From Genealogies to Apologetics

Neither Judaism nor Hellenism can be deemed a merely historical phenomenon. Both stake out positions on how humanity regards the universe. Heinrich Heine moved between two worlds when he wrote the following in memoriam for another intellectual nomad, Ludwig Börne:

All men are either Jews or Hellenes, men with ascetic drives yearning for spiritualization and hostile to representation in art, or men of a nature that serenely accepts life, prides itself in development , and is realistic. So there were Hellenes in the families of German pastors and Jews who were born in Athens and are perhaps descended from Theseus.

Both Abraham Zakuto and Josephus lived and worked in the context of this creative tension and both had their lives altered beyond recognition when this culture clash turned into an existential one during their lifetimes. In my lecture, I will address the two perspectives on Judaism’s relationship with Hellenism—the essential and the historical—in Abraham Zakuto’s writings. The first part of my lecture will deal with Zakuto’s use of Josephus’ writings. The second will discuss the direct and indirect influence of the character of Josephus’ writings on Zakuto.

Abraham Zakuto was born in mid-fifteenth century Salamanca in the Kingdom of Castile. In his youth, he studied Torah and Talmud. He attended the University of Salamanca, showed remarkable talent in the field of astronomy, and received a teaching position. In the 1570s and 80s, he immersed himself in creating astronomical tables for sailors and for the purpose of constructing more accurate navigational devices. He served both Colombus and Vasco da Gama as an astronomical consultant. Notwithstanding his exalted standing in both the royal courts of Spain and Portugal, he was banished from both countries. After enduring a harsh journey and being taken captive, he settled in Tunis for several years. Late in life, he immigrated to the Land of Israel and lived in Jerusalem. He died in either Jerusalem or Damascus circa 1515.

Zakuto wrote works on astronomy and other closely related fields. For instance, he composed an article calculating the End of Days based on his integration of astrology and astronomy. He almost certainly began composing *Sefer ha-Yuhasin* (The Book of Genealogies), which he completed in 1504, while still in Spain. *Sefer ha-Yuhasin* is rooted in two different worlds. Most of the work belongs to the literary genre referred to as the Jewish successor chronicle: a genre delineating the chain of transmission of Torah study and Jewish law from Moses’ time, or even earlier, until the author’s period. The first two chapters of *Ethics of the Fathers* in many ways mark the birth of this genre as they describe the transmission of the Torah from master to disciple.

With the Geonic period, this genre became ubiquitous, appearing in the form of autonomous works, such as the *Epistle of Sherira Geon*, *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* and others, and, as part of book introductions, such as the *Seder ha-Kabbalah* found at the beginning of Maimonides’ monumental halakhic work, *The Code of Jewish Law* (*Mishneh Torah*). The final part of Zakuto’s book, entitled “The Sixth Chapter [*Ma’amar*]” is a historiographical work, synchronically detailing the history of the Jewish people and humanity from Creation to the period following the Spanish Expulsion. Notably, Zakuto also occasionally slips into particularistic and universal history in the first part of *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*.

Zakuto’s sources are diverse, including, of course, the entirety of Talmudic and rabbinic literature, Christian history books—some of which will be discussed later—and, of course, Joseph ben Gurion ha-Kohen’s work. Notwithstanding the rich literary and intellectual nature of Zakuto’s work, aside from José Luis Lacave’s brief article published about fifty years ago, his sources have barely been scrutinized. The question of his sources can be divided in two: What source provides *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*’s narrative backbone? And, What are the exact identities of the authors and of the editions cited in their names? I will address the second question first, since, from a certain perspective, it is easier to answer and it sheds light on the answer to the first question. Of course, in this context I will primarily address Zakuto’s relationship with Josephus’ writings.

Zakuto mentions Joseph ben Gurion ha-Kohen throughout his work. Sometimes he contrasts his reportage with rabbinic or Christian sources, and sometimes he cites him to supplement his central point. The question we must answer, of course, is whether Zakuto is referring to *Sefer Yosippon*, a work that traditional, Medieval commentators considered to have the greatest historical accuracy, or whether he is referring to Josephus’ own works.

Joseph ben Gurion’s first mention in *Sefer ha-Yuhasin* occurs in the first chapter with regard to the number of years King Saul reigned. According to one passage in the Bible, Saul reigned over Israel for two years. The traditional biblical commentators were surprised at this number and having pondered the conundrum extensively found no suitable resolution. Zakuto cites the chronology of the rabbinic sages at great length, based on various Talmudic sources, and seems to accept it. Afterwards he notes, “this is in contradistinction to Joseph ben Gurion who stated that Saul reigned for twenty years, 18 during Samuel’s period, and two afterwards.” לאחר מכן הוא מציין 'לאפוקי יוסף בן גוריון שאמר כי שאול מלך עשרים שנה, י"ח בימי שמואל ושתי שנים אחריו'. Zakuto explains that according to Joseph ben Gurion—whose position he rejects because it clashes with the traditions of the sages—we need to interpret the biblical text as denoting the years that Saul reigned after Samuel’s death.

In this case, Zakuto is clearly not referring to *Sefer Yosippon*, since, aside from King David, *Sefer Yosippon* does not address the endeavors of the Israelite kings. Zakuto’s chronology is a mish-mash of Josephus’ reportage in various passages from *Antiquities*. At the end of *Antiquities*, Book Six, Josephus asserts:

'ושאול מלך בימי חיי שמואל שמונה עשרה שנה ועשרים ושתים שנה אחרי מותו' (6.378).

; however, in Book 10, in his summary of all the kings undertakings, he apparently relies on a different chronological tradition, which asserts that 'קיים שאול, מלכם הראשון של ישראל... את השלטון בידו במשך עשרים שנה'. . Thus, Zakuto divided the periods based on Samuel’s lifetime in *Antiquities* 6; however, he relies on *Antiquities* 10 to determine the number of years.

The encounter between Alexander the Great and the High Priest reveals how complex the matter of Zakuto’s sources really is. Zakuto describes Simeon the Righteous’ deeds and notes

'ויש אומרים כי שמעון הצדיק שמו עידו בן יהושע כהן גדול, ואין נראה זה בספר יוסף בן גוריון'.

The name ‘Ido’ appears in *Sefer Yosippon*, and it seems to be a corruption of the word ידוע which appears in *Antiquities of the Jews*. Since Zakuto notes that the name ‘Ido’ does not appear in Joseph ben Gurion then he is apparently referring to *Antiquities* itself; thus, he is differentiating between *Antiquities* and *Sefer Yosippon*. Later Zakuto writes that

'בדברי הימים של מלכי הגוים אומר שראה במצחו השם על הציץ, וקורין לו בלשון יון טטר"א גרמתהו"ן, רצה לומר שם בן ד' אותיות'.

This narrative appears identically in *Antiquities of the Jews*, but Zakuto cites the source of this information as “the chronicles of the Gentile kings.” I will return to the matter of this book’s identity later.

Zakuto later writes that Alexander requested

'שהבנים שיולדו להם בשנה ההיא שיקראו אלסכנדרוס על שמו'.

This request does not appear in any way, shape, or form in *Antiquities of the Jews*. However, in *Yosippon*, the High Priest proposes that

'כל ילידי הכהנים אשר יוולדו בשנה הזאת בכל ארץ יהודה ובכל ארץ ירושלם יקראון בשמך אלכסנדרוס'.

Perhaps Zakuto possessed a textual variant of this legend that had also made its way into *Sefer Yosippon*, or, alternatively, perhaps he is merely presenting his readers with an exceedingly free paraphrase of *Yosippon*’s text.

Our last example comes from the waning days of the Second Temple period. Zakuto comments on the passage from *Ethics of the Fathers* which relates that Hillel and Shamai received the Torah from the pair that preceded them:

'וזה הדבר מוזכר בספר בן גוריון... כי שמאי היה תלמידו של הלל'.

Josephus does mention two sages named Samaias and Polion in *Antiquities*; however, even though both of them are linked to Herod, Josephus makes no connection between them. *Sefer Yosippon*, in contrast, explicitly states with regard to Herod,

'ויכבד מאד את הלל הזקן שר הפרושים ואת שמאי תלמידו'.

Thus, we may assert that when Zakuto mentions Joseph ben Gurion he is not referring to *Yosippon* or Josephus specifically. He possessed both sources, and he used both extensively without really differentiating between them. In doing so, he is like his colleagues, those contemporary historians who had not yet learned to distinguish between the two distinct compositions.

In fact, the matter is even more complex. I already mentioned the book *The Chronicles of the Gentile Kings*. This book appears or is alluded to more than a few times over the course of *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*. As José Luis Lacave has demonstrated, Zakuto is referring to the *General Estoria*, a gargantuan work that was written in the court of and upon the command of the thirteenth-century king of Castile, Alfonso X (also known as, the Wise). This work was essentially a rewrite of a quite noticeable percentage of the historical works that were familiar to medieval, Western Christians: first and foremost the Christian Bible, Josephus, the chronicles of Eusebius and Hieronymus, Isidore of Saville and more. The *General Estoria* was not only one of Zakuto’s historical sources but also seems to have provided the structure for Zakuto’s sixth chapter. This chapter is characterized by its synchronization of those events occurring in both the biblical world and in antiquity, particularly the histories of Greece and Rome. Thus, for instance, during the time of Jacob,

'באה אשה חכמה ושמה קרס והיא למדה החרישה בשוורים וכיצד יזרעו ויעשו להם חיטה... והיתה כמו אלוה להם וקורין לה פרישיפינה ר"ל אלוה פירות הארץ'.

This comprehensive description of Ceres-Persephone’s deeds and their placement in Jacob’s period appears in the GE. As for Josephus, some of his passages are cited almost word-for-word in translation, some are cited with certain omissions, and most are cited with predictable rhetorical expansions. More times than one can count, GE explicitly states that the following material is based on Josephus, introducing it with the formulaic, “E assí como dize Josefo” or “dize Josefo,” or in other ways. This being the case, we our obliged to examine whether Zakuto’s references to Joseph ben Gurion’s book refer to Josephus’ material that is cited by the GE or to Josephus’ book itself.

I mentioned the encounter between Alexander and the High Priest a moment ago. As you may remember, the description of the *tzitz* with the Ineffable Name on it, appears in Josephus; however, Zakuto notes that this information comes from the *Chronicle of the Gentile Kings*. And, indeed, GE states that Alexander noticed that upon the High Priest was placed,

"e sobr'ella una corona lamina d'oro en que estava escrito el nombre de Dios Tetragramaton" (GE part 4, vol. 2, p. 327), while in Josephus we find τὴν κίδαριν καὶ τὸ χρυσοῦν ἐπ᾽ αὐτῆς ἔλασμα, ᾧ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐγέγραπτο ὄνομα.

Furthermore, in this case, the GE does not specify its source as Josephus, so, perhaps, it is for this very reason that Zakuto attributes this information to the “chronicle of the Gentile kings,” and not to Josephus.

Now, we will examine another piece of information that Zakuto attributes directly to Josephus. A few minutes ago, I dealt with the chronology of Saul’s reign. Zakuto sided with the sages, explicitly stating that according to Joseph ben Gurion, Saul reigned for eighteen years during Samuel’s lifetime and for two years afterward. In the GE, we find:

E este cabo que aqui oides cuenta Josefo… E reino Saul en la vida de Samuel diez e ocho anos, e despues d'el dos anos, e fizo la vida e el cabo que avedes oido. [= It is worth noting that Josephus tells here that… Saul reigned in the life of Samuel eighteen years, and after him two years, and he lived as long as you heard.] (GE p. 2, vol. 2, p. 647)

As you may remember, this is not how Josephus himself describes Saul’s reign; rather, this appears to be a conflation of two separate and distinct passages in Josephus. Therefore, it seems that when Zakuto cited Joseph ben Gurion’s chronology, he did not read Josephus’ books themselves, but rather relied directly on the GE. Of course, it is possible that Zakuto behaved like professional historians are supposed to and he checked Josephus’ chronology in various passages (*Antiquities* 6.294; 6.378; 10.143). As we will soon see, given Zakuto’s methodology it is indeed possible that this is what happened. We must look for passages that will enable us to conclusively prove that Zakuto used the Jewish historian’s writings directly, without the mediation of the chronicles of the Christian king. At this point, I believe that I can adduce two passages that make this case quite effectively.

Zakuto found the story of Honio’s Temple most engaging for a number of reasons, and he devoted a relatively large amount of space to it. For the sake of our discussion, I will cite his words in their entirety:

ובספר בן גוריון כי חוניו בן חוניו הלך למצרים ושלח כתב לאלסכנדריא שהיה שם המלך בטלמיוס והמלכה ששם היה בית גדול שנפל שיתן [רשות] לעשות בית המקדש שם כמו בית המקדש של ירושלם וצריך לעשות זה כי ישעיה ניבא ת"כ שנה קודם על זה, ואז השיב לו המלך ואמר שהוא תמיה איך בארץ הזנות רצה לעשות מקדש קדוש ואמר שאינו עון נגד תורת משה שיעשה הבית ומה שאמר שניבא ישעיה על זה הוא מורה כדבר הזה, ואז בא לאלסכנדריא ועשה בית ומזבח ומצא שם כהנים ולוים ועשה כלים. אבל אין להזכיר פחיתות הבית וכליו בערך בית המקדש של ירושלם. ואז באו לפני תלמי חכמי השומרונים וחכמי ירושלם על דבר הבית בהר גריזים ונתוכחו מאד על זה. וחוץ הטענות האמיתיות מן התורה שלא יהיה בית כי אם בירושלם מצאו כי כל מלכי הגוים בכל הזמנים היו שולחים מנחה לירושלם ולא שום איש להר גריזים ואז נצחום וגזר המלך שיהרגום ושיעשו כרצונם. ואז בחרו גם כן אנשי אלסכנדריא מהבית שעשו.

This story is a very close paraphrase of Josephus in *Antiquities* 13.62-79. While Josephus extemporizes at greater length, the principal elements of the story are the same. Honio the son of Honio appeals to King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra to permit him to build a temple. He mentions Isaiah’s prophecy in the context of this request. The king is surprised to hear that a temple may be built in a ritually impure locale, but in light of Isaiah’s prophecy he grants Honio’s request. A temple is constructed that functions much like the Temple in Jerusalem. Immediately following this, a conflict erupts between the Jews and the Samaritan community in Alexandria regarding the temple on Mount Grizim.

The story about Honio’s temple also appears in GE. However, in Alfonso the Wise’s version no mention is made of Isaiah’s prophecy, the dispute with the Samaritans, or the complex discussion between Honio and Ptolemy. Presumably, the little that is mentioned in GE is taken from Josephus’ writings, but in order to complete the picture, Zakuto had to peruse Josephus’ own description in *Antiquities of the Jews*.

The following example is more complicated, but it sheds light on the many considerations Zakuto had to take into account, the sources he used, and reveals the problematic state of the *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*’s textual transmission. In the biblical description of the period of the Judges, the Tanakh states:

'וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אַחֲרָיו אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵילוֹן הַזְּבוּלֹנִי וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים: וַיָּמָת אֵלוֹן הַזְּבוּלֹנִי וַיִּקָּבֵר בְּאַיָּלוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ זְבוּלֻן' (שופטים יב, יב).

It seems to me that Elon receives the briefest and most laconic description of any of the Israelite judges. In Filipowski’s edition of *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*, we read:

"אילון הזבולוני העשירי לשופטי ישראל ויוסף בן גוריון קראו אקילון. ושפט את ישראל עשר שנים. ואמר בעל הספר שהשבעים זקנים המעתיקים לא כתבו אות ל'"

And, indeed, when we turn to GE, we find an expansive and interesting discussion about Elon ha-Zevuloni:

vino por juez de Irrael uno a que llamaron Ahilon, e Josefo le llama Chilon, e dizen todos que duro en el sennorio de la alcaldia diez anos; mas que ninguna cosa poca nin mucha que de escriuir fuese , nin lo escrivieron los santos padres en la Bribia , nin los esponedores, que aquel Achilon fiziese en estos diez annos. Asi que cuenta del maestre Pedro que los setenta trasladadores non fallaron del , nin de los sus diez annos, ninguna cosa. Nin entrase Ahilon otrosi en la cuenta de los juezes de Irrael, que son doze con el obispo Heli.

There came as judge of Israel one whom they called Ahilon, and Josephus calls him Chilon, and everyone says that he lasted in the office of the judge ten years; More than anything little or much to write was, nor did the holy fathers write it in the Bible, nor the sponsors, that Achilon did in these ten years. So the master Pedro tells that the seventy porters did not fail, not one of his ten years, nothing. Ahilon otrosi should not enter into the account of the judges of Israel, who are twelve with Bishop Heli.

The GE begins by raising the question of what Elon’s name was and notes the difference between Josephus who refers to him as Chilon and the more common denotation of Ahilon, which is closer to Elon. In the second part, GE discusses his place in the Septuagint, or to be more precise, the fact that Elon does not appear in the Septuagint.

Let’s begin with the first part. Zakuto, as we have mentioned, is aware of the differences between the various transcriptions of Elon’s name. However, he claims that Josephus referred to him as Akilon. And, indeed, in the Catalan edition of *Antiquities of the Jews*, we find: “And after him, Akilon from the tribe of Ephraim and Zebulun.” Zakuto is in complete agreement with Josephus.

So where did the GE come up with the notion that Josephus referred to this judge as Chilon? The GE certainly did not have the Catalan translation at its disposal in the thirteenth century, so the authors must have read Josephus in Latin translation. In the Latin translations of Josephus, this judge is, indeed, referred to as Chilon. Thus, Zakuto was aware of the GE’s comment regarding Josephus’ choice of nomenclature and of the Catalan translation of Josephus, and he compared them.

The second point raised in both the GE and *Sefer ha-Yuhasin* relates to what the Septuagint had to say about Elon ha-Zevuloni. First, we should note that the Septuagint version in our possession translates the verses about Elon precisely as they appear in the Masoretic text. I have not yet managed to determine the source that the GE relied upon. The editors may have had a different version of the Septuagint at their disposal. Be that as it may, the matter requires further research.

Zakuto’s comment is also problematic. According to Zakuto the GE claims that the Septuagint omitted the letter ‘lamed’ from the judge’s name. However, the ‘lamed’ appears in all the textual variants found in the biblical translations. Furthermore, we should note that in the first print edition of *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*, which is briefer by far, this content is omitted entirely. However, in MS Oxford 16, dating from 1564, we find the following:

'ויוסף בן גוריון קראו אקילון ושפט עשר שנים. ואמ' בעל הספר שהע' סנהדרין המעתיקין לא כתבו **אותו'**.

This version is, indeed, consonant with the GE, and it emphasizes the problems with Filipowski’s edition and the need to publish a new one.

Even though we have not yet analyzed and discussed all of Zakuto’s references to Joseph ben Gurion, we may safely conclude that it is impossible to make any generalizations. Zakuto possessed both *Sefer Yosippon* and Josephus’ works, apparently in Catalan and Castilian translation, and, of course, he also had access to the quotes cited in the GE. So we need to examine manuscript versions of *Sefer ha-Yuhasin* in detail and determine what sources he may have had access to in order to understand his methodology and how he related to the sources from antiquity.

Having investigated a number of test cases, with the hope of shedding light on Zakuto’s acquaintanceship with Josephus, the time has come to apply broad brush strokes to limn both the similarities and the differences in their historiographical works. The manifest difference is of course the language they chose to write in. Josephus wrote his books in Greek, while Zakuto write in Hebrew. By choosing to write in Hebrew, he indicated that his target audience was just the Jews. Various conjectures have been offered with regard to Josephus’ target audience; however, at the beginning of *Antiquities of the Jews*, he explains that he believes his book: 'יהיה ראוי לעיון בעיני ההלנים' . Notwithstanding the difference in language and in their target audiences, both works had identical goals: strengthening Jewish belief both within the community and in terms of the community’s dealings with the outside world. At the beginning of chapter six, Zakuto writes that historical knowledge brings 'חיזוק ואמונה ביכולת השם יתברך', , and, in particular, strengthens the belief in Divine recompense. Furthermore, הספר 'יועיל מאד לישראל הדרים בין האומה הנוצרית להתווכח עמם על דתם'

These two goals are also at the heart of Josephus’ literary endeavor. In his introduction to *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus claims that historical knowledge allows us to learn,

'ביחוד דבר אחד... והוא שכל הנוהרים אחרי רצונו של האל ואינם נושאים את לבם לעבור על החוקים הטובים, הצלחתם בכל דבר היא למעלה מכל דמיון... וכל אימת שיסורו מדרך שמירת המצוות המדוקדקת, נעשה להם כל דבר קל לקשה וכל מעשה טוב, שישתדלו לעשות, סופו אסון שאין לו תקנה'.

Later in the introduction, Josephus adds an apologetic twist. He writes that a significant portion of his writings will function as a rewritten version of Moses, the Legislator’s, words. Josephus, further writes, that he believes Moses’ laws and conception of the deity to be far superior to those of other legislators, that is to say, to those of the founders of other religions and states. Naturally, in order to prove the superiority of Judaism and its sources over those of all the non-Jewish ones, one must compare and contrast the various sources, and, indeed, Zakuto explains that

'זכרתי לפעמים קצת אנשים חוץ מדתנו שלא היה ראוי לזכרם... מפני שהיה הדבר הכרחי להודיענו זה לתועלת גדולה'.

In other words, in order to argue with someone else’s point of view, we need to familiarize ourselves with their position. And, indeed, throughout *Sefer ha-Yuhasin*, and especially in chapter six, Zakuto cites a diverse assortment of authors. Josephus adopts a similar tactic when he cites Greco-Roman sources that substantiate Jewish beliefs and tradition. In *Against Apion*, Josephus cites Greco-Roman literature at great length., sometimes in order debate a particular position and sometimes in order to prove the Jews’ claims in various contexts. Both also agree that the Jewish traditions are infinitely superior to the Gentile traditions and compositions. According to Zakuto,

'וכן לא תחשוב כי כל מה שכתוב בספר דברי הימים שלהם... שהוא כולו אמת כמו ספרי תורתנו הקדושה חלילה וחס, כי תדע אשר פיהם דבר שווא וימינם לשון שקר'.

Jospehus adopts a similar position in all his books. He critiques the Gentile histories of Judaism mercilessly. In his introduction to *Antiquities*, he informs us that he wrote *The Wars of the Jews* because those who had written on the topic had “turned truth into falsehood.” The primacy of the Holy Scriptures and the Jew’s traditions are trumpeted loudly at the beginning of *Against Apion* as well.

So, let us repeat the question. Does Zakuto treat Josephus as not only a source of information of some sort or also as a model for his historiographical writing? Zakuto’s first five chapters are deeply rooted in medieval Jewish historiography, and his work offers a methodological improvement to the successor or chain of transmission genre. He brings the various Jewish traditions into confrontation, arguing with Maimonides, making calculations, and sailing far and wide on the sea of Talmudic literature to adduce an authoritative genealogy for the Torah’s intergenerational transmission.

Indeed, his sixth chapter provides a true innovation to the field of historiography. Throughout the chapter, Zakuto describes Jewish history and the recipients of significant developments in the Greco-Roman world. He pays especial attention to the wise human beings who taught humankind music, agriculture, and so forth, and were, therefore, apotheosized. Zakuto’s innovation is twofold: firstly, the very synchronization of biblical and world history in one composition. Secondly, his intensive preoccupation with providing rational, historical explanations for the myths of the gods. It is true that Josippon and even the genre of the chain of transmission also permitted certain elements from world history to infiltrate. Ibn Daoud even wrote a brief work that recounts the history of the Roman Caesars and the European monarchs, but he made no genuine attempt to create a ‘universal history,’ or even a history of Jewish life, as opposed to a chronology of the sages and their disciples.

It seems like Zakuto owes his “return to history” to Josephus. Even though he does not state this explicitly, his introduction to chapter six implies as much: “and while everyone relies on Joseph ben Gurion ha-Kohen, even though I do not, and even though he exaggerates and he speaks of great things לשון מדבר גדולות, and makes calculations that are not supported by a literal reading of the Torah, this notwithstanding he fulfills the desire of our people who wish to know all the things that are written about [*lah*] them.” Zakuto provides us with a glimpse into the reading habits and cultural mores of contemporary Jews. Whether Zakuto is referring to Josephus, in translation to European languages, or to *Sefer Josippon*, clearly he perceives this work to be the one Jews read most. Zakuto wishes to provide an alternative to it, to provide his coreligionists with a more accurate and appropriate historical work.

In order, to achieve this goal, Zakuto had to both imitate Josephus and when necessary part ways. Therefore, Zakuto adopted the prevalent, contemporary historical model that was presumably familiar to the Jews as well. He did not choose the models of Herodotus or Thucydides, as Josephus had, but the GE, which had been disseminated widely in Spain and beyond. In other words, in order to compete with Josephus, Zakuto mimicked Josephus’ by writing an apologetic history that reflected the historiographical model common in his day. But at the same time, he took a different path since Zakuto’s historiographical implements are borrowed from the contemporary historiographical sphere, which was very different from the one Josephus inhabited.

It is quite possible that the men’s similarities and differences as authors stem from their life stories. Both Zakuto and Josephus experienced crises and destruction as a result of a clash between the Jews and the Gentiles. Both were uprooted from their places of birth due to the vicissitudes of history; however, the resulting directions they took were entirely different.

Josephus was raised as Joseph ben Matityahu ha-Kohen in Jerusalem, only learned Greek in adulthood, and eventually lived among the Greco-Roman elite. In contrast, Zakuto grew up in an environment suffused with high Christian culture. His early works were not about Jewish law or tradition but about astronomical tables designed for universal use. While Josephus was attached to the Caesars’ entourage for military reasons, Zakuto was rewarded with such a position by the monarchs of Spain and Portugal because of his astronomical and navigational expertise.

For Josephus, the destruction of Judeah was the moment of his transition from a Hebrew- and Aramaic-speaking Jewish society in Jerusalem to a metropolitan, Gentile society of the Roman emperors, while for Zakuto, the expulsions from Spain and Portugal distanced him from the vibrant, intellectual arena and the seaports from which the great thirteenth-century explorers set sail. Zakuto drifted from one Jewish community to another along the Mediterranean seashore and ended his life studying in a Talmudical academy in Jerusalem. However, even though the two men took diametrically opposed paths from a cultural perspective, neither gave up on the attempt to facilitate an encounter between the two different worlds they inhabited. Joseph ben Matityahu and Abraham Zakuto teach us that some human beings are both Hellenes and Jews.