

Allusions to Josephus in Abravanel's Writings

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What would a Jewish reader living in the Middle Ages do had he wanted to read Josephus's writings?¹ If he lived in Spain or in Italy, there is a chance that he would have read it in Latin, or otherwise, he could have read it in Hebrew in *Sefer Yosifon* (The book of Josippon),² an anonymous book composed in the tenth century. This book relies on the Hegeisippus, a Latin adaptation of Josephus's *Antiquities* and *Wars of the Jews*. It describes the history of the Jewish people from the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. and the subsequent conquest of Masada by the Romans (74 A.D.).

One of the Jews who expressed interest in Josephus was Don Isaac Abravanel, the Jewish commentator who lived in Spain and Italy during the Renaissance. Abravanel mentions Josephus explicitly in his commentary to the Bible several times.³ He refers to him as Joseph ben Gorion. In fact, he differentiates between two compositions of Josephus: one addressed to the Jews (written in Hebrew), and the other – to the Romans (written in Greek or Latin, *הספר שעשה לרומים*).

In this paper I will point to both explicit and implicit allusions to Josephus found throughout Abravanel's writings. I shall argue that Abravanel had at his disposal both the Josippon in its Hebrew version and Josephus's writings in their Latin version. These allusions and others may point to a greater influence of Josephus upon Abravanel than is generally supposed.

Abravanel's Knowledge of Latin

Solomon Gaon wrote that Abravanel “was the first Jewish biblical exegete to make systematic use of such Gentile authorities as Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Jerome, de

¹ All passages from Josephus come from the Brill translation: L. H. Feldman, *Judean Antiquities 1–4*, Volume 3 of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. S. Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, vol. 4: Flavius Josephus Judean Antiquities 5–7, trans. C. T. Begg (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

² D. Flusser, *Sefer Yosifon*, 2 Vols. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1980).

³ Some of them were mentioned by Baer. See Y. Baer, “Don Isaac Abravanel and His Relationship to Problems of History and State”, *Tarbiz* 8 (1937), 241-259 (Heb.).

Lyra and even the convert, Paul of Burgos”.⁴ We may add to this list Josephus’s writings as well. Abravanel may be considered the first Jew in the renaissance who read Josephus’s writings, second only to the author of Josippon. Netanyahu stresses that “The study of Latin and the Roman classics was thus part of Abravanel’s education”.⁵ If Abravanel knew Latin, reading Josephus in its Latin translation should not have been a problem for him. To be sure, there was a Hebrew translation of Josephus by the 16th century, namely, of Samuel Shullam. However, he translated only *Against Apion*.⁶ More elaborated Hebrew translation were published only in the 19th century, by Filipowski and Kalman Schulman.

Likewise, one should not assume that Abravanel alludes to Josippon rather than to Josephus, since in many places, the reference may not be found in Josippon, but it can be found in Josephus. We should note, however, that there are times when Abravanel’s reference to Josephus is not to be found in Josephus’s writings.

The Latin Versions of Josephus

A Latin translation of the *Antiquities* - along with *Against Apion* - was commissioned by Cassiodorus (ca. 484/490-584/590 C.E.) and completed around the middle of the sixth century.⁷ Sievers⁸ writes that between 1470 and 1535 there were over twenty printings of Latin translations of Josephus. To be sure, we do not know the exact manuscript that Abravanel used. However, we may surmise that he had access to one of these editions.

The Parallel Biographies of Josephus and Abravanel

There are many parallels between the lives of Josephus and Abravanel: They both held high positions among their Jewish community during the first phase of life; they were both exiled from their homelands; and they both wrote commentaries to the Bible. In both one finds independent interpretations, not necessarily committed to the

⁴ S. Gaon, “Don Isaac Abravanel and the Christian Scholars”, *American Sephardi* 6 (1973), 16-21; Cf. E. Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance towards Tradition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 199.

⁵ B.Z. Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 13. Seymour Feldman argues that Abravanel had no command of major Latin philosophical compositions. See S. Feldman, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel: Defender of the Faith* (London and New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

⁶ See articles “Josephus” and “Shullam” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

⁷ T. Leoni, “The Text of Josephus’s Works: An Overview”, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period*, 40 (2009), 149-184 (at 160).

⁸ J. Sievers, “New Resources for the Study of Josephus”, *Society of Biblical Literature: Seminar Papers* 38 (1999) 264-271,

rabbinic Sages: While we may understand Josephus's stance (he lived before the editing of the Mishna and the Talmud), the same cannot be said of Abravanel, who lived many years later. Still, they may be deemed outsiders, as far as the commitment to tradition is concerned.

On Methodology

How do we locate the occurrences where Abravanel alludes to Josephus? Various databases lead us to the explicit citations of Josippon in Abravanel's writings. In each case the reference must be collated with Josephus's writings to find out whether Abravanel is referring to Josippon or Josephus. As to the implicit citations, the situation is more complicated. Here, we will have to examine whether each particular exegesis is unique to Josephus or includes Abravanel.

As these two exegetes have always been of interest to me, I have studied each of them separately, but only recently have I begun the project of the comparing Abravanel's writings to those of Josephus.

Explicit References to Josephus

There are a few cases in which Abravanel mentions Josephus explicitly.

1. In his commentary to Genesis 4, Abravanel mentions Josippon, who adds two facts regarding Abel: a. Abel was a hundred years old when he was murdered; b. Cain and Abel had twin sisters who became their wives.⁹ We shall return to this case later.
2. Abravanel on Genesis 10: כוש יצאו ממנו הכושים השחור'י ושוכני האיאוֹפִיִּיא"ה שהיא בסוף מהאוריטאניא"ה ארץ גדול' כנגד המזרח כמו שכתב יוסיפון

⁹ מצינו תולדות קין ואשה היתה לו בהכרח וכתוב בספרי האומות שתאומות קין שהיתה אשתו היתה שמה קלמ"אנא ואתאומות הבל שהיא אשתו היתה שמה בלב"ירא ומדברי יוסיפון הקדמוניות ואולי שהתאומות והבנים האלו נכללו במה שאמר הכתוב בפרשה זה ספר תולדות אדם כשספר תולדות אדם שאמר אחרי שת ויולד בנים ובנות רומז ... בין קין והבל מי יירשנה ומי מהם ישאר במקום אביו לסגולה להדבק בענין האלהי ויהיה זולתו הקליפה וגם זה מסכים בצד מה למה שביארתי. וכתב יוסיפון שהיה הבל בן מאה שנה כשנהרג זהו פי' הפסוקים האלה לדעתו. ורבינו נסים כתב שקין להיותו סכל מאד בדרכי השם כמו שהורה עליו מה ... שלא יחלוק על הכונה האלהית קרא שם העיר בשם בנו חנוך כאלו הוא היה הבונה והיושב בעיר לא קין כי נע ונד היה בארץ. וכתב יוסיפון ששם העיר חנוכיא ואתה רואה מתוכן הספור שקצר הספור בחמשת הדורות שנולדו לקין כי לפי שהיה אחריתן להכרית לא היה ראוי להאריך בספורים גם ...

The blacks are descended from Cush and live in Ethiopia, which is beyond Mauritania, a great land that lies in the east, as Josippon has written.¹⁰

This matches what Josephus writes on Kush (*Ant.* 1.131):

For of the four sons of Chamas time has done no damage to Chousaios. For the Ethiopians, whom he ruled, are still even now called Chousaioi by themselves and by all those in Asia.

By contrast, these details do not appear in Josippon.

3. Abravanel deals in his commentary to Exodus 25 with the symbolic meaning of the twelve loaves of show-bread. He refers to Josephus, who explains that it is to be connected to the twelve tribes of Israel or to the twelve months of the year. We shall deal with this reference later.
4. In his commentary to Deuteronomy 28 Abravanel comments that the Torah refers to the destruction of both the first and the second temples. He refers to Josippon, who depicts the Roman armies that were comprised of soldiers from many lands. We do read of the Roman legions in War 7.82. The counting of the number of the dead corpses is mentioned in Josephus, Wars 5.567-569 and in Josippon, chap. 68:

מקצה הארץ, לפי שרב' רחוקה מאד מירושלים, גם כי בחיל אנשי' באו עמים רבים מארצות המערב מברט"נייה ואינגי"לטיר' ובר"גונייה ומארצות מזרח גם כן כנזכר **בספר יוסיפון** ולכן אמר שביאתם מרחוק, ועם היות ביאתם מרחוק זכר שיבאו במהירות רב ובפתע פתאום והוא אמרו כאש' ידאה הנשר, ולפי שהיה לשונם לשון בל ... להכניעם תחת ידי הרומיים ושב אספסינוס לרומא להתקסר שם ונשאר טיטוס בנו עד שנלכדה ירושלם ונותצו חומותי' ושרפו בית ה' וכמו שנזכר כל זה **בספר יוסיפון**: הנה על שלש הפעמים האלה שבאו על ירושלם לשחת', אמ' אדון הנביאים פה, ישא ה' עליך גוי מרחוק וגו', ולכן נזכרו בפסוקים שלשה פעמים ... כל זה הטוב וההצלחה בהם מפעל ההשגחה כן ישיש וישמח אתכם להאביד אתכם ולהשמיד אתכם כי היה הרבוי בהשגחה והמעוט בהשגחה גם כן. וכבר כתב **יוסיפון** ששאל טיטוס את היהודים כשלכדו את ירושלם להגיד לו מספר המתים באמת. והמונם אשר יצאו מכל שערי ירושלם להקבר בימי הרעב הנודעים להם.

10 Melamed, *Image*, 182

5. In *Maayene ha-Yeshuah* (“Sources of Salvation”), 375, Abravanel argues that Josephus was relying on the erroneous chronology of the Romans. He points out that Josephus contradicts himself many times in his chronological statements and cannot be used as a source with which to attempt to refute the Sages. Abravanel also refers to certain Christians who, in their interpretations of Daniel 9:24-27, view the Persian period as having been a protracted one:

Josephus did this only to propitiate [the Romans]; for he was unable to gird himself amidst his enemies to disagree with that which was commonly believed by them; for . . . when he found himself in Rome amidst kings and dignitaries, in order to placate and flatter them, he wrote things that pandered to the biases that they held due to their false premises.¹¹

He also refers therein to the authenticity of the Testimonium Flavianum in his *Commentary* on Daniel (10.7): “if Josephus had written this, we do not accept it from him, for he has written a great deal, but not all of it is true.”¹² Abravanel’s skepticism regarding the Testimonium was evidently encouraged by the absence of a parallel Testimonium in the Josippon, which he assumed was a first-century text.

Implicit References to Josephus

In other cases, Abravanel does not mention Josephus by name, but by comparing his interpretation to Josephus’s writings reveals that he alludes to him or even bases himself upon him.

1. Abravanel’s criticism of Cain as the first founder of the city is to be found also in Josephus, *Ant.* 1.60-62:

Abravanel writes with regard to Cain: קין בחר לנחלה לו עבודת האדמה להיות (‘‘Cain chose to engage in mechanical matters and thus became a farmer... despoiling his land, and his intellect became subservient to his bestial position’’).¹³

The following already appears in Josephus:

After passing through much land Kais settled with his wife in Nais, as the place was called, where he established his residence and where children were

¹¹ Translation adopted from Lawee, 190.

¹² Eisler’s translation

¹³ Translation adopted from D. Polish, *‘‘Give Us a King’’: Legal-Religious Sources of Jewish Sovereignty*, (Hoboken, NJ, 1990), 139.

born to him. Yet, he did not take his punishment as a warning, but searched out every pleasure for his body for increase of his vice, even if it was necessary to have this through insolent behavior with his companions. And he increased his property through a great quantity of possessions acquired through robbery and force; enticing those who crossed paths with him to pleasure and robbery, he became a teacher to them of wicked activities. And by the invention of measures and weights he transformed the simple life that men had previously lived, leading into knavery their lives, that had been guileless and magnanimous owing to their ignorance. He was the first who set boundaries of land and built a city and fortified it with walls, necessitating his kinsmen to congregate in the same place.

2. In Exodus 25, Abravanel deals with the symbolic significance of the mishkan.

וגם בזמן בית שני היו החכמים שבישראל עושים רמזים במשכן וכליו ראה דברי יוסף בן גוריון בספר הקדמוניות שעשה לרומיים מ"ג פי"א ממנו כתב וז"ל. הנה המחפש ימצא כי כל אשר נעשה במשכן היה על דמיון הדברים הטבעיים כי אם ישקיף אל זה השקפת דעת מופשטת מהקנאה והתאוה יראה כי המשכן שהי' ארכו שלשים אמות היה נחלק לג' חלקים. והב' החלקים הראשונים החיצונים נתנה רשות לכהנים ללכת בו. והם רומזים אל הים ואל היבשה שהם מקומות מיוחדים אל האנשים ללכת בהם. והחלק האחר מהמשכן שהיה קדש הקדשי' רומז אל השמים אשר לא יעבור שם רגל אדם כי השמים שמים לה' ושנים עשר לחמי הפנים הנתונים על השולחן רומזים אל התחלק השנה ל"ב חדשים. והמנורה אשר בה שבעה קנים. רומז אל ז' הפעולות או כחות שופעות מכל אחת משבעה ככבי לכת ומשבעת הככבים האלה תתבאר תנועת הגלגלים. ואמנם היות הקלעים כלם בעלי ד' גוונים ירמוז לטבע הד' יסודות כי שש רומז אל הארץ למה שהפשתן צומח בה ומראת הארגמן דומה לים כי הוא עשוי מדם דג מיוחד. והתכלת רומז ליסוד האויר ותולעת שני רומז ליסוד האש. ומלבוש הכהן שהיה של שש רומז אל כללות הארץ והמלבוש של תכלת רומז לשמים והרמונים רומזים אל הברקים והלפידים השמימיים והקול הנשמע מן הפעמונים רומז אל הרעמים. ומעיל האפוד רומז לכל הדברים הטבעיים. ולזה צוה האל שתהיה אריגתו מארבעה צבעים מעורבים עם זהב רומז לדעתי אל האור המפוזר בעולם. ואמנם הושם החשן באמצע האפוד לדמיון הארץ אשר היא מרכז לשמי' והיא באמצעותם מכל הצדדים. וחשב האפוד היה רומז אל הים הגדול או אל ים אוקינוס אשר הוא סובב הכל. והנה השמש והירח נרמזים באבני השהם אשר על כתפות האפוד ושתיים עשר' אבני החשן אם שירמוז ל"ב חדש השנה או אל הגורת י"ב המזלות הנקראים אצל היונים עגול זודיאקו. והמגבעות או הכובע ירמוז אל השמי' בכלל לפי דעתי על שם התכלית כי באופן אחר לא יצדק היות מונח עליו שמו יתברך.

Some parts of this symbolic interpretation are found indeed in Josephus Ant. 3.123: It happened that such an arrangement of the Tent was also an imitation of the nature of the universe. For its third part, which is within the four pillars, which was inaccessible to the priests, like heaven, was set aside for God, while the twenty cubits, just as earth and sky are accessible to men, were thus consigned to the priests alone

See also War 5.217 ff (Whiston):

When any persons entered into the temple, its floor received them. This part of the temple therefore was in height sixty cubits, and its length the same; whereas its breadth was but twenty cubits: but still that sixty cubits in length was divided again, and the first part of it was cut off at forty cubits, and had in it three things that were very wonderful and famous among all mankind, the candlestick, the table [of shew-bread], and the altar of incense. Now the seven lamps signified the seven planets; for so many there were springing out of the candlestick. Now the twelve loaves that were upon the table signified the circle of the zodiac and the year; but the altar of incense, by its thirteen kinds of sweet-smelling spices with which the sea replenished it, signified that God is the possessor of all things that are both in the uninhabitable and habitable parts of the earth, and that they are all to be dedicated to his use. But the inmost part of the temple of all was of twenty cubits. This was also separated from the outer part by a veil. In this there was nothing at all. It was inaccessible and inviolable, and not to be seen by any; and was called the Holy of Holies. Now, about the sides of the lower part of the temple, there were little houses, with passages out of one into another; there were a great many of them, and they were of three stories high; there were also entrances on each side into them from the gate of the temple. But the superior part of the temple had no such little houses any further, because the temple was there narrower, and forty cubits higher, and of a smaller body than the lower parts of it. Thus we collect that the whole height, including the sixty cubits from the floor, amounted to a hundred cubits.

But a more elaborate view of this kind of symbolism attributed to the tabernacle is found in Philo. We shall return later to the question of Abravanel knowledge of

Philo¹⁴. Generally speaking we may say that the reason for utilizing the works of Philo and Josephus was necessary since the Torah does not specify the symbolic significance of the tabernacle, and Abravanel could find in these works an answer to a question that bothered – and still bothers – commentators: How should we understand all the details given with regard to the tabernacle? Abravanel neutralized the apologetic view of both Philo and Josephus when using their assessments regarding the symbolism of the tabernacle.

3. In Deut. 25:5-10 we read of the levirate marriage. What is the meaning of the phrase *שם אהיו המת על יקום*? What is meant by the statement of purpose "that his name may not be blotted out of Israel"? It is interesting to find out that both Josephus and Abravanel were among the only interpreters who understood these verses referring to the man's "name" as connected with his property. Abravanel seems to have ignored the rabbinic view on this matter.¹⁵ The same cannot be said of course of Josephus, in whose writings the matter of Halakha is very complicated.¹⁶

Josephus *Ant.* 4.254

Upon the death of her husband, if she is childless, that man's [the first husband's] brother should marry her. Calling the child that is born by the name of the one who died, she should raise him as successor to the inheritance. This will be of advantage to the community, if houses do not disappear and the possessions remain with the kinsmen; and it will bring to the women, as they live with those nearest to their former husbands, an

Abravanel on Deut. 25

The eldest son that she will bear will be named after his dying brother and will inherit his property and estate...when Boaz took Ruth, he said: 'to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance' (Ruth 4:10), implying that this was for the matter of inheritance, that the son born will be named after the deceased himself.

¹⁴ S.D. Robertson, *The Account of the Ancient Israelite Tabernacle and First Priesthood in the "Jewish Antiquities" of Flavius Josephus* (Ann Arbor 1991).

¹⁵ See R. Y.T. Mecklenburg in his *HaKetav v'haKabbalah* ad loc. Henshke argues that in fact we do have such an opinion in Tannaitic sources. See D. Henshke, "On the Nature of Tannaitic Legal Midrash: Two Issues", *Tarbiz* 65 (1996), 417-438 (Hebrew).

¹⁶ See David. Nakman, "The Halakhah in the writings of Josephus" (Ph. D. diss. Bar Ilan University, 2004). Davies argues that this is the proper meaning of the verse. See E.W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage: Part. 1", *VT* 31 (1981), 138-44.

alleviation of their suffering.

This resemblance seems hardly a coincidence, and it is probable that Abravanel consulted Josephus in this matter.

4. The Reason of the Levirate Marriages: Interestingly, not only does Abravanel concur with Josephus's explanation of the Levirate marriage, but he also follows his explanation to this law, *t'aamei Hamitzva*: the support for childless widows.

Josephus: and it will bring to the women, as they live with those nearest to their former husbands, an alleviation of their suffering.

5. On Kingship: In his paper dealing with the references to Aristotle in Abravanel's writings, Abraham Melamed claims that Abravanel did not read Aristotle's *Politics* in the original, but rather indirectly. Melamed did not raise the possibility that Abravanel was in fact influenced by Josephus.

In *Ant.* 4.223, Josephus writes:

Now aristocracy and the life therein is best. Let not a longing for another government take hold of you, but be content with this. And having the laws as your masters do each thing according to them, for it is sufficient that God is your ruler.

Understanding Josephus's stance towards kingship is not an easy task. Some scholars hold that his position is negative while others¹⁷ argue that he had a more complex view.

Nonetheless, when we read Abravanel's stance towards kingship, we find that he followed Josephus, albeit not referring to him explicitly. I agree with Strauss,¹⁸ who wrote that "Abravanel restates the aristocratic and anti-monarchist view of Josephus".

¹⁷ T. Rajak, "The Against Apion and the Continuities in Josephus's Political Thought", in S. Mason (ed.), *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1998), 222-46; L.H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 435.

¹⁸ Leo Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching", in Isaac Abravanel – Six Lectures, J. B. Trends and H. Loewe (eds.), Cambridge 1937, pp. 95-129, here 127.

6. The Surrender of King Jehoiachin to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon (2 Kings 24): In 2 Kings 24 we read that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon cast a siege upon Jerusalem. Comparing this narrative to the subsequent narrative on King Zedekiah, the reader might expect that the fates of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah would be similar. However, while Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons, blinded Zedekiah's eyes and destroyed Jerusalem, he did not do the same to Jehoiachin. The question arises as to why this is so. As far as I know, Josephus is the only exegete who explained this (*Ant.* 10.100-101):

He, being kind and just by nature, did not think it right that the city should be permitted to be endangered for his sake. Instead, abandoning his mother and relatives, he handed them over to the generals sent by the Babylonian, after receiving their oaths that neither they nor the city would suffer anything. Their pledge, however, did not remain [operative] for even a year, for the king of the Babylonians did not keep it. On the contrary, he commanded his generals to take captive everyone in the city who was youthful in age, as well as the craftsmen, and to bring them bound to himself.

Similarly, Abravanel (*Comm. to Kings*, 675) asserts that:

And when they were bringing the city under siege, Nebuchadnezzar came there himself and Jehoiachin and his mother and princes came out to meet him, in order to flatter him and to present himself just like the clay in the potter's hand, and to put his neck under his yoke, letting him doing whatever he pleases. He thought that when Nebuchadnezzar would see this behavior, he would have mercy on him and return him to his kingship. However, Nebuchadnezzar did not do so, but rather arrested him.

Abravanel Alludes to Josippon and Not to Josephus

In his commentary to Deuteronomy 27, Abravanel deals with the causes of exile and the destruction of the temple. One of the causes relates to the behavior of the wealthy people living in the second Temple period who distorted the Torah and manipulated it. He concludes with *כפי מה שסיפר בן גוריון*, as is narrated by Josephus. However, this cannot be a reference to Josephus, since Josephus blames the Zealots for the

destruction. The פריצים (paritzim) that Abravanel mentions match the depiction in Sefer Josippon in chapter 91.

Erroneous Allusions

In some places Abravanel alludes to Josephus, but upon checking Josephus's writings, we find no such reference.

1. Commenting on Genesis 4:17, Abravanel writes:

And Joseph ben Gorion wrote in his 'Book of Ancients' that Jabal was separating sheep from goats and kids from sucking lambs, and he put the black and white droves apart.

וּכְתַב יוֹסֵף בֶּן גּוֹרִיּוֹן בְּסֵפֶר הַקְּדֻמוֹנִים שֶׁהָיָה יָבֵל מְבַדִּיל אֶת הַרְחָלִים מִן הָעִזִּים וְהַגְּדִיִּים
מִן הַטְּלָאִים וְהָיָה עוֹשֶׂה עֵדֶר מְכַל צִבְעֵי הַלְּבָנִים עֵדֶר לְבָדוֹ, וְהַשְּׁחֹרִים עֵדֶר לְבָדוֹ וְשִׁלְזָה אָמַר אָבִי כָל
יּוֹשֵׁב אֶהֱל וּמִקְנָה.

When we search for such a depiction of Jabal in Josephus's writings, the only thing that we find in Josephus (*Ant.* 1.64) is that "Jabal built tents and loved a pastoral life".

We should note that the motif of separating the flocks is probably borrowed from the story of Jacob and Laban.

This story does not appear in *Sefer Yosippon* either. It appears in another book, *Sefer Ha-yashar*. Scholars are divided regarding the date of this book: While Zunz¹⁹ dates it earlier, to the eleventh or twelfth century, Joseph Dan²⁰ dates it to the sixteen century. If we accept Zunz's dating, than Abravanel could have read it. However, accepting Joseph Dan's dating makes this suggestion problematic. If so, where did Abravanel read about this? We may surmise that it was an oral tradition that Abravanel incorporated it into his writings.

2. Abravanel (Comm. Genesis, p. 125) writes that Cain and Abel had twin sisters, named Kalmana and Balbira.²¹ He then refers to "Josippon ha-Kadmoniyot". Josephus does say that Cain and Abel had sisters, but he

¹⁹ L. Zunz, *Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden* (Frankfurt, 1832; 2nd enlarged edn, 1892; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), pp. 162-65; idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* (3 vols.; Berlin, 1875, 1876; 3 vols. in one, Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1976), III, 98-100. For further references, see: M. Maher, "Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of Exodus 2.21", in K.J. Cathcart and M. Maher (eds.), *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honour of Martin McNamara* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 83, n. 8.

²⁰ J. Dan, *Sefer ha-yashar* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1986).

²¹ והנה מצינו תולדות קין ואשה היתה לו בהכרת וכתוב בספרי האומות שתאומות קין שהיתה אשתו היתה שמה קלמ"אנא ותאומות הבל שהיא אשתו היתה שמה בלב"ירא ומדברי יוסיפון הקדמוניות

does not specify their names. This detail appears in several Christian sources,²²

. ואמנם מאמר למך לנשיו עדה וצלה שמענה קולי בא ענינו בכתוב הזה סתום מאד וא"א לפרשו יפה אלא כמו שפירשו רז"ל. ומצאתי ספורו גם כן בספרי הרומים כי הם לקחו הדברים האלה מדברי יוסיפון שכתב בספר הקדמונים. והוא שלמך היה סומא והיה יוצא השדה לצוד ציד אם להתענג כמנהג השרים ואם לצורך העורות ללבוש ונער קטון נוהג בו ומוליכו בשדה וכשראה הנער מרחוק את קין שהיה מתחבא בתוך עצי השדה נדמה לו ברוב שערותיו שהיה חיה ואמר ללמך בראותו אותו למשוך בקשת כנגד אותו צד באשר הוא שם ולמך משך...

3. As mentioned earlier, Abravanel deals in his commentary to Exodus 25 with the significance of the number twelve with regard to the loaves. He refers to Josephus, but no such explanation is found in Josephus, who only notes (Jos. Ant. 3.143): "We shall mention elsewhere the reason why these things were contrived". However, Josephus never composed the promised treatise. This symbolic understanding is also found in Philo (*De Spec Leg* 1.172; 2.161). Although it is difficult to trace any direct influence of Philo of Alexandria on Abravanel, it is possible that some of his ideas were adopted by him. The assumption that Abravanel had access to Philo's ideas is not unreasonable, since there was contact between Philo and R. Judah Abravanel. In addition, Philo is mentioned by another 16th century Jewish author, namely, Azariah de Rossi, in his *Meor Eynayim*.
4. In Ma'yenei Hayeshua, 10, 7, Abravanel blames Josephus for distorting Jewish history:

הלא ראית בדברי הימים שנגף ה' את ירבעם ואת ישראל לפני אביה, ובני יהודה, ויפלו חללים מישראל חמש מאות אלף איש בחור, והוא כתב בספר שעשה לרומיים חמישים אלף בחור

You must have seen that in Chronicles, whereas it is narrated that God defeated Jeroboam before Abijah, and 500,000 were killed, he [Josephus] writes in his book intended for the Romans, that only 50,000 people were killed.

²² Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 158. To his list we should add the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius.

However, when we read the retelling of this story in Josephus's *Antiquities* 8.284, we discover that Josephus follows the text of the book of Chronicles strictly. Therefore, either Abravanel is distorting Josephus's retelling or Abravanel may have had at his disposal a different Vorlage of Josephus, at least in this case.

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown that Abravanel made use of Josephus's *Antiquities* in his commentaries to the Bible. We have discussed the explicit, implicit and erroneous references to Josephus. Errors in referencing may have been caused due to the many books Abravanel used, and to his inability to get the help of a team of assistants as well as not having the aid of digital databases. When coming to uncover Abravanel's sources, scholars should not begin with Abravanel's contemporaries, both Jewish and Christians, but rather take Josephus into account.

At the moment, we cannot find any consistent method in these references: When does he refer to Josephus and when not? Only in the case of the request for kingship in 1 Samuel 8, can one understand the reason, which is probably political, for Abravanel is relying on Josephus. In other cases the reason remains unknown.