

JEWISH IDENTITIES IN ANCIENT TIMES: THE CASE OF ARTAPANUS

No extant source mentions the work or the personality of Artapanus, and only three fragments of his literary production have survived the vagaries of transmission.¹ These fragments, therefore, are all we have which allow a glimpse into Artapanus' inner world. They reach us third hand, quoted by Eusebius, who in turn cites from the anthology of Alexander Polyhistor, which had been composed in the first century BCE.⁴ For once, there seems to be no question about their basic authenticity. Primarily a compiler of quotations, a *grammatikos*, as ancient tradition puts it, Polyhistor displays no bias in the way he doctored his sources and no historiographical tendentiousness in abbreviating them. His cited passages consist of a series of loosely connected fragments accompanied by the authors' names and the titles, without critical comments. Even when turning the original *oratio recta* into *oratio obliqua*, it appears that he still manages to preserve some of the flavor and style of each author.² As for Eusebius, it appears that he was not particularly interested in the content of the works he cited. His citations from Polyhi-

stor were rather meant to prove to his readers that Greek intellectuals such as Polyhistor knew the Jews through the authors they cited. This was meant to add to the prestige of the Christians, who were the Jews' heirs. Eusebius closely copied Polyhistor's text to the point of citing even the editorial notes that Polyhistor inserted between his excerpts taken from the Jewish authors.³ There is no question, therefore, about the basic authenticity of Artapanus' fragments.

As for his geographical belonging, a probable origin from Egypt is not disputed in contemporary scholarship since his work focuses heavily on this country and on its cultural and mythological traditions. The time when he lived and wrote is more difficult to determine, and the only firm term is the *terminus ante quem*, to identify with the death of Alexander Polyhistor who quotes him, in the thirties BCE. The *terminus post quem* is more problematic. Various possible dates have been suggested in the third⁵ or the second century BCE,⁶ but no definite conclusion may be proved.

¹ EUS., *Praep. Ev.* 9, 18, 1; 9, 23, 1-4; 9, 27, 1-37 = C. HOLLADAY, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 1, Scholars Press, Chico (CA) 1983, pp. 189-243.

² See G.E. STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography*, Brill, Leiden 1992, pp. 145, 151. On his literary work, see J.J. COLLINS, *Reinventing Exodus: Exegesis and Legend in Hellenistic Egypt*, in R.A. ARGALL et al. (eds.), *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity. Festschrift for George W. E. Nickelsburg*, Trinity Press, Harrisburg (PA) 2000, p. 53 and C. ZAMAGNI, *Alexandre Polyhistor et Artapan: une mise en perspective à partir des extraits d'Eusèbe de Césarée*, in P. BORGEAUD et al. (eds.), *Interprétations de Moïse: Égypte, Judée, Grèce et Rome*, Brill, Leiden 2010, pp. 64-78.

³ See S. INOWLOCKI, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors: His Citation Technique in an Apologetic Context*, Brill, Leiden 2006, pp. 276-278.

⁴ J.J. COLLINS, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI) 2000, pp. 38-39 and ID., *Artapanus Revisited*, in P. WALTERS (ed.), *From Judaism to Christianity: Tradition and Transition: A Festschrift for Thomas H. Tobin, S.J. on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, Brill, Leiden 2010, p. 63.

⁵ K.S. WINSLOW, *Moses' Cushite: Marriage Torah, Artapanus, and Josephus*, in C. FREVEL (ed.), *Mixed Marriages: Inter-marriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period*, T&T Clark, New York 2011, p. 284.

⁶ See, for example, E. GABBA, *The Growth of Anti-Judaism or the Greek Attitude towards the Jews*,

The cultural identity of Artapanus which emerges from his extant fragments poses no fewer queries. On one hand, Artapanus consistently emphasizes the glory of the Jewish people and their superiority vis-à-vis their Egyptian neighbors, in a way that has no precedent in the works of ancient gentile authors. On the other hand, his three fragments display considerable departures from the Jewish tradition, which consist not only of chronological gaps, omissions, and additions but also of odd statements at variance with basic Jewish tenets.

In the first fragment, Artapanus claims that the Jews were originally called *Hermiouth* – a term nowhere else attested and presumably a concoction by Artapanus, who adds that the term «means “Jews” when translated into the Greek language». Artapanus goes on to explain that the Jews were called Hebrews from the time of Abraham, who «came with his entire household into Egypt to Pharethothes, the king of the Egyptians, and taught him astrology». ⁷ The second fragment has the Jews building pagan temples. In Joseph’s time, Artapanus writes,

«these peoples named Hermiouth built both the temple in Athos and the one in Heliopolis». ⁸

The most startling statements show up in the third fragment concerning Moses, where he is identified with a figure of the Greek mythology, Mousaeus: «[Moses] as a grown man was called Mousaeus by the Greeks. This Mousaeus was the teacher of Orpheus», ⁹ where Artapanus reverses the usual relationship of Orpheus as teacher of Mousaeus which appears in Diodorus’ work. ¹⁰ Moses is also identified with Hermes «because of his ability to interpret the sacred writings». ¹¹ Here, Artapanus may reflect the Hellenized Egyptians’ association of Hermes with Thoth-Mosis, the scribe of the gods and supervisor of good order. ¹² According to Mussies, the association of Moses with Thoth-Mosis, no doubt aided by the similarity of names, would imply that in worshipping Hermes, the Egyptians were in fact paying honor to Moses. ¹³ While in each instance Artapanus records these fusions as attested by others – Egyptian priests amalgamated Moses with Hermes, and Greeks gave Moses the name Mousaeus¹⁴ – there is no indication that Artapanus

in W.D. DAVIES - L. FINKELSTEIN (eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, p. 640 and H.M. ZELLENTIN, *The End of Jewish Egypt: Artapanus and the Second Exodus*, in G. GARDNER - K.L. OSTERLOCH (eds.), *Antiquity in Antiquity, Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2009, pp. 29-30 and 54-63.

⁷ *Praep. Ev.* 9, 18, 1. Gruen observes that the rewriting plainly aims to strengthen the association of Abraham with Egypt, and to establish continuity between the patriarch’s endowment and the development of Egyptian culture: E.S. GRUEN, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1998, p. 151; ID., *Hellenism and Judaism: Fluid Boundaries*, in Z. WEISS et al. (ed.), *Follow the Wise: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake (IN) 2010, p. 57.

⁸ *Praep. Ev.* 9, 23, 4.

⁹ *Ivi* 9, 27, 3-4. See STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, cit., p. 178.

¹⁰ DIOD. 1, 96, 4 (a passage commonly ascribed to Hecataeus). By inverting the normal order of succession, Artapanus makes Greece dependent upon Moses, implicitly claiming that Moses was the ultimate source also of Greek culture. See STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, cit., p. 178 and

the bibliography cited by COLLINS, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, cit., p. 41, n. 62.

¹¹ *Praep. Ev.* 9, 27, 6.

¹² On Thoth as Hermes, see P. BOYLAN, *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt. A Study of Some Aspects of Theological Thought in Ancient Egypt*, Ares, Chicago 1979 [1922] and G. FOWDEN, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993. See also D. FLUSSER - S. AMORAI-STARK, *The Goddess Thermuthis, Moses and Artapanus*, «Jewish Studies Quarterly» 1,3 (1993-1994), pp. 217-233.

¹³ G. MUSSIES, *The Interpretatio Judaica of Thoth-Hermes*, in M. HEERMA VAN VOSS et al. (eds.), *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee*, Brill, Leiden 1982, pp. 89-120; P.W. VAN DER HORST, *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Freiburg 1990, p. 203; J.M.G. BARCLAY, *Manipulating Moses: Exodus 2.10-15 in Egyptian Judaism and the New Testament*, in R.P. CARROLL (ed.), *Text as Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1992, p. 33 and J.M.G. BARCLAY, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117 CE)*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1998, p. 129.

¹⁴ See M. GOODMAN, *Jewish Literature Composed in Greek*, in G. VERMES - M. GOODMAN (eds.), *The*

panus dissociates himself from these identifications.

Greek and Egyptian motives and traditions are freely intertwined with the Jewish ones, and the portrayals of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses depict them as exemplary leaders who benefited Egyptian culture. Abraham taught astrology; Joseph gave numerous benefits to the priests;¹⁵ and Moses «bestowed many useful benefits on mankind, for he invented boats and devices for stone construction and the Egyptian arms and the implements for drawing water and for the warfare, and philosophy. Further he divided the state into 36 nomes». Here, the similarity is striking between the cultural benefactions attributed to Moses by Artapanus and those ascribed to the Egyptian Pharaoh Sesostriis in Diodorus' work. Here, too, Sesostriis is said to be the first Egyptian to build warships, to provide irrigation canals and to divide Egypt into 36 nomes.¹⁶ Artapanus also interprets the first plague as the cause of the natural cycle on which Egyptian life depends, claiming that when Moses struck the Nile with his rod, he established its annual flooding.¹⁷

As Gruen points out, Artapanus juggled a variety of traditions:

He shrewdly exploited stories about Egyptian and other Near Eastern heroes and divinities, notably Sesostriis, Semiramis, Isis, Osiris and Hermes, most of them subsequently recorded in the first book of Diodorus Siculus. Exploits ascribed to one or more of these figures are simply transferred to Moses. [...] Artapanus expropriated and transfigured pagan legends¹⁸

History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. - A.D. 135), vol. 3, 1, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1986, p. 522.

¹⁵ *Praep. Ev.* 9, 23, 2.

¹⁶ See R. DORAN, *Jewish Hellenistic Historians before Josephus*, in «ANRW II» 20,1 (1987), p. 259; Barclay, *Manipulating Moses*, cit., p. 33; STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, cit., p. 177; COLLINS, *Reinventing Exodus*, cit., p. 54. This Sesostriis, in fact, was not a historical person but a conflation of real figures in Egyptian history, built up into the greatest of Egypt's legendary national heroes, the prototype of the heroic world conqueror, whose exploits were a commonplace first in Egyptian literature, and then in the work of Herodotus and in later Greek literature. See M. BRAUN, *History and Roman-*

[...] his fragments [...] provide an arresting example of an intellectual's conception of interrelationships between Israelite traditions and other cultures of the ancient world.¹⁹

Surprisingly, there is no mention whatsoever of the divine revelation on Mount Sinai, and no mention, also, of the Jewish Law and its precepts, subjects which are thoroughly dealt with by other Hellenistic authors living in Egypt such as Aristeas, Demetrius and Aristobulus. One might ascribe this silence to the vagaries of the transmission chain and to the fact that only three fragments of his work are extant, but this is apparently not the case, since passages are also found, where deviations from the biblical text cannot be categorized as additions and embellishments, but rather as contradictions of the biblical text.²⁰ The most astonishing contradiction has Moses giving to Egypt the gods to be worshiped in the forms of cats, dogs and ibises: «(he) appointed for each of the nomes the god to be worshiped [...] that they should be cats and dogs and ibises».²¹ The same is implied in another passage mentioning «the animals which Moses had made sacred».²² The very man who would later inscribe the covenantal agreement between God and the Hebrews is credited with acting in opposition to a fundamental tenet of that very agreement.²³ Artapanus presents Moses not as the lawgiver but rather as a standard Egyptian hero, a charismatic figure who goes so far as to identify the earth with the goddess Isis.²⁴

In fact, Jewish and Egyptians worlds are presented not as antagonistic but rather as com-

ce in Graeco-Oriental Literature, Blackwell Braun, Oxford 1938, pp. 3-4 and T. RAJAK, *Moses in Ethiopia*, «Journal of Jewish Studies» 29 (1978), p. 115.

¹⁷ *Praep. Ev.* 9, 27, 28.

¹⁸ GRUEN, *Heritage*, cit., p. 158.

¹⁹ ID., *Hellenism and Judaism*, cit., p. 57.

²⁰ COLLINS, *Artapanus Revisited*, cit., p. 61.

²¹ *Praep. Ev.* 9, 27, 4.

²² *Ivi* 9, 27, 12.

²³ See P. AHEARNE-KROLL, *Constructing Jewish Identity in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Case of Artapanus*, in D.C. HARLOW - J.J. COLLINS (eds.), *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism, Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI) 2011, p. 436.

²⁴ «On this account the Egyptians dedicate the rod in every temple, and similarly [they dedicate it]

plementary. Moses is said to have been properly held in divine honor; his rod is revered in Egyptian temples;²⁵ his patronage of the animal cults and priests is reciprocated by his being accorded divine honor by the priests and hailed as Hermes;²⁶ a cult is instituted for his mother,²⁷ and the goddess Isis is named in a positive tone.²⁸

The obvious question arises, which may have been the background (context?) of these statements.

Some scholars argue that Artapanus was not a Jew. Jacobson, for example, claims that

the notion that of all people Moses instituted animal worship in Egypt is hard to stomach. What could be more contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the Pentateuch? [...] Artapanus says things that seem (and would have seemed to his contemporaries) unlikely and almost intolerable in the mouth of a Jew. For example, he states that Moses assigned an Egyptian god for each nome and even chose the animals that would be associated with these gods. Now, he had plenty to credit Moses with. Animal worship could be left out without substantially reducing Moses's contributions. Idolatry in general and animal worship in particular was an abomination to Jews, not merely in the Bible but in the Hellenistic period too.

Artapanus, Jacobson concludes, was not a Jew at all but rather a gentile who may have had some knowledge of the Septuagint version of the Exodus. The fact that he extolls Moses would not prove that he was a Jew, since exceptional praises of Egyptians appear also in the works of Greek authors such as Herodotus and Hecataeus:

to Isis, since the earth is Isis, and when it was struck with the rod, it released the marvels» (*Praep. Ev.* 9, 27, 32).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ivi* 9, 27, 6.

²⁷ *Ivi* 9, 27, 16.

²⁸ *Ivi* 9, 27, 16; 27, 32.

²⁹ H. JACOBSON, *Artapanus Judaeus*, «Journal of Jewish Studies» 57,2 (2006), pp. 216-219. Feldman, too, expresses some doubt that Artapanus was a Jew and observes that 'if Artapanus is indeed a non-Jew, his tribute to the originality and importance of the Jewish contribution to civilization would be all the more effective': L.H. FELDMAN, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from*

[...] writers who write of alien people will often have admiring, indeed idealizing, views of them [...] A work of admiration and praise for a people is scarcely an argument for the author's belonging to that people [...]. There is no reason to believe Artapanus a Jew and there is evidence to support his being a gentile.²⁹

These views are rejected by most scholars.³⁰ Collins argues that it is difficult to imagine that a pagan author would have written an account that glorifies Moses and the patriarchs in such superlative terms without any hint of criticism. Even Hecataeus, whose account of Moses is sympathetic, admits that he introduced «an unsocial (*apanthropos*) and somewhat intolerant (*misoxenos*) mode of life»,³¹ and, moreover, no pagan author devoted a whole work to praise Jewish heroes. Authors can write idealizing accounts of nations to which they do not belong, but no example is extant of such an account written by any ancient author concerning Jewish figures. Collins concludes that «while it is not theoretically impossible that a Gentile composed the narrative of Artapanus, the balance of probability is heavily against that possibility».³² Ahearne-Kroll, too, rejects the possibility that Artapanus was a gentile, both because at the time non-Jewish Greek authors display no awareness of the Septuagint translation – and therefore would not know many of the details reported by Artapanus – and because their writings do not portray the superiority of non-Greeks.³³

Artapanus, therefore, must have been a Jew. In this case, there is general consensus that his startling statements reveal cultural as-

Alexander to Justinian, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993, p. 208.

³⁰ See C.R. HOLLADAY, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of this Category in New Testament Christology*, Scholars Press, Missoula (MO) 1977, pp. 216-232; STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, cit., pp. 167-186; BARCLAY, *Jews*, cit., pp. 127-132; GRUEN, *Heritage and Hellenism*, cit., pp. 155-160.

³¹ DIOD. 40, 3, 4.

³² COLLINS, *Artapanus Revisited*, cit., pp. 59-62.

³³ Artapanus' level of knowledge of the Genesis and Exodus narratives and his portrayal of the superiority of the Hebrew ancestors over Egyptian leaders are the predominant reasons why most

similation and accommodation to his pagan environment. Accordingly, he is often defined as a “syncretistic” and/or a “polytheistic” Jew. Holladay claims that Artapanus reflects «a liberal outlook, typical of a large segment of Diaspora Jews who did not find pagan traditions threatening or compromising to fidelity to their religious tradition». ³⁴ Barclay, too, includes this narrative among those attesting to “cultural convergence”, where authors integrated Jewish scriptures and distinctive practices with the norms and values of their cultural context:

Like many of his contemporaries, Artapanus can refer interchangeably to God (singular) and Gods (plural); even as a Jew he is both a monotheist and a polytheist. He shows no embarrassment in this confident cultural synthesis. Perhaps his generous attitude towards Egyptian religion was more common than we realize, and it is possible that, within his own time and community, he represented a popular Egyptianized Judaism [...]. Artapanus indicates the possibility of being both a proud Egyptian and a self-conscious Jew. ³⁵

It is however surprising that Artapanus consistently emphasizes the superiority of the Jews and of their God over other peoples and their deities. Goodman contends that Artapanus was not a polytheist or an assimilationist, and suggests that we should rather give a euhemeristic meaning ³⁶ to the statements in which Moses bestows gods to the Egyptians. Accordingly, the sacred animals would not be “worshipped” by Moses but rather “consecrated” to God on account of their usefulness. ³⁷

Collins, too, observes that Moses does not himself worship the sacred animals, nor does he

prescribe their worship for Judeans but only for Egyptians. ³⁸ Moreover, it is significant that even holding unconventional views, Artapanus still claims that the Jewish divinity is “the master of the universe”. The view is therefore common in contemporary scholarship that the pagan gods, including the animals worshipped by the Egyptians, may be explained euhemeristically as inventions useful to humankind. On the other hand, the Jewish divinity is never demythologized in this euhemeristic way. Artapanus seems to have approved of polytheism only for the (inferior) Egyptians, and therefore, Collins observes, «monotheism may not be the right word for his own faith, but he is at least a “henotheist”, who believes that “the master of the universe” is superior to other deities». In the end, the Egyptian sacred animals are destroyed in the Red Sea. ³⁹ Koskenniemi, too, suggests that Artapanus was neither a strict monotheist nor a polytheistic Jew who considered Judaism fully compatible with the pagan religion, and concludes that «monolatry seems to be the correct term for his view». ⁴⁰

A kind of Jewish identity, it appears, was important to Artapanus. Collins points out that

the restrictions on what he would allow are quite simply determined by whatever would augment the glory of the Jews. He is concerned with the identity of the Jewish people. The only fidelity required is that Jews maintain a distinct identity and affirm their superiority over against other peoples [...] Artapanus reflects an understanding of Judaism which is based on pride in the national tradition, but is prepared to treat that tradition in a rather plastic manner to bolster the identity of the Jews as a distinctive people worthy of respect in Hellenistic Egypt. ⁴¹

scholars think he was Jewish. See AHEARNE-KROLL, *Constructing Jewish Identity*, cit., pp. 438-448.

³⁴ C. HOLLADAY, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 1, Scholars Press, Chico (CA) 1983, p. 193.

³⁵ BARCLAY, *Jews*, cit., pp. 127-132. This interpretation is rejected by Collins, since it ignores the carnage of the Exodus which indisputably does elevate the God of the Jews over the gods of the Egyptians (COLLINS, *Artapanus Revisited*, cit., p. 65).

³⁶ Euhemerism – from Euhemerus of Messene who flourished around 300 BCE – is the theory according to which the gods were originally kings who

brought benefits to humankind, and their worship arose as an expression of gratitude (COLLINS, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, cit., p. 42, n. 66).

³⁷ GOODMAN, *Jewish Literature*, cit., p. 523.

³⁸ COLLINS, *Artapanus Revisited*, cit., p. 61.

³⁹ ID., *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, cit., p. 42. See also ZELLENTIN, *The End of Jewish Egypt*, cit., p. 51.

⁴⁰ E. KOSKENNIEMI, *Greeks, Egyptians and Jews in the Fragments of Artapanus*, «Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha» 13,1 (2002), p. 30.

⁴¹ COLLINS, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, cit., pp. 42-46.

Along the same lines, Kugler, too, observes that with his Moses narrative, Artapanus would have also reminded recipients that in spite of the legitimacy of their neighbors' religious choices and traditions, their God was still sovereign. The latter half of the fragment dealing with Moses shows that not only did the God of Israel sponsor the religions of Egypt; when the practitioners of those religions were hostile to the people of Israel, this God did not hesitate to take action against the perpetrators. The God of Israel remained master of the universe:

[...] it is the God of Moses who was in charge and who benefited or destroyed Egypt, its people, and its leader. This is the God who killed Chenepheres for his abuse of the Jews. This is the God who answered Moses' prayer for a respite for the people from a fire without fuel. This is the God who commanded Moses to make war against Egypt to set the people free. This is the God who, at least according to Clemens' fragment of Artapanus, opened the doors of the prison in which Moses was restrained by Pharaoh. This is the God whose name, when whispered in someone's ear or disdained in its written form, can slay them. This is the God who provided Moses with a rod that had power over Isis, the Egyptian divinity of earth and water. This is the God who subordinated and shamed Egypt's priests when they thought to challenge Him. And this is the God who delivered the people led by Moses through the miracle of the parted sea. Here, in subtle changes to and embellishments of the scriptural narrative, the audience would have encountered a story that assures the absolute superiority of the God of Israel over all other powers and religious realities. Although they may be legitimate – indeed their sponsorship by the God of Israel through Moses assures the recipients that they are – the Egyptian religions and their de-

mands remain subordinate to the God who made them in the first place.⁴²

No doubt, the Diaspora experience engenders borrowing, overlapping, and interconnection, and therefore makes anachronistic and unhelpful the whole concept of "Liberal" and "Orthodox" Jewish communities.⁴³ Against this background, Gruen points out that Artapanus' work qualifies as a prime document of cultural integration:

Artapanus even brings Arabs into the mix. He alters the biblical narrative that has Moses wed the daughter of Midianite priest, describing the union more broadly as marriage into the leading house of Arabia. Egyptians saw him as Thoth, Greeks as Mousaios Mousaeus; he brought hieroglyphics to Egypt and circumcision to Ethiopia. Artapanus' capricious book exemplifies the self-perception of Jews who reckoned insight into other cultures as an enrichment of their own.⁴⁴

This statement prompts intriguing questions regarding the nature of the background to be found behind Artapanus' blending of traditions and contradictions to the biblical tradition, and these questions, in turn, are of the utmost importance for an assessment of Artapanus' cultural identity.

It is often assumed that Artapanus' choices were conscious and deliberate. The biblical text would have been used by Artapanus as a point of departure to tell his own stories, adding to it and modifying it or even contradicting it seemingly at will.⁴⁵ Artapanus would have «thumbed his nose at other interpretations», having «no hesitation in ignoring the Scriptures now and again»⁴⁶

⁴² R.A. KUGLER, *Hearing the Story of Moses in Ptolemaic Egypt: Artapanus Accommodates the Tradition* in A. HILHORST - G.H. VAN KOOTEN (eds.), *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian and Gnostic Essays in Honor of Gerard P. Luttikhuisen*, Brill, Leiden 2005, p. 77.

⁴³ See E.S. GRUEN, *The Twisted Tales of Artapanus: Biblical Rewritings as Novelistic Narrative*, in I. RAMELLI - J. PERKINS (eds.), *Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: The Role of Religion in Shaping Narrative Forms*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2015, p. 37.

⁴⁴ GRUEN, *Hellenism and Judaism*, cit., p. 59.

Scholars' positions vis-à-vis Artapanus' *sui generis* Jewishness are dealt with by STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, cit., p. 179, n. 218. As for the term "Jewishness" signifying all the features of a person's life and worldview that constituted his/her self-identification as "Jewish", see S.J.D. COHEN, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1999, pp. 2-8.

⁴⁵ STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, cit., p. 175.

⁴⁶ GRUEN, *Heritage and Hellenism*, cit., pp. 157, 159.

and employing the book of Exodus «as no more than a frame to reconstruct his own adventure tales»⁴⁷. Zellentín goes so far as to suggest that Artapanus expected his audience to notice the differences between the Bible and his own work, and to generate meaning precisely through the implied audience's tacit approval of the ensuing ethical and historical incongruities.⁴⁸

Artapanus' talent, Gruen suggests,

directed itself principally toward capturing an audience with familiar biblical narratives presented in fresh, innovative, diverting and often surprising ways[...]. The whimsical character of Artapanus' additions and alterations emerges frequently in this text. [...] Whimsy and mischief are predominant [...] Both the populace and the intellectual classes [...] could take pleasure in the narrative charm and mischievous inversions of Artapanus.⁴⁹

This may be the case, but other scenarios, not less plausible, are also possible. The fact that Artapanus shows no awareness of basic Jewish tenets such as Jewish monotheism, for example, gives rise to some question regarding his familiarity with the Jewish world. The more so since he nowhere mentions the promulgation of the Law, which was the climax of the Exodus story in the Jewish tradition. In fact, Egyptian, Greek and Jewish traditions are presented so closely interwoven that one gets the impression that Artapanus was not aware of the differences obtaining between them, and, also, of the fact that sometimes such differences implied contradictions.

The possibility therefore emerges that his startling statements and deviations from biblical traditions may have stemmed not from free choice, but rather from scant familiarity with the Jewish world.

This would be no wonder had he lived in the Egyptian *chora*, far away from the intellec-

tually and culturally refined world of Alexandria, where Jews were apparently a considerable presence in the city. That this was probably the case is indicated by Artapanus' limited use of the current language of administration and by his emphasis on issues related to magic, such as, for example, the role attributed to Moses's rod⁵⁰ and the mysterious power of the Divine name, which, when whispered in the pharaoh's ear, causes him to fall down, and when written down, causes the priest who ridicules it to die in a convulsion.⁵¹ Artapanus seems to have lived in a social context where miraculous tales were more effective than sober history or philosophy. These characteristics would point to the Hellenized milieu of a country town rather than the educated élite of Alexandria,⁵² a humbler milieu in a peripheral center – whether Memphis,⁵³ Leontopolis, Hermopolis, or Heliopolis⁵⁴ – where popular local Egyptian traditions were dominant⁵⁵ and little may have been known of Jewish monotheism and of its exclusivism. In this case, it is clear why Artapanus has the God of the Jews smite the Egyptian gods while, at the same time, the other Greek and Egyptian deities are no less legitimate.

As Ahearne-Kroll points out,

the context of Jewish life in antiquity is often depicted too simplistically as polytheistic without much attention being given to the different religious traditions within that polytheistic world or to the particular social power that individual traditions exercised in different geographical regions. The subtle paradigm shift that I have proposed with Artapanus is to read fragment 3 in light of the influential polytheistic traditions that Jews encountered in Egypt. There appears to have been a Jewish community living in Memphis⁵⁶ and at the very least there were significant communities living near Memphis, in the Delta region and in the Fayûm whose

⁴⁷ GRUEN, *Hellenism and Judaism*, cit., p. 58.

⁴⁸ ZELLENTIN, *The End of Jewish Egypt*, cit., p. 33.

⁴⁹ GRUEN, *The Twisted Tales of Artapanus*, cit., pp. 41-42.

⁵⁰ *Praep. Ev.* 9, 27, 27, 28, 31-32.

⁵¹ *Ivi* 9, 27, 24-26.

⁵² See BARCLAY, *Jews*, cit., pp. 127-28.

⁵³ P.M. FRASER, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972, vol. 1, pp. 704-706; vol. 2, p. 985, n. 199.

⁵⁴ On the various possibilities, see STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, cit., p. 169, n. 178. See also BARCLAY, *Manipulating Moses*, cit., p. 33, n. 3; BARCLAY, *Jews*, cit., p. 128, n. 5, and KUGLER, *Hearing the Story of Moses*, cit., p. 69.

⁵⁵ See D. BARBU, *Artapan: introduction historique et historiographique*, in P. BORGEAUD et al. (eds.), *Interprétations de Moïse: Égypte, Judée, Grèce et Rome*, Brill, Leiden 2010, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁶ On the Jewish community at Memphis, see D.J.

life would have been affected by Egyptian religious practices in the Memphis area.⁵⁷

The issue of Artapanus' dependence on the Jewish tradition remains obscure. In the past it has often been maintained that Artapanus' account of the Exodus is based on that found in the Septuagint. Recently, however, this possibility has been re-examined,⁵⁸ and Zellentín argues that

a close synoptic reading of Artapanus and the Septuagint reveals that the supposed connection is far more problematic than previously realized and it remains intriguing that neither Freudenthal nor his successors were able to prove a single unambiguous textual relationship between Artapanus and the Septuagint.⁵⁹

In the case of the description of the plagues, Zellentín aptly points out that the examples adduced are not particularly conclusive, since the words in question do not have endless synonyms in Greek. Similarities, therefore, cannot be taken as decisive,⁶⁰ and Artapanus' dependence on the Septuagint appears to be rather loose. Sterling, too, arrives at the same conclusion. Of the twenty proper names in Artapanus, six agree with the Septuagint, five vary and nine have no parallel. The same pattern holds true for place names. Of the eleven place names that occur in Artapanus, four agree while five have no biblical parallels. It is also meaningful that in Artapanus names assume a fully declinable form instead of the indeclinable transliterations of the Septuagint.⁶¹

The possibility therefore arises that Artapanus relied on one or more traditions quite different from what we call the biblical story.⁶²

A statement in fragment 3 is highly significant in this context. When dealing with the passage of the Jews through the Red Sea, Artapanus reports not one but three different traditions. One, he says, was in force at Memphis: «Now the Memphites say that Moses was familiar with the countryside and watched for the ebb tide and he conveyed the multitude across through the dry sea».⁶³ Artapanus adds another tradition, from Heliopolis, which does not deal with the way Moses took the Jews through the Red Sea, but rather with the reason why the Egyptians chased the Jews.⁶⁴ Then a third version is offered, similar to that of the biblical account.⁶⁵

This passage, which constitutes a refutation of the hostile literary account attributed to Manetho, is not only a suitable example of the working style of the contemporary ethnographic studies, but has the utmost importance because it attests that in Artapanus' day different traditions pertaining to the Exodus were in force in Egypt in different places. This passage also allows for the possibility that these different traditions, either in written or oral form, were his sources of information all along the way, directly or indirectly – in fact, one cannot exclude the possibility that Artapanus had no text whatsoever in front of him, and quoted only hearsay. Moreover, it is striking that Artapanus presents these three traditions without expressing any preference, namely, that he regards none of them as binding. Perhaps at the time the Septuagint had not yet reached wide circulation and

THOMPSON, *Memphis under the Ptolemies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1988, p. 17.

⁵⁷ AHEARNE-KROLL, *Constructing Jewish Identity*, cit., pp. 438-448, 454-456.

⁵⁸ See J.J. COLLINS, *Artapanus*, in J.H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, Doubleday & Company, Garden City (NY) 1985, p. 894; ID., *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, cit., p. 38.

⁵⁹ ZELLENTÍN, *The End of Jewish Egypt*, cit., p. 32 and n. 17.

⁶⁰ *Ivi* p. 32.

⁶¹ STERLING, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, cit., p. 174, n. 196.

⁶² See also COLLINS, *Artapanus Revisited*, cit., p. 60.

⁶³ *Praep. Ev.* 9, 27, 35.

⁶⁴ «But the Heliopolitans say that the king rushed down on them with a great force, together with the consecrated animals, since the Jews had acquitted and were carrying off the property of the Egyptians» (*ibid.*).

⁶⁵ «But a divine voice came to Moses to strike the sea with his rod and divide it. When Moses heard, he touched the water with the rod and thus the flowing water separated and the host went through a dry path» (*Praep. Ev.* 9, 27, 36).

may have been confined to specific circles and/or geographical centers of the country, not yet having the reputation and prestige it was later to gain.⁶⁶ In fact, the fact that other translations (or versions) of the Pentateuch circulated in Egypt before the Septuagint (or at the same time) is no news. The Letter of Aristeas calls them «earlier and somewhat unreliable translations of the Law».⁶⁷

In conclusion, Artapanus' surviving fragments reflect a cultural world theologically mixed and characterized by fluid boundaries, where Egyptian, Greek and several different Jewish traditions coexisted, closely intertwined, and where little was known about Jewish monotheism and its exclusivism. This may well explain those statements found in his work, which to us

today appear startling and odd, but may have appeared much less so in the time and the place where he lived. In this case, the deviations from the biblical tradition would reflect not a conscious capricious choice, but rather a perception of the Jewish world very different not only from that prevailing in our time but also from that which emerges from the works of the other Jewish authors living and writing in Egypt in Hellenistic times as cited by Alexander Polyhistor.

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SUMMARY

Artapanus' literary work includes passages which not only display cultural assimilation and accommodation to the surrounding pagan environment but also utterly contradict Jewish tenets. An examination of the background of these passages and of Artapanus' doubtful dependence on the Septuagint suggests the possibility that his deviations from the biblical account reflect not a deliberate disregard but rather a scant familiarity with the Jewish world.

KEYWORDS: Greek and Egyptian traditions; Biblical account; Cultural identity.

⁶⁶ On authoritative status of the Septuagint in Philo's time, see H. NAJMAN, *Philo's Greek Scriptures and Cultural Symbiosis*, in M. POPOVIC (ed.), *Jewish Cultural Encounters in the Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern World*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2017, pp. 190-200. See also E. ULRICH, *From Literature to Scripture: Reflections on the Growth*

of a Text's Authoritativeness, «Dead Sea Discoveries» 10,1 (2003), pp. 3-25 and, on issues pertaining to canon formation, T.H. LIM (ed.), *When Texts Are Canonized*, *Brown Judaic Studies* 359, Brown Judaic Studies, Providence (RI) 2017.

⁶⁷ *Arist.* 314.

