Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity

Edited by LANCE JENOTT and SARIT KATTAN GRIBETZ

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Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This volume presents essays that emerged from a colloquium on the topic of cosmogony (the creation of the world) among ancient Jews and Christians held at Princeton University in May 2010. Funding for the program was generously provided by Princeton's Department of Religion, Program in Judaic Studies, and Program in the Ancient World.

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Citations throughout the volume adhere closely to the SBL Handbook of Style (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

Princeton, New Jersey, 2013

Lance Jenott Sarit Kattan Gribetz

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VIII

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	Australian Biblical Review
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJSR	Association for Jewish Studies Review
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers (ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson)
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (ed. H. Temporini and W.
	Haase)
APF	Archiv für Papyrusforschung
ArBib	Aramaic Bible Series
BBA	Berliner byzantinistische Arbeiten
BCNH	Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum: Series graeca
СР	Classical Philology
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DSD	Dead Sea Discoveries
DSSR	Dead Sea Scrolls Reader
FC	Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
GRBS	Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
HeyJ	Heythrop Journal
HR	History of Religions
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
JAJ	Journal of Ancient Judaism
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JECS	Journal of Early Christian Studies
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JJTP	Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JR	Journal of Religion
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSQ	Jewish Studies Quarterly
MHR	Mediterranean Historical Review

Abbreviations

NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	New Testament Studies
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
PG	Patrologia graeca = Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca
	(ed. JP. Migne; 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886)
POC	Proche-Orient Chrétien
OrChrAn	Orientalia christiana analecta
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (ed. J. Charlesworth; 2 vols.)
RE	Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft (ed. A. F. Pau-
	ly; Stuttgart, 1893–1957)
REG	Revue des études grecques
REJ	Revue des études juives
RHR	Revue de l'histoire des religions
RSR	Recherches de science religieuse
SA	Studia anselmiana
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWGRW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Greco-Roman World
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (supplement to Numen)
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SPhilo	Studia philonica
ST	Studia theologica
StOR	Studies in Oriental Religions
SVF	Stoicorum veterum fragmenta (ed. H. von Arnim; 4 vols. Leipzig, 1903-
	1924)
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
VC	Vigiliae Christianae
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WZKM	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

Х

In the Beginning: Cosmogony in Late Antiquity

LANCE JENOTT AND SARIT KATTAN GRIBETZ

In 1584, in the Italian village of Montereale, a poor miller named Domenico Scandella, known more commonly by his nickname Menocchio, described his view of the world's creation:

I have said that, in my opinion, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass formed – just as cheese is made out of milk – and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels, and among the number of angels, there was also God, he too having been created out of that mass at the same time, and he was made lord, with four captains, Lucifer, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. That Lucifer sought to make himself lord equal to the king, who was the majesty of God, and for this arrogance God ordered him driven out of heaven with all his host and his company; and this God later created Adam and Eve and people in great number to take the places of the angels who had been expelled...¹

Menocchio's vivid cosmogony is preserved in records of his inquisitorial trial, which resulted in his execution a few years later. The miller imagined that the world had formed from a mass of primordial elements from which worm-like creatures crawled and became angels, and he invokes the metaphor of milk fermenting into cheese to illustrate the process. While Menocchio's cosmogonic ideas caused the authorities to doubt his sanity, his culinary imagery is actually resoundingly similar to ancient ideas about the world's creation. The fifth-century rabbinic midrash *Genesis Rabbah* describes the formation of the heavens out of an expanse of water: "This may be compared to milk that was placed in a bowl. Before one drop of resin is placed in it, it quivers, but after a drop of resin is placed in it, it immediately curdles and stands still."² The midrash extends its metaphor by referencing a verse from Job (26:11), "the pillars of heaven quiver": "When the drop of resin was put into it, 'There was evening and there was morning the second day' (Gen 1:8). As Rav said, '[God's work] was liquid

¹ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century*. *Miller* (trans. John and Anne Tedeschi; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 5–6.

² Gen. Rab. 4:7 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabba, 31).

on the first day and on the second day it solidified."³ Though Menocchio's cosmogony sounded preposterous and blasphemous to sixteenth-century ears, it has precedents in ancient religious traditions and scientific lore. His notion that God was *created* from the primordial mass, rather than having created it himself, evokes ancient debates about the world's origins and God's agency in the creation.

Carlo Ginzburg begins his study, *The Cheese and the Worms*, with Menocchio's fanciful cosmogony. It is not surprising that this part of Menocchio's worldview serves as Ginzburg's point of departure for exploring the cultural universe that Menocchio and those like him inhabited. Menocchio's cosmogony molded how he regarded the world, how he understood his place within it, and how he conducted himself as a result. It mattered to Menocchio how the universe came into being, and by what forces. His idiosyncratic views also characterized him as a quirky member of his small village, someone with unorthodox opinions, and eccentric charm. The inquisition, though, soon deemed him a heretic with dangerous ideas. For the church authorities, Menocchio's description of the world's origins and most importantly of God's role in creation posed a significant threat to great theological and ecclesiastical principles. Much hung in the balance.

Debates about the proper understanding of the world's origins are ancient, and creation stories often became the focal point of disputes long before Menocchio's time.⁴ Among the ancient Greeks, the question of creationism was debated by Thales and the pre-Socratics, Plato and Xenophon, the Epicureans, Aristotle, and the Stoics.⁵ In his work on creation, Philo of Alexandria attempted to reconcile Platonic and biblical perspectives in response to Jewish and pagan critics who posited insurmountable

³ Gen. Rab. 4:7.

⁴ For an overview of the term and concept of "cosmogony" in religious traditions, see Charles H. Long, "Cosmogony," *Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Lindsay Jones; 2nd ed.; Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA, 2005), 3:1985–91, and on cosmogony in the Hebrew Bible and subsequent Jewish interpretation, see "Creation and Cosmogony in the Bible," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik; 2nd ed.; Detroit: Mac-Millan Reference USA, 2007), 5:273–80, and the collections of essays in Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, eds., *Creation in Biblical Traditions* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992) and Bernhard W. Anderson, ed., *Creation in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁵ David Sedley explores such debates in *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); see also M. R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity* (Sciences of Antiquity; New York: Routledge, 1995); Arthur Stanley Pease, "Caeli Enarrant," *HTR* 34.3 (1941): 163–200.

tensions between the two worldviews and the communities that espoused them. 6

The rabbis regarded proper interpretations of problematic biblical verses that could be used to argue against God's singular power in creation (e.g. Gen 1:1–2, 1:26–27) as litmus tests for acceptable belief.⁷ Disagreements about details in the creation story also distinguished different rabbinic schools from one another.⁸ Christian heresiological treatises often identified the cosmogonic myths of "the heretics" as examples of their dangerous attitudes towards the world, while patristic debates were particularly concerned with the problems of *creatio ex nihilo*, the origins of matter, and the eternity of creation. These themes challenged the reconcilability of Greco-Roman philosophy and Christian doctrine and became significant concerns for Clement, Origen, Basil, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome, among others.⁹ Cosmogony lay at the center of debates about communal

⁸ Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai argued about the order of the creation of heaven and earth as well as whether the *act* of creation occurred during the day or also at night (e.g. *Gen. Rab.* 1:15, 12:14). According to a passage in the Palestinian Talmud, the schools of R. Ishmael and R. Akiva disagreed about whether creation could be studied, Rabbi Akiva maintaining that it was forbidden but Rabbi Ishmael permitting interpretation of Gen 1 (*y. Hag.* 2:1, 77c), though this dispute is not attested in tannaitic sources and may reflect contemporary debates rather than historical ones.

⁹ See Paul M. Blowers, Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and his earlier essay, "The Doctrine of Creation," in The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies (ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 906–31; Karen King, The Secret Revelation of John (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Simo Knuuttila, "Time and Creation in Augustine," in The Cambridge Companion to Augustine (ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 103–15; Gerhard May, Creatio ex nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994); Richard Sorabji, Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Sorabji, The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD, Volume 2: Physics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 162–95.

⁶ Roberto Radice, "Philo's Theology and Theory of Creation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (ed. Adam Kamesar; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 124–45, and David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the* Timaeus *of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

⁷ See for example Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Maren Niehoff, "*Creatio ex Nihilo* Theology in *Genesis Rabbah* in Light of Christian Exegesis," *HTR* 99.1 (2006): 37–64; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Gary Anderson, "The Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 in the Targums," *CBQ* 52.1 (1990): 21–29. On the other hand, see John C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992) for an example of early Jewish traditions being incorporated into later Manichaean cosmogony.

inclusion and exclusion, legitimate scriptural interpretation, and proper theological opinions.

Galen, writing in the second century CE, recognized the great amount of ink spilled on these debates, but provocatively disregarded inquiry into the origins of the world as fruitless and ultimately irrelevant to one's conduct in the world. He summarizes a plethora of speculative questions about creation asked by philosophers:

whether this world is self-contained; whether there are more worlds than one; whether there are a huge number of them; and likewise whether this world is created or uncreated; just as also whether, if it had a beginning, some god acted as its craftsman, or no god did, but some irrational and unskilled cause by luck made it as beautiful as *if* a supremely wise and capable god had supervised its construction. But questions like these contribute nothing to running one's own household well or minding out appropriately for the affairs of one's city, or dealing justly and sociably with relatives, fellow-citizens, and foreigners ... For these and many other such questions are perfectly useless for 'moral and civic' virtues and activities, just as they are for the cure of mental ailments.¹⁰

Despite the fact that Galen devoted substantial energy to defending the idea of divine craftsmanship, in works such as his treatise *On the usefulness of parts* and his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, he nonetheless insisted that speculation about the origins of the universe led nowhere beyond intellectual and scientific musings. They did not, in his view, affect domestic activities or political affairs.

Yet in contrast to Galen, the Epicurean philosopher Lucretius maintained that truly understanding the world required a firm grasp of creation since all things followed from it. "For I now begin," he says, "to make my discourse on the lofty law of god and heaven above, and shall reveal the building blocks from which all things are fashioned ... since it is from these that all proceed."¹¹ For Lucretius, what people believed about the origin of the world shaped the way they behaved in the world. "Therefore we must consider well celestial happenings, and by what principle the sun and moon run on their courses, and all phenomena upon the earth ..."¹²

Following Lucretius, the essays in this volume demonstrate that wonderings about creation featured prominently in the ancient world and penetrated into social, political and ethical spheres far beyond the abstract musings of philosophers.¹³ The diverse ways in which Jews and Christians im-

¹⁰ Galen, On the doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato XI 7.9 ff., cited in Sedley, Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity, 242.

¹¹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* I.53–61, trans. A. E. Stallings, *The Nature of Things* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007), 4–5, slightly modified.

¹² Lucretius, De Rerum Natura I.127-31 (Stallings, 7).

¹³ On the reception of Gen 1 among Jews, Christians and Greco-Roman philosophers, see the collection of essays in George H. van Kooten, ed., *The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Reinterpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy,*

agined the world's creation informed their conceptions of past, present and future, the interpretation of their sacred texts, their understanding of the relationship between the divine and human worlds, their ethics, space, art and ritual practice – in short, how they constructed their own worlds and chose to live their lives.¹⁴

By exploring a broad range of texts and contexts, from the Second Temple period through the emergence of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, this volume underscores how thinking about creation contributed to a wide spectrum of attempts at articulating the relationship among God, the cosmos, and humanity. For fourth-century inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Temple Mount and newly-built Church of the Holy Sepulcher were not only sites of devotion and worship but also sat on the exact location of the world's origin where the tehom of Gen 1:2 lay subdued beneath a magical rock. In synagogues and churches throughout the region, the weekly liturgy reenacted the creation story, inserted worshippers into the history of salvation, and reminded them of the fragility of human existence in contrast to the permanence of God's work. In Egypt, ascetics strove to attain the original glory of Adam, and interpreted the union between Adam and Eve as a symbol for the renunciation of sexuality. For Valentinian Christians, the belief that humanity was originally divided into three classes supported their community's ethical expectations. In Christian schools, the placement of the creation story at the beginning of Moses' Torah reinforced a range of pedagogical functions and communal identity markers in and out of scholastic settings. Rabbinic conceptions of procreation and the formation of the fetus were modeled on accounts of the world's creation. while bans against the study of creation highlighted the rabbis' fear of blaspheming God, revealing secrets, and testing the limits of human knowledge. It is a basic contention of this volume that for ancient thinkers knowledge of origins - aitia - was key for making sense of their own experience of the world.

Several central texts and traditions form a common backbone for discussions about cosmogony in antiquity. There are, of course, the foundational sources from the Hebrew Bible – the creation stories in Gen 1–2, the agonistic elements preserved in many of the Psalms, and the cosmogonic themes in Wisdom literature, including Job, Proverbs, Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Greco-Roman philosophical writings such as Plato's

Christianity, and Modern Physics (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, ed., The Creation of Man and Woman: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (trans. William R. Trask; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion* (trans. William R. Trask; New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

Timaeus offered compelling theories with which Jews and Christians felt compelled to contend and reconcile the biblical traditions. Texts from the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, Romans, and 1 Corinthians, added additional layers of meaning to the Jewish scriptures. These complex webs of creation narratives provided Jews and Christians with an overlapping cosmogonic vocabulary from which to draw and upon which to build.

We have organized the volume into four thematic sections: I. Scripture and Interpretation; II. Theology and Anthropology; III. Pedagogy and Ethics; and IV. Space and Ritual. While each contribution touches upon many interrelated themes, the divisions are intended to highlight the several spheres of life in which creation theories played a role.

Part I: Scripture and Interpretation

In "Made to Order: Creation in *Jubilees*," James VanderKam analyzes *Jubilees*' creative rewriting of Gen 1–2. He suggests that the author looked in two directions as he composed his account of creation: backwards, to his base text in Gen 1–2, and outwards, to discussions and debates about creation present in his own time. Through an analysis of *Jub.* 2, in which the narrative departs significantly from the text of Genesis, VanderKam considers whether the author was responding to contemporary cosmogonic traditions popular in the Hellenistic world.

VanderKam demonstrates how the author took great care to write his narrative in such a way that would prevent potential misinterpretations of Genesis concerning agents of creation other than the God of Israel (e.g., Gen 1:20 "Let *the waters* bring forth..."; 1:24 "Let *the earth* bring forth..."; 1:26 "Let *us* make man..."). The author of *Jubilees* sought to show beyond doubt that God alone was responsible for creation. His careful rewording of such passages subtly emphasized that God had no help from anyone or anything in the process of creation, neither primordial earth, nor waters, nor angels – all possibilities left open in the text of Genesis. VanderKam cautiously suggests that in denying any creative agency to forces other than God, the author was consciously responding to traditional notions in Greek cosmogonic thought about the generative roles played by earth (e.g. in Hesiod's *Theogony*) and water (e.g., in the philosophy of Thales), two of the four constitutive elements of Hellenistic science.

Furthermore, VanderKam analyzes how *Jubilees*' treatment of the Sabbath highlights the election of Israel and bars any possibility that the Sabbath could be seen as a special day intended for all people. *Jubilees* draws a parallel between God's twenty-two creative works before the Sabbath, and the twenty-two generations from Adam to Jacob. By implication, Jacob and the Sabbath are both blessed, and it is Jacob's descendants who celebrate the Sabbath with God and the angels (2:20–21). VanderKam suggests that the author's exclusivist view of Sabbath observance may hint at a contemporary debate over "the wisdom of such segregation."

Ancient anxieties over proper interpretation of the Genesis creation account also lie at the center of Yair Furstenberg's essay, "The Rabbinic Ban on Ma'aseh Bereshit: Sources, Contexts and Concerns." The ban on speculating about creation is first recorded in tannaitic sources of the second and third centuries (the Mishnah, Tosefta and Tannaitic Midrashim), and yet most previous scholarly attempts to uncover its origin and purpose have relied on elaborations of the rule in later sources (the Talmuds and Genesis Rabbah). These sources suggest that the rabbis were anxious about the proliferation of specific heretical interpretations that involved multiple primordial powers and potentially negative creative forces present before the world's creation. While such concerns do indeed seem to have preoccupied later rabbis, just as they did the Christian heresiologists, Furstenberg finds no traces of such concerns in the earlier rabbinic texts that first set forth the prohibition. By turning, instead, to sources from the Second Temple period, Furstenberg argues that the initial rabbinic impulse to curtail study of biblical verses about the world's creation stemmed from a widely-held concern about properly understanding the mysteries of creation, and not questioning the logic of the created world or the Creator. Maintaining God's honor, not the potential of competing heretical sects, initially motivated the rabbis in the tannaitic period to limit the study of creation.

Rabbinic sources are not the only Jewish texts that warn against inquiring into the unknown realms of existence. The Wisdom of Ben Sira (3:21-22) urges its readers not to search out "what is hidden from you," for one has "no business with mysteries." For Ben Sira, such mysteries involve the world's past and future, which are generally only accessible to and thus also concealed by God. In the Mishnah's formulation of its prohibition, it too forbids inquiry into "what is ahead and what is behind." Furstenberg thus locates the Mishnah's ban within the context of Ben Sira's anxiety about accessing knowledge that ought to remain beyond human comprehension. Several texts from Qumran that appropriate Wisdom literature also provide a helpful context for locating the Mishnaic prohibition. In contrast to Ben Sira, who discourages the quest for unattainable knowledge, multiple references among the Dead Sea Scroll texts to the raz nihveh, "the mystery that is to be," urge the study of these mysteries precisely in order to attain a better appreciation for God, the creation, and the trajectory of world history. Through these sources, again, it becomes clear, according to

Furstenberg, that the Mishnah has in mind such inquiry into the secrets of creation, which was promoted in the esoteric circles at Qumran but deemed potentially dangerous and blasphemous by Ben Sira and the rabbis who banned it.

Rather than expressing anxiety about what preceded the world's creation or that which lies beyond the created world, the mishnaic ban as it is presented in the Mishnah and associated tannaitic midrashim is most concerned with maintaining respect for human fate and God's governance of the universe from the moment of its creation. It was only in later interpretations of these sources, in subsequent centuries, that the rabbis became alarmed by the threat of inappropriate inquiry into primordial times and speculation about the cosmos, its origins, and its creator(s) by those whom they considered heretics.

While VanderKam and Furstenberg focus on attempts to curtail exploration of creation beyond what is found in Genesis, Geoffrey Smith studies a text that uses the biblical narrative to develop a complex cosmogonic myth. In "Constructing a Christian Universe: Mythological Exegesis of Ben Sira 24 and John's Prologue in the *Gospel of Truth*," Smith analyzes the biblical underpinnings of the creation story from a Gospel that most scholars believe reflects the theology of a Valentinian Christian.

Unlike other Valentinian creation stories, which involve characters such as Wisdom (Sophia) and a demiurge, the *Gospel of Truth* relates that the world was produced by Error (Planê), personified as female. Its cosmic drama begins with the pre-existent heavenly beings searching for God, their maker; yet because they existed within God, they could not find him. Their ignorance of the Father led to fear, and as they became terrified, the power of Error exploited their situation. Error created the material world to entice them into a dreadful life, and finished her deception by enshrouding humanity in a perpetual "mist" of ignorance.

While previous studies of the *Gospel of Truth* have attempted to explain this unique creation story by reference to other Valentinian myths, Smith emphasizes the need to read it on its own terms, and not as a cryptic variation of an assumed Valentinian ur-myth. He therefore asks, "How would someone with no knowledge of 'the Valentinian myth' interpret the myth of Error in the *Gospel of Truth*?" In answering this question, Smith investigates the author's interpretation of two foundational stories from scripture, namely the prologue to the Gospel of John, and the tale of Wisdom's descent as a "mist" in Ben Sira 24. In light of the textual fluidity of John's prologue in the second century and the wide range of its interpretation by Christian exegetes, Smith demonstrates that the author had a text of John 1:3 before him that read "apart from him nothing came about." The author identified "him" with the Father himself (not with the Logos), and inter-

Introduction

preted "nothing" substantially, as a reference to the phantasmal world of deception created by Error, which, as Smith shows, the *Gospel of Truth* frequently associates with the abstract concept of nothingness. Therefore this Gospel's creation myth explains that "all things" (the heavens) were created by the Father, while "nothing" (the world of Error) did indeed come about apart from him – that is, apart from his will. Yet if all heavenly things were created by the Father, why, then, does John say that no one has ever seen him except the Son (John 1:18)? And from where did "the darkness" arise (John 1:5)? The author of the *Gospel of Truth* sets forth his mythological explanation, including the myth of Error, to resolve these theological problems.

Smith offers an intriguing suggestion regarding the scriptural inspiration for the *Gospel of Truth*'s description of Error enveloping humanity with a mist. He points to the same, rather rare metaphor of "mist" used by Ben Sira 24:3 to describe the descent of Wisdom to the earth, and suggests that the author may have deliberately adapted the image in a creative inversion by applying it to his own feminine personification of Error. Thus, in keeping with the prologue of John, life in this world is marked by ignorance of the Father, rather than the experience of his wisdom.

Finally, Smith discusses how the soteriology of the *Gospel of Truth*'s myth takes seriously John 1:18's teaching that the world did not know the Father until the Son revealed him. The *Gospel of Truth* does not criticize the world of matter per se, but rather Error who created it. Despite the usual scholarly generalizations about Valentinian views of the created world, the theology set forth here is not anti-materialistic or anti-cosmic, but rather offers hope, through the arrival of Christ, for the improvement of a world in which most people live in ignorance.

Part II: Theology and Anthropology

In "The Emergence of Monotheistic Creation Theology in Hellenistic Judaism," Maren Niehoff examines the genesis of a novel theological concept – that the Creator alone is the only true god – in the writings of Philo and Josephus as they responded to the fluctuating philosophical currents and political *realia* of the first century. Niehoff argues that the city of Rome, with its marked preference for Stoicism, was the setting in which both authors first encountered the need to harmonize Judaism with Stoic natural theology. In a climate in which anti-Jewish sentiment was on the rise, Philo and Josephus hoped to convince their Roman audiences that Judaism offered the best, and most original, exposition of Stoic ideals regarding God's eternal care for creation and humanity's ability to know God by studying nature.

Niehoff traces a shift in Philo's views on creation theology from the treatises of his earlier *Allegorical Commentary* on scripture, composed in Alexandria, to those of his later *Exposition of the Law*, written after his extended stay in Rome (ca. 38–41 CE).¹⁵ In the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo rejects Stoic theories that identify God with creation itself, or which speak of God's immanence therein. Instead, he emphasizes the Platonic doctrine of God's utter transcendence, his existence beyond creation, and the latter's total dependence on God. Accordingly, the "young" Philo taught that people cannot know God through the creation, by observing its orderly movements, as the Stoics believed. The only way to find the transcendent deity is to leave nature behind altogether, to "fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can," as Plato famously prescribed in the *Theaetetus*.

However, one sees a change in Philo's attitude toward Stoicism in the later treatises of his great Exposition of the Law, which were written after his visit to Rome. Here, Philo emphasizes views that are compatible with Stoic natural theology, especially the idea that God's providence is eternally active in creation, and, as a consequence, that one can know God through creation, that is, by observing and studying natural phenomena. Philo thus presents Abraham as the philosopher par excellence, since it was he who first formulated monotheism by studying the movements of the heavens and, in contrast to the Chaldean astrologers of his era, inferred that there is one true God, a divine intelligence, who created and continues to maintain their order. Moreover, Abraham realized all this long before his visit to Egypt, lest anyone be misled by the claims of critics who say that Judaism is a mere permutation of Egyptian religion. According to Philo, quite the opposite is the case. Abraham anticipated the very theories of both the Stoics and the Egyptians. Niehoff then identifies nearly the same exposition of Abraham in Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews.

Why the shift in Philo's theology and its whole-hearted adoption by Josephus? Niehoff suggests an answer that accounts for both intellectual and socio-political trends in the first century. She argues that Roman sympathies toward Judaism present in the age of Augustus gave way to hatred and slander in subsequent generations. Varro and Strabo had showed a rather open-minded attitude toward the customs of Judaism because they sought to find philosophical wisdom embedded in the ancestral traditions of ancient peoples. But the post-Augustan age witnessed a nasty turn. The

¹⁵ For a list of the treatises which belong to each collection, see Maren Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xiii–xiv, 7–8.

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