
During the past few years, Aarhus University in Denmark has become a prime mover in the study of Judaism and Christianity in antiquity, even beyond the Nordic countries. The research program on “Jews, Christians and Pagans in Antiquity—Criticism and Apologetics,” which was completed in 2007, brought about a number of publications both in English and Danish. Perspektiver på Jødisk Apologetik (= Perspectives on Jewish Apologetics) is published in the semi-popular Danish series established by the Aarhus project, but is in fact an important publication on the international level as it represents the most comprehensive discussion of Jewish apologetics since Paul Friedländer’s landmark study from 1903. Hence I have allowed myself a rather comprehensive presentation and discussion.

Six scholars contribute in the book, and, quite clearly, fruitful exchange and lively discussions have taken place prior to the completion of the papers. At certain points a consensus emerges, at other points disagreement is maintained, whereas in some cases—and this is my first critical comment—further discussion and clarification would have been beneficial, as Jewish apologetics in antiquity is indeed a tricky topic.

In his introduction to the book, Anders Klostergaard Petersen outlines how standard views of “the Jewish apologetics” (with the definite article) have been questioned and overturned during the past decades, from Tcherikover to Gruen. Most scholars no longer view Jewish apologetics as a direct response towards a disapproving audience, and even less as an attempt to win gentile converts. Recent scholarship do not perceive Jewish apologetics as an attempt to mediate between Judaism and Hellenism as to separate and ideal entities, but applies a more dynamic understanding of Judaism and Hellenism an culture in general.

In what sense, then, is it meaningful to speak of Jewish apologetics (without the definite article) in antiquity? First, Petersen abandons the notion that (Jewish) apologetic literature necessarily addresses an audience of outsiders. He rather perceives (Jewish) apologetics as expressions of (Jewish) self-definition and identity formation. “A defence is never directed exclusively against the other, but just as much against one self” (38-39; cf. 92). Second, the distinction between emic and etic approaches is applied. To the extent that our sources imitate the rhetorical apologia, they are apologetic in the emic sense. Josephus’ Contra Apionem is here the primary example. An etic approach opens up for other types and degrees of apologetics. It might be a matter of set motives (topoi) such as the proof from antiquity (that Judaism is ancient and hence deserves respect and praise) and the dependence theme (that Greek philosophers adopted Jewish views and practices), a matter of apologetic strategies of interpretation (see below on allegory), or a
matter of a apologetic perceptual horizon (by engaging with competing world view), etc. This theoretical conception—which I find very useful—is developed and exemplified most explicitly in Petersen’s further contributions and is questioned by Henrik Tronier in his paper on Philo.

Within this theoretical framework, e.g. the *Letter of Aristeas* embodies apologetics in the indirect sense: a panegyric exposition of Judaism that emerges from an apologetic perceptual horizon and represents an indirect reaction to the threat from competing world views that without reference to the Torah promotes the same ideals as the author of the *Letter of Aristeas* (67). Rather than attempting to bridge a gap between two conflicting cultures, he proudly extols the Jewish tradition while at the same time being fully conversant with the philosophical and rhetorical traditions of Hellenism—without that making him less Jewish. The apologetic traits of Artapanus and Aristobulus are similar, and in addition these authors introduce the proof from antiquity and the dependence theme.

At this point I will question the recurring references to competing world views as “threats” and to cultural exchanges as “discursive fights,” “cultural battles,” etc. In my view an analytical language that is less belligerent and warlike is to be preferred. Arguably the most clever and insightful discussion within the book concerns the understanding of the allegorical method. Does it represent an apologetic mode of interpretation, in the sense that it makes it possible to come to terms with those elements in ancient scriptures that have become disturbing or even unacceptable? Jesper Hyldal and Petersen argue this case, whereas Tronier claims that the allegorical method need not be an expression of apologetics and that in the case of Philo it is certainly not so. The contributions of Hyldal and Tronier provide general discussions of allegorical interpretation in Philo with particular reference to Stoicism (both) and Middle Platonism (Tronier). Petersen emphasizes the ethnic conflicts in Alexandria as the context for Philo’s writings and exemplifies his approach by a cursory reading of *De migratione Abrahami*.

With the exception of the contribution by Kåre Fuglseth on Philo and the Jerusalem temple, the remaining essays represent basic introductions to single writings: to the *Letter of Aristeas*, Aristobulus and 1-4 Maccabees by Petersen, to Artapanus by Ellen Juhl Christiansen, and to Philo’s *In Flaccum* and *Legatio ad Gaium* as well as Josephus’ *Contra Apionem* by Per Bilde. The common concern for apologetics makes these contributions more focused and readable than isagogic contributions sometimes are.

There is certainly no room for a discussion of each essay, but since *Contra Apionem* was the focus of my own dissertation, I choose to comment upon Bilde’s treatment of this document. The overall approach and much of the discussion will be familiar to anyone that knows his influential introduction to Josephus (*Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, His Works, and Their Importance; JSPSup 2*; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988): *Contra Apionem* is both an apologetic writing and “a work of missionary literature” that gives us “a key” to the authorship of