The divine promise to Abraham that because of him a blessing would come to all the world might seem a perfect proof text for earnest Jews intent on explaining to non-Jews the excellence of Judaism and the unfairness of accusations that Jews were hostile to the outside world. The notion that Jews indulged in a great deal of such apologetic in the late Second Temple period was once taken for granted, but most of the Greek Jewish writings which used to be identified as belonging to this literary genre can now be seen to have a Jewish readership in mind, or, like the claim of the disguised Jewish author of the third book of the *Sibyline Oracles* that “the people of the great God … will be guided in life for all mortals,” to provide too obscure a message to Gentile readers for them to pick up anything much at all about the Jewish message to the world. Philo’s *Hypothetica* was described by Eusebius in the fourth century as an apologetic writing, but the generic ascription may well have been assigned to the work not by Philo but by Eusebius, for whom apologetic was a familiar genre because of the efforts of Christian apologists since the second century. Of all Jewish writings in the first century, only those of Josephus can be placed unequivocally in the category of apologetic aimed at a Gentile readership: in all of his extant works he takes for granted that some at least of his readers are non-Jews. *Contra Apionem* is presented like a defence speech in a courtroom, employing with considerable skill the techniques of forensic rhetoric to defend the Jewish tradition against its
detractors, and the Antiquities are a fine example of apologetic history. What use, then, does Josephus make in these works of the depiction of Abraham and his universal significance in Gen 12:1–3?

That the option was available to Josephus to make a great deal of the significance of Abraham while reaching out to Gentiles is clear. He knew that the name of Abraham was not unknown in the wider world, and that he had a reputation as a wise man with expertise in magic and astrology and was known to respectable intellectuals like Alexander Polyhistor, teacher of Cicero in the mid first century BCE. It is uncertain how much he had read of the works of Philo, but he may have been aware that Philo had written about Abraham in his Exposition in a fashion comprehensible to non-Jews, although how many non-Jews actually studied Philo’s obscure ruminations about the deep philosophical and moral significance of the biblical narrative about the patriarch is unknown. More helpful may have been Philo’s treatment of criticism of the biblical narrative from within the Jewish community, such as the vitriol poured on the “godless and impious” scoffer whose punishment for his sarcasm (about the suggestion in the biblical text that the divine gift to Abram consisted in no more than an extra alpha to enable him to change his name) was an untimely and inglorious suicide by hanging—if Jews were inclined to mock at this part of the story, all the more so, outsiders. Unlike Moses, about whom Gentiles thought they knew a great deal (by no means all of it favourable), Gentiles knew much less about Abraham, but Josephus believed (or purported to believe) that the people of Pergamum thought that they had been friendly with the ancestors of the Jews in the time of Abraham, “who was the father of all Hebrews,” and that the Spartans had asserted in the past that they shared descent from the patriarch, and emphasising his remarkable impact on the well-being of the world might have seemed a good idea, particularly in the anti-Jewish atmosphere of Rome in the

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9 On Philo, see Phoebe Makiello in this volume.

10 Philo, Mut. 61–62.
