits well with the use of *exempla* in Roman historiography of roughly the same time, wherein the focus often fell on military cunning and courage in battle (e.g., Polybius XI 16).⁵²

When discussing the Roman discourse of exemplarity, Roller has suggested that it is "a discourse linking actions, audiences, values, and memory."⁵³ He further proposes that:

In and through this discourse, Romans of the late Republic and Empire encountered their past, gave it value and meaning, and deployed it in the service of the present. Through it, they also gave value and meaning to contemporary actions, in the expectation that these actions would have repercussions in the future, just as past actions were having repercussions in the present.⁵⁴

Critical to this process, in his assessment, is the extrication of a figure or event from their own historical context and their association with a specific

⁵⁰ On the audience(s) for Josephus' writings see Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees*, 57-81; idem, "'Should Any Wish to Enquire Further' (*Ant.* 1.25): The Aim and Audience of Josephus' *Judean Antiquities/Life*," in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (ed. Steve Mason; JSJSup 32; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 64-103; idem, "Of Audience and Meaning: Reading Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* in the Context of a Flavian Audience," in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (ed. Joseph Sievers and Gaia Lembi; JSJSup 104; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 71-100; Jonathan J. Price, "The Provincial Historian in Rome," in *Josephus and Jewish History*, 101-20; Spilsbury, *Image of the Jew*, 18-22.

⁵¹ For this theme in Josephus' retelling of Genesis, see Louis H. Feldman, "Abraham the General in Josephus," in *Nourished with Peace*, 43-50.

⁵² On the aptness of Polybius for comparison with Josephus, see Cohen, "Josephus, Jeremiah, and Polybius," esp. 367-86.

⁵³ Roller, "Exemplarity," 4.

⁵⁴ Roller, "Exemplarity," 50.

value imbued with trans-historical meaning—or, simply stated: “historical decontextualization in the service of ethics.”⁵⁵ Inasmuch as different authors deployed the meaning of the same figure or event for different aims at different times and with a focus on different elements, the result was the multiplication of traditions surrounding an exemplary figure or event, as variously expressed in histories, orations, funerary inscriptions, and public monuments.

As noted above, Roller investigates exemplarity discourse through a focus on the rich complex of early Roman traditions surrounding Horatius, a figure associated with bravery, self-sacrifice, and military cunning. If we read Josephus’ references to Abraham against the background of this parallel and contemporaneous case of Roman reflection on the past, we may be able to glimpse some elements missed by the usual focus, in scholarship on Josephus’ depiction of Abraham, on Josephus as biblical interpreter.⁵⁶

The parallel, for instance, might help us to make sense of the striking differences between Josephus’ two accounts of the events surrounding Sarah’s sojourn in the house of Pharaoh (cf. Gen 12:10-20). In *Ant.* 1.161-168 and *J.W.* 5.375, the details differ. What remains the same is Abraham’s status as a paragon of piety. This virtue is used, in the *Antiquities*, to enhance Abraham’s image as a wise-man akin to Greek philosophers. In the *War*, however, Abraham’s paradigmatic piety enables Josephus to put a Jewish spin on the Roman virtue of courage. Courage here is not a matter of cunning military action or a willingness to sacrifice the self. On the contrary, it is passive trust in the inevitability of God’s vindication of the Jewish people. For Jews to emulate Abraham, then, means to eschew military resistance and to place their trust wholly in God. In depicting himself as acting in imitation of this very deed, moreover, Josephus tacitly defends his own act of surrender to the Romans as akin to their own expressions of *mos maiorum* and as similarly rooted in the imitation of virtuous ancestors—even as he also promotes pacifism as an ancient and enduring element of Jewish collective identity.

⁵⁵ Roller, “Exemplarity,” 2.

⁵⁶ For a similar approach to Josephus’ portrayal of Moses, whereby resonances with Roman culture are highlighted through the juxtaposition with Plutarch’s approach to Lycurgus, see Louis H. Feldman, “Parallel Lives of Two Lawgivers,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, 209-42.

3. Exemplarity and the Problem of Perfection

Also important, for our present purposes, is the subversion of exemplarity found in some first- and second-century Roman sources. Perhaps most striking is the playful appropriation of exemplary discourse in Roman satire. In Juvenal's tenth *Satire*, for example, he redeploys the familiar sub-genre of *exempla* to stress the folly of humankind, thereby inverting the expressions of exemplarity by authors such as Valerius Maximus.⁵⁷ Other cases are more pointedly connected to the changing political circumstances of Rome; for instance, Christine Kraus has recently suggested that the transition from Republic to Empire saw a shift in the historiographical use of *exempla*, whereby the appeal to figures of the Roman past stood increasingly in tension with the imperial appropriation of the discourse of exemplarity.⁵⁸ If Kraus is correct, then the case of the *Apocolocyntosis* proves all the more striking. Here, the author (possibly Seneca) presents a satirical take on the death of the emperor Claudius in 54 C.E.⁵⁹ He counters claims of imperial apotheosis with a humorous account of the emperor's dubious postmortem reception by the gods.

Attention to such trends in Roman literary culture might help us to make sense of what is an otherwise anomalous example of an approach to Abraham from around the same time, namely, the *Testament of Abraham*.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ See further Gilbert Lawall, "Exempla and Theme in Juvenal's Tenth Satire," *TAPA* 89 (1958): 25-31.

⁵⁸ Christine S. Kraus, "From Exempla to Exemplar? Writing History around the Emperor in Imperial Rome," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, 181-200.

⁵⁹ On the question of its authorship and function, see P. T. Eden, ed., *Apocolocyntosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 6-12; Vasily Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature Under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization* (London: Routledge, 1997), 37-40. On its approach to Claudius, also Susanna Morton Braund and Paula James, "Quasi Homo: Distortion and Contortion in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*," *Arethusa* 31 (1998): 285-311; Timothy J. Robinson, "In the Court of Time: The Reckoning of a Monster in the *Apocolocyntosis* of Seneca," *Arethusa* 38 (2005): 223-57.

⁶⁰ All references below are to the longer recension, in which the subversion of exemplary discourse is more evident. On the relationship between the two see Francis Schmidt, "The Two Recensions of the Testament of Abraham: In Which Way Did the Transformation Take Place?" in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (ed. George W. E. Nickelsburg; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 65-84; George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Structure and Meaning in the Testament of Abraham," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, 85-94; Robert A. Kraft, "Reassessing the 'Recensional Problem' in the *Testament of Abraham*," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, 121-38; Dale C. Allison, *Testament of Abraham* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 12-27. For the manuscript evidence, see F. Schmidt, *Le Testament grec d'Abraham*:

The *Testament of Abraham* is an expansive and imaginative account of the events leading up to Abraham's death. Most scholars hold that the *Testament of Abraham* took form in Roman Egypt, probably in the first or early second century C.E.⁶¹

The text sometimes circulated under the title of "testament" (διαθήκη), suggesting that some of its premodern tradents associated it with other writings (e.g., *Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs*) that conform to a parabiblical literary genre featuring deathbed speeches by biblical heroes.⁶² From the structure and contents of the text, however, it is clear that the *Testament of Abraham* is not a "testament" in the strict sense of the term.⁶³ We find little hint that its authors/redactors sought to tell the story of Abraham's death within the constraints of testamentary genre conventions; in fact, one of the main points of the text is that Abraham *did not* deliver a last will and testament to his children, even despite the repeated urgings of others to do so.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the authors/redactors of the *Testament of Abraham* seem to presuppose testamentary genre conventions inasmuch as they make meaning through the playful subversion of the reader's expectations of what a description of the events surrounding the death of a patriarch should entail.⁶⁵ The narrative of the *Testament of Abraham* thus mobilizes—in its own way and for its own aims—a set of expectations shaped by pentateuchal accounts of the deaths of Israel's ancestors (esp. Gen 48; Deut 31-33) and concretized in the parabiblical genre of the

Introduction, édition critique des deux recensions grecques, traduction (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 6-31.

⁶¹ For a summary of the evidence and various scholarly theories concerning its date and provenance, see Allison, *Testament*, 32-40. I here follow the scholarly consensus is that the text initially took form in the first or second c. C.E., even as its present forms bear the marks of its transmission and transformation in later circles and settings; cf. James Davila, *The Provenance of Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (JSJSup 105; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 199-207. For our present purposes, what is significant is the possibility that the *Testament of Abraham* may preserve an expression of biblically-based piety with reference to the patriarchal past from early Roman Egypt.

⁶² Allison, *Testament*, 41.

⁶³ Collins, *From Athens to Jerusalem*, 248; idem, "The Genre Apocalypse in Hellenistic Judaism," in *Apocalypticism in the Hellenistic World and the Near East* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 531-48.

⁶⁴ *T.Abr.* Rec. A, 1:4; 4:11; 8:11; 15:1, 7; Anitra B. Kolenkow, "The Genre Testament and the Testament of Abraham," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, 139-52.

⁶⁵ Jared W. Ludlow, *Abraham Meets Death: Narrative Humor in the Testament of Abraham* (JSPSup 41; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 8-47.

testament. Similarly, as we shall see, the *Testament of Abraham* seems to presuppose the elevation of Abraham to the status of exemplar in Second Temple Judaism, even as it makes its meaning through the narrative subversion of his exemplarity.

The *Testament of Abraham* includes assertions of the patriarch's righteousness, piety, and hospitality.⁶⁶ In fact, Abraham's exemplarity is proclaimed at the very outset in the summary of his life and character that prefaces the tale:

All the years of his life he passed in quietness (ἡσυχία), meekness (πραότητι), and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). The just man (ὁ δίκαιος) was altogether kind to strangers (φιλόξενος) . . . he welcomed all—rich and poor, kings and rulers, the crippled and the helpless, friends and strangers, neighbors and travelers. These the pious and all-holy, righteous, and hospitable Abraham (ὁ ὅσιος καὶ πανίερος καὶ δίκαιος καὶ φιλόξενος Ἀβραάμ) welcomed equally. (*T.Abr. Rec. A*, 1:1-2, trans. Allison)

Consistent with the tendency to place assertions of exemplarity within speeches, as noted above with reference to Livy and Josephus, the description of Abraham's virtues in the rest of the *Testament of Abraham* is primarily expressed through statements attributed to other characters as direct speech. The first such reference is placed in the mouth of God. When ordering Michael to descend to earth to inform Abraham about his impending death (1:4-7), God lauds the patriarch as follows:

For I have blessed him as the stars of heaven and as the sand by the shore of the sea. He has had a prosperous life with many things and is exceedingly rich. Yet above all people he has been righteous, good, hospitable, and strongly affectionate to the end (παρὰ πάντων δὲ δίκαιος, ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόξενος καὶ φιλόχρηστος μέχρι τέλους). (*T.Abr. Rec. A*, 1:5, trans. Allison)

The exemplarity of Abraham is also expressed through words attributed to Michael. When the angel cannot bring himself to carry out this

⁶⁶ The characterization of Abraham in the *Testament of Abraham* is considered in detail in Ludlow, *Abraham Meets Death*, 48-72. For parallels with other depictions of Abraham and resonances with Greco-Roman notions of virtue, also Allison, *Testament*, 67-69, 92-93; Daniel J. Harrington, "Abraham Traditions in the Testament of Abraham and in the 'Rewritten Bible' of the Intertestamental Period," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, 165-72.

divine decree, for instance, he ascends to heaven (4:5) and pleads with God thus:

Lord, Lord, may your sovereignty know that I am unable to proclaim the notice of death to that just man (τὸν δίκαιον ἄνδρα). For I have not seen a man like him on the earth—merciful and hospitable, just, truthful, God-fearing (ἐλεήμονα καὶ φιλόξενον, δίκαιον, ἀληθινόν, θεοσεβῆ), abstaining from every evil deed. (*T.Abr.* Rec. A, 4:6, trans. Allison)

Elsewhere in the text, Michael and Death repeatedly stress Abraham's righteousness in their conversations with the patriarch, as does God when conversing with them about him.⁶⁷

These assertions about Abraham's status as a paragon of virtue, however, stand in some contrast with the narrative description of his actions. The narrative, in fact, portrays the patriarch's deeds as anything but exemplary. Here, Abraham is a man motivated, above all, by a fear of dying. When faced with his own mortality, he refuses to follow the divine decree.⁶⁸ Moreover, he does not hesitate to exploit the special treatment afforded to him as God's "friend" (φίλος)—a title by which the patriarch is called, throughout the text, by other characters.⁶⁹ For instance, Abraham asks to see all of God's creation, promising that he will die willingly thereafter (9:1-6). Michael thus takes him on a tour of otherworldly realms, and Abraham learns all about postmortem judgment (10:1-14:5). Yet, afterwards, Abraham reneges on the deal (15:8-10). Even in heaven, all seem surprised by the actions of the famously righteous man (15:11-15).

When God thus sends Death to Abraham to take his soul (*T.Abr.* Rec. A, 16:1-13), the patriarch also resists (16:14-17:2), and he tries to distract Death by asking to see all of his faces (17:9-19). He first tells Death that he will cling to life until Michael comes to take him (19:4). He then tries to cut yet another deal: "if you want me to follow you, teach me about all your metamorphoses" (19:5). Death complies with the request (19:7-20:2), but Abraham merely sends him away (20:4). In the end, Death must resort to trickery to take his soul (20:8-9).

⁶⁷ *T.Abr.* Rec. A, 2:3, 6, 12; 7:8; 9:8; 13:4, 14; 14:2; 15:6, 9; 16:9, 11; 17:7, 10; 18:6; 19:7, 14; 20:3, 14.

⁶⁸ *T.Abr.* Rec. A, 7:12; 8:2, 12; 15:10; 16:6; 19:4.

⁶⁹ *T.Abr.* Rec. A, 2:3, 6; 4:7; 8:2, 4; 9:7; 15:12-14; 16:5, 9; 20:14; cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Isa 41:8.

The *Testament of Abraham* concludes with Abraham's soul sent to Paradise (20:14). But his end is bittersweet. Unlike the heroes of other testaments, he did not pass on his wisdom in a farewell address; he was so preoccupied with avoiding death that he never took the time to distribute his property or bless his children. According to the *Testament of Abraham*, Abraham went to his death having already learned all about afterlife judgment, and he knew that his soul would dwell with God in Paradise. Nevertheless, the patriarch still feared dying and did everything in his power to escape it.

The patriarch lauded, at the beginning of the text, as quiet, meek, and righteous (*T.Abr.* Rec. A, 1:1) is thus ironically portrayed as acting in audacious resistance of God's will. In the course of the narrative, the man whom all call just and merciful is also depicted as acting unjustly; while ascending to heaven and seeing the earth below, for instance, Abraham condemns sinners without giving them a chance to repent (10:4-14), thus causing God to become concerned "lest he see all the inhabited world... see all those living in sin [and] destroy all the creation" (10:12-13). Furthermore, despite the assertions of Abraham's generosity and kindness towards all, his ruse to stall Death ends up causing the untimely demise of 7,000 servants in his household (17:18), whom he must thus pray to God to resurrect (18:1-11). Far from being promoted as a model for emulation, Abraham is here portrayed as contravening the very virtues for which he is said to be famed. Through the narrative account of his deeds, in fact, he emerges as a negative *exemplum* of the proper way to prepare for one's death.

It is perhaps not coincidental that the narrative account of Abraham's actions in the *Testament of Abraham* stands in such striking contrast, not just with comments about him voiced within the text itself, but also with the idealized patriarch of post-biblical tradition more broadly.⁷⁰ Whereas a

⁷⁰ As has often been noted in scholarship on this text, the closest parallel to its characterization of Abraham is the depiction of Moses in rabbinic traditions about his resistance of death; Samuel E. Loewenstamm, "The Testament of Abraham and the Texts concerning the Death of Moses," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, 219-26; Esther G. Chazon, "Moses' Struggle for His Soul: A Prototype for the Testament of Abraham, the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra, and the Apocalypse of Sedrach," *SecCent* 86 (1985): 151-64; Allison, *Testament*, 24-26. Tannaitic midrashim preserve some accounts of Moses arguing against God's decree of his death and gruffly rebuffing the Angel of Death (*Sifre Deut.* 304; 357). Full-fledged narratives, however, do not appear until the Middle Ages (esp. *Petirat Moshe*, as paralleled in the late addition to *Deb.R.* 11:10). The *Testament of Abraham's* depiction of Abraham may have been influenced by early forms of such traditions; alternately, traditions about the deaths of Abraham and Moses may have developed in tandem.

number of early Jewish and Christian writings exalt the patriarch's obedience, for instance, the *Testament of Abraham* describes him as stubbornly resisting God's decree, even when it is delivered directly to him by a messenger from heaven.⁷¹ And, whereas Philo and Josephus celebrate Abraham's wisdom and discernment, the *Testament of Abraham* describes the patriarch as ignorant as to Michael's identity and purpose. Abraham, for instance, is depicted as blind to the meaning of a series of signs that his visitor is not just an ordinary man (esp. *T.Abr.* Rec. A, 3:3, 11). His failure to recognize and/or acknowledge Michael's status as an angel is emphasized by the contrast with the reader, who is privy to information about the angel's mission, and with his wife Sarah, who is described as immediately recognizing Michael as one of the three angels who visited them to announce the birth of Isaac (6:1-5; cf. Gen 18).

The *Testament of Abraham* has puzzled many modern scholars, precisely because of what appears to be its deliberate reversal and subversion of earlier traditions about Abraham. Scholars have described the text variously as parody, as paradox, and as an "anti-testament."⁷² Part of this puzzlement may come from the comic elements of the text. Contrary to our usual expectations of religious literature, "the humor in this text is"—as Erich Gruen notes—"deliberate and persistent."⁷³

Just as the *Testament of Abraham* seems to satirize the very genre of the testament, so its depiction of Abraham may offer a critique of the elevation of this patriarch to the status of an ideal model, perfect beyond the capacity of emulation. If so, then its approach to Abraham may point us to a tension at the heart of the very notion of exemplarity. To single out a figure or event as a positive *exemplum* is to propose an aptness for emulation. With the elevation of certain people and moments, however, also comes a threat to the very possibility that anyone could emulate them. "Through habitual deployment in particular modes," as Roller notes, "particular figures [can come] to be so closely associated with particular values as to become mere metonyms or personifications—hence unattainable, incontestable, eminently 'dead' ideals."⁷⁴ If the discourse of exemplarity

⁷¹ *T.Abr.* Rec. A, 7:12; 8:2, 12; 15:10; 16:6; 19:4.

⁷² George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Stories of Biblical and Early Post-Biblical Times," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 61-62; Ludlow, *Abraham Meets Death*, 17-28; Allison, *Testament*, 42.

⁷³ Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amongst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 187.

⁷⁴ Roller, "Exemplarity," 51.

holds out the possibility of human perfectibility, then the elevation of *exempla* also threatens to expose the gap between perfected paradigms and those called to imitate them. Just as the *Apocolocyntosis* ironically recovers the ideals of Roman collective identity through its comic critique of the Roman emperor Claudius, so the authors/redactors of the *Testament of Abraham* may achieve something similar: faced with the increasingly unattainable ideal represented by the elevated Abraham of Jewish memory, they recover the poignantly flawed patriarch of Genesis, painting a vivid portrait of a great man at the end of his life that stands, at the same time, as a reflection on the fears of death felt by all.

As in the above treatments of Philo and Josephus, my aim is not to try to identify specific Roman texts on which the authors/redactors of *Testament of Abraham* may have directly drawn, nor to pinpoint discrete lines of influence. My hope, rather, is that the juxtaposition with contemporaneous Roman sources may aid us in understanding how its portrait of Abraham might have resonated within the broader cultural context. The writings of Philo, of course, invite comparison with so-called “pagan” sources insofar he makes explicit appeal to Greek philosophy and borrows terms and concepts from non-Jewish learned circles of his time. Inasmuch as Josephus ostensibly tailors his works for a non-Jewish audience, his writings similarly invite scholarly efforts at contextualization through comparison. In the case of the *Testament of Abraham*, the value of a similarly integrative approach may be suggested by the presentation of Abraham himself.

In the *Testament of Abraham*, Abraham’s exemplarity is not explored through his status as the father of the Jews, as in the writings of Josephus, nor through his status as a prominent character in the prophetic and didactic writings of Moses, as for Philo. Moreover, there is no attempt to limit Abraham’s heirs either to his genealogical descendants or to those who adopt any single set of beliefs; indeed, the contrast could not be more striking with appeals to Abraham in New Testament and early Christian literature to promote a view of participation in the promises to the patriarch as contingent on faith in Jesus as messiah (e.g., Gal 3-4; Rom 4, 9-11) and/or as predicated on the exclusion of the patriarch’s genealogical heirs from the category of the chosen (e.g., Barn 13:6-7; Justin, *Dial.* 119.3-6).⁷⁵

Scholars have long debated whether the *Testament of Abraham* is “Jewish” or “Christian” in ultimate origin.⁷⁶ What is perhaps most striking

⁷⁵ See further Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*, 28-76, 128-51, 163-98.

⁷⁶ For a summary of the evidence and arguments see now Davila, *Provenance of Pseudepigrapha*, 199-207.

about the text, however, is its complete lack of concern for any such questions and distinctions. As Gruen notes, the *Testament of Abraham* reflects “an attitude that transcends sectarianism and dismisses barriers between Jews dwelling abroad and their pagan neighbors”; here, “only ethics, not ethnics, matter.”⁷⁷ Its authors/redactors “do not exalt Judaism over its pagan rivals,” as Dale Allison observes, and they seem comfortable “borrowing from Greco-Roman mythology . . . betraying no anxiety in doing so” (cf. *T.Abr.* Rec. A, 3:11; 6:6-7).⁷⁸ Their vision of the afterlife may even integrate Egyptian elements.⁷⁹

In its present forms, the style and vocabulary of the *Testament of Abraham* find their closest counterparts in the New Testament and Christian literature (esp. *T.Abr.* Rec. A, 11:2-11; cf. Matt 7:3-14).⁸⁰ Yet overtly Christian material is minor in scope and incidental to the plot and main themes. Furthermore, references to Christ are absent in places where one might expect to find them; the account of afterlife judgment, for instance, involves Adam, Abel, the twelve tribes of Israel, and God but makes no mention of Jesus. If the text took form among Jews, then they seem to have been Jews who were less concerned (at least here) to laud their ancestral customs and heritage than to stress that all human deeds will be judged after death⁸¹—and who thus freely integrated images of the afterlife from others who shared this concern, whether Neoplatonic, Egyptian, or even Christian. Conversely, if the text took form among Christians, then its authors/redactors embodied the fluidities and continuities between Egyptian Judaism and Egyptian Christianity in a manner that differed dramatically from authors like Clement and Origen⁸²—not least because they shared with their Jewish predecessors and contemporaries a notion of the patriarchal past as a normative horizon for ethical action.

⁷⁷ Gruen, *Diaspora*, 193, 222.

⁷⁸ Allison, *Testament*, 30. See also Grace H. MacCurdy, “Platonic Orphism in the Testament of Abraham,” *JBL* 61 (1942): 213-26.

⁷⁹ See the discussion of this possibility in George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Eschatology in the Testament of Abraham: A Study of the Judgment Scenes in the Two Recensions,” in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, 31-40.

⁸⁰ Allison, *Testament*, esp. 16-20 on Recension A.

⁸¹ For Jewish sources with similar perspectives see Gruen, *Diaspora*, 103-80.

⁸² On these fluidities and continuities see David Frankfurter, “Legacy of the Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (ed. James C. VanderKam and William A. Adler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 143-50; on the *Nachleben* of Egyptian Jewish traditions in Egyptian Christianity, also David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 132-211.

Accordingly, the Abraham of the *Testament of Abraham* is not the Abraham of Jewish apologetics or polemics against “pagans.” Nor is he the Abraham of early Christian controversies concerning the Torah, Jews, or Judaism. Rather, the subversion of earlier views of Abraham’s exemplarity has here resulted in a portrait of the patriarch as paradigmatically human—characterized, above all, by the mortality that he shares with all other creatures (*T.Abr. Rec. A*, 8:9).

In this, we may find a poignant parallel to the subversion of exemplary discourse within Roman satire. In his tenth *Satire*, Juvenal (fl. ca. 110-130 C.E.) similarly takes aim at an array of famous figures, including Greeks like Demosthenes and Romans like Cicero and Pompey, and he satirizes precisely those elements for which each were typically most celebrated. The result is, as Gilbert Lawall notes, “a pageant of great men who represent human life as a whole.”⁸³ By means of the playful inversion and subversion of earlier traditions about the exceptionalism of these very figures, he transforms them into examples of the human condition—with all its weaknesses, vanities, and foibles. Similarly, the inversion and subversion of Abraham’s exemplarity in the *Testament of Abraham* functions to transform the patriarch, from an elevated model for imitation, into an example of what all human beings experience even apart from efforts at emulation: fear in the face of death and irrational resistance to its inevitability. In the process, however, the *Testament of Abraham* succeeds in re-imagining Abraham as a universal figure, the experiences of whom can speak to Jew and Gentile, Greek and Roman, Christian and Egyptian alike.

⁸³ Lawall, “Exempla and Theme,” 30.