

“He was Thoth in Everything”

Why and When King Solomon Became Both
Magister omnium physicorum and Master of Magic

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Two Branches of the Solomonic Lore

During the Middle Ages, a new legendary tradition about King Solomon developed and spread throughout Jewish literature, and was added to earlier traditions that dealt with Solomon, the magician and the ruler of the supernatural world. This new tradition depicted Solomon as a king whose wisdom encompassed all of the “wisdoms” according to the classification of that period, namely, philosophy and the sciences.¹ In this legendary tradition, Solomon was presented, among other things, as the teacher of philosophers such as Pythagoras² and, perhaps most importantly, of Aristotle.

The precursive core of this medieval legendary tradition can be found in two Jewish sources from the Hellenistic and Roman periods – the Wisdom of Solomon and the *Jewish Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus. These two books expanded on the biblical references to Solomon’s great wisdom (1 Kgs 3:9–14) and attributed to him supreme proficiency in the “wisdom of nature” (*tôn ontôn / rerum natura*) alongside the command of magic (healing and exorcism).

* *Magister omnium physicorum*, i.e., “master of all natural things.”

¹ On the various versions of the legendary tradition about Solomon as a “philosopher” and as Aristotle’s teacher, see Y. Shavit, “Stolen Libraries – the Transformations and Functions of the Legendary Tradition of ‘King Solomon’s Library’ and Aristotle as its Main Protagonist,” in *Libraries and Book Collections* [Hebrew], ed. Y. Kaplan and M. Sluhovsky (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2006), 413–45; A. Melamed, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Science and Philosophy* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2010).

² The Spanish Muslim scholar Šā’id al-Andalusī states in his *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-umam* (*Book of the Categories of Nations*, 1068 CE): “Pythagoras studied philosophy in Egypt under the disciples of Solomon, son of David.” In Šā’id al-Andalusī, *Science in the Medieval World: Book of the Categories of Nations*, trans. and ed. S. I. Salem and A. Kumar (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 21, it is stated that Isokrates (436–338 BCE) wrote that Pythagoras visited Egypt and “became a student of the religion of the people, and was the first to bring the Greeks all philosophy” (*Busiris*, 21–23).

The first of the two passages I will discuss in the following pages is found in the seventh chapter of *Wisdom of Solomon*, a work apparently written in Palestine and Egypt in the second or first century BCE, where the king himself, the reputed possessor of all wisdom, describes his broad encyclopedic knowledge, imparted to him by God:

"For it is he (God) who gave me unerring knowledge (*gnōsis*) of what exists (*tōn ontōn*),

To know the structure of the world (*sustasis kosmou*) and the activity of the elements (*energeia stoicheiōn*);

The beginning and end and middle of times,

The alternations of the solstices (*tropōn allagai*) and the change of the seasons,

The cycles of the year and the constellation of the stars,

The nature of animals and the temper of wild animals (*pneumatōn bias*),

The powers of spirits (*pneumatōn*)³ and the thoughts of human beings,

The varieties of plants and the virtues of roots,

I learned both what is secret and what is manifest,

For wisdom the fashioner of all things taught me." (*Wisdom* 7:17–22)⁴

According to the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Solomon's wisdom thus encompasses wide knowledge in ontology, cosmology, physics, astronomy, biology, botany, zoology, and in esoterica.

The second passage comes from Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*, written at the end of the first century CE, which also describes Solomon as well-versed in *rerum natura*:

Now so great was the prudence and wisdom which God granted Solomon that he surpassed the ancients, and even the Egyptians, who are said to excel all man in understanding, were not only, when compared with him, a little inferior but fall far short of the king in sagacity. [...] There was no form of nature with which he was not acquainted or which he passed over without examining, but he studied them all philosophically and revealed the most complete knowledge of their several properties. (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.42–44)⁵

³ The intention may not be "evil spirits," but according to some scholars, it may be the Egyptian *akhu* = powers of the soul.

⁴ Translation from L. L. Grabbe, trans., *Wisdom of Solomon* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 64. See also the translations of D. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Anchor Bible 43; Garden City: Doubleday, 1979), 172, and of S. Holmes in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 1:546.

⁵ Trans. H. Thackeray and R. Marcus (LCL 281; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 3:693–95.

Unlike the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Josephus explicitly compares Solomon's wisdom to that of the Egyptians, but he does not explain what "Solomon's wisdom" exactly entailed. In contrast, Josephus highlights Solomon's dominion over the supernatural world:

And God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men. He also composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved, and left behind forms of exorcism with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return. (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.45–46)

In other words, Josephus attributes to Solomon not only the authorship of one thousand five hundred books of odes (*ōdai*) and songs (*melos*), and three thousand books of parables (*paroimiai*), but also knowledge of the art used against demons. Moreover, as we shall see below, Josephus finds it necessary to cite a concrete example of Solomon's power as a healer and exorcist of demons, namely, as a magician – a tradition that emerged during the Hellenistic and Roman periods and was further developed in the literature of the Sages. This different outlook notwithstanding, Josephus also repeats, albeit briefly, the tradition from the *Wisdom of Solomon* about Solomon as a master of wisdom, which (re-)emerged in the Middle Ages as a result of the Jews' encounter with Greek philosophy.

Much attention has been given to Josephus' portrayal of Solomon as an "esoteric king,"⁶ as a "magician," or as an "exorcist." Scholars have generally focused on the words of Josephus about Solomon the magician as another source for understanding the role that various branches of theoretical and practical magic played in Jewish society and culture in the Hellenistic-Roman period (and of course, after it).⁷ However, much less attention has been paid to Josephus' description of Solomon as a philosopher.

My main intention in this article is to try to clarify what led Josephus to describe Solomon both as someone acquainted with all "forms of nature" – i.e., a "*magister omnium physicorum*" – and as a master of magic. Why did he feel the need to attribute to Solomon both magical *and* theoretical knowledge about nature? And why did the first signs of the tradition about Solomon as a philosopher emerge in the Hellenistic and Roman periods?

In the following, I do not intend to argue that the legendary tradition about Solomon as a philosopher-king that appeared in the Middle Ages is a direct continuation of the tradition from much earlier generations. Quite

⁶ For a general survey of Josephus' portrayal of Solomon, see L. H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 570–628.

⁷ See Gideon Bohak's recently published comprehensive work, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); D. Berger, "The Wisest of all Men: Solomon's Wisdom in Medieval Jewish Commentaries of the Book of Kings," in *Hazon Nahum: Studies in Jewish Law, Thought, and History*, ed. Y. Elman and J. S. Gurock (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 93–114.

the contrary, the tradition about Solomon as a magician and ruler of demons was the dominant legendary tradition until the Middle Ages, and it was not until the Renaissance that the two traditions merged again. I rather wish to assert that in both cases – in the Hellenistic and Roman periods and in the Middle Ages – the tradition about Solomon as a “philosopher-king” was born to fill a similar cultural need. Before doing so, however, I will try to shed some light in the images of royal sages and philosophers that might have served Josephus as a model for description of King Solomon.

King Solomon and Other Royal Sages in the Ancient Near East

The tradition about Solomon as a sage was undoubtedly inspired by the model of the sage king, which was prevalent in the cultures of the ancient Near East. Under its influence, the author/s of the Wisdom of Solomon and Josephus attribute the highest wisdom not to an ancient sage but to a king. In the ancient Near East, quite a few kings were described as sages endowed with wisdom and knowledge.⁸ The topos of Solomon as a “royal sage” could well have been inspired by traditions about several kings of Assyria and Babylonia, who boasted about their profound wisdom (*basisu palku*). Assurbanipal (668–631 BCE), for example, bragged about his talents and declared that he was a scholar with knowledge of science and books – both “theoretical wisdom” and “practical wisdom”:

Marduk, the wisest (*apkalla*) of gods, gave me the wide understanding (*uznu*) and extensive intelligence (*basisu*), and Nabu, the scribe (who knows) everything, granted me his wise teaching (*ibzī nemeqi*) [...] I learned the art of the Sage Adapa (so that now) I am familiar with the secret storehouse of all scribal learning (including) celestial and terrestrial potent [...].⁹

⁸ A rich literature exists on the various types of “wisdom” in the ancient Near East. See J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990); M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas, eds., *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1955); J. L. Crenshaw, ed., *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (New York: KTAV Publ. House, 1976); L. Kalugila, *The Wise King: Studies in Royal Wisdom as Divine Revelation in the Old Testament and its Environment* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1980); S. Walchli, *Der weise König Salomo: Eine Studie zu den Erzählungen von der Weisheit Salomos in ihrem alttestamentlichen und altorientalischen Kontext* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1999).

⁹ See R. F. G. Sweet, “The Sage in Akkadian Literature: A Philological Study,” in *The Sage in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 55; Kalugila, *Wise King*, 38–61.

The sage himself, from the city of Eridu, received from the god of wisdom Ea “much knowledge so he might discover the laws of the earth.”¹⁰ Other Mesopotamian kings also prided themselves on their command of various types of wisdom (*nemequ*).

It is more likely, however, that the topos about Solomon as a royal sage as it appears in Josephus was influenced more directly by the image of several kings of Pharaonic Egypt. For instance, King Tuthmose III of Egypt (1479–1425 BCE) is praised as follows:

Behold, His Majesty knew what has come into being. There was nothing at all which he did not know. He was Thoth in everything; there was not any subject of which he was not knowledgeable [...] after the manner of the Majesty Seshat. He could construe (or “divide”) a sign according to its value (or “use”) like the god who ordained it and created it.¹¹

Similarly, king Sesostris I (1917–1872 BCE) is praised by Sinuhe as “the master of knowledge,”¹² and King Ramses II (1279–1213 BCE) is said to be “wise in knowledge like Thoth, knowing how to instruct, skilled (?) in craftsmanship [...]”¹³ In quite a few cases, the wisdom of the king of Egypt is extolled by comparison with that of the god Thoth.

There is no way of knowing why – and when – a description of the “wisdom of nature” granted to Solomon by God was added to his biblical “biography.”¹⁴ Nor is it clear which “Egyptian wisdom” is meant in

¹⁰ The myth of Adapa was found on a silt tablet from El Amarna and on fragments of two tablets in the Ashurbanipal library. See J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3d ed.; Princeton: Anet, 1969), 101–3. See also E. Reiner, “The Etiological Myth of ‘Seven Sages,’” *Orientalia* 30 (1961): 1–11.

¹¹ In R. Jasnow and K.-T. Zauzich, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth: A Demotic Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the Classical Hermetica*, vol. 1: *Text* (Wiesbaden: Harrsowitz, 2005), 62; after D. B. Redford, *Pharaonic King-Lists, Annals and Day-Books: A Contribution to the Study of the Egyptian Sense of History* (Mississauga: Benben, 1986), 166–67.

¹² D. W. K. Simpson, “The Story of Sinuhe,” in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (2d ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 57–74. In the Lichtheim translation: “He is lord of knowledge, wise planner, skilled leader”; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1: *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1975), 225.

¹³ D. B. Redford, “The Earliest Years of Ramesses II and the Building of Ramesside Court at Luxor,” *Journal of Egyptian Archeology* 57 (1971): 113.

¹⁴ The unending attempt to describe Solomon’s topos as historically reliable, to clarify what sources “influenced” his wisdom, and to state that he created a special *Gattung* of the nature of ancient wisdom in Israel seems unfounded to me. See A. Alt, “Solomonic Wisdom,” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 102–13. The descriptions of Solomon’s royal court as a place served by Egyptian scribes or Israelite scribes educated in Egypt, as one that maintains diplomatic contacts with Egypt, through which elements of Egyptian culture were transmitted to Solomon’s kingdom, are also imaginary. However, this is not the place to deal with the reliability of the biblical story about Solomon or the stages of its writing and editing. In any event, in my view, its writing was completed before the Hellenistic period, and it is not necessarily true that the references to Solomon’s wisdom

1 Kings 5:10. In any event, it was surely not the wisdom of the Egyptian magicians, at whom the prophet Isaiah jeers (Isa 19:11–12), since there is no allusion to the prevalent image of Egypt as a “land of mystery.” Yet, on the other hand, it would be correct to say that the addition shows that the author was familiar with the value and prestige ascribed to “wisdom” in the ancient Near East, and no less importantly, it also suggests that the biblical author knew about the image of Egypt as a country marked by “wisdom” and “learning.”¹⁵ Hence, he saw fit to emphasize that Solomon’s wisdom “excelled the wisdom of all the children of the land of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1 Kgs 5:10). This wisdom finds its expression in Solomon’s ability to speak “of trees from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of (about) beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things and of fishes” (1 Kgs 5:13).

The Change in the Nature of Solomonic Wisdom

The concrete wisdom the Hebrew Bible attributes to Solomon, then, is the writing of Wisdom literature: “And he spoke three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five” (1 Kgs 5:12). However, the “wisdom and knowledge” (*chokhmah* and *madda*’; 2 Chr 1:11–12) granted to biblical Solomon were far less than the “wisdom” ascribed to the Assyrian king or to the Egyptian king. The first change in the nature of Solomon’s wisdom appears in the Septuagint (LXX), which uses the word pair *sunesis* and *sophia* in 2 Chronicles 1:11–12 in order to render the Hebrew words *chokhmah* and *madda*’, where the translation in LXX 1 Kings 3:12 speaks of “a heart of understanding and wisdom” (*kardian phronimên kai sophiën*). In Pablo A. Torijano’s view, these two words refer to *both* “practical wisdom,” political skill and wisdom, and physical science, *and* “knowledge of divine things, that is, of unchanging entities in philosophical terms.”¹⁶ However, here too, there are no details about the scope and content of Solomon’s wisdom. Also in the second century BCE, Aristobulus, a priest from Jerusalem who settled in Egypt, wrote in his *Commentary on the Law of Moses* that “Solomon said clearly and better that wisdom existed before heaven and

were added under the influence of the model of the Greek / Hellenistic philosopher-king. See M. McGlynn, “Solomon, Wisdom, and the Philosopher-Kings,” in *Studies in the Book of Wisdom*, ed. G. G. Xeravits and J. Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 61–81.

¹⁵ According to Diodorus Siculus, Egypt was the birthplace of every human aspect, including “sciences” (*Bibliotheca historica* 1.96–98).

¹⁶ P. A. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus: Development of a Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 29.

earth” (Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 13.12.11), but he also does not say what the content of that “wisdom” was.¹⁷

In apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature, wisdom (*sophia*) has many meanings – as a divine summons to man, as a means of revelation, as world-reason (*logos*), as a cosmic element found in everything, as a way of life, as a body of knowledge, etc.¹⁸ – and it is bestowed by God, or by angels. As a body of knowledge, handed down to an elect one, wisdom appears, for example, in *1 Enoch*:

After that he gave me instructions in all the secret things (found) in the book of my grandfather, Enoch, and in the parables which were given to him, and he put them together for me in the words of the book which is with me. (*1 Enoch* 68:1)¹⁹

In the *Book of Jubilees*, Enoch is described as

the first who learned writing and knowledge and wisdom, from (among) the sons of men. [...] And he wrote in a book the signs of the heaven according to the order of their month, so that the sons of man might know the (appointed) times of the years and months. (*Jubilees* 4:17)²⁰

“The Book of Heavenly Luminaries” in *1 Enoch* 72–82, written in the third century BCE, is an astronomical text that describes the heavenly bodies, “the position of each and every one, in respect to their ranks, in respect to their authorities and in respect to their seasons; each of one according to their names” (*1 Enoch* 79:1–2), and was influenced by far older Mesopotamian writings.²¹

It thus becomes clear that the appearance of “wisdom” as knowledge in this literature was meant, among other things, to fill a large lacuna in Jewish culture. And it expresses the consciousness of this lacuna, which was filled not only by a description of the “state of the culture” or the “state of education” among the Jewish people, but rather by citing the names of mythological creators of “culture.” The lacuna was also filled by an emphasis on the importance of the book in the preservation of wisdom and knowledge and their transmission to the coming generations:

¹⁷ Trans. A. Yarbo Collins, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 2:841.

¹⁸ G. Fohrer, “Sophia,” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 63–83.

¹⁹ R. H. Charles writes that wisdom is “omnipotent, omniscient, and puts all the attributes into action”; *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 1:527.

²⁰ Trans. O. S. Wintermute, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:62. See also J. J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989); J. H. Charlesworth, “Jewish Interest in Astrology during the Hellenistic and Roman Period,” *ANRW* 2.20.2 (1987): 926–50.

²¹ W. Horowitz, “The 360 and 364 Year in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Society* 24 (1996): 35–44; M. E. Stone, “The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century BCE,” in Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 247–58.

Now, my son Methuselah, I shall recount all these things to you and write them down for you. I have revealed to you and give you the book concerning all these things. Preserve, my son, the book from your father's hand in order that you may pass it to the generations of the world. (*1 Enoch* 82:1)

The Wisdom of Solomon, however, is the first book that does not deal solely with a definition of "wisdom" and a description of its qualities and traits, but rather attributes the possession of all branches of this wisdom to King Solomon, instead of figures from the earliest times of the human race or the fathers of the nation. I do not believe it would be exaggerated to claim that Josephus felt the same need to attribute the understanding of the structure and order of the universe of the early sages to the fathers of humankind. Thus, he writes in his *Antiquities* that the sons of Seth "discovered the science of the heavenly bodies and the orderly array" (*Ant.* 1.69–70), and that Abraham "introduced [the Egyptians] to arithmetic and transmitted to them the laws of astronomy." (*Ant.* 1.167–68).²² In other words, Abraham transmitted the wisdom of astronomy from Mesopotamia to Egypt, so that Solomon did not discover the "wisdom of astronomy," but was merely better-versed in it than the Egyptians, probably because he continued to investigate it.²³ However, like the Wisdom of Solomon, Josephus did not merely ascribe the source of the various wisdoms to the ancient fathers of the nation, but saw it fit to endow Solomon with the image of a "super sage." Hence, while the apologetic Jewish-Hellenistic literature attributed various "inventions" (*inventiones*) to the patriarchs of Israel, Josephus was unable to attribute any "inventions" from the dawn of history to Solomon. He could, however, attribute to him encyclopedic wisdom, in which he surpassed the ancients, and even the Egyptians (*Ant.* 8.42–44). In other words, Josephus was interested in presenting to his readers the image of a Jewish royal sage, equal in status to eminent kings / royal sages in the ancient Near East, and there was no other king but Solomon who could fill that

²² Trans. H. St. J. Thackeray and R. Marcus (LCL 242; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 1:23, 33.

²³ See J. S. Siker, "Abraham in Graeco-Roman Paganism," *JSJ* 18 (1987): 188–208. From the description ascribed to Eupolemus, probably from the first century BCE, of Abraham as an astrologer who invented astrology and taught it to the Egyptians (trans. F. R. Falton in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:861–79), and from several other mentions, some scholars have jumped to the exaggerated conclusion that "the Jews were known in the ancient world not only as miracle workers, magicians, fortunetellers, and the like, but also as astronomers." See M. Bar-Ilan, *Astrology and Other Sciences Among The Jews of Israel in the Roman-Hellenistic and Byzantine Periods* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2011), 28. The boundary between astrology and astronomy was quite hazy in that period, and remained so even after it. In any event, they both shared the view that the universe was a "defined structure of directly related bodies." See A. Long, "Astrology: Arguments Pro and Contra," in *Science and Speculation: Studies in Hellenistic Theory and Practice*, ed. J. Barnes et al. (Paris: l'Homme, 1982), 165–92.

role. Since Solomon's contribution to humankind could not be expressed in "inventions" from ancient times, Josephus attributed to him "wisdom," as it was perceived in Hellenistic-Jewish literature, as it was personified in the figure of the Egyptian god Thoth or inspired by the comparison of several kings of Egypt to Thoth.

To Which Egyptian Wisdom was Josephus Referring?

When Josephus writes about Solomon's "wisdom of Egypt," does he refer only to magic (*haka*), to esoteric wisdom? Was he not familiar with the Egyptian wisdom literature, or the content of the concept of *Ma'at*?²⁴ Was he ignorant of the many achievements of the Egyptians in various fields of "science" – in mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and others, long before the Ptolemaic period?²⁵ Or perhaps he chose to ignore them? If he had wanted to laud Solomon's universal knowledge, for example, or his knowledge in astronomy, why did he not compare this knowledge with Greek science or with the science that flourished in Hellenistic-Roman

²⁴ N. Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom be Found? The Sages' Language in the Bible and in Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); M. Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

²⁵ Egyptian priests produced a wide range of literature, including wisdom literature, historical accounts, and medical and astronomical texts. See A. Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, trans. H. M. Tirrard (New York: Dover, 1971), 329–34. Chaeremon's (Stoic philosopher, 1st c. CE) depiction of the learned priests completing their religious services and spending the rest of the day on arithmetical and geometrical speculations, searching for new discoveries, and engaged in the pursuit of learning was not entirely imaginary (P. van der Horst, *Chaeremon: Egyptian Priest and Stoic Philosopher: Fragments* [Leiden: Brill, 1987], 17, 21). The Greek geographer Strabo, who visited Heliopolis between 19 and 24 CE, was shown the "lodgings" of Plato and his companion Eudoxus, was told that they both spent twelve years with the priests, and "since these priests excelled in their knowledge of heavenly bodies, albeit secretive and slow to impart it, Plato and Eudoxus prevailed upon them in time by courting their favor to let them learn some of the principles of their doctrines"; Strabo, *Geography* 1.29; trans. H. L. Jones (LCL 49; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 1:83–85. There is disagreement as to the achievements of the Egyptians in the various fields of science. In any event, there is no disagreement about their achievements in medicine, engineering, mathematics, and other fields. M. Clagett, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Science: A Source Book*, vol. 1: *Knowledge and Order* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989); R. Sloley, "Science," in *The Legacy of Egypt*, ed. S. R. K. Glanville (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), 160–78; G. R. Robins, "Mathematics, Astronomy, and Calendars in Pharaonic Egypt," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. M. Sasson (repr., Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 3:1799–1813; B. L. van der Waerden, *Science Awakening*, trans. A. Dresden (Gröningen: Noordhoff, 1954); O. Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (2d ed.; Providence: Brown University Press, 1957), 71–97; R. Palter, "Black Athena, Afrocentrism, and the History of Science," *History of Science* 31 (1993): 227–87.

Alexandria? After all, it is difficult to believe Josephus knew nothing about the widespread scientific activity that developed in Alexandria, in particular, the activity in the museum in the various branches of science, which also included science based on observation.²⁶ When Josephus writes, "There was no form of nature with which he was not acquainted or which he passed over without examining, but he studied them all philosophically and revealed the most complete knowledge of their properties," was he referring to the Pharaonic "Egyptian wisdom" or to "Greek-Hellenistic philosophy and science"? This question arises because, unlike the Wisdom of Solomon, Josephus claims that Solomon's wisdom is greater than that of the Egyptians. This may be a reaction to the literature that glorifies Egyptian wisdom and its influence on Greek wisdom – a claim which is not completely legendary. According to this tradition, Greek scholars visited Egypt and learned their wisdom from Egyptian priests.²⁷ If we assume that Josephus was familiar with this tradition, it is reasonable to surmise that he was making the claim that while Egyptian wisdom is truly great and impressive, the "wisdom of the Jews" – not the wisdom of mythological or very ancient figures but that which Solomon represents – is far greater. He had to make this assertion because he undoubtedly was familiar with the value and importance assigned in Greek and Hellenistic culture to scientific *paideia*. Moreover, Josephus was familiar with the derogatory words of Apollonius Molon, who claimed that the Jews had not only failed to invent any crafts, but had also not contributed anything to spiritual creation (*Against Apion* 2.36/255–61).²⁸ However, since he was unable to point to any contribution by Jews to these branches of science, he had no other reply to the depiction of "Jewish inferiority" in these fields, which had already been countered in *Ad maiorem Iudeorum gloria* by Hellenistic Jewish writers, but to glorify Solomon. Therefore, inspired by the content of 1 Kings, he ascribed broad "scientific" knowledge and philosophical understanding to the one man

suggested by the Jewish tradition, i.e., King Solomon, but merely offers a generalized description of Solomon's wisdom.

In view of all this, it is surprising to see that Josephus chose to stress Solomon's command of magic, rather than the superiority of his Wisdom literature as found in the books of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. The one field that he not only mentions, but for which he also cites a concrete example (see below) is that of Solomon as an exorcist. This is an image that from the first century CE onward grew into the rich tradition about Solomon as the ruler of an army of demons (described, among other places, in *Testament of Solomon*, a syncretistic esoteric work written in Egypt between the first and fourth centuries CE, and in Hermetic and gnostic literature).²⁹ Josephus did not choose to represent Solomon as "the philosopher" superseding all other philosophers and the men of science of the Greco-Roman world. But would Josephus not have impressed his readers more if he had described Solomon as a philosopher-king, or as an "enlightened" king? He could have written about Solomon in the same vein that Philo of Alexandria wrote about Moses in *De Vita Mosis* (1.5–21) – who is there said to have been taught arithmetic, geometry, and the arts of meter and music, together with philosophy conveyed by hieroglyphs, astrology, and the regular syllabus, the so-called "encyclopaedic subjects," by Egyptian, Chaldaean, and Greek scholars in Pharaoh's palace.³⁰ Philo adds that Greek philosophers adopted Moses' theory about the structure of the universe.³¹ In contrast, Josephus only writes that the Greek philosophers followed in Moses' footsteps (*Against Apion* 2.281) and that from the Jews they received "the truth and the correct perception of God" (2.255). If the philosophy vocabulary of the Wisdom of Solomon and of the *Antiquities* was influenced by the Greco-Hellenist-Roman scientific and philosophical language – an influence manifested, for example, in the use of the terms *dynamis*, *energeia*, and *stoicheia*³² (which also appear

²⁶ The anonymous author of *Expositio totius mundi et Gentium* (second half of the fourth century) wrote, as if he were responding to Josephus: "It is impossible, in whatever matter you may wish, to find such a wise man as the Egyptian; and so of all philosophers and men versed in the wisdom of letters, the best have been those who have always dwelt in this country." On this literature about the "first discoverers" (*prōtoi heurētai*), see K. Thraße, "Erfinder, II (geistesgeschichtlich)," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. T. Klausner (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1962), vol. 1, cols. 1191–278; G. Sarton, *Hellenistic Science and Culture in the Last Three Centuries bc* (New York: Dover, 1993), 280–433.

²⁷ See a brief summary in Y. Shavit, *History in Black: African-Americans in Search of an Ancient Past* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 131–38. On the Greeks' willingness to acknowledge their "debt" to Egypt, see the brief summary there, 113–21.

²⁸ B. Bar-Kochva, "The Anti-Jewish Treatise by Apollonius Molon," in Bar-Kochva, *The Image of the Jews in Greek Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 500–3.

²⁹ Solomon's name appears in four tractates of a corpus of texts, *On the Origins of the World*, from Nag Hammadi, and in one of them, "the Book of Solomon" is mentioned. See J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* (rev. ed.; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 177.

³⁰ Trans. F. H. Colson (LCL 289; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 286–89; and see A. Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1982), with review by J.-G. Kahn, "Philo's Secular Education" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 54 (1985): 306–14. Also T. Conley, "General Education" in *Philo of Alexandria*, ed. W. Wuellner (Protocols of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies 15; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

³¹ H. Cliford, "Moses as Philosopher-Sage in Philo," in *Moses in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions*, ed. A. Graupner and M. Wolter (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 151–67.

³² Scholars found in Wisdom of Solomon the influence of Middle Platonism, "in which many Stoic notions were incorporated"; P. S. Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," in E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus (175 bc–ad 135): A New English Version*, ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman (rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 3.1:342–79.

in Hermetic texts) – why not compare Solomon to these scholars who were aware of the value of the “scientific” investigation of natural phenomena?³³ Nonetheless, Josephus did not try to depict Solomon as a “Greek” philosopher and scientist, not only because he may not have known about Greek mathematical astronomy (e.g., Eudoxus of Cnidus, Aristarchus of Samos, Apollonius of Perga, Hipparchus of Nicea),³⁴ but mainly because science was not part of his intellectual world, and perhaps because his apologetic rhetoric was directed against the “autochthonous” Egyptians and the image of Egypt as the “cradle of wisdom.” As a result, Solomon is portrayed in the *Antiquities* as an esoteric king. In Torijano’s words: “the lore that is described (in *Wisdom*) has little to do with biblical wisdom or purely scientific disciplines ... as a matter of fact, each of the points listed is at the core of Hermetism, astrology, or magic in general.”³⁵ Torijano also writes: “It is quite probable that Josephus knew of a tradition that connected Solomon with philosophical and Hermetic conceptions of four elements,” and that his chosen wording “describes the king as a scientist or philosopher.” Moreover, he also argues that Josephus’ depiction of Solomon is an echo of a popular tradition of Solomon as a ‘Hermetic’ sage.”³⁶

Did Josephus mean to compare Solomon to a mythological figure, to a god?

Is Solomon a Counterpart of Thoth?

Is Solomon’s image in the *Wisdom of Solomon* and Josephus’ *Antiquities* actually that of a hermetic sage? Or is he even depicted as a counterpart of Thoth-Hermes, the “Thoth in everything”? To answer this question we need to see what sort of wisdom was attributed to Thoth and to clarify how the author/s of the *Wisdom of Solomon* and Josephus could have known the Hermetic literature of their own time or of an earlier time.

In fact, there was nothing innovative about such a comparison. According to the Jewish historian Artapanus in the second century BCE, Moses discovered “many useful things,” including philosophy and even Egyptian

³³ G. E. R. Lloyd, *The Revolution of Wisdom: Studies in the Claim and Practice of Ancient Greek Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 272–73.

³⁴ O. Neugebauer, *Exact Science in Antiquity* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1957), 71–96. The philosopher and mathematician Abraham Bar Hiyya, who lived in Spain in the twelfth century, wrote in his book *Sefer ha-ibbur* (Book of the Intercalation) that Hipparchus learned astronomy from the Jews, and from him it was passed on to the Gentiles. See S. Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 307.

³⁵ Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 93.

³⁶ Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 99–100, 103–4.

religion, and he refers to Moses as Hermes.³⁷ However, Josephus, who was familiar with the literature that presented Moses as a magician and sorcerer,³⁸ would certainly have hesitated to openly compare him to Thoth-Hermes. If so, was he ready to compare Solomon to Thoth-Hermes?

The god Thoth (*mr-rh*) (“the-one-who-loves-knowledge,” or “the-one-who-wishes-to-learn”) – later on, Hermes Trismagistus (“Thrice-great one”) – became, over the generations, a god possessed of many various qualities and many varied functions. Egyptians and Egyptian-Hellenistic literature ascribed to him, among other things, books on magic and knowledge in theology and philosophy (according to Manetho 36,525 books, and according to Seleos, 20,000 books), and he was regarded as the creator of cosmic order, the lord of knowledge, who “knew all that is hidden under the heavenly vault and beneath the earth,”³⁹ and the inventor of the measurement of time and hieroglyphic script. “Esoteric wisdom,” however, was his special preserve.⁴⁰ “Book of Thoth” is a title applied to numerous distinct texts, which were the product of scribes, probably associated with the “House of Life” (*pr-nh*), the library of the temple. In this “book,” Thoth emphasizes special branches of knowledge: “What is its nature? What is the shape of the papyrus plant?”⁴¹ At the same time, the “book” revolved around the acquisition of knowledge – mainly, the topography of heaven and the underworlds; it is prominent in underworld theology and “excellent in magic.”⁴²

Josephus certainly knew about the place and role of magic in the world of the Egyptians,⁴³ and he may have known about the various magic prac-

³⁷ See A. J. Droge, *Homer or Moses?: Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 26; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 25–35; G. Mussie, “The Interpretatio Judaica of Thoth-Hermes,” in *Studies in Egyptian Religion: Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee*, ed. M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss (Leiden: Brill, 1982). See also the interpretation of Gruen, who regards Artapanus’ use of “pagan legends” as an attempt to amuse an educated audience: E. S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 201–12.

³⁸ See J. G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 134–61. Moses appears in far more magic papyri than Solomon, and he is ascribed knowledge in alchemy.

³⁹ PGM VIII.14–15, cited after G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 75.

⁴⁰ Trans. J. J. Collins, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:899–903; Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 23.

⁴¹ Jansow and Zauzich, *Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth*, 64.

⁴² It is important to note here that Thoth is not only omniscient, but is also an “inventor” (for example, of writing), an ability that was not attributed to Solomon.

⁴³ G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum, 1994); E. Hornung, *The Secret Lore of Egypt*, trans. D. Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 55–63; J. Baines, “Society, Morality, and Religious Practice,” in *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myth, and Personal Practice*, ed. B. E. Shafer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 164–72. One example of the value of magic literature is *The Admonitions of Ipwew* (Middle Kingdom, ca. 2040–1640 BCE). The writer laments: “Lo, the private chambers,

tices common in Egypt in the Roman period.⁴⁴ Since Thoth-Hermes was among the most popular of all the Egyptian gods⁴⁵ and was regarded in Greek magical papyri as a cosmic power, creator of heaven and earth, and an almighty world-ruler,⁴⁶ it is likely that Josephus was familiar with his mythological image. However, there is no evidence to affirm whether he had access to any of the "books of Thoth," which were indeed "restricted knowledge" in the possession of temple scribes, although parts of them were copied and circulated. Neither do we know whether he had access to early versions of what is known as the Hermetic corpus, dated from the first to the third centuries CE. Accordingly, it seems difficult to believe that Josephus chose to compare Solomon to a mythological sage (who was unknown to the author of Solomon's biblical biography) and thus that the god Thoth might have served as for Josephus' Solomon. If at all, it seems much more likely that Josephus' Solomon is akin to Egyptian kings, who in turn were compared to Thoth in order to glorify them.

The Riddle of Solomon's Ring

At this point, I should like to raise another question: why was Josephus not content merely to praise Solomon's knowledge of magic and its practice? Why did he decide to add a story about a miracle that proves the power of the incantations written by Solomon? According to this well-known story (i.e., *Ant.* 7.45–49), Josephus claimed that he saw with his own eyes a man (perhaps an Essene) named Eleazar, who, in the presence of Vespasian, his sons, and a number of other soldiers, freed men possessed by demons:

He put to the nose of the possessed man a ring which had under its deal one of the roots prescribed by Solomon,⁴⁷ and then, as the man smelled it, drew out the demon through his nostrils, and when the man at once fell down, adjured the demon never to

its books are stolen, / The secrets in it are laid bare ... / Lo, magic spells are divulged." In M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1: *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1975), 155.

⁴⁴ See R. Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire: The Demotic Spells and their Religion Context," *ANRW* 2.18.5 (1995): 3333–79; F. Graf, "Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. M. W. Meyer and P. A. Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 29–42; R. Kotansky, "Greek Exorcistic Amulets," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 242–77; D. Frankfurter, "Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category 'Magician,'" in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. P. Schäfer and H. G. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 115–35.

⁴⁵ Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 22.

⁴⁶ Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 25.

⁴⁷ Ring (= *daktulios*) and seal (= *sphragis*). They are sometimes one object (see *Esth* 3:12) A seal is attached to the ring, and they were attributed with magical powers. In the

come back into him, speaking Solomon's name and reciting his incantations (*epôdai*) which he composed.

The exorcism of the demon revealed to the onlookers the "greatness of his [Solomon's] nature and how God favored him, and that no one under the sun may be ignorant of the king's surpassing virtue of every kind."⁴⁸ The addition of this episode to the description of Solomon's wisdom is a riddle of sorts, which has aroused much scholarly interest, among other reasons, because it "reveals" the significant role of magic, magic practices, and astrology in Jewish culture and society. Josephus also wrote that there were books in circulation giving "recipes" and that he himself knows of a work under such a title ascribed to Solomon.⁴⁹

The explanation that has been given as to why Josephus decided to include this episode is that Josephus thus gives evidence of a living, popular tradition about Solomon as magus.⁵⁰ Indeed, there is quite a lot of evidence that a tradition of Solomon as a magician was widespread during the Second Temple period, testimonies that attest to his reputation from the first century CE onward. Solomon's ring and amulets are mentioned frequently in magic texts. For example, in the Paris magical papyrus from the fourth century CE: "I adjure (*exorkizô*) thee [the demons] by the seal which Solomon laid upon the tongue of Jeremiah and he spoke."⁵¹ On papyrus Köln 338 from the third century CE, we similarly find: "I adjure every spirit wicked and evil by the great God most high who created heaven and earth and the seas and all things in them, to come out of Allous, whom Annis bore, the holder of the Seal (*sphragis*) of Solomon."⁵²

However, we have not come across any magic papyri from or before the first century CE that mention Solomon and can be attributed to Jews.⁵³ In

Testament of Solomon, the seal ring is given to him by the archangel Michael so that he can control demons.

⁴⁸ Trans. Thackeray and Marcus with Bohak's modification, cited after Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 101.

⁴⁹ C. C. McCown, "The Christian Tradition as to the Magical Wisdom of Solomon," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 2 (1922): 1–24.

⁵⁰ So many books have been written on magic in general, and on magic in the ancient world in particular, that I saw no need to cite even a few of them here. On magic and exorcism in the Second Temple period in general, and in the time of Josephus in particular, see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 71–142 (on Josephus: pp. 83–85, 99–105).

⁵¹ *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Supp. graec., no. 564, 11, 3039f [PGM IV.3039f]. Cf. also C. Bonner, "The Technique of Exorcism," *HTR* 36 (1943): 39–49; Kotansky, "Greek Exorcistic Amulets," 261–66.

⁵² D. R. Jordan and R. D. Kotansky, "A Solomonic Exorcism," in *Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Sonderreihe Papyrologica Coloniensis*, vol. 7.8: *Kölner Papyri*, ed. M. Gronewald, K. Maresch, and C. Römer (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997), 53–69.

⁵³ See H. D. Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation (Including the Demotic Spells)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

the "Song for the Stricken" (*Shir ha-pegat'im*) from Qumran, which is attributed to David (11QPsAp),⁵⁴ Solomon is mentioned as having received from his father David a hymn to exorcise an evil spirit;⁵⁵ Jesus is described as "greater than Solomon" in the Gospel of Matthew (12:42); and there are many references to Jesus as "son of David"⁵⁶ and to his acts of exorcism in the Gospels (e.g., Matt 9:27–34; 12:22–24). However, these probably cannot be regarded as sufficient evidence of the existence of a Jewish "popular tradition" about Solomon as an exorcist of demons, and of the use of Solomon's name for purposes of magic already in the first century BCE and the first century CE.⁵⁷ There is no evidence that Solomon was associated not only with the writing of magic incantations but also with the performance of magic.⁵⁸

It is true that magic was an integral part of culture in the ancient world, and from the first century CE, its techniques and motifs moved across the borders of various cultures and became "international" and syncretistic in nature. However, neither this phenomenon, nor the fact that exorcism was a widespread practice in Jewish culture, can explain why Josephus saw fit to give Solomon "magical wisdom,"⁵⁹ which is not attributed to him in the Bible. One might also wonder why Josephus believed that the story of Eleazar's act of exorcism, in which he was helped by incantations and recipes written by Solomon, would impress the educated Roman reader, and why he did not cite a different concrete example of the depth and breadth of Solomon's wisdom. Bohak writes that Josephus "assumed his non-Jewish

⁵⁴ See the survey of Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," 342–79. PGM XII.201–69 states: "A little ring [useful] for every [magical] operation and for success. Kings and governors [try to get it]. Very effective." Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 161.

⁵⁵ J.M. Baumgarten, "The Qumran Songs Against Demons" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 55 (1985): 442–45.

⁵⁶ D. C. Duling, "Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David," *HTR* 68 (1975): 235–52. On magic in the synoptic writings and in ancient Christianity, see J.M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition: Studies in Biblical Theology* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 2d ser., 28; London: SCM, 1974), 73–145; A. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," in *ANRW* 2.23.2 (1980): 1707–57; W.L. Knox, "Jewish Liturgical Exorcism," *HTR* 31 (1938): 191–203.

⁵⁷ Torijano writes that "the figure of Solomon as exorcist enjoyed enough fame among the gentile readers of Josephus to allow the adaptation of pre-existent patterns without much trouble" (*Solomon the Esoteric King*, 104–5). However, there is no evidence that Solomon was famous among non-Jewish readers in the time of Josephus. Duling also writes that "the fascinating legend of Solomon's magical wisdom was widespread in Late Antiquity." D. C. Duling, "The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* 6:42–49," *HTR* 78 (1985): 1.

⁵⁸ Emperor Julian wrote that Solomon also engaged in theurgy (lit. working things divine): "Solomon was proficient in the secret cult of God," namely in performing magic practices that created a link with the divinity and also influenced it. See Julian, *Contra Galilaeos* 224c–d, and discussion below.

⁵⁹ Contrary to Duling's claim in "Eleazar Miracle," 7.

readers would share his own excitement about such a glorious manifestation of the supreme wisdom of an ancient Jewish king."⁶⁰ Josephus must have been cognizant of the harsh, even derisive criticism of faith in magic practices (*magikê technê*), which were thought to belong to *dedita superstitionis gens*, to be *miracula circumlatoris* and *magicae vanitates*. Josephus lived and wrote in Rome at the time when the Roman authorities failed to suppress traditional Egyptian magical techniques and the circulation of magical texts.⁶¹ The expulsion from Rome of astrologers and sorcerers in 33 BCE was not effective, and the burning of thousands of magic books by order of Emperor Augustus in 13 CE was also to no avail (the church father John Chrysostom [ca. 347–407] states that in the city of his birth, Antioch, soldiers searched for books of magic and set fire to them).⁶² At the same time, in Egypt under Roman rule, "much of what had constituted public religion was driven underground, becoming a secretive and 'private' practice."⁶³

In my view, the importance that Josephus ascribes to Solomon as the author of magic incantations is not sufficiently explained by the fact that exorcism was a widespread practice in Jewish society.⁶⁴ Nor is it sufficiently explained by traditions from *Jubilees* about Nahor's father teaching him the researches of the Chaldeans so he could practice divination and astrology according to the signs (*Jub* 9:8) or about Noah having written down "everything in a book just as we (i.e., angels) taught him according to every kind of healing, that the evil spirits were restrained from following the sons

⁶⁰ Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 100–1. Joshua Amir goes even further when he writes that Josephus sees in Solomon's ring "the greatness of Solomon" and also adds that, if so, "it is no wonder, then, that in the eyes of the simple Jew of the time Solomon's magical power seemed to be one of the strong cards of Judaism in its great proselytizing campaign." Y. Amir, "On King Solomon's Image in Hellenistic Judaism," *Beth Mikra* 35 (1968): 17. Feldman's claim that Josephus added the episode because "exorcising demons was regarded as the sign of special power in a wise man" is odd. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 584.

⁶¹ R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 89.

⁶² R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Roman Empire* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 46–127; H. G. Kippenberg, "Magic in Roman Civil Discourse: Why Ritual Could be Illegal," in *Envisioning Magic*, 137–63. The use of magic is attributed mainly to the lower classes, belonging to the private domain and banned as part of the official (public) cult.

⁶³ R. K. Ritner, "The Religious, Social, and Legal Parameters of Traditional Egyptian Magic," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 43–60. At the same time, Pliny the Elder writes, "Magic rose to such a height that even today it has sway over a great part of mankind, and in the East commands the King of Kings" (*Natural History* 30.1.1–2, trans. W. H. S. Jones [LCL 418; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963]).

⁶⁴ E. Eshel, *Demonology in Palestine during the Second Temple Period* (PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999). The Emperor Julian spoke mockingly about the Christians as being immersed in sorcery (e.g., *Contra Galilaeos* 340a).

of Noah, and he gave everything which he wrote to Shem, his oldest son" (*Jub* 9:10–14).⁶⁵

Furthermore, did Josephus have any reason to believe that the Emperor Vespasian would be impressed by Eleazar's ability to cure a blind man, using a ring and incantations? Tacitus (56–120 CE) states that while the emperor was staying in Alexandria, a blind man and a man who had lost the use of his hand approached him and begged to be cured. Vespasian first ridiculed these appeals and treated them with scorn. However, when the men persisted he "took precaution" and consulted his physicians

whether such blindness and infirmity could be overcome by human aid. Their reply treated the two cases differently: they said that in the first the power of sight had not been completely eaten away and it would return if the obstacles were removed; in the other, the joint had slipped and become displaced, but they could be restored if a healing pressure were applied to them. Such perhaps was the wish of the gods, and it might be that the emperor has been chosen for this divine service; in any case, ridicule would fall only on the poor supplicant. So Vespasian, believing that his good fortune was capable of anything and that nothing was any longer incredible, with a smiling, and amid intense excitement on the part of the bystanders, did as he was asked to do. The hand was instantly restored to use, and the day again shone for the blind man. (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81)⁶⁶

In order to confirm the veracity of the story, Tacitus stresses that "both facts are told by eye-witnesses even now when falsehood brings no reward." It is impossible to know what the truth is in this story, but it seems more reliable to me than the story of Josephus, even though the latter states that he himself was present at the act of exorcising the demon.

Why would Josephus provide support, for example, for Poseidinius' assertion that the Jews are a people of sorcerers who pretend to use incantations? Duling suggests that Josephus believed that such a story would enhance Solomon's prestige with a public that believed in supernatural forces and was familiar with the traditions about Solomon's greatness and wisdom.⁶⁷ This explanation seems to me contrived.⁶⁸ The only reasonable

⁶⁵ Trans. Wintermute in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:76.

⁶⁶ Trans. C.H. Moore (LCL 249; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 15–163. Tacitus also writes that the Egyptians "are the most superstitious of nations."

⁶⁷ Duling, "Eleazar Miracle," 25.

⁶⁸ There is no evidence that "Solomon's ring" (or "seal") was known in Jewish history before the writing of *Jewish Antiquities*. Possibly, the motif appears under the influence of the book, which was quite popular. Tertullian writes: "The Jew Josephus, native champion of Jewish antiquities, must be consulted" (Tertullian, *Apologetics* 19.5–6; trans. T.R. Glover [LCL 250; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931]). The motif was known, for example, to several Byzantine chronographers, such as Georgios Hamartolos (ca. 850), who mentions the exorcism carried out by Elazar, and Cederez (ca. 1000), who mentions the act of exorcism and the incantations composed by Solomon. See Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*, 87. Another example is a glass paste oval amulet from the Byzantine

explanation is that Josephus did not find in the historical tradition any concrete example demonstrating that Solomon was well-versed in all branches of "scientific" knowledge. Therefore he decided to add the episode about Eleazar – and even to affirm it, declaring that he himself saw it with his own eyes. And perhaps the simple explanation is that Josephus, like many authors, wanted to introduce anecdotes into his story, a fruit of his creative imagination.

Whatever the reason, this episode certainly had much influence on the shaping of Solomon's legendary image as a ruler of demons, which dominated the imagination of the coming generations. Josephus' image of "Solomon the philosopher," by contrast, was revived only centuries later, and in a different cultural context, giving birth to a widespread tradition about Solomon as a philosopher and scholar of nature.

In Late Antiquity, Jews faced the claim that they had contributed nothing to philosophy and science. Celsus, the Platonist scholar of the first half of the first century BCE wrote in *Alêthês Logos* that the Jews "never did anything worthy of its name" (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.31), and the Roman emperor Julian (r. 361–363 CE) wrote: "Is their 'wisest' man Solomon at all comparable with Phocylides or Theognis or Isocrates among the Hellenes" (*Contra Galilaeos* 178b) and "the son of Theodorus is superior to their 'wisest' king" (224d).⁶⁹ The Emperor did not limit himself to a mention of Solomon, but rather referred to the Jews as a collective:

But has God granted to you to originate any science (*epistême* = knowledge) or any philosophical study (*mathêma philosophôn*)? Why, what is it? For the theory of the heavenly bodies was perfected among the Hellenes, after the first observations had been made among the barbarians in Babylon. And the study of geometry took its rise in the measurement of the land of Egypt, and from this grew to its present importance. Arithmetic began with the Phoenician merchants, and among the Hellenes in the course of time acquired the aspect of a regular science. (Julian, *Contra Galilaeos* 178a–b; trans. Wright)

These jeering remarks by Emperor Julian probably indicate that he had seen literature glorifying Solomon's wisdom. Yet, at the same time, they still describe a cultural reality. There is no information from the Roman-Hellenistic period (not to mention earlier periods) about any institutionalized "scientific" activity or any individual "men of science" in Jewish society. And what is more important, there is no evidence of a Jewish reaction to

period on which Solomon's ring appears. See J. Russel, "The Archeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 39. However, it is impossible to prove that Josephus was the progenitor of this motif.

⁶⁹ Trans. W.C. Wright (LCL 157; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 383.

this claim. In those instances when the literature of the Sages discusses the value of "Greek wisdom" or "foreign wisdom," Solomon is not cited as an example proving that there is such a thing as an original, all-embracing "Jewish wisdom" that is superior to any other.

The new – in fact, the first real – encounter with Greek-Hellenistic philosophy and science in the Middle Ages gave rise to the phenomenon of Solomon as a philosopher-king and as a king engaging in "science." Only then did a profound need to render it legitimate for Jews to engage in philosophy and science emerge. No other figure was then found in Jewish historical tradition who could become a better personification of the ancient wisdom of the Jews.