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Temple as Cosmos

Xavier Pena, Joabson

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Temple as Cosmos

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Temple as Cosmos

The Jerusalem Temple Imagery in Josephus' Writings

PhD thesis

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by

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For Maria Ísis and Luís Felipe,
the joys of my life

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Abstract

The Judaeen-Roman historian Flavius Josephus (ca. 37 CE – ca. 100 CE) is among the thinkers of the early Imperial Age who provides a colourful description of the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor, the wilderness Tent. Josephus' elaborate descriptions of the Temple's symbolism assign cosmological meaning to the structure of the cult site, its appurtenances, the associated services, and the priests' attire. Those narratives found in *Judaeen War* 5.207-237 and *Judaeen Antiquities* 3.108-187 have not received as much notice as other areas of Josephan scholarship have over the past decades. The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to elucidate the Temple-as-cosmos idea in the writings of Josephus. To this end, I approach Josephus' narrative on the cosmological symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple and its prototype the Tent through historical investigation. I interpret his narratives in detail, considering the conventions of the time and milieu in which Josephus writes to determine the meaning of his language.

The thesis shows that the cosmological reading of the Temple/Tent by Josephus should be understood in light of the powerful Judaeen deity he sought to depict. Josephus seeks to convince his Roman readership that the Judaeen god is not only a national and local deity, but the Most High God, the supreme ruler of the entire universe, who once established the Temple/Tent as the centre from where he exercised authority over the world and its peoples. Making use of philosophical elements, Josephus indicates that the arrangement of the cult site, its personnel, ritual practices, and implements embodied the universe as created and maintained by God. Seen from this perspective, we observe Josephus in dialogue with a well-established Roman Imperial tradition of symbolic depiction of buildings as images of the cosmos. Additionally, Josephus demonstrates in his *Judaeen Antiquities* that the Temple arrangement conforms to Judaeen Law, which in its turn codifies the cosmic law created by God.

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Note on Illustrations, Translations, and Abbreviations

Illustrations

The illustrations of the Herodian Temple in Chapter Five and those of the Tent, its furnishings, and priestly attire in Chapter Six were commissioned by the author from the artist Gabriel Costa. These original colour depictions attempt to build a picture of how Josephus saw those cult sites and their appurtenances. Despite the detailed descriptions by Josephus in *Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities*, these reconstructions can only be approximations.

Translations

Most of the translations of ancient texts are either from LCL or other recent editions. However, I have varied the translation sporadically to obtain a more precise meaning or a more consistent use of English words corresponding to the Greek or Latin. All departures from those translations are noted. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

Abbreviations

BrillDAG	Montanari, Franco. <i>The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek</i> . Edited by Madeleine Goh, Chad Schroeder, under the auspices of the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015.
FGrH	Jacoby, F. et al, eds. <i>Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker: Text und Kommentar</i> . Leiden, Boston, Cologne (1923-).
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i> . Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
LSJ	Liddell and Scott. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9 th ed. Revised by H. Stuart Jones (1925-40) and Supplement by E. A. Barber and others (1968).

NOAB	<i>The New Oxford Annotated Bible</i> . New Revised Standard Version with The Apocrypha, 4 th ed. Edited by Michael D. Coogan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Schürer-Vermes	Schürer, Emil. <i>The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ</i> . 3 vols. in 4. Edited by Geza Vermes et al. Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1973-87.

Abbreviations of ancient works and authors are given according to those used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th ed.) and supplemented by *The SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd ed.).

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

Psalm 8:3-4 (NVI)

Chapter 1: Introduction

For thousands of years Jerusalem has been regarded by many as the beating heart of all world. This is because, for about a millennium, the city was home to one of the world's famous cult centres. In a large walled precinct atop a prominent hill overlooking the old city, the Temple stood majestically, the chief object of veneration for Judaeans. The Jerusalem Temple came to an end when the Romans utterly destroyed it in 70 CE. The centre of Judaeans worship, for it was the only cult site at which the sacrificial rituals required by the Mosaic Law could be performed, the Temple in Jerusalem was portrayed in many different ways throughout Antiquity. Of those descriptions, the most intriguing are references to the cult site's design as mirroring the cosmos. The Judaeans-Roman historian Flavius Josephus (ca. 37 CE – ca. 100 CE) is among the thinkers of the early Imperial Age who provides a colourful description of the Temple and its predecessor, the wilderness Tent.¹ Josephus' elaborate descriptions of the Temple's symbolism assign cosmological meaning to the structure of the cult site, each piece of furniture, the associated services, and the priests' attire. My aim in the present study is to elucidate the Temple-as-cosmos idea in the writings of Josephus.²

As a man of letters in the heart of the Graeco-Roman Empire, Josephus presents in his compositions a distinctive description of the Jerusalem Temple and its furnishings (as well as its predecessor the Tent) as representative of the cosmos. A member of the priestly caste, who came from a distinguished aristocratic family of Jerusalem, Josephus evinces in all his works the central position that the Temple occupies in Judaeans culture and tradition. He refers to the successive historical forms of the Temple: the Tent, the Solomonic Temple, the Post-Exilic Temple, and the Herodian Temple. A fascinating characteristic of all these phases, however, is his portrayal of the cult site as a miniature of the cosmos. For Josephus, the Temple, with its vessels, rituals, and priestly vestments, represents the cosmos.³ Among his literary productions, the interpretation of

¹ Throughout this thesis, we opt for translating the ancient Greek ethnonym Ἰουδαῖος and the Latin *Iudaeus* employed in Graeco-Roman literature as 'Judaeans', so as to retain its ethnic value. See, in this regard, Mason 2007: 457-512; 2017: 88-91.

² For monographs and articles on Josephus' life and works, see Thackeray 1929; Shutt 1961; Cohen 1979; Rajak 1983; Attridge 1984: 185-231; Bilde 1988; Hadas-Lebel 1993; Mason 2003; Pastor et al. 2011; Chapman and Rodgers 2016.

³ The term cosmos (κόσμος), from the earliest Greek literary sources, had the sense of 'order', encompassing both the material and moral senses. 'It was from this very idea of material and moral order that the meaning of *kosmos* expanded to signify form, government, decoration, and honour' (Marconi 2004: 211). Making use of these combinations of senses, philosophers from the sixth century BCE appropriated the term 'for the grand structure of the earth, sea, and the sky above, encompassing by day the sun, clouds and rainbow, and by night the bright patterns of the moon, stars and planets.' Pythagoras is believed to be the first philosopher to designate the whole system as the cosmos (Wright 1996: 3; *Aetius* 2.1.1; see also Finkelberg 1998: 103-136; Horky 2019: 22-4).

the cult site as an image of the cosmos comes up explicitly in two of his major works: *Judaean War* 5.207-237 and *Judaean Antiquities* 3.108-187. Whereas the description in *War* is given in the context of the fall of Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 CE, in *Antiquities* it is related to the giving of the Law by God to the lawgiver Moses.

The characterisation of the Jerusalem Temple as a symbol of the cosmos is not unique to Josephus' narrative. The cosmological interpretation is part of a Judaeian tradition that appears in compositions by earlier writers and seems to go back at least as far as the second century BCE. Furthermore, the cosmological reading of the Judaeian Temple is not only a characteristic of Judaeian culture; other ancient cultures that flourished around the Mediterranean basin and Near East shared similar understandings of other cult sites. In Rome, where Josephus lived under the auspices of the Flavian family, several imperial buildings mirrored the structure of the universe. In ancient Egyptian tradition, temples were usually designed to embody the cosmos. Heaven, earth, and the netherworld met in Egyptian temples, with doors marking the transition from one cosmic region to another. The ceiling, usually painted blue with yellow stars, symbolised the sky. The shape of the columns was made to represent papyrus, lotus, and palm plants, with their worked capitals portraying leaves and flowers (Wilkinson 2000: 76-77; Dieter 1997: 177-178).⁴

Roman Imperial buildings, in particular, make political statements of the *princeps*' power over the cosmos. Beginning with Augustus, new building projects showed Rome as the centre of the inhabited world and the Roman *princeps* as the source of order for the entire realm, whose power reaches as far as the fringes of the cosmos. A Roman reader of Josephus' *War* and *Antiquities* would find the cosmological reading of the Jerusalem Temple, and its predecessor the Tent, similar to common perceptions of those imperial buildings in Rome. Writing for a local Roman audience in the first instance, it makes sense that Josephus would employ such an interpretation for the Jerusalem cult site. Making use of these common understandings, he demonstrates for his readers the relevance of the Temple not only for Judaeians, but for all humanity.

Josephus' depiction of the Judaeian Temple in cosmic terms relates to his purpose of presenting the Judaeian god as the only deity who has power over the whole cosmos, which is consequently revealed in the Temple, its furnishings, and its priests' attire. He also shows that the arrangement of the cult site conforms to Judaeian Law, which in its turn codifies the universal law created by God. The description of a deity with cosmic powers is well-attested in the Greek east of the empire. Several *poleis* describe or depict their local deities in a way that showed their

⁴ For a similar understanding in other ancient cultures, see Rochberg 2005: 317; Ragavan 2013.

supremacy over the cosmos. In this thesis, therefore, we focus on this symbolic understanding of the Jerusalem Temple and its prototype the Tent brought to light by Josephus in his *War* and *Antiquities*. We explore the ways in which Josephus' portrayal of the Judean cult site is related to the Graeco-Roman tradition of reading and construction of buildings and temples as mirroring the structure of the universe.

1.1 Previous Studies on the Cosmological Symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple

Modern studies on the cosmological interpretation of the Jerusalem Temple by Judean thinkers arise from research on the sacred architecture of ancient Near Eastern cultures. From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, modern scholars, benefiting from archaeological excavations, proceeded to investigate the idea that cult sites held cosmic symbolism. Inspired by Friedrich Delitzsch's *Babel und Bibel* Lectures (1902-1904), a group of scholars called pan-Babylonians speculated about the influence of Mesopotamian culture, especially cosmology, in many other cultures including ancient Israel.⁵

Mircea Eliade was one of the leading exponents of this pan-Babylonian tradition. He developed several notions related to sacred architecture, including the ideas of *axis mundi* and *imago mundi*. He explains how traditional societies set up cult sites as cosmic axes that communicate among the three cosmic zones and are regarded as centres of the world. Those sacred buildings are generally seen as small replicas of the cosmos: 'This multiplicity of centres and this reiteration of the image of the world on smaller and smaller scales constitute one of the specific characteristics of traditional societies' (Eliade 1987: 43). Eliade's studies have often been criticised, mainly 'for their attempts to universalise principles that are specific to certain regions and for his misunderstanding of the various traditions he described' (Ragavan 2013: 4). Despite the criticism that has been raised against Eliade's theories, his *axis mundi* and *imago mundi* are still popular among students of sacred architectural symbolism in traditional societies.⁶

Another crucial theoretical study that contributed to the exploration of sacred architecture symbolism, often cited in recent investigations, is *La production de l'espace* (1974) by Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre understands space as a conceptual triad made up of (1) spatial practice, (2) representations of space, and (3) representational spaces. For the study of temple symbolism, the

⁵ For an overview of Delitzsch's studies, see Arnold and Weisberg 2002: 441-457.

⁶ For examples of criticism to Eliade's approach, see Allen 1988: 545-565; Studstill 2000: 177-194.

concept of representational spaces or symbolic space is relevant. Lefebvre defines the notion as follows:

Space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of “inhabitants” and “users”, but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs (1991: 39).

Those concepts have been employed, or have served as references, in some essential studies on sacred architecture of ancient Israel, including the wilderness Tent and the Jerusalem Temple.⁷

Josephus’ narratives concerning Temple symbolism, and the same is true of other Judaeans authors, have not received much notice from modern scholars. Some preliminary work on the Jerusalem Temple-as-cosmos idea was carried out in the early 1930s by Erwin R. Goodenough (1935) and continued in the following decades by scholars such as Jean Daniélou (1953, 1957), Jean Pépin (1958, 1986), Craig R. Koester (1989), C. T. R. Hayward (1996), and Jonathan Klawans (2006). Although those scholars devote some pages to explaining the cosmic symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem among Judaeans in the Graeco-Roman period, no study to date has examined this view in Josephus’ writings in any methodological way.

Goodenough appears to be one of the first to discuss the Temple-as-cosmos idea among Judaeans, particularly in Philo of Alexandria’s writings. In his magisterial study *By Light, Light* (1935), Goodenough suggests that the cosmic reading of the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor the Tent by Judaeans thinkers arose from the influence of Hellenistic mysteries. Calling it also ‘Aaronic Mystery Hellenistic Judaism’, Goodenough claims that ‘[it] got its symbolism from the great Jerusalem cultus, the temple and priesthood, and was a worship of God from the point of view of the material world’ (1935: 96). Taking Philo as a reference for this understanding, Goodenough explains the cosmological arrangement and furnishings of the Judaeans Temple, along with the degree of purity required to enter each area of the cult site, as symbolic of stages of spiritual progress of a candidate in a mystery ritual, which was similar to the Egyptian mysteries and the Hermetica (1935: 97-98, 119). Commenting on the cosmic portrayal of the high priest in *Mos.* 2.133-135 and the significance of the Judaeans priesthood and Temple in Philo, he states:

⁷ See, for instance, George 2009; Davis 2013.

It is a worship designed for those who are worthy of association with God, or of mystical union with Him, or deification, and is a transformation of the worshipper into the Cosmic Being, made up of Logos and Matter, to be sure, but still oriented in a great harmony through God's Powers of Goodness and Mercy (1935: 106).

Goodenough observes that although there were a variety of traditions concerning the 'Mystery of Aaron', all of them 'agree on this point...that the service of the Jewish priesthood, and all the temple except the holy of holies, was a Cosmic Mystery in which the initiate or worshipper rose to join in the hymn of the universe to its maker' (1935: 115). For Goodenough, the Mystery of Aaron, as known by the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, and Josephus, was 'a product of Palestinian syncretism' (1935: 120).

A few years later, Goodenough returned to this discussion again through scattered arguments spread throughout his monumental twelve-volume work *Jewish Symbols in the Graeco-Roman Period* (1953-1968). From the study of mural paintings of an excavated synagogue in Dura-Europos (third century CE) and other later synagogues, Goodenough identifies astral and cosmic symbols that lead him to suggest that 'the fascination of later pagan antiquity with solar and astral religion is clearly reflected in popular Judaism' of the period (1992: 120). To understand the influence of this 'astralism' upon the Judaeans in Late Antiquity, he proceeds to investigate the roots of this thought in the Graeco-Roman period and its influence among Judaeans such as Philo and Josephus.

Goodenough suggests that astral traditions of eastern origin had a strong influence on Graeco-Roman philosophy: 'As the astral conception came in from the East, most of the older myths and divine personalities, and a large part of ancient ritual, were interpreted or altered to express the sense of fatalism and determinism that astral control of the universe and of man's fate indicated'. Judaeans appropriated those 'astral values in their own worship and thinking' (1992: 116). The fascination with astral ideas was also reflected in 'popular Judaism', leading to 'the adoption of solar symbols of all kinds on Jewish amulets, and to such explicit solar symbols as Helios driving the quadriga through the zodiac in the synagogues' (1992: 120). Goodenough proposes that '[the] Jews brought the symbols into Judaism in order to appropriate the values inherent in the symbols, and that though by giving them Jewish explanations the origin of the symbols in paganism was obscured, at least to the Jews who borrowed them the basic values were by no means lost'. They Judaized the astral and cosmic symbols 'with explanations in Jewish terms while they had used the original values of the symbols to enrich Jewish religious life and hope' (1992: 26).

As to the influence of 'astralism' in Judaeon literature, Goodenough reminds us that this idea was widespread among Judaeon thinkers, who were influenced by Greek sources (1992: 162). Regarding the cosmic symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple in Judaeon literature, Goodenough speaks of the incorporation of 'mystic terms' for the deeper meaning of the cult site. In Philo, for instance, 'the symbols of the other shrine...represented the material manifestation of God in the universe, represented indeed the universe itself, and one who properly shared in this cultus joined the great cosmic worship wherein all creation manifested and worshipped the Creator' (1992: 163). Goodenough writes that Josephus also describes the Temple and Tent in such terms, but with fewer details than Philo gives. He adds that 'from these independent sources, then, we have evidence that Jews actually made their temple cultus, made Judaism itself, into an astral religion' (1992: 167).⁸

Even though Goodenough offers some very illuminating discussions on the emergence of the cosmological symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple among Judaeon writers in the Graeco-Roman period, his claims about this interpretation and Judaeon traditions by following Hellenistic mysteries almost immediately received substantial criticism for their speculative assumptions and methods.⁹ Despite the terminology employed by Judaeon thinkers (mainly Philo), Goodenough' reviewers, such as S. Belkin, wrote that 'Philo's allegories belong to the domain of philosophy and can hardly prove what was the nature of Jewish worship in Alexandria' (1938: 281). Traces of a dialogue between mystery cults and Judaeon traditions are not found in Philo or other Judaeon thinkers that address the cosmic symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem. Gary Lease writes that Philo even 'in some places... openly polemicises against the mystery religions and cautions Jews from flirting with their practices and their communions' (1987: 873).

In the 1950s, the French scholar Jean Daniélou suggested that the roots of the cosmological reading of the Jerusalem Temple go back to the Hebrew Bible, but were explicitly developed in the Graeco-Roman period under the influence of Hellenistic conceptions. In contact with Pythagorean and Posidonian conceptions, Hellenistic Judaeans recovered the cosmological symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple (1953: 61, 63-64). A few years later, Daniélou developed his ideas about the influence of Greek philosophy on Judaeon thinkers' reading of the Temple in Jerusalem by explaining that cosmological interpretations of the cult site, furnishings, and priestly raiment correspond with Stoic ideas. According to the Stoics, the whole universe was the

⁸ The similitude raised by Goodenough between the Judaeon tradition with the so-called 'astral religion' of the Graeco-Roman period was a topic extensively explored earlier by the Belgian scholar Franz Cumont (1906). It seems that Cumont' ideas had a significant influence over Goodenough' discussions on Judaeon culture in Late Antiquity.

⁹ For a review of the main criticism, see Lease 1987: 868-871.

temple of God. According to this principle, followed by Judaeen writers, ‘the different parts of the Temple are going to become different part of the cosmos’ (2014: 99-100).

Along the same line of reasoning, the French scholar Jean Pépin offers in his *Mythe et Allegorie* (1976) a detailed analysis of the development of allegory in antiquity and its influence on the interpretation of biblical texts in Judaeen thinkers. For Pépin, the allegorical reading of the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor the Tent by Philo and Josephus is a Judaeo-Hellenistic product (1976: 231-232). Thus, the use of allegory for the interpretation of Mosaic texts, including the description of the Tent, are explained in light of the nature of the language Moses employed in the composition of the texts. The cosmological interpretation of the Exodus Tent by Josephus in *Antiquities* 3 is an example of a text that would require the use of such allegory for the correct understanding of the account:

C’est ainsi qu’il reprend et amplifie la tradition, courante dans la *Sagesse de Salomon*, chez Philon et dans les Midrashim, selon laquelle le costume liturgique du grand prêtre, décrit dans *l’Exode* xxviii et xxxix, est porteur d’un symbolisme cosmique; pour lui, non seulement les vêtements sacerdotaux, mais même les détails de la construction du Tabernacle et les ustensiles du culte, ont pour raison d’être de “rappeler et de figurer l’univers” dans ses divers constituants (1976: 243).

A decade later, in an essay on cosmic piety, he developed this same theme to present a connection between the view of the temples in the Graeco-Roman period as a copy of the world and the cosmic tradition of the Hellenistic philosophers (1986: 408-435).

Some scholars have also perceived the cosmic reading of the Jerusalem Temple by the Judaeen thinkers as a component of a broader discussion on Mosaic Law in connection with the universal law of philosophical origins.¹⁰ An example of this case is the French translation and commentary of Philo’s *On the Special Laws* by Suzanne Daniel. Daniel not only identifies the Stoic theory of natural law in Philo’s remarks on the Temple, but she also explains that the cosmological interpretation connects with Hellenistic thought. In Daniel’s view, Philo conceives of the Temple in Jerusalem as the only legitimate cult site for the worship of God on earth. That is why he portrays the temple as a symbol of the cosmos (1975: xlix-li).

As for Josephus, Carl Holladay concludes that the cosmological symbolism of the Tent in *Antiquities* is related to the Stoic view of natural law. Holladay argues that Josephus, acquainted with this Stoic doctrine, invites the detractors of the Judaeans to observe the arrangement of the Tent and recognise the cosmic meaning of the cult site as intended by Moses. Thus, Josephus

¹⁰ See, for instance, Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer’ remarks on Philo’s perspective about Mosaic Law as a cosmic constitution (2007: 29-53).

would prove that Mosaic Law was not created only for the Judaeans, but also had a universal appeal (1977: 102). However, Holladay's finding is not part of a systematic study on this topic. The discussion only appears in his investigation on Josephus' use of the term θεῖος ἀνὴρ for Moses' description in *Antiquities* 3.180.

In his revised doctoral thesis, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and The New Testament* (1989), Craig R. Koester analyses references to the Tent in Judaeans and Christian literature in Antiquity. In his discussion devoted to the Tent in Judaeans literature of the Graeco-Roman period, Koester observes that Philo and Josephus when interpreting the Tent cosmologically 'drew on priestly traditions which Josephus presented unadorned, and Philo in a characteristically philosophical manner' (1989: 42). He also suggested that the symbolic reading of the Temple by the Judaeans thinkers could have started with the Jerusalem Temple and only later applied this cosmological view to the Tent (1989: 59). In consonance with Holladay's conclusions, Koester also explains that the symbolic interpretation of the Tent played a notorious role in Judaeans apologetics.

Philo and Josephus used the cosmological interpretation of the tabernacle to commend observance of the Mosaic law. Philo included his most extensive discussion of the tabernacle's cosmological significance in a section of his *De Vita Mosis* which demonstrated that people who want to live in harmony with the universe should do so by following the Mosaic law. Josephus discussed the cosmological significance of the tabernacle in the hope of gaining greater tolerance for Judaism and perhaps persuading some to adopt Jewish practices (1989: 174).

Louis Feldman, in his study on Josephus' recasting of Moses, comes to the same conclusion as Holladay, reporting that allegorically, Josephus imputes cosmic meaning to the Tent. In this way, 'Josephus was appealing to the Stoic view that law must have a cosmic significance' (1998: 194; cf. 2000: 280, n. 474).¹¹ Markus Bockmuehl walks the same path, highlighting Josephus' dependence on Philo and others for the portrayal of the Tent and the unclear information regarding the description of the Tent in *Antiquities*, which Josephus insists is 'an imitation of nature of the cosmos'. Bockmuehl comments that 'while no particular moral implications attach to this belief, it is in keeping with the common Jewish understanding that all the Torah is according to the law of nature' (2000: 109-110; cf. 1995: 42-43).

In a significant advance in the 1990s, C. T. R. Hayward surveyed some of the most important texts of the Graeco-Roman period that deal with the Jerusalem Temple's symbolism. In his introductory book *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook* (1996), Hayward offers a non-

¹¹ See also Zuleika Rodgers for conclusions similar to those of Holladay (2008: 146).

exhaustive analysis of the significance of the Jerusalem Temple and the services performed within during the Graeco-Roman period through the lens of eight non-biblical sources: Hecataeus of Abdera, Aristaeus, the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira (Hebrew and Greek texts), *Jubilees*, Philo of Alexandria, Flavius Josephus, and pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*. For each text, he provides an introduction, a translation of the writing, and a short commentary.

Hayward observes that while modern scholars write about the architectural form of the Jerusalem Temple and the sacrifice rituals performed by the priests within it, few studies are concerned with 'what the ancient writers who speak of the Temple and its Service thought about the meaning and significance of the things they describe' (1996: 4-5). Hayward maps five main ideas about the Temple expressed in the literature analysed: (1) the Temple as the stabiliser and keeper of the order in the cosmos; (2) the Temple as symbolic of the cosmos; (3) the Temple service and angelic worship; (4) the Temple as the place where God is invoked on Israel's behalf; (5) the Temple as a place of light (1996: 6-16).

Of those Jerusalem Temple imageries studied by Hayward, the most relevant for our study are those supporting the understanding of the Temple, furnishings, ritual practices, and priestly vestments as symbolic of the cosmos. He writes that this is an approach characteristic of Philo and Josephus. For him, 'it is quite possible that both men were motivated by the need to offer an apologetic for Jewish religion, and found in the cosmic, universal aspects of the Temple Service a useful response to Gentile misunderstandings or calumnies' (1996: 9). Especially with Josephus' cosmological reading of the Temple, Hayward situates the account in the aftermath of the collapse of the cult site in 70: 'It is...not surprising that he [Josephus] strongly brings to the fore the cosmic significance of the Temple, the high priest, and the Service.' In a manner consistent with Philo, '[Josephus] explains to his non-Jewish readers that the worship offered in Jerusalem had a beneficial effect for the whole world: perhaps he implies that the destruction of the sanctuary augurs no good for the future' (1996: 152). Making use of Josephus' other texts, Hayward mentions that the Judaeans offered sacrifices even for the Roman *principes*. Like Philo, '[Josephus] seeks to defend his people against slander, and his defence of the Temple Service relies on its universal character' (1996: 152-153).

Hayward's introductory study on the symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple is well-grounded and traces the evolution of the cosmic reading of the cult site in the Graeco-Roman period. Hayward's purposes do not, however, include any attempt to correlate the symbolic reading of the Temple by a Judaeian author with Graeco-Roman traditions about the cosmological interpretation of buildings and cult sites. Unavoidably, given that the cosmic aspect of the Jerusalem Temple is

part of a range of Temple symbolism, his comments on the cosmological reading by ancient authors are superficial and limited.

In Part II of his *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (2006), Jonathan Klawans examines the attitudes toward the Temple and sacrificial rituals found in Judaeen texts from the Graeco-Roman period. He begins his analysis by tracing the differentiation between two main conceptualisations of the Temple in those texts: (1) 'the [Jerusalem] temple as a symbol of the cosmos' and (2) 'the earthly temple as an analogue to a sanctuary located in heaven' (2006: 111). In this context, Klawans explains that Josephus is one of the ancient Judaeen thinkers who clearly articulates the Temple-as-cosmos idea in his *Judaean War*, with a more comprehensive treatment in *Judaean Antiquities*. Much like Hayward, Klawans perceives the exploration of this cosmological interpretation in *Antiquities* as an apparent response 'to unspecified calumnies uttered against the temple by those hostiles to the Jewish people' (2006: 114).

While Klawans believes that Josephus' cosmological reading of the Temple, furnishings, and priestly garments reflect a common understanding among Judaeans, he writes that 'Josephus' approach accords with what many scholars believe to be the general symbolic understandings of temples in the ancient Near Eastern world, ancient Israel included.' According to this view, the typical Eastern idea of temples-as-cosmos is reflected in the biblical accounts of the Tent and Solomonic Temple. 'Josephus' explicit testimony in this regard can then be seen on some level as tentative support for these approaches.' For Klawans, Josephus' symbolic approach to the Temple is deeply rooted in biblical traditions, and so he 'is not creative but conservative. It is hardly likely that Josephus created anew among Jews an analogy that is well attested in ancient Near Eastern literature' (2006: 114-115).

The main limitation of Klawans' study is that he offers no further explanation for the Eastern idea of temples-as-cosmos, and he does not explore the degree to which biblical authors employed this tradition in the alleged cosmic symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple, or how Josephus and other Judaeen thinkers could be considered heirs of such an established tradition. Interestingly, Klawans affirms that 'there is much literature devoted to the Second Temple and its symbolic significance' (2006: 105). There is a certain superficiality here. While he is correct in stating that some limited studies point out the cosmic symbolism of the Temple, Klawans mentions only Hayward in support, and his introductory book could not be considered a comprehensive study of the theme.

In a more recent study, Oliver Gussmann examines in his revised dissertation *Das Priesterverständnis des Flavius Josephus* the different concepts of priesthood in Josephus' compositions. In the second part of the study, especially Chapter 7 and 8, Gussmann explores a bit of Josephus' cosmological interpretation of the Temple, in particular the priestly vestments. Referring to Josephus' model of the temple as an *imago mundi*, Gussmann observes that Josephus interprets the Temple in *schöpfungstheologisch* way ('concerning a theology of creation') (2008: 341-342).¹² This is evident, for instance, in the reading of the Temple's textiles, which material point to different days of the Genesis creation story (2008: 387-389). While Gussmann gives a rough idea of the Temple's arrangement and furnishings, he explores the priestly textiles more fully.

Although the studies surveyed have contributed to the understanding of the Temple-as-cosmos idea in the works of Judaeans thinkers, including Josephus, none of them is exclusively about this theme in Josephus' writings. To our knowledge, the only full-length monograph devoted to Josephus' description and cosmological interpretation of a Judaeans cult site remains the unpublished thesis *The Account of the Ancient Israelite Tabernacle and First Priesthood in the Jewish Antiquities of Flavius Josephus* (1991) of Stuart Dunbar Robertson. As the title suggests, Robertson intended to examine only the narrative on the Tent in Josephus' *Antiquities*. The author's objectives are: (1) to describe the retelling of the biblical account of the ancient Israelite Tent; (2) to learn about the biblical sources used by Josephus in his account of the Tent; and (3) to determine which possible non-biblical sources Josephus employed in his reshaping of the biblical narrative (1991: 1).

In Robertson's view, 'the symbolism Josephus finds in the Tabernacle fits, in whole and in parts, into the cosmological order, which he saw to be in conformity with the order set forth in the laws of Moses' (1991: 238). In its turn, 'this was an element in Josephus' reasoning which he exhibits a correlation between his Pharisaism and Greek Stoicism' (1991: 108). Robertson also observes that 'in the Graeco-Roman world there was a lingua franca of live symbols. To show that the Tabernacle had these symbols was to participate in this lingua franca. The similarity of outlook among Josephus, Philo, and the Stoics enabled Josephus to place the Jewish symbols in the Tabernacle into a "vernacular" of nature-symbolism' (1991: 262).

A conclusion that follows logically from Robertson's thesis is that Josephus drew upon biblical texts, such as Numbers, Exodus, and Ezekiel's vision of the idealised Temple. Josephus

¹² The idea that the construction of the Tent mirrors the Genesis creation narrative is defended by several modern scholars. See, for instance, Levenson 1984: 275-298; Angel 2020: 64-65, Meyers 2020: 18.

seems to have been aware of Philo's texts on the symbolism of the Temple, and some of Josephus' interpretations finds a parallel in Philo's *Life of Moses*. Robertson also notes that some of Josephus' remarks echo in the Mishnah, Talmud, and the Midrashim, suggesting that Josephus drew on 'some haggadic and halakhic developments that appear later in the Midrashim and Talmud' (1991: 303-305). Moreover, 'the shrine of Apollo at Delphi was evidently an important source for Josephus as he looked for a pagan parallel to enhance the prestige of the Tabernacle' (1991: 305).

While Robertson's thesis on the Tent's account in Josephus' *Antiquities* offers a substantial contribution to the study of the temple-as-cosmos idea in Josephus, the investigation limits itself to a specific layout of the Judaeen Temple in one of Josephus' works. Robertson seems to fail to provide adequate arguments for Josephus' possible use of non-biblical sources in the biblical account of the Tent. Even though he mentions Judaeen writers who may have influenced Josephus (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo) and Josephus' awareness of other Graeco-Roman texts dealing with temples, Robertson overlooks the correlation between the symbolic view of the Tent in Josephus with other Graeco-Roman cult sites that were read in such a way.

A fundamental problem with much of the literature concerning the cosmological view of the Temple in the works of Judaeen thinkers, including Flavius Josephus, is the lack of care in interpreting those texts within particular contexts, without considering to whom the ancient authors are addressing their writings. Research on the cosmic symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple has tended to focus on the connection of this cosmological interpretation with biblical themes, including eastern cosmological lore and, to a lesser extent, Graeco-Roman philosophical traditions. To investigate why Josephus employs this cosmological interpretation of the Jerusalem Temple and the images he uses to signify the building structure, furnishings, and priestly vestments, it is essential to understand how those concepts were created and circulated in the early Roman Imperial period.

In sum, although scholars have shown some awareness of the cosmological symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple theme, a complete analysis of the Judaeen cult site as an imitation of the cosmos in Josephus' writings remains a desideratum. Given the relevance of the Josephan corpus for the understanding of the Jerusalem Temple in the Judaeen tradition of the early Imperial period, a serious investigation of the Temple-as-cosmos idea is timely. The cosmological representation of the Jerusalem Temple via Josephus' writings is an immensely valuable source for the reconstruction of the multiple facets of the cult site's symbolism and significance throughout its existence.

1.2 Methodology

Such a project requires us to dig beneath the surface of Josephus' accounts to uncover the foundations of ideas with which the original audience would have been familiar: that is, the works' relation to the social and cultural milieu in which they emerged. A writer is a product of the period in which he lives, and his works reflect the spirit of the time. Thus, Josephus' oeuvre should be understood in view of the milieus in which his writings were produced. To this end, I approach Josephus' narrative on the cosmological symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple and its prototype the Tent by way of historical method. The historical methodology refers to the investigation of specified problems in the human past by the interpretation of cultural artefacts (for this thesis, mainly ancient texts and building remains). Taking these material products into consideration, I intend to navigate through Josephus' accounts and understand how they were produced and structured, and how his target audience may have comprehended the clues.

We know that Josephus leaves Judaea for Rome after the destruction of Jerusalem (*Life* 422), and it is from the capital of the Graeco-Roman empire that he, under the support of the imperial family, writes all his known works (*Judaean War*, *Judaean Antiquities-Life*, and *Against Apion*). To whom Josephus may have addressed his writings is a matter of intense debate. In *War*'s proem, Josephus says that he writes for the inhabitants of the Roman *imperium* who were not involved in the war and therefore were ignorant of the events (1.3, 6, 16). In *Antiquities*, Josephus addresses to all Greeks who 'were eager to know about our affairs' (1.9; see also 1.12; 16.174; 20.262).

Concerning *War*'s audience, Henry St. J. Thackeray advocates the view that the 'work was a message of warning addressed in the first instance to Jewish and eastern readers to deter them from further revolt by portraying the invincible majesty of Rome' (1929: 51). Now, Per Bilde observes that the readers of *War* are varied. For him, the composition is aimed at two different groups: 'the ruling class in Rome in a political-apologetic attempt to mend the broken relationship and to restore the favourable situation the Jewish people enjoyed before the year 66'; and the Judaeans, 'with a political and theological interpretation of the War and the disaster which occurred' (1988: 77-78). As to *Antiquities*, Bilde maintains that *Antiquities* is addressed to two different gentile groups: the first one, who had a neutral attitude towards the Judaeans and their culture – assumed by him as the primary audience –, and the second one, who was favourable to the Judaeans and had an interest in their way of life (1988: 102-103).

In recent years, some scholars have taken for granted Josephus' statement about his audience in those two major works. Jonathan Price, for instance, writes that 'Josephus' books address multiple audiences – the Greek-educated Roman upper class in Rome and the cities of the empire, the Greek-speaking intelligentsia of the eastern provinces and the Greek-reading Jewish inhabitants of the eastern provinces' (2005: 102). Tessa Rajak indicates that Josephus is interested in the Greeks under Roman imperial rule, including Judaeans users of Greek (2005: 80-81). For John Curran, Josephus addresses his first writings to 'Jewish listeners and readers' (2011: 76-79).

Steve Mason's investigations have demonstrated, however, that Josephus' immediate audiences should be understood in light of the procedures followed for the creation, dissemination, and reading of literary works in ancient Rome.¹³ As Mason has noted, the idea of production of a book at that time was rather distinctive from the modern concept of publication. 'The public envisaged by the ancient historian, the only people whose knowledge-base and tastes he could reliably anticipate, were those living around him. He knew many of them well, and others were acquaintances of friends' (2017: 80). Following this line of reasoning, Josephus could be addressing his compositions to a restricted group in Rome that could include 'some fellow-Judaeans...though he wrote with special concern for Greeks and Romans in the capital' (Mason 2005: 73, 79).¹⁴ While Josephus envisaged reaching a broad audience, aiming at eternity, in Lucian's words, it is conceivable that Josephus' major works were primarily addressed for a group of people in Rome who had interests in Judaeans history and traditions (*His. conscr.* 40, 61; Mason 2011: 81-94).¹⁵

This study agrees with the explanation Mason proposes. As we shall observe, the portrayal and construction of temples and other imperial buildings as representations of the cosmos was a common tradition of the Roman Imperial Age. Since Josephus was writing from Rome and presumably addressing his works to local Roman readers in the first instance, it would make sense for him to portray the Jerusalem Temple as an image of the universe. As certain buildings in Rome were built or interpreted as representing elements of the cosmos, to highlight their political aspects and pre-eminence to others, the cosmological connotation of the Jerusalem Temple also has an apologetic tone. Josephus, as other Judaeans thinkers before him, presents the Judaeans god as the creator and the only deity who exercises control over the universe, earth, and its peoples. Thus, he seeks to convince his readers of the majesty and power of God in the splendour

¹³ On the writing and circulation of texts in ancient Rome, see Vallette-Cagnac 1997: 157; Potter 1999: 29-41.

¹⁴ For objections to Mason's view, see Huitink and Van Henten 2009: 49-60.

¹⁵ For the Roman readership in *War*, see Mader 2000: 155-156.

of his only permitted place of worship on earth. The Temple's layout, contents, and rituals are a statement of the cosmic prerogatives of God.

From this perspective, I propose to investigate how Josephus, in his *Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities*, presents the Temple in Jerusalem as a symbol of the cosmos for his audience in Rome. From this primary inquiry, we hope to answer some secondary questions, such as the following: (1) What message was Josephus attempting to convey in his Temple-as-cosmos narrative? (2) How would his readers have understood the cosmological interpretation of the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor the Tent? (3) Which works, thoughts, or imperial buildings influenced his cosmological interpretation of the cult site?

In order to properly address those questions, we shall approach Josephus' narratives of the Temple in *Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities* through historical investigation. For this purpose, we intend to interpret his narratives in detail, considering the conventions of the time and milieu in which Josephus writes to determine the meaning of his language. The interpretation of Josephus' texts requires attention to his aims, themes, content, as well as the structure of these works, and their audiences. We must also explore what words could mean when Josephus used them in his narrative, how members of Josephus' circle of acquaintances would have interpreted the cosmological reading of the Temple, what literary techniques and sources were used for the compositions, and how historical circumstances shape the narrative.

1.3 An Overview of the Study

This study of the cosmic symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple and its prototype in Josephus' compositions will be developed in five main chapters. Chapter 2 is concerned with the development of the cosmological tradition in the Graeco-Roman world and the ways in which this philosophical tradition influenced the reading of existing buildings and the construction of new edifices as symbols of the universe in the early Roman Imperial period. Although a number of buildings were constructed or read in accordance with this understanding, the chapter deals with eight specific cases: the underground cult site called the *Mundus*, Varro's aviary, the Circus Maximus, the temple of Vesta, Nero's *Domus Aurea*, the *Domus Augustana*, Hadrian's Pantheon, and mithraea.

Chapter 3 focuses on the cosmological interpretation of the Jerusalem Temple, its furnishings and priestly attire, and the rituals that took place there, along with its predecessor the Tent, in Judaean literature of the Graeco-Roman period. We begin the discussion with the controversy around the roots of the reading of the Temple as the image of the universe in early

Israelite and Judahite history. Citing early biblical texts about the Tent and Solomonic Temple, modern scholars have suggested that those cult sites could be read as symbols of the cosmos. We point out the limitations of the arguments employed by those scholars and propose that the cosmological understanding of the Tent and Jerusalem Temple belongs to the Graeco-Roman period. In this regard, we show that several Judaeans seem to depict the Jerusalem Temple with cosmological connotations. Among those Judaeans and authors, we include the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira, Aristobulus, the *Letter of Aristeas*, the Wisdom of Solomon, Philo of Alexandria, and rabbinical writings.

After the investigation of the roots of the reading of the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor, the Tent, as mirroring the structure of the universe, Chapter 4 deals with the relevance of the cult site to the writings of Josephus. The study of the texts reveals the essential role that the Temple played in Judaeans tradition and culture. In two of his major works, the *Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities*, the Jerusalem Temple and its precursor the Tent are the exclusive places for the worship of a mighty God whose power extends over the whole universe. In this context, Josephus seeks to convince his audience that the Judaeans cult site displays God's cosmic ordering power. Additionally, Josephus demonstrates in his *Antiquities* that the Temple arrangement conforms to Judaeans Law, which in its turn codifies the cosmic law created by God.

Chapter 5 concentrates on the portrayal of the Herodian Temple in *Judaean War* 5.207-237. Although Josephus refers to other versions of the Temple in *War*, it is only the last construction project on the cult site by King Herod that is read cosmologically. As a native of Jerusalem with priestly ancestry and as an eyewitness to the fall of the city and destruction of this Temple, Josephus' account of the Temple is relevant for the understanding of this cult site for the Judaeans elite of the first century CE in the context of the consolidation of Roman power over this region. Josephus offers lengthy remarks on the structure of the Temple, but essential information is lacking and only filled in by comparisons with the accounts in his *Antiquities* 15.380-425 and *Against Apion* 2.102-109. Furthermore, Josephus does not here provide an extensive cosmological interpretation for the Temple and its components, but does cosmologically explain some of the cult site's features, furnishings, and priestly garments. We shall observe that through the portrayal of the Temple in cosmic terms, Josephus wants to convey an important message to his intended audience in Rome, that the Judaeans god is a powerful deity whose dominion extends over the cosmos.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the cosmological connotation of the Tent in *Judaean Antiquities* 3.108-187. Considering that Josephus notes that his description of the Tent follows the Hebrew

biblical texts closely, we compare the accounts in both texts. Differing from his description of the Jerusalem Temple in his first composition, the *Judaean War*, Josephus presents a lengthy commentary about the Tent and its cosmological symbolism. He explores the courtyard of the Tent with its furnishings (e.g., the altar of sacrifices and the washbasin), exterior and interior of the cult site, the curtains, the table of showbread, the lampstand, the altar of incense in the Holy Place, the ark in the Holy of Holies, and the priests' clothing. In addition to reading Josephus' description along with the biblical texts, we seek to connect Josephus' cosmological interpretation of the Tent's components with those elaborated by other Judaeans thinkers, as well as similar references made by Gentile authors about Graeco-Roman temples. Just as in *War*, Josephus attempts to convince his audience via the cosmological symbolism of the Tent that God is not only a national deity with restricted power, but the creator, maintainer, and supreme ruler of the universe.

Finally, Chapter 7 brings the thesis to a close by briefly looking at the key issues and discussions on Jerusalem Temple-as-cosmos idea in Josephus' works. Also, the final section of the chapter demonstrates the necessity of continuing the research on this theme not only in Josephus, but also in other Judaeans thinkers.

This thesis has been conceived in the hope of adding a useful new element to the discussion of cosmological symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple in Flavius Josephus' writings. By looking at the rich and colourful language that Josephus employs for his account of the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor the Tent in *War* and *Antiquities*, this is an exercise in demonstrating that the cosmological reading of the Judaeans cult site is only clear when we consider it as part of a Graeco-Roman tradition of interpreting buildings and temples as images of the universe, and in light of Josephus' communication with his Roman readership.

Chapter 2: Buildings as Images of the Universe in Ancient Rome

The present chapter provides some background for the study. We start with a discussion of the development of cosmology in the Graeco-Roman world, with particular interest in the approaches made by the Pre-Socratic, Platonist, Stoic, and Neopythagoreans philosophers. In the second section of the chapter, we present the influence of this thought in the interpretation of cult sites and buildings as symbols of the cosmos in ancient Rome, and how some of these structures were built with reference to this concept. On the whole, the examples presented here come from the end of the Roman Republic to the first two centuries of the Imperial Age.

2.1 The Study of the Cosmos in the Graeco-Roman World

The origin and development of the study of the cosmos (or cosmology) in the Graeco-Roman world is closely linked with the beginning of philosophical reflection in ancient Greece, when numerous intellectuals become increasingly enthralled by the might of a cosmic order. At that time, celestial bodies were believed to influence everything on earth. The notion was that the sun, moon, planets, and stars determined the fates of people and nature. And in order to explain this interaction, philosophers ‘set out to discard mythical and theological traditions and to forge a new language of nature and necessity to account for the structure and functioning of phenomena’ (Wright 1995: 5). The advance of cosmology is also result of the routes opened to Egypt and the Near East, observable especially from the time of the achievements of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE, when a process of cultural assimilations between autochthonous peoples and Greeks resulted in new forms of governance, art, economics, and behaviours concerning the sacred.

Describing the progress of philosophy in this period, Walter Burkert states that ‘the Greek religion...had been defined by forms of behaviour and by institutions; now it becomes a matter of the theories and thoughts of individual men who express themselves in writing’ (1985: 305). Philosophers begin to ‘emphasise the reform of theology, the capacity for abstract generalisation, totalising explanations, counter-intuitive hypotheses driven by argument, or commitment to critical inquiry’ (Long 1999: 15). Therefore, the contemplation and study of the stars came to have a place among the intellectual pursuits, even including astrology, which appears from the beginning as ‘a consistent scientific system’, effective principally ‘because it provided the framework for a new philosophico-religious interpretation of the world’ (Koester 1995: 151).

Although the study of the cosmos is considered part of physics, φυσική (one of the three areas of study in ancient philosophy, along with ethics and dialectic, Diog. Laert. 1.18), it was diffused through a variety of textual genres in verse or prose, including those dealing with medicine, geography, mathematics, architecture, comic dialogues, and moral essays.¹ In some instances, only fragments of the original works have survived, and two of the most preeminent philosophers, Pythagoras and Socrates, may not even have written anything on the cosmos (Wright 1995: 11; Diog. Laert. 1.16; 8.1.6).

The western Greek scrutiny of the cosmos begins among the Pre-Socratics in the sixth century BCE. It commences with the pioneering work of Thales in the study of astronomy, going through Anaximander (610–c. 546 BCE) and Pythagoras (c. 580–c. 500 BCE). Aristotle terms these first two philosophers from Ionia *physiologoi* (φυσιόλογοι), meaning those who discoursed about *physis* (*Metaph.* 986b). Later, Diogenes Laertius states that both philosophers give rise to the Ionian philosophical school. According to him, another school was founded by Pythagoras, named the Italian school, since Pythagoras ‘worked for the most part in Italy’ (1.14, 23; see also Iambl. *VP* 6.28–30). Aristotle had called members of the Italian school ‘Pythagoreans’ (*Cael.* 293a).

Athens only becomes the centre for cosmology in the fifth century BCE, with the recognition of Socrates and his pupil Plato, who founded the Academy. The Stagirite Aristotle, who was Plato’s pupil, founded another philosophical school in Athens, the Lyceum. From the Hellenistic period, two opposing institutions were founded, the schools of Epicurus and of the Stoic Zeno of Citium (Diog. Laert. 1.19).² In the following centuries, both Epicureans and Stoics would have a considerable influence on the intellectual life of Rome. Over the same period, Alexandria flourished as the centre for the study of the cosmos in the Graeco-Roman world, where ‘some of the brightest and most influential astro-cosmologists worked over a number of centuries, culminating in the great Ptolemy’ (Wright 1995: 6–7).

As already mentioned, systematic inquiry into the origins and nature of the universe by ancient Greeks also benefited from the ancient Near East astronomical lore. Peoples who lived in this area had long traditions regarding the heavens. Literary, epigraphic, and other material evidence concerns the location of heavenly bodies and celestial phenomena. This accumulation of knowledge culminated in an accurate understanding of the sun’s path through the zodiac, the phases of the moon, the timing of lunar and solar eclipses, and the motions of the planets.

¹ For poetry describing and explaining the natural world in Graeco-Roman literature, see Taub 2008.

² For the philosophical tradition founded by Epicurus, see Long and Sedley 1987: 25–157; Morel 2006: 486–502.

Babylonians ‘divided the zodiac circle remarkably accurately into degrees, and then went on to relate the zodiac constellations to the birth date and life events of individuals’ (Wright 1995: 12-13; see also Horowitz 1998; Dieleman 2003: 140; Rochberg 2020: 147-159) (table 2.1).

Table 2.1: *The Twelve Zodiac Signs*

English name	Latin name	Greek name	Late Babylonian name³
The Ram	Aries	Κριός	HUN, LU (Hired Man)
The Bull	Taurus	Ταύρος	MÚL.MÚL (Stars, Bull of Heaven)
The Twins	Gemini	Δίδυμοι	MAŠ.MAŠ (Twins)
The Crab	Cancer	Καρκίνος	ALLA (Crab)
The Lion	Leo	Λέων	A (Lion)
The Maiden	Virgo	Παρθένος	ABSIN (Furrow)
The Balance	Libra	Ζυγός	RÍN (Scales)
The Scorpion	Scorpius	Σκορπίος	GÍR.TAB (Scorpion)
The Archer	Sagittarius	Τοξότης	PA (Pabilsag)
The Goat	Capricornus	Αἰγοκέρω	MÁŠ (Goat-Fish)
The Water-Bearer	Aquarius	Υδροχόος	GU (Great One)
The Fish	Pisces	Ιχθύες	ZIB.ME (Tails)

Among the innovations and theoretical advances brought by the early Greek philosophers, we can highlight ‘the use of models as a method of approaching an understanding of the unknown, and the related concept of cosmobiology, the view of the cosmos as an organic entity, with the associated comparison between the whole as macrocosm and the individual as microcosm’ (Wright 1995: 7). From this heterogeneous group of Pre-Socratics, the Pythagoreans stood out by their cosmological speculation in association with numbers. Their passion for numbers led them to ‘the notion of offering mathematical values for relationships between bodies in the heavens, as part of a grand scheme in which everything had its number.’ The great Pythagorean achievement was ‘the discovery of numerical ratios in musical harmonies’, which was significant in the

³ The Babylonian names of the twelve constellations of the zodiac are given in accordance to the list prepared by Francesca Rochberg (2004: xxv).

development of ‘the theory of the harmony of the spheres.’ This theory proposes that the sun, moon, and planets move in a harmonious arrangement circling about the earth. The Pythagoreans suggested that the intervals of separation between the heavenly bodies correspond to the harmonic intervals, each emitting a different musical tone (Barton 1994: 21; Arist. *Cael.* 290b).⁴

Indeed, the most influential reference to the development of the cosmology in the Graeco-Roman world is found in the works of Plato (ca. 428 – 347 BCE). The theme is extensively discussed in his late writings, such as the *Laws* and *Timaeus*. In these texts, we find a depiction of the universe as beautiful, harmonious, and organised. Plato tells us that contemplation of the heavens is a benefit bestowed upon us; he understands that by observing the heavens, it is possible to identify the invariable ‘motions of the world soul, stars, and planets too, and seek to assimilate the perturbed motions of our souls to their unperturbed regularity’ (Skemp 1986: 116).

In the *Timaeus* – a dialogue that was considered innovative in ideas related to the cosmos, and which became the reference for cosmology in the Graeco-Roman period and beyond – Plato develops the idea that the cosmos is a single and harmonious structure created by the Craftsman, the structure of which is basically formed from four elements: fire, water, air and earth (31b).⁵ Each of the four elements is made up of particles, and these particles are identified with geometrical figures: fire is the tetrahedron, water is the icosahedron, air is the octahedron, and earth is the cube (54d-55c).

According to Plato, the order in the cosmos cannot be due to chance; there was a mind behind all this. The Craftsman, or ‘Demiurge’ (δημιουργός), is the artisan responsible for the creation and maintenance of the physical universe: ‘He, in the first place, set all these in order, and then out of these He constructed this present universe, one single Living Creature containing within itself all living creatures both mortal and immortal’ (*Ti.* 69c [Bury, LCL]).⁶ For the philosopher, the Cosmic God is the Soul of the Cosmos. He is the intelligence that ‘eternally moves the world and whose perfect wisdom is manifested in the very order of cosmic movements’

⁴ For more details on the theory of the harmony of spheres, see Plin. *HN* 2.84; Iambl. *VP* 15.65; Huffman 1993: 279-283.

⁵ Plato’s theory of the four elements is an adaptation of the hypothesis produced earlier by the Pre-Socratic Empedocles in his *On Nature*. Named “roots” (*rhizomata*), Empedocles ‘emphasised their biological character, but he also gave them the names of gods – Zeus, Hera, Aidoneus and Nestis – as the authoritative source of all things, and in their eternal and unchanging nature deserving the respect and wonder traditionally due to gods’ (Wright 1995: 64; Man. *Astronomica* 1.135-140; Diog. Laert. 8.2.76).

⁶ At first, as presented by Plato in *Timaeus*, the Demiurge seems to have been taken as the highest principle working in the universe. However, with the Neopythagoreans, ‘the One, as a totally transcendent first principle, was placed above the active principle, the Demiurge came to be seen as a second God, Intellect (*nous*), the agent or *logos* of the Supreme God’ (Dillon 1977: 7).

(Festugière 1954: 49).⁷ Moreover, ‘the cosmos is a god in the shape of a perfect sphere, generated yet imperishable according to the will of his creator’ (Burkert 1985: 328; *Ti.* 33b).

Since man is made of the same elements as the souls of the stars, Plato asserts that the two are connected.⁸ His perception is that the human soul is made of leftovers from the manufacture of the souls of the stars, although to a lower degree than star souls. Each soul was assigned to a specific star, and at death, the soul could return to its companion star or reincarnate (*Ti.* 41d-42c). For Plato, the objective of human life is ‘to have the soul’s orbits in perfect movement, controlling the body and independently engaged in the activity of reason, in imitation of the orbits of the cosmic soul which keeps the celestial bodies in ordered rotation and has its own rational life’ (Wright 1995: 65).

Plato also declares in two of his later works that heavenly bodies are gods:

If our statements on all such existences are to prevail, and the whole order of them is to be convincingly shown to be divine by their origin, we must certainly class them as one or the other of two things; either we must in all correctness glorify them as actual gods, or suppose them to be likeness produced, as so many images, of the gods, creations of the gods themselves (*Epin.* 984a [Lamb, LCL]).

In the *Laws*, discussing the relevance of the study of the stars, the philosopher informs us that the sun and moon are gods (7.821a-d). Eudoxus of Cnidus, a pupil of Plato, links the twelve Olympian gods to the signs of the zodiac (Hackforth 1952: 74). Erwin Goodenough observes that this syncretism was intended to preserve the principles of the old Greek gods as it ‘went over into the new religion of the cosmos’ (1992: 139). The tendency during the Hellenistic and Imperial period was to identify the Graeco-Roman gods with different celestial bodies, and considering that the stars occupied different levels in the heavens, this inevitably accommodated the view of the divine world in a specific hierarchical form (Nuffelen 2011: 104).⁹

The idea that celestial bodies are divine beings is not exclusive to Plato’s studies; before him, the Pythagoreans had already admitted such eastern astrological beliefs.¹⁰ Louis Rougier argues that the possibility of describing the movements of the heavenly bodies as a simple optical illusion,

⁷ Considering what Cicero tells us in *On the Nature of the Gods*, we perceive that in the same period, Antisthenes also, in his book the *Physicus*, declares that there is only ‘one god in nature’ (1.32).

⁸ This belief would still reverberate through Late Antiquity; Pliny the Elder says that ‘man is related to the stars and that our souls are a part of the heaven’ (*HN* 2.95).

⁹ Concerning this view among other philosophers, see Cic. *Nat. D.*, 1.27 and Plutarch, *De tranq. anim.* 20. Not all Graeco-Roman philosophies agree with this belief. The Epicureans, for instance, rejected the doctrine of heavenly bodies as gods (Festugière 1949: 259).

¹⁰ The notion that heavenly bodies were gods who decide ‘the fate of nation, war and peace, the growth of the fruits of the field, and the health and fertility of domestic animals has its origin in Mesopotamia’ (Koester 1995: 151).

resulting from the geometrical combination of ordered movements, contributes to the Pythagoreans' 'scientific reasons' for believing in the divine character of the stars (1959: 2). Despite that opinion, such a tradition was strange to the customs practised by the Greeks in the Classical period. The deities revered by the Greeks had nothing in common with the celestial bodies. Although Plato's *Laws* (7.821b-882c; 12.946e) recognises Helios (the Sun) as a divine being, the so-called solar theology is a product of the Hellenistic era, when the supremacy of Helios became recognised (Weinstock 1971: 384).¹¹

During the Hellenistic period, we also notice the development of the cosmology of the Stoics. This school of thought, with its origin in Zeno of Citium's ideas, found acceptance principally among the members of upper-class Romans at the end of the Republic and beyond.¹² From this period, the city becomes 'a hub of Stoic activity' (Sedley 2003: 30). The primary purpose of the Stoics was the study of the 'principle of the cosmos', which could be called 'God' (Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.39; Diog. Laert. 7.1.148-149). The Stoics understood the study of the gods as a segment of physics, more precisely as that segment which does not place emphasis on the particularities and 'the purely physical aspects of cosmic processes, but rather on their overall coherence, teleology, and providential design, as well as on the question of how this cosmic theology relates to popular forms of belief and worship' (Algra 2003: 153; Diog. Laert. 7.1.132).

Although Stoic ideas of the cosmos interacted with those developed by Platonists, 'one should not regard such remarks in later Stoics as Platonizing intrusions, for they reflect a strand that had been present in orthodox Stoicism all along' (Algra 2003: 167-168). According to John J. Collins, 'the Stoics were quite probably influenced by the astral religion of the Chaldeans, but they integrated their borrowings into a philosophical system' (2001: 328).¹³ Since their emergence, the Stoics had been absorbed by the study of the cosmos. Zeno of Citium's view was that 'the law of nature is divine', the 'reason (*ratio*) which pervades all nature is possessed of divine power. He likewise attributed the same powers to the stars, or at another time to the years, the months and the seasons' (Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.36 [Rackham, LCL]).

The Stoics also created the idea of cosmic sympathy (συμπάθεια), namely: that all living beings on earth were connected with the heavens. In Stoic philosophy, the entire cosmos is

¹¹ Graeco-Roman astrology was also responsible for providing 'the framework in which the old gods made their appearance as universal powers.' The king of the gods, Zeus, was converted into the celestial body Jupiter, the goddess Aphrodite identified as Venus, Ares became Mars, and Hermes transformed into Mercury. The universalisation of the Greek deities also gave to the sun a central position, and was responsible for the development in Late Antiquity of the 'Invincible Sun' (*Sol Invictus*). Furthermore, the days of the week were also associated with the five planets, sun, and moon (Koester 1995: 152).

¹² On the life of Zeno of Citium, see Diog. Laert. 7.1.1-5.

¹³ See also Cumont 1911: 171; Koester 1995: 150-151.

understood ‘as a perfect living body whose parts, though, are imperfect, insofar as they are not self-sufficient and autonomous; for they cannot function by themselves and always depend on their being parts of this whole and its other parts.’ The universe is considered a single body, a living organism (ζῷον), and the element that holds the whole system together is called breath or *pneuma* (πνεῦμα). It is composed of air and fire and is spread through the world and its soul. Thus, the *pneuma* is recognised by the Stoics as being God (Ierodiakonou, 2006: 100-101; Manilius, *Astronomica* 2.60-6, 80-3; Plin. *HN* 2.1; Plut. *Conj. Praec.* 34; Diog. Laert. 7.1.138-139, 142-143).

As a result of the existing connection between the living beings on earth and the heavenly bodies, the Stoics believed that any change in the cosmic order could change something on earth. Thus, it was necessary to study ‘the organisation of the stars into their constellations and the association of their annual cycle of risings and settings with patterns of weather and human (mostly agricultural) activity’ (Jones 2003: 328; Ptol. *Tetr.* 2.54-55). This idea had a great affinity with astrology during the period in question; Cicero, for instance, describes how the positions of the zodiac could influence the future of a person. Cicero refers this process as ‘the Chaldean method of foretelling the future (*Chaldaicum praedicendi genus*)’ (*Div.* 2.89).¹⁴

At the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Imperial Age, the Graeco-Roman world experienced a renewal of Platonic philosophy. Labelled ‘Middle Platonism’ by scholars in the 19th century in order to distinguish it from the new Platonic movement in the third century CE, it was anchored in the traditions of Plato but also incorporated ‘elements of Aristotelian logic, Stoic psychology and ethics, and Pythagorean mysticism in different proportions by different philosophers of the time’ (Tripolitis 2002: 37; Berchman 1984: 9). The interest in Platonic philosophy seems to have also been connected with the revival in the teachings of Pythagoras, principally on ‘the mathematisation of reality’. This tradition can be seen as a branch or denomination within the Middle Platonism of the Roman Imperial period (Riedweg 2005: 124-125; Dillon 1977: 383).

To sum up, from the sixth century BCE onward, Graeco-Roman intellectuals began to forge a new language, with the objective of understanding the origins, structure, and functioning of the cosmos. Through the contemplation and observation of the heavens, philosophers commenced discussing the universe and the influence of the heavenly bodies on the earth more systematically.

¹⁴ On Stoic cosmology, see Hahn 1977; Jones 2003: 328-344; Cambiano 2020: 607-618.

The following section is concerned with the application of this theoretical tradition to the Roman practice of construction and interpretation of cult sites and buildings as symbols of the cosmos.

2.2 Cult Sites and Other Buildings as Images of the Universe in Rome

A number of buildings and cult sites were constructed or interpreted as symbols of the cosmos in ancient Rome. Those structures provide examples of the transmission of Greek cosmological theory and its resignification in the Roman political context. The imperial buildings were a statement of Rome's centrality in the *oikoumene* (i.e., Europe, Asia, and Africa), and consequently, the universe. The indication that Roman architecture could embody Greek knowledge comes from the only surviving treatise on architecture written in the early Imperial Age, by the Roman M. Vitruvius Pollio. In his *On Architecture*, Vitruvius points out a series of skills that an architect should have, on the ground that architecture makes diverse requests of the one who practices it:

He must be an experienced draftsman, well versed in geometry, familiar with history, a diligent student of philosophy, know music, have some acquaintance with medicine, understand the rulings of legal experts, and have a clear grasp of astronomy and the ways of Heaven (*De arch.* 1.1.3 [Rowland]).¹⁵

In the preface to Book 8, Vitruvius presents the philosophical discussion of the four elements among the Pre-Socratics, including the prominence of water. In Book 9, he gives a detailed description of the cosmos as an architectural design, and also associates the laws of the cosmos with those of architecture, as is evident from this passage:

Now the cosmos is the all-encompassing system of everything in nature, and also the firmament, which is formed of the constellations and the courses of the stars. This revolves ceaselessly around the earth and sea at the extreme hinges of the axis. For thus the power of nature has acted as architect, and she has placed the hinges as central axes, one at the top of the firmament, far from land and sea, beyond the very stars of the North, and the other directly opposite, beneath the earth in the regions of the South (9.1.2 [Rowland]).

Vitruvius' handbook offers a valuable clue about the use of Greek cosmological theory by imperial architects in the construction of Roman buildings and by Graeco-Roman writers in the

¹⁵ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill explains that *On Architecture*, Vitruvius persuades his Roman audience 'that architecture is no mere technical and practical field, but an expression of deep rational structures, of *ordinatio* and *dispositio*, of *eurythmia* and *symmetria*, that can give to the built environment a logic and order that is underpinned by the deeper logic and order of nature, the object of scientific study' (2008: 147). For additional remarks on Vitruvius' link of architecture to other disciplines, see Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 157-158.

reading of existing ones. The concept appears to be widespread by the principate of Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE). Some new structures built by Augustus in the northern Campus Martius seem to testify to the imperial ideology that places Rome at the central axis of the world and the *princeps* as the great source of power that regulates the universe.¹⁶ Augustus' Mausoleum, the Ustrinum, the Horologium, and Ara Pacis appear to mark out the area as a cosmological centre (fig. 2.1). The structures represented Augustus' self-promotion as the source of cosmic power. The obelisks at the Horologium and Mausoleum, for instance, served as symbols of connection between earth and the heavens. The Egyptian obelisk of the Horologium 'as a symbol of solar cult and victory, literally pointed to heaven and thus was a symbol of apotheosis' (Rehak 2006: 144; see also Davies 2000: 76-78). Thus, time, space, and the cosmos were all organised around the person of the *princeps*.¹⁷

Fig. 2.1: Ara Pacis, Horologium, and Mausoleum. Drawing by Edmund Buchner, 'Solarium Augusti und Ara Pacis'. *Römische Mitteilungen* 83 (1976).

¹⁶ In the heading to his *Res Gestae*, Augustus states that he 'placed the whole world under the rule of the Roman people (*quibus orbem terra[rum] imperio populi Rom[ani]*)'. Coins minted during Augustus' principate depict Victory standing on a globe in a clear performance of the universal power claimed by Rome. Ovid expresses this view when he says that 'the area of Rome and of the world is the same (*Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem*)' (*Fast.* 2.684).

¹⁷ For further details on those structures built by Augustus, see Yegul and Favre 2019: 206, 209-210.

We shall now see that throughout Rome, other notable buildings and cult sites furthered the idea of Rome's centrality in the *oikoumene* and were regarded as a miniature of the cosmos. This study has as its starting point the underground cult site called the *mundus*, followed by the analysis of Varro's aviary. It proceeds to the Imperial Age with the study of the Temple of Vesta, Circus Maximus, Nero's *Domus Aurea*, the *Domus Augustana*, and Hadrian's Pantheon as symbols of the cosmos, concluding with an inquiry into the cult of Mithras in Rome in connection with the mithraeum.

2.2.1 *Mundus*

Mundus was a vaulted ritual pit located in the centre of ancient Rome. In the biographical narrative of the founder of Rome, Plutarch states that Romulus and other men dug a large hole in the ground on the Palatine called the *mundus*:

A circular trench was dug around what is now the Comitium, and in this were deposited first-fruits of all things the use of which was sanctioned by custom as good and by nature as necessary; and finally, every man brought a small portion of the soil of his native land, and these were cast in among the first-fruits and mingled with them. They call this trench, as they do the heavens, by the name of *mundus*. Then, taking this as a centre, they marked out the city in a circle around it (*Vit. Rom.* 11.1-2 [Perrin, LCL]).

Drawing from Varro and other ancient literary sources, Plutarch states that a round trench was dug on the Palatine and named *mundus* (μοῦνδος), because of its similarity to the vaulted heavens (ὁ οὐρανός). The structure was located in an area within the *pomerium* (Rome's sacred boundary). Later, Festus, citing Cato, provides similar information on the meaning of the term: 'the name has been given to the *mundus* which is above us, for its form is similar to it, as may be known from those who have entered into [the matter]' (Fest., s.v. *mundus*, 142 Müller [Spaeth]).¹⁸

Although we are well informed on the meaning of this circular trench, there is still controversy over the function of the *mundus*, which is aggravated by the failure to find the supposed site. There are two traditions on the *mundus*. The first, mentioned by Plutarch, seems to be a description of an ancient foundation ritual. Richard Lawrence suggests that 'probably Plutarch's source has concocted a Romulean origin for a foundation ceremony that was used for early Latin colonies' (1992: 259). The second tradition locates the *mundus* in the Forum

¹⁸ Cato the Elder, who lived in the second century BCE, is considered our most ancient source to describe the *mundus*. The account given on the cult site is preserved in part in the *commentarius iuris civilis* of Sextus Pompeius Festus (Lawrence 1996: 259; Humm 2004: 52).

Romanum, near the *Comitium* on the Palatine, and states that its circular structure was the symbolic centre of a city (Humm 2004: 47-48).¹⁹

The descriptions given by the sources are obscure. As has been pointed out, Plutarch relates the structure to the foundation of Rome. Festus understands the *mundus* as a cult site:

The elder decided that its lower part [the *mundus*] must be kept closed at all times, just as if it was consecrated to the Manes, except on those days which are written above, which days they judged ill-omened for the reason that at the time when those things that were secret and hidden belonging to the cult of the Manes are brought, so to speak, into the light and exposed, they did not want anything to be done at that time in the Republic (Fest., s.v. *mundus*, 142 Müller [Spaeth]).

From the account given by Festus, we note that the underground site was usually kept closed, since the structure was dedicated to the Manes, the underworld gods. The structure was a type of gate to the underworld, mainly because it was opened only at three special times in the year, allowing the spirits of the ancestors emerge to the world of the living. The opening was considered a state ritual, and during those special days, certain activities were not permitted and considered taboo, such as those reported by Varro:

Hence Varro too writes: 'When the *mundus* is open, it is as though the doorway of the baleful gods of the Underworld is open: for that reason, it is taboo not just to join battle but also to conduct a military levy, to set off on campaign, to set sail, and to take a wife for the purpose of procreation' (Macrob. *Sat.* 1.16.18 [Kaster, LCL]).

Festus, who calls the vaulted ritual pit the *mundus Cereris*, says that it was opened 'nine days before the Kalends of September [August 24], and three days before the Nones of October [October 5], and six days before the Ides of November [November 8]' (Fest., s.v. *mundus*, 54 Müller [Spaeth]). Besides being dedicated to the underworld gods, the structure is also associated by Festus with Ceres, the Roman goddess of the harvest. Otherwise, Macrobius declares that the *mundus* was consecrated to *Dis Pater* (Pluto) and his wife Proserpine (*Sat.* 1.16.17). According to Lawrence, 'the association with Ceres may mean no more than that the need was felt to find an association less dread than the real one for the monument, and Ceres, who as the mother of Proserpina could pass back and forth between Olympus and the underworld, could serve here' (1992: 260). Barbetta Stanley Spaeth has a different interpretation. She believes that 'Ceres' connection with the ritual may well be related to her association with the death and the divinities

¹⁹ Filippo Coarelli goes one step further, suggesting that the *mundus* should be identified with the *umbilicus Romae* in the Forum Romanum (1983: 210-226).

of the underworld... The mundus is a gateway (*ianua*) to these divinities, the “jaws of Pluto” (*fauces Plutonis*)’ (1996: 64).

Most of the information given on the *mundus* and its function comes from late sources in the Graeco-Roman period. Most are replying to materials written earlier, mainly from the Late Republic. To make matters worse, the few details given by the authors diverge on the denomination of the cult site, the place where the structure was located, the gods to whom the building was devoted, and the purpose of the *mundus* (Pailler 1988: 409-410). However, they appear to agree that the obscure archaic shrine marked the centre of Rome, and therefore the centre of the cosmos (Bradley 2012: 120).

Even if its complete layout is still obscure, it is possible to construct an idea of how the *mundus* was arranged. From the accounts by Cato and Plutarch, we comprehend that the *mundus* was domed or beehive-shaped. It contained at least a chamber that was only large enough for one person, and probably it was a mostly or entirely underground structure. As recorded by the ancient writers, the cult site remained closed during most of the year, except for the three specified days. Its aperture, located in the centre of its roof, was closed by a stone called the *lapis manalis* (Fowler 1912: 25; Lawrence 1992: 260).

Michael Humm proposes that the structure was composed of various parts with different meanings: the subterranean part, dedicated to the underground gods; the ground with an altar, probably devoted to Ceres; and the highest part, which resembled the celestial sphere, was the space where the Olympian gods were believed to dwell. As ancient literary sources make clear, the *mundus* corresponded to the three definitions of the *templum* given by Varro: ‘*templum* is used in three ways, of nature, of taking the auspices, from likeness: of nature, in the sky; of taking the auspices, on the earth; from likeness, under the earth (*natura in caelo, ab auspiciis in terra, a similitudine sub terra*)’ (*Ling.* 7.6 [Kent, LCL]; Humm 2004: 52-53).

Pierre Boyancé, in his study on Scipio’s dream in Cicero, argues that the late descriptions of the *mundus* given by the Graeco-Roman writers rely on cosmic symbolism of philosophical origin, which reverberates in Cato’s works. Boyancé demonstrates that in this milieu where the cosmos was seen as a temple, particularly as a temple of initiation, it would not be difficult to understand some cult sites as standing for the cosmos.²⁰ This comparison, as we shall see, is also identified in the Roman cult of Mithras in the mithraeum (1936: 118-119).

²⁰ For the cosmos as a temple, see Cic. *Rep.* 6.15.

In Humm's view, this philosophical interpretation of the *mundus* could be essentially Pythagorean, since the three parts of the cult site represent the three regions of the cosmos. The Pythagorean cosmology, according to Philolaos, provides the main semantic elements of the Roman *mundus* in which the three-superposed levels reproduce the central structure of the cosmos (*mundus*): the celestial sphere, dwelling of the Olympian gods; the earth, residence of living beings; and the subterranean, the home of the dead and the underground gods. Thus, the cult site was a miniature of the universe (2004: 55).

Humm observes that the term *mundus* has the same meaning as the Greek word κόσμος. The meanings of both words demonstrate that they designate the orderly and harmonious organisation of the universe. For Cato and Plato, *mundus* basically indicates the heavens and is associated with the dwelling of the Olympian gods. Indeed, the Pythagoreans had established a difference among 'the Olympus, the cosmos, and the sky', as is evidenced by the citation made by Aëtius on Philolaus:

Philolaus [says] that there is fire in the middle around the centre which he calls the hearth of the whole and house of Zeus . . . And again, another fire at the uppermost place, surrounding [the whole]. [He says] that the middle is first by nature, and around this ten divine bodies dance: heaven, planets, after them the sun, under it the moon, under it the earth, under it the counter-earth, after all of which the fire which has the position of a hearth about the centre (Aëtius 2.7.7 [Huffman]).

Humm also notes that this tradition appears to be known to the Romans in the Late Republic, since that the same cosmology is found in the dream of Scipio, written by Cicero in his *On the Republic* 6.17 (2004: 54-55).

Lastly, Humm notices that the description of the *mundus*, as presented by Plutarch, shows Pythagorean influence. Plutarch claims that on the structure 'were deposited first-fruits of all things, the use of which was sanctioned by custom as good and by nature as necessary.' This information is full of symbolism, and it could be understood that political order (or social order) and natural order are (or should be) homogeneous, because one and the other are (or should be) the image of the cosmos which concerns the *logismos*, that is to say, the mathematical principle that governs the universe. Thus, for this scholar, the information given by Plutarch contains a political philosophical message of Pythagorean inspiration (2004: 55-56).

2.2.2 Varro's Aviary

Another structure evidenced at the end of the Roman Republic with an apparent cosmic reading is Varro's aviary in his villa at Casinum. The description, which appears only in Varro's treatise *On Agriculture*, presents a large and elaborate structure, replete with colonnades, a wooded area, fish-basin, a small bird-theatre, duck-docks, dining room, and water clock.²¹

According to Varro, the aviary was located in his villa near the current Monte Cassino, halfway between Rome and Naples (fig. 2.2). The ornithon is 'shaped in the form of a writing-tablet with a top-piece (*tabulae litterariae speciem cum capitulo*).'²² At the bottom of the structure are the cages and an entrance to the open courtyard. At the entrance, there are colonnades on the right and left sides, 'arranged with stone columns in the outside rows and, instead of columns in the middle, with dwarf trees; while from the top of the wall to the architrave the colonnade is covered with a net of hemp, which also continues from the architrave to the base.' In these colonnades are confined many species of birds that are fed through the netting (*Rust.* 3.5.11-12 [Hooper and Ash, LCL]).

At the upper end of the open quadrangle, there is a path that gives access to the *tholos*, a circular building with a vaulted roof and peristyle. The structure itself is surrounded by columns, and between the pillars and the outside wall 'is a wood planted by hand with large trees, so that the light enters only at the lower part, and the whole is enclosed with high walls.' Nets fall along the outer and inner columns; thus, the birds can have a view of the wood, but not fly there. Between the interior and exterior columns, there is a 'little bird-theatre (*theatridion avium*), with brackets fastened at frequent intervals to all the columns as bird-seats.' In this area, the birds, called 'guests' (*convivae*), receive their food under the netting, and the water is supplied through a 'small trench' (*Rust.* 3.5.12-14 [Hooper and Ash, LCL]).²²

In the middle of the circular building is a pond, and in the middle of it, a little island with a pillar in the centre. This pillar holds up 'a wheel with spokes' that is 'revolved by a single manservant in such a way that everything to drink and eat is placed on it at once and moved around to all the guests'. The depiction of the birdhouse ends with a reference to the dome of the rotunda with its astronomical paraphernalia:

Inside, under the dome of the rotunda, *Lucifer* by day and *Hesperus* at night circle around near the lower part of the hemisphere, and move in such a manner as to show what the hour is. In the middle of the same hemisphere, running around the axis, is a compass of the eight winds, as in the horologium at Athens, which was built by the Gyrrestrian; and there a pointer, projecting from the

²¹ For an extensive study on Varro's aviary, see Seure and des Angès 1932.

²² For the discussion about whether the 'guests' described in the passage are meant to be birds or humans, see Kronenberg 2009: 123, n. 39.

axis, runs about the compass in such a way that it touches the wind which is blowing, so that you can tell on the inside which it is (*Rust.* 3.5.15-17 [Hooper and Ash, LCL, modified]).

The image of the aviary, as presented by Varro, leaves open the question of whether the structure itself was a real and working ornithon or was in fact an allegory of Roman society at one of the most traumatic moments of Roman history, the end of the Republican era. The sumptuous installation of the birdhouse, with its elaborate paraphernalia, which was designed only for the birds themselves, does not seem to be a characteristic of a rural business (Stierlin 1986: 146).²³ Carin Green defends the idea that Varro's aviary should be read as 'a small city-like structure for bird-citizens'. She also suggests that the discussions presented in the work 'may be considered as a commentary (or even a satire, in its widest and most Menippean sense) on the social and political state of Rome' (1997: 431, 443).

Whether the aviary was real or not, it is possible to infer cosmic symbolism in the way the structure was organised. In the opinion of Henri Stierlin, the squared area located at the bottom of the aviary, and its semicircle at the other end, evoke the cosmos. According to him, the squared area is associated with terrestrial activities, while the semicircle expresses the celestial dome (1986: 148). Roger Beck draws attention to the upper end of the aviary, built in a set of concentric rings with a dining room at the centre in the form of an open, rounded building. For him, 'the rings collectively intimate the concentric celestial spheres, although individually they relate rather to the terrestrial elements (earth, water, air), not to particular celestial bodies' (2006: 121).

From the description given by Varro, we know that in the middle of the rotunda there was a table that, like the orbits of the heavenly bodies, have moving components. Furthermore, under the dome of the building '*Lucifer* by day and *Hesperus* at night circle around near the lower part of the hemisphere, and move in such a manner as to show what the hour is.' According to Beck, 'the twelve hours of the day and the twelve hours of the night would be painted in a circle on the inside of the dome, much as the twenty-four "hours" of "right ascension" are shown on a modern star map.' It is not possible to ascertain how accurate the clock was; perhaps Varro only wanted to stress the relevance of time for the 'universal order' (2006: 122).

Lastly, Varro says that in the middle of the hemisphere there was 'a compass of the eight winds', which he compares to the horologium built by Andronicus of Cyrrhus in Athens.²⁴ The

²³ Although no other surviving ancient source mentions such paraphernalia in aviaries, we know that similar and portable mechanism mirroring the universe existed. See, for instance, *Cic. Nat. D.* 2.88.

²⁴ The Horologium or Tower of the Winds, is an octagonal marble building existing in Athens that was built around the first century BCE. The construction of the tower is attributed to Greek astronomer Andronicus of Cyrrhus. The eight faces of the building correspond to the eight winds, and each face contains a frieze of a mythical figure representing

revolving pointer, projecting from the axis, informed those inside the rotunda of the direction of the wind. Beck suggests that the purpose of the instrument was not to transmit information, since the “guests” dined in an open space, but to demonstrate ‘how the actual wind relates to the scheme of the eight cardinal and intra-cardinal points and so to the idea of Direction itself in the cosmos’ (2006: 122).

Figure 2.2: *Varro's Aviary*. Plan de la volière et des viviers de Varron, d'après Pirro Ligorio / Pierre-Adrien Pâris, [S.I.]: [P-A. Pâris], [1700-1800]. Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon, Collection Pierre-Adrien Pâris, Vol. 481, n. 98.

Beck concludes by noting a curious aspect of the ‘bird-theatre’ (*theatridion avium*): located on the *tholos*, between the internal and external columns ‘there is built up step by step a sort of little bird-theatre, with brackets fastened at frequent intervals to all the columns as bird-seats’ (3.5.13, [Hooper and Ash, LCL]). From this portrayal, Beck asks who are the onlookers and who are the performers in this little bird-theatre. For him, Varro’s account is clear: ‘birds view men,

these winds. Besides the weather vane, the tower held a sundial and a water clock that was used to record the time when there was no sunlight (Noble and Price 1968).

not men birds. Varro's dinner guests might think themselves bird-watchers, but the reality is otherwise. However, those who had read their Plato would quickly get the point: the heavens on the periphery belong to winged souls; the wingless inhabit earth at the centre' (2006: 123).²⁵

Conceivably, it would be tough to assimilate such an interpretation into Varro's description of the aviary if we did not know the association of this Roman writer with astrological traditions. From Cassiodorus, we are aware that Varro wrote a book on *Astrologia*, and he was considered one of the most original investigators in the field of astrology (*Inst.* 2.7). Stierlin maintains that the meteorological paraphernalia situated in the *tholos*, with its weather vane coupled to the planetarium, represent the idea that meteorological phenomena and planets are connected. This idea, advocated by the Roman Stoic Tubero (c.120 BCE), was based on the astrological system of trigons. In this system, winds played a fundamental role, each of which was associated with a group of three zodiac signs. According to Stierlin, the connection between winds and planets is part of the idea that winds are positioned in the same level of the *pneuma*, the 'universal breath' mentioned by Aristotle, as the planets are. The connection between the earth and the stars is operated through the winds, which are the manifestations of the gods. It is through their intervention that planets act on the earth (1986: 148).

Considering the cosmic symbolism of the aviary in *On Agriculture*, and Varro's knowledge of astrological matters, we come to identify the significant interest of the Roman elite in philosophical astrology. Tamsyn Barton argues that 'Romans could have been encouraged in this attitude not only by the prestige of Stoic philosophy but also out of respect for the astronomy about which they learnt from Greece' (1994: 37). This tradition influenced not only the way in which the Romans handled ordinary matters, but also their politics.²⁶

2.2.3 The Temple of Vesta

The small circular *tholos* temple dedicated to the cult of Vesta was located at the Forum Romanum's southeast end, at the foot of the Palatine Hill. The cult of Vesta was vital to Rome's state tradition. The foundation of the cult site is credited to King Numa in the sixth century BCE (*Ov. Fast.* 6.257-60; *Plut. Vit. Num.* 11.1). The temple was destroyed and reconstructed several times again. Under the rule of both Augustus (14 BCE) and Nero (64 CE), the temple was damaged by fires, but it was again rebuilt by those *principes* (*Tac. Ann.* 15.41; *Hist.* 1.43; *Cass. Dio* 54.24.2).

²⁵ For the categorisation of living creatures in Plato, see *Ti.* 39e-40b.

²⁶ Giles Sauron has some additional remarks on the cosmological interpretation of Varro's aviary (2019: 232-235).

The restored portion of the cult site that stands today was brought to light by excavations during the later nineteenth century. The setting of the remaining structure, based on images found in bas-reliefs and coins, indicates that the temple was a circular edifice of white marble surrounded by a colonnade articulated on the podium and a central cella (fig. 2.3). The conical roof was covered with gleaming bronze (Richardson 1992: 413; Stamper 2005: 15).

Although the cult of Vesta is thought to date back to the time of King Numa, under the principate of Augustus, it gained new relevance. As *pontifex maximus* in 12 BCE, Augustus established a new shrine to Vesta within his house on Palatine. 'This sent out a dynastic message that the Palatine was now the principal focus of Augustus' state religion and also that the sacred hearth of the Roman people was once more within the house of the ruler' (Littlewood 2006: 81).

The goddess of the temple was served only by priestesses known as Vestal Virgins. The most crucial rite carried out by a priestess was to maintain the sacred fire at the hearth in the rounded building. 'The Vestal hearth and flame symbolised a generative fire which was thought to maintain the prosperity of the Roman state' (Littlewood 2006: 80). Rarely depicted in human form, Vesta was considered the guardian of fire, 'being the earth and occupying the central place in the universe, kindles the celestial fires from herself' (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.66.3 [Cary, LCL]).²⁷ Ovid similarly identifies Vesta with the earth and writes that 'both possess an unsleeping fire. Earth and the hearth symbolically represent their central location' (*Fast.* 6.267 [Littlewood]). The Roman poet goes on to comment on the similarities between the temple and the earth:

The earth resembles a ball, suspended and unsupported in space. Its rotary motion keeps it poised, for it is a perfect sphere. It is central in the universe because it is uniformly convex. Archimedes' globe hangs poised in the air: a miniature model of the vast heavens. The earth is poised in the centre of the universe as a consequence of its spherical shape. The shape of Vesta's temple is the same (*Fast.* 6.269-281 [Littlewood]).

As evidenced in the text, Ovid compares the roundness of the cult site with the spherical earth. As the earth rotates at the heart of a geocentric system, Ovid alludes to the centrality of the temple of Vesta for the Roman state.²⁸ Eric C. Steward explains that the 'microcosmic representation of the universe, as found in Vesta's temple, served to justify Rome's rule of the inhabited world. Such representations furthered the idea of Rome's centrality on the earth, and therefore, in the cosmos.' Moreover, 'as the earth is the "central weight" of the universe, so Rome

²⁷ The historian Herodian mentions what was apparently the only time, on the occasion of the fire that broke out during Commodus' rule (191 CE), that the public had the chance to see the sacred image of Vesta since it had been carried to Italy from Troy (1.14.4).

²⁸ For additional remarks on Ovid's text, see Littlewood 2006: 89-93.

becomes the central axis of the world, from which everything stretches out across the oikoumene’ (2009: 118-119).²⁹

Figure 2.3: Nero's gold coin showing in its reverse *the rounded temple of Vesta* with the portrayal of the goddess seated holding patera in right hand and sceptre in left hand. British Museum, London, inv. no. R.70. © The Trustees of the British Museum

For Plutarch, the roundness of the cult site was in the likeness of the universe and connected to the Pythagorean conception of the cosmos:

It is said that Numa built the temple of Vesta, where the perpetual fire was kept, of a circular form, not in imitation of the shape of the earth, believing Vesta to be the earth, but of the entire universe, at the centre of which the Pythagoreans place the element of fire, and call it Vesta and Unit. And they hold that the earth is neither motionless nor situated in the centre of surrounding space, but that it revolves in a circle about the central fire, not being one of the most important, nor even one of the primary elements of the universe. This is the conception, we are told, which Plato also, in his old age, had of the earth, namely that it is established in a secondary space, and that the central and sovereign space is reserved for some other and nobler body (*Vit. Num.* 11 [Perrin, LCL]).

Apart from relating the roundness of Vesta's temple to the universe, Plutarch associates the holy fire of the cult site, which he calls Vesta and Unit (Monad), with the cosmic hearth of the Pythagorean universe (Huffman 1993: 41-42). According to Aristotle, the Pythagoreans believed that the earth does not lie at the centre of the universe. 'These affirm that the centre is occupied by fire and that the earth is one of the stars, and creates night and day as it travels in a circle about the centre' (*Cael.* 293a [Guthrie, LCL]; see also Burkert 1985: 337-350).

²⁹ For this view in later imperial texts, see Frazer 2015: 202.

2.2.4 The Circus Maximus

The Roman circus was an entertainment building designed for hosting chariot racing (*ludi circences*). Built as an open-air structure, it was basically constituted of a track covered in sand, where the competitors raced. At the centre of the track, there was a barrier, the *spina* or *euripus*, decorated with obelisks, statues, and shrines, that also served as a kind of boundary; the chariots ran in a circuit around it. Generally, the spectators were accommodated on bleachers. Certainly, the most famous circus existing in the Graeco-Roman world was the Circus Maximus in Rome, and which originated in the Regal Era (fig. 2.4). Little remains of what was once considered the oldest and largest circus in Rome. Nowadays, visitors can only contemplate, in the Valley of Murcia between the Palatine and Aventine, an extended broad area arranged as a public park. It maintains the outlines of the ancient Circus Maximus, and parts of the original seats at the semi-circular end on the Palatine side came to the surface by excavations in the 1930s.³⁰ A study of our ancient literary sources demonstrates that the Circus Maximus was not merely a Roman entertainment site, but it was also endowed with cosmological meaning.

Figure 2.4: *Circus Maximus*. Drawing by Banister Fletcher. *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921.

³⁰ New excavations were begun in 2010 under the direction of Marialetizia Buonfiglio, which discovered and made open to the public much of the ancient foundation at the south end, including the Triumphal Arch of Titus built to honour the *princeps*' conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE. For a more detailed survey of the excavations, see Buonfiglio 2017: 119-126. For another recent study, see Bariviera 2017: 421-445.

Although it is difficult to say with certainty when the first structures of the Circus were erected in the Valley of Murcia, the ancient tradition has attributed the creation of the Circus to the Etruscan kings Tarquin the Elder (616-578 BCE), and to Tarquinius Superbus (534-509 BCE), additional improvement (Livy 1.35.24; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.68.1). John Humphrey states that the information, as presented by our ancient literary sources, has some support from archaeological findings, ‘since horse races were represented in Etruscan friezes by at least the early sixth century and chariot races are commonly shown in tomb paintings of the second half of that century.’ Despite the fact that a proto-circus was already present in the Regal period, the Circus Maximus, ‘like many other buildings of the capital, underwent a long and gradual evolution’ (1986: 60, 64; see also Dodge 2010: 236-237).

The monumental layout of the Circus, as we can identify from the archaeological site nowadays, is a product of the end of the Republic and early Imperial period, with the massive construction of the building by Julius Caesar and its completion by Augustus (Augustus, *Res Gestae* 19; Plin. *HN* 36.102; Suet. *Iul.* 39.2). The description of the Circus by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, which dates to his stay in Rome during the government of Augustus, gives us an idea of how the structure could have appeared. From him, we know that the Circus Maximus would ‘become in time one of the most beautiful and most admirable structures in Rome.’ It measured c. 620 by 140 metres, and provided seats for 150,000 spectators:³¹

For the Circus is three stades and a half in length and four plethra in breadth. Round about it on the two longer sides and one of the shorter sides a canal has been dug, ten feet in depth and width, to receive water. Behind the canal are erected porticos three stories high, of which the lowest story has stone seats, gradually rising, as in the theatres, one above the other, and the two upper stories wooden seats. The two longer porticos are united into one and joined together by means of the shorter one, which is crescent-shaped, so that all three form a single portico like an amphitheatre, eight stades in circuit and capable of holding 150,000 persons. The other of the shorter sides is left uncovered and contains vaulted starting-places for the horses, which are all opened by means of a single rope. On the outside of the Circus, there is another portico of one story which has shops in it and habitations over them. In this portico, there are entrances and ascents for the spectators at every shop, so that the countless thousands of people may enter and depart without inconvenience (*Ant. Rom.* 3.68.1-4 [Cary, LCL]).

Between the reigns of Augustus and Trajan, the Circus was severely damaged by flood and fire (Dio Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 56.27.4-5; 58.26.5; Tac. *Ann.* 6.45.1; 15.38; Suet. *Dom.* 5). In the meantime, the building was repaired several times, but it seems that only under Trajan’s rule was

³¹ For more details on the measurement of the Circus, see Humphrey 1986: 124-126.

an extensive reconstruction of the Circus made, with the addition of new seats (Humphrey 1986: 102-106; Richardson 1992: 85). The Circus continued to be frequented even after the consolidation of the Christians in Rome, but gradually lost its importance, culminating in the last recorded chariot race in 549, during the reign of the Ostrogothic King Totila (Humphrey 1986: 131; Procop. *Goth.* 7.37.4).

Besides describing the development of the Circus Maximus and its relevance for Roman society, our ancient literary sources also devote some lines to the cosmological aspects of the chariot racing stadium. For example, we have in the late second century CE the description of the Circus by Tertullian, and in the sixth, the account by Cassiodorus and John Lydus. The Christian writer Tertullian, in his moral treatise on the spectacles, affirms that the building was primarily dedicated to the Sun god, and that the origin of the name Circus is a tribute to the Sun's daughter, Circe. He also gives details on the decorated barrier, and explains the meaning of the ornaments:

The circus is primarily dedicated to the Sun; the sun's temple is in the middle of it; the sun's effigy shines from the top of the temple. They did not think it right to pay sacred honours under a roof to him whom they have in the open above them. Those who maintain that the first circus spectacle was produced by Circe in honour of the Sun her father (as they choose to hold), argue that the name of the circus is derived from hers. Obviously, the enchantress carried the business through (no doubt about it) in the name of those whose priestess she was; she did it, that is, for the demons and the fallen angels. In the very decoration of the place itself, how many idolatries do you recognize? The ornaments of the circus are in themselves so many temples. The eggs are assigned to the honour of Castor and Pollux by those who do not blush to believe them sprung from the egg of the swan Jove. The dolphins spout in honour of Neptune. The columns carry images of Sessia (from sowing), of Messia (from mowing), of Tutulina (from tutelage of the crops). In front of them are seen three altars for the triple gods, the Great, the Potent, the Prevailing. They think these are Samothracian. The huge obelisk, as Hermatelesa maintains, is set up for the sun; its inscription is like its origin; the superstition is Egyptian (*De Spect.* 8-9 [Glover and Rendall, LCL]).

The information given by Tertullian that the area of the Circus was dedicated to the Sun god seems to be corroborated earlier by Varro and Tacitus (*Ling.* 5.74; *Ann.* 15.74). In Humphrey's view, a shrine dedicated to the cult of *Sol Indiges* likely existed in the valley from an early date. As portrayed by Vitruvius, the cult site was probably open to the sky, since that would allow the deity to enter the shrine through his rays (1986: 91; *De arch.* 1.2.5).³² Not was only a shrine dedicated to the Sun god established on the Circus perimeter, but an altar to the Moon goddess (*Luna*) was also present (John Lydus, *De Mensibus* 1.12).

³² For reference to the shrine devoted to the *Sol Indiges* in the Circus Maximus, see Schofield 1969: 639-649.

The association between the chariot racing and the deities mentioned is confirmed both by the popularity in representing the Sun god as a charioteer conducting a *quadriga* (a chariot drawn by four horses abreast), and the Moon goddess, the *biga* (a chariot drawn by two horses), and by ancient literary evidence, as for example in Cassiodorus: ‘the two-horse chariot was invented as an imitation of the moon, the four-horse of the sun. The out-riders’ horses, on which the circus attendants announce the heats to be run, imitate the speed of the morning star, the sun’s fore-runner’ (*Var.* 3.51.6 [Barnish]).³³ Humphrey writes, ‘the linking in this particular fashion presumably came about because the ancient thought that the Moon travelled faster than the Sun - and the lighter *biga* travels faster than a *quadriga*’ (1986: 94).

Tertullian claims that the 8-meter-wide *spina* was decorated with eggs and dolphins. In fact, the ornaments were part of the game. Platforms with frames held eggs and dolphins that worked as lap-counters for each of the seven laps of a chariot race. Alison Futrell affirms that ‘eggs, raised on individual spikes, had been used for this purpose since the early second century BCE; as the lead chariot finished each lap, an egg would be lowered to mark the progress of the race.’ Furthermore, dolphins were ‘known by the Romans as a racing animal, due to their behaviour around ships at sea. They were also associated with the god Neptune, patron of horses’ (2006: 73; Dio Cass. 49.43). Also, a huge Egyptian obelisk set up in the *spina* was devoted to Sol. Pliny states that the obelisk, devoted to the Egyptian Sun-god Ra and ‘a symbolic representation of the sun’s rays’, was removed from its location in Heliopolis, Egypt, and set up in the Circus Maximus during Augustus’ rule (*HN* 36.64-65, 71).³⁴

Perhaps the complete description of the Circus as an ordered representation of the cosmos is this one, by Cassiodorus in the sixth century:

But Augustus, the lord of the world, raised a work equal to his power, and laid out a construction [the Circus Maximus] in the Murcian valley that is a marvel even to the Romans. A vast mass, firmly girded in by hills [the Palatine and Aventine], encloses a space which contains images of the universe. Hence, they placed twelve gates for the twelve signs of the zodiac. These are opened suddenly and together, by ropes let down from small herms, showing that everything, as men suppose, is done with forethought, there where a carven head is seen at work. The colours, moreover, are designed as a fourfold image of the seasons: the Green is dedicated to the fertility of spring, the Blue to the clouds of winter, the Red to fiery summer, and the White to the frosts of autumn. Thus, the entire year is indicated, passing, as it were, through the twelve signs. This is done so that the works of nature may be mimicked by the ordered fantasy of the public shows...The whole race is run with seven goals, an

³³ See also Tert. *De Spect.* 9.

³⁴ For the purpose of the Egyptian obelisk in the Circus Maximus during Augustus’ rule, see Halsberghe 1972: 29-30.

image of the week's recurring seven days. The goals themselves, like the zodiacal divisions, have three peaks, around which the swift four-horse chariots wheel like the sun. They signify the limits of east and west. The central cisterns [the Euripus] give an image of the glassy sea; hence, marine dolphins there pour in the waters. Moreover, lofty obelisks are raised to the heights of heaven; yes, and the taller is dedicated to the sun, the lower to the moon, while the mysteries of the ancients are marked on them by Chaldaean signs [hieroglyphs], as though by letters (*Var.* 3.51.4-5, 7-8 [Barnish]).³⁵

Thus, the whole structure of the Circus encompassed the entire cosmos, including the heavens, earth, and sea. The arena could be interpreted as the earth, and the channel surrounding the edge of the arena together with the dolphins as the ancient idea of Oceanus encircling the world. The twelve starting gates (*carceres*) for chariots represented the twelve signs of the zodiac. Comparable to many heavenly bodies, the chariots raced around the decorated barrier, where were located the Egyptian obelisk dedicated to the Sun and a smaller column to the Moon, indicating that the completion of the seven laps represented the seven-day week. This particular arrangement converted the entire circus into a sundial, with the sun marking its way around the world (Feldherr 1995: 249). Competitors were distinguished by four colours that corresponded to the four seasons or the four elements of nature. Tertullian affirms that originally there were two colours, white and red. White was dedicated to Winter and red to Summer. At a later date, 'some dedicated the red to Mars, others the white to the Zephyrs, the green to Mother Earth or Spring, the bluish to Sky and Sea or Autumn' (*De Spect.* 9 [Glover and Rendall, LCL, modified]).³⁶

In light of the description presented by our ancient literary sources, Feldherr suggests that the Circus Maximus 'becomes a place where the power structure of the state represents and defines itself for all those who participate in the spectacle.' For him, both the spectacle and design of 'the circus focused attention on the vertical hierarchies of the Roman universe.' The deities, senators, and ordinary people all occupied distinct and regulated seats in the stands, as carefully arranged as the cosmos. 'As at the theatre, the Romans did not watch the games as individuals on their days off but as members of the state.' The chariot 'was itself a potent and immediate

³⁵ The cosmological interpretation of the Circus Maximus by Cassiodorus is confirmed earlier by Charax of Pergamum (ca. second century CE) and is preserved in the writings of the Byzantine chronicler John Malalas (ca. 490 – ca. 570): 'Charax also wrote the following, that the structure of the hippodrome was modelled on the regulation of the world, that is, of the heaven, the earth and the sea. He related the twelve doors to the twelve houses of the zodiacal cycle, which regulates the land, the sea and the fleeting course of man's life. The race-track represents the whole earth; the spine is the sea surrounded by the land; the curve by the starting gates is the East; the curve by the turning point is the West; the seven lanes represent the course and astronomical motion of the seven stars of the Great Bear. The emperor Romus was the first to devise the contest in Rome, likewise in honour of the Sun and the four elements subject to it. He celebrated it in the region of the West, that is, Italy, with four-horse chariots corresponding to the earth, sea, fire, and air. Romus gave names to those four elements: that of the Green faction to the earth, because of its greenness; the Blue faction to the sea, that is, the water, because of its blueness; the Red faction to fire, because of its redness; the White faction to air, because of its whiteness. That is how the four factions were devised in Rome' (*Chron.* 7.4-5 [Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott]).

³⁶ For a possible interpretation of the Circus as a symbol of the cosmos in Statius' *Thebaid*, see Lovatt 2005: 34-35.

manifestation of control and governance which could be applied to the sun in the heavens, or to the political leader handling the reins of the state' (1995: 249-250).

2.2.5 Nero's *Domus Aurea*

During the first two centuries of the Imperial period, it is possible to identify in Rome certain palaces and cult sites that reflected philosophical traditions concerning the cosmos. Certainly, one of the most famous was Nero's *Domus Aurea* (Golden House). Construction of this imperial palace, located in the very heart of Rome, was begun after the great fire of 64 CE and continued until Nero's death in 68. The *Domus Aurea*, as described by ancient literary sources and from the modern archaeological studies of its remains, embodied ideological overtones that reflected claim to Nero's solar kingship.

After the great fire of Rome in July of 64 CE, Nero spent the four last years of his rule pursuing a series of measures in order to rebuild the destroyed city. This new urbanisation was informed by the conception of order and beauty; the understanding was that the empire was enjoying a new golden age of peace, order, prosperity, and security (Blaison 1999: 3-4). From this context, we understand the relevance and the meaning of the *Domus Aurea* for the image of the *princeps*. The imperial residence was a component of the imperial propaganda.

Tacitus and Suetonius are the major sources of information on the palace. With a moralising historical view of Nero's kingship, both writers see that the aberrant behaviour of the *princeps* 'flourishes in the dysfunctional workings of the imperial household as the centre of the newly established political system' (Mordine 2013: 102). Both writers consider the construction of the palace the ruin of Nero. From Tacitus, we know that Severus and Celer were the architects and engineers responsible for the building. According to him, 'gems and gold' were employed in the edifice, and the area was surrounded by 'fields and lakes and the air of solitude given by wooded ground alternating with clear tracts and open landscapes' (*Ann.* 15.42 [Jackson, LCL]).

From Suetonius, we learn that before the great fire in Rome, a palace from the Palatine to the Esquiline had been built, called the House of Passage (*Domus Transitoria*); after the fire came the *Domus Aurea*. This writer gives details of the complex:

Its vestibule was large enough to contain a colossal statue of the emperor a hundred and twenty feet high; and it was so extensive that it had a triple colonnade a mile long. There was a pond too, like a sea, surrounded with buildings to represent cities, besides tracts of country, varied by tilled fields, vineyards, pastures and woods, with great numbers of wild and domestic animals. In the rest of the

house all parts were overlaid with gold and adorned with gems and mother-of-pearl. There were dining-rooms with fretted ceilings of ivory, whose panels could turn and shower down flowers and were fitted with pipes for sprinkling the guests with perfumes. The main banquet hall was circular and constantly revolved day and night, like the heavens. He had baths supplied with sea water and sulphur water. When the edifice was finished in this style and he dedicated it, he deigned to say nothing more in the way of approval than that he was at last beginning to be housed like a human being. He also began a pool, extending from Misenum to the lake of Avernus, roofed over and enclosed in colonnades, into which he planned to turn all the hot springs in every part of Baiae; a canal from Avernus all the way to Ostia, to enable the journey to be made by ship yet not by sea; its length was to be a hundred and sixty miles and its breadth sufficient to allow ships with five banks of oars to pass each other (*Ner.* 31. 1-3 [Rolfe, LCL]).

As is evident from this account, the *Domus Aurea* was a vast complex that housed many buildings. The sizeable suburban villa set down in the heart of Rome accommodated ‘a huge residence with vast porticoes, private apartments, banqueting rooms, and official quarters used for the administration of private and state affairs’ (Hannah, Magli and Palmieri 2016: 512). Soon after Nero’s death, the complex was dismantled. The Flavians drained the lake for the construction of the amphitheatre, and the Esquiline Wing was filled with earth and used for the foundations of the Baths of Trajan. A few of the Esquiline Wing foundations have survived into the present day, and this area of the building helps us understand the cosmic dimension of Nero’s power.

The most expressive area of the *Domus Aurea* as described by our ancient sources is the *Cenatio Rotunda*, or Octagonal Room, which is usually associated with the main dining hall depicted by Suetonius (fig. 2.5). The room is considered a tour de force of Roman architecture; built as a vaulted dome with an open circular summit and on an octagonal basis, it is ‘one of the first known concrete vaults in the history of architecture’ (Hannah, Magli and Palmieri, 2016: 514; see also Hemsoll 1989: 1-17). According to Suetonius, the circular room revolved constantly, both day and night, like the celestial bodies. Writing a few decades earlier, Seneca affirms that in fact what moved was the ‘ceiling of movable panels that present one pattern after another, the roof changing as often as the courses’ (*Ep.* 90.15 [Gummere, LCL]).

Although no information is given on how the dome was moved, Heinz-Jürgen Beste and Henner von Hesberg suppose that the ‘rotation was made possible by movable wooden cladding, hooked to the dome, which showed the motions of the stars.’ This sort of mechanical system was not totally unknown at the time; there are mentions of such structures in Petronius’ *Satyricon*

and in Varro's aviary (2013: 326).³⁷ Roger Beck presumes that the dome of the ceiling revolved 'once every twenty-four hours, bringing the images of the stars and constellations on to the meridian in synchronisation with their macrocosmic referent' (2006: 121).³⁸

Figure 2.5: *Domus Aurea's Octagonal Room, Rome.* Photo by the author

³⁷ In the *Refutation of All Heresies*, a work by an unknown Christian author of the early third century CE, the polemicist describes in detail the paraphernalia used by magicians to make the moon and stars appear on a ceiling. Making use of mirrors, a bowl of water, and lamps, the magicians produced the appearance of the moon and simulated its phases. Anchovy and dolphinfish scales soaked in water with gum resin were plastered on the ceilings to give the appearance of stars (4.37-38).

³⁸ For more archaeological evidence on the mechanical system of the dome, see Stierlin 1986: 45-46.

Some studies suggest that the dining room reflects Nero's solar kingship (Champlin 2003: 112-144, 178-209).³⁹ Indeed, the studies that have been conducted on the remains of the room have shown the connection between the sun's path and the lightning of the chamber through the oculus at the top of the rotunda. Making use of computer simulations, Robert Hannah, Giulio Magli, and Antonella Pamieri have proposed that the project of the construction of the octagonal hall 'was governed from the very beginning by the wish to obtain the spectacular equinox hierophany' (2016: 517).⁴⁰

Recent excavations have shown that the main entrance of the room was accessible from the south, via a straight corridor. This characteristic of the Esquiline Wing, aligned along an east-west direction with the octagonal room at the centre, demonstrates its centrality to the whole building. Most likely, this arrangement expressed the solar ideology of the *princeps* clearly. Not only the excavations support this idea, but also contemporary literature itself associates Nero with the sun at the equinoxes. The chamber north of the Octagonal Room 'inside which the beam of light enters like the light of a modern reflector, was occupied by a fountain, or *nymphaeum*. People entering the room at or near noon would have perceived the corresponding ideology "actualised" by the positioning of the sunbeam inside the room.' For these scholars, 'these characteristics and, particularly, the equinoctial hierophany, suggest astronomy was a key part of the project' (2016: 516-519).

Suetonius further mentions that the octagonal hall, with its coffered ceilings, was fitted with panels that could revolve 'and shower down flowers and were fitted with pipes for sprinkling the guests with perfumes.' According to Seneca, 'saffron perfumes' were spread on the guests (*Ep.* 90.15). In the cosmological conception of the *Domus Aurea*, Stierlin calls attention to the need to consider this colourful and fragrant rain with the symbolism associated with the power to make it rain, which is considered a divine prerogative. For this scholar, the space could not be seen as a room where a simple meal took place, but was a place for a mystical communion to which the *princeps*-god invites his guests, as part of a ritual celebrating the cosmocrator. Nero moves in his heavenly environment with the starry sky moving above him, and he manifests its ability to

³⁹ Hans-Peter L'Orange, in his thesis on *Domus Aurea* (1942), suggested that the complex was inspired by Persian palace architecture. The *Domus Aurea* was the palace of a 'solar cosmocrator'. For this author, the hall with the representation of the heavenly bodies was equivalent to the throne rooms of the Persians. Nowadays, scholars tend to disagree about this view. The concepts behind the construction of the complex are considered representative of Graeco-Roman architecture. For more information on this view, see Blaison 1999: 9-10; Beste and Hesberg 2013: 326-327.

⁴⁰ It is important to emphasise here that the Octagonal Room was the main room in the complex and that it was used as an *aula*, the Romanised Greek term for a royal court. Michael Mordine identifies Hellenistic influence in the construction of the Octagonal Room, according to him, 'Nero was a consummate Hellenophile, and, more than any of his predecessors, he consciously emulated Greek customs and attitudes, including the adoption of some monarchical trappings in the style of Hellenistic courts' (2013: 104).

control meteorological events by spreading on the audience a perfumed and colourful rain (1986: 47-48).⁴¹

Lastly, Suetonius notes that in the vestibule area stood a colossal statue of Nero 30 metres in height. The bronze statue was designed by the Greek sculptor Zenodorus, who possibly represented the *princeps* with Helios' characteristic traits. While the statue itself has not survived, it is probable that its representation is shown on coins that circulated during the period, showing the face of the sculpture wreathed in golden rays. Pliny the Elder, who agrees to some extent with Suetonius on the height of the statue, informs us that after the *princeps*' death, the sculpture was dedicated to the Sun god (*HN* 34.45).⁴²

Although our ancient literary sources do not give the exact position of the statue, Hannah, Magli, and Palmieri, analysing satellite images, assume that the sculpture was positioned 'at an azimuth which can span from a few degrees south of west to true west when seen from the terrace of the Esquiline Wing.' For a spectator looking from the Esquiline Wing, the head of the statue was seen, 'suddenly illuminated by the rising sun, in the days near the equinoxes, perhaps corresponding to Suetonius' words about the birth of Nero, illuminated by the first rays "*exoriente sole*"' (2016: 522; *Suet. Ner.* 6).

Characterising oneself as a Helios/Apollo was not Nero's creation (fig. 2.6). Sigrid Mratschek states that under the influence of the Stoics and Greek thinking, other Roman leaders, such as 'Mark Antony, Julius Caesar, and Augustus had all become associated with the solar symbolism that represented the Sun god as an observer of the human world and guardian of the cosmic order.' According to her, 'this solar symbolism served to legitimise the universalist aspirations of Hellenistic world rule' and had its emergence in the cult of the ruler. Before Nero, other sovereigns had already played similar roles as a 'New Helios': 'both Caligula and Alexander, conqueror of the east, ...and Octavian too had taken the role of Phoebus Apollo at a Twelve Gods Festival' (2013: 49).⁴³

It is important to highlight that Nero was surrounded by philosophers who tutored him in his early years, and who in one way or another influenced the *princeps*. Chaeremon, a Stoic philosopher and Egyptian priest, was appointed in 49 to tutor Nero. The Stoic philosopher Seneca

⁴¹ Lucian's *On the Hall* describes the dazzling light effects of a room ceiling which resembles Nero's octagonal room: 'The ceiling of this hall...well-featured itself, is as much embellished by the gilding as heaven by the stars at night, with sprinkled lights and scattered flowers of fire. If all were fire, it would be terrible, not beautiful, to us. You will observe that the gilding yonder is not purposeless, and not intermingled with the rest of the decorations for its own charm alone. It shines with a sweet radiance, and colours the whole hall with its flush; for when the light, striking the gold, lays hold of it and combines with it, they gleam jointly and make the flush doubly brilliant' (8 [Harmon, LCL]).

⁴² On the debate over the depiction of Nero's statue as the Sun god, see Champlin 2003: 129-131.

⁴³ For the fabrication of Nero's image as the Sun, see Champlin 2003: 112-144.

was also tutor and advisor of Nero. In the opinion of Mratschek, it was Seneca ‘who transferred the Sun god identification to his pupil and inserted it into the official schedule of events celebrating his accession to the throne in 54.’ This seems to be clear in Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*; the satire on the death and apotheosis of Claudius compares the new *princeps* with Helios-Sol as the bringer of the Golden Age (2013: 49-50).⁴⁴ Hannah, Magli, and Palmieri make the identification a bit later in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*. Written around 60, the poem seems to present ‘the idea of a new, Apollonian golden age under the “Solar emperor”’ (2016: 521).⁴⁵ In light of that, Jean-Louis Voisin writes that the *Domus Aurea* corresponds to the renewal of a thinking that unites philosophy, mathematics, astrology, and architecture and places them at the service of the cosmocrator *princeps*. The complex itself suggests that the harmony and motion of the heavenly bodies is the model of the order that should prevail in the terrestrial world (1987: 539). In Oleg Neverov’s words, ‘this gigantic construction was evidently planned to be not only a luxurious villa in the centre of the city, but also very definitely a “palace of the sun”, the dwelling-place of a cosmic divinity’ (1986: 190).

Figure 2.6: *Nero Helios Base* (Aphrodisias). The inscription reads: ‘[Nero] Claudius Drusus Caesar Augustus – Helios’. Photo by the author

⁴⁴ ‘Like as the daystar from on high scatters the stars of night, As, when the stars return again, clear Hesper brings his light, or as the ruddy dawn drives out the dark, and brings the day, as the bright sun looks on the world, and speeds along its way his rising car from morning’s gates: so Caesar doth arise, so Nero shows his face to Rome before the people’s eyes; his bright and shining countenance illumines all the air, while down upon his graceful neck fall rippling waves of hair’ (*Apocol.* 4.25-33 [Heseltine, Rouse, LCL]).

⁴⁵ ‘When your watch completed, you seek the stars at last, the palace you choose in heaven will greet you with joyful skies: would you like to wield the sceptre? Or climb aboard the flame-laden car of Phoebus and with Earth all unafraid of an altered sun, sweep round in a rush of sparks? For you, every divinity will make way, and Nature will leave to your discretion what God you would be, where you will place your throne on high. But please, do not choose to take your seat in the Arctic zone, nor yet at the opposite pole where the hot southern sky curves down; from those you would squint with star aslant at your own dear Rome! If you burden the measureless ether all on one side, the axis will feel your weight; keep the scales of heaven balanced mid-sphere; may that side of the tranquil ether be crystal clear, and our view of Caesar free from clouds!’ (*De Bello Civili* 1.45-59 [Joyce]). For remarks pertaining to the text, see Roche 2009: 138-143.

All things considered, it would not be far wrong to say that the *Domus Aurea* was conceived as a microcosm. In view of the influence of the Stoic philosophers on Nero's education and the solar symbolism behind the government of the *princeps*, it could be said that his Golden House was an echo of this philosophical tradition. Thus, it is possible to reason that the whole complex housed the three cosmic regions: the domed Octagonal Room, representing the heavens with the *princeps* as the Sun; the buildings around the area with vineyards, pastures and woods, and great numbers of wild and domestic animals, symbolising the earth; and the lake, representing the sea. Edward Champlin goes even further by saying that the whole complex 'may have represented the Roman Empire in miniature', while the shining statue of Nero, at the entrance of the villa, holds 'the world in his hand' (2003: 132).

2.2.6 *Domus Augustana*

Nero's Golden House was not the only imperial residence in Rome with cosmic symbolism. Two decades later, the last member of the Flavian dynasty (69-96), Domitian, constructed a palace on the Palatine hill, which seems to be in the same tradition. Although the remains of the complex are still visible, we cannot say for sure how the description given by our ancient literary sources fits with the debris that has survived. From the accounts given by the Roman writers Martial and Statius, a sumptuous and luxurious residence appears, with a banqueting hall, or *Coenatio Iovis*, that has a high ceiling. The image of the *princeps* in isolation in the apse gave those authors the image of Domitian as Jupiter in the heavens.

The construction of the new palace complex by Domitian (81-96) replaced older buildings dating from the Republic to Nero's time. The brick-face concrete palace was designed, according to the poet Martial, by Rabirius, one of the most famous architects in the Imperial period (*Spect.* 7.56). The complex, which covered the whole south-eastern part of the Palatine hill, was the result of terracing that created an immense platform housing the main state apartments. The core area is commonly divided into three main sections: the *Domus Flavia* (public space), the *Domus Augustana* (residential area), and the *Stadium* (porticoed garden) (Colledge 2000: 970; Zanker 2002: 107).⁴⁶

Filippo Coarelli maintains that in contrast to the *Domus Aurea*, 'which was freely articulated within its space in the manner of a large urban villa, the palace of Domitian is an organically closed structure'. The division between the public space and the private area 'fulfils the need of the

⁴⁶ For a detailed description of the *Domus Augustana* based on archaeological evidence, see Cantino 1966.

dominus et deus to present himself to the public in a special, solemn light' (2007: 153). Yet Coarelli suggests that the complex had only a simple name: 'the *Domus Augustana* – the residence of the Augustus. The name evoked the sense of continuity with the first *princeps*, the empire's founder.' Although the palace was restored and enlarged after Domitian, the name was never replaced. The imperial residence 'retained its official name, the *Domus Augustana* (or more simply, the Palatium) until the very end of the empire, indicating, by definition, the residence of the emperors' (2007: 146-147).

The descriptions of the palace that appear in the works of Domitian's protégés, Martial and Statius, give us a vague idea of how the residence might have appeared. Although they praise the *princeps* for the immense and luxurious palace, their two relevant poems *On the Spectacles* and *Silvae* present little information, and the texts could be used more successfully to grasp the effect of the spectacle on visitors to the imperial residence. In general, the poets are struck by the height of the rooms of the residence, which they compare with the heavens; at the same time, the numerous columns remind them of cult sites. Martial extols Rabirius for his understanding of the stars and sky, important for the building of the domed roof of Domitian's palace (*Spect.* 7.56). Later, he affirms the superiority of the palace to the pyramids, and states that its ceiling is so high that it receives the first sunbeam, even before Circe, Helios' daughter:

Laugh, Caesar, at the royal marvels of the pyramids; barbarous Memphis no longer talks of eastern work. How small a part of the Parrhasian palace is equalled by Mareotic toil! The sun sees nothing more magnificent in all the world. You would think the seven hills rose in unison. Ossa bearing Thessalian Pelion was not so tall. It pierces the ether, so that, concealed in the bright stars, the clear summit thunders with the cloud below; and it is sated with Phoebus' hidden light before Circe sees her nascent father's face. Yet, Augustus, this mansion, whose top strikes the constellations, though it equal heaven, is less than its lord (*Spect.* 8.36 [Bailey, LCL]).

Statius, in his *Silvae*, expresses gratitude to Domitian for inviting him for one of the sacred banquets (*sacrae cenae*) held in the palace. He writes that during the dinner, he 'recline[s] with Jupiter among the stars and take[s] immortal liquor proffered by Ilian hand' (4.10-12). The author describes the palace where the banquet takes place:

An august edifice, vast, magnificent not with a hundred columns but as many as might support heaven and the High Ones were Atlas let go. The Thunderer's neighbouring palace views it amazed; the deities rejoice to see you established in a residence equal to their own (nor hasten you to ascend the great sky!); so wide the pile, such the thrust of the hall, freer than a spreading plain, embracing much of heaven within its shelter; he fills the household and weighs it down with his mighty being. Here contend the mountains of Libya and the gleaming stone of Ilium, dark Syene too and Chios, and

rocks to rival the grey-green sea, and Luna, substituted only to support the columns. Far aloft extends the view; your weary eyes could scarce attain the roof, you would think it the gilded ceiling of heaven (*auratique...laquearia caeli*). When Caesar bade Romulus' magnates and the columns of robed Knights recline here together at a thousand tables, Ceres herself with her dress girt up and Bacchus toil to supply their wants. So flowed the bounteous path of sky-borne Triptolemus; so Lyaeus shaded bare hills and sober fields under his clustered vines (*Silv.* 4.2.18-37 [Bailey, LCL]).

Unlike Nero's *Domus Aurea*, where the complex was probably erected to resemble a microcosm, the information given here seems to be metaphorical. Paul Zanker points out that the 'lavish splendour of the décor' could have had 'a tremendous impression on his contemporaries'. Perhaps 'the costly and varied coloured marbles on the walls and the floors, the wealth of columns and statues, and most of all the unique dimensions of the receptions rooms' could have attracted the attention of Statius and Martial as well (2002: 117). The language employed by the authors is similar to the description of the residence of Menelaus in Homer's *Odyssey*. In his visit to the divine house of Menelaus, Telemachus admires the splendour of the high-roofed residence and the light that shines from it, comparable to the sun and moon (4.43-46, 71-75).

The use of the Latin word *laquearia* by Statius in the passage cited above is also noteworthy. While it is rendered in English as a ceiling, in Roman literature, *laquearia* had a particular meaning. As Roger B. Ulrich explains, the word denotes 'a horizontal panelled ceiling framed in wood and often covered with gold'. In general, 'gilded coffered ceilings were reserved for the most prestigious of public buildings: basilicas, temples, and meeting halls.' It could be that Domitian wished to incorporate in his palace 'an element that had not only a venerable tradition full of royal and divine allusion, but even one with celestial connotation' (2007: 156). In early imperial literature, *laquearia* was also identified with heaven (*caelum*), as observed, for instance, in Manilius' description of the elaborated ceiling of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome (*Astronomica* 5.285-292). This is the same cult site employed by Statius in his comparison with Domitian's palace (Ulrich 2007: 157).

Although the depictions of the palace in our ancient sources might reflect fantastic reading more than an accurate description, they show us the heavenly atmosphere that Domitian wanted to create in order to present himself as Jupiter, the supreme god of sky and thunder and king of the gods. Certainly, the guests shared of a sort of theatrical gesture, created by Domitian, which aimed to enhance the political and ideological status of the *princeps* and to show his position at the centre of the *oikoumene* and the cosmos. Therefore, the imperial residence can be used to say something about the concerns of the *princeps*.

On the association of Domitian with one of the gods of the Roman pantheon, Zanker argues that the *princeps* 'created this aura around his own person by distancing himself in various ways and continually stressing his affinity with the god' (2002: 117). The correspondence with Jupiter is also visible in the coins available in the period. Darwall-Smith argues that in 85, coins circulated depicting Domitian holding a thunderbolt and sceptre: 'this assumption of Jupiter's most distinctive accoutrement is Domitian's most open identification with him' (1996: 114).⁴⁷ Comparisons of Roman sovereigns with Jupiter was not at all new; Augustus had been identified with this god before (Zanker 2002: 117).

As demonstrated, our ancient literary sources also identify Domitian with Jupiter. For instance, Martial, supposing that he could be invited to banquets held by both Jupiter and Domitian, says:

If I were invited to dinner in different heavens by Caesar's summoner on the one hand and Jupiter's on the other, though the stars were closer and the Palace farther off, I should give this answer to be returned to the High Ones: Seek on for one who would rather be the Thunderer's guest: my Jupiter, see, keeps me on earth. (*Spect.* 9.91 [Bailey, LCL]).

Statius also depicts Domitian with the king of the gods (*Silv.* 1.1.39-40), and claims that the *princeps* established in a residence equal to the gods (4.2.20-22). Surely, the identification of Domitian with Jupiter is more explicit when analysing the cosmic portrayal of the palace made by this author. Dining with the *princeps*, Statius sees himself reclining 'with Jupiter among the stars.' Thus, the banquet hall is seen not only as a notable room, but also as a sacred area for the *dominus et deus*.

On the whole, we can say that although our ancient sources present a description of the *Domus Augustana* that is difficult to figure out, they do not indicate that it was constructed to resemble a microcosm, as Nero's *Domus Aurea* was. They do indicate the splendour, opulence, and heavenly images evoked when guests approached the imperial residence. As maintained by Zanker, 'the effect of the rooms, with their costly furnishings, the army of servants, in short the entire stage set of the *sacra cena* contributed significantly to enhancing the occasion. Everything was contrived as if to make real, if only for a moment, the myth of the emperor as the regent of Jupiter' (2002: 118).

⁴⁷ The use of a golden crown with an image of Jupiter in competitions by Domitian, as described by Suetonius, could be also considered evidence of this connection between the *princeps* and the king of the gods (*Dom.* 4).

2.2.7 The Pantheon

Among the buildings described so far, the Pantheon is the only one that is preserved almost entirely, at least since its ancient rebuilding. The conservation of this edifice is mainly due to its conversion into a church dedicated to St Mary and the Martyrs in the seventh century by the Byzantine *imperator* Phocas. Built by Agrippa around 25 BCE, it was consumed by fire in 80 CE and totally rebuilt by the *princeps* Hadrian, perhaps continuing substantial work by Trajan around 126. The following study of the building considers the last renovation made by Hadrian and the potential reading of the structure as a model of the cosmos.⁴⁸

From the scant information on the Pantheon provided by ancient literary sources, we observe that the name of the building was always the Pantheon. Guessing why, Dio Cassius writes: ‘it has this name, perhaps because it received among the images which decorated it the statues of many gods, including Mars and Venus’ (53.27 [Cary and Foster, LCL]). From the same passage, it seems that the building was originally planned as an *Augusteum*, but as Augustus refused to have a statue of himself and the due honour, it was consecrated to all gods. Later on, he states that the edifice collapsed in the fire during the government of Titus in 80 CE (65.24). Literary sources from Late Antiquity inform us that Domitian rebuilt the Pantheon, which again caught fire in 110. During Hadrian’s administration, the Pantheon was restored once more. Although our sources declare that the building was only repaired, scholars understand that a new creation was set up, with the principal addition of the rotunda (Stierlin 1986: 129).⁴⁹

As built by Agrippa on the Campus Martius, the original purpose of the Pantheon is still under debate. Despite the fact that Dio Cassius says that it was a temple dedicated to all gods, the information comes from a period after Hadrian’s government, and we cannot be sure that this description agrees with the original purpose. Christiane Joost-Gaugier supposes that the Pantheon was originally a cult site and that it was essentially related to the *gens Julia* (1998: 25). We know that Agrippa’s edifice was constructed as a part of a great improvement in the city of Rome, which included other sites. Excavations indicate that the initial design of the building was of rectangular form with its façade towards the south side, in the opposite direction of the present front (Coarelli 2007: 286).

⁴⁸ It seems that other Hadrian’s building projects were built with specific astronomical orientations. Marina de Franceschini and Giuseppe Veneziano carried out archaeoastronomical analyses of Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli and his mausoleum in Rome, and they suggest that those buildings are solar-aligned (2011; see also Davies 2000: 82–85; Sauron 2019: 242–246). Paolo Vitti also has researched on Hadrian’s Mausoleum, and his results differ considerably from the previous observations (2016: 675–688; 2018: 33–48).

⁴⁹ For a complete list of ancient literary sources on the Pantheon, see Licht 1968: 180–184.

Hadrian's Pantheon, which was used by the *princeps* for worship and as a court, is composed with a front portico of eight granite Corinthian columns that support a gabled roof with a triangular pediment (Dio Cass. 69.7). Behind the columnar portico is a circular building, which is designed as a hemispherical dome with a central opening to the sky. This oculus is the only opening through which the sunlight comes in. The spherical design of the edifice is expressed by the diameter of the interior circle and the height of the oculus, which are the same: 43.3 metres. Perhaps Dio Cassius' impression of the enormous hemispherical dome led him to affirm that the vaulted roof 'resembles the vault of the sky (θολοειδὲς ὃν τῷ οὐρανῷ προσέοικεν)' (53.27).

Certainly, the rotunda is the central and most important part of Hadrian's Pantheon. In spite of that, the meaning of the structure still intrigues various scholars, and several studies have been conducted in order to understand the significance of the building with no conclusion.⁵⁰ Among the interpretations of the rotunda, two are relevant for the association of the building with cosmic symbolism: the first one, proposed by Robert Hannah and Giulio Magli, explores the role of the sun in the edifice's design; the second one, offered by Henri Stierlin and Christiane Joost-Gaugier, examines the influence of philosophical astrology traditions, mainly Pythagorean, for understanding the edifice.

Hannah and Magli argue that the design of the Pantheon's rotunda was not totally new in ancient Rome. In fact, it can be considered an heir of the Octagonal Room of Nero's *Domus Aurea*, which was connected with astronomical meaning, mainly a solar one. Like the octagonal hall, the scholars argue that the Pantheon, with its hemispherical dome, was probably designed 'as an image of the celestial equator'. The architectural elements of the building were connected to 'the sun's passages at the equinoxes (and solstices)' (2011: 502; see also Hannah 2019: 41-46).

That a dome could evoke the vault of heaven is perceptible in some Pompeian buildings (La Rocca 2015: 66-67). Dio Cassius writes that the ceilings of some rooms of Septimius Severus' palace were painted like the starry sky (77.11.1-2). Philostratus describes a Babylonian palace in a similar way: 'They say that they also visited men's quarters with a domed roof imitating a kind of sky, roofed with sapphire (this stone is very blue and heavenly to look at). Images of the gods whom the Persians worship were set up on high and looked golden, as if they were in the upper air' (V A 1.25.3 [Jones, LCL]). An elaborate bas-relief, sculptured on the ceiling in the temple of

⁵⁰ For details on the main interpretations of the Pantheon's rotunda, see Joost-Gaugier, 1998: 21 and Hannah and Magli 2011: 489.

the goddesses Isis and Hathor at Dendera (ca. first century BCE) represents the vault of heaven, including the signs of the zodiac.⁵¹

From the analysis of the movement of the sunbeam entering the rotunda through the oculus of the Pantheon, Hannah and Magli identify two patterns: '(1) the equinoxes, when the sun at noon crosses the apparent spring of the dome and becomes visible from outside through the grille over the entrance; and (2) 21 April, the date of the foundation of Rome, when the sun fully illuminates the entrance' (2016: 512). Certainly, one of the most important manifestations of the sun inside the rotunda is 21 April (fig. 2.7). The relevance of this day is in the symbolic action of the sun in putting 'Rome among the Gods'. Supposing that Hadrian celebrated this date there, they believe that 'his entrance "together with the sun" would have a symbolic link between the people and the gods' (2011: 502). Thus, for these scholars, the special manifestation of the sun inside both buildings is not only related to the sun's cycle, but also to the power of Rome, specifically the power of the *princeps* (2016: 512).⁵²

The interpretation of the Pantheon's rotunda as having astrological undertones in Stierlin's and Joost-Gaugier's studies is based on Hadrian's interest in astrology, divination, and magic, as indicated by our ancient sources (Dio Cass. 69. 11, 22; Philostr. *VA* 8.20). Stierlin argues that the circular building is a synthesis of the main philosophical traditions present at the time. Its geometrical and cosmological properties refer to the mechanical universe of the Stoics, the numbers of the Pythagoreans, and the Platonic solids. Depicting the cosmic order, the edifice embodies the primacy of the sun that illuminates the interior of the rotunda through the oculus, commanding the whole space as the *princeps* does the empire (1986: 126-128).

Concerning the geometrical properties of the Pantheon, Stierlin takes as a reference Cicero's discussion of geometrical figures (*Nat. D.* 2. 47-48). In this way, he claims that the hemispherical building contains some of those figures, such as the cube, cylinder, pyramid and cone. In this view, those solids express the divine intelligence that culminates in the most perfect figure, the sphere or globe (1986: 128-129).⁵³ The discussion of the pre-eminence of the sphere among other solids

⁵¹ For the vision of heaven in ancient vaulted structures, see Lehmann 1945; Smith 1971: 79. For zodiac ceilings in other Egyptian temples and funerary monuments of the Ptolemaic and Roman period, see Moyer 2011: 235, n. 99.

⁵² Vitruvius' instructions on the erection of temples to Sun support the view that the Pantheon could be devoted to a solar deity: 'Correctness of function occurs when temples dedicated to...the Sun and Moon are made open-air shrines, beneath their patron deity, because we see the appearance and effect of these divinities in the light of the outdoor world' (*De arch.* 1.2.5 [Rowland]).

⁵³ It is possible also to identify a different tradition that circulated in Antiquity and that associates geometrical figures with gods, and whose origin is, according to Eudoxus, Pythagorean: 'It is plain that the adherents of Pythagoras hold Typhon to be a daemonic power; for they say that he was born in an even factor of fifty-six; and the dominion of the triangle belongs to Hades, Dionysus, and Ares, that of quadrilateral to Rhea, Aphrodite, Demeter, Hestia, and Hera, that of the dodecagon to Zeus, and that of a polygon of fifty-six sides to Typhon, as Eudoxus recorded' (Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 363a [Babbitt, LCL]; Burkert 1972: 349).

long predates Cicero's work. In the *Timaeus*, Plato writes that the cosmos is spherical and that among the shapes, this 'is the most perfect and the most self-similar' (33b). Aristotle, in his treatise *On the Heavens*, also affirms that the sphere is the perfect form, and that its harmonious qualities propound the idea that the universe is spherical (286b). Besides the spherical character of the building that represents the heavenly dome, Stierlin suggests that the five horizontal rows in the cupola, with 28 coffers in each one, depict the motion of the planets: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The sun and moon are associated with the oculus.⁵⁴

Figure 2.7: *The Pantheon*. Sunlight coming in through the oculus and falls on the entrance of the building at local noon, 21 April 2017, Rome. Photo by the author

⁵⁴ William Loerke suggests that 'the five ranges of coffers recall the five circles marked on ancient celestial globes: two arctic, two tropics, and the equator' (1990: 42; Arist. *Mete.* 362a-b; Geminus 15.1-4; Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.563-602; Cleomedes, *Caelestia* 1.193-270).

Following the same line of reasoning, Joost-Gaugier posits that the structure of the Pantheon indicates not only cosmic concerns, but Pythagorean ones as well. Familiar with arithmetic and interested in the Greek culture of the east, the *princeps* Hadrian could have had access to Pythagorean traditions in order to build his Pantheon. Reading the Pantheon as a Pythagorean composition, a ‘Pythagorean scheme of numbers as known and admired in Hadrian’s time was used to create a sophisticated formulation that would have been better understood to contemporary observers than it can be to us today’ (1998: 21, 29).

For Joost-Gaugier, the rotunda is characterised by the number one, which is identified among the Pythagoreans as the monad ‘because of its indivisible character and because it is the only number perfect in power’. This number is represented by the oculus, which represents the sun for Pythagoreans, more precisely the god Apollo. From the oculus, the sunbeam radiates through the coffers, in five rings of 28, which constitute the planetary vault. In Antiquity, the number 28 was associated with the phases of the moon. Considering the symbolism of the number for the Pythagoreans, Joost-Gaugier suggests that the vaulted dome with the oculus could correspond to one (the sun), the 28 coffers, the moon, and the five coffered rings of the vault, ‘the marriage or wedding number’.⁵⁵ Thus, the domed rotunda could symbolise ‘the dominant theme of the “marriage”, or accord, of the sun and the moon’ (1998: 30; Loerke 1990: 40-41; Plut. *Mor.* 388c; Diog. Laert. 8.1.22-23).⁵⁶

Internally, the circular building is characterised by seven niches: three large semi-circular niches and four rectangular ones. An imaginary line drawn among the three semi-circular niches forms one triangle, whose apex lies in the apse Hadrian might have used to sit in judgment. According to the Pythagorean tradition, the apex of the triangle was connected with Apollo. The four rectangular niches could also have Pythagorean associations, such as the four elements and the four seasons. The combination of the number three and four ‘represent[s] the cosmos and the key to the universe.’ The number seven, the sum of three and four, denotes ‘the order of the cosmos through the number of the planets and their modes’, and also ‘symbolised the birthday of Apollo’ (1998: 30).⁵⁷

Joost-Gaugier writes that in the Pythagorean tradition, the ‘notion of cosmic order and universal harmony developed side by side with the increasing interests of Romans in astrology.’

⁵⁵ On the nature of the numbers in the Pythagorean tradition, see Sext. Emp. *Math.* 4.2; pseudo-Iamblichus *Theologumena arithmeticae*.

⁵⁶ Eugenio La Rocca proposes a different view. He suggests that the Pantheon ‘follows the rules of a *templum* on a circular plan. More precisely, with its division into 16 segments (seven exedrae plus eight niches plus the entrance), the plan imitates the celestial templum according to the rules of Etruscan learning’ (2015: 70).

⁵⁷ For Gert Sperling, the Pantheon’s rotunda symbolises the sphere of the sky, and the convex pavement is a representation of the earth’s surface. For more details, see 2015: 215-227.

Thus, it was unsurprising that a *princeps* would portray himself ‘as the immortal sun of heaven in a cosmic setting’. Nero, as we have seen, represented himself as the Sun god, and from his *Domus Aurea*, he, the *princeps*-god, ‘sets the lower planets in motion and directs the order of the world below’. Having as reference the solar symbolism of the Pantheon, and probably his villa at Tivoli, it is possible to deduce that Hadrian sees himself as the Sun god (1998: 33).

Several interpretations have been given for the meaning of the Pantheon’s rotunda. This structure continues to intrigue scholars not only for its singular character, but also for the scarce information about it transmitted to us by our ancient literary sources. It is only possible to presume that the Pantheon was a rich synthesis of several traditional techniques, and beliefs about the cosmos and the role of the *princeps* as the benefactor of the whole earth.

2.2.8 The Mithraeum

The last structure to be analysed and which is rich in cosmic symbolism is the mithraeum. These cult sites devoted to the cult of the Persian god Mithras are found throughout the Graeco-Roman world as well. Ideally, the layout and furnishings of a mithraeum imitated the cosmos. Arranged under a natural cave, or built as a structure to resemble a cave, mithraea (plural of mithraeum) contained a series of astrological symbols that ‘if properly used by the proper people, can realise the mystery of the soul’s descent and entry into mortality and its exit and ascent back up again to immortality’ (Beck 2006: 112) (fig. 2.8). As we shall note, the mithraeum as an image of the universe replicates philosophical Graeco-Roman conceptions of space and the cosmos.⁵⁸

It is difficult to date the origin of the mithraeum and the cult of Mithras in the Graeco-Roman world. The earliest reference to the cult and the mithraeum in Rome is found in Statius (ca. 90), who probably refers to Mithraic reliefs in a mithraeum (‘Perses’ cavern’ or ‘*Persei antri*’) in Rome (*Theb.* 1.719-720). In view of what Plutarch says in his *Life of Pompey*, the cult was already known by pirates of Cilicia in the first century BCE. These pirates, according to him, ‘celebrated there certain secret rites, among which those of Mithras to continue to the present time, having been first instituted by them’ (24.5 [Perrin, LCL]).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ It seems that a mithraeum was not the only cave structure that resembled the cosmos in the imperial period. A cave located at Tiberius’ imperial residence at Sperlonga also appears to have mirrored the universe. See Sauron 2019: 239-241.

⁵⁹ For Cumont, Dio Cassius’ account of the visit of Tiridates of Armenia to Rome to be crowned by Nero, and the perception of the *princeps* as Mithras by Tiridates, is evidence that the cult of Mithras was already established in Rome (Dio Cass. 63.5; Cumont 1913: 85-86). For a detailed analysis of the first mithraea in the Graeco-Roman Empire, see Chalupa 2016: 75-89.

Although Plutarch states that the cult of Mithras was commonplace in Asia Minor, it is hard to sustain the argument that this cult was as the same one present in Rome. We know that the cult of the Iranian god of the sun Mithras predates the Roman one, and that the Roman cult was quite different from the Iranian one. Miguel Versluys argues that from the source material available, the Roman cult of Mithras can only be dated to the Flavian period, when ‘an originally Iranian concept was appropriated for a Roman context.’ According to him, although the cult was understood to have an Iranian origin, it was part of the Roman socio-cultural system that recreated and nurtured it (2013: 249-250).

Figure 2.8: *The Mithraeum at the Baths of Mithras (Ostia Antica)*. Photo by the author

Because of its character as a mystery cult, little is known about the Mithras cult's beliefs or the meaning of the mithraeum. On the whole, scholars have based their interpretations on the poor gleanings from the epigraphy and iconography available in the cult sites that have been found

in Rome and throughout the former territory of the Roman Empire. The scanty ancient texts also give a glimpse of the rituals performed by the initiated and the meaning of the mithraeum. Most of this information comes from Late Antiquity, mainly through the descriptions given by the philosophers Celsus and Porphyry, and assertions of hostile Christian writers (which must be read with caution).

Of the ancient authors mentioned, the third-century Neoplatonist Porphyry is the only one to give a partial description of the mithraeum:

Similarly, the Persians call the place where they introduce an initiate to the mysteries, revealing to him the path by which souls descend and go back again. For Eubulus tell us that Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cave in honour of Mithras, the creator and father of all; it was located in the mountains near Persia and had flowers and springs. This cave bore for him the image of the cosmos (εἰκόνα...τοῦ σπηλαίου τοῦ κόσμου) which Mithras had created and the things which the cave contained by their proportionate arrangement, provided him with symbols of the elements and climates of the Cosmos. After Zoroaster others adopted the custom of performing their rites of initiation in caves and grottoes which were either natural or artificial (*De antr. nymph.* 6 [Westerink]).

As Porphyry clearly says, all mithraea (whether they were true caves or imitations of natural ones) are shadows of the archetypal mithraeum dedicated by Zoroaster to the god Mithras, ‘the creator and father of all (τοῦ πάντων ποιητοῦ καὶ πατρός)’. Furthermore, this cult site is named and designed as a ‘cave’ because it is intended to be a model of the cosmos. The cave represents, therefore, the cosmic world and the paths that the souls take when entering and returning from it.

The adornment and structure of some mithraea support Porphyry’s idea that the layout and furnishings of these cult sites were fashioned in order to resemble the celestial dome and its constituent parts. Thus, it is possible to identify heavenly bodies painted on the ceiling in the mithraeum at S. Maria Capua Vetere, orbits of the planets in Sette Sfere at Ostia, and *loculi* for the twelve signs of the zodiac at Vulci, Etruria (Alvar 2008: 350).

The heavenly theme of these reliefs also aimed at introducing, according to Porphyry, ‘an initiate to the mysteries, revealing to him the path by which souls descend and go back again’. The path of the soul is perhaps better understood in Celsus, who writes that in the mystery of Mithras ‘there is a symbol of the two orbits in heaven, the one being that of the fixed stars and the other that assigned to the planets, and of the soul’s passage through these.’ According to him, the souls ascend through the seven planets, which are connected by a ladder with seven gates made of different metals, and is also related to ‘musical theories’:

The first of the gates is of lead, the second of tin, the third of bronze, the fourth of iron, the fifth of an alloy, the sixth of silver, and the seventh of gold. They associate the first with Kronos (Saturn), taking lead to refer to the slowness of the star; the second with Aphrodite (Venus), comparing her with the brightness and softness of tin; the third with Zeus (Jupiter), as the gate that has a bronze base and which is firm; the fourth with Hermes (Mercury), for both iron and Hermes are reliable for all works and make money and are hard-working; the fifth with Ares (Mars), the gate which as a result of the mixture is uneven and varied in quality; the sixth with the Moon as the silver gate; and the seventh with the Sun as the golden gate, these metals resembling their colours (*C. Cels.* 6.22 [Chadwick]).

According to Jerome, there were seven grades of initiation into the cult of Mithras in ascending order of prestige: 'Raven (*corax*), Bridegroom (*nymphus*), Soldier (*milus*), Lion (*leo*), Perseus (*perses*), Sun-Runner (*heliodromus*), and Father (*pater*)' (*Epistulae* 107.2). Manfred Clauss argues that those seven initiatory grades were inspired by and connected to the number of planets (2001: 131-133). Although the mithraea at St Prisca and di Felicissimo at Ostia seem to confirm his understanding – since both cult sites have the seven grades as a central theme of their internal ornament – Alvar points out that there is no evidence for the same number of grades in mithraea along 'the Britanno-Rhine-Danube sector'. It is more likely that 'the number of grades was, in some places, especially in Rome, Ostia and neighbouring areas, artificially inflated in order to correlate with the number of planets' (2008: 366).

With reference to the physical structure of the mithraeum, the cult site had some basic features: it accommodated a fresco or a relief sculpture of Mithras killing a bull (tauroctony), which occupied the central part of the site. In many Mithraic sites, the tauroctony is framed with accessory scenes which include planetary figures and the signs of the zodiac. The cave also contained lateral podia used by the worshippers and a central aisle that permitted access to the podia and to the central relief; the altar(s), located outside the cave, in an unenclosed space outdoors; and the dining rooms used for the communal meal, and which were separated from the central area.

On the cosmological meaning of the tauroctony and its location in the mithraeum as an indication of a celestial map, Porphyry tells us:

The equinoctial region they assigned to Mithras as an appropriate seat. And for this reason, he bears the sword of Aries, the sign of Mars, he also rides on a bull, Taurus being assigned to Venus. As a creator and lord of genesis, Mithras is placed in the region of the celestial equator with the north to his right and the south to his left (*De antr. nymph.* 24 [Westerink]).

On the macrocosmic level, Porphyry's understanding is that Mithras is the commander of the celestial equator, the imaginary circle around the sky above the earth's equator that divides

the northern celestial hemisphere from the southern one, and the equinoxes, characterised by the times when the sun crosses the plane of the earth's equator. Mithras is imagined seated at the vernal equinox 'facing inwards across the universe to the autumn equinox diametrically opposite. The ecliptic with the northern signs (Aries, Taurus, etc.) curves upwards to his right; the southern signs (in reverse order: Pisces, Aquarius, etc.) curve downwards to his left' (Beck 2008: 107).⁶⁰

Beck says that this celestial structure is replicated on a smaller scale in the mithraeum by placing the tauroctony relief in a niche or as a fresco on the wall. From this location, 'Mithras commands the aisle extending him towards the entrance.' Thus, the niche could be seen as the spring/vernal equinox, and the entrance the autumn equinox. Therefore, the 'top above the ceiling is the north celestial pole, its bottom below the floor is the south celestial pole; the hoop itself is the equinoctial colure, the great circle of the celestial sphere which passes through both poles and both equinoxes.' Furthermore, as Beck demonstrates, the lateral podia used by the worshippers are a representation of the celestial equator: 'If the longitudinal section of the mithraeum is the plane of the equinoctial colure, then the plan of the mithraeum must be the plane of the celestial equator, for that is the horizontal plane which is at right angles to the plane of the equinoctial colure.' In this way, 'the side-benches, constructed as two semicircles joined at the cult-niche and the entrance', characterise the celestial equator (2006: 108).

Like the other cult sites and palaces studied, the mithraeum replicates Graeco-Roman conceptions of the universe. Beck, for example, states that the cult of Mithras broadly belongs to Platonic traditions, mainly on the model established in Plato's *Timaeus*. Two important aspects of the cosmology of the *Timaeus* could be identified here: first, 'the celestial tropics, the heavens are where Time and Space are related. The celestial bodies are created specifically to instantiate Time in the cosmos'; second, the interaction between the macrocosm and microcosm; observing the invariable motions of the heavenly bodies, it is possible to correct the disorder of human souls (2006: 79; *Ti.* 47b).⁶¹

⁶⁰ In his published thesis, Michael P. Speidel (1980) suggests that the Mithraic cult icon represents a series of equatorial constellations, with Mithras as corresponding to the constellation of Orion. For other alternative cosmological interpretations of the tauroctony, see Adrych et al. 2017: 32-37.

⁶¹ David Ulansey is another scholar who perceives the Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition in the cult of Mithras, although his thesis is based mostly on Stoic philosophy. Having as reference Plutarch's description of the cult by the Cilician pirates, he argues that the cult was a product of Stoic intellectuals in Tarsus. The interest of the Stoics in Tarsus in astrology and cosmology during the first half of the first century BCE; the attention given for 'speculations regarding world ages and long cycles of time determined by the movements of the stars'; and the 'tradition of allegorising gods and mythological figures as representing cosmic and natural forces' are essential for his premise of Stoic influence (1991: 73). Although Ulansey cites some ancient philosophers and historical events, it has been discounted by many scholars as a speculative and unexacting interpretation of the ancient literary sources. See Bowen 1991: 359-360; Swerdlow 1991: 48-63.

2.3 Summary

In this chapter, we have examined the development of Graeco-Roman cosmology and seen how the influence of this tradition shaped the reading and construction of cult sites and buildings in the likeness of the cosmos in ancient Rome. The first part of the discussion considered some of the most famous and influential Graeco-Roman philosophical schools, including Pre-Socratic, Platonist, Stoic, and Neopythagoreans, and how some of the Roman buildings were built with reference to those concepts.

As is evident from the examples analysed here, several buildings and cult sites from the Late Republic to the Imperial Age were designed or interpreted by Romans as embodiments of the cosmos. The construction and reading of these structures by our ancient literary sources consider the new language created by the Graeco-Roman philosophers for the comprehension and functioning of the universe. Also, those structures testified about the submission of the *oikoumene* under Roman rule, the centrality of Rome and the *principes* in the empire's territory, and consequently, the cosmos. The following chapters will show that the use of this tradition of interpreting buildings as images of the universe was not only confined to ancient Rome, but that Judaeans of the time also read the Jerusalem Temple as a symbol of the cosmos.

Chapter 3: The Jerusalem Temple Imagery in Judaeon Literature

From the Graeco-Roman period, we can see evidence of several Judaeon writers depicting the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor the Tent as mirroring the structure of the universe. As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, the reading and construction of buildings as symbols of the cosmos was common in the period in question and had philosophical origins. Although we cannot say for sure whether all the Judaeon writers to be analysed here shared this Graeco-Roman tradition of interpreting cult sites as the embodiment of the cosmos, the study suggests that they were somewhat familiar with philosophical cosmology. Therefore, this chapter begins by examining the origins of the interpretation of the Temple of Jerusalem as the embodiment of the cosmos among Judaeon writers in the Graeco-Roman period, then explores how these writers usually explain the Temple, its contents, personnel, and the rituals that took place there using cosmic imagery.

3.1 The Roots of the Reading of the Jerusalem Temple as a Symbol of the Cosmos

Although the interpretation of the Temple in Jerusalem and everything related to it as the image of the universe was found in some Judaeon writers in the Graeco-Roman period (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon, Philo of Alexandria, Flavius Josephus), modern scholars diverge on the originality of this reading. Was the understanding of the Temple as the embodiment of the cosmos a newly developing tradition in the Graeco-Roman period, or did it have more ancient origins? Various approaches have been proposed to solve this issue, but in general, they can be categorised into two groups: those scholars who understand the reading of the Temple as a symbol of the cosmos as being already developed during the period of Solomon's Temple; and those ones who perceive the portrayal as an 'innovation of Hellenistic Judaism' (Levenson 1984: 285).

As an example of the first group, William F. Albright's seminal book on the archaeology and traditions of ancient Israel shows that Solomon's Temple could be read as a symbol of the cosmos. For him, the building itself and its contents 'prove' that in the early monarchy, the cult site already had 'a rich cosmic symbolism which was largely lost in later Israelite and Jewish tradition' (1942: 154-155). For instance, this scholar assumes that the two pillars of bronze (Jachin and Boaz) that stood at the vestibule of the Temple (1 Kgs 7:15-22, 41-42) most likely had cosmic symbolism

under Canaanite influence: 'they may have been regarded as the reflection of the columns between which the sun rose each morning to pour its light through the portico of the Temple into its interior' (1942: 148).

Albright associates the functions of the cast-bronze basin called the 'sea' (1 Kgs 7:23-25) with the Mesopotamian *apsû*, 'employed both as the name of the subterranean fresh-water ocean from which all life and all fertility were derived and as the name of a basin of holy water erected in the temple' (1942: 148-149). He further suggests that the twelve bulls that support the 'sea' are 'partly symbolic, partly decorative in origin.' According to him, the bull was associated in the Ancient Near East with the rain-giver Baal-Hadad, but also 'in connection with the life-giving water of rivers and the underworld.' The arrangement of the twelve bulls in four groups of three, facing different directions, represents 'the four seasons of the year' (1942: 149-150). Although Albright does not give detailed information on the altar of burnt offering, he says that it reproduces 'Mesopotamian cosmic ideas' (1942: 150).

In the following decades, various studies on the cosmic symbolism of the First Temple were carried out, with similar findings. The French scholar André Parrot, for instance – expressly relying on Albright's studies – draws our attention to the meaning of the 'sea', which according to him could evoke both the sacred lake of the Egyptian temples and the Babylonian *apsû*. Parrot also supposed that the giant water tank could represent the heavenly ocean.¹ He agreed that the twelve bulls were both symbolic and decorative. In the land of Canaan, he argues, bulls were symbols of fertility. The tripartite division of the cult site also holds cosmic symbolism. Although he does not identify the specific meaning of the division, he refers to the Graeco-Roman Judaeen writers (e.g. Philo and Josephus) to suggest that their reading of the Temple in a three-part world is related to the biblical cosmogony. Furthermore, the two bronze pillars at the portico of the Temple could recall the world resting on columns (1954: 32-33; 38-39; see also Ps 75:3; Job 9:6).²

With respect to the lampstand, Carol Meyers has examined the meaning of this object in line with the cultures surrounding ancient Israel. According to her, there is a parallel between the form and details of the lampstand and the sacred tree of the Ancient Near East, including the arrangement in six-plus-one branches. Meyers argues that, at least from the time of the Mitanni dynasty (1500-1240 BCE), seven-branched lampstands were associated with the heavenly bodies:

¹ In a similar vein, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith suggests that the lack of information for the practical application of the Sea, and the large size of the structure, imply that it had a symbolic use. Besides the interpretation of the tank as the cosmic water, she also mentions that modern scholars tend to relate it with the 'waters of life' that emanated from the garden of Eden (1994: 20).

² For more details on the cosmic symbolism of the two bronze pillars and the Sea, see Lundquist 1982: 271-297; Keel 1997: 136-140. For other contents of the First Temple, see Clements 1965: 65-67.

‘The biblical combination of tree form with actual lamps, i.e. the tabernacle menorah, must be seen against this background of continued association of plant life and celestial light’ (1976: 121). Meyers also calls into question the pertinence of the phenomenological approach for the study of space occupied by the lampstand. As she states, from this position, ‘it is axiomatic that every sanctuary is constituted as an *imago mundi*, with the cosmos as paradigmatic model. In this way, it can provide the desired link between heaven and earth and ensure the irruption of the sacred, that which is pre-eminently real...at a specified location’ (1976: 171).

Even though numerous studies have shown the ancient origins of the reading of the Temple in Jerusalem as a symbol of the cosmos, scholars such as Richard Clifford point out the limitations of these studies. For Clifford, Solomon’s Temple is cosmic in the sense that the cult site represents the heavenly temple which is the fount of order in the cosmos. A key problem with much of the interpretation of the First Temple as the image of the cosmos is that ‘more evidence is needed as well as a clearer understanding of the meaning of cosmic in this context.’ Without clear evidence, the suggestions remain hypothetical (1972: 178-180).

In contrast to those scholars who find cosmic symbolism in Solomon’s Temple, some researchers are inclined to identify that reading with a legacy from the Graeco-Roman period. Roland de Vaux, in his brief analysis of the cosmic symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem, maintains that the cosmic view given by Graeco-Roman Judaeans of the Temple in Jerusalem does not emerge before this period. For him, no biblical text ‘suggests that the Temple itself ever had a cosmic significance.’ As an illustration, he cites the incorrect use of Psalm 78:69, for some scholars the corroboration of the First Temple as the embodiment of the cosmos: ‘He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever’ (NRSV). The explanation of this verse, according to De Vaux, is ‘that God’s choice of Sion as his dwelling-place, and of David as his servant, is definitive, and as enduring as the heavens and the earth’ (1961: 328).

De Vaux also stresses the problematic nature of interpreting the biblical texts when the text itself does not explicitly present the intended reading. There is no evidence that the biblical authors assumed that the three parts of the Temple meant the cosmic regions; that the two bronze pillars and the lampstand corresponded to the heavenly bodies; or that the ‘sea’ symbolised the primordial waters. Furthermore, until the end of the monarchical period, the people of Israel had to deal with ‘the paradox that there was a man-made house in which there dwelt that God whom the heavens could not contain (1 Kgs 8:27); consequently, they distinguished between the Temple, where men prayed, and heaven, where God dwelt (1 Kgs 8:30).’ As a result, the Israelites did not

conceive their cult site as the image of the cosmos, and this interpretation appeared only at a later time (1961: 328-329).

De Vaux's approach has not escaped criticism; Harold Turner, in his phenomenological analysis of the Temple of Jerusalem, is not convinced that the reading of the Temple is 'a post-biblical speculative and mystical development in sophisticated and possibly hellenised minds.' According to him, the fact that the canonical books of the Old Testament do not give attention to the cosmic interpretation of the Temple does not mean that it could not be read as such, since cosmic interpretations of buildings recur in different cultures across the world. With respect to the Solomonic Temple, 'cosmic symbolism might have been only an inheritance from a pagan world that was uncomprehended or else quickly suppressed, but from all that we know of the long intermingling of Canaanite and other influences with the religion of Israel it is most unlikely that the temple would have been such an exception.' Turner concludes his ideas assuming that although the worshipper would not be fully aware of the embodiment of the Temple as a symbol of the cosmos in its entirety, 'some sense of the temple as the earthly representation of the heavenly realms must have permeated the religious consciousness of Israel long before post-biblical writers worked the idea out in elaborate and somewhat artificial analogies' (1979: 59-60).³

Nevertheless, De Vaux's assumptions are elaborated in studies by scholars such as Jean Daniélou and Gregory Stevenson. Daniélou points out that although some specific passages in the Hebrew Bible appear to suggest a cosmic symbolism of the Tent and Solomon's Temple, the idea of the Temple as the embodiment of the cosmos is more evident in the Graeco-Roman period. The contact of the Judaeans with Graeco-Roman philosophy leads them to view their cult site as the image of the universe (1953: 61, 63-64; 1955: 85). Stevenson also draws attention to the late cosmic reading of the Temple in Jerusalem. He argues that the Judaeans usually portray Jerusalem and its cult site as standing at the centre of the world. However, such a conception could not be read back as far as the First Temple: 'one cannot deny the possibility of cosmic symbolism with reference to Solomon's Temple, and one might be able to support such a claim through comparison with contemporary temples. The problem with such an interpretation, however, is that any clear sign of such cosmic significance is lacking in the Old Testament' (2001: 155).

Different explanations have been given, then, for the reading of the Temple of Jerusalem as a symbol of the cosmos in Antiquity. In spite of the arguments presented by the first group of

³ See also Clements 1965: 67.

scholars, who see the roots of the reading of the Temple in Jerusalem as present already in Solomon's Temple, I side with the second group, who perceive the cosmic interpretation of the cult site as a product of the Graeco-Roman period. As seen in the first chapter, many buildings were erected and interpreted as images of the cosmos during the period under investigation. Making use of philosophical conceptions, ancient Graeco-Roman scholars began replicating the philosophical understanding of space and the cosmos for the construction and interpretation of buildings and cult sites. Thus, it is possible to infer that Judaeans made use of this tradition in order to read the Tent and Temple of Jerusalem as representing elements of the cosmos.

3.2 The Jerusalem Temple as the Image of the Cosmos in Judaeans Literature

In the Graeco-Roman period, we can see, a number of Judaeans writers commenced depicting the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor the Tent as the embodiment of the cosmos. Even though the Temple is described with cosmic symbolism by these Judaeans thinkers, it is essential to understand that during the period in question, two different approaches existed to the Temple in Jerusalem. The first notion perceives the Jerusalem Temple as analogue of a temple situated in heaven, whereas the second view conceives the earthly Temple as a symbol of the cosmos.

In his analysis of the correspondence of the earthly temple with the heavenly one, George MacRae shows that the roots of this idea are found in the Tent of the Old Testament. In Exodus, God is presented revealing to Moses the plan of the cult site and its contents (25:9, 40). Solomon's Temple is also described as having been constructed according to a divine plan (1 Chr 28:19). Although the texts do not clearly point to a heavenly temple of which the earthly temple is a shadow, they were appropriated for this later conception on the Temple (1978: 182). The notion of the heavenly temple is clearly distinguished in the Judaeans Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and rabbinic literature.⁴ In the Ethiopic version of Enoch, Enoch is described as envisioning entering the house of God in heaven (1 Enoch 14; 90:28-29). The Testament of Levi describes the entrance of the patriarch through the gates of heaven, and noting 'the temple of glory' (5:1; 18:6). Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the so-called Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice comprise angelic praises of God. The fragments present the celestial temple as the archetype and model for the earthly temple.⁵ In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the author depicts the earthly temple as 'a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary' (8:1-5; 9:23). Revelation also

⁴ For the view on rabbinic literature, see Patai 1947: 130-132.

⁵ See Davila 2002: 1-19.

mentions a temple in heaven and describes the angelic liturgy (8: 3-5; 11:19) (1978: 183-184; see also Gray 1925: 154-156; 164; 175-176).

Although different approaches towards the Temple of Jerusalem existed in the Graeco-Roman period, our study is concerned only with the cosmic aspect of the cult site in Jerusalem. As has been pointed out, the interpretation of buildings in cosmic terms was part of a standard view in the Graeco-Roman period, and had philosophical origins. It is not necessary to imagine that the Judaeans who depicted the Temple using cosmic imagery mastered ancient Greek philosophy. However, the evidence from the study of those writings points towards the idea that the cosmic interpretation of the Temple in Jerusalem is an appropriation and adaptation of an existing reading of buildings and cult sites in the Graeco-Roman world.

MacRae terms such a reading among Judaeans writers 'Hellenistic temple symbolism', since it is first found and developed in the group of Greek-writing Judaeans writers (1978: 184). In fact, most of the writings to be considered here come from the Hellenised Judaeans in Egypt. The involvement of these writers in depicting the Temple as the embodiment of the cosmos can be explained in part by the interest in and development of the study of the cosmos in Egypt, principally in Alexandria. And an attempt of the Judaeans intelligentsia in Alexandria to interpret their sacred writings in line with Greek thought, including the portrayal of God as a universal ruler who dwells in a Temple regarded a miniature of the cosmos created by him.

It is also worth mentioning that some of the Judaeans authors mentioned in this study equate the Tent with the Temple in Jerusalem. In the view of the author of *Wisdom of Solomon*, for instance, the Tent has a correspondence with the Temple: 'you commanded me to build a temple (ναόν) on your holy mountain, and an altar in the city of your abode, a copy of the sacred tabernacle (μίμημα σκηνῆς ἁγίας) which you prepared from the very first' (*Wis* 9:8 [Winston]). Philo also considers the Tent and Temple equal. He says that during the journey of the people of Israel through the desert, 'a portable shrine (φορητὸν...ἱερόν)' was built (*Mos.* 2.73; see also *QE* 2.83). He also affirms that the Tent (σκηνὴ) 'was built to resemble a sacred temple (νεὼς ἅγιος)' (*Mos.* 2.89).

The following section examines the compositions of Judaeans in Palestine and Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period. The section commences with the analyses of the priest's role in the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira*, proceeding to the scrutiny of one of the central institutions of the Judaeans – the Passover – in *Aristobulus*. It continues with the examination of the priest's vestment in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and then a careful consideration of the reading of the

Temple, appurtenances, ritual, and contents in Philo of Alexandria. It concludes with a brief discussion of Temple symbolism in rabbinic literature.

3.2.1 Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira

The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira, also called Ecclesiasticus or Sirach, is one of the first writings of the Second Temple Period that presents clearly the author behind the writing and the approximate date when it was written (ca. 180 BCE). The work stands in the tradition of wisdom instruction, containing maxims, proverbs, and reflections about life and customs of the period (Veltri 2005: 2779). The writer of the book has a favourable opinion of the Temple and its priesthood. This is particularly clear in Chapter 24, where the Temple is presented as the dwelling place of God and his wisdom, and in the section devoted to the Praise of the Ancestors (44-50).⁶ In Chapter 50, Ben Sira praises the figure of the High Priest Simon II, son of Onias II, who is acclaimed for his virtues. Although Ben Sira says almost nothing of the structure of the Temple, furnishings and the cosmological meaning, when describing the rituals performed by Simon in the Temple, the writer uses cosmic terminology to depict the splendour of the priest in his occupation.

The book was composed originally in Hebrew by Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sirach (Sir 50:27), but it was through the Greek translation made later by Ben Sira's grandson, which eventually became part of the Septuagint (LXX), that the work reached a broader readership. Ben Sira was possibly a professional scribe, given the account of his lifestyle in 39:1-11; his grandson says in the prologue that his grandfather was a diligent student of the 'Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom'. He apparently led a 'house of instruction', maybe in connection with the Jerusalem Temple complex (51:23; see also Harrington 2010: 1457).

The approximate date of the composition of the work is given by Ben Sira's grandson in the prologue. He says, 'I came to Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Euergetes and stayed for some time, I found opportunity for no little instruction. It seemed highly necessary that I should myself devote some diligence and labour to the translation of this book' (NOAB). Inferring that the king mentioned was Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (145-116 BCE), scholars date the arrival in Egypt to 132 BCE. Assuming that the grandson was an adult when he migrated (presumably to Alexandria), his grandfather must have written the volume sometime in the 180s BCE. The

⁶ For remarks on Chapter 24, see Zsengellér 2008: 135-149; Church 2017: 31-36.

estimated date seems to be confirmed by the eulogy of Simon II, who was priest from 219-196 BCE (50:1-29; see also Josephus *Ant.* 12.157, 224-225). Chapter 50 indicates that the writer was a contemporary of Simon, but the praise was probably written after the high priest's death (Schürer-Vermes 1986: 202; Collins 1997: 23).⁷

Chapter 50 belongs to the third major division of the volume, and it is termed Praise of the Ancestors. The acclamation of Simon II is the climax of a series of praises made of the early patriarchs, prophets, judges, kings, and priests. Ben Sira devotes most of the Chapter 50 to describe the improvements implemented by Simon II at the Temple and the city of Jerusalem (1-4) and the appearance of the eminent high priest when performing the sacrificial ritual (5-26).⁸ The cosmic and natural terminology employed to portray Simon as he comes out of the Temple to take part in the sacrificial service deserves particular attention:

5 How glorious he was, surrounded by the people,
as he came out of the house of the curtain.
6 Like the morning star among the clouds,
like the full moon at the festal season;
7 like the sun shining on the temple of the Most High,
like the rainbow gleaming in splendid clouds;
8 like roses in the days of first fruits,
like lilies by a spring of water,
like a green shoot on Lebanon on a summer day;
9 like fire and incense in the censer,
like a vessel of hammered gold studded with all kinds of precious stones,
10 like an olive tree laden with fruit,
and like a cypress towering in the clouds.
11 When he puts on his glorious robe
and clothed himself in perfect splendour,
when he went up to the holy altar,
he made the court of the sanctuary glorious (NOAB).

In these verses, Ben Sira makes use of eleven similes to describe Simon's appearance when taking part in the Temple's service. Four comparisons relate to the cosmos (star, moon, sun, and rainbow) and seven to the natural world (rose, lily, green shoot, fire, golden vessel with precious

⁷ For a different view on the date for the writing of the work, see Mulder 2003: 13.

⁸ This is not the only passage where Ben Sira refers to the splendour of a high priest when performing his duties. In Chapter 45:8-13, the author mentions the rich attire worn by Aaron.

stones, olive tree, and cypress). The writer himself seems to have been present among the public, observing the high priest with his special attire in all his splendour and indicating that God's glory is upon the high priest.

Astonished by the magnificent view, the author exclaims how glorious Simon was. The Hebrew text describes the high priest as 'honourable' (*nhdr*), and when he goes up to the holy altar, it is said he makes the sanctuary court honourable (*wyhdr*). Robert Hayward explains that the choice made by Ben Sira of the verbal root *hdr*, to describe Simon's appearance is noteworthy. Ben Sira rarely uses the verb, and when it used, it is mostly for the description of natural phenomena (firmament of heaven, rainbow) and heavenly bodies (43:1, 9, 11); all images are employed later for the portrayal of Simon. For Hayward, it appears that 'the high priest is here described as related to things of great beauty above the territorial sphere, and as if he had in some manner made these things present in the Temple' (1996: 49). Additionally, Ben Sira says that the high priest comes out with all his majesty when leaving 'the house of the curtain'. This curtain (τὸ καταπέτασμα) in the Greek version of the text is usually identified as the veil at the entrance of the Holy of Holies. If Ben Sira refers to Simon's exit from the most sacred area of the Temple, then he is likely giving an account of the ceremony of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), the only day the High Priest could enter the sacred space (Collins 2007: 696).⁹

In vv. 6-7, Ben Sira portrays Simon in all his magnificence, comparing him to heavenly bodies and natural phenomenon. The first comparison is with the morning star in the midst of the clouds. Since Antiquity, the morning star, or planet Venus, has been known for being one of the brightest stars and the last to disappear before the sunrise. In the context of the Ancient Near East and the Graeco-Roman period, stars were regarded as instruments of good fortune or misfortune. In so far as it compares an individual with heavenly bodies, the analogy does not seem strange in biblical texts. The first reference to the morning star as a person appears in Isaiah 14:12: 'How you [king of Babylon] are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn.'¹⁰ In the Hebrew text of Ben Sira 50:6, the first analogy is translated as 'luminous star', which may denote, according to Otto Mulder, the unique, preeminent position of Simon 'in the context of cosmic symbolism' (2003: 126). Ben Sira also portrays Simon as the full moon (σελήνη πλήρης) that served as a marker of the festal days. Indeed, Ben Sira uses this symbolism 'in order to qualify Simon as High Priest for the task of determining the times and the festival days according to the Torah.' Two of

⁹ There has been an inconclusive debate about whether the Greek word τὸ καταπέτασμα, as used by the Greek text, means the inner or the outer curtain. In Hebrew, *pārōket* is employed for the inner curtain, and *māsāk*, for the outer curtain. However, the LXX Pentateuch translates the two Hebrew words as τὸ καταπέτασμα. For a concise discussion on the use of the word by Ben Sira, see Di Lella 1987: 551-552; Porter 2012: 185-186.

¹⁰ The same analogy is found in Revelation, which portrays Jesus as the morning star (Rev 22:16).

the main festivals at the time, Passover and Tabernacles, were calculated through reference to the full moon (2003: 130; see also Sir 43:6-8).

In v. 7, Simon is compared to the ‘sun shining (ἥλιος ἐκλάμπων) on the Temple of the Most High’. Ben Sira may be alluding here to the magnificence of the high priest when leaving the inner sanctuary after offered incense, and the scenario created it could be the result of the reflection of the sun’s ray in the golden ornaments present in the vestment. An example compared to this one used by the thinker is found in Psalm 89:36-37. The text says that David’s throne shall endure like the sun and be established forever like the moon. Alternatively, the high priest movements in the Temple could ‘echo the movements of the sun and the stars through the heavens’ (Church 2017: 43). Furthermore, according to Hayward, these verses ‘betray a sense of Simon’s quasi-royal presence and authority’ (1996: 51). Burton Mack points out that ‘Ben Sira was careful not to claim the office of the ruler-king for Simon, but it is clear he wished his readers to understand that the primary functions of the king...were associated with him’ (1985: 35).

C. T. R. Hayward also underlines the particular use of divine names by Ben Sira’s grandson in his translation, which ‘effectively highlights the universal significance of the ritual he describes.’ The epithet Most High (ὁ ὑψιστος) is employed in three verses (50:7, 19, 21). Hayward notes that the title was usually applied to Zeus, indicating ‘his headship of the pantheon and his universal dominion.’ In the Judaeian context, the designation was used to show the universal authority of God and his supremacy over other gods (1996: 75-76). V. 7 is then completed with the identification of Simon with the rainbow (τόξον) that gleams in the clouds.¹¹ The symbolism recalls the Noahic covenant and its universal meaning. Mulder highlights that ‘this universal aspect points to the main line of Ben Sira’s thought and of his vision of the temple that, rooted in wisdom that identifies itself with Torah, is universal and cosmic by nature’ (2003: 133). The covenant could also evoke, according to Hayward, the guarantee of ‘the stability of the created order after the eruption of chaos at the Flood: Simon is compared with its visible sign, a sign of God’s remembering His creation (Gn 9:15) of His mercy.’ Ben Sira’s view is that the service performed by Simon in the Temple has relevance for the ‘stability of creation’ (1996: 51-52).¹²

As is evident from the verses analysed, Ben Sira employs several analogies to associate Simon and his priestly robe with heavenly and botanical imagery. As to the use of that imagery, Philip Church comments that as the ‘heavenly creatures reflect God’s glory and move at his command’, the high priest ‘Simon embodies them all, reflecting these, the greatest of God’s works’

¹¹ Similar analogy is found in Ezek 1:28.

¹² For commentary on verses 8-10, see Di Lella 1987: 552; Mulder 2003: 287-288.

(2017: 41). Interestingly enough, the portrayal of Simon is somehow comparable to the description of the high priest Eleazar (260-245 BCE) found in the *Letter of Aristeas*. Although the writer does not compare the high priestly raiment with the cosmos, he indeed emphasises the extraordinary nature of the vestment and the amazement that it caused when it was seen:

We are greatly astonished when we beheld Eleazar at his service, both at the facts of his dress and his glory, which were exhibited through his attire of which he wore robe and the precious stones all around it. For there are golden bells all around its hem, giving forth a unique musical sound. And next to each of these are pomegranates embroidered with brilliant colours remarkable in hue. And he was girded with a distinctive and striking girdle, woven with the most beautiful colours. And upon his breast he wore the so-called “oracle” in which are set twelve stones, differing in kinds, attached with gold, the names of the tribal leaders according to what would have been the original order, each one flashing forth an indescribable natural colour individual to itself. And upon his head was the so-called tiara and upon that the inimitable mitre, the sacred diadem, engraved upon gold leaf with holy letters, the name of God, between his eyebrows, filled with glory. He is thought worthy of these in his ministrations. The appearance of these things produces awe and confusion, so that one might think that he had gone out of this world into another. And I insist that any person who comes near to the sight of those things that I have previously recounted will come into amazement and indescribable wonder, when turning his mind to the sacred construction of each thing (96-99 [Wright]).

Klawans notes that although ‘Ben Sira stops short of explicitly ascribing cosmic symbolism to the priestly vestments – the implication...is that the garb casts a cosmic appearance’ (2006: 114). It is difficult to know if Ben Sira had Graeco-Roman philosophical ideas in mind when portraying the high priest with those similes. Although we know that he composed the volume at a time when the Hellenistic culture had already expanded into Palestine, there are few elements in the work that demonstrate that he was acquainted with Hellenistic literature and philosophy.

In Chapter 39:4, for example, the author writes that a student of the law of the Most High ‘travels in foreign lands and learns what is good and evil in the human lot’. For Di Lella, the autobiographical information may be considered as an evidence for the acquaintance of Ben Sira with Hellenistic literature. Therefore, it is not ‘unreasonable to assume that he would employ in his own book some of what he learned from the Gentiles.’ Though Di Lella believes that portions of Ben Sira’s composition are derived from other, non-Judaean sources, he states that a distinction must be made ‘between *expressions* or *ideas* that Ben Sira borrows indirectly from pagan authors and pagan *works* that he read personally and then directly alludes to in his own book’ (1987: 46-47).

The extent to which Ben Sira drew on non-Judean sources is a subject of intense debate

among modern scholars. Various scholars have argued over the possible presence of Stoic and Epicurean ideas in the composition. Martin Hengel, for instance, maintains that Ben Sira shared with the Stoics the idea that the cosmos is a single whole, permeated by a rational power, which is personified in Ben Sira by wisdom (1974: 1.148, 160).¹³ Richard Clifford agrees with Hengel on the influence of Stoic ideas and identifies their traces in Ben Sira's 'ideal of human dignity (41:14-42:8), in his ideal of the unity of the world (45:27), and of the human race (56:1-4, 22).' Epicurean echoes are also recognised by Clifford, mainly ideas related to 'a life ruled by reason, marked by equilibrium within, free of bodily pain and inner disquiet' (1998: 117). Conversely, some scholars disagree with some of these explanations. Sharon Matilla, for instance, disputes Hengel's idea of the wisdom in Ben Sira as 'a universal cosmic ordering principle.' Nowhere in the text, according to Matilla, does wisdom appear in this role. Instead of a cosmic principle or a personification, wisdom emerges as God's gift to humanity (2000: 476-477, 488-489).¹⁴

Despite the cosmic and natural terminology employed by Ben Sira for his portrayal of Simon, we lack the means to determine the influence of Graeco-Roman cosmological traditions for this interpretation. However, the reading of the high priest in his glorious vestment made by Ben Sira provides information for the development of the systems of interpretation of the high priest's attire during the period in question. Michael Swartz explains that the nature of the robe permitted that understanding. The high priest's garb 'gained additional layers of hermeneutical possibilities because their fabric, form, and order were commanded by God to be used in the cult.' Also, the garb had an active role to play, since when dressed by the high priest, it represented the people before God. According to Swartz, 'this led the way to a rich semiotic system in which each detail of the vestments could stand for something greater or perform a significant function in the cult, depending on the sensibilities of the interpreter' (2002: 78). Thus, the high priestly attire worn by Simon shows that his service in the Temple had an effect in the preservation of the cosmic order.

3.2.2 Aristobulus

Aristobulus, who lived in Alexandria in the first half of the second century, is believed to be the first Judaeon who clearly identified himself as a philosopher-exegete (Walter 2007: 390; Cook 2008: 193; Niehoff 2011: 58). Almost nothing is known of Aristobulus' life, and the little

¹³ For more Stoic features identified by Hengel, see 1974: 2.94-95.

¹⁴ For additional material on the influence of Hellenistic philosophy in Ben Sira's work, see Mack 1985: 91-92; Lee 1986; Di Lella 1992: 931-945; Collins 1997: 39-41.

information available was mainly recorded by Christian authors, as well as by the transmission of scattered excerpts of his work. The available fragments of his commentaries of the Mosaic laws demonstrate his attempt in harmonising Graeco-Roman philosophical thought and Judaeen tradition. Although no information on the structure of the Temple appears in the surviving excerpts, Aristobulus mentions the Passover – a rite that was performed within the area of the Temple – and which is described relative to a cosmic phenomenon.

Aristobulus is generally held to be the figure of that name mentioned in 2 Maccabees, and to whom the author of the work addresses a letter. In 2 Macc 1:10, the writer says that Aristobulus came from a ‘family of the anointed priests’ and was a ‘teacher of King Ptolemy’, thus having all the credentials to be a respected figure in the Graeco-Roman world. It is difficult to determine the veracity of this information, since our later sources only repeat what has been said in part in Maccabees (Euseb. *P.E.* 8.8.56; 13.11.3-12).¹⁵ Concerning Aristobulus’ being called a royal tutor (διδάσκαλος), Carl Holladay assumes that the title should be understood in the literary sense, since his work was dedicated and addressed to the king (1995: 46). Although the identity of the Egyptian king is not mentioned in Maccabees, Clement of Alexandria writes that Aristobulus’ work was addressed to Ptolemy VI Philometor (180-145 BCE) (*Strom.* 1.22.150.1). Later sources identify the writer as a Peripatetic philosopher (*Strom.* 1.15.72.4; *P.E.* 8.9.38; 13.11.3; *Chron. Pasch.* 178C).¹⁶

The surviving fragments indicate that Aristobulus’ work was composed of exegetical discussions of the writings of Moses. Clement, for instance, affirms that Aristobulus wrote ‘abundant books to show the Peripatetic philosophy was derived from the law of Moses’ (T 4 = *Strom.* 5.14.97.7 [Holladay]). Anatolius of Laodicea (third century CE) says that Aristobulus’ ‘commentaries on the law of Moses’ were dedicated to the Egyptian king (Euseb. *H.E.* 7.32.16). In the *Paschal Chronicle*, the composition is called ‘the Explanations of Mosaic Scripture’ (ἐξηγήσεις τῆς Μωσέως γραφῆς) (178c). In Holladay’s view, the commentaries were written in the form of a dialogue between the writer and Ptolemy VI Philometor, with questions and answers related to the Torah. As was commonplace among Graeco-Roman Judaeen writers, the exposition of the laws was addressed to both Judaeen and gentile readers (1995: 74; see also Gruen 1998: 247).

From the fragments available, it appears that Aristobulus intended to present the affinity

¹⁵ No information about Aristobulus’ priestly ancestry is found in later tradition. Even though the surviving excerpts do not allude to his genealogy, Jonathan Goldstein suggests that the information given by Maccabees hardly could be an author’s forgery, since ‘for as a propagandist he could not afford to risk exposure by Oniads familiar with their own genealogy.’ Also, it is possible that the writer may have indicated his ancestry in parts of the work we cannot access (1983: 168). For more assumptions on Aristobulus’ life, see Walter 2007: 389.

¹⁶ About the controversy over the association of Aristobulus with Peripatetic school, see Holladay 1995: 72-73.

between the biblical tradition and Greek wisdom. For the author, the Law of Moses is assumed to be philosophical. The writings of Moses have many points in common with Greek philosophy, which occurred because Greek philosophers and poets not only had a high opinion of Moses, but also borrowed ideas from him and the other prophets (Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.22.148.1; 1.22.150.1-3; 5.14.99.3; Euseb. *P. E.* 9.6.6; 13.12.4). Because of 'its antiquity and the divine wisdom of its prophetic author, the law of Moses is far superior to the doctrines of the Greek wise men and philosophers, who are dependent on it' (Hengel 1974: 1.165). Moreover, by pointing the similarities between the two traditions, Aristobulus demonstrated that the biblical content was comprehensible to educated Greeks (Holladay 1995: 74; see also Stone 1984: 274; Cook 2008: 200).

Five large excerpts of Aristobulus' commentaries have survived in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and *Preparation for the Gospel*. Parts of these fragments are also found in Clement of Alexandria's *Miscellanies*. The first fragment Eusebius takes from an earlier study 'On Easter (Περὶ τοῦ Πάσχα)' by the bishop Anatolius; the four remaining fragments are direct quotes from Aristobulus. For our investigation, the first fragment is important, since Aristobulus comments on Passover in relation to solar and lunar equinoxes. The excerpt found in Anatolius' treatise seems to have been used to support the idea that Easter should be celebrated on the same date as Passover, the 14th of Nisan. Anatolius refers to earlier Judaeans writers in order to support his idea.¹⁷ Of the Judaeans who mention the observation of the feast after the vernal equinox, Anatolius gives especial attention to Aristobulus:

When these explain the questions relating to the Book of Exodus, they say that all are required to sacrifice the Passover in the same manner after the vernal equinox, in the middle of the first month; but this is found to occur when the sun passes through the first sector of the solar, or as some of them have called it, the zodiacal cycle. But Aristobulus adds that, at the time of the feast of Passover, of necessity this would be when not only the sun is passing through an equinoctial sector, but the moon as well. For, since there are two equinoctial sectors, the vernal and the autumnal, and since they diametrically oppose each other, and since the day of Passover has been assigned to the fourteenth of the month after evening, the moon will take a position diametrically opposite the sun, just as one is thus permitted to see it at times of full moon; and the one, the sun, will be in the sector of the vernal equinox, while the other, the moon, will of necessity be in the sector of the autumnal equinox. I know many other statements of theirs, some of them probable, others advanced as absolute proofs, by which they try to prove that the feast of Passover and of Unleavened Bread must by all means be held after the equinox. But I refrain from demanding this sort of demonstration for matters from which

¹⁷ Anatolius mentions Philo, Flavius Josephus, Musaeus, and the two Agathobuli (Euseb. *H.E.* 7.32.16). Apart from Philo and Josephus, none of the authors mentioned is identifiable (Holladay 1995: 210).

the veil of the Mosaic law has been removed... (Fr. 1 = Euseb. *H.E.* 7.32.17-19 [Holladay]).¹⁸

Here Aristobulus links the celebration of Passover to ‘the vernal equinox’ (ἰσημερίαν ἐαρινήν), also called spring equinox. In his *Introduction to the Phenomena*, Geminus (first century BCE) explains that the cosmic phenomena ‘occurs around the height of the flowering time, [when the Sun is] in the first degree of Aries.’ Occurring near 21st March, the event is characterised by the crossing of the Sun over the celestial equator, which results in a day and night of approximately the same length (1.9-10 [Evans and Berggren]). For Aristobulus, the passage of both the moon and the sun through the equinoctial sector was important, and the festive day was identified as that on which the sun and moon take positions diametrically opposite from each other.¹⁹

The interpretation given by Aristobulus puzzles modern scholars, since no text in the Torah (Deut 16:1-8; Exod 13:3-4; 23:15; 34:18) or of later Judaeans writers – at least that survives – refers to that understanding. Philo, for example, only writes that Nisan begins with the vernal equinox (*QE* 1.1), and Josephus states that the feast is observed on the 14th of Nisan, ‘according to the moon, the sun being in Aries’ (*Ant.* 3.248). It may be assumed that the philosophical astronomy current in Alexandria at the time influenced Aristobulus, and as a result, he searched for a philosophical basis for the observance of the Judaeans festival. Furthermore, by associating the day of Passover with the vernal equinox, Aristobulus may also intend to present a cosmic significance for the event (Holladay 1995: 203).

Aristobulus also appears to make use of Stoic ideas to ascribe cosmic significance to Passover. John Barclay emphasises that ‘Aristobulus redefines the meaning of Moses’ text to find there the Stoic God who permeates the cosmos, the only God of which one can talk with “fitting speech”.’ Making use of the ‘naturalistic theology’ of the Stoics, Barclay claims that Aristobulus justifies this central Judaeans institution in regards to ‘the physical structures of the world.’ Moreover, if the Judaeans law ‘describes God in theological terms as the immanent power in the universe, it is entirely fitting that the Jew’s most prominent festival should be in tune with the structures of nature.’ Thus, the Judaeans practice has an entirely philosophical rationale (1996: 154-155; see also Euseb. *P.E.* 13.12.4; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.14.99.3).²⁰

By associating a Judaeans festival with a cosmic event, Aristobulus show that the rituals performed within the Temple reflect the order of the cosmos. In this way, the exegete builds a

¹⁸ As is evident from the quote, most of the text is a commentary by Anatolius. Whether Aristobulus is directly cited by Anatolius is not evident, but Holladay suggests sections §17 and §18 (1995: 198).

¹⁹ For additional information on the Passover and equinox, see Beckwith 2001: 282-286.

²⁰ The same reasoning is applied by Aristobulus for his commentary on the Sabbath, albeit the writer explores more Pythagorean speculation on the number seven (Fr. 5 = Euseb. *P.E.* 13.12.9-16; Fr. 5a = Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6.16.137.4-138.4; see also Hengel 1974: 166-167; Walter 2007: 390; Cook 2008: 202).

bridge between the Judaeen intellectual systems and Greek philosophical tradition. The exposition of the writings of Moses by the Judaeen author must be comprehended in light of the attempt of a Judaeen community to vindicate itself vis-à-vis Hellenic culture (Stone 1984: 279; Gruen 1998: 246). Furthermore, the exegesis made by Aristobulus appears to fit within the Alexandrian context of universality, which under the direction of the founders of the Mouseion assumed that all human knowledge could be translated (Martin 1982: 93). Aristobulus is not alone in that endeavour; later Graeco-Roman Judaeen writers also understood Judaeen traditions as a philosophy that was in accord with the cosmos.

3.2.3 Wisdom of Solomon

Written sometime around the turn of the era, the Wisdom of Solomon does not indicate the name of the author behind the writing, although internal analysis of the work points to an Alexandrian Judaeen. The hortatory discourse follows the Hebrew wisdom tradition, while also accommodating significant philosophical traditions current in the Graeco-Roman period. For this Judaeen thinker, all human experience is bound up with the structure of the cosmos, and it is with this philosophical idea in mind that we note the description of the high priest's robe as a model of the cosmos, in the last section of the work.

Although manuscripts and versions attribute the composition to Solomon, the association with the king of Israel may be only related to the information given in Chapter 9, in which is described Solomon's prayer for wisdom, as presented in 1 Kgs 3:6-15 and 2 Chr 1:8-12, and the mention of God's command to build a temple on Mount Zion (9:8). Since Late Antiquity, the claim of Solomonic authorship has been doubted (Larcher 1983: 126). Probably, the author belonged to the Judaeen community of Alexandria (Walter 2007: 394). The profusion of philosophical terminology and philosophical discussions in the work show that the author was well-acquainted with these aspects of Alexandrian culture. The author even lists philosophy as a discipline he has studied (7:17; see also Bar-Kochva 1996: 179).

In addition to the problem with authorship, the work gives no date of composition and makes no reference to any event or social context. Because of the difficulty in dating the work, scholars have proposed different dates, most during the early Roman Empire. Since the author uses some books of the LXX, the work could not be written before 200 BCE. David Winston proposes the reign of Caligula (37 – 41CE) for the composition of Wisdom. The period of persecution against the Judaeen community in Alexandria during the rule of Caligula may, according to Winston, be related to the apocalyptic vision described in Chapter 5:16-23, in which

the author relates the extirpation of the wicked (1979: 20-25; see also Collins 2000: 195-196). Lester Grabbe, on the other hand, suggests some decades earlier, during the rule of Augustus. For Grabbe, Wisdom 'represents an earlier stage of development in the trajectory of biblical interpretation that reached its culmination in the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. A date about 20 BCE would fit the contents of the book' (2010: 1427).²¹

Although the author appears to address the work to a Graeco-Roman audience, because of the use of an elaborated Hellenistic rhetorical device, the content of Wisdom of Solomon suggests primarily educated Judaeans readers. Grabbe argues that the author of Wisdom aimed his work at educated Judaeans youths of Alexandria who might venture into the surrounding Hellenistic culture, participate in the various Hellenistic cults, and be tempted to abandon the customs of their fathers (2000: 87). Thus, the author 'seeks to convince them that their way of life, rooted in the worship of the one true God, is of an incomparably higher order than that of their pagan neighbours, whose polytheism had sunk them into the mire of immortality' (Winston 1979: 63; see also Schürer-Vermes 1986: 570).²²

The Wisdom of Solomon, like the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira, belongs to the Ancient Near Eastern tradition of sapiential writings. The composition presents elements common to those cultures that emphasise the importance for the search of wisdom for immature and inexperienced youth, although here, wisdom is presented with cosmic characteristics and described with philosophical concepts (Collins 2001: 326). Reflecting the influence of Hellenistic literature, the work is also categorised as a λόγος προτρεπτικός or hortatory discourse, that consisted of 'rhetorical, didactic exhortation in which a teacher of philosophy was expected to adopt a firm stand on a particular topic and attract students to his position by the deliberate display of a wide range of knowledge' (Schürer-Vermes 1986: 570; see also Collins 2000: 195-196). The work is also associated with another Hellenistic genre, the encomium, a genre in which 'the writer or orator praises a particular thing, often a person but sometimes something more abstract such a particular course of action or way of life' (Grabbe 2000: 87).

Wisdom is traditionally divided into three parts, although there is no consensus on their specific limits (Winston 1979: 9-12). The major divisions of the work are: 1-6 Book of Eschatology, 7-10 Book of Wisdom, and 11-19 Book of History. In the first division, the Temple appears in a brief mention of Solomon's prayer: 'You have given command to build a temple on your holy

²¹ The confirmation of the composition of Wisdom in Egypt appears to be indicated in some passages, such as 19:13-17, that refer to the wicked acts committed by Egypt. The author seems to be addressing the words to an audience who knows very well the sins of Egypt, and to whom he is not afraid to speak against them. For the analysis of other passages, see Grabbe 1997: 90 and Collins 2000: 195.

²² For a different view, see Zurawski 2017: 195-214.

mountain (ἐν ὄρει ἁγίῳ σου), and an altar in the city of your habitation, a copy of the holy tent that you prepared from the beginning (μίμημα σκηνῆς ἁγίας, ἣν προητοιμάσας ἀπ' ἀρχῆς)' (9:8 NOAB). The text presents a favourable view of the Jerusalem Temple by the writer, who sees the cult site not only as a place of God's dwelling, but as the archetype of the heavenly abode of God.²³

In the third section, the author demonstrates the influence of divine wisdom operating in history, from Creation to the Exodus and wilderness years (1979: 6-9). Chapter 18, in particular, is relevant for presenting a description of the high priest's garments. The account (verses 20-25) is related to the tragic event of Numbers 16:41-50, in which Aaron makes atonement and offers incense for the appeasement of the divine, which had sent a plague that had killed 14,700 people. The brief description of Aaron's vestment, breastplate, and diadem is as follows:

For on his long robe the whole cosmos (ὅλος ὁ κόσμος) was depicted, and the glories of the ancestors were engraved on the four rows of stones, and your majesty was on the diadem upon his head (18:24 NOAB).

The scene presented by the author calls to mind Ben Sira's account of the high priest Simon (*Sir* 50:5-7); both authors describe vividly the high priests performing their services in a heavenly atmosphere. According to the text of Wisdom, Aaron's garments display the cosmos, the glories of the patriarchs, and the name of God. The description of the priestly vestments refers to Exodus 28, 39 and Leviticus 8, and has also parallels with *Sir* 45:6-12, although the passages in the writings of Moses and Ben Sira do not indicate a cosmic reading of the garments. In Chrysostome Larcher's view, the author of Wisdom uses the terminology and conceptions that prevailed in his milieu, when the Judaeen priesthood was still a reality (1985: 1035).

It should be noted that the author uses the expression 'ἐπὶ ποδήρου ἐνδύματος' for the full-length robe, which may include the long white linen tunic that reached the feet, the cloak, the ephod that was woven with gold, hyacinth, purple, and scarlet fibres, and fine twisted linen. The ephod was fastened with a decorative waistband, which was tied around the high priest (Exod 28:6-14; 29:5; Lev 8:7). According to the author, the high priest's attire represented 'the whole cosmos (ὅλος ὁ κόσμος)'. For Winston, in this excerpt, the author of Wisdom alludes to the idea of equating temples with the cosmos. This conception was notably widespread among Cynic and Stoic philosophers of the first century CE (1979: 321). Thus, for example, we see the Stoic Seneca equating the universe with a temple:

²³ Philip Church suggests that holy Tent mentioned in the text is the created universe. Thus, the cult site mirrors the cosmos (2017: 56-59).

The whole world is the temple of the gods (*totum mundum deorum esse immortalium templum*), and, indeed, the only one worthy of their majesty and grandeur, and yet that there is a distinction between things sacred and profane; that not all things which it is lawful to do under the open sky and in the sight of the stars are lawful to do in the nook to which has been assigned the name of a sanctuary (*Ben. 7.7.3* [Basore, LCL]).²⁴

Despite the reading of Aaron's garment as a symbol of the cosmos, no further information is given about the cosmic elements present in any item of clothing. The brief mention of the high priest's vestment, without specifying how the whole universe was depicted in the robe, may indicate that the author was relying on exegesis of Judaeon predecessors, whose compositions have been lost or survived only in fragments (Larcher 1985: 1037).

Wisdom of Solomon also affirms that 'the glories of the ancestors' (πατέρων δόξαι) were carved 'on the four rows of stones' (ἐπὶ τετραστίχου λίθων γλυφῆς). Certainly, the author refers to the biblical picture of the priestly breastplate bearing the names of the twelve patriarchs (Exod 28:21). In contrast to the garment, no cosmic reading is given to the device; instead, the author is concerned only with the glorious deeds of the patriarchs. Lastly, he mentions that 'the majesty (μεγαλωσύνη)' was on the 'diadem (διαδήματος)' upon Aaron's head. Wisdom may be alluding to the gold plate attached to the high priest's turban, on which had been engraved 'holy to the Lord' (Exod 28:36). Furthermore, the use of the word διάδημα by the author may be related to his interest in associating the high priest with a sovereign, since the word was used at the time for royal insignia.²⁵ On the whole, it seems that Wisdom portrays Aaron not only as a mere priest of the people of Israel, but also as an intercessor for all humanity, since his long robe is full of cosmic symbolism (Larcher 1985: 1040; see also Borgen 2003: 120-121).

The reading of the high priest's vestment as a symbol of the cosmos fits with the philosophical outlook that permeates the work. Even though the composition is written in a biblical style, the author employs a number of Graeco-Roman philosophical conceptions. Wisdom does not mention any Graeco-Roman philosopher, but it is possible to identify Platonic and Stoic ideas. As John J. Collins argues, 'the world view of the Wisdom of Solomon is based on the belief that human destiny, history, and eschatology are all bound up with the structure of the universe' (1977: 128). Following Stoic concepts, Wisdom shows us that the ideal is to conduct life in harmony with the 'cosmic principle of order and purpose that is immanent in the universe' (Chesnutt 2003: 242). Moreover, 'God is encountered through the cosmos, by wisdom. History

²⁴ In the fourth epistle of Pseudo-Heraclitus, the author talks of the 'whole world' as 'the temple of God, 'decorated with animals, plants, and stars (ὁ κόσμος αὐτῷ ναὸς ἐστὶ, ζῷς καὶ φυτοῖς καὶ ἄστροις πεποικιλμένος)' (Attridge 1976: 59). See also Cic. *Rep.* 6.15; Plut. *Mor.* 477c-d; Macrobius. *In Somn.* 1.14.1-2. For other sources cited in Winston 1979: 321.

²⁵ For the association of the high priest with kingship in post-exilic times, see De Vaux 1961: 400-403.

illustrates the structure of the universe, and eschatology is also built in to that structure. The human way to salvation is by understanding the structure of the universe and adapting to it in righteousness' (Collins 1977: 128).²⁶

Throughout the work, it is possible to see that the author elaborates parts of his narrative by appropriating Graeco-Roman ideas of the physical world. Grabbe believes that for the thinker, 'to be wise meant knowing about the natural world, the mysteries of plants and animals, the movements of the heavens, and the workings of the cosmos' (1997: 64-65). He points out, for instance, the apparent scheme developed in Wisdom of Solomon in which the four elements are related to the plagues in Egypt in chapters 16-18: water (16:1-4), earth (16:5-14), fire (16:15-20), and air (17:1-18:4). This association of a certain element with the habitat of particular creatures has a Platonic origin (1997: 42-43; Plato *Ti.* 39e; Cicero *Nat. D.* 2.42).²⁷

Although the author of Wisdom does not present a broad outlook on the cosmic symbolism of the Temple, then, his brief mention of the high priest as the mediator between God and the people and the maintainer of the order of the world, as depicted in Aaron's garment, shows us that the author is somehow familiar with the Graeco-Roman tradition of equating cult sites and everything inside them with the cosmos. Moreover, throughout the composition, it is possible to identify a number of Graeco-Roman philosophical conceptions related to the cosmos. The author is not alone in this endeavour. In the same milieu, Philo of Alexandria stands out for his intricate compositions explaining the Tent, contents, and associated rituals as symbols of the cosmos.

3.2.4 Philo of Alexandria

Among the Judaeans authors discussed so far, Philo of Alexandria is by far the most exceptional thinker to present an elaborated and complete reading of the Tent/Temple as the image of the cosmos. Eusebius says that 'Philo became known to a great many, not only among our own, but also among those who came from abroad, as a man most distinguished for his erudition' (*Hist. eccl.* 2.4.2 [Deferrari]). Philo appears to have enjoyed a good reputation since Late Antiquity, mainly among Christian authors. Often taken to be a philosopher, Philo employs a number of Platonic, Stoic, and Pythagorean conceptions in the composition of his works. This approach is clearly seen in the allusion he makes in his expansive corpus to the arrangement of the Tent/Temple, its contents, priests, and rituals performed within it, as the embodiment of the

²⁶ In this regard see, for instance, Wis 1:7-8; 7:15-30.

²⁷ For more examples on the appropriation of Graeco-Roman philosophical concepts, see Schürer-Vermes 1986: 571-772; Clifford 1998: 137-138; Sterling 2017: 211.

universe. Since Philo refers to the cult site in numerous passages of his oeuvre, we shall highlight only the main aspects of his cosmic reading for the sake of brevity.

Philo of Alexandria was born in one of the most distinguished and influential Judaeon families of Alexandria. The thinker presents little information about himself; most of the details of his life are found in a brief mention by Josephus and scattered among church fathers. The dates of his birth and his death are unknown; however, it is possible to infer from the events mentioned in his works that he lived from ca. 20 BCE to 50 CE. The only datable episode of Philo's life is his reference to leading an ambassadorial mission to Caligula in 39-40 CE. In his work on the Judaeon delegation from Alexandria to Rome, he describes himself as an aged man with grey hair (*Legat.* 1). Josephus also comments on the Judaeon embassy from Alexandria and refers to Philo with the following words: 'Philo, who stood at the head of the delegation of the Judaeans, a man held in the highest honour, brother of Alexander the alabarch and no novice in philosophy, was prepared to proceed with the defence against these accusations' (*Ant.* 18.259 [Feldman, LCL, modified]).

Although Philo does not refer to his family, Josephus says that his brother Alexander Lysimachus occupied the post of alabarch, a tax administrator, and had 'surpassed all his fellow citizens both in ancestry and in wealth' (*Ant.* 20.100; see also 18.159-160). His family was very influential among the Judaeon elite and also with the imperial family in Rome. The youngest of Alexander's sons, Marcus Julius Alexander, married Berenice, daughter of Herod Agrippa I (*Ant.* 19.276). Alexander's other son, more frequently mentioned by Josephus, is Tiberius Julius Alexander, who was procurator of Judaea (ca. 46-48 CE) and prefect of Egypt (ca. 66-70) (*Ant.* 20.100; *J.W.* 2.309). He is the only member of the family mentioned by Josephus who did not persevere in the ancestral customs of the Judaeans (*Ant.* 20.100).

As a member of a wealthy family, Philo seems to have received general instruction and attended a gymnasium, like other members of the Graeco-Roman elite. In *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*, Philo states that before being 'excited by the stimulus of philosophy', he studied in his early youth grammar, geometry, and music, which were part of the general teaching (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία) and essential for the study of philosophy (74-76; see also *Spec.* 2.130; *Prov.* 2.44-46; Hadas-Lebel 2012: 55-56). Since Philo probably received his education in a gymnasium, he presumably held the rights of Alexandrian citizenship. Certainly, Philo was active in Alexandrian cultural life, attending sporting events and theatres (Hadas-Lebel 2012: 56; *Congr.* 64). He was also familiar with the traditions of his compatriots in Alexandria. Besides the Greek education, Philo was trained in the Scriptures from his 'earliest years under divinely gifted men' (*Spec.* 1.314). In Barclay's view, Philo navigates easily between the Graeco-Roman and Judaeon

world, ‘although in some respects he feels superior to his non-Jewish friends, the social and intellectual achievements of Alexandria are not alien to him. There is here no hint of a tension between “Greek” and “Jewish” values, no fundamental struggle to reconcile the Jew and the Greek within him’ (1996: 161).²⁸

As is evident from the words of Philo, he had a deep and lasting interest in Graeco-Roman philosophy. For Philo, philosophy is associated with the contemplation of the universe; it ‘was showered down by heaven and received by the human mind, but the guide which brought the two together was sight, for sight was the first to discern the high roads which lead to the upper air.’ Philosophy is also considered ‘the fountain of good things, all that are truly good,’ and everyone who ‘draws from that spring deserves praise’ (*Spec.* 3.185 [Colson, LCL]). There is no simple way to identify the routes followed by Philo for his Graeco-Roman philosophical background. However, judging from his writings, it is possible to deduce he has attended public lectures and theatres, which were ‘filled with philosophers discoursing at length’ (*Congr.* 64). Moreover, Philo was an enthusiastic reader of philosophical writings, which is evident from the abundance of Graeco-Roman philosophers mentioned by him.²⁹ According to Mireille Hadas-Lebel, he might have had their works in his private library, or had access via the library belonging to the Mouseion (2012: 56-57).

Given that Philo was raised in a gentile culture, it is not surprising that Graeco-Roman philosophical conceptions permeate his compositions. However, it is challenging to fit Philo into a specific tradition of philosophical thought.³⁰ Since Late Antiquity, there has been an intense debate over which philosophical group Philo belonged to. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, calls him ‘the Pythagorean Philo’ (ὁ Πυθαγόρειος Φίλων; *Strom.* 1.72.4; 2.100.3).³¹ By contrast, Jerome says that the Greeks considered him a Platonic philosopher, and there was even a saying: ‘Either Plato Philonizes, or Philo Platonizes’ (Ἡ Πλάτων φιλωνίζει ἢ Φίλων πλατωνίζει; *De vir. ill.* 11.7; see also Nikiprowetzky 1977: 13). His essay *Every Good Person is Free* is classically Stoic in its argument.

In his works, Philo dialogues with different Graeco-Roman philosophical traditions existing at the time, absorbing ‘what he considered to be the best from each tradition and incorporated it into his own thought. This means that he did not treat all philosophical traditions as equals, but

²⁸ For additional information on Philo’s life, see Barclay 1996: 158-163; Hadas-Lebel 2012: 27-58; Daniélou 2014: 1-24; Niehoff 2018.

²⁹ The philosophers mentioned by Philo in his writings can be traced from the pre-Socratics to these ones of his own time. For the list with the names pointed out in Philo’s works, see Wolfson 1962: 93-94.

³⁰ Regarding this issue, see Runia 1990.

³¹ For the reasons that lead Clement perceives Philo as a Pythagorean, see Runia 1995: 1-22.

measured them against his own understanding of reality and incorporated them appropriately' (Sterling 2014: 137). Although Philo appears to debate with all of them, his eclectic thought is influenced more by Platonic, Stoic, and Pythagorean concepts. In fact, Philo demonstrates a deep respect for Plato, whose 'sacred authority' (τὸν ἱερώτατον Πλάτωνα) he evokes (*Prob.* 13); furthermore, the thinker nominates the Stoic quartet of philosophers Parmenides, Euripides, Zeno, and Cleanthes as 'divine men', and writes that they formed a 'sacred society' (*Prov.* 2.48; *Aëtius* 2.4).³² This eclecticism in Philo's thought reflects the period to which he belongs: a period characterised by the complexity in establishing borders among the main traditions of philosophical thought.³³

Although the Graeco-Roman philosophical influence in Philo's work has been much discussed, some scholars regard him not as a philosopher, but primarily as an exegete of Moses' writings, or as he calls it, 'ancestral philosophy (ἡ πατριος φιλοσοφία)' (*Somn.* 2.127). Philo's originality lies in the combination of the philosophical thought with the Judaeian presuppositions and biblical texts (Schürer-Vermes 1987: 800). Peder Borgen explains that, as an exegete, Philo employs methods of exegesis which already existed in earlier Judaeian literature, and which had similarities with methods of interpretation in the Graeco-Roman context (2003: 125). Moreover, the thinker continues to explore the method, already noted in Aristobulus and the Wisdom of Solomon, of interpreting the Mosaic laws and Judaeian existence by means of Graeco-Roman concepts. For all of them, 'the authentic philosophy was formulated by Moses, and Greek philosophy contained elements of this true philosophy and was in some points derived from the teachings of Moses' (2003: 114).³⁴

Because of the nature and extent of Philo's works, they are usually grouped in the *Allegorical Commentary*, the *Exposition of the Law*, *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus*, *Philosophical Writings*, and *Historical Writings*, which were addressed primarily for well-educated Judaeians.³⁵ Most of the passages concerning the reading of the Tent/Temple as a symbol of the cosmos are found in the *Exposition of the Law*, *Allegorical Commentary*, and into a lesser extent in *Questions and Answers on Exodus*. According to Maren Niehoff, 'in the Allegorical Commentary Philo responds to highly critical Jewish colleagues in Alexandria and develops his

³² See also Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 2.4.2-3; Schürer-Vermes 1987: 871-872.

³³ For examples of this eclecticism in Philo's time, see Daniélou 2014: 37-42.

³⁴ For Philo's reference to the Mosaic laws in Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition, see *Her.* 214; *QG* 3.5, 16; 4.152, 167; *Legat.* 1.108; *Spec.* 4.60-61;

³⁵ A means possibly used by Philo for disseminating his works is the synagogue. Valentin Nikiprowetzky explains that Philo's compositions present in their structure a Judaeian form of literary exposition, whose origin should be sought in the Palestinian tradition of public reading of the pericope of scripture in the synagogue on Shabbat. Acclimatised in Alexandria's synagogues, Philo may have used this custom for his sermons and homilies on the Pentateuch (1977: 42; see also Perrot 1984: 109-132). For more on Philo's audience, see Runia 1990: II.192; Cohen 2007: 21-23.

own, more conservative approach, which combines literal scholarship with extended allegory'. *Questions and Answers* 'appeals to less sophisticated readers, who may have been Philo's own students.' By contrast, the *Exposition of the Law* appears to be a creation of the thinker's later life. The compositions do not follow 'Alexandrian conventions of a running commentary and are generally more removed from the concerns of textual scholarship.' One must also consider 'Philo's use of exegesis in a world where Rome and non-Jewish readers played an increasingly important role' (2011: 7-8; see also Borgen 2014: 75-77, 87-90).³⁶

For Philo, the Temple is a microcosm, and everything within resembles the universe. The entire physical structure of the cult site, contents, and services performed by the priests work in harmony with the universal laws. The Temple is a replica of 'the highest, and in the truest sense the holy, temple of God' (τὸ μὲν ἀνωτάτω καὶ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἱερὸν θεοῦ), that is, 'the whole universe' (τὸν σύμπαντα...κόσμον), which has for its 'sanctuary the most sacred part of all existence, even heaven, for its votive ornaments the stars, for its priests the angels who are servitors to His powers' (*Spec.* 1.66 [Colson, LCL]).³⁷ As we have already seen in *Wisdom of Solomon*, Philo is appropriating Stoic and Cynic ideas regarding the universe as the temple of God.³⁸ According to Jutta Leonhardt, while Philo does not support the idea of the worship of the cosmos, 'he uses motifs from the cosmic worship of the philosophers and the view of the world as a Temple to express the universal relevance of the Jewish Temple' (2001: 284-285).

When describing the Tent curtains, which were ten in number and consisted of twisted linen woven with hyacinth, purple, and scarlet yarn (Exod 26:1), Philo relates them to Platonic ideas on the structure of the cosmos, when arguing that the number of materials used for weaving the work is 'equal in number to the elements – earth, water, air, fire – out of which the world was made' (*Mos.* 2.88; see also Plato *Ti.* 31b).

The linen is a symbol of earth (σύμβολον δὲ γῆς μὲν ἢ βύσσοις), since it grows out of earth; the hyacinth of air (ἄερος δὲ ὁ ὑάκινθος), which is naturally black; the purple of water (ὑδατος δὲ ἡ πορφύρα), since the means by which the dye is produced, the shell-fish which bears the same name, comes from the sea; and the scarlet of fire (πυρὸς δὲ τὸ κόκκινον), since it closely resembles flame (*Congr.* 117 [Colson, LCL, modified]; see also *QE* 2.86).

Philo tells us that the veil that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Exod 26:30-34) 'indicates the changeable parts of the world which are sublunary and undergo changes of

³⁶ For a different point of view on the nature and readers of Philo's works, see Nikiprowetzky 1977: 202.

³⁷ In Philo's view, 'the cosmos signifies the whole system of heaven and the stars including the earth and the plants and animals thereon' (*Aet.* 4 [Colson, LCL]; see also Daniélou 2014: 41-42).

³⁸ Concerning the appropriation of Stoic ideas by Philo in the passage aforementioned, see Mbuvi 2007: 62-64.

direction, and the heavenly (region) which is without transient events and is unchanging. And (it shows) how they are set off and separated from one another, for the ethereal and airy substance is, as it were, a covering'. The veil is also woven with the same material and colour as the other curtains, and for Philo, they are 'tokens and symbols of the four elements' (*QE* 2.91-92 [Marcus, LCL]).

The ark, a gold-covered wooden chest located in the Holy of Holies (Exod 25:10-22), is also full of cosmic symbolism. According to Philo, the gold 'wreathed wave' moulding around the ark indicates the heavenly bodies:

For they circle and roll around, some in the same way as the whole heaven, and others with a particular motion which has been assigned to them as peculiarly their own. For in the same way as a rotating axle does not change its position and, as it goes around by itself, does not move away, so also does the heaven revolve without change of place (*QE* 2.55 [Marcus, LCL]).

The four gold rings fastened to the four corners of the ark, two on each side, represent the air, aether, earth, and water. The two sides also may represent the equinoxes, 'of which the four seasons are divisions. There are two warm and fair (seasons), summer and autumn; and two are cold, winter and spring' (*QE* 2.56 [Marcus, LCL]). Philo also writes that 'some hold that' the two golden cherubim placed in a golden lid above the ark, 'set facing each other, they are symbols of the hemispheres (σύμβολα τῶν ἡμισφαιρίων), one above the earth and one under it, for the whole heaven has wings (πτηνὸν γὰρ ὁ σύμπαξ οὐρανός)' (*Mos.* 2.98 [Colson, LCL, modified]).³⁹

The altar of incense, located before the veil in the Holy Place (Exod 30:1-9), indicates the four elements: 'its wood is of earth, the incense offered on it of water, since it is first melted and then resolved into drops, while the perfume is of air and the part which is ignited of fire' (*Her.* 226 [Colson, LCL]). The incense prepared on the altar also denotes the four elements. For Philo, the mixture of 'oil drop of cinnamon, cloves and galbanum of sweetening and clear gum of frankincense (στακτὴν, ὄνυχα καὶ χαλβάνην ἡδυσμοῦ καὶ λίβανον διαφανῆ)' that compose incense are a 'symbol of the elements (σύμβολα τῶν στοιχείων)':

First, he said 'take to thyself sweet spices, oil drop of cinnamon, cloves, both these with the asyndeton, symbols of the heavy substances earth and water' (τῶν βάρους ἐχόντων, ὕδατος τε καὶ γῆς, σύμβολα). Then he makes a fresh beginning using the conjunction, "and galbanum of sweetness and clear gum of

³⁹ The view held by other exegetes on the cosmic symbolism of the Tent, such as those referenced by Philo in the excerpt, shows us that he was indebted to important earlier Judean thinkers. The question about Philo's predecessors has caused much debate among modern scholars. The problem relies somehow on the absence of names in Philo's works. We can only say for sure that his view is part of a long tradition of interpreting the Tent/Temple as the embodiment of the cosmos, and which was very influent among Judean writers in Alexandria. For further discussion on Philo's predecessors, see Runia 1986: 410; 1990: 1.13-14; Cohen 2007: 13-14.

frankincense”, and these two, which indicate the light elements, air and fire (τῶν κούφων, ἀέρος καὶ πυρός, [τὰ] σημεῖα) (*Her.* 197-198 [Colson, LCL]).

The golden seven-branched lampstand situated in the Holy Place (*Exod* 25:31-39) is ‘a copy of the march of the choir of the seven planets’ (τῶν ἐπτὰ πλανήτων χορείας μίμημά; *Her.* 221). In the same composition, he says that ‘the Craftsman (ὁ τεχνίτης), wishing that we should possess a copy of the archetypal celestial sphere with its seven lights (...ἀρχετύπου τῆς κατ’ οὐρανὸν σφαίρας ἐπταφειγούς μίμημα), commanded this splendid work, the lampstand’ (*Her.* 225 [Colson, LCL, modified]). Placed at the south of the Holy Place, Philo explains that the sacred lampstand (ἡ ἱερὰ λυχνία) figures ‘the movements of the luminaries above; for the sun and the moon and the others run their courses in the south far away from the north’ (*Mos.* 2.102 [Colson, LCL]; see also *QE* 2.78-79).

Although Philo is familiar with the dispute among astronomers on the order of the planets, he takes sides with these ones who ‘assign the middle place to the sun and hold that there are three above him and the same number below him’ (*Her.* 224 [Colson, LCL]). In this manner, the sun holds the central place in the lampstand, and the six branches that extend from the sides of it – three on one side and three on the other – represent the planets above (Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars) and below the sun (Mercury, Venus, and the Moon). Referring to the Pythagorean theory of the harmony of spheres, Philo shows that the planets represented are tuned to ‘harmony as an instrument of music truly divine (ἁρμοζόμενος τὸ μουσικὸν καὶ θεῖον ὡς ἀληθῶς ὄργανον)’ (*Mos.* 2.103; see also *QE* 2.75; *Iambl. VP* 15.65).⁴⁰

Not only are the lamps interpreted as heavenly bodies, but the ornaments on the lampstand shaped like flowers with buds and blossoms are ‘the form and nature of the zodiac signs’, while the four cup-shaped flowers on the shaft represent ‘the seasons of the year, which are four’ (*QE* 2.76-77). According to *Exodus* 27:21, the lamps on the lampstand should be kept burning from evening to morning before God. The instruction is due because ‘the lamps are symbols of the light-bearing stars’ (*QE* 2.104 [Marcus, LCL]; see also *Spec.* 1.296).

The table of showbread, made of wood and covered in gold (*Exod* 25:23-30), is associated with the winds. Since it is set at the north side of the Holy Place, Philo writes that it is related to the north winds (ὁ βορέας), which ‘provide us with food, and food comes from heaven and earth, the one sending rain, the other bringing the seeds to their fullness when watered by the showers.’⁴¹

⁴⁰ For the relevance of the number seven in the writings of Philo, see *Opif.* 89-128; Moehring 1995: 167-168; Runia 2001: 260-266; Hadas-Lebel 2012: 260-266.

⁴¹ It seems that the association of north winds (ὁ βορέας) with food (ἡ βορέα) was well known in the Graeco-Roman period. See *Clem. Al. Strom.* 5.35.3; *Porph. De antr. nymph.* 28.

The exegete also adds that ‘in a line with the table are set the symbols of heaven and earth (οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς...τὰ σύμβολα) ...heaven being signified by the lampstand, earth and its parts, from which rise the vapours, by what is appropriately called the censer’ (*Mos.* 2.104-105 [Colson, LCL, modified]). The twelve loaves on this table correspond to the numbers of the months of the year, and the arrangement in two piles with six loaves in each pile represent the two equinoxes, in spring and autumn:

At the spring equinox (ἱαρινῇ) all the seed crops come to their fullness just when the trees begin to produce their fruit, and at the autumn equinox (μετοπωρινῇ) that same fruit is brought to maturity and it is the season when the sowing begins again. Thus, nature running its age long round alternates its gifts to the human race, symbolised by the two sets of six loaves exposed upon the table (*Spec.* 1.172 [Colson, LCL]).

Philo identifies the sacrifices performed in the courtyard of the Tent on the first of every month, or new moon, with lunar motion. According to Numbers 28:11-15, ten animals should be sacrificed: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs. The exegete explains that ‘the month in which the moon fulfils its cycle is a complete or perfect whole’. As a result, the lawgiver ‘considered that the number of animals should be perfect’. Imbued with Pythagorean ideas, Philo explains that ‘ten is a perfect number (ἡ δεκάς...παντελὴς ἀριθμός)’. The animals immolated are associated with the lunar phases as follows: the two young bulls symbolise two phases, the waning and waxing; the one ram symbolises the one law or principle that rules the phases of the moon; and the seven lambs symbolise the complete changes of the moon cycle, the phases of which last around seven days each (*Spec.* 1.177-178).

Philo’s portrayal of the high priest’s attire is undoubtedly the most distinctive section in his entire exegesis on the Tent/Temple. His considerable knowledge of Graeco-Roman cosmology is demonstrated in the richness of details he gives in describing the vestments. Agreeing with Wisdom of Solomon, Philo asserts that the high priest’s garments are ‘an imitation of the whole heaven’ (τοῦ παντός ἀντίμιμον...οὐρανοῦ; *Somn.* 1.215; see also *Spec.* 1.84).⁴² He states that to human eyes, the priestly clothing ‘presents a most amazing appearance transcending any woven work that we possess in variety and costliness, to the mind the philosophical conceptions which its parts suggest (νόησιν τὴν περὶ τῶν αὐτῆς μερῶν φιλόσοφον)’ (*Spec.* 1.95 [Colson, LCL]).

⁴² Besides the reading of the high priest’s vestment as the whole heaven, pseudo-Solomon and Philo present a number of similarities in themes discussed, as well as linguistic parallels. Despite the correspondence of contents in both authors, there is still considerable controversy surrounding the dependence of the one on the other. Much of the current debate revolves around the date of composition of Wisdom. For further details on the similarities in pseudo-Solomon and Philo’s works, see Winston 1979: 59-63.

When the high priest dresses himself with the distinctive vestment, the exegete affirms that 'he arrays himself in earth and air and water and fire and all that comes forth from those (γῆν γὰρ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ ἀέρα καὶ πῦρ καὶ τὰ ἐκ τούτων ἐπαμπίσχεται)' (*Fug.* 110). In wearing a robe that represents the world, he maintains that the first responsibility of the high priest is 'to carry the pattern enshrined in his heart, and so be in a sense transformed from a man into the nature of the world (τοῦ κόσμου φύσιν) ...the high priest himself becomes a microcosm (βραχὺς κόσμος)' (*Mos.* 2.135 [Colson, LCL, modified]).⁴³ The influence of Stoic ideas on the conception of the high priest as a microcosm are evident here.

Each part of the high priest's garment is 'a typical representation of the cosmos and its particular parts (ἀπεικόνισμα καὶ μίμημα τοῦ κόσμου, τὰ δὲ μέρη τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον μερῶν).' Thus, the golden plate attached to the high priest's turban and engraved with four letters are 'symbols of the first numbers, one, two, three and four; since the geometrical categories under which all things fall, point, line, superficies, solid, are all embraced in four.' The symbols also recall musical harmony, with 'the fourth, fifth, octave and double octave intervals, where the ratios are respectively four to three, three to two, two to one and four to one' (*Mos.* 2.115 [Colson, LCL]). Once again, Pythagorean ideas are perceptible in the interpretation of the turban, mainly the application of arithmology, which consisted in 'the use of the symbolism of numbers derived from arithmetic in order to demonstrate abstract ideas relating to the universe created by God, or numbers imbued with religious import' (Joost-Gaugier 2006: 102). In the passage shown from Philo, it is noted that the thinker shows Pythagorean principles of universal harmony by presenting three of the four components: arithmetic, geometry, and music, lacking only astronomy.⁴⁴

The hyacinth gown is the 'image of the air, for the air is naturally black, and so to speak a robe reaching to the feet, since it stretches down from the region below the moon to the ends of the earth, and spreads out everywhere'. The pomegranates, flowers, and bells, at the extremities of the long robe, are symbols of earth and water, which occupy 'the lowest place in the universe'. In this manner, the flowers indicate the earth, and the pomegranates represent the water (*Mos.* 2.117-120 [Colson, LCL]; see also *Spec.* 1.93). Moreover, the instruction given in Exodus 28:34 for the alternation of the accessories around the hem are an indication of 'the harmony and

⁴³ For objects as microcosms in Graeco-Roman literature, see Coulter 1976: 100-101.

⁴⁴ According to pseudo-Iamblichus, 'the tetrad comprehends the principle of soul, as well as that of corporeality; for they say that a living creature is ensouled in the same way that the whole universe is arranged, according to harmony.' The perfect harmony appears to exist in three harmonies: the fourth, the fifth, and the octave. 'Once there are the first four numbers encompass in accordance with musical principles...If the universe is composed out of souls and body in the number 4, then is also true that all concords are perfected by it' (*Theologumena arithmeticae* 30 [Waterfield]).

community of the elements. For if there had not been produced in the world the harmonious blending into a symphony of antiphonal voices as if of a choir sounding as one, it would not have received its full perfection' (*QE* 2.120 [Marcus, LCL]).

In Philo's view, the ephod is 'the symbol of heaven' (οὐρανοῦ σύμβολον). The two round emeralds fastened in the shoulder pieces of the ephod indicate 'the two celestial hemispheres' (τῶν ἡμισφαιρίων ἑκάτερον). 'For, just as the stones are equal to each other, so is the hemisphere above to that below the earth.' Moreover, each stone has engravings of six names of the sons of Israel, totalising twelve names, which Philo affirms are also the zodiacal signs, 'since each of the hemispheres also divides the zodiac into two, and appropriates six of the signs' (*Mos.* 2.122-123; see also *QE* 2.109). The breastplate is in 'imitation and representation of the heavenly bodies that give light in the firmament of heaven (οὐρανὸν φωσφόρων ἄστρον ἀπεικόνισμα καὶ μίμημα)' (*Somn.* 1.214). The twelve precious stones, arranged in four rows of three, model the zodiac. With different colours and origins, the twelve stones are related to the signs of the zodiac, since it 'also produces its own particular colouring in the air and earth and water in their phases, and also in the different kinds of animals and plants.' The arrangement in four rows also indicates the four seasons, as the zodiac circle is partitioned in four parts and 'constitutes by three signs in each case the seasons of the year – spring, summer, autumn, winter – those four, the transition in each of which is determined by three signs and made known to us by the revolutions of the sun, according to a mathematical law, unshaken, immutable and truly divine' (*Mos.* 2.124, 126 [Colson, LCL]; see also *QE* 2.112-114).

Philo points out a significant reason for the portrayal of the high priest's attire as the image of the universe. From his perspective, the intention is that 'the universe may join with man in the holy rites and man with the universe' (*Somn.* 1.215; see also *Mos.* 2.133). When performing his service, the high priest intercedes not only on behalf of all of humanity, but equally for nature, represented by the four elements: 'For he holds the world to be, as in very truth it is, his country, and in its behalf, he is wont to propitiate the Ruler with supplication and intercession, beseeching Him to make His creature a partaker of His own kindly and merciful nature' (*Spec.* 1.97 [Colson, LCL]).

As is evident from the study of Philo's works, the author masterfully incorporates Graeco-Roman cosmological traditions into his interpretation of the biblical texts related to the Tent. His reading of the Tent as the structure of the universe represents an attempt to demonstrate the cosmic prerogatives of the Judaean god and the universal extension of his power. The reading of the cult site as an image of the cosmos is Philo's attempt to trace a parallel between the Law of

Moses and Graeco-Roman philosophy. The idea is to demonstrate that the Judaeen law is in harmony with the law by which the universe is controlled. His perception is that the same God who gave the law to Moses at Mount Sinai is also the one who created the world and with it the law of nature; therefore, the Tent/Temple and the services performed within it are in accordance with the law of the cosmos codified by Graeco-Roman thinkers (Nikiprowetzky 1977: 131, 201).

3.2.5 Rabbinic Literature

The tradition of reading the Jerusalem Temple as a symbol of the cosmos persisted even after its final destruction by the Romans in 70 CE. Rabbinic writings of Late Antiquity and the medieval period give a detailed account of the cosmological meaning of the structure of the cult site, its contents, and the associated priestly robe. Although we cannot say for sure whether the authors of those accounts drew on the Judaeen writers above mentioned, what is clear from those descriptions is the relevance of the Temple as a centre of worship of an omnipotent God whose power extends over the whole universe. God's majesty and his cosmic prerogatives are displayed in the splendour of the Temple's precincts.

In the *Midrash Tadshe*, a work traditionally ascribed to the second-century sage Rabbi Pinhas ben Ya'ir, the Temple and its prototype the Tent are regarded as representative of the cosmos. The actual date and provenance of the writing are still matters of debate; it is, however, generally held to be medieval, dated to the eleventh century and reflecting cosmological traditions of the Jerusalem Temple in the Graeco-Roman period (Klawans 2006: 125-126). According to the text, the Tent was made to resemble the created world. The Holy of Holies is understood as the earth; the eleven curtains correspond to heaven; and the Tent's courtyard represents the sea. The table of showbread indicates the earth and the arrangement of the twelve loaves of bread in two rows of six signifies the months of summer and winter.

While the large basin of the cult site represents the sea, the lampstand corresponds to the lights of heaven. As to the Temple, the pillars Jachin and Boaz symbolise respectively the moon and the sun: 'Jachin corresponding to [the moon as it is written], "It shall be established forever as the moon", for it is the moon which establishes the feasts for Israel, as it is written, "He appointed the moon for seasons." And Boaz corresponds to the sun which comes out in power and in strength, as it is written, "it [the sun] rejoices as a strong man to run the course"'. The foursquare altar of sacrifices corresponded to the four cardinal points (Patai 1947: 108-109, 116).

Additionally, Midrash Numbers Rabbah 13.19 mentions that ‘the Court surrounds the Temple just as the sea surrounds the world’. *B. Sukkah* 51b reports that the Herodian Temple was built of white and blue marble and alabaster and when Herod wanted to overlay the wall with gold, the sages said: ‘Let it be, it is more beautiful so, for it looks like the waves of the sea’. The Midrash Psalms *Shocheh Tov* records an explanation of the Temple’s furnishings by rabbi Yehuda Bar Shalom, a fourth-century sage; the lampstand of pure gold light represented the lights in the firmament, the winged Cherubs ‘the fowl that flies in the firmament of heaven’, and the animal sacrifices the living creatures (Patai 1947: 107-108).

3.3 Summary

This investigation has shown that the roots for reading the Temple of Jerusalem, its contents, personnel, and the rituals that took place there as the embodiment of the universe – as understood by some of the Graeco-Roman Judaeen writers analysed here – appear to be correlated with the development of philosophical cosmology. Although it may be suggested that the Temple could have been comprehended as a microcosm before the Graeco-Roman period, as were some of the temples and cult sites existent in the Ancient Near East, the terminology used by the Judaeen thinkers to portray the Temple only makes good sense in light of the Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition.

We have noted two different traditions concerning the Temple were circulating among Judaeen writers in the Graeco-Roman period. While certain Judaeans understood the Temple as a miniature of the heavenly temple, others conceived the cult site as mirroring the structure of the universe, and it was precisely on this group that our investigation focused. With the exception of the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira and rabbinic literature, in which cases we are not certain of the specific influence of philosophical cosmology for their reading of the Temple-as-cosmos idea, the study confirms that Aristobulus, the author of Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo of Alexandria were familiar with the Graeco-Roman tradition of the identification of buildings, cult sites, and everything related to them as images of the universe. The idea behind that interpretation by the Judaeen authors was to prove that the writings of Moses were in harmony with Graeco-Roman philosophical conceptions. The correspondence was obvious because the tradition of philosophical thought held to be developed first by the Greeks was in reality derived from the teachings of Moses.

Chapter 4: The Jerusalem Temple as a Symbol of the Cosmos in Josephus

The Jerusalem Temple plays an essential role in the compositions of the Judaeen historian Flavius Josephus. Josephus emphasises that the Temple was once the exclusive place for the worship of a powerful God who manages the whole cosmos and human affairs. He also describes the cult site, its fame, the grandeur of rituals performed within, their worldwide scope, and the role of the Temple and its furnishings as a representation of the cosmos. Josephus' portrayal of the Jerusalem Temple, and its predecessor the Tent, in cosmic terms relates to his purpose of presenting the Judaeen god as the only deity who has power over the whole universe, which is consequently revealed in the arrangement of his only dwelling-place on earth. And the conformity of the cult site with Judaeen Law, in its turn, codifies the universal law created by God. Moreover, Josephus demonstrates for his Roman audience not only the national importance of the Temple for the Judaeans, but also its universal character. The present chapter explores the reasons why the Temple of Jerusalem and the Tent are depicted as a symbol of the cosmos in the two works by Josephus, *Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities*.

In *War*, Josephus turns the reader's attention to the Herodian Temple before its destruction by Romans hands 70 CE (5.184-247). In his second work, *Antiquities*, the historian gives lengthy commentaries on the successive historical forms of the cult site: the Tent (3.102-199), the Solomonic Temple (8.61-98), and the Herodian Temple (15.380-425). Among those accounts, the portrayal of the cult site as a model of the cosmos comes up only in *War* 5.207-237 and in *Antiquities* 3.108-187. Whereas the account in *War* comes in the context of the tragic fall of Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 CE, *Antiquities* connects the Tent with the giving of the Law by God to Moses.

4.1 The Temple in *Judaean War*

Formerly a native of Jerusalem, Josephus has a lot to say in his *Judaean War* about Jerusalem and its Temple in the period preceding the fall of the *polis* and cult site. As it was the place of his birth and education, and given his priestly ancestry, Josephus was particularly sensitive to the capture and destruction of this symbol of Judaeen culture (*J.W.* 1.3). The Temple occupies a central place in the events that lead to its destruction in 70 CE. Josephus repeatedly discusses the

relevance of the cult site for those who came to Jerusalem from around the world to offer sacrifices (4.262, 324). The Temple frequently appears in the context of its defilement by the rebels in the civil war and God's use of the Romans to purge with fire the pollution caused by the rebels' bloodshed (5.19; 6.109-110). The portrayal of the Temple as the symbol of the cosmos emerges in a lengthy excursus on Jerusalem before its siege by Titus in 70 (5.136-247). As we shall observe, the reading of the Temple, its personnel, and implements in cosmic terms is part of Josephus' effort to convince his Roman readership of God's universal power and greatness, and the primacy of the Jerusalem Temple as the place of the legitimate cult of God on earth.

The Jerusalem Temple appears already in the preface of *War*. Following the traditional framework of Graeco-Roman historical works, Josephus commences with mentioning of the Judaeo-Roman War (66 – 74 CE) as the greatest battle of his time, proceeding to the inadequacy of accounts currently in circulation and to his unique credentials to provide a truthful narrative of the event. He excuses himself for his personal feelings in the work and blames the tragic fall of Jerusalem and its Temple on 'the civil war (στάσις)' led by 'Judaeo tyrants (οἱ Ἰουδαίων τύραννοι)'. Josephus then writes that his composition includes, among other topics:

The arrangement of the temple and sanctuary (τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ τοῦ ναοῦ) with the precise measurement of all these [buildings] and the altar (τοῦ βωμοῦ); some national festivals, the seven purities (αἱ ἑπτὰ ἀγνεΐαι), the service of priests (τῶν ἱερέων λειτουργίας), the garment of the priests and high priest (τὰς ἐσθῆτας τῶν ἱερέων καὶ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως), and what sort was the holy place [of the sanctuary] (τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ ἅγιον)...in what manner the temple was set on fire, against Caesar's desire, and the number of sacred treasures rescued from the flame (1.9-10, 25-28).

The centrality of the Temple in *War* can be observed in the position of the cult site in both the opening and the conclusion of the narrative account (Mason 2017a: 99). At the beginning of Book 1, the Temple appears in the context of its capture and desecration by Antioch IV Epiphanes in 167 BCE. Josephus writes that the king sacked the Temple and interrupted the daily sacrifices for three years and six months. During this time, the high priest Onias escaped to Egypt and, under the protection of Ptolemy VI, constructed in Heliopolis 'a shrine similar (ναὸν...ὁμοῖον)' to the Jerusalem Temple (1.31-33). Josephus' readers do not learn more about that shrine until they get to the end of *War*, where the author writes about its closure by order of Vespasian in 73 CE. Josephus also states that Onias was not honest in his intentions: he wished to build a cult site that would rival the Jerusalem Temple and draw worshippers away from Jerusalem (7.420-432).¹

Indirectly, the Jerusalem Temple also appears in the middle of *War* in the figure of its prominent leaders, the former high priests Ananus and Jesus. Both chief priests had leading roles

¹ For a comprehensive study of the Temple of Onias, see Piotrkowski 2019.

during the civil war in Jerusalem and were killed by the Idumeans. Steve Mason has demonstrated that Josephus resorts to artificial literary frames, commonly found in ancient literature, to structure his works. In *War*'s case, the murder of Ananus and Jesus occurs in the centre of *War*'s middle book (4). That arrangement exhibits a concentric structure that places the description of Ananus' death by the Idumeans at the crux of *War*'s narrative (2008: 85; 2017a: 100).

For Josephus, the murder of Ananus and Jesus meant the defeat of Jerusalem and the collapse of the Judaeans commonwealth (4.318). Elsewhere, he notes that the killing of Ananus and Jesus by the Idumeans led to the end of reverence towards God, the eradication of the civic structure, and the arrival of chaos with the denial of the Laws (7.267). In this context, Josephus seems to show his readers that the high priest stands as the guarantor of order against chaos. Besides, the high priest carries out within the Temple rituals of wide-reaching importance. Josephus tells us that Ananus and Jesus 'had worn the sacred clothing (τὴν ἱερὰν ἐσθῆτα), leading the rituals of worldwide scope (τῆς κοσμουκῆς θρησκείας), and been revered by those from many parts of the inhabited world (τῆς οἰκουμένης)' (4.324).² In this way, the rituals performed within the Temple have a universal reach, which means that serious disturbance of the services, as with the killing of the chief priests, could culminate in the collapse of the order.³

While there is a good deal of information about the Temple in Jerusalem rebuilt by Herod in *War*, Josephus writes almost nothing about the pre-Herodian cult site. Details about this former Temple appear only in the context of the siege and entrance of Pompey into Jerusalem in 63 BCE. Josephus writes that Pompey's entry into the Temple was one of the greatest calamities (συμφοραῖς) that fell upon the Judaeans, given that that Roman commander entered 'the unseen holy place' (ἀόρατον ἅγιον), exposing to foreign eyes what should be hidden from view. Josephus also reports that Pompey, along with other fellows, put their feet in places allowed only to the high priest. Josephus writes nothing about the physical size and nature of that pre-Herodian Temple, but lists what the Romans saw in the sanctuary: 'the lampstand and lamps (λυχνίαν...καὶ λύχνου), the table (τράπεζαν), the bows and censers (σπονδεῖα καὶ θυμιατήρια) all of solid gold (ὁλόχρυσα)'.

² Considering that the Temple in Jerusalem was the central axis of that integration, Clemens Thoma explains that Josephus describes the Judaeans as a society that attempts, even when at war, to keep pure their cultic practice and effectively serve as guardians of the cult site. Thus, 'not only the Temple cult and the high priest reach into the realm of God but also the whole priesthood and the Jewish people, as far as it is obedient to the laws of the fathers.' This notion further underscores 'the understanding of the cosmic-transcendental dimension of the Jewish cult, of the high priesthood, and the people' (1989: 202-203). Josephus also seems to emulate a Roman tradition that perceives the universe as 'a theatre of civil war' that goes back to the early imperial period. Roman writers use Greek texts, such as Aratus' *Phaenomena* and Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, to explain order and 'the disintegration of order'. The idea of the cosmos on the point of collapse was frequently used as a metaphor for the depiction of chaos in Roman society (Gee 2013: 110, 260). Even in Josephus' time, the use of such metaphor still prevailed, as seen for example in Statius' *Thebaid*, which evokes the civil war in 69 and the rise to power of the Flavian family (Gee 2013: 110, 128, 260).

³ For other minor pre-war events that orbit around the Temple in Josephus' *War*, see McLaren 2016: 275.

According to him, Pompey touched none of these items, however, and after the occupation of the cult site, he gave orders to purify the area and resume the rituals (1.152-153).

Details about the Herodian Temple and events conducted there are distributed all over *War*. Josephus first introduces this Temple compound in the context of Herod's public building programme (1.401-425). He dates the renovation to the fifteenth year of Herod's reign (ca. 20 BCE),⁴ and writes that the extensive reconstruction of Temple was undertaken because of the king's piety (εὐσέβεια).⁵ According to Josephus, the rebuilding included new foundation-walls with the doubling of the surrounding area. The cost of the work was immeasurable and its grandeur unsurpassed. As indicative examples, Josephus mentions the grand porticoes around the Temple courts and Antonia fortress on the north side of the Temple (1.400-401).

Although Josephus refers to the massive renovation brought by Herod, he elsewhere makes it clear to his readers that the actual founder of the Temple was King Solomon (5.137, 185). At another point, he goes even further by stating that a temple existed before King David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made the city his capital. The cult site was built by a Canaanite chief whose name in the native language meant 'righteous king (βασιλεὺς δίκαιος)'.⁶ The indigenous ruler was not only 'the first to officiate as a priest of God (ιεράσατό τε τῷ θεῷ πρῶτος)', but also 'the first to build the temple (τὸ ἱερόν)'. Besides, Josephus reports that the ruler was the founder of Jerusalem, giving the city, 'previously called Solyma (Σόλυμα), the name of Hierosolyma (Ἱεροσόλυμα)' (*J.W.* 6.438; see also *Ant.* 1.180).

Josephus says that from the conquest of the city by King David to its destruction by Titus in 70, a period of over one thousand years passed. He also implicitly dates the Canaanite temple to a thousand years before David's conquest (6.440-441). When read in light of the Graeco-Roman historiographical tradition, Josephus' remarks evidence his attempt to demonstrate the antiquity of the Judean people and the cult site and make them respectable.⁷ Like other eastern historians, Josephus places the origin of the history and institutions of his people in a time preceding Greek and Roman history. In this way, he implicitly indicates that the Temple in Jerusalem precedes any

⁴ In *Antiquities* 15.380, Josephus says the eighteenth year of Herod's reign.

⁵ The patronage of cult sites as a demonstration of piety towards the gods constituted a noble virtue of Hellenistic rulers, which was adopted by Augustus and other Roman *principes*. See Jacobson 2007: 147-148.

⁶ Josephus likely refers to Melchizedek, whose name is also identified as 'king of righteousness (βασιλεὺς δικαιοσύνης)' in Hebrews 7:2. Cf. Gen 14.

⁷ Pausanias employs similar arguments when referring to the temple of Artemis in Ephesus. According to him, the reasons why the *poleis* worshipped Artemis of Ephesus and individuals honoured her above all the gods is because of the extreme antiquity of the temple, the size of the cult site that surpasses all buildings among men, and the reputation of Ephesus (4.31.8).

important cult site built by those peoples. Elsewhere he even writes that Jerusalem (and consequently the Temple) had as its founder God himself (7.376).⁸

In addition to the antiquity of the Temple, the centrality of the cult site is highlighted in *War* when Josephus refers to Jerusalem (fig. 4.1). He describes Jerusalem as ‘the holy *polis* (τὴν ἱερὰν πόλιν)’ (2.397; 4.241; 7.328, 379), a ‘splendid *polis* and celebrated by all men (λαμπρὰ τε πόλει καὶ παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις διαβοηθείῃ)’, ‘the great *polis* (ἡ μεγάλη πόλις)’, and ‘the mother-*polis* of the entire Judaeen people (τοῦ παντὸς Ἰουδαίων γένους μητρόπολις)’ (7.375).⁹ In the Greek world, μητρόπολις would refer to relations maintained by a central *polis* with members of the same ethnic group living elsewhere.¹⁰ Josephus suggests in *War* that Judaeen communities all around the inhabited world (*oikoumene*) expressed their affiliation with Jerusalem and its unique Judaeen Temple, by way of tributes offered to God and by making pilgrimages to Jerusalem for numerous festivals and occasions (4.324; 5.187). Along with other Judaeen authors, Josephus perceives the Temple in Jerusalem as an institution that unifies those of his people and that are spread throughout the *oikoumene*.

Douglas Edwards explains that ‘geography and the power of place proved important in presenting rhetorical...displays of power.’ The claim by the Judaeans ‘that their people were spread across the known world also confirmed their association with a powerful deity’ (1996: 150). Thus, Josephus’ assertions about the spreading of the Judaeen people over the inhabited world also confirmed their association with a mighty deity, given that God had a power that extended beyond the Judaeen territory.

Josephus writes that Jerusalem lies at the centre of Judaea, surrounded by ten districts (κληρουχίας). He also writes that sometimes the city has been described as ‘the navel of the [Judaea] territory (ὀμφαλὸν...τῆς χώρας)’. As the capital of Judaea, Jerusalem rises over the ten districts of the country, dominating those districts as ‘the head (ἡ κεφαλὴ)’ dominates the ‘body (σώματος)’ (3.52-54). Xenophon had said much the same about Athens: ‘one might reasonably think that the *polis* lies in the middle of Greece and indeed of the entire inhabited world (τῆς οἰκουμένης)’ (*Vect.* 1.6). Even though Josephus does not mention the Temple here, the use of the

⁸ Concerning the theme of the antiquity of peoples in Graeco-Roman historiography, see Sterling 2007: 231-243; Mason 2008: 93-130.

⁹ For the occurrence of μητρόπολις in *War*, see Mason 2008: 309, n. 2522.

¹⁰ Philo defines this relationship between Jerusalem and the Judaeen communities outside Judaea well: ‘While she, as I have said, is my fatherland (πατρίς) she is also the mother-*polis* (μητρόπολις) not of one territory Judaea but of most of the others in virtue of the colonies (τὰς ἀποικίας) sent out at divers times to the neighbouring lands... and the lands lying far apart’ (*Leg.* 281-282 [Colson, LCL, modified]). Elsewhere he writes that Jerusalem ‘is the holy *polis* (τὴν ἱερόπολιν) where the sacred temple (νεὸς ἅγιος) of the Most High God stands’, and for this reason, regarded by the Judaeans as their ‘mother-*polis* (μητρόπολιν)’ (*Flacc.* 46; see also van der Horst 2003: 140-144).

word ὀμφαλός may suggest a parallel between the Judaeen cult site and the temple of Apollo at Delphi, which was regarded by the Greeks as ‘the navel of the earth (τῆς γῆς ὀμφαλόν)’ (Strabo 9.3.6; cf. Eur. *Ion*, 5-7; Scott 2014).

Figure 4.1: Jerusalem and its Temple at the time of Herod the Great. © Leen Ritmeyer

Josephus does not refer to Jerusalem or Judaea as the centre of the *oikoumene*, but other Judaeen authors do so. For instance, the Greek text of Ezekiel calls the land of the Israelites ‘the navel of the earth (τὸν ὀμφαλὸν τῆς γῆς)’ (38:12). In *Jubilees* 8:19, Mount Zion, also identified at the time as the Temple Mount, is the navel of the world.¹¹ The *Sibylline Oracles*, in its turn, places the city in the middle of the earth (5.250).¹² Moreover, the location of Jerusalem seems to fit with the Platonic thesis of the ideal *polis* that mirrors the universe (*Leg.* 745b, 771b). Situated inland, the *polis* is the centre of the Judaeen territory. Although Josephus does not refer to the Platonic

¹¹ See Van Ruiten 2000: 326-327; Scott 2005: 161-209.

¹² For the Temple as a navel of the world in rabbinic literature, see Patai 1947: 85-86.

division of the *polis* in twelve parts, he seems to suggest that the Temple, towering above all Jerusalem, is the acropolis of the *polis*.

Josephus may also have wanted to model the role of Jerusalem on the position of Rome as the centre of the world.¹³ Vitruvius writes that ‘within the area of the entire earthly globe and all the regions at the centre of the cosmos, the Roman People has its territories’, and ‘the divine intelligence established the state of the Roman People as an outstanding and balanced region - so that it could take command over the earthly orb’ (*De arch.* 6.10-11 [Rowland]); see also Plin. *HN* 37.77.201-202). Graeco-Roman authors could thus imagine the geographical centrality of either Greece (Arist. *Pol.* 1237B) or Rome in the *oikoumene*. On the border of the Graeco-Roman and Parthian empire, and because of its strategic location at the crossroads of three continents, Jerusalem seems to have a more compelling claim to centrality in the inhabited earth, and this image would endure in Christian conceptions, as we see in the famous Hereford *mappa mundi*.¹⁴

The Jerusalem Temple is dealt with extensively in all major stages of Josephus’ account of the first Judaeo-Roman War, mostly in relation to themes of purity, pollution, and purification of the cult site.¹⁵ The point of departure for this theme may be Josephus’ assertions on the beginnings of the conflict in Book 2. There, he reports that some young priests in an act of unprecedented irresponsibility, induced those officiating in the cult site in the summer of 66 CE ‘to accept no gift or sacrifice from any outsider’. For Josephus, ‘this was the foundation of war against the Romans’, for they rejected the sacrifice on behalf of foreigners and Caesar. The restriction of gifts from outside nations and the prohibition of imperial sacrifices together with the sacrifices of certain people is for Josephus a harbinger of ‘irremediable calamities’.¹⁶ The rebels voted, in effect, to condemn Jerusalem and its Temple for impiety when they chose to reject the gifts and sacrifices from strangers. Josephus seems to mean that those foreign worshippers had sustained the Temple and made it possible for Judaeans to declare their openness to the world. Although Judaeans were prevented from worshipping and offering sacrifices at other cult sites, foreigners were invited to show piety in the Temple at Jerusalem (2.409-417).

In Book 4, with its emphasis on the civil strife in Jerusalem in the 60s, Josephus begins his narrative by explaining how the internal conflict arose in the *polis* and how these events related to the occupation of the Temple. He reports that with the advance of the Roman troops through

¹³ See, for example, this view in Philo (Niehoff 2001: 36).

¹⁴ See <https://www.themappamundi.co.uk/mappa-mundi/>. The *Corpus Hermeticum* also characterises ancient Egypt as the centre of the world (Bull 2018: 443).

¹⁵ For the identification of this theme and other major thematic clusters in *War*, see Mason 2017a: 101-121.

¹⁶ For a study about this episode, see McLaren 1998: 268-277.

the region, Jerusalem flooded with fugitives, including bandits.¹⁷ The massive influx of such a mob eventually led to chaos (4.121-137). Josephus lists a series of crimes committed by those troublemakers, but none was more extreme than the pollution of the Temple. He explains that after the bandits 'exhausted all kinds of crimes they had done to men, they transferred their audacity to the realm of the divine, and with polluted feet, they entered into the sanctuary (τὸ ἅγιον)' (4.138-150).

With the escalation of tension and violence among different factions in Jerusalem, the Temple became a prize to be won by the rebels. Josephus reports that the party led by the chief priests Ananus and Jesus acted 'to punish these destroyers of their freedom and purify the sanctuary of murderers', though they were unsuccessful in this enterprise (4.158-161). In his words of encouragement and strength, Ananus says that it would be an honour for the people to die in the area of the Temple and sacrifice their lives for God and the cult site (4.191). In several places in *War*, Josephus blames the Zealots, among others, for the state of confusion in Jerusalem. Josephus strives to show the damage to the cult site at the hands of the rebels throughout the conflict. Elsewhere, he comments that at the end of the first fight between Zealots and civilians, those Zealots who were wounded went into the Temple, 'covering with blood the sacred floor', and it was only the Zealots' blood that 'contaminated the temple (μιᾶναι τὰ ἅγια)' (4.201). Josephus sees in the desecration of the cult site by the entry of rebels and the murder within its boundaries a recipe for national disaster. The only way to safeguard the Temple in Jerusalem and put an end to chaos seems to be the return of control of the cult site and *polis* to the legitimate leaders. However, Josephus makes clear in *War* that this restoration of order was never achieved, resulting ultimately in the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple.

Josephus enumerates a series of acts of impiety committed by the rebels within the Temple. For instance, John of Gischala, Josephus' *bête noire*, is said to have melted down the offerings dedicated to the Temple and many other items used in the rituals that had been given by the Roman *principes*. While those leaders honoured and embellished the cult site, Josephus states that John ripped out the gifts (5.562-564).¹⁸ In another place, he writes that the rebels did not respect even the worshippers who came from all corners of the world to offer sacrifices, and so they were slaughtered along with their animal victims:

¹⁷ For Josephus' understanding of bandits in *War*, see Mason 2008: 39, n. 342.

¹⁸ Elsewhere, Josephus mentions the offering of a gold crown (χρυσοῦν...στέφανον) to God by the Roman governor Gaius Sosius (*J.W.* 1.357). The offering of gold wreaths by Roman rulers to local divinities was a long-standing tradition (Lo Monaco 2016: 208-211).

For the artillery missiles threw with such force that they reached the altar and the sanctuary (τοῦ βωμοῦ καὶ τοῦ νεῶ), falling upon priests and sacrificers; and many of those having hurried from the ends of the earth (ἀπὸ γῆς περάτων) to this renowned place which the humankind held sacred (τὸν διώνυμον καὶ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις χῶρον ἅγιον) fell themselves before their sacrifices, and sprinkled with libations of their own blood the altar universally revered by Greeks and barbarians (τὸν Ἑλλησι πᾶσι καὶ βαρβάροις σεβάσμιον βωμόν). A multitude of corpses of natives and foreigners, priests and laypeople were mingled, and the stagnant blood of the victims formed pools in the courts of God (5.16-18; cf. 4.262; 5.101-105; 6.259).

For Josephus, the contamination of the Temple leads directly to God's abandonment of the cult site and its final destruction in 70 CE. The deity uses the Romans to purify with fire Jerusalem and its Temple of iniquity: 'For you [*polis*] were no longer God's place, nor could you survive, after becoming a grave for the bodies of your people and turning the sanctuary (τὸν ναόν) into a house of warfare' (5.19; cf. 5.412-414). Because of the state of impurity of the cult site, Josephus explains through Titus' mouth that 'the cosmos (τὸν κόσμον) was a finer temple (ναόν) for God' than the Jerusalem Temple (5.458). Josephus' words may indicate that God's presence cannot be contained to the Temple in Jerusalem, but that he dwells in the heavens above.

In addition to exonerating the Romans for the tragic end of the Temple and blaming the Judaeans rebels for its destruction, Josephus refers to the calendrical coincidence of the cult site's previous ruin: the burning of the First Temple by the Babylonians and the burning of the Herodian Temple occurred on the tenth day of the month of Lous (6.250, 268-270). The comparison of the two most famous versions of the Temple might suggest, given that the Solomonic Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and rebuilt some decades later, that Josephus hopes for the same reversal with the Herodian Temple.¹⁹

Josephus also demonstrates that Roman power operates in accordance with God's desire. The fall and destruction of both Jerusalem and Temple did not occur because of the strength of the Roman army, but occurred because the Judaeans people disobeyed divine orders and stained the *polis* and its cult site with a number of sins. Therefore, the deity distances himself from the Temple and allows the Romans, by means of fire, to purify Jerusalem and its cult site (2.455-6, 539; 5.19; 6.109-10). Also, Rome's pretension to universal rule is viewed as a result of divine will: 'Tyche (τὴν τύχην) had from every side passed to them [the Romans], and God, who brought

¹⁹ Gabriella Gerardini proposes a different analogy. Given that Josephus mentions the destruction by fire of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in Rome during the civil war in 69 and its reconstruction by Vespasian a few years later, he may have hoped for the same turnaround for the Temple in Jerusalem (2014: 100; see also Van Henten 2017: 369-370).

dominion (ἀρχήν) round to each nation (ἔθνος), was now over Italy' (5.367). For Josephus, God is over all, and the Roman empire can only exist as the deity permits it.

It is in the context of the civil strife in Jerusalem during the Judaeo-Roman War that Josephus provides the longest and most extent description of the Herodian Temple, including its cosmological reading, on the eve of the Roman conquest (5.136-247). The account appears in a lengthy excursus on Jerusalem's topography before the advance of the Roman troops led by Titus to the *polis*. Josephus begins by describing Jerusalem's walls, towers, and Herod's Palace (5.136-183), proceeding then to describe the cult site. He portrays first the physical area of the Temple Mount, then the porticoes, courts, gates, the structure of the sacred building, the furnishings, the areas within the holy perimeter, and the priests and their vestments (5.184-237). This digression on the city of Jerusalem is concluded with a characterisation of the Antonia Tower (5.238-247). Thereafter, Josephus resumes his narrative of the Roman siege of Jerusalem and the first attacks on the *polis*. Jan Willem van Henten explains that 'the narrative function of the elaborate description of Jerusalem and its Temple in Book 5 is to enhance the reader's awareness of what was at stake when the siege of Jerusalem began and of what was lost when the Temple burned down because of a fire that might have been caused by the Jews themselves' (2017: 362).

This excursus is the only place in *War* where Josephus gives an extended account of the Herodian Temple and its cosmic meaning. He does not, however, systematically interpret the sanctuary's entire structure, furniture, and priestly attire cosmologically, but singles out a few features only. For instance, he writes that the curtains located at the entrance of the sanctuary symbolise the universe (5.214). In the Holy Place of the sanctuary, the lampstand with its seven lamps represents the planets; the twelve loaves of bread on the table reflect the months of the year, as well as the circle of the zodiac (5.217). The altar, with its thirteen fragrances from sea and land, reflects that everything comes from and is for God (5.218). We shall return to Josephus' account of the Temple symbolism in detail in the next chapter.

As observed in previous chapters, the description of cult sites and other imperial buildings as representations of the cosmos was a trope frequently found in Graeco-Roman literature. Jupiter, the supreme god of the Roman pantheon and who comes closer to the Judaeo god, is also said to dwell in a temple that mirrors the heavens. In this respect, the Roman poet Propertius (c. 50 – 10 BCE) writes that 'the house of Jove at Elis [Olympia]...imitates the sky (*caelum imitata*)' (*Elegies* 3.2.20). Josephus, who writes from the heart of the empire and addresses his works primarily to a local audience, was likely familiar with this tradition of interpreting buildings as images of the universe. As certain buildings in Rome and other Eastern Greek *poleis* were built

or interpreted as imitations of the cosmos to emphasise their political aspects and superiority to others, as well as the pre-eminence of their gods, the Temple symbolism in Josephus also has an apologetic edge.

Josephus presents God as the only deity who has power over the whole cosmos, which is represented by the arrangement of the cult site, furnishings, and priestly raiment, and asserts that the services performed within the sacred complex benefit not only the Judaeans but also all peoples on earth.²⁰ As we shall now see, Josephus was by no means alone in his portrayal of a god as having cosmic prerogatives, other communities within and beyond the Mediterranean basin also depicted rulers and deities with universal power.

4.1.1 Rulers and Deities as the Source of Cosmic Power

Attempts to identify deities and rulers with cosmic powers were well-known in the Graeco-Roman period. The idealised view of kingship along cosmological lines was broadly explored by Greek-Roman thinkers from the fourth century BCE to the second century CE. The germ of this idea is found in Plato's works (e.g., *Plt.* 273e-274e; *Resp.* 500c-501b), and it was developed by some of Plato's contemporaries and later by Cynics, Stoics, and Neopythagoreans.²¹ On the whole, the so-called 'philosopher-king' is 'the vicegerent of the gods, and the one who establishes divine harmony on earth.' The ruler 'imitates divine virtue and bestows these virtues magnanimously upon his people.' Therefore, he is of vital importance for the connection of his people to God. As living law, the 'philosopher-king' 'represents divine reason, and by his reign, he is able to make his subjects conform to this divine reason and thereby establish on earth the divine harmony of the cosmos.' He is the one who 'brings peace and establishes harmony within his realm.' For the Neopythagoreans, that harmony has a cosmic scope. 'Their ideal king should establish on earth the harmony believed to exist in the heavens' (Smith 2011: 87-90). Thus, the idealised Hellenistic king is regarded as the source of cosmic power, order and control in the earthly realm.

This Hellenistic kingship imagery seems to have been assimilated later by Roman *principes*. At least, the understanding was observed in the *principes*' building programme, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. In the Greek East of the Empire, specific deities were likewise described or sculpted in a way that showed their control over the cosmos. The cosmic power of local deities served as a vehicle for the local elites and those on the periphery of power to 'negotiate their relation to local,

²⁰ For this view in Josephus and Philo, see Stevenson 2001: 155-157.

²¹ For a detailed study of the development of this idea among Graeco-Roman thinkers, see Desmond 2011: 19-45. For the reception of this idea in Graeco-Roman and Judaeon literature, see Smith 2011: 19-89; 90-162.

regional, and empire wide-power networks.’ Those who wanted to take part ‘in the imperial network of power as well as local and regional networks often had to acknowledge the power and the presence of the cosmic realm associated with those arenas’ (Edwards 1996: 49-50).

Figure 4.2: *Marble cult-statue of Artemis Ephesia* from the Prytaneion, Ephesus. Photo by the author

Ephesus had a long association with the goddess Artemis Ephesia. Because of her birth in Ephesus, the city was regarded as sacred. The Ephesians ‘claimed a unique and divinely-initiated relationship between the goddess and the city’ (Immendörfer 2017: 176). The association between the *polis* and the goddess is observed in the epithet of Ephesus as τῆς πόλεως Ἀρτέμιδι. The Ephesians worshipped Artemis as the Queen of Heaven. The cult statue of Artemis Ephesia exhibits her neck decorated with extravagant jewellery, including Nike and signs of the zodiac (fig. 4.2). Similarly, a second-century CE stele from Argos depicts the goddess Selene with a lunar tiara, with seven large stars around her head and shoulders, and the twelve signs of the zodiac encircling the outer rim of the niche (fig. 4.3). According to Stephen J. Patterson, this cosmic motif ‘has the

effect of universalizing the sovereignty of the deity, now seen as lord of the heavens, who controls the progression of time and events' (1985: 440).

Fig. 4.3: *Reddish marble carved votive relief of the goddess Selene*. British Museum, London, inv. no. R. 1818,0214.1.
© The Trustees of the British Museum

Association with the cosmic realm is exemplified in the role of Aphrodite of Aphrodisias and the portrayal of the cult statue of the goddess. For the Aphrodisians, their deity had more than just local power. As is evident in the Aphrodisian cult statues, the goddess' garment displays four zones that represent Aphrodite's authority extended over the underworld, earth, sea, and sky (Edwards 1996: 58). Like Aphrodite of Aphrodisias, Aphrodite *Ourania* was regarded in the Bosphoran Kingdom as the great goddess, 'the guardian of its kings and their subjects, the grantor of power and victory in battle, the supreme cosmic deity of this world and the protectress of the dead in the nether world, and a great fertility-goddess, reigning the vegetal and animal kingdoms' (Ustinova 1999: 27; see also 129-174). Isis is another goddess portrayed with cosmic prerogatives in the Graeco-Roman period (Gasparro 2007: 40-72).

Assimilations of local deities with a universal and powerful god, such as Zeus-Jupiter, are also observed in the Roman province of Syria. The Temple of Bel in Palmyra, for instance, displays

the Mesopotamian god Bel as a powerful deity and entitled to be worshipped as Jupiter. The carved reliefs that adorn the northern cult niche of the temple exhibit a series of astral symbols that suggest Bel as a cosmic deity. The lintel shows an eagle (which here stands for Bel) with outstretched wings over a starry sky. The eagle is accompanied on either side with the bust of a moon and a sun god. The domed ceiling of the thalamus portrays the zodiac around seven medallions, each depicting an astral god: Bel (Jupiter) in the centre, the Sun, Mars, the Moon, Venus, Saturn, and Mercury (Teixidor 1979: 1-11; Dirven 1999: 54-56). The Temple of Jupiter-Hadad in Damascus is also another example of the transformation of a local deity into a supreme heavenly-astral god. The colossal cult site that competed with the Herodian Temple in Jerusalem made clear the universal extension of Jupiter-Hadad's power (Burns 2007: 40, 54-55, 61). According to Macrobius, the colossal temple of Jupiter Heliopolitanus at Baalbek reflects a similar understanding. He says that the cult nature and appearance of Jupiter Heliopolitanus 'point to the conjoined power of Jupiter and the Sun (Hadad)', who was considered the 'highest and greatest' deity of the Assyrians. The statue of the deity 'is distinguished by rays angled downward, making plain that heaven's power is in the rays of the sun that are sent down to earth' (*Sat.* 1.23.10-22 [Kaster, LCL]).²²

As with the Eastern cultures, Josephus – a member of an aristocratic family of the eastern Graeco-Roman Empire who later came to Rome and lived as a man of letters under the auspices of the imperial family – wanted to define the place of Jerusalem and its Temple in relation to the rise of Roman power. The Jerusalem Temple is anchored in a far distant past, and its founder was God himself (*J.W.* 7.376). Jerusalem is also presented as the only place on earth authorised for the worship of the deity, who is the sole creator and supreme ruler over the inhabited world and the universe (1.584; 3.370). Thus, the reading of the Temple, its contents, and priestly garments as images of the cosmos in *War* evidence that everything in the cult site was organised to display the universe created by God. Furthermore, because of the beneficial effect of the services performed within the Temple for the whole world, all the nations on earth were invited to offer sacrifices and worship God in Jerusalem.

4.2 The Temple in *Judaean Antiquities*

Just as in *War*, the Jerusalem Temple remains preeminent in *Antiquities*. A survey of the content will prepare for our focus on the crucial passage in the next chapter. This *magnum opus* recounts

²² An ample description of the temple of Jupiter Heliopolitanus is given in Yegül and Favro 2019: 736-743.

the history of the Judaeen people from the creation of the world to the administration of the Roman procurator Gessius Florus (64-66 CE; *Ant.* 1.5, 13), and the Jerusalem Temple appears at different stages of this history. Its first mention occurs in the context of the Hebrews' journey through the wilderness, with God's ordinance for the setting up of a Tent, which served as a model for the Jerusalem Temple. Later, we hear about the construction and fall of the Solomonic Temple, the renovation of the cult site by Persian kings, and the massive reconstruction of the Temple complex by King Herod. The internal division of *Antiquities* into twenty volumes also indicates the centrality of the cult site in Josephus' composition. Modern scholars have recognized an internal division of the work into two equal parts, Books 1-10 and 11-20. While the first ten books deal with everything from Creation to the destruction of the First Temple and the Exile, the last ten cover the period from Alexander to the outbreak of the Judaeen-Roman War. Thus, Book 10 describes the destruction of the Solomonic Temple in 586 BCE, and Book 20 leads to the fall of the Herodian Temple in 70 CE (Thackeray 1929: 58; Bilde 1988: 89-90; Mason 2000: xx-xxi). Before proceeding further with the cosmological view of the Temple in *Antiquities*, it is worth noting the successive historical forms of the cult site in the composition.

According to Josephus, God wished a Tent to be made where He could be in contact with the Hebrews (3.99-100). Thus, the Tent was an island of holiness in the wilderness-desert. After the conquest of Canaan, Josephus reports that the Tent remained in the city of Silo until circumstances allowed the Hebrews to build a sanctuary (ναόν) for God (5.68). Once King David established himself in Jerusalem [Hierosolyma],²³ he brought 'the ark of God (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ κιβωτόν)' to the *polis* and wished to construct there 'a sanctuary (ναόν)' for God. The deity withheld from David the privilege of building the temple but promised that the cult site would be built by his son Solomon. The place chosen for the erection of the Temple in Jerusalem had previously witnessed important manifestations of the divine.²⁴ In David's reign, the area was a threshing floor that belonged to the Jebusite Araunah. Later, the king purchased the place for the erection of an altar to offer sacrifice to God. Also, it was at this site that Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. Josephus writes that David designated the whole area for the future construction of the sanctuary (7.329-333; see also 1.222-236).

Josephus dates the building of the Temple to the fourth year of Solomon's reign and gives a comprehensive account. He refers to the Temple foundations, dimensions, out-buildings, internal

²³ About the name of the city, Josephus writes: 'For in the time of our ancestor Abram it was called "Solyma" [some, however, say that Homer afterwards called it "Hierosolyma"]. The temple, however, they named "Solyma," which in the Hebrew language means "security"' (7.67 [Begg]). For additional remarks about the passage, see Begg 2005: 222.

²⁴ On the manifestation of divine and temple sites in the Greek world, see Pedley 2005: 3-5.

arrangement of the sanctuary, decoration, columns, the giant water tank – also called ‘the sea (θάλασσα)’ – furnishings, priestly garments, courts, and the dedication of the cult site to God (8.61-123). Josephus also refers to the constant defilement and desecration of the Solomonic Temple under the leadership of Israelite kings (9.99-100, 243, 257; 10.37).

Josephus explains that because Israel disobeyed God’s laws – which included among other things, the prohibition against worshipping other gods – Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. 4.312-313). According to Josephus, the Temple was burned 470 years, six months and ten days after its construction. The significance of the ruin of the cult site is stressed with its discussion alongside other vital biblical events, such as the Creation, the Flood, and the wandering of the Hebrew people (10.148-149).

Josephus writes that seventy years after the fall of the Temple and the deportation of the people to Babylon, God remembered his people and restored their land and cult site (11.1-3). The Jerusalem Temple was rebuilt under the auspices of King Cyrus of Persia, who recognized that God appointed him king of the *oikoumene* and that God had predicted that he would reconstruct the deity’s temple in Jerusalem (11.3-7). Josephus writes that the building was erected on the same spot where the Solomonic Temple had stood and that it was sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide (26.5 m).²⁵ Cyrus ordered that the Temple’s vessels transported by King Nebuchadnezzar as spoils be returned to Jerusalem. He also demanded that the priests perform sacrifices in Jerusalem in accordance with the Laws of Moses and that prayers to God include those for the welfare of the king, his family, and his kingdom (11.13-15, 17).

Josephus also refers in *Antiquities* to the building of rival sanctuaries. According to him, in the time of King Darius, the satrap Sanaballetes ordained the construction of a cult site similar to the one in Jerusalem at Mount Gerizim in Samaria. Sanaballetes gave the office of high priest to his son-in-law Manasses, who formerly officiated in the Jerusalem Temple. Josephus notes the rivalry between the two cult sites. While those from Jerusalem argued that their ‘holy temple (ιερόν ἅγιον)’ was built in accordance with the Law of Moses, demanding that the sacrifices be sent there, the Samaritans wanted to go to Mount Gerizim (11.310-312, 324; 12.10; 13.74-76, 79). As in *War* (cf. 1.31-33; 7.420-4320), Josephus mentions the sanctuary built by Onias in Leontopolis. Without giving many details about the cult site, he states that it was ‘smaller and poorer (μικρότερον...καὶ πενιχρότερον)’ than the Jerusalem Temple (13.62-73). Despite the existence of those rival sanctuaries, Josephus makes clear that the Temple at Jerusalem was

²⁵ The cubit (ὁ πῆχυς, or Latin *cubitum*) is an ancient unit of length equivalent to 0.44 m.

superior, given that it was ‘ancient and the most famous over the inhabited world (ἀρχαῖον καὶ διασημώτατον τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην)’ (13.77).

Josephus stresses the related point of the recognition and respect of gentile worshippers and leaders not only for the Jerusalem Temple, but also for the god worshipped there. Besides King Cyrus, he describes Alexander the Great paying honour to God in the Temple. The author writes that when Alexander approached Jerusalem, he prostrated himself before the high priest, stating that he bowed not before the high priest, but before deity whom the high priest served. Alexander explains that God assured him in a dream that he would be the master of Asia and that the deity would lead his army and give over to him the empire of the Persians. As a way of showing due honour to God, Alexander entered the Jerusalem Temple and under the guidance of the high priest offered sacrifice to the deity (11.333-339). Elsewhere, Josephus refers to the magnificence and craftsmanship of the dedicatory offerings sent by King Ptolemy to the Temple of God. These included a golden table five times as large the one existing in the Temple and golden and silver vessels (12.60-84). Josephus even mentions the conversion of the Queen Helena of Adiabene and her son Izates to the Judaeans customs and the visit of the queen to the Temple in Jerusalem (20.49-51). The universality of the Temple is also evidenced in the generous offerings given for a very long time ‘by all the Judaeans and worshippers of God over the *oikoumene*’ (14.110).²⁶

Not all gentile leaders paid their respects to the Temple. Josephus described the desecration of the Temple by King Antiochus Epiphanes, who not only pillaged the cult site but also forbade the daily sacrifices. Josephus shows, however, that all those who acted impiously against the Temple of God were punished. He writes that the king suffered from severe sickness and died as a result – as Antiochus himself recognised – of despoiling the Temple and treating God with disdain (12.249-53, 357-359). The same can be said for Caligula’s attempt to erect a statue of himself in the Temple and his tragic end (18.306-309).²⁷

Josephus gives a lengthy account of the Herodian Temple and its beauty and grandeur. The author writes that Herod considered the renovation of the structures as ‘the most magnificent of all his deeds... enough for his everlasting remembrance.’ Ten thousand workers, including priests, were employed in the construction, and the sanctuary was built of ‘white and mighty stones’. He mentions a Royal Portico that could be seen from a distance of many stadia and was the most remarkable work under the sun. He refers to the large porticoes that surrounded the sanctuary and the inner precincts of the Temple compound. Josephus remarks that ‘[Herod] surpassed his

²⁶ For other references, see *Ant.* 13.243-244, 20.195.

²⁷ Josephus also mentions the entrance of Pompey into the Temple, but just as in *War* (1.152-153), he writes that the Roman commander showed reverence towards God and did not pillage the cult site (14.72-73).

predecessors in expenses such that no other person was reputed to have adorned the sanctuary more.’ The author notes that the sanctuary was completed in a year and five months and that during its construction, through the work of God, no rain fell during the daytime, but only during the night (15.380-425 [Van Henten]).²⁸

Finally, in the context of the disturbances in Judaea during the 60s, Josephus comments on the chaos brought to Jerusalem by bandits, who committed murders in the *polis* and the Temple. Josephus then observes, as he had in *War* (5.19; 6.109-110), that the tragic fall of Jerusalem and its Temple resulted from the sacrilege of those troublemakers: ‘This is the reason why, in my opinion, even God himself, for loathing of their impiety, turned away from our city and, because He deemed the temple to be no longer a clean dwelling place for him, brought the Romans upon us and purification by fire upon the city, while he inflicted slavery upon us together with our wives and children; for he wished to chasten us by these calamities’ (20.165-166 [Feldman, LCL]).

As in *War*, Josephus draws his readers’ attention to the fact that there was only one powerful and Most High God (ο μέγιστος Θεός)²⁹, ‘the father (πατέρα) and origin of all (γένεσιν τῶν ὅλων), the creator (δημιουργόν) of things human and divine (ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ θείων).’³⁰ As such, God has dominion over the whole cosmos and human affairs, and everything moves in accordance with his will (1.27, 31-34, 72, 155; 3.91; 10.277-279; 11.55; 12.22). Josephus also underlines the existence of a single temple on earth for God, that located in Jerusalem (4.200-201; 7.335; 13.54). Even though the Tent and later the Jerusalem Temple appear in Josephus as the only accredited buildings for the worship of God and practice of ritual sacrifices on earth, the author tries to demonstrate – resorting to Stoic ideas on God and the cosmos, as observed previously – that God is not only present in the Jerusalem Temple but also accessible to everyone. Josephus’ universalistic description of Judaeian traditions, with the Temple as a medium, is evident when Josephus’ Solomon refers to the cult site as a place to be visited by people from all over of the world to pray to God: ‘For thus all will learn that it was by your wish that this house was built by us for you and that we are not inhumane by nature nor ill-disposed to those who are not compatriots. Rather, we wish that your help and the benefit of good things be common to all’ (*Ant.* 8.115-117 [Begg and Spilsbury]; see also Sherwood 2013: 206; Church 2017: 259).³¹

²⁸ In the rabbinical writings is said that during the construction rain fell only at night and in the morning the wind dispersed the clouds and the sun shone (*b. Ta’an* 23a).

²⁹ For God’s title, see 6.86; 8.319; 9.133, 211, 288-9.

³⁰ Josephus seems to equate in this extract, as in other passages (1.155, 172), the δημιουργός of Platonic philosophy with God. According to Plato, the Demiurge was ‘the maker and father (ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα) of the universe (τοῦ παντός)’ (*Tim.* 28c).

³¹ For Stoic colouration of Solomon’s prayer, see Feldman 1998: 619-620.

During the dedication of the First Temple, while the people and priests, impacted by the effect of the incense within the complex, assumed that ‘God was present’ and ‘taking up residence in the place’, Josephus’ Solomon refutes such ‘human opinion’ and declares that God has ‘an everlasting house...namely the heaven, the air, the earth, and the sea; [God is] spread throughout all these things, but are not encompassed by them’ (*Ant.* 8.102, 107 [Begg and Spilsbury]). Given that God moves within the cosmos created by him, Josephus reports that the Temple was dedicated to God, so that from it the people could send up ‘prayers into the air’, sacrifices, and hymns. Thus, the worshippers would be convinced that God is ‘present and not far distant’. For as God ‘look[s] down upon everything and hear everything,’ he does not ‘cease to be near to everyone’ (*Ant.* 8.108). Even though Josephus’ Solomon recognises the imperfection of the Temple as a residence for God, the king asks the divine to ‘send forth a certain portion of your spirit (μοῖρα...τοῦ σοῦ πνεύματος) to the sanctuary and cause it to dwell there, so that you may appear to be with us on earth’ (*Ant.* 8.114 [Begg and Spilsbury]; see also Levison 1996).³²

Consistent with *War*, these arguments about God’s greatness and his power over the whole cosmos would suffice to show why the preceding model of Jerusalem Temple, the Tent, was interpreted as an ‘imitation and representation of the universe’ (ἀπομίμησιν καὶ διατύπωσιν τῶν ὅλων) in *Antiquities* (3.180; see also 3.123), but Josephus adds commentary on the view of the Judaeans’ customs and civil constitution (πολιτεία) as being in harmony with the universal law established by God himself. Since the building of the Tent, and later the Temple, is comprised in the Judaeans’ constitution, the cult site could be regarded as an image of the universe.

4.2.1 Universal Law and the Temple

The identification of the Judaeans’ Law with universal/natural law has Graeco-Roman philosophical roots. As we have seen in the introductory chapter, Carl Holladay and other scholars propose that the Judaeans’ writers who deal with this topic were influenced by Stoic ideas about universal law (1977: 102; see also Feldman 1998: 194). While those scholars are correct in their association of those Judaeans’ discussions of law with Graeco-Roman philosophy, it seems incorrect to associate them exclusively with Stoic debates. The concept of natural law (Greek: νόμος φύσεως; Latin: *lex naturalis*), as elaborated by Graeco-Roman philosophers, is much older and is based on the premise that there is a universal law, which is discernible only by reason. It is

³² Strabo indicates a similar idea when explaining in what manner the Judaeans conceive God: ‘God is the one thing alone that encompasses us all and encompasses land and sea – the thing which we call heaven, or universe, or the nature of all that exists’ (16.2.35–6 [Jones, LCL]). Prior to Josephus, Cicero reports that Xerxes regarded it as ‘unholy for the gods’ ‘to be held shut within walls’, given that their home is the ‘entire universe’ (*Rep.* 3.9).

also in the universal law that the criteria for right and wrong can be found, and it is independent of human laws and customs. Being universal, it is valid everywhere and for everyone.³³

The correspondence of Judaeon Law with universal law appears in writings by earlier Judaeon thinkers and seems to go back as far as the second century BCE. The *Letter of Aristeeas*, for instance, says that a copy of the Judaeon law should be deposited in the Library of Alexandria because it is both ‘very philosophical and uncorrupted (φιλοσοφωτέραν...καὶ ἀκέραιον), inasmuch as it divine (θείαν)’ (Ar. 31). Commenting on the Judaeon law, the author says: ‘In general everything is similarly constituted in regard to natural reasoning (τὸν φυσικὸν λόγον), being governed by one supreme power, and in each particular everything has a profound reason (λόγον βαθύν) for it’ (Ar. 143). Elsewhere, the author refers to the Judaeon law as the ‘utmost dignity’ and ‘natural reasonableness (φυσικὴν διάνοιαν)’ (Ar. 171 [Wright]).³⁴

Aristobulus also seems to fuse the Judaeon Law with universal law when comparing the Sabbath to the cosmic order:

And connected (with this) is (the fact) that God, who has established (κατεσκεύακε) the whole cosmos (τὸν ὅλον κόσμον), has also given us a rest – because life is troublesome for all –, the seventh day, which (day) indeed might φυσικῶς be called the first (day) also, the creation of light, by which (light) all things can be seen together at the same time (Fr. 5 = Euseb. *P.E.* 13.12.9 [De Vos]).

J. Cornelius de Vos proposes that Aristobulus makes a correspondence between the law and the cosmos when employing the verb κατασκευάζω at the beginning of frag. 5 and its cognate noun (κατασκευή) in the last paragraph of frag. 4 to indicate the constitution of the Judaeon law (2016: 140). Aristobulus could also be connecting the Sabbath with the Stoic theory of the εὐπάθειαι (‘good feelings’). He says that ‘because life is troublesome (κακόπαθος) for all’, the Sabbath was given for rest; that is, a day without κακοπάθειαι, not disturbed by affliction and distress. Κακοπάθειαι is the antonym of εὐπάθειαι, a technical term used by the Stoics for good emotions (Diog. Laert. 7.116). Εὐπάθειαι are only achievable by living in harmony with the law of nature (2016: 141-142).³⁵

This suggests that for Aristobulus the Sabbath works in accordance with the cosmic order, as evidenced by his equation of the Sabbath (and Judaeon legislation) with natural law: ‘And it [the legislation] has shown plainly that it [the seventh day] is ἐννομος for us as a sign of the seven-principle which is established around us, by which we have knowledge of human and divine

³³ See Stalley 1983: 33; Brown 2009: 338; Hayes 2015: 55.

³⁴ For additional information, see Honigman 2013: 215-218.

³⁵ See also the discussion of this theory by the Stoic Posidonius (Galen, *Hipp.* F150b = Kidd, Fragment 187).

matters' (Fr. 5 = Euseb. *P.E.* 13.12.12 [De Vos]). Observe that Aristobulus does not employ the word νόμος for law here, but ἐννομος, meaning 'conforming to a law, legal, legitimate' (BrillDAG). De Vos explains that although the word does not express the law itself, it is 'the expression of the law of nature which is identical with the seven-principle' (2016: 150-151; see also Doering 1999: 314; Holladay 1995: 230).

The connection of Judaeon law with universal law reached a new level with Philo of Alexandria. In the opening of *On the Creation*, Philo comments that the origin of the law is marvellous, since it consists of a narrative of the creation of the cosmos, and he proceeds to demonstrate how the law and the cosmos are connected:

The reasoning for this being that the cosmos is in harmony with the law and the law with the cosmos (ὡς καὶ τοῦ κόσμου τῷ νόμῳ καὶ τοῦ νόμου τῷ κόσμῳ συνάδοντος), and the man who observes the law is at once a citizen of the cosmos (κοσμοπολίτης), directing his actions in relation to the rational purpose of nature, in accordance with which the entire cosmos also is administered (*Opif.* 3 [Runia]; see also *Opif.* 143; *Abr.* 61; Diog. Laert. 6.63).

Philo's words here encapsulate some of his views on universal law, as proposed by the philosophers, and Mosaic Law. He argues for the correspondence between the cosmos and Mosaic Law. Because the law of Moses was drawn up according to this universal law, it was possible for those who lived before the giving of the law at Sinai to walk in accordance with the law of nature, which means 'to follow God' (*Migr.* 128). As Philo shows in his treatises, the patriarchs ensouled (ψυχόω) that unwritten law of nature (ἄγραφος νόμος). In his account of Abraham, he shows that the patriarchs had 'laws endowed with life and reason (ἐμψυχοὶ καὶ λογικοὶ νόμοι)', and Moses praised them for two reasons: first, the established ordinances were not inferior to those of nature; second, those willing to live in conformity with the law would find no difficulty, since those who lived before its codification by Moses – even Moses himself (*Mos.* 1.162) – were capable of following the unwritten law. With no systematic instruction but trust in their own instincts, 'they gladly accepted conformity with nature, holding that nature itself was, as indeed it is, the most venerable of statutes, and thus their whole life was one of happy obedience to the law' (*Abr.* 4-6 [Colson, LCL]). Philo shows that the Law goes beyond the countless codes created by different peoples. The exemplary lives of the patriarchs prove that the Law can be practised by conforming with nature, which is itself also called 'divine law (θεῖος νόμος)' (*Abr.* 275).

By that logic, Mosaic Law is nothing less than the 'image and copy' (ἀπεικονίσματα καὶ μιμήματα) of the law of nature (*Mos.* 2.11). Moses, 'the best of all lawgivers' that ever existed,

received from God the most excellent and truest laws.³⁶ The laws omit ‘nothing that is needful’, and ‘with the seals of nature herself (σφραγῖσι φύσεως αὐτῆς), remain secure from the day when they were first enacted to now, and we may hope that they will remain for all future ages as though immortal, so long as the sun and moon and whole heaven and universe exist’ (*Mos.* 2.12-14 [Colson, LCL]).

When commenting on why Moses began to write the law book with the history, and not with the ordinances and prohibitions, Philo explains that Moses wanted to show two essential things:

First that the Father and Maker of the world was in the truest sense also its Lawgiver, secondly that he who would observe the laws will accept gladly the duty of following nature and live in accordance with the arrangement of the universe, so that his deeds are in harmony and agreement with his words and his words with his deeds (*Mos.* 2.48-49 [Colson, LCL, modified]).

Furthermore, those who ‘carefully examine the nature of the particular enactments will find that they seek to attain to the harmony of the universe and agree with the principles of eternal nature.’ Those who rebelled against virtue and practised other vices are ‘enemies not of men but of the whole heaven and universe’ (*Mos.* 2.52-53 [Colson, LCL]). Philo even gives examples of commandments that harmonise with nature.³⁷

In general, Philo employs philosophical concepts and reformulates them in order to demonstrate the universal character of the Mosaic Law and its legitimacy not only for the Judaeans but also for all peoples. For Philo, God is not only the creator of the cosmos, but also the author of the law given to Moses at Sinai. Thus, those who keep the law are at the same time conforming their lives to the natural order of the cosmos as established by God at creation. While the Mosaic Law is not the same as the cosmic law, there is a harmony between them.

Josephus inherits that discussion from these and likely other predecessors. He likewise interprets the law of Moses in a philosophical vein. Although he does not formulate the notion as extensively as Philo, there is no question that he understands that Mosaic Law as in harmony with universal law. Indeed, the law of Moses sets the tone for most of *Antiquities*. Of the 327 occurrences of the term νόμος in the work, 276 are related to the Mosaic Law. Expressions

³⁶ Elsewhere, Philo gives reasons why Moses surpassed other lawgivers and why the Mosaic law is superior to others. While the laws elaborated by those lawgivers lack reflection and are ‘indolent’, ‘unphilosophical’ and ‘full of trickery’, the law of Moses is distinctive: ‘He [Moses] did not immediately state what should be done and what not, nor did he, since it was necessary to form in advance the minds of those who were to make use of the laws, invent myths or express approval of those composed by others’ (*Opif.* 1-2 [Runia]).

³⁷ Homicide = *Decal.* 132; greed = *Spec.* 4.212; Sabbath = *Dec.* 98; *Mos.* 2.215-216; Cf. Bockmuehl 2000:109.

commonly used by the author include: 'laws of the Judaeans' (Ἰουδαίων νόμους, *Ant* 12.20), 'laws of Moses' (Μωυσεός νόμους, 1.59; 13.74), and 'ancestral laws' (πατρίους νόμους, 4.71).

Just as for Philo, the point of departure for Josephus' exposition of Mosaic Law and its universal dimension is the figure of Moses as the greatest legislator who ever lived. The author writes that Moses exceeds in antiquity the legislators referred to in the records of others: 'For he was born two thousand years ago, a span of time such that not even their poets ventured to refer to it the births of the gods, let alone the deeds or the laws of men' (*Ant*. 1.16 [Feldman]). In contrast to other legislators, Moses did not resort to myths to comprehend God's nature, since he preserved 'the discourse about him [God] pure from every unseemly mythology that is found among others' (1.15; cf. 22; cf. Philo *Opif.* 1-2). Accordingly, Josephus implies that Mosaic Law is not an invention of human reason, but is of divine origin.³⁸

When referring to Moses' life, Josephus comments that the legislator 'surpassed in understanding all men who had ever lived and having utilised his thoughts in the best way' (*Ant*. 4.328). Elsewhere, Josephus writes that 'God established the constitution for us through Moses and his virtue (ἀρετή)' (3.322). In another place, he writes that the Judaeian constitution is 'consonant with the renown of Moses for virtue (ἀρετή)' (4.196 [Feldman, modified]).³⁹ Furthermore, the author observes that Moses studied 'the nature of God' and contemplated God's works with the eye of reason, imitating 'the best model of all' and trying 'to follow it to the extent possible' (1.19). Since the legislator embodied the law of nature, he was capable of writing the Law:

For neither would the lawgiver, if he lacked this contemplation, ever have had proper understanding, nor would anything of the things that he would write with regard to the rationale of virtue (ἀρετή) turn out well for those who received it unless they had been taught before all else that God, who is the Father and Lord of all and who looks upon all things, grants a happy life to those who follow Him and surrounds with great misfortunes those who transgress virtue (ἀρετή) (1.20 [Feldman]).

Josephus' remarks on Moses' life agree with Plato's portrait of the ideal lawgiver and governor of the ideal city-state in the *Laws* (e.g., 6.769a-771a). According to the Platonic propositions, 'those who truly know reality, in its human, political and cosmic aspects – those who are enlightened – earn the right to legislate and to govern, i.e. to order the life of the citizens and the city after the movements of the sky' (Brisson 2019: 141).

About the giving of the Law, Josephus comments on the reasons for the superiority of the Judaeian Law and the constitution. The author states that Moses was writing the 'constitution and

³⁸ See the discussion on this passage in Nodet 1990: 6, n. 1.

³⁹ For a detailed study of ἀρετή, see Feldman 1998: 377-378.

laws, in accordance with which they would live agreeably to God, having no occasion for complaint against one another.’ Thus, the legislator ‘composed all this in accordance with the direction of God.’ Josephus also states that Mosaic Law is ‘superior to human sagacity’ and is ‘a gift of God’ (*Ant.* 3.213, 223 [Feldman]). Elsewhere, he explains that Moses wrote the Laws as ‘God advised and taught him’ (17.159).

Like Philo in *On the Creation* (1.1-2), Josephus writes that Moses begins the arrangement of the laws not ‘with contracts and the rights of people with one another’ like other legislators, but instead ‘led their thoughts up to God and the structure of the universe’, which is a product of the divine creative mind (*Ant.* 1.21, 27). In another place, Josephus comments that Mosaic Law contains not only laws, but also the ‘philosophy of nature (φυσιολογία)’ (1.18). After demonstrating the authority of Moses, Josephus goes on to suggest that Mosaic Law reflects God’s virtue and that it applies to all humanity as well as to the Judaeans: ‘Our legislator, having shown that God possesses a virtue (τὴν ἀρετὴν) that is pure, thought that human beings ought to try to participate it...’ (1.23 [Feldman]; see also *Ag. Ap.* 210).⁴⁰

According to Josephus, the structure of the Laws is in accordance with the ordering of the universe: ‘For if they will look at it thus nothing will appear to them unreasonable or incongruous with the majesty and benevolence of God. For all things have their arrangement in harmony with the nature of the universe (πάντα γὰρ τῇ τῶν ὅλων φύσει σύμφωνον ἔχει τὴν διάθεσιν)’ (*Ant.* 1.24 [Feldman]).⁴¹ Elsewhere he remarks that those who wish to consider the reasoning of the Judaeans laws would find them ‘very philosophical (λίαν φιλόσοφος)’ (1.25).

As a whole, Josephus’ remarks on Mosaic Law in connection with the universal law demonstrate that the author carries on a discussion begun by his predecessors. Like Philo, Josephus uses philosophical themes that were influential at the time to build his account of the Judaeans ancient traditions.⁴² Josephus’ purposes are to show not only that the Judaeans Law and constitution were designed according to the universal law created by God, but also that they are

⁴⁰ Similarly, Plutarch stresses the virtues of Numa and Lycurgus and states that both leaders derive their laws from a divine source (*Vit. Lyc. et Num.* 1.1). Later, Lucian goes on to write that Lycurgus, when elaborating Spartan constitution, ‘drew from the sky his ordering of their whole polity and made it their law never to leave their country, even to go to the wars’ (*De Astrologia* 25 [Harmon, LCL]).

⁴¹ In *Against Apion*, Josephus equates God and Mosaic Law with universality: ‘For what is most remarkable is that the law by itself has had such a powerful influence, without the seductive allure of pleasure, and just as God permeates the whole universe, so the law has travelled through all humanity’ (2.284 [Barclay]). Thus, Josephus ‘implies that Judean laws are not simply the ‘ancestral customs’ of one nation, but as inherently universal as God himself’ (Barclay 2007: 329).

⁴² In Stuart D. Robertson’s view, Josephus’ reasoning ‘exhibits a correlation between his Pharisaism and Greek Stoicism’ (1991: 108). As demonstrated earlier, this view is by no means circumscribed to Stoic discussions. Also, there is nothing in Josephus’ language here, or in *Antiquities* that indicates him as a Pharisee. For the controversy around Josephus’ commitment to the Pharisees, see Mason 1991:325-356; 2001: 21, n.91.

superior to other constitutions. Indeed, the reading of the Tent and the rituals performed within it as the embodiment of the cosmos is a thread of an intricate tapestry woven by Josephus, who attempts to correlate the Mosaic Law with the philosophical notion of universal law.

Given that the portable wilderness sanctuary, the precursor of the Jerusalem Temple, was set up in accordance with the laws given by God to Moses, it would make sense that the cult site was regarded as an ‘imitation and representation of the universe (ἀπομίμησιν καὶ διατύπωσιν τῶν ὅλων)’ in *Antiquities* (3.180). De facto, this cosmological interpretation emerges in the account of the Tent in his retelling of the biblical account of the giving of the Law in the wilderness, more specifically in the episode of Moses’ second ascent to Mount Sinai. Josephus explains that after Moses stayed on the mount forty days and nights, he returned and revealed to the multitude that God had ‘advised him in what manner they would be happy in their form of government (πολιτευόμενοι)’, as well as of his desire for a Tent:

He wished a Tent (σκηνή) to be set up for Himself, into which He would descend to them when He was with them, ‘in order that when we move to another place we may make it with us and no longer have need of the ascent to Sinai, but that He Himself, frequenting the Tent, may be present at our prayers’ (3.99-100 [Feldman]).⁴³

We could infer from Josephus’ words that God’s presence within the Tent also marked the centre of the cosmos from which the maintainer of the universe reigned. The cult site was the place where the heavenly and earthly realms converged. However, because the nature of the sacred structure and the Hebrews’ sojourn in the wilderness, the centrality of the cosmos was mobile.

In the account of the Tent, Josephus’ Moses says that the layout and appurtenances should be in line with what ‘[God] himself had indicated’ (3.101). Josephus emphasises the divine instructions for the building of the Tent. Elsewhere, he notes that Moses appointed Bezalel and Oholiab as ‘supervisors for the works, in accordance with the instruction of God (κατ’ ἐντολὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ).’ He also states that ‘Moses, in accordance with the direction of God (κατὰ τὴν ὑποθήκην τοῦ Θεοῦ), instructed them in all the details concerning the measurements and the size and what vessels it had to contain for the one who would attend to the sacrifices’ (3.104, 107 [Feldman]). Josephus’ stress on the divine inception of the Tent is significant for his defence of the pre-eminence of the cult site.

⁴³ Josephus is meticulous when describing the status of God’s presence within the Tent. While in Exodus, God ordains the construction of a dwelling place for his residence in the midst of the people (25:8), Josephus reports that God would be visiting (ἐπιφοιτῶν) the Tent (3.100). In another place, commenting on the consecration and God’s entry into the Tent, the author comments that ‘God was a guest (ἐπεξενώθη)’ in the cult site (*Ant.* 3.202). As observed previously, a close observation is made by Josephus in his rewriting of Solomon’s temple-building account.

Josephus also writes that when the multitude heard Moses, they rejoiced along with him and started to donate materials for the construction of the Tent. With the material accumulated, the author mentions that '[Moses] built the Tent (σκηνή), and it differed not at all from a portable and wandering temple (μεταφερομένου καὶ συμπερινοστοῦντος ναοῦ)' (3.103 [Feldman]).⁴⁴ Like other Judaeans writers, Josephus perceives the Tent as the precursor of the future Temple in Jerusalem. The author alludes to the Tent (σκηνή) as a sanctuary (ὁ ναός) at least 17 times in Books 3 and 4.⁴⁵

Like Philo, Josephus describes the Tent as a portable temple (*Mos.* 2.73; *QE* 2.83).⁴⁶ Josephus seems to perceive the portable cult site as temporary; elsewhere, he writes that as soon as the Hebrews entered Canaan, 'in the fairest part of the land', on God's direction, one holy city would be selected as the place for the Temple. No other city in the land of the Hebrews would have an altar or cult site (*Ant.* 4.200-201). The idea of a transitory cult site that would serve as a blueprint for the permanent one in Jerusalem is reinforced by the layout of the new Temple and the usage of the Tent's furnishings. Thus, at the dedication of the Solomonic Temple, Josephus reports that they carried 'the ark and the tent that Moyses had erected as well as all the vessels for the sacrificial service of God' to the complex (*Ant.* 8.101 [Begg and Spilsbury]).

Thereafter, Josephus goes on to describe the Tent. He begins with the court (3.108-114), the exterior (3.115-121), and the interior (3.122-123), continuing to the furnishings (3.124-150), and the garments of the priests (3.151-179), which we will examine in a separate section. After outlining the characteristics of the cult site and the high priest's attire, he comments:

One might wonder at the hatred of men toward us which they have continued to have on the ground that we belittle the Divinity that, indeed, they themselves have made up their minds to reverence (σέβειν). For if someone should investigate the construction of the Tent and should observe the clothing and the vessels of the priest that we use for the sacred service, he would find that our lawgiver (νομοθέτης) was a divine man (θεῖον ἄνδρα) and that the slanders that we hear from the others are unfounded. For he will find that each of these is in imitation and representation of the universe (ἀπομίμησιν καὶ διατύπωσιν τῶν ὅλων), if someone should be willing to consider them ungrudgingly and with understanding (*Ant.* 3.179-180 [Feldman, modified]).

⁴⁴ Here and elsewhere, Josephus and other Judaeans writers use the term σκηνή for the identification of the biblical tabernacle following the LXX (e.g., Exod 40:22; 40:5) (Koester 1989: 20).

⁴⁵ Stuart Robertson has identified the following mentions: 3.103, 125, 129, 130, 139, 142, 202, 242, 243, 245, 270, 278; 4.200, 201, 203, 313, 314 (1991: 47).

⁴⁶ Robertson suggests that Josephus could have relied on Philo for the idea of a portable shrine (1991: 49). Although both thinkers share the idea, the terms they employ are not the same.

Josephus appears here to use the cosmological interpretation of the Tent to refute some of the frequent accusations levelled against the Judaeans throughout antiquity, including impiety (ἀσεβεια).⁴⁷ Moreover, Josephus may have intended to refer to the nature of God as misconstrued by outsiders,⁴⁸ and the view that the native god of the Judaeans had power only within a circumscribed geographic area.⁴⁹ As a way to refute such slanders about Judaeans worship and enhance Moses' character, Josephus invites his readers to observe the structure of the Tent, its contents, and the priestly garments he has just described.⁵⁰ In this way, he remarks, the readers will find that the 'lawgiver (νομοθέτης) was a divine man (θεῖον ἄνδρα).'⁵¹

Θεῖος ἀνὴρ was an expression commonly employed by Graeco-Roman litterateurs, but with a wide range of connotations. F. Cornford explains that the epithet 'could be taken literally, as when Pythagoras or Plato was supposed to be the son of a god.' Within the context of metempsychosis, 'it could denote the condition of a soul which had achieved purification and was destined to escape further reincarnation and to join the company of the gods.' The term 'divine' could also mean "'divinely inspired" and was applied to the seer and to the poet.' Lastly, the term could denote the existence of a group of men 'whose wisdom is not derived from ordinary experience in the light of common days but from access to a world of gods and spirit or timeless reality however conceived' (1952: 108; see also Thiebaut 1998: 200-231).

Josephus does not appear to regard Moses as a god (ὁ θεός) or demigod (ὁ ἡμίθεος), though he indeed emphasises the elevated status of the lawgiver in the manner of the great philosophers and sages of old.⁵² Christopher Jones explains that 'philosophers...caused particular difficulties of classification, since their mode of life and their devotion to knowledge often seemed to place them

⁴⁷ The peculiar customs of the Judaeans in refusing to reverence the gods of the *polis* or country could lead to their being suspected of atheism or impiety (Sevenster 1975: 97). Tacitus, for instance, writes that 'the Judaeans regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abominate' (*Hist.* 5.4 [Moore, LCL, modified]). In instances of manifest sacrilege, a formal accusation could be issued. Josephus himself was familiar with such charges, since in Domitian's principate the couple Flavius Clemens and Domitilla were apparently charged for having adopted Judaeans ways. Clemens, though a serving consul, was condemned to death, and his wife was banished from Rome (Barclay 2007: 251, n. 552; Cass. Dio 67.14.2a-3a; cf. Suet. *Dom.* 15).

⁴⁸ See Origen *C. Cels.* 1.23; cf. Cook 2004: 116.

⁴⁹ See Julian. *C. Gal.* 354a-c; cf. Cook 2004: 275-276.

⁵⁰ As observed in Chapter One, Craig R. Koester suggests that Josephus used the cosmological interpretation of the Tent in the hope of persuading some readers to adopt Judaeans practices (1989: 174). This understanding, however, is not clear and distinct in this particular passage.

⁵¹ The term appears again in *Against Apion*, but there Josephus does not indicate his own opinion of Moses' divinity. He only mentions that for the Egyptians, Moses is a 'man marvellous and divine (ἄνδρα θαυμαστὸν...καὶ θεῖον)' (1.279).

⁵² The characterisation of biblical figures as if they were great philosophers is distinctive in the first half of *Antiquities*. Thus, Abraham is pictured as 'an extremely intelligent man and gifted not only in understanding but also persuading by his words with regards to whatever he would undertake to teach' (1.168). King Solomon, with his 'prudence and wisdom (φρόνησις καὶ σοφία)' excelled all the ancients in understanding. The king was also acquainted with all aspect of the nature and 'studied them all philosophically' (8.42-44). For other biblical figures, see Feldman 1998: 335-373 (Joseph), 629-657 (Daniel).

above the normal level and in close contact with the divine'. In this way, several prominent philosophers were described as wise men of a divine intellect (2004: 76-77).⁵³

Josephus characterises Moses as a man who lived by God's will and who excelled in virtue. Furthermore, 'Josephus shows that although Moses is clearly just a man, he has a unique status that is the result of approaching and apprehending God's nature and that qualifies him to be the preeminent lawgiver' (Mathews 2012: 25). Because Moses rightly understood the nature of God and the universe, he was capable of constructing a constitution that has its 'arrangement in harmony with the nature of the universe' (*Ant.* 1.24; cf. 1.15, 19-20), which finds explanation in the Graeco-Roman philosophical theory of the cosmic dimension of the law. Considering that Mosaic Law regulates the Tent and the rituals performed within, it is rational to think of the cult site as an 'imitation and representation of the universe (*ἀπομίμησιν καὶ διατύπωσιν τῶν ὅλων*)' (3.180; see also 3.123). The structure of the Tent, its furnishings, and the priestly vestments all would reflect the universal cosmic principles established by the God who is the creator and preserver of all things.

Thus, when Josephus describes the Tent, its appurtenances, and the priests' clothing, he also gives their cosmological meaning (3.123, 132, 145-146, 181-186). He writes, for instance, that the types of material used to weave the Tent's textile indicate the basic elements of nature from which God made the universe. The internal divisions of the Tent are 'an imitation of the nature of the universe' (*μίμησιν τῆς τῶν ὅλων φύσεως*) and therefore connected with three cosmic regions: the land, the sea, and the sky (3.123). The lampstand and the twelve loaves of bread signify heavenly bodies, and the priests' attire the whole universe. Josephus then concludes his narrative on the Tent by suggesting that the cosmic symbolism of the cult site is due to the virtue of Moses, the only one who knew God's nature and mind (3.187; 4.180; see also Feldman 2000: 282, n. 492). Thus, the Tent was not only a dwelling built to celebrate the universal power of God, but also a product of a constitution that was in harmony with universal nature and drafted by the greatest sage and legislator who ever lived.

4.3 Summary

In this chapter we have surveyed several Josephan texts that demonstrate the relevance of the Jerusalem Temple for the Judaeen author. While the cult site figures in virtually all his

⁵³ For further details on the use of *θεῖος ἀνὴρ* in Josephus' portrayal of Moses, see Tiede 1973: 231-232; Holladay 1977: 82; Mason 2008: 116, n. 895; Feldman 2000: 279, n. 473.

compositions, Josephus devotes large sections of *Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities* to accounts of the Temple. Josephus' descriptions encompass all the versions of the Temple: the Tent, the Solomonic Temple, the post-exilic Temple, and the Herodian Temple. In *War*, his focus is on the Herodian Temple; in *Antiquities*, all the main iterations of the cult site are described. Following in the footsteps of his predecessors, Josephus attempts to show his Roman readers the significance of the Temple in Jerusalem not only for the Judaean people, but also for humanity in general. Thus, Josephus' assertions on the Jerusalem Temple should be examined in their socio-political and cultural context. Obviously, his compositions were in continuous dialogue with his historical milieu, and the contours of the accounts were adjusted to the interests and developments of his generation.

It is also in those two major works that Josephus portrays the Temple as a miniature model of the cosmos. For Josephus, the cult site is an 'imitation and representation of the universe' (*Ant.* 3.180). The structure of the Temple, its contents, services, and personnel embody such universal cosmic principles. Whereas the cosmological interpretation of the Jerusalem Temple in *War* may be understood as Josephus' attempt to show the power of the Judaean god over the whole cosmos, maintaining the harmony and preservation of the universe, with a resulting reflection in the arrangement of the cult site, in *Antiquities*, in addition to this argument, Josephus resorts to a conception of Mosaic Law as being in tune with the cosmic harmony. Stressing the superiority of Judaean Law, Josephus shows that this Law is authoritative because it codifies the universal law, which in its turn represents the will of the God – the creator of the universe.

Up to this point in our investigation, we have touched on the reasons why the Jerusalem Temple, and its predecessor the Tent, was portrayed as the embodiment of the cosmos in Josephus' *Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities*. In the following two chapters, we turn to Josephus' extended cosmological explanation of the Herodian Temple in *War* (5.207-237), and its first version, the Tent, in *Antiquities* (3.108-187).

Chapter 5: The Herodian Temple in *Judaean War*

As observed in the introductory chapter, almost nothing has been written specifically about the cosmological view of the Temple in Josephus' *War*. For those few who devote some pages to the cult site, the discussions are usually interwoven with Josephus' remarks on the Tent symbolism in *Antiquities*, and almost nothing is said about specific passages in *War*. We also note that those experts tend to hold the opinion that the use of this imagery in *War* is related to 'cosmic religion'. Erwin Goodenough, for instance, proposes the idea that the cosmological colouring employed by Josephus in his cult site's interpretation should be read as the author's attempt to make the Temple cultus into an 'astral religion'. The astral elements indicate that the whole universe participated in 'the great cosmic worship' of God (1992: 167). C. T. R. Hayward expresses the same view and indicates that 'Josephus may imply that the worship of the Temple symbolised the universe in its various parts, in such a way that the cosmos might be said to worship God in the course of Temple Service' (1996: 144; see also Gussmann 2008: 394). In dialogue with Goodenough's ideas (1935: 97-98, 119), Jean Daniélou also perceives the symbolism of the Temple as presented by Josephus in a mystic way. For him, the cosmological elements reveal the soul's journey into God; the high priest is the only initiate who has access to the hidden mysteries (1955: 86).

We shall see that except for the cosmological elements employed by Josephus in his apologetic portrayal of the Jerusalem Temple, there is nothing in the author's description of the cult site indicating that Judaean practices are immersed in astralism or that Roman readers would associate the services with mystery cults. Even though Josephus refers to the worldwide scope of the rituals performed by the high priests (*J.W.* 5.236), as shown in the previous chapter, the cosmological motifs of the Temple do not indicate that all creation worships the creator during the services. On the contrary, as we shall now observe, they appear to emphasise the uniqueness and exclusivity of the Temple and present God's sovereignty over the entire cosmos.

5.1 The Portrayal of the Temple by Josephus

The portrayal of the Jerusalem Temple by Josephus in *Judaean War* refers to the last construction project of the cult site in the Graeco-Roman period. Since the Temple was entirely rebuilt by order of King Herod, this iteration is commonly termed the Herodian Temple by scholars. Even though much of Josephus' description of the Temple, its furnishings and priests'

vestments, and cosmological meaning are concentrated in his extensive digression on Jerusalem in *War*'s Book 5.184-236, the passage has a particular literary function – to help readers picture the siege now beginning – and so does not tell us everything we might like to know about his view of the cosmological aspects. Moreover, Josephus' later accounts of the Temple in *Judaean Antiquities* 15.380-425 and *Against Apion* 2.102-109 diverge in some details from this description. Despite these inconsistencies, the supplementary material found in later writings helps us to better understand the layout of the Herodian Temple.

It is worth stressing that Josephus paints an incomplete and sometimes distorted picture of the Jerusalem Temple. Understanding the nature, and the limitations of the account in *War* is essential to the use of Josephus' text in constructing a picture of the cult site. Two things are clear in Josephus' narrative of the Temple: the use of rhetorical flourishes and the compactness of the cosmological explanation of the Temple. Josephus' resort to rhetorical device to mark the perfection of God's Temple is evident in his use of an architectural language that extols ideal symmetry and proportion of the structure, which resembles the harmony of the cosmos and which, in its turn, was valued by ancient Graeco-Roman architects (Vitr. *De arch.* 3.1.1).

War does not provide as comprehensive a cosmological interpretation of the Temple as *Antiquities*. Few of the cult site's features, vessels, and priests' apparel are explicitly read symbolically. Though one cannot determine that every single part of the Herodian Temple had a cosmological significance, we are in a position to conjecture, by comparison with other cult sites existing in Josephus' time, that at least some of them did for Josephus. Also, the historical nature of the work imposes limitations on the writing style and on what Josephus could explore at any length (e.g., *J.W.* 1.7, 9, 11-12; 6.199-200; 7.454), in contrast to Judaean authors who devoted their writings to the exegesis of the biblical texts or Judaean philosophy.

5.2 The Herodian Temple

5.2.1 General View of the Temple

Josephus writes that the massive reshaping of the Jerusalem Temple began by the main building (sanctuary) that was completed in a year and five months, while the porticoes and the outer enclosed areas took eight years to be finished (*Ant.* 15.420-421). Other work on the site seems to have extended for decades, since Josephus continues to write about additions during the administration of the procurator Albinus (62-64 CE) (*Ant.* 20.219).

For Josephus, Herod's outstanding renovation project was a direct result of his devotion to God, a theme highlighted in *War* but somewhat submerged in his *Antiquities* (Mason 1991: 186-192). He also relates that the extraordinary work undertaken by the king consisted of both the reconstruction of God's sanctuary and the enlargement of its precinct. The costs of such a project were immeasurable, and the magnificence of the Temple Mount compound was incomparable. Priests executed part of the project and, according to Josephus, the people saw divine manifestations in the period during which the sanctuary was constructed (*J.W.* 1.400-401; cf. *Ant.* 15.380, 390, 425).

Josephus employs rhetorical techniques in *War* to create a vivid mental image and make the Jerusalem Temple come alive in the minds of his audiences.¹ In Book 5, he begins his account of the Temple by situating it on 'a strong hill (ἐπὶ λόφου καρτεροῦ)' in Jerusalem.² He writes that the level area of the hill summit was originally barely sufficient to accommodate the shrine (τῷ ναῷ) and the altar (τῷ βωμῷ), given that the surrounding ground was 'precipitous and steep (ἀπόκρημνος...καὶ καθάνης)'. But King Solomon, the founder of the Temple (τὸν ναὸν ἔκτισεν), surrounded the east side of the hill with a fortification wall and levelled that area. Other sides of the cult site, however, remained exposed. In successive generations, the Israelites did extensive works, including the fortification and levelling of other areas. According to Josephus, the accomplishment of such an enterprise was only possible with the funds in the sacred treasury and tributes offered to God from the entire world (τῆς οἰκουμένης) (5.184-187).³

Josephus' positioning of the Jerusalem Temple on a hill that turned into the residence of God would have been understood by ancient societies, given that high places were the natural dwellings of gods and a privileged place of meeting between gods and humans. Merle Langdon explains that 'mountains intervene between godly space, which is at a level above all else, and mortal space. Mountains also symbolise the ultimacy of the godhead and facilitate nearness to the divine canopy' (2005: 461; see also Pedley 2005: 3-5). Among the Greeks, mountain peaks such as the Olympus were the perfect landscape for Zeus. In Rome, the Capitoline Hill was the dwelling of the most important god of the Roman pantheon, Jupiter Optimus Maximus. The Romans also

¹ For the use of vividness in ancient narratives, see Pitcher 2009: 84-91.

² This is a rare expression is attested previously only in Thucydides' work. There, 'strong hill' also appears in the context of war (4.129.4; 4.131.1; 5.7.4; 7.78.6).

³ In examining the ancient topography of Jerusalem, one notes that the hill described by Josephus, also known as Mount Moriah, is bounded on the east side by the Kidron Valley and the west by the Tyropoeon Valley (or Cheesemakers' Valley). The oblong crest reaches at its highest point that Josephus locates the original Temple (Bahat 1999: 43; see also *J.W.* 5.136-141).

regarded this hill as indestructible and eternal (Lewis and Short 1891: 286-287; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 9.440; Hor. *Carm.* 3.30).

Josephus begins the description of the Temple compound by inviting his readers to imagine themselves in the outside Temple area and then proceeding to the sanctuary. Josephus attempts to show the beauty and grandeur of the cult site when he refers to the rare, expensive, and finely crafted material used in the construction. His description of the Herodian Temple evidences an architectural concept well-known in temples of the Graeco-Roman period: a rectangular piazza raised over an artificial platform, surrounded by porticoes on all sides, perhaps with one side a basilica (Royal Stoa), with a sanctuary standing alone in the centre (fig. 5.1). This type of temple plan was commonly found in the eastern Empire and North Africa, but none of the surviving ruins competes with the Jerusalem Temple site in dimensions.⁴ Thus, the Herodian Temple layout appears to have been influenced by the innovative feature of the Herodian program that included a variety of architectural features of Graeco-Roman and Eastern origins (Roller 1998: 90-91; Levine 2002: 232; Lalor 2002: 113).

5.2.2 The Porticoes and Courts

Josephus tells us that the sanctuary was surrounded by large porticoes that had double rows of supporting columns twenty-five cubits high (11 m). Each column was made out of ‘a single block of the whitest marble (μονόλιθοι λευκοτάτης μαρμάρου)’ and covered with a cedar-panelled ceiling. He explains that ‘the natural splendour of these columns, polished and fitted, presented a notable spectacle (θεωρίαν ἄξιόλογον), without any adornment in addition such as painting or bas-relief’ (5.190-191).⁵ Josephus here, as in several parts of his account, stresses the whiteness of the stones used in the Herodian temple. In ‘ancient Greek tradition, the beauty of colour was associated with its brightness, which in turn depended on the colour’s purity.’ The purer the

⁴ See, in this regard, Paturel 2019: 211-219.

⁵ In the Imperial Age, marble was one of the noblest materials employed for architectural purposes. Also, the white marble was the preferred stone in the Flavian period (Attanasio 2003: 21). Moshe Fischer has expressed doubt about the use of marble in the Herodian Temple. According to him, archaeology has not confirmed the massive extent use of marble in Herodian buildings, and no natural source of marble is found in Palestine and its vicinity (1994: 80-81). Given that Josephus refers in *Antiquities* 15.416 to polished columns without specifying the stone, Fischer suggests that Josephus may have erred in *War*, ‘then his references there to marble must have designated some other building material rather than the real thing’. It could be that Josephus referred to ‘a light-coloured local limestone’ (1994: 83-84). Despite the controversy surrounding the use of the Greek term μάρμαρος by Josephus, one could argue that, by stressing that this was no common stone, which men could carry, but the whitest and most expensive stone, Josephus intends ‘marble’. For the use of white marble in Roman temples, see Schertz and Fine 2020: 85.

colour, the brighter it would be. For Plato, brightness, purity, and clarity of colour were also associated with the heavens (Schibille 2014: 120; *Phd.* 110e).

Figure 5.1: Reconstructed plan of the sanctuary and its sections according to Josephus' War. Rendered by Gabriel Costa⁶

The porticoes were thirty cubits wide (13.5 m), and their complete circuit, including the Antonia Fortress in the northeast side, measured six stadia (1065 m).⁷ The whole uncovered area of this court was paved with 'all type of stones in various colours' (ἅπαν πεποικίλτο παντοδαπῷ λίθῳ) (5.192; cf. *Ant.* 15.416). Indeed, a floor pavement made of different stones and colours would appeal to the magnificence and luxury of the court's floor. However, Josephus does not say anything about arrangement and type of stones or the colours used in the pavement.

⁶ The plan of the sanctuary and its sections is based on Josephus' description of the Herodian Temple in *War's* Book 5.193-227. In view of the lack of information about particular areas of the sanctuary, the reconstruction does not accurately present the measurements of the floor plan.

⁷ In *Antiquities*, Josephus mentions a Royal Portico along the southern wall of the Temple, and considers the building 'the most remarkable of those under the sun'. He refers to the height of the Royal Portico that was supported by four rows of columns in a total number of 162. The column capitals were of 'Corinthian style with carvings', and caused astonishment to those who saw them 'because of the magnificence of the ensemble' (15.411-416 [Van Henten]). The temple of Artemis at Ephesus had 127 columns (Schertz and Fine 2020: 87).

On 6 September 2016, the Temple Mount Sifting Project announced the discovery of decorated floor tiles, known as *opus sectile*, from the Herodian Temple.⁸ The coloured floor tile segments, according to the researchers involved, could have come from the Temple courtyard. As evidence, they mention Josephus' remarks on the pavement and rabbinic literature. Given the fragile nature of those coloured designs, it is not certain whether they paved the courtyard or the covered porticoes floor of the Temple.

Because of the variety of stones used and the difficulty of mounting tiles, the *opus sectile* technique was treasured in the Graeco-Roman period (Dunbabin 1999: 254). The fragments of the paving tiles found in the Temple Mount suggest different geometric forms of arrangement, including squares, triangles, and eight-pointed-stars. The floor patterns were made of tiles of distinctive colours: dark tiles made of bitumen, light-coloured tiles made of limestone, calcite-alabaster, breccia, and marble (Synder et al. 2016: 56-59). In rabbinic literature, the marble tiles used in the Herodian Temple pavement are described as the waves of the sea (*b. Sukkah* 51b).

Josephus writes that those crossing the Open Court (ὕπαιθρον), which was accessible to both Judaeans and Gentiles, entered a Second Court of the Temple (τὸ δεῦτερον ἱερὸν) demarcated by an exquisitely worked stone balustrade three cubits high (1.5 m).⁹ This inner court open to the sky was called the 'holy place (ἱερὸν ἅγιον)'. The admission to the inner *temenos* was restricted to purified Judaeans. Slabs in Greek and Latin were placed in the court giving notice about the prohibition and the strict observance of the law of purification (*J.W.* 5.193-194). Josephus even writes that the inscriptions threatened the trespassers with the death penalty (6.124-126; *Ant.* 15.417).¹⁰ A more reverential atmosphere might have surrounded this area, reminding the visitors that they were standing in God's realm.

The Second Court was accessible from the Open Court by fourteen steps, and this upper area, of a square shape (τετράγωνον), was enclosed by a wall forty cubits high (17.5 m). He also explains that a level terrace of ten cubits (4.5 m) wide separated the fourteen steps from the Temple's wall. From the terrace, a further five steps conducted worshippers to the gates (*J.W.* 5.195-198). Whether or not the numbers of steps are idealised in Josephus' account, they might have Pythagorean symbolism for him and his audience. Five is an odd number, and fourteen is an

⁸ See <http://tmsifting.org/en/2016/09/06/1374/>

⁹ In *Antiquities*, Josephus refers to this court as 'the first precinct' (ὁ πρῶτος περιβόλος; 15.417).

¹⁰ Josephus' remarks are confirmed by two marble slabs written in Greek and preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The copy in Istanbul has a complete text: 'No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and forecourt around the sacred precinct. Whoever is caught will himself be responsible for (his) consequent death' (Cotton et al. 2010: 43-44). Philo does not mention a slab, but he comments on the prohibition of gentiles in the inner courts and the punishment with death to those who disrespected the ordinances (*Leg.* 212; see also Sanders 1992: 61).

even-odd number, which when divided in two gives an odd number (seven). According to Plutarch, odd numbers were connected with celestial gods (*Vit. Num.* 69-70; see also March 2008: 232).

Josephus also mentions ten gates in the innermost wall: four gates in the north side, four gates in the south side, one in the east, and another opposite the east gate within the enclosed area for Judaeen women to worship, and which connected the women's courtyard to the men's.¹¹ The Court of the Women (ἡ γυναικωνῆτις) was the only precinct assigned to a Judaeen woman for worshipping. Women could enter through two gates – one in the north wall and another the south – and remain in the enclosed area, but they were not allowed to go beyond the partition wall through their own inner gate (*J.W.* 5.198-199).¹² The number of gates in the innermost wall of the Temple also seems to suggest number symbolism. Ten represented perfection. The Pythagoreans associated ten with the universe, heaven, eternity, God, and the sun. Ten represented the universe, 'because all things are arranged by it both in general and in particular; and because it is the most perfect boundary of number... just as heaven is the receptacle of all things, they called it "heaven"' (*Theologumena arithmeticae* 79-80, 82 [Waterfield]).

Josephus observes that there was no gate on the west side of the Temple building. Instead, he describes porticoes between the gates, fronting the Treasury Chambers (τὰ γαζοφυλάκια) on the inner side of the west wall.¹³ Again, Josephus evokes the grandeur of the Temple columns, writing that the colonnades, in a single row only, were supported by 'exceedingly beautiful and tall columns (σφόδρα μὲν καλοῖς καὶ μεγάλοις...κίουσιν)' not inferior to the colonnades in the lower court (5.200). The author appeals to the readers' senses, demonstrating that those splendid and lofty columns are an invitation to enter into a world of beauty and refinement. The vivid representation of the columns calls to mind the description of the lofty columns of the shining palace of the Sun in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2.1), as well as the height of the columns of Domitian's palace, which is compared to the heavens by Statius (*Silv.* 4.2.18-31).

Josephus makes explicit here that the entire area of the Temple Mount was not sacred, but only the quadrilateral space within the balustrade, though elsewhere he describes the whole esplanade as a 'sacred precinct of God (τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ τέμενος)' (4.388). This Second Court seems to

¹¹ Josephus mentions seven gates in *Antiquities*: three gates in the southern and northern areas, and one in the eastern area (15.418). See Bahat's remarks on the difference in the numbers of gates in *War* and *Antiquities* (1999: 52-53).

¹² While in *War* Josephus limits the area as only for women, in *Antiquities* 15.418 and *Against Apion* 2.104, he indicates that the court was accessible for men and their wives. For further details about the Women's Court, see Levine 2002: 240.

¹³ Elsewhere, Josephus explains that the Treasury Chambers were a depository of all Judaeen wealth. In the destruction of the Temple in 70, a large amount of money, clothing, and other valuables perished in the fire (*J.W.* 6.282). For treasury chambers in Greek temples, see Interdonato 2016: 172, 175.

be the boundary of the original Temple spot constructed by King Solomon. In *Antiquities*, Josephus writes that the precinct was ‘holy (Ἱερόν)’ and had a ‘square layout (τετραγώνου)’. Only those who observed the strict law of purification were allowed to enter (8.96).¹⁴ Several temples in the Graeco-Roman world were built as squares, and we know that admiration for geometry, numbers, and proportions and their relation with the cosmos were common among philosophers.

In other Judaeon literature, the ideal Temple of Jerusalem is depicted as square, which could symbolise perfection. Ezekiel describes a square sanctuary (LXX: ἁγίασμα...τετραγώνου) of five hundred by five hundred cubits (220 m) (45:1-2). Eupolemus mentions the foundations of the Solomonic Temple as being sixty cubits long and sixty cubits wide (26.5 m) (Fr. 2 = Euseb. *P. E.* 9.34.4). In the *Temple Scroll*, the ideal Temple compound is surrounded by three concentric square courtyards (11QT 30-46). In Revelation, the heavenly Jerusalem has no temple – given that God and the Lamb are themselves the temple – but the city is foursquare, twelve thousand stadia¹⁵ long and twelve thousand stadia wide (21:16-22).¹⁶ Among the Pythagoreans, the square is a geometric figure related to the earth (Heath 1908: 226; see also Van Henten 2015: 368-369).

Although *War* 5 gives no additional information about the layout of the Jerusalem Temple and its cosmic symbolism, other elements in his account may have cosmic connotations. When anticipating this later discussion of the Temple in an overview in *War* 1, for instance, Josephus mentions ‘the seven purifications (ἑπτὰ ἁγνείας)’ (1.26). Some scholars have understood this, because of possible parallels in other texts, as a reference to the zones of graded holiness into which Jerusalem and its Temple were divided (Thackeray 1927: 14-15).¹⁷ The ability to approach each one of those zones or rings would depend on the state of the purity, gender, and lineage of the worshipper. The Mishnah, by comparison, maps ten concentric circles of holiness: the land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, the area within the barrier, the Court of Women, the Court of Israelites, the Court of the Priests, the area between the porch and the altar, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies (*m. Kelim* 1:6-9).

Alternatively, Josephus could be referring to seven degrees of purification required of worshippers to enter different areas of the Temple, in which case the spaces would be within the *temenos*, or ‘the holy place’ mentioned in *War* 5.194. While he does not present a detailed view of

¹⁴ The reference to the holy court as being square is noteworthy. Greek writers used τετραγώνος for the translation of *Roma quadrata*. The term refers to the place on the Palatine Hill chose by Romulus for the foundation of Rome (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.65.3; Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 9.4). It could be that Josephus attempts to connect the prestige and antiquity of this Roman site with that of Jerusalem, though more evidence is needed.

¹⁵ One *stadium* was equivalent to 625 Roman feet (ca. 185 m).

¹⁶ For other references in Judaeon literature, see Hayman 1986: 179-180.

¹⁷ The late second century Christian thinker, Clement of Alexandria, writes of seven circuits around the Jerusalem Temple (*Strom.* 5.32.2).

the degree of holiness of the Temple, like that found in the rabbinic literature, his remarks on the purity system and people who were able to access each area of the cult site are noteworthy. For Josephus, the degree of holiness within the holy perimeter of the Temple area could, for example, be divided into the following grades: (1) the Second Court, approached by all Judaeans who observed the purification law (5.193-194, 227); (2) the Court of the Women (5.198-199); (3) the Court of the male Judaeans (implicit); (4) the Parapet (Court of the Priests; 5.226), approached by those of priestly origin, including those ones who could not officiate because of some physical deformity (5.228); (5) the Altar (5.229) and (6) the Holy Place (5.216), allowed only to priests free of any physical defect; and (7) the Holy of Holies, accessed by the high priest only in special occasions (5.219, 230).¹⁸

According to this view, there would be seven different spaces within the square area. The number seven plays a vital role in Judaeon tradition, usually in relation to God's works, and denoted perfection. In the Graeco-Roman period, Judaeon writers such as Aristobulus and Philo highlight the role of the number in the order of the cosmos (Collins 1984: 1253-1257). Besides the association of the number seven with the planets, the Pythagoreans also associate the number with reverence and fulness, to the point that, 'many things, both in the heavens of the universe and on the Earth – celestial bodies and creatures and plants – are in fact brought to completion by it' ([Iamblichus] *Theologumena arithmeticae* 59 [Waterfield]). For John Strange, the arrangement of the Temple in seven precincts could indicate 'a journey through the seven planet spheres, a Hellenised concept linked to astrology'. The whole plan could also suggest that 'in Jerusalem, the true *kosmos* was to be found' (2003: 112).

5.2.3 The Gates

Josephus writes that nine of the ten 'gates (πυλῶν)' in the inner wall were overlaid with 'gold (χρυσῷ)' and 'silver (ἀργύρῳ)', along with their doorposts and lintels. The gate outside the sanctuary area was embellished with 'Corinthian bronze (Κορινθίου χαλκοῦ)', exceeding in value even those overlaid in silver and gold (5.201).¹⁹ Pliny confirms the inestimable value of this metal that exceeded gold and silver, and reports on people becoming agitated in their attempt to get it.

¹⁸ Josephus is inconsistent with the internal division of the Temple complex in other writings. In *Antiquities*, he mentions three main areas: the inner precinct which was accessed by both Judaeon men and their wives; a second precinct, considered sacred and inaccessible to women; and a third precinct for the priests, which included the Temple and altar (15.418-421). In *Against Apion*, the author mentions four areas: the outer court for foreigners; the second court for all Judaeans, both men and women; the third court, only Judaeon men; the court of the priests wearing priestly attire; and the inner sanctuary, only accessed by priests in special garments (2.103-104). See also Orian 2016: 183-211.

¹⁹ In another place, the author notes that twenty people were required to close this massive door (*J.W.* 6.293).

Corinthian bronze was an alloy of copper, gold, and silver, which could have three different appearances. According to Pliny, there was ‘a white variety, coming very near to silver in brilliance...a second kind, in which the yellow quality of gold predominates, and a third kind in which all the metals were blended in equal proportions’ (*HN* 34.1, 6-8 [Rackham, LCL]).²⁰ Given that the bronze gate was directed toward the sunrise, the gate might well have produced a dazzling effect on those who visited the Temple in the early morning when the first sunrays of the day struck it and remembering the visitors that the majesty of God was set in the splendour of the door.

Additionally, Josephus tells us that ‘each gateway (πυλῶνος) had double doors (θύραι), and each door was thirty cubits high (13 m) and fifteen cubits wide (6.5 m). Beyond and within the entrances, these gateways expanded on either side into tower-like chambers (πυργοειδεῖς) measuring thirty cubits in width and length (13 m) and over forty cubits high (17.5 m); each of these chambers was supported by two columns twelve cubits in circumference (5.5 m)’ (*J.W.* 5.202-203).²¹ Josephus explains that all of the gates were of the same dimensions, except for the gate to the west of the Corinthian gate entering into the Women’s Court, on the east side. This gate that gave access to the court reserved for Judaeans men was fifty cubits high (22 m), with doors forty cubits wide (17.5 m). The inner gate was more ‘splendidly decorated with a lavishly thick overlay of silver and gold (τὸν κόσμον πολυτελέστερον ἐπὶ δαυιλῆς πάχος ἀργύρου τε καὶ χρυσοῦ).’ Josephus also tells us that a stairway of fifteen steps led from the Women’s Court to this large gate. He explains that the plating of the nine gates was a gift of Alexander the Alabarch, the brother of Philo of Alexandria (5.204-206).

The reader again becomes aware of the richness and grandeur of the Jerusalem Temple through Josephus’ emphasis on the substantial use of precious metals. In the context of a cosmic reading of the Temple, the gold and silver may be linked to the heavenly bodies. In Ancient Near Eastern and later in the Graeco-Roman world, gold and silver were identified with the two brightest objects in the earthly sky: sun-gold and moon-silver (Keyser 1990: 361-362; Couprie 2001: 41). In his commentaries on Homer’s works, Heraclitus also associates precious metals with the four elements. For him, ‘gold means the aetherial substance’, and ‘silver the air, which resembles it in colour’ (*All.* 43). Whether this would have been conventional thinking in Josephus’ cultural-elite or it reflects Heraclitus’ unique allegorical reading of the Homeric account remains uncertain.

²⁰ For further information, see Jacobson and Weitzman 1992: 237-247.

²¹ Based in biblical and rabbinical texts, Leen Ritmeyer proposes that those gates were not mere openings in the wall, but they were buildings with rooms on both sides of the central hallway (2006: 371).

Furthermore, the stairway of fifteen steps leading from the Women's Court to the Judaeon Court is a composite of number five, an odd number. Plutarch calls the number five 'nature' and 'perfection', and he associates it with Apollo (*Mor.* 388c-f). According to the Mishnah, the fifteen steps corresponded to the fifteen Songs of Ascents in Psalms 120-134 sang by the Levites when climbing the stairs. The final step culminated with Psalm 134 (*m. Mid.* 2:5). This song recognises God as the creator of heaven and earth, and who from his Temple in Jerusalem blesses all his servants.

5.2.4 The Sanctuary

Josephus then proceeds to the description of the 'sanctuary (ναός)' building, which he regards as 'the holiest place (τὸ ἁγίον ἱερόν)' in the entire Temple compound. Situated in the centre, the sanctuary edifice had three different chambers: the sanctuary vestibule, the Holy Place, and the 'the Holy of the Holy'. A stairway of twelve steps approached the entrance to the edifice. The façade of the vestibule was square with height and width, a hundred cubits (44 m) each way. As noted before, a hundred is a multiple of ten, a perfect number.²² According to Josephus, the structure behind the façade was forty cubits (17.5 m) narrower, 'for in front it had as it were shoulders extending twenty cubits (9 m) on either side' (5.207-209). The Mishnah agrees with Josephus about the Temple plan and compares it to a lion, 'narrow behind and wide in front' (*m. Mid.* 4.7). Although Josephus records nothing about the orientation of the façade of the Temple, it is implied that it was aligned to the eastern side, facing the golden-silver gate.²³

We also learn of a gate (πύλη) without doors (θύρας) that was seventy cubits high and twenty-five cubits wide (31 x 11 m) located in the front side of the vestibule. According to Josephus, the gate 'exhibits the open and uninterrupted expanse of the sky (τοῦ γὰρ οὐρανοῦ τὸ ἀφανὲς καὶ ἀδιάκλειστον ἐνέφανε)'. At the end side of the vestibule, giving access to the sanctuary, there were two golden folding doors (θύρας... χρυσᾶς) fifty-five cubits high and sixteen cubits wide (24.5 x 7 m).²⁴ The entire façade of the entranceway was covered with gold, as was the entire wall

²² For other possible Pythagorean number interpretations of the Temple's dimensions, see Chyutin 2006: 240-248.

²³ This orientation would agree, for instance, with the majority of Roman temples in Syria whose alignment is towards the east (Paturel 2019: 155). An eastern orientation of the sanctuary is suggested in *Antiquities*: 'Within it [wall], above, at the top itself ran another stone wall, which had on the eastern ridge a double portico of the same length as the wall – the sanctuary being in the middle – facing its doors. Many former kings decorated this [portico]' (15.401 [Van Henten]). See Leen Ritmeyer remarks on the eastern alignment of the Temple's façade (2006: 267). Alternatively, Joseph Patrich suggests an east-southeast orientation of the cult site (2009: 505-526).

²⁴ In *Against Apion*, Josephus gives different dimensions for the sanctuary's doors. He states that they were sixty cubits high, and twenty cubits wide (26.5 x 9 m), all overlaid with gold and almost entirely of solid metal. He also mentions that every day, 200 men were needed to close the doors (2.119).

surrounding it. Josephus notes that through the vestibule, worshippers from outside could see the first chamber of the sanctuary.²⁵ He also comments that the visitor's eyes were met by the radiance of the gold surrounding the gate. Ornaments in the form of 'golden grapevines (τὰς χρυσᾶς...ἀμπέλους)' stood above the doors, with large clusters as tall as a man (*J.W.* 5.208-212).²⁶

Josephus describes a series of staircases in between interior levels of the Temple's sacred area. The first staircase gave access to the quadrangular platform (5.195); beyond it, in the space of ten cubits (4.5 m) from the first staircase, another staircase led up to the gates (5.198); the third staircase is described between the Women's Court and the inner court of the sanctuary (5.206); and the fourth, in front of the sanctuary building (5.207). Complex stairways were an essential feature of Graeco-Roman temples, and they may indicate 'the widespread symbolism within the Mediterranean world of the kinetic experience of ascent as a way of achieving proximity to the divine.' This architectural image is observed in the Near Eastern cultures, including ziggurats in Babylon and Egyptian cult sites, and during the Roman Imperial Age in Syria, Lebanon and the eastern side of Jordan River, where staircases for ritual ceremonies became prevalent features in the local temples (Miles 1998/1999: 24-25; see also Miles 2016: 212). Josephus seems to stress this symbolism when relating a series of restrictions necessary to access each one of those elevated areas and their degree of holiness. The higher the area, the closer to heaven, the realm of God. Additionally, the staircase leading to the sanctuary, comprising twelve steps, could represent the tribes of Israel, as well as the signs of the zodiac.²⁷

With reference to the sanctuary's gate, modern readers may think it abstruse that a gate without doors can display the vastness of the sky, but for a Graeco-Roman reader, this understanding would make sense. E. Baldwin Smith explains that in ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman cultures, gateways had a special meaning. For instance, 'the city gateway with its towered façade, archway, and vestibule,' of great importance in all aspects of the life of the city, 'acquired divine, royal, and celestial meaning.' According to Smith, 'in the Ancient East, the gateway was a symbol of the heavenly authority just because it was the entrance to the domain and dwelling of both godlike kings and kinglike gods...Under the Romans, a similar imagery became customary in all parts of the Empire where the theophanic implications of the *Adventus*

²⁵ That is to say, when the doors of the sanctuary were folded back, and the curtain of the first chamber remained hanging and moving by the current of the wind (Branham 2006: 21).

²⁶ In *Antiquities*, Josephus locates the ornament above the doors at the entrance of the sanctuary and below the cornice. Instead of 'golden grapevines', he refers to 'a golden vine (ἀμπελος...χρυσή)' with bunches of grapes (βότρυας) hanging down from it. The author describes the adornment as 'a marvel of size and artistry to those who saw how much of the construction was made out of expensive material' (15.395 [Van Henten]).

²⁷ For the interpretation of the staircase steps of the sanctuary in terms of Vitruvius' remarks on the number of stairs leading to a temple, see Schwartz and Peleg 2011: 80.

Augusti and of triumphal entries gave a celestial import to the towered portal of the castrum and the triumphal arch.' Not only were city gateways highly regarded, but those located in palaces and temples, 'where the populace welcomed their kings and god-images as heavenly beings', were also important (1956: 10-13). Some of those arch-shaped gates were detached structures, outside the walls, showing that they were not for security, but were symbolic (e.g., in Tiberias and Gerasa).

Similar examples of gates regarded as the cosmos include the Gate of Ishtar in Babylon, where arched and towered portal ornamented with golden rosette-stars on a glazed blue brick imitated the arch of heaven; in Syria, during the Graeco-Roman period, some temples attached a celestial value to a gateway, especially as the mark of a heavenly stronghold and triumphal entrance on temples dedicated to sun and sky worship. In Rome, the *Porta Triumphalis*, which was used in the route of a triumph, may have linked its archway with heaven (Smith 1956: 30).²⁸

Josephus gives scant information about the gate of the sanctuary. However, his remarks on the cosmological meaning of the entranceway as a representation of the sky and later depictions of its façade in Late Antiquity show similarities with the gate pattern mentioned above.²⁹ According to those representations, the gate was an arched entranceway, located on the front side of the vestibule. The silver tetradrachm minted during the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 CE), for instance, shows on its obverse what seems to be the façade of the sanctuary with an arched entrance (fig. 5.2). Even though the coins circulated sixty-two years after the Temple's destruction, presumably some remains were still visible on the Temple Mount. In any case, there may have been older adults still living who could remember the former glory of the cult site (Avi-Yonah 1970: 328).³⁰ It seems that Josephus understands the gate to the sanctuary as a transitional space between different spheres. The gate led the priests to the heavenly realm, the dwelling of God.

Concerning the doors of the sanctuary, except for the substantial use of gold in the doors, which indicated the manifestation of God's presence, Josephus adds nothing about the cosmological symbolism of the front doors. However, doors mirroring the cosmos are found in the palace of the Sun in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The Roman poet describes the doors with reliefs

²⁸ For additional information on the *Porta Triumphalis*, see Cic. *Pis.* 23.55; Jos. *J.W.* 7.130; Versnel 1970: 132-163; Popkin 2016: 26-31.

²⁹ T. A. Busink suggests that the upper part of the vestibule wall was painted blue colour and for this reason it was interpreted by Josephus as the sky (1980: 1145). There is nothing, however, in Josephus' description that leads to this conclusion.

³⁰ Based on the tetradrachm of the Bar Kokhba Revolt and other Judaeon frescoes from Late Antiquity, Michael Avi-Yonah has attempted to reconstruct the Herodian Temple's façade (1970: 327-335). While Avi-Yonah has argued for a rectangular gate, Joshua Schwartz and Yehoshua Peleg have analysed the same sources and suggested a semi-circular arch (2011: 85-88).

carved in the shape of Oceanus, the earth, and the shining sky with the signs of the zodiac (2.5-19).

Figure 5.2: *Silver tetradrachm*, overstruck in the later Bar Kokhba Revolt, showing in its obverse the remembered façade of the Herodian Temple. British Museum, London, inv. no. R. 1910,1004.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Later sources confirm the grapevine at the entrance of the sanctuary.³¹ Tacitus refers to a golden vine (*vitisque aurea*) located in the Temple and the belief of some that the Judaeans worshipped Liber (= Dionysius), the Roman god of grape and wine (*Hist.* 5.5; see also *Plut. Mor. Quaest. conv.* 671d).³² In the Mishnah, a golden vine also stands over the entrance of the sanctuary, and the text adds that devotees who left leaves and berries as a freewill-offering had their donations hung up by the priests (*m. Mid.* 3.8). While Josephus does not explicitly assign any cosmic symbolism to the grapevine, his emphasis on the motif and its value shows the richness and singularity of the architecture of God's sanctuary when compared with other Graeco-Roman temples.

Relief ornaments in the shape of a bunch of grapes were a widespread motif in the Judaeen art of the Graeco-Roman period. They are found on coins of the First and Second Judaeen-Roman Wars, on mosaics of the early synagogues, and tombs (Hachlili 2013: 470). This motif can be traced back to the biblical texts, where the people of Israel are compared to a vine that God planted (Ps 80:8-9; Isa 5:1-7). The prophet Hosea describes the Israelites as a luxuriant grapevine (Hos 10:1). Also, Jeremiah compares the people to a vine chosen by God, and that turns against the deity into a corrupt and wild vine (Jer 2:21). The Judaeans of the Graeco-Roman period would be

³¹ Josephus refers in *Antiquities* to a golden grapevine worth five hundred talents that the Judaeen king Aristobulus II gave to Pompey as a gift. The golden work of art was deposited in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome (14.34-6).

³² For the association of the Judaeen god with Liber and Dionysius in Graeco-Roman literary sources, see Kirkpatrick 2014: 167-186.

familiar with this symbolic meaning of the vine and suspended grapes and leaves in the sanctuary's doors as a remembrance of their unique relationship with God. The practice of suspending offerings over the doors of temples was also common in Rome. Horns and stags decorated the doors of the temple of Diana, and garland and corn-wreath (*corona spicea*) hung on the temple of Ceres' doors in Rome (Smith 1859: 627).³³

5.2.5 The Curtain

According to Josephus, in front of the golden doors of the sanctuary hung a wondrous curtain (καταπέτασμα) of equal length to the gate.³⁴ In *Antiquities* 3.129, Josephus explains the practice of hanging a curtain in front of the sanctuary's doors as a custom that goes back to the portable wilderness sanctuary.³⁵ The curtain is a woven fabric of Babylonian provenance (πέπλος ἦν Βαβυλῶνιος) embroidered in various colours: hyacinth (ὑακίνθου), fine linen (βύσσου), scarlet (κόκκου), and purple (πορφύρας). Josephus, who may have seen the hanging up close, writes that it was 'fashioned in an extraordinary manner (θαυμαστῶς... εἰργασμένος)' (5.212). Elsewhere, he refers only to 'purple hangings (τὰ πορφυρᾶ...καταπετάσματα)' from the Temple in the Roman triumph (7.162). Also, in contrast to the account in *War*, Josephus refers in *Antiquities* to 'multi-coloured curtains (ποικίλοις ἐμπετάσμασιν), with floral designs (ἄνθη) in purple dye (ἀλουργέσιν), and with woven columns (κίονας δὲ ἐνυφασμένους)' (15.394 [Van Henten]).³⁶

Josephus' audience was familiar with curtains in temples, but few ancient Graeco-Roman authors mention them. Pausanias writes that the Temple of Zeus in Olympia had a woollen curtain (παραπέτασμα ἐρεοῦν) embellished with 'Assyrian weaving and Phoenician purple', which had been dedicated by Antiochus IV. He also states that 'the curtain is not drawn upwards to the roof as is that in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, but it is let down to the ground by cords' (5.12.4 [Jones and Ormerod, LCL]). A century later, Porphyry writes that 'the curtains (τὰ παραπέτασματα)' of the temples are drawn at noon, and no worshipper is allowed to enter the temples at this time (*De antr. nymph.* 26). One can note that the Greek authors employ the word παραπέτασμα for curtain, which is different from the καταπέτασμα used by Josephus in *War*

³³ For additional information on the golden vine in Josephus and other Graeco-Roman texts, see Busink 1980: 1147-1148. For the vine motif in Judaeon buildings, see Romanoff 1944: 299-301; Hachlili 2014: 470.

³⁴ It appears that the curtain at the sanctuary's entrance survived the Temple's destruction, given that Josephus counts curtains (καταπετάσματα) among the sacred treasures taken by the Romans (*J.W.* 6.387-391). He also indicates that the curtains of the sanctuary were deposited and kept in Vespasian's palace (*J.W.* 7.162).

³⁵ See André Pelletier comments on this practice (1975: 202-203).

³⁶ Besides floral designs, Josephus adds columns as architectural motifs adorning the sanctuary veils. Architectural motifs are confirmed in Herodian building projects and Near Eastern textiles (Elledge and Netzer 2015: 43).

(5.212, 232; 6.389-390; 7.162). It seems that καταπέτασμα was a technical term for the hanging in the Jerusalem Temple (Madvig 1971: 794). The term appears regularly in Judaeans and Christian texts when referring to the Temple's curtains (e.g., LXX Exod 26:31; Sir. 50:5; *Arist.* 86; Philo, *Mos.* 2.81, 87; Matt 27:51).³⁷

Josephus reports that the curtain of the sanctuary was a Babylonian tapestry. This textile was highly esteemed in the Graeco-Roman world. The reputation of those tapestries goes back to the twentieth century BCE (Foldvari and Leeuwen 2015: 26). In the Hebrew Bible, Achan is accused of hiding a beautiful mantle from Shinar in Babylon (Josh 7:21). Among Graeco-Roman authors, the Babylonian textiles appear as an example of great extravagance. Arrian, for instance, writes that the tomb of Cyrus was covered with a 'Babylonian tapestry (ἐπίβλημα τῶν Βαβυλωνίων)' (*Anab.* 6.29). In the novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, written by Chariton of Aphrodisias (ca. first century CE), the character Demetrius is presented as setting up a royal canopy on a ship, 'enveloping it with Babylonian textiles of purple and embroidered with gold (πορφυρίδα καὶ χρυσοῦφῃ Βαβυλώνια περιθείς)' (8.4.7). Pliny the Elder refers to the exorbitant prices of the tapestries when he records that during Metellus Scipio's time, Babylonian coverlets (*tricliniaria Babylonica*) were sold for 800,000 sesterces; they later cost Nero 4,000,000 sesterces. In line with Josephus' words, Pliny states that Babylonian textile had a unique pattern resulting from a process of weaving threads of different colours (*HN* 8.196).³⁸

Josephus tells us that the combination of materials of the sanctuary's curtain holds cosmic meaning and displays 'an image of the universe (εἰκόνα τῶν ὅλων)' (5.212):³⁹

For the scarlet (τῇ κόκκῳ) seems to denote symbolically the fire (τὸ πῦρ), fine linen (τῇ βύσσῳ) the earth (τὴν γῆν), hyacinth the air (τῇ...ὑακινθῳ τὸν ἀέρα), and purple the sea (τῇ πορφύρᾳ τὴν θάλασσαν). Indeed, the similarity became evident by the colour (τῆς χροίας), and in the case of the fine linen and purple by their origin (τὴν γένεσιν), given that linen is produced by the earth (ἡ γῆ) and purple by the sea (ἡ θάλασσα). On this curtain (ὁ πέπλος) was portrayed the whole vault of the sky (κατεγέγραπτο...ἅπασαν τὴν οὐράνιον), except for the signs of the zodiac (ζωδίων) (*J.W.* 5.213-214).

³⁷ For reference to curtains in ancient Graeco-Roman and Judaeans sources, see Andrianou 2009: 99-100; Wright 2015: 199.

³⁸ It is not certain, however, whether those Babylonian fabrics of the imperial period were produced in Mesopotamia or were referred by ancient authors as a style of the tapestry. Josephus mentions supplies of purple and scarlet for the sanctuary curtains (*J.W.* 6.389-90); and in Flavian triumphal parade, he refers to woven carpets in 'the Babylonian style (τῇ Βαβυλωνίων τέχνῃ)' (7.134) (Elledge and Netzer 2015: 42). For further references to Babylonian textiles in ancient Graeco-Roman texts, see Morgan 2007: 29; Foldvari and Leeuwen 2015: 26-27.

³⁹ The classical Greek tragedian Euripides refers to the tapestries of a festival tent as having woven cosmic decorations (*Ion* 1132-1165).

As he does later with the Tent's textiles in *Antiquities*, Josephus associates the material of the sanctuary's curtain with the four cosmic elements, with reference to the colours of the threads and their origin.⁴⁰ The first dye mentioned by Josephus is 'scarlet (κόκκος)', which he associates with 'fire (πῦρ)'. This purplish-red dye was obtained from the dried bodies of the kermes insect (Plin. *HN* 16.32; 24.8). Because of their rarity and value, scarlet and purple became a symbol of power and prestige in the Graeco-Roman world (Plin. *HN* 9.104-105, 124; 37.204). The colour was also associated with divinity. For example, Pausanias notes that statues of Dionysius were painted with this dye (7.26.11; 7.39.6). Pliny describes scarlet as a 'brilliant colour (*nitoremque... cocci*)' (9.134). Artists also depicted the sun in a bright scarlet colour (Greenfield 2005: 19-21, 29-30; see also Brecolouki 2014: 3-35). The identification of scarlet (red) with fire was well-known in ancient times. The word πυρρός, for instance, was used for both the colour of fire and red (Hippoc. *Aer.* 20; Hdt. 3.139; Pl. *Ti.* 68c).

Unlike the other elements pointed by Josephus, the fine linen (βύσσος) is not associated with any colour, but linked with its place of origin, the earth (γῆ). Fine linen was a fabric highly valued in ancient times. It seems that Egypt produced the most excellent quality of linen in the Mediterranean basin. Pliny writes that a variant of the Egyptian flax, called *xylina*, produced a fibre the thread of which bore a 'brilliant whiteness' and made a smooth fabric. He also notes that garments made of this linen were favoured among Egyptian priests (19.14-15; see also Hdt. 2.37). Writing about the linen clothing of those priests, Plutarch also says that 'they wear linen garments because of the colour which the flax displays when in bloom, and which is like to the heavenly azure which enfolds the universe' (*Mor., De Is. et Os.* 352c-d [Babbitt, LCL]).⁴¹

As Josephus himself writes, 'the hyacinth (ὑάκινθος)' dye indicates 'the air (ἀήρ)'. Given that this period had no fixed terminology for colour, it is difficult to determine what colour 'hyacinth' was. Ὑάκινθος is employed in Judaeal literature for hyacinth-coloured garments or fabric that may or may not be related to the Tent/Temple (LXX Exod 26:1, 31, 36; *Joseph and Asenath* 2.8; Philo *Mos.* 2.84). In other Graeco-Roman sources, ὑάκινθος (Latin *hyacinthus*) may refer to a type of flower (Plin. *HN* 21.65-66), precious stone (Plin. *HN* 37.125), or colour made by a dye with a purple-blue shade (Irwin 1990: 206-207). Since Josephus associates the hyacinth with air, it possible that he alludes here to a blue or grey colour (Heron, *Aut.* 28.3). Nevertheless, this remains conjectural, given that blue was not part of the ancient Graeco-Roman colour palette.⁴²

⁴⁰ As already observed, Josephus recalls the interpretation given earlier by Philo *Mos.* 2.88. For the same reading in Christian sources, see Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.6.

⁴¹ For additional reference to the use of linen in ancient times, see Plin. *HN* 19.1-25; Maeder 2017: 500-519.

⁴² For studies on the definition of blue and other colours in ancient societies, see Deutscher 2010.

Lastly, Josephus links ‘the purple (πορφύρα)’ (Latin *purpura*) with ‘seawater (θάλασσα)’. Although the author associates the colour with the origin of the dye, πορφύρεος contains in itself the meaning of sea. In Homeric poems and works by later Graeco-Roman authors, the word πορφύρεος could denote the waves of the sea or the sea itself (Hom. *Il.* 1.482; 16.391; *Od.* 2.428; Eur. *Hipp.* 737-740; Plin. *HN* 9.105). This dye was the most expensive substance in the Graeco-Roman period and a symbol of royalty. Also called Tyrian purple (Ov. *Ars am.* 170), it was produced from the secretions of several marine snails of the genus *Murex* found in the Mediterranean Sea (Plin. *HN* 19.126-127). The sea-dye came in an array of colours, and Pliny reports that it could give a reddish (*rubens*) or a blackish (*nigrans*) colour, a brilliant scarlet (*nitor cocci*), an amethyst colour (*amethysti colos*), and its perfect shade, that of congealed blood (*sanguis concretus*) (19.133-135; see also Bradley 2009: 195-196; Jensen 1963: 104-118).⁴³

Differing from Exodus 26:31, which has images of winged creatures in the hangings, Josephus notes that on the curtain was ‘portrayed the vault of the sky (κατεγγράπτο...τὴν οὐράνιον)’. Karl Heinrich Rengstorff defines καταγράφω as ‘to portray (by an embroidered or woven pattern)’. In this context, the verb could also mean ‘to engrave’ (Polyb. 5.9.4) or ‘to paint’ (Lucian *Pro im.* 34). If Josephus comments may be taken literally, then perhaps the needlework on the curtain represents the heavenly bodies that they could see up in a dark sky (Pelletier 1958: 171; Elledge and Netzer 2015: 42). Presumably, the sanctuary’s curtain contained woven ornaments that reminded Josephus of a starry sky, but the screen itself lacked embroideries in the form of heavenly bodies (Gurtner 2007: 95).

5.2.6 The Holy Place

Josephus invites his readers to enter the ground floor of the sanctuary. The ground storey was sixty cubits high, sixty cubits long, and twenty cubits wide (26.5 x 26.5 x 9 m). As shown, all sanctuary dimensions are multiples of ten, a perfect number associated with God, the universe, heaven, and eternity. The number six figures in the measure, and it is also considered a perfect number. Like ten, it is identified with the universe. For the Pythagoreans, ‘the perfection of the universe falls under the hexad, the virtue of the Creator God’ ([Iamblichus] *Theologumena*

⁴³ Despite the detailed description of Josephus on the Temple’s curtain, almost nothing has been written about the interpretation of this textile in *War*. For instance, C. T. R. Hayward has nothing to say about the similarity of the curtain symbolism in Josephus with a Graeco-Roman tradition. He does, however, compare the description here with the *Letter of Aristeas*, Philo, and the Mishnah, even though Philo does not refer to the Herodian Temple’s curtain in his biblical exegeses (1996: 145).

arithmeticae 48, 50, 79-80, 82 [Waterfield]). Because they are perfect numbers, Vitruvius considers six and ten as fundamental to architectural design (*De arch.* 3.1.5-6).

The sanctuary building was internally divided into two sections. The first part, also called 'the Holy Place (ἅγιον)' (1.152), was forty cubits long (17.5 m) and contained 'three of the most marvellous works, much talked about by everyone', especially in Rome now, where they were featured in the Flavian Triumph and were then housed and displayed in the *Templum Pacis*.⁴⁴ Those three articles of furniture were: 'a lampstand, a table, and an altar of incense (λυχνίαν τράπεζαν θυμιατήριον)' (5.215-216) (fig. 5.4). Josephus gives a concise and limited description of those furnishings here. Even though lampstands, tables, and censers were pieces of furniture commonly found in Graeco-Roman temples, Josephus' readers are not informed of the design, purpose, and exact location of all of them.

Later, when listing the spoils taken by the Romans from the Temple, Josephus refers to the table and lampstand as made of gold (χρυσῇ...τράπεζα...καὶ λυχνία χρυσῇ). He notes that the lampstand was shaped in a pattern different from those commonly used and describes it as follows: 'Fixed to the pedestal was a central shaft, from which extended slender branches arranged like a trident; a forged lamp was attached to the extremity of each branch; there were seven of these lamps, indicating the esteem of the number seven among the Judaeans (τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἐβδομάδος τὴν τιμὴν ἐμφανίζοντες)' (7.149).⁴⁵ As noted earlier, it could be that some of Josephus' readers noted the furnishings in the triumphal procession that took place in Rome after Jerusalem's fall, in the new *Templum Pacis* (75 CE), where Vespasian deposited the golden artefacts (7.158-162), or yet depicted along the frieze of the Arch of Titus constructed by Domitian in 81-82.⁴⁶ The relief from the Arch shows four of the objects looted from the Temple: the lampstand, the table, two cups for incense, and two trumpets (fig. 5.3).⁴⁷

Whether the lampstand illuminated the chamber or was a decorative object linked with the ritual of the sanctuary, or both, is not clear in Josephus. In ancient times, the illumination of temples' interiors depended almost exclusively on natural light. As a result, many cult sites were oriented toward the sun. Considering that the sanctuary had an eastern orientation and

⁴⁴ Later rabbinic authors refer to those and other spoils of the Temple as being kept in Roman palaces (Tucci 2017: 228-229).

⁴⁵ Except for the altar of incense, Josephus assigns the same symbolism to both lampstand and loaves of bread in *Antiquities* (3.144-146; 182).

⁴⁶ The first representations of the lampstand appear in Hasmonean coins in the second half of the first century BCE. Before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, depictions of the lampstand sprouted across Judaea (Hachlili 2013: 292-296).

⁴⁷ It seems that all those objects and temple textiles were destroyed in the great fire that burned to the ground the *Templum Pacis* during the rule of Commodus (191) (Herodian 1.14.2-3).

apparently no windows, its primary source of light during daytime was solar, through the immense golden doors.⁴⁸

Figure 5.3: Arch of Titus, Rome. Photo by the author

Josephus now reads all the furnishings in the Holy Place cosmologically. They served as an explicit statement of God's rule over the inhabitable world and an expression of his control of time and nature:

The seven lamps (such are the number branching from the lampstand) represent the planets (ἐπὶ τὰ λύχνοι τοὺς πλανήτας); the twelve loaves on the table, the zodiac circle and the year (τῆς τραπέζης ἄρτοι δώδεκα τὸν ζῳδιακὸν κύκλον καὶ τὸν ἐνιαυτόν). The altar of incense, filled up with thirteen spices from sea and land, both deserted and inhabited, signified that all things are from God and for God (τὸ θυμιατήριον δὲ διὰ τῶν τρισκαίδεκα θυμιαμάτων, οἷς ἐκ θαλάσσης ἀνεπίμπλατο καὶ τῆς τε ἀοικήτου καὶ οἰκουμένης, ἐσήμαινεν ὅτι τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα καὶ τῷ θεῷ) (5.217-218).

The view of lamps as representing celestial bodies seem to be well-known among Graeco-Roman readers. In Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen*, 'the radiant eye of the whirling lamp (λαμπρὸν ὄμμα τοῦ τροχηλάτου λύχνου)' corresponds to 'the bright sun (λαμπρὰς ἡλίου)' (1-5). In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the flame of the lamp is likened to the heavenly light: 'Even though

⁴⁸ For light in the interior of Greek temples, see Miles 2016: 206-208.

that tiny flame of yours is small and made by human hands, it still retains consciousness of that greater heavenly fire (*maioris et caelestis ignis*), as if of its own parent; thus by divine presentiment, it can itself know and announce to us what the latter is about to enact in the summit of the sky' (2.12 [LCL, Hanson]).⁴⁹ Josephus also tells us a story of a man called Zabidos who 'made a wooden contraption, which he placed around himself; he fastened to it three rows of lamps and walked about in such a way that he appeared to those standing at a distance to be like stars travelling upon the earth' (*Ag. Ap.* 2.112 [Barclay]). Additionally, Roman readers may have connected the cosmological symbolism of the lampstand with the statuette of the Roman goddess Tutela (or possibly Fortuna) crowned with images of the seven planetary Roman gods (fig. 5.5) (Lehoux 2016: 109; Fine 2020).⁵⁰

Fig. 5.4: *Graffito with Temple furnishings*, including the lampstand, the altar of incense (right above), and the showbread table (right below) (ca. first century BCE). Photo by Steve Mason

⁴⁹ For the usage of lamps in a divine context in the Graeco-Roman world, see Gee 2002: 207-218; Zografou 2010: 276-294.

⁵⁰ In his *Historical Commentaries*, Euphron says Dionysius II, ruler of Syracuse, 'dedicated a lampstand in the town-hall of the Tarentines that was capable of holding as many burning lamps as there are days in the year' (*Ath. Deipn.* 15.700d [Olson, LCL]).

As observed before, Josephus remarks that the number of branches of the lampstand signifies the respect that the Judaeans have for the number seven (ἑβδομάς). We have already noted that the number seven was seen with reverence by the Pythagoreans and many others. The text of Nicomachus of Gerasa (c. 60 – 120), preserved by pseudo-Iamblichus, shows that one of the reasons for the veneration of the number was that ‘the Creator God necessarily considered that the hebdomad was an instrument and his most authoritative limb and has gained the power of creativity’ (*Theologumena arithmeticae* 58 [Waterfield]; see also Pessin 1999: 29-48).⁵¹

Fig. 5.5: Goddess Tutela (*Fortuna?*) (150-220 CE). Silver statuette of the goddess holding a patera in her right hand and in her left a double cornucopia, with heads of Diana and Apollo. Her long wings carry busts of Castor and Pollux, and support a stand on which rest the seven planetary gods. British Museum, London, inv. no. R. 1824,0424.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Josephus does not read symbolically the table. However, he reads the twelve loaves of bread on the table as the representation of the year and the zodiac. The association with a calendar is understood by the number of loaves of bread on the table. Moreover, the ancient Judaeans calendar

⁵¹ Macrobius has a lot to say about the symbolism of number seven in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (1.6.5-83).

year features twelve lunar months, and the loaves of bread, likely in a circular shape, imitate the moon. The idea that bread in a rounded form could resemble heavenly bodies is evidenced by Athenaeus of Naucratis, who writes that the ancient peoples made ‘everything associated with their own dining style resemble what the world that surrounded them looked like. They accordingly...made their pastries (φθόεις) circular and decorated them with stars (which they refer to as moons)’ (*Deipn.* 11.489c-d [Olson, LCL, modified]).⁵²

The identification of the Judaeen twelve-month calendar with the zodiac was popular in representations found on Palestinian synagogue mosaic floors of Late Antiquity (fourth – sixth CE). The zodiac panel consists of two concentric circles, with the central circle representing the Sun god with the moon and stars, and the outer circle representing the twelve signs of the zodiac (Hachlili 2013: 344-346). Given that those mosaic patterns were found only in Late Antiquity, it is difficult to say with certainty whether they paved synagogues or Judaeen house floors in the first-century CE (fig. 5.6).

Fig. 5.6: *Zodiac wheel mosaic* from Beth Alpha synagogue (sixth century CE). Photo: Wikimedia Commons

⁵² For reference to other dining table accessories as symbols of the cosmos, see Ath. *Deipn.* 11.489c-492e.

For Josephus, the thirteen ingredients used to make the incense of the altar show that everything is from and for God. God, the creator of the earth and sea, is pleased with the intense fragrance of the incense, the ingredients for which came from God's creative mind. Moreover, burning incense was an essential element of cult worship in the Graeco-Roman tradition. It was used in private ceremonies, including banquets and weddings, and public celebrations, such as triumphal processions and funerals (Green 2011: 28; Verbanck-Piérard 2017).⁵³ Molly M. Lindner explains that 'burning incense did more than carry prayers to the gods', it 'separated the heavenly realm from the mortals on earth, purifying and sanctifying the human actions to follow.' Incense connected the divine and mortal worlds 'by bringing the gods down from heaven to witness the sacrifice' (2015: 219).

Although Josephus mentions that the substances used for the incense of the altar came from the sea and the earth, his readership is uninformed of how the Temple may have smelled like. Elsewhere, however, he comments about the use of 'cinnamon and cassia (κιννάμωμὸν... κασσίαν)' as some of the spices of the burned incense offered daily to God (6.390).⁵⁴ Philo, by contrast, uses the four ingredients of the biblical text (Exod 30:34: cinnamon oil, cloves, galbanum and, clear gum) and reads them as symbols of the four elements (*Her.* 196-197).⁵⁵ *Jubilees* lists seven substances: frankincense, galbanum, stacte, nard, myrrh, spice, and costus (16:24). A passage from the Babylonian Talmud presents sixteen ingredients of the incense compound: balm, onycha, galbanum, frankincense, myrrh, cassia, spikenard, saffron, costus, aromatic rind, cinnamon, lye, Cyprus wine, salt of Sodom, and Jordan resin (Ker. 6a).⁵⁶ Except for onycha, which seems to originate from a Red Sea mollusc, all the spices are plant-based (Daly-Denton 2017: 217).

Josephus' readers could have recognised some of the ingredients above mentioned, but the author does not specify all the components of the recipe in any part of *War*. It seems that Josephus is more interested in the number of spices used in the compound than in their names. The variety of ingredients indicate the costliness of the incense and the richness of the scent. On the relevance of mixing different spices, Theophrastus writes: 'the more numerous and the more various the perfumes that are mixed, the more distinguished and the more grateful will be the scent' (*De*

⁵³ Regarding the former use, Josephus elsewhere writes that in the reception of Vespasian in Rome, the city, like a temple, was filled with garlands and 'incense (θυμιαμάτων)' (*J.W.* 7.71).

⁵⁴ For origins and uses of those aromatic substances in the Graeco-Roman period, see Plin. *HN* 12.42.85-43.98.

⁵⁵ In Busink's view, Josephus could have added more ingredients to the incense in order to accentuate the importance of the incense-altar that, according to him, was the least valued of the three furnishings of the Holy Place (1980: 1173).

⁵⁶ Judaea seemed to be the sole producer of the rare balm (or balsam) within the Graeco-Roman Empire. Josephus mentions balsam production in Ein Gedi (south of Jericho) (*J.W.* 1.138; 1.361).

odoribus 12.57 [Hort, LCL]; see also Plut. *Mor. De Is. et Os.* 80).⁵⁷ Most of the aromatics were imported from African and Arabian coasts. And some of those exotic aromatic substances, such as the frankincense and myrrh, were so highly prized that their value was similar to gemstones and precious metal (McLaughlin 2010: 61).

5.2.7 'The Holy of the Holy'

The innermost part of the sanctuary measured twenty cubits long (9 m) and was screened from the outer section by a 'curtain (καταπέτασμα)'. Josephus does not connect the curtain that covered the holiest area with cosmic symbolism, and the reader does not know whether or not it had the same fabric and design of that one found at the entrance of the sanctuary. The chamber was called 'the Holy of the Holy (ἁγίου δὲ ἁγίου)'. Josephus notes that nothing stood in this holiest place of the sanctuary and that it was inaccessible (ἄβατον), pure (ἄχραντον), and unseen (ἀθέατον) to all (*J.W.* 5.219).⁵⁸ In *Against Apion* he states that no Graeco-Roman ruler who occupied the Temple discovered anything in that space, 'but only the purest form of piety (*sed purissimam pietatem*)' (2.82 [Barclay]).⁵⁹ Only the high priest was allowed to officiate in this chamber, and this happened only once a year, 'on the day on which it was custom of everyone to fast to God' (5.236).

Joan Branham notes the contrast between the Holy of Holies and the Temple's other precincts. In this chamber there 'seems to be an inverse relationship between increasing gradation of sanctity and decreasing structural substance.' The Holy of Holies 'is ultimately empty', invisible to human eyes, and 'only the 'name' of God exists there, completing a spatial system of absolute sacralisation utter dematerialization' of the space (2006: 22; cf. *J.W.* 7.346). Moreover, the vast emptiness of the chamber without any portrayal of God would suggest the grandeur of the deity who could not fit in the small space of the sanctuary. While God, in some sense, was present in the Jerusalem Temple, as a creator and lord of the universe, he was not confined to this building. As one could see in the cosmic meaning of the sanctuary's appurtenances and Solomon's speech in *Antiquities* (8.102, 107), heaven was God's dwelling place.

Three words describe the holiest area. First, ἄβατος was used in Graeco-Roman texts to refer to a sacred place to which access was restricted (Pl. *Criti.* 116c; Plut. *Quaest. Graec. et Rom.* 267d,

⁵⁷ For a study on the cult use of incense in ancient Israel, see Heger 1997.

⁵⁸ In another place, Josephus seems to call this chamber 'the unseen holy place' (ἀόρατον ἅγιον) (*J.W.* 1.152).

⁵⁹ Josephus' audience was apparently familiar with the emptiness of the holiest place of the sanctuary. Livy writes that there is no image in the Jerusalem Temple; 'for they believe that there is no such thing as a bodily form of a god' (frag. 26a = *Scholia in Lucanum* 2.593 – Usener, 85 [Schlesinger, LCL]).

271a, 300c). The term was commonly used to indicate incubation sanctuaries, such as the Asclepeion at Epidaurus. Those sacred places had a secluded space for ritual sleep, called the *abaton* (Csepregi 2018: 110-135).⁶⁰ Second, ἄχραντος means uncontaminated, intact, or pure, though not necessarily related to a sacred place, as in Josephus' *War* (5.381; Eur. *IA* 1574; Pl. *Alc.* 113e). Finally, ἀθέατος denotes the unseen, invisible, or hidden. In Josephus, as in Plutarch, the term indicates sacred objects that may not be seen (1.355; Plut. *Num.* 9.8). The point to observe here is Josephus' distinctive selection of words to indicate the unique nature of God's place.

Figure 5.7: Herodian Temple according to the Mishnah. © Leen Ritmeyer

In contrast with his remarks in *Antiquities* (3.123, 181), Josephus does not state explicitly that the internal structure of the sanctuary was associated with any cosmic region. It may be assumed, however, that Josephus regarded the whole building as symbolising the heavens or

⁶⁰ In some instances, the term ἄδυτος also denoted the innermost part of a temple, a place inaccessible to the profane (Hom. *Il.* 5.448; Hdt. 5.72.3; see also Renberg 2016: 15-16).

universe. His Roman readers seemed aware of that association. Referring to the entrance of Pompey into the Jerusalem Temple, L. Annaeus Florus notes that the Roman general saw the great secret of the Judaeans laid open to view, ‘the heavens beneath a golden vine (*sub aurea vite caelum*)’ (*Epitome* 1.40.30). Florus is alluding to the front doors that led to the sanctuary, which when open gave a view of the sky. Little is known about the identity of Florus, who may have flourished at the turn of the second CE and relied on Livy’s work for this account (e.g., Book 102). But he also appears to reflect ideas about the Jerusalem Temple already familiar to the Romans. As shown before, the idea of equating the universe with temples was widespread among Roman Stoics in the Imperial period.⁶¹

5.2.8 Priests’ and Other Chambers

Josephus also speaks about a three-storey annexe that surrounded the lower part of the sanctuary. The annexe comprised many interconnecting chambers, which could be entered by gates in the northern and southern walls.⁶² In another place, he appears to identify the roof of the priests’ chambers as the place where a priest traditionally stood to announce the Sabbath with the sound of a trumpet (*J.W.* 4.582).⁶³ Josephus also refers to the upper storey of the sanctuary, which had no corresponding chambers, given that it was narrow. When compared with the lower storey, it was more modest. It rose a further forty cubits high (17.5 m); added to the sixty cubits of the ground floor (26.5 m), the total height was of a hundred cubits (44 m) (5.220-221) (fig. 5.7).⁶⁴ Josephus does not assign any cosmic symbolism to those chambers.

5.2.9 The Exterior of the Sanctuary

Josephus’ readers should have been impressed with the description of the exterior of the sanctuary at the height of its splendour (fig. 5.8). Given that the walls of the sanctuary were covered with ‘massive plates of gold (πλαξι...χρυσοῦ στιβαραῖς)’, the appearance of the building

⁶¹ The same idea is shared in Philo *Spec.* 1.66-67.

⁶² The Mishnah gives a number of thirty-eight small chambers, fifteen to the north and south, and eight to the west (*m. Mid.* 4.3).

⁶³ One of those signs marking the place of the trumpeting was found in the Temple Mount in 1970 (Cotton et al. 2010: 48-50).

⁶⁴ The Mishnah describes the entrance to the Upper Chamber on the south side of the sanctuary. At the entrance of the chamber, two cedar posts gave access to the chamber’s roof. Within the chamber, the ends of flagstones marked the division between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. There were also in the Upper Chamber openings into the Holy of Holies which were used to get down workers in boxes, so they would not see anything in the holiest place (*m. Mid.* 4.5).

would have caused astonishment in those who saw it (*J.W.* 5.222). Gold-plated cult sites were a characteristic of Zeus-Jupiter temples. Titus Livius writes that King Antiochus IV built a magnificent temple to Zeus in Antioch with its roof panelled with gold, and the walls covered with gilded plates (41.20). The temple of Jupiter on Capitoline Hill had gilded roof tiles from at least the second century BCE. When the cult site burned down in 80 CE, Domitian used 12,000 talents of gold in the ornamentation of the temple's roof. Presumably, Josephus was familiar with the gold-plated roof of the temple of Jupiter (Plut. *Publ.* 15.3-5; Schertz and Fine 2016: 141-142).

Figure 5.8: Avi Yonah's model of the Herodian Temple, Jerusalem. Photo by the author

Josephus states that 'as soon as the sun (αὐγήν) was up it radiated like fire (ἡλιακάϊς ἀκτίσιν), so that anyone straining to look at it would be forced to turn their eyes away as if from the solar rays,' as if this viewing experience indicated the divine glory that lay upon the sanctuary. In Greek literature, light is considered 'an important dimension of the experience of a divine appearance', and 'gods often reveal their power in an atmosphere of light, thus declaring their superiority' (Constantinidou 2010: 94, 99). Josephus also writes that no visitor on his way to Jerusalem could escape the overwhelming impression of the Temple clearly recognisable from afar: 'for the foreigners coming to it [sanctuary] appeared from a distance like a snow-capped mountain (ὄρει χιόνος πλήρει), as everything plated with gold was of purest white (λευκώτατος)' (*J.W.* 5.222-223).⁶⁵ While the use of gold for the architectural embellishment of temples and

⁶⁵ Another important consideration is that Josephus' assertion on the lofty position of the Temple agrees with Vitruvius' recommendation about cult sites devoted to gods who were particularly involved in the protection of a *polis*. According to Vitruvius, the building should be sited in a very high place, from which the deities could look out the *polis* walls and exercise their role as protectors (*De arch.* 17.1).

imperial palaces was common in Rome, the information about the Jerusalem Temple's façade being entirely covered with plates of gold is controversial. Josephus himself states that the visitors who were approaching the cult site would identify the white stones. It could be that the façade was partially overlaid with gold (Schertz and Fine 2016: 141-142).

Josephus does not specify the type of stone employed in the construction, but it could be white limestone. The sanctuary's walls may have been washed each year before Passover, restoring the whiteness of the stones (Patrich 2000: 261). On the edges of the roof were installed golden pointed sticks (χρυσέους ὀβελοὺς) that prevented birds from perching and polluting (προσκαθεζομένῳ μολύνοντο) it. Josephus also stresses that some of the massive stones in the building were forty-five cubits long, five cubits deep, and six cubits wide (20 x 2 x 2.5 m) (*J.W.* 5.224).⁶⁶

Gold was used to signify the divine in Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures. When Graeco-Roman authors, architects, or sculptors depicted the divine, they employed gold as the proper expression and property of the deity (Stevenson 1995: 261). Josephus shares this understanding when he stresses the use of gold in the Temple to represent the divine realm. Additionally, the reflection of the solar rays on the plates of gold was, according to him, like 'fire (πυρῳδεστάτην)' in appearance. The correspondence between gold and fire/the sun is reported in a treatise attributed to Aristotle ([*Col.*] 791a). In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes the palace of the Sun as overlaid with gold that shone like fire (2.1). It could be that for a contemporaneous mind, gold was not only associated with fire, but also with the colour white. Empedocles, for instance, in his association of the four elements with colours, appears to equate white with fire and the sun (Ierodiakonou 2005: 9; Bradley 2009: 58).⁶⁷ Even the golden spikes on the sanctuary's roof could remind viewers of the sun's rays.

5.2.10 The Altar

In front of the sanctuary stood a sacrificial 'altar (ὁ βωμός)' of monumental form and proportions, which served later in the narrative, as the waters become more agitated, the stage for the bloody massacre during the Judaean-Roman War (*J.W.* 5.15-18; 101-105; 6.259). Although Josephus does not say anything about its axial alignment, it probably followed the layout found in many classical temples and stood on the same axis of the sanctuary's doors. In this way, from the

⁶⁶ In *Antiquities* Josephus gives different dimensions for the stones used in the sanctuary: twenty-five cubits long, eight cubits high, and twelve cubits wide (11 x 3.5 x 5.5 m) (15.392).

⁶⁷ Air and water are considered white in the work credited to Aristotle ([*Col.*] 791a).

innermost chamber, the deity could witness the rituals performed at the altar. Like some Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman altars, the Temple's altar was enormous, fifteen cubits high, with length and breadth both extending to fifty cubits (6.5 x 22 x 22 m) (5.225).⁶⁸ For instance, the monumental altar of the temple of Zeus at Akragas was 17.5 x 54.5 metres (Jacobson 2007: 153).⁶⁹ Those large altars allowed the priests to perform simultaneously several sacrifices atop the podium. Furthermore, the altar of celestial gods (*caelestes*) should be raised as high as possible (Potter 1818: 228).

The altar had a square shape (τετράγωνος) with projections like horns (κερατοειδείς) at its corners.⁷⁰ Graeco-Roman sources refer to the altar of Apollo at Delos as a *keraton*, or 'altar of horns' (Callim. *Hymn* 3.61-64; Plut. *Mor.* 983e).⁷¹ Horns were a symbol of power and dignity of the gods in Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman cultures (Osborne 2002). The goddesses Selene and Isis, for example, are depicted wearing horns. According to Josephus, a ramp led up to the Temple altar from the south. He writes that the altar was built without the use of iron (σιδήρου), and iron never even touched it.⁷² Both altar and sanctuary were surrounded by 'an elegant low parapet made of beautiful stones (εὐλίθον τι καὶ χαρίεν γείσιον)'; the author, however, records nothing about the kind of stone used. It was about a cubit high (0.4 m), and separated the worshippers from the priests inside (5.225-226; see also *Ag. Ap.* 1.198; *Philo Spec.* 1.274).

Apparently, Josephus assigns no cosmological meaning to the Temple altar, although he seemed to perceive it as part of the proper hallowed boundary of the sanctuary, given that it was the main point of contact with God. Elsewhere he writes that prior to the Judaeo-Roman War, some strange events occurred within the Temple, including a brilliant light that shone around the sanctuary and altar during the night-time (5.290). This supernatural phenomenon indicated not only the degree of holiness of the spot, but also the centrality of the altar to worship God.

⁶⁸ Busink considers Josephus' measurements for the altar exaggerated and suggests that the author could have been thinking of the Altar of Zeus at Pergamon, which he may have heard of (1980: 1154). Busink's claim seems to be somewhat speculative, however, given that the designs of the altars are different and that Josephus does not refer to the Pergamon altar in any part of *War*.

⁶⁹ For comparison, Plutarch writes that the altar of Olympian Jupiter was twenty-two feet high (7 m) (5.13.9).

⁷⁰ The four-horned altar is described in biblical texts and seems to have ancient Canaanite roots (Exod 27:2; Lev 8:15; 1 Kgs 1:50-51; Ezek 43:15). Horned altars (including incense altars) have been found in the ancient cities of Tel Beer-sheba, Megiddo, Lachish, and Tel Qedesh (Green 2011: 20).

⁷¹ Nonnos' *Dionysiaca* refers to a sacrifice made by Cadmos Agenorides to Zeus in an altar with horns (44.95-100).

⁷² Josephus does not comment on the reasons for the prohibition of iron in the building of the altar. Perhaps readers familiar with biblical texts knew about God's ordinances against utilising iron tools on the altar stones (Exod 20:25; Deut 27:5-6). The Mishnah in its turn mentions that the stones came from the valley of Beth Kerem and were quarried from a virgin soil and brought from there as blocks of stones without the use of iron for lifting. The use of iron invalidated the stones, even with a touch. Twice a year the altar stones were whitened, once at Passover and once at the Feast of Tabernacles. According to the rabbinic writing, iron was created to abbreviate man's days, while the sacrificial altar was made to extend man's days (*m. Mid.* 3.4).

Furthermore, his remark on the altar fire is noteworthy. During the Feast of Wood-Carrying, it ‘was a custom for everyone to bring chopped wood to the altar so that fuel for the fire might never fail (it continues always without being extinguished (ᾄσβεστον)’ (2.425 [Mason])). For a Graeco-Roman reader, the altar fire connected with a temple signified the presence of the deity. Josephus’ description of the fire burning uninterruptedly in the Temple’s altar would have evoked, among his Roman readers, the most sacred fire of Vesta. Graeco-Roman writers describe the temple of Vesta as the place where the perpetual fire is kept burning, and they also mention the dangers and terrors brought into men’s minds when it is extinguished (Ovid. *Fasti* 1.6.5.29; Livy 1.18 c.11). As hinted in Chapter 2, the Pythagoreans regarded the fire in the temple of Vesta as the central fire of the universe, around which all the heavenly bodies revolved (Plut. *Vit. Num.* 9).

5.2.11 The Priests’ Clothing

Josephus tells us that priests who could not officiate in the Temple because of some physical deformity were admitted within the parapet along with other unblemished priests. Even though they were by birth qualified for some benefits, they wore ‘ordinary clothes (ἐσθῆσιν ἰδιωτικαῖς)’. Only the officiating priests were allowed to wear the ‘sacred (ιεράν)’ vestments. Josephus goes on then to delineate the difference between the priestly and high priestly raiment. The priests who were without physical defect, after undergoing a purification process that included abstention from ‘strong drink (ἄκράτου)’ – as a signal of reverence and in order to avoid any mistake during the ritual performance – went up to the altar and sanctuary dressed in ‘fine linen (βύσσον)’ (*J.W.* 5.228-229).⁷³ Josephus says nothing about the colour of the linen, but it was probably brownish yellow, the natural colour of untreated linen. This suggestion may be inferred from Josephus earlier comparison of the linen curtain of the sanctuary with the earth (5.213-214; see also Sanders 1992: 97-98).

The high priest, in his turn, wore special garments when performing the sacred rituals on particular occasions, which included: ‘the seventh days (ἐβδομάσι) and new moons (νουμηνίαις), and national festivals (ἐορτῇ πάτριος) or any regular annual feast assembly’, officiated with special garments (*J.W.* 5.228-230). He wore first ‘the breeches (διάζωμα)’ covering thighs to loins, an ‘undergarment (ὑποδύτην)’ made of ‘linen (λινούν)’, and over that a ‘hyacinth (ὑακίνθινον)’ robe that covered the body down to the feet (ποδήρη), ‘full-skirted and tasselled (στρογγύλον θυσανωτόν)’. From the ‘tassels (θυσάνων)’ hung in alternation ‘golden bells (κώδωνες χρυσεοί)’

⁷³ For a list of physical defects that disqualified a priest from the priesthood, see Lev 21:16-23.

and ‘pomegranates (ῥοαὶ)’. Josephus interprets the ornaments as natural phenomena: the bells symbolise ‘thunder (βροντῆς)’ and the pomegranates ‘lightning (ἀστραπῆς)’ (5.230-231). Although Josephus does not explain here the reasons why the ornaments could be linked to thunder and lightning, at least for the bells it may be related to the sounds produced by them. Plutarch seems to be the only Gentile author to describe this priestly item. He writes that the high priest has ‘numerous bells (κώδωνες) attached to his clothing and ringing below (ὑποκομποῦντες) him as he walks’ (*Mor. Quaest. conv.* 672a).⁷⁴

The ‘belt (ζώναις)’ tying the robe at the chest consisted of five bands of various colours: ‘gold, purple, scarlet, fine linen, and hyacinth (χρυσοῦ τε καὶ πορφύρας καὶ κόκκου πρὸς δὲ βύσσου καὶ ὑακίνθου).’ Josephus explains that the belt was interwoven with the same material found in the sanctuary’s curtain, implying that the materials also denote the four elements of nature (5.232; cf. 5.213). He also states that the same pattern appears in the high priest’s ephod (ἐπωμίδα), though with gold prevailing. Additionally, for a Graeco-Roman reader, the belt around the chest of a person could indicate high rank and was usually worn by dignitaries and rulers (Osborne 2002).

The ephod had the shape of a breastplate (θώρακος) and was fastened at the shoulders by ‘two little golden shields (δύο...ἁσπιδίσκαι χρυσαῖ)’, set with ‘enormous and beautiful sardonyxes (κάλλιστοὶ τε καὶ μέγιστοι σαρδόνυχες),’ on which were carved the names of the tribes of the nation. To the front of the breastplate were attached twelve stones in four rows of three, and on each one was engraved the name of a tribe: ‘sardius, topaz, emerald; carbuncle, jasper, sapphire; agate, amethyst, jacinth; onyx, beryl, chrysolite’ (5.233-234). The list of gemstones agrees with the one found in *Antiquities* 3.166-168, although the order of the stones here is slightly different.⁷⁵ Josephus adds nothing about the cosmic meaning of the ephod, but his readers may have perceived it as a representation of the zodiac (cf. *Ant.* 3.186).⁷⁶ In his account of the ‘true earth’, Plato refers to three of the gemstones mentioned by Josephus: sardius, jasper, and emerald. According to the philosopher, these stones prized here on earth are also available in the ‘true earth’. There, however, they have ‘smoothness and transparency and finer colours’ (*Phd.* 110b-e).

⁷⁴ Pomegranate was a widely known fruit in ancient times, and it was usually associated with fertility (Lundquist 2008: 33-41).

⁷⁵ See Feldman’s remarks on the stones of the high priestly ephod in Josephus’ works (1988: 462).

⁷⁶ We know, for instance, that zodiacal signs among seal-stones were common in the Hellenistic period (Wallenfels 1993: 281-289; Jacobus 2015: 13-14).

Lastly, the high priest covered his head with a ‘tiara (τιάρα)’ made of ‘fine linen (βυσσίνη)’ and fringed with ‘hyacinth (ὑακίνθω)’ encircled by a ‘golden crown (χρυσοῦς...στεφανός)’.⁷⁷ On the crown were, in relief, ‘sacred characters (ιερά γράμματα)’, these being ‘four vowels (φωνήεντα τέσσαρα)’ which Josephus neither specifies nor explains (5.235). It could, however, that Josephus intended to parallel the four Hebrew letters of God’s name with the name of God in Greek (θεός) and Latin (*deus*).⁷⁸ A band tied around the head was a symbol of royalty in the Graeco-Roman period. While oriental kings used a gorgeous head-dress, the Greek kings’ headgear was a narrow purple-dyed linen band tied around the head with its ends hanging free about the neck (Ath. *Deipn.* 12; Bevan 1902: 274; Strootman 2007: 361-368).

Josephus concludes by emphasising that the high priest wore those eight garments when also officiating alone in the innermost sanctuary (τὸ ἅδυστον), or Holy of Holies, which happened only once a year. On this day of fasting, the confluence of all things sacred was fulfilled. The high priest, the most sacred person of the nation, crossed the threshold of the Holy Place and accessed the holiest place on earth, the Holy of Holies, and led, before the creator and lord of the universe, ceremonies of worldwide scope (κοσμικῆς) revered by worshippers who came to Jerusalem from widely scattered places throughout the world (5.236; cf. 4.324).

At the end of his account of the Jerusalem Temple, Josephus tells us: ‘concerning the *polis* and the temple, and the customs and the laws relating to the latter, we shall speak more precisely in the future; for on these matters a few yet remain to be said’ (5.237). Josephus reminds his readership here that given the historical nature of his *War*, history imposes certain constraints on what he can explore at any length. This may explain the reasons why Josephus does not devote a significant portion of his account in the reading of the Jerusalem Temple as symbolic of the cosmos. Only in *Antiquities* – a work that comprises the Judaeae history and traditions – is the Temple’s predecessor (the Tent) read in an elaborated way as an image of the universe.⁷⁹

5.3 Summary

⁷⁷ Natalio Fernández Marcos explains that Josephus ‘resorts to semantic variation and introduces the term τιάρα, an oriental loanword typical of the Persian dress instead of the κίδαρις (of Semitic origin) and μίτρα used by the Old Greek, Aristeas and Philo’ (2006: 332). Except for the golden material employed, the crown mentioned here is entirely different in design from the triple crown of *Antiquities* (3.172).

⁷⁸ For a different explanation, see Thackeray 1928: 75.

⁷⁹ Even though Josephus devotes large sections of *Antiquities* and *Against Apion* to the explanation of Judaeae traditions and customs, we cannot say for sure if Josephus’ intention was fulfilled in these later works, because he again comments on his planned work on *Customs and Causes* (περὶ ἔθων καὶ αἰτιῶν) in *Antiquities* (1.25; 20.268). For additional information, see Thackeray 1929: 74; Feldman 2000: 10, n. 34.

We have seen that Josephus attempts to cast the Jerusalem Temple in a favourable light in the eyes of a Roman audience. Although the Temple is regarded in *War* as a source of resistance for the Judaeans rebels during the Judaeans-Roman War, which eventually fell into Roman hands, Josephus seeks to convince his readers of the importance of the cult site not only for the Judaeans but for all the nations. For this purpose, he first indicates the Judaeans god as an omnipotent deity whose universe belongs to him. Given the character and attributes of God, it will not come as a surprise to see that his only authorised Temple on earth displays the cosmic dimension of his power.

Although Josephus does not formulate his cosmological interpretation of the Jerusalem Temple as precisely as in the first description of the cult site in his *Antiquities* 3.180-187, it seems clear that he understood the Temple and its appurtenances as mirroring the perfection of the universe. Making use of philosophical elements, Josephus provides a colourful description of the Jerusalem Temple, denoting its beauty, grandeur, and symmetry which, in turn, echo the cosmos. The arrangement of the cult site also indicates that the universe in its totality is governed by God and orbits around the divinity and his power. Josephus writes of the sacred building as the centre of the earthly worship of God and the axis between heaven and earth. Seen from this perspective, we observe Josephus in dialogue with a well-established Roman Imperial tradition of symbolic depiction of buildings as images of the cosmos.

Chapter 6: The Tent in *Judaean Antiquities*

In contrast to the Temple in *War*, there are a reasonable number of studies about the imagery of the Tent in *Antiquities*. As already indicated in Chapter One, some scholars suggest that Josephus echoes Stoic conceptions for his portrayal of the Tent.¹ On the other hand, Jonathan Klawans finds that Josephus' cosmological interpretation of the Tent reflects symbolic understandings of cult sites in the ancient Near Eastern world (2006: 114-115). We shall observe that Josephus appears to use a language closer to that employed by Graeco-Roman writers when describing buildings and clothing in cosmic terms than to a supposed ancient Near Eastern tradition, which we discussed at the beginning of Chapter Three. In his use of philosophical concepts for the depiction of the Tent and its furnishings and priestly attire, Josephus does not seem to be attached to a specific philosophical school. On the contrary, he appears to have drawn on a pool of common ideas and theories in vogue in Rome during the first century CE.

6.1 The Portrayal of the Tent by Josephus

Just as in *War*, the cosmological reading of the Tent by Josephus in *Antiquities* should be understood in view of the mighty Judaean deity he sought to depict. As observed in Chapter Four, Josephus seeks to convince his Roman audience that God is not only a national deity, but the creator, maintainer, and supreme ruler of the universe. As we noted earlier in this study, this discussion of the Tent in *Antiquities* emerges in the context of God's giving his Law to Moses. Josephus begins the narrative with the story of the donation of material by the Hebrews for the fabrication of the cult site. He then describes the physical structure of the Tent, its appurtenances, and the priests' apparel, explaining that everything within is in 'imitation and representation of the universe (ἀπομίμησιν καὶ διατύπωσιν τῶν ὅλων)' (*Ant.* 3.102-187). Josephus also states in *Antiquities*' proem that his work is 'translated from the Hebrew writings (τῶν Ἑβραϊκῶν μεθρημηνευμένην γραμμάτων)' (1.5, 13); some passages later, he mentions that his narrative will 'set forth the precise details of what is in the Scriptures according to its proper order. For I promised that I would do this throughout this treatise, neither adding nor omitting anything (οὐδὲν προσθεὶς οὐδ' αὖ παραλιπὼν)' (1.17 [Feldman]; see also 4.196).

¹ See Daniélou 1953: 61, 63-64; 2014: 99-100; Pépin 1976: 234; Holladay 1977: 102; Robertson 1991: 108. Feldman 1998: 194.

Table 6.1: *The Tent Account in Josephus and Exodus*

Description of the Tent	Josephus	Hebrew Text of Exodus
Materials and Offerings for the Tent	3.102-103	25:1-8; 35:4-29
Bezalel and Oholiab (Architects)	3.104-107	31:1-11; 35:30-35; 36:1-5
The Tent Courtyard	3.108-113	27:9-19; 38:9-20
The Washbasin	3.114	30:17-21; 38:8
Exterior and Interior of Tent	3.115-123	26:15-29; 36:20-38; 40
The Curtains	3.124-133	26:1-14, 31-37; 36:8-19, 35, 37
The Ark	3.134-138	25:10-22; 37:1-9
The Table of Showbread	3.139-143	25:23-30; 37:10-16
The Lampstand	3.144-146	25:31-40; 37:17-24
The Altar of Incense	3.147-148	30:1-10; 37:25-29
The Altar of Sacrifice	3.149-150	27:1-8; 38:1-8
The Priests' Apparel	3.151-179	28:1-43; 39:1-31

The account of the Tent in *Antiquities*, however, does not cohere with the Hebrew text of Exodus, or even with the LXX (table 6.1). The description of the cult site cannot be considered a word-for-word translation of the Scriptures; it omits much from the biblical account while also adding material. Josephus conceives his task as not only translating the sacred texts, but also interpreting them for his Roman audience (Feldman 2000: 4). When compared with the two accounts of the Tent in Exodus 25-31 and 35-40, Josephus follows the sequence of the second description, except for the mention of the courtyard and the basin for washing, which he explains first (Feldman 2000: 259).²

6.2 The Exterior of the Tent

Just as in *War*, Josephus begins the narrative with the exterior of the Tent, proceeding to the interior of the building and furnishings and concluding with the priestly vestments. His rearrangement of the biblical account helps the reader visualise the sequence of actions taken in order to erect the cult site. Thus, after commenting on the materials donated for the Tent and

² Philo's extensive narrative on the Tent in *De vita Mosis* 2.77-117 does not follow the order of any of the biblical accounts in Exodus, matching only in the initial portrayal of the structure of the building and concluding with the priestly vestments, as found in Exodus 35-40: description of the exterior and interior of the Tent (2.77-93); the altar of sacrifices (2.94); the ark (2.95-97); the altar of incense (2.101); the lampstand (2.101-102); the table (2.104); priestly garments (2.109-116); and the washbasin (2.136-139).

the appointment of Bezalel and Oholiab as architects of the enterprise, Josephus states that Moses announced a festival and sacrifices and set up the building (3.102-108).

In agreement with both the Hebrew and the Greek texts of Exodus, Josephus mentions that the dimensions of the Tent's courtyard were fifty cubits in width and a hundred in length (22 x 44 m) (3.108; cf. Exod 27:12). The enclosing walls were constructed of pillars of bronze, with capitals made of silver and bases resembling spikes of lances. Twenty pillars were set on each of the two longer sides and ten on the smaller sides of the courtyard enclosure. Panels of 'fine linen (βύσσου)' fabric hanging from the capital to the base of the columns were extended over all the enclosure wall and were attached with cords and rings, 'intended to render the Tent motionless in the face of the force of the winds' (3.110 [Feldman]) (fig. 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Conjectural design of *Josephus' Tent*. Illustration by Gabriel Costa³

According to Josephus, the entrance to the courtyard was located on one of the small sides of the enclosure, which later he identifies as being the west side (3.115). Two pillars overlaid with silver stood on either side of the entrance, resembling gatehouses (πυλώνων). Besides these two

³ The model of the Tent is based on Josephus' *Antiquities* Book 3.108-150. The conception does not accurately present the measurements of the structure given by Josephus.

shafts, Josephus refers to three other pillars on each side of the gatehouses, which were ‘fitted into the door-posts, and from them a curtain of fine linen had been wrapped around.’ The gateway was made of an elegant curtain; the fabric of the entry screen was of ‘purple (πορφύρας) and scarlet (φοίνικος) made with hyacinth (ὑακίνθω) and fine linen (βύσσω).’ He also writes that the curtain was ‘embellished with many and variegated designs but did not represent the forms of animals’ (3.111-113 [Feldman]) (fig. 6.2). Josephus says nothing here about the cosmological meaning of the textiles, but his later remarks on the materials and dyes used to weave the Tent’s fabrics, including the gateway curtain, may indicate the nature of the elements: the earth, sea, fire, and air (3.183). In this way, Josephus seems to follow Philo, who interprets the curtain at the entrance of the courtyard cosmologically. For him, the screen was woven with the same material as the curtain that was placed inside the Tent; thus, the four materials of the embroidered curtain represent the four elements which the universe was made: ‘linen (βύσσος) coming from the earth (γῆς), purple (πορφύρα), from the water (ὕδατος), hyacinth (ὑακίνθος) becomes like the air (ἀέρι) which is naturally dark, and scarlet (κόκκινον) like fire (πυρὶ), since both are red (φοινικοῦν)’ (*Mos.* 2.87-88).

Figure 6.2: *The entrance to the courtyard according to Antiquities 3.111-113.* Illustration by Gabriel Costa

Josephus completes the description of the courtyard with the mention of a basin made of bronze located within the gates which was used by ‘the priests to wash their hands and to pour water on their feet’ (3.114 [Feldman]). Nowhere in Josephus’ description of the Tent are the

structure of the courtyard and basin for washing read as symbols of the cosmos. Interestingly though, when Josephus describes the large washbasin of the Solomonic Temple, he refers to it as ‘a bronze sea (θάλασσαν χαλκῆν)’ in ‘the shape of a hemisphere (ἡμισφαίριον ἐσχηματισμένην).’ Josephus adds that the “bronze item was called the ‘sea’ because of its size’ (8.79 [Begg and Spilsbury]).

Josephus proceeds to describe the exterior of the Tent, which he reports was set in the middle of the courtyard. The building was thirty cubits in length and ten cubits in width (13 x 4.5 m). The long walls faced south and north, the rear faced westward, and the front was oriented toward the rising sun. The explanation for this arrangement is ‘that the sun, when rising, might send its rays first upon’ the cult site (3.115).⁴ Recent scholarship has provided several explanations for Josephus’ remark on the orientation of the Tent toward the rising sun.⁵ Stuart D. Robertson, for instance, explains that Josephus could have had in mind Ezekiel 43:2, 4, where the prophet Ezekiel describes the return of God’s glory to the renewed Temple in Jerusalem as entering the building through the gate facing east. Thus, Josephus’ editorial ‘is to suggest that the glory of God entered the tabernacle as the sun’s rays shone in at dawn, as Ezekiel suggests’ (1991: 85). Robertson also shows the significance of the sunbeam for Judaeans writers, as well as for Josephus’ readers who worshipped Apollo. ‘Josephus undoubtedly knew of this interest in the early rays of the sun among pagan worshippers at Delphi, so that to describe the Tabernacle’s eastern direction was apologetically useful in communicating with non-Jewish readers’ (1991: 254-255). Despite the extraordinary arrangement of the temple of Apollo at Delphi in relation to the sun’s path, it is not clear here whether Josephus attempts to correlate the Tent with this famous Greek cult site.⁶

What is perceptible in *Antiquities* is Josephus’ tendency to represent God by means of the sun, even though he acknowledges the Judaeans deity as the creator of the heavenly body (1.31). Elsewhere, Josephus comments about King Uzziah’s attempt to enter the Holy Place of the Temple and offer incense. As a result of his impious act against God, ‘a great earthquake shook the earth and the sanctuary was split open. A dazzling ray of sunlight (φέγγος ἡλίου λαμπρόν) shone through and fell on the face of the king, with the result of leprosy immediately appeared upon him’ (9.224-225 [Begg and Spilsbury]). When describing the Essenes in *War*, Josephus states that

⁴ The reason for an eastern-facing Tent is Josephus’ addition (cf. Philo, *Mos.* 2.92). The Hebrew text of Exodus only mentions that the width of the court on the east end is fifty cubits (22 m) (27:13; 38:13). The biblical account only indicates the eastern orientation of the courtyard, while Josephus places the front of the building towards the east. In contrast to the Hebrew text, the LXX shows a southern-facing orientation in Exod 27:9. The explanation for this interpretation of the biblical account in the Alexandria text could be, according to Martha Wade, ‘either ideological or due to a series of errors on the part of the translator’ (2003: 100).

⁵ See, for example, Nodet 1990: 150, n. 3; Feldman 2000: 261, n. 267.

⁶ For the direction of solar light within the temple of Apollo at Delphi, see Vlachos, Liritzis, and Georgopoulos 2018.

the members of the group utter no mundane things before the sun rises, 'but only certain ancestral prayers to him, as if begging him to come up.' Also, when they excrete into holes, they wrap themselves entirely with their cloaks 'so as not to outrage the rays of God' (*J.W.* 2.128, 148 [Mason]).⁷

Josephus' remarks in *Ant.* 3.115 should also be understood in light of the positioning of Graeco-Roman cult sites. Orientation along the arc of the rising sun was a feature of many Graeco-Roman temples (Plut. *Vit. Num.* 69). The dependence on sunlight to illuminate the interiors seems to be one of the reasons for the orientation of the façades of the cult sites to the eastern horizon (Miles 2016: 206; Boutsikas 2017).⁸ Vitruvius says that Roman temples, in particular, should be positioned to the west side of the sky, 'so that those who approach with offerings and sacrifices will look toward the image with the temple beneath the eastern part of the heavens, and thus when they are raising their prayers, they will view both the temple and the rising heaven, while the images themselves will seem to be rising as well, to view the supplicants and sacrificers because it seems necessary that all altars of the gods face east' (*De arch.* 4.5.1-2 [Rowland]).

Josephus appears to maintain that the skeletal structure of both the upper and lower part of the Tent had the same measure, having a shape like that of a rectangle.⁹ He reports that the Tent was constituted of wooden frames, which he calls pillars (κίονες), completely covered with plates of gold on the inner and outer sides. The pillars were bounded together with golden rings fixed to the outer side. Through those rings were passed golden rods, five cubits in size (2 m), which joined the pillars together, giving an appearance of a single wall (3.116-120). Josephus does not explicitly read the exterior of the Tent cosmologically, but the dimensions of the Tent and its courtyard as multiples of ten seems to reflect Pythagorean ideas. As observed earlier, ten was a sacred number and associated with 'universe...heaven...and God (κόσμον...οὐρανόν...καὶ θεόν)' ([Iamblichus] *Theologumena arithmeticae* 80, 82).¹⁰

6.3 The Interior of the Tent

Josephus reports that the interior space of the Tent was divided into three parts, but only the remotest corner, located ten cubits (4.5 m) from the western wall, seemed to be enclosed by four pillars. The place within the pillars was 'the innermost sanctuary (ἄδυτον)'. While access to the

⁷ For more examples of the depiction of the sun as a deity in Josephus, see Mason 2008: 105-106, n. 804.

⁸ For the debate on the orientation of Greek temples, see Salt 2009; Hannah, Magli, Orlando 2017;

⁹ Exodus 26:15-29 is not precise about the exact measurements of the Tent. However, judging from the dimensions of the pillars used in the structure of the cult site, it seems that they had the same dimensions as those given by Josephus.

¹⁰ See Philo for the number symbolism of the Tent's pillars (*Mos.* 2.79-80).

area was restricted, the rest of the cult site was open to the priests (3.122) (fig. 6.3). Josephus' internal division of the cult site into three parts finds no parallel in the biblical texts. Exodus mentions only a curtain suspended on acacia-wood poles that separates 'the Holy Place from the most Holy' (26:32-33 NRSV), without spelling out explicitly the dimensions of the internal division of the cult site. Feldman suggests that Josephus' rearrangement of the Tent may be based on his first-hand knowledge as a former priest in service in the Jerusalem Temple (2000: 263, n. 281). However, such a description is unusual in the surviving Judaeen literature of the Graeco-Roman period.

Figure 6.3: *The interior of the Tent according to Antiquities 3.122-148.* Illustration by Gabriel Costa

With this internal division of the Tent in mind, Josephus states that the three sections correspond to the heavens, the earth, and the sea:

It happened that such an arrangement of the Tent (σκηνή) was also an imitation of the nature of the universe (μίμησιν τῆς τῶν ὅλων φύσεως). For its third part, which is within the four pillars, which was inaccessible to the priests, like heaven (οὐρανός), was set aside for God, while the twenty cubits [9 m], just as the earth and sea (γῆ καὶ θάλασσα) are accessible to men, were thus consigned to the priests alone (3.123 [Feldman]).

Later, in his apology on the Judaeon reverence towards God, Josephus reiterates the cosmic symbolism of the Tent:

For by dividing the Tent (σκηνήν), which is thirty cubits long [13 m], into three parts, and designating two of them for all the priests as a place accessible and in common, he signifies the earth and the sea (τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν), for these also are accessible to all. But he earmarked the third part for God alone because of the fact that the heaven (τὸν οὐρανόν) also is inaccessible to men (3.181 [Feldman]).

For Josephus, the plan of the Tent was designed to resemble ‘the nature of the universe’, and the threefold division indicated three cosmic regions. The third part was reserved for God, signifying the heavens, unreachable by men.¹¹ Here again, the author could be playing with number symbolism. For the Pythagoreans, the number three was called ‘perfect...because it is the first numbers to signify the totality – beginning, middle, and end’.¹² Sometimes, it was also called ‘harmony’ ([Iamblichus] *Theologumena arithmeticae* 17, 19 [Waterfield]).

As to the other two areas of the Tent that represented the earth and the sea, there is little about the features and boundaries that separated the spaces. From what Josephus reports of the internal structure and the explanation that they were accessible to the priests, one might imagine an open area. However, given that the Hebrew text of Exodus and Judaeon literature from the Graeco-Roman period do not present the cult site in such threefold division, it is challenging to visualise Josephus’ Tent arrangement.¹³ He appears to have been the first Judean writer to explain the Tent with this threefold division and cosmic geography in mind.

C. T. R. Hayward suggests that Josephus may have in mind the Genesis creation narrative. ‘The waters of the sea recall the “deep”, the abysses where the waters under the earth (Gen 7:11) are located. Josephus may be hinting that the Temple in some manner holds together with the earth what is above it (the heaven) and what is below (the sea)’. According to this view, ‘the abysses or the deeps are parts of the universe: people may go down into them (e.g., Ps. 107:26), and they would therefore be appropriately represented in the tabernacle’ (1996: 148). Hayward’s ideas, however, seem to be somewhat inaccurate. There is nothing in Josephus’ language indicating that

¹¹ Although the author writes that this space was denied to the priests, he does not mention that the high priest was allowed to access it on the Day of Atonement. When ministering before God, the high priest approached the area with bull’s blood for a sin offering (Lev 16; see also Begg 2012: 97–120).

¹² The reference to God as being the beginning and the end is found in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (e.g., Isa 44:6; 48:12; Rev 1:8, 17; 22:13).

¹³ Philo does not read the internal division of the Tent cosmologically in his *Life of Moses*, but in *QE* 2.94 he comments that the ‘holy (parts of the tabernacle) are classified with the sense-perceptible heaven, whereas the inner (parts), which are called the Holy of Holies (are classified) with the intelligible world’ [Marcus, LCL]). As hinted in Chapter 3, the rabbinic literature will give a comparable interpretation when presenting the Tent as the structure of the universe (*Midrash Tadesht* 2).

his Roman audience understood the sea as being ‘the abysses’ of the ancient Near Eastern cosmology.¹⁴ Even in his earlier retelling of the creation (1.27-31), Josephus does not refer to the sea as the abysses. Furthermore, Josephus speaks of the sea and the earth as being accessible to everyone; the deep abysses are not accessible to all.

However, Roman buildings may have inspired Josephus’ threefold cosmological arrangement of the Tent. At least two structures that existed in Rome at the time, the Circus Maximus and Nero’s *Domus Aurea*, had similar readings and arrangements, as has been shown in Chapter 2.¹⁵ Josephus may have been in the *Domus Aurea* during his first visit in Rome on a mission to Nero’s court (*Life* 14-16), and in the Circus Maximus, during the Flavian triumphal procession after the Judaeo-Roman War (*J.W.* 7.122; see also Mason 2017a: 21). Whether or not Josephus had visited those constructions, it is likely that he was familiar with this interpretation and applied it to his symbolic reading of the Tent.

Josephus explains that five golden pillars with bronze bases stood in front of the entrance of the Tent.¹⁶ The cult site was also covered with various curtains made of ‘fine linen (βύσσου) in which purple (πορφύρας), hyacinth (ὑακίνθου), and scarlet (φοίνικος) hues were blended’ (3.124). The first curtain hung between ‘the sanctuary (ναός)’ and ‘the holy place (ἅγιον)’. Josephus records that the screen measured ten cubits in each dimension (4.5 m) and covered the four pillars, thereby restricting the view of the sanctuary. Following the biblical text, he calls the whole temple the ‘Holy (Place) (τὸ ἅγιον)’, and the secluded sanctuary within the curtain as ‘the Holy of the Holy (τοῦ ἁγίου τὸ ἅγιον)’ (3.125; Exod 26:33).

While the Hebrew text of Exodus describes richly coloured hangings of fine twisted linen, with cherubim woven into it (26:31), Josephus writes that ‘the covering was beautiful with all manner of flowers (ἄνθεσι παντοίοις) such as grow from the earth, adorned with all the other designs woven in, as many as could bring adornment, except the form of living creatures’ (3.126 [Feldman]) (fig. 6.4). Josephus’ editorial additions may identify one of the cosmic regions in the Holy Place. Given that he highlights the design of flowers that the earth produces, this textile partition could symbolise the earthly area of the Tent.

Josephus describes a second curtain, similar to the first one in size, fabric, and colour. It seems that this hanging together with the five pillars were the only structures to enclose the

¹⁴ For ancient Near Eastern cosmology, see Horowitz 1998.

¹⁵ For a similar view of Hadrian’s villa in the second century, see Stierlin 1986: 134-141, 158-170.

¹⁶ In his remark on the passage, Feldman seems to have made a mistake when comparing the pillars in front of the Tent (five, Exod 26:37) with the upright supports separating the sanctuary from the Tent (four, Exod 26:32). For him, Josephus adds a pillar for the entrance, where the Hebrew text of Exodus mentions four (2000: 264, n. 291).

eastern side of the cult site. The author reports that rings hold the curtain at the corner of the pillars, fixed from the top to the centre of the pillars. The space below was left as an entrance for the priests. He also writes that above the screen there was another curtain made of linen of the same dimensions, which were drawn by ropes to either side. Thus, it could be left unrolled or rolled up, 'so that it should not be in the way for one looking in, and especially on the distinguished days' – apparently the major festivals. In rough weather, the hanging served as a covering for the coloured curtain. Josephus tells us that 'the custom remained even when we had built the Temple that a curtain of such a sort was to lie round about the entrances' (3.127-129 [Feldman]).

Figure 6.4: *The Holy Place area according to Antiquities 3.139-148. Illustration by Gabriel Costa*

Josephus mentions ten more curtains, four cubits wide and twenty-eight cubits in length (2 x 12 m), which were fastened with golden pegs 'in union of female and male, so as to seem one.' The hangings were extended over the Tent and 'covered the top and the walls on the side and those standing behind rising as much as a cubit (0.4 m) from the ground' (3.130). Other curtains were woven with different fabrics and set over the Tent. Josephus reports that they were 'equal in width, one more in number and greater in length, for they were thirty cubits (13 m).' Some of them were 'woven of hair, similar in fine workmanship to those made of wool, stretched flowingly to the ground.' At the entrance of the Tent, this arrangement gave the appearance of a gable roof and a porch. Other curtains made of skins were extended above those woven of hair and served as

‘protection and support... in the blazing heat and whenever rain occurred.’ The author comments that such ordering caused amazement to those who viewed the Tent from a distance, ‘for they seemed in their colours to differ not at all from those that occur in heaven (τὸν οὐρανόν)’ (3.131-132).

Although Josephus does not specify which colours of the covering’s materials resemble those from heaven, we are informed in his account of the Hebrews’ donation of material for the Tent that some ‘goats’ hair and skins of sheep’ were ‘dyed with the colour of hyacinth (ὑακίνθῳ), and some with scarlet (φοίνικι). Some displayed the colour of purple (πορφύρας), and others showed a white (λευκήν) colour’ (3.102). Those colours certainly would fit with the author’s cosmological interpretation.¹⁷ Coverings made of hair and skins were also suspended in front of the curtain at the Tent’s entrance. The purpose was to restrain ‘the blazing heat and the wanton violence caused by the rains.’ Josephus concludes this section stating that ‘the Tent was constructed in this way’ (3.133 [Feldman]).

Josephus’ audience was familiar with such coverings’ imagery. Coloured awnings were a common feature of Roman theatres and amphitheatres and protected spectators from sun and rain. Pliny writes that in Nero’s principate, awnings of ‘the colour of sky (*colore caeli*)’ and covered with ‘stars (*stellata*)’ were stretched with ropes over the amphitheatres (*HN* 19.6.24). Cassius Dio mentions that, during a state visit of the King of Armenia to Rome in 66 CE, the curtains of the Theatre of Pompey that ‘stretched overhead to keep off the sun were of the colour of air (τοῦ ἀέρος) [blue or grey?], and in the centre of them was an embroidered figure of Nero driving a chariot, with golden stars (ἀστῆρες χρυσοῖ) gleaming all about him’ (63.6 [Cary and Foster, LCL, modified]).

It is important to keep in mind that the cosmological reading of a tent-like structure is by no means a phenomenon unique to Josephus and other Judaeoan thinkers. Luxurious Persian tents, whose design were later copied and adapted by Hellenistic kings, seem to have received the same treatment. Those round royal tents were immense and displayed precious objects. According to Hesychius of Alexandria, such a round Persian pavilion was called ‘heaven’ (οὐρανός). Those tents ‘were intended as a model of the heavens, as a setting for the “cosmic” ruler’ (Bloom and Blair 2009: 282). Phylarchus describes the opulent Persian tent of Alexander as a structure ‘large enough to accommodate 90 couches; 50 gold columns supported it; and the canopies (οὐρανίσκοι) that extended overhead and covered the top had gold woven into them and

¹⁷ Philo interprets the four materials used in the screens as alluding to the four elements as he employs Pythagorean number symbolism to explain the number of materials and curtains and their size (*Congr.* 116-117; *QE* 2.86-87).

were expensively embroidered' (Ath. *Deipn.* 12.539d-e = *FGrH* 81 F 41 [Olson, LCL]; see also Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 687 [38.1-3]).¹⁸

6.4 The Furnishings of the Tent

6.4.1 The Ark

Josephus goes on to comment on the Tent's furnishings, beginning with the only material object in the Holy of Holies (τοῦ ἁγίου τὸ ἅγιον), the ark (ἡ κιβωτός). While in the Exodus narrative the ark of acacia (Heb. *shittim*) wood is said to have been made by Bezalel (25:10; 37:1), which the LXX renders as ἐκ ξύλων ἀσήπτων ('decay-resistant wood'), Josephus writes only that the 'ark was made for God of wood strong by nature and unable to suffer rottenness (ξύλων ισχυρῶν τὴν φύσιν καὶ σήψιν παθεῖν οὐ δυναμένων)' (3.134 [Feldman]). Josephus does not explain any symbolism behind the use of such wood, but in Philo's view the 'undecaying wood... alludes symbolically to the parts of the world attached to one another, of which it consists and is compacted and which hold fast to one another' (*QE* 2.53 [Marcus, LCL]).¹⁹

Josephus considers the ark of God as a beautiful and harmonious handiwork. Its dimensions are given in conformity with the instructions in the Hebrew Bible, a length of five spans and width and height of three spans each (1 x 0.6 x 0.6 m).²⁰ Josephus writes that the ark was overlaid with gold both inside and outside 'so as to conceal the woodwork.' The ark 'had a cover marvellously united by golden pivots, which was even from all sides, in no part injuring the harmony of proportions by protrusions.' To each of the two longer sides of the ark, two golden rings were attached, and through these passed a gold-plated rod on each side, which was used by the priests to carry the object when needed.

Above the ark-cover were attached 'two bas-reliefs (πρόστυποι δύο)' that are called by the Hebrews 'cherubim (Χερουβείμ)' (3.137). Josephus describes them as 'winged creatures, quite similar in form to nothing of those seen by men. Moses says that he saw them neighbouring to

¹⁸ For more details of Alexander's tent, see Collins 2017: 71-76. For the description of a Hellenistic Persian-style tent, see Ath. *Deipn.* 5.196-7.

¹⁹ Rarely attested outside medico-philosophical treatises, the word 'acacia comes from Greek ἄ (not) + κακία (badness). The Greek term does not usually denote a tree variety, but refers to the character trait of innocence or lack of guile, as also in the LXX (Ps 7:9; 25:1, 11). The shittah tree was native to the Near East (Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica* 1.101). Josephus highlights the main characteristics of the wood, as being free of corruption or rot, rather than giving it a technical botanical name.

²⁰ Span (ἡ σπιθαμή, or Latin *palmus*) is an ancient unit of length equivalent to 22.18 cm.

(προστυπεῖς) the throne of God.²¹ The two tablets upon which ‘the ten words were recorded, five on each of them, two and a half on each side’ were put inside the ark (3.135-138 [Feldman, modified]). Given that Josephus refers to winged creatures as ‘neighbouring to the throne of God’, it may be that his readers understood the ark as a representation of the footstool for God’s throne. This imagery was typical in ancient Egyptian practice (Walton and Matthews 2000: 106). Furthermore, the Romans knew about the practice of placing tablets with inscribed laws and honours under the feet of their deities. For instance, Cassius Dio mentions the deposit of silver tablets beneath the feet of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome at Caesar’s time (44.7.1).

Figure 6.5: *The Ark according to Antiquities 3.134-138*. Illustration by Gabriel Costa

Josephus’ omission of the portrayal of the cherubim and their innovative arrangement on the ark-cover is noteworthy (fig. 6.5). The Hebrew and LXX texts of Exodus speak of two cherubim of hammered gold with faces and wings. They were positioned on each end of the cover with their wings overshadowing it, facing each other and looking towards the cover. Josephus, on the other hand, only refers to engraved winged creatures on the cover, which no men’s eyes have seen. No other Judaeon writer known to us makes any such depiction. As already observed, he avoids

²¹ The detail that Moses saw the cherubim adhering to the throne of God is Josephus’s extra-biblical remark. The reference to cherubim surrounding God’s throne is not found in the Pentateuch, only in Ezekiel 10:1-22 (Patai 1990: 80).

reference to the cherubim in the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies (3.126). In giving an account of Solomon's Temple, he proceeds in a similar manner, evading the mention of cherubim on the Temple's walls and doors, and when describing the golden cherubim in the Holy of Holies, he writes that 'no one can say of what sort the cherubim were or draw analogies' (*Ant.* 8.73 [Begg and Spilsbury]; cf. 1 Kgs 6:29-35).

In Thackeray's view, Josephus refrains from depicting the cherubim in order to avoid accusations of the worship of animals by the Judaeans (1930: 375).²² In his turn, Robertson says that '[Josephus] may have wished to disarm any notion that the cherubim were like griffins that were well-known on the helmet of Athena in the Parthenon' (1991: 71). Excepting that both creatures had wings, it is not clear how Josephus' readers could possibly associate the cherubim with the mythical griffins, or even relate to with the cult-statue of Athena Parthenos.

It could be, however, that Josephus refused to describe the cherubim because of his ignorance of what those living creatures looked like. Exodus says almost nothing about their form or appearance (25:18-22; 37:7-9). The Hebrew text of Ezekiel speaks about a cherub with four faces, four wings, and under its wings something like human hands (10:20-22). Judaeans rarely refer to the cherubim in the Graeco-Roman period. Philo limits himself to mention that upon the propitiatory of the ark were placed two winged creatures that faced each other (*Mos.* 2.97-98; see also Patai 1990: 75-79; Villeneuve 2016: 98-108).

6.4.2 The Table of Showbread

In the second zone of holiness, 'the Holy Place (τὸ ἅγιον)', Josephus describes a few objects, beginning with the table (ἡ τράπεζα) (fig. 6.6). He writes that the table was 'quite similar to those at Delphi (Δελφικαῖς παραπλησίαν),' and in agreement with the Hebrew and LXX texts of Exodus (25:23), the author characterises the furniture as a rectangular structure, two cubits in length by one-cubit in width by three spans (1 x 0.4 x 0.6 m) in height. Josephus, however, ignores the

²² Graeco-Roman thinkers voiced concerns about Judaeans worship of animals. Josephus comments that the Egyptian Apion asserted that 'the Judaeans had set up the head of an ass' in the Jerusalem Temple, 'and worshipped that animal, considering it worthy of the greatest reverence.' The discovery of the golden head was made, according to Apion's Josephus, when Antiochus IV Epiphanes entered in the inner part of the Temple (*Ag. Ap.* 2.80 [Barclay]; see also 2.114). It seems that different versions of this story circulated in the Graeco-Roman period. In Diodorus' variant, Antiochus entered the Temple and found 'there a marble statue of a heavily bearded man seated on an ass, with a book in his hands, he supposed it to be an image of Moses' (34/35.1.3 [Walton, LCL]). Tacitus speaks about a statue of an entire ass, which apparently was dedicated in the shrine because its guidance enabled the Judaeans to escape 'wandering and thirst' (*Hist.* 5.4; cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 670d). The satirist Petronius in one of his poems concludes that the Judaeans do not eat pork because they may worship it as a 'pig-god (*porcinum numen*)' (frag. 37; cf. Schäfer, 1998: 77-79). Plutarch talks about Judaeans' reverence of the pig, which he supposes 'taught them sowing and ploughing' (*Quaest. conv.* 670d).

biblical description of the object as overlaid with gold. He also notes that the table's legs from its 'half to the bottom were perfectly finished, similar to those which the Dorians (Δωριεῖς) put on their bed-couches (ταῖς κλίναις),' but the upper parts of the legs were four-sided. Each of the legs had rings to insert wooden poles covered with gold for carrying the table. On the border of the table top was a 'spiral (ἑλικός)' ornament (3.139-141 [Feldman, modified]).

Josephus' attempt to enhance the Tent's table with comparison to those of prestigious places of ancient Greece is noteworthy, as already observed in Chapter 5. He first states that the table is like those found at Delphi. Given that Josephus mentions Delphian tables in the plural, it is not clear to which table existing in Delphi he refers. From Strabo, we know about a three-legged table on which the Pythian priestess sat to utter prophecies in the temple of Apollo at Delphi (9.3.5). Robertson points out that Josephus' details of the Tent's table do not match the table used by the Apollonian priestess, because the Tent's furniture 'had rings attached to the junction of table-top and legs, through which staves were passed. Of course, this would be impossible with a three-legged table' (1991: 145).

Josephus does not specify the number of legs in the Tent's table, which is given as four in the Hebrew and LXX texts of Exodus (25:26). Judging by the relief of the Temple spoils on the Arch of Titus, which depicts the Temple's table with four legs, Josephus could have had a four-legged table in mind (fig. 6.6). The term τράπεζα employed by Josephus was used in Graeco-Roman literature for tables with either three or four legs (Richter 1966: 65). If the author is not referring to the famous stool utilised by the Delphic oracle, he is likely alluding to well-known tables found in Delphi with which his readers were familiar. Dimitra Andrianou has demonstrated that tables were frequently encountered in Greek temple accounts. She shows three possible reasons for the presence of this furniture in Greek cult sites: tables given as dedications, tables used as *mobilier du culte*, and tables for the disposition of offerings (2009: 50).

While the form of the Delphic table in Josephus' account is undetermined, the purpose of associating this furniture with the Tent's table is understandable. The temple of Apollo at Delphi was regarded as the centre of the world. Strabo writes: 'For it [the temple] is almost in the centre of Greece taken as a whole, between the country inside the Isthmus and that outside it; and it was also believed to be in the centre of the inhabited world (τῆς οἰκουμένης), and people called it the navel of the earth (τῆς γῆς ὀμφαλόν)' (9.3.6 [Jones]; cf. Paus. 10.3) As others regarded the temple in Delphi a hub of the Greek world, Josephus seems to regard the Tent as the centre of a worldwide worship.

Figure 6.6: *The Table of Showbread according to Antiquities 3.139-143*. Illustration by Gabriel Costa

Having as reference Walter Burkert's remarks on Greek temples' furnishings (1985: 91), Robertson suggests that Josephus not only wishes to trace a parallel between the tables at each cult site, but also other furnishings, including incense stands and lamps. He also notes that there was no image in the *adyton* ('innermost sanctuary') of either building (1991: 140-141). Except for the explicit comparison between the Tent's table and the one at Delphi, we cannot say for sure whether Josephus had other Delphic furniture in mind. As observed in the previous chapter, those furnishings were common to Graeco-Roman cult sites. Moreover, we are informed that in the Imperial Age, a golden image of Apollo existed in the innermost part of the temple at Delphi (Paus. 10.24.5).

The reference to Dorian bed-couches is obscure. We do not have any specific information about a Dorian style of bed-couches in Graeco-Roman textual sources. If this was a standard design in the furniture of the first century CE, more evidence is required. Josephus may describe a Doric pattern that was famous in Sparta in the golden age and was well known by his audience. The parallel established by Josephus between the Tent's furniture and the Spartan one can be understood in light of the prestige gained by the Spartans among Roman intellectuals since the turn of the era (Feldman 1988: 208-209).²³

²³ See Josephus' comparison between Judaeans and Spartan traits (*Ag. Ap.* 2.225-235). See also Mason 2007a: 219-261.

Josephus writes that the '[table] was placed in the sanctuary (τῷ ναῷ) toward the north (ἄρκτον) far from the remotest corner.' Although information about the placement of the table is not present in the Hebrew and LXX texts of Exodus, the author's remark is in line with Philo, who not only refers to the piece of furniture in the north side of the Tent, but also associates its position with the winds, as we have seen (*Mos.* 2.104). Departing from the biblical account, Josephus does not mention all the utensils placed on the table, including dishes, pans, pitchers, and bowls (*Exod* 25:29). He mentions only twelve loaves of 'unleavened bread (ἄρτους...ἄζύμους)' 'made of pure wheat-flour (καθαροῦ...τοῦ ἀλεύρου)' and arranged in two piles of six loaves. The reference to unleavened bread is an extra-biblical remark, along with the specification that above the piles of bread, there were 'two golden offerings-cups full of incense (φιάλαι δύο χρύσεαι λιβάνου πλήρεις).'²⁴ He does not specify the ingredients of the incense, but the LXX and Philo give them as pure frankincense and salt (*Lev* 24:7; *Mos.* 2.104). Josephus also comments that every seven days the twelve loaves were replaced with new ones, and this happened 'on the day called by us the Sabbath. For we call the seventh day the Sabbath.' Elsewhere Josephus adds that the loaves of bread were baked 'on the evening before the Sabbath,' and placed on the 'sacred table (τῆς ἱερᾶς τραπέζης)' on the Sabbath morning (3.142-143; 255 [Feldman]).

Josephus does not assign a cosmic reading to the table, but his mention of a golden 'spiral (ἑλικος)' ornament around the table is notable. The Greek word for 'spiral (ἡ ἑλιξ)' used by the author could denote not only a shape made up of curves, but also the paths of the celestial bodies (*Arist. Metaph.* 998a5) and the orbits of the five planets, the sun and the moon (*Eudoxus of Cnidos* 5.3; 9.2). In *Timaeus* 39a-b, Plato uses the word ἡ ἑλιξ 'for the spirals traced out by the planets, the sun and the moon as they move zodiacally and at the same time participate in the diurnal rotation' (Kouremenos 2018: 130; see also Cornford 1997: 112-115). Whether Josephus' readers would have perceived this connection of the word with heavenly motions, it is difficult to determine.

The loaves of bread on the table indicate time: 'By placing on the table the twelve loaves of bread he signifies the year that is divided into as many months' (3.182 [Feldman]). In this interpretation, Josephus follows Philo (*Spec.* 1.172). Except for the number twelve indicating the months of the year, there is no further clarification for this reading, but Josephus' emphasis on the Sabbath seems to indicate a connection to this understanding. The replacement of the loaves

²⁴ Both Hebrew and LXX texts refer to the use of direct incense on the piles (*Lev* 24:7). Given that the Arch of Titus depicts two cups above the Temple's table, and rabbinic literature refers to them, Josephus may have in mind these utensils used in the Herodian Temple (Feldman 2000: 268, n. 349).

of bread every seven days could denote the closing of a weekly cycle and the beginning of a new one, something of a small-time marker within the annual calendar. The arrangement of a seven-day week played a crucial role in Judaeen liturgy and ritual within the Temple. As for Rome, a seven-day planetary week was known, mainly after the adoption of the Julian calendar. However, the seven-day interval was restricted in the early imperial period to astrological uses. It appears that only between the second and third century CE did this arrangement of the week become widespread in the Graeco-Roman Empire (Zerubavel 1985: 6-20).

6.4.3 The Lampstand

When it comes to the lampstand (λυχνία) in the Holy Place, Josephus seems to have significantly benefited not only from the Exodus account, but also from his observation of the Jerusalem Temple's furniture of his day (Fine 2016: 26). He notes that the lampstand was placed in front of the table close to the south wall, which is in accordance with the biblical text (Exod 40:24). In contrast to the Tent's other furniture, the lampstand was cast from gold, hollow, and of the weight of a Greek talent.²⁵ Josephus does not specify its dimensions, but nor does the biblical account.²⁶

The lampstand was made up of elaborate ornamentation, which included 'globules (σφαίρια)', 'lilies (κρίνα)', small 'pomegranates (ρόϊσκοις)', and small 'kraters (κρατηριδίοις)', with a total number of seventy units of decorations (possibly ten ornaments for each branch) (fig. 6.7).²⁷ The lampstand was composed of this design from its 'base to the top, having been made so as to consist of as many parts as they allocate to the planets [i.e., the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn] and the sun (τοὺς πλανήτας καὶ τὸν ἥλιον).' The object had seven branches, and at the head of each of them was a lamp, which recalled 'the number of planets.' The lamps faced 'the east and the south, it being placed crosswise' (3.144-146 [Feldman]). Possibly, Josephus' readers understood the relation between the location of the lampstand within the Tent with the position of the celestial bodies in the sky. In Graeco-Roman cosmology, the planets perform their revolutions towards the south (Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.34.8).

²⁵ An Egyptian gold talent, according to Marcus Varro, weighed more than 27 kg (Plin. *HN* 33.52; Humphrey et al. 1998: 487, n. 5).

²⁶ The Babylonian Talmud specifies the height of the lampstand as eighteen handbreadths (*b. Menachot* 28b).

²⁷ Some scholars have suggested a lampstand with seventy parts instead. Rachel Hachlili, for example, proposes the following structure: the lampstand itself (base and central stand = 1); five units for each of the three pairs of branches (=15), the ornaments in the central stand, joining together capitals (=15); the ornaments in the central stand, joining together flowers (=4) and capitals (=4); the ornaments in the branches, combining flowers (=18) and capitals (=18); other capitals embellishing the central stand (=3); and lamps (=7); for a total of seventy (2001: 34; see also Thackeray 1930: 403, n.145; Robertson 1991: 177; Feldman 2000: 269, n. 359).

In another place, Josephus elaborates the cosmic interpretation of the lampstand, stating that Moses, when composing the object with seventy parts, ‘hinted at the tenth parts of the orbits of the planets (τὰς τῶν πλανητῶν δεκαμοιρίας) and by making the seven lamps upon it he hinted at the motion of the planets (τῶν πλανητῶν τὴν φορὰν), for they are so many in number’ (3.182 [Feldman]).

Figure 6.7: *The Lampstand according to Antiquities 3.144-146*. Illustration by Gabriel Costa

In view of the elaborate description of the lampstand in Exodus (25:31-40; 37:17-24), Josephus omits many details. The Hebrew text, recalling floral imagery, describes a lampstand made entirely of pure gold with cups, calyces, and petals. Each one of the six branches emerging from the sides of the central stand was decorated with three cups in the appearance of almond blossoms, with a calyx and petals. On the central stand, there were ornaments in the form of four cups moulded in the shape of almond blossoms with calyces and petals. Also, there is a calyx under each pair of branches going out of the lampstand, for a total of three more (Exod 25:31-36). Alternatively, the LXX refers to an engraved lampstand, with stem, branches, bows (κρατῆρες), knobs (σφαίρωταιρες), and lilies (κρίνα). Each of the six branches that go out sideways bears three bowls shaped like nuts (καρυϊσκους), a bud, and a lily. On the central shaft, four bowls have the appearance of nuts, with knobs and lilies. Under each pair of branches that go out of the central shaft is a knob. Both the Hebrew and Greek texts of Exodus mention the lampstand’s utensils

(NRSV: snuffers and trays; LXX: oil vessels [τὸν ἐπαρυστήρα] and underlays [τὰ ὑποθέματα]) and the oil from olives used in the lamps (Exod 27:29-21). These details are missing in Josephus' account.

Given the variation in terminology between the Hebrew and Greek texts of Exodus, it appears that Josephus benefited from the vocabulary of the LXX. Except for pomegranates (ρόϊσκοις), he uses all three words that describe the components of the lampstand in the Greek text (σφαιρία, κρίνα, κρατηριδίοις).²⁸ Even so, it seems that Josephus used ροῖσκος (pomegranate) for the rendering of the LXX σφαιρωτήρ (knob), while his σφαιρίον replaces the LXX καρύισκος (nut). Although Thackeray and Feldman translate σφαιρίον as 'globule', it could also have the sense of berry or nut in ancient Greek botanical texts (Theophr. *Hist pl.* 3.7.4; Discorides, *De Planta Medica* 2.179). If this reasoning is right, Josephus will have consulted the LXX text for the description of the seven-branched lampstand.

Considering that the lampstand was composed of seventy parts, Josephus writes that it modelled the orbits of the planets, in that each one has an interval of ten degrees (ἡ δεκαμοῖρια; Latin *decani*). As Thackeray has noted, Josephus uses a term employed by Graeco-Roman astronomers to refer to 'a portion of the heavens occupying 10 degrees of the zodiac or a power presiding over those 10 degrees' (1930: 404). Thus each zodiacal sign is divided into three equal parts, each comprising ten degrees, called a δεκανός and presided over by a planet. Josephus' description recalls Philo's remarks, given that he also notes that the seven lamps upon the metallic structure alluded to the seven planets as well as to the 'motion of the planets (τῶν πλανητῶν τὴν φορὰν)' (*Ant.* 3.182). Even though Josephus explains that the seventy parts of the lampstand signify the movement of the celestial bodies, he does not assign cosmic readings to each of the ornaments described. Robertson, however, suggests that the pomegranates were added by Josephus 'to heighten the "tree of life" symbolism of the menorah' (1991: 168). Since Josephus addresses his work to a Roman audience, it is difficult to determine whether the readers had any knowledge of this Judaeon symbolism.

6.4.4 The Incense-Altar

²⁸ For Robertson, Josephus' usage of ροῖσκος could evoke the καρύισκος of the LXX. He translates καρύισκος as 'almond' and notes that the nut resembles the pomegranate, given that they are both 'small and round'. Moreover, ροῖσκος resembles καρύισκος phonetically (1991: 167-168). However, Robertson's findings do not appear to support his own conclusions. Firstly, pomegranates and almonds do not have the same shape; while the fruit is rounded, the nut is oval. Secondly, the phonetic resemblance of the suffix -ίσκος in both words does not evidence that Josephus had in mind an association between them, given that a number of Greek words have similar suffixes.

Josephus goes on to describe the last of the three appurtenances of the Holy Place, one with which a Roman reader would be familiar. The incense-altar (τὸ θυμιατήριον) was placed between the table and the lampstand in the Holy Place (fig. 6.8).²⁹ Just like the ark, the altar is made of imperishable wood, plated with a metal not specified by Josephus, possibly gold (3.198). The altar was a cubit long, a cubit wide, and two cubits high (0.4 x 0.4 x 0.8 m). Upon it was a golden grate, and in each corner a crown (ὁ στέφανος) of gold. Exodus, however, describes golden horns (30:3). The altar was equipped with rings for rods to be used by the priests in transport (*Ant.* 3.147-148).

Figure 6.8: *The Incense-Altar according to Antiquities 3.147-148.* Illustration by Gabriel Costa

Elsewhere Josephus explains that the priest should twice a day, before sunrise and at sunset, burn the incense at the altar (3.199). This indicates that the rituals performed here were in accordance with the sun's daily path from the point of its rising to its setting. When writing about the consecration of the Tent and priests, he states that the ingredients for the incense prescribed for use at the altar of incense 'were many and varied... and they were of very great value.' However, Josephus omits a detailed explanation, lest it become burdensome to his readers (3.198 [Feldman]). Exodus lists four ingredients: stacte, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense,

²⁹ The biblical text, on the other hand, mentions the furniture in front of the curtain that is over the ark (Exod 30:6; 40:26). While Josephus does not place the altar facing the hanging, it is possible to infer that it was in that direction, since the table, that stands in the south side of the altar, is close to the Holy of Holy (*Ant.* 3.142).

which were seasoned with salt (30:34 NRSV). The LXX text gives oil of myrrh (στακτήν), onycha (ὄνυχα), galbanum (χαλβάνην), and translucent frankincense (λίβανον διαφανῆ).

The altar of burning incense is, along with the ark, one of the two appurtenances without apparent cosmic symbolism in Josephus' *Antiquities*. Philo, on the other hand, reads the table cosmologically. He understands the position of the altar in the middle as 'a symbol of the thankfulness for earth and water which should be rendered for the benefits derived from both of these, since the mid-position in the universe has been assigned to them' (*Mos.* 2.101 [Colson, LCL]); and its parts and ingredients prepared for the incense as symbolising the elements (*Her.* 197-198).³⁰

Josephus' use of the word τὸ θυμιατήριον, however, might suggest astral imagery. Given that Josephus writes that the Tent and its furnishings are 'imitation and representation of the universe (ἀπομίμησιν καὶ διατύπωσιν τῶν ὅλων)' (*Ant.* 3.180), the incense-altar may have symbolised a constellation with the same name. The constellation of Altar or Ara appears in the Graeco-Roman literature as both an Altar (Θυτήριον; Aratus, *Phaen.* 403; 708-714) and an Incense-Burner (Θυμιατήριον; Ptol. *Tetr.* 1.9.24). The prototype of the constellation figure indicates a model of an incense-altar of a kind found in cultures of the Near East (Condos 1997: 38). Aratus locates the constellation in the south-west (*Phaen.* 403, 407, 710). Similarly, Josephus appears to place the altar of incense near the south-west part of the Holy Place, when he writes that it stands between the lampstand and the table (*Ant.* 3.147). Additionally, the constellation of the Altar is connected with the heavenly temple (*mundo templum*) in the work of the Roman author Manilius (*Astronomica* 1.420-432). It would seem that such language may have evoked astral symbolism with Josephus' readers attuned to this knowledge of the constellations.

6.4.5 The Altar of Sacrifices

The last appurtenance that Josephus describes is the altar of sacrifices located in the courtyard (fig. 6.9). It is not clear why Josephus chooses to leave the mention of this crucial piece of furniture for the end.³¹ He employs the standard Greek word βωμός for the altar. In the LXX, however, this word is used to denote altars of pagan gods, or altars used by Israelites that were not recognised by God. Greek Exodus uses θυσιαστήριον for 'altar' (Doroszewski 2018: 187-188; Van der Kooij

³⁰ Clement of Alexandria reads the incense-altar as 'a symbol of the earth situated in the middle of the cosmos' (*Strom.* 5.33.1). This interpretation does not appear in any other source known to us.

³¹ In Robertson's view, Josephus postpones the reference to the furniture 'because he wished to emphasise the prayers. Prayers were offered by the people in the courts of the Temple' (1991: 74). Nevertheless, Josephus does not say anything about prayers in his account of the Tent in *Antiquities*.

2003: 601). Later, Josephus uses θυσιαστήριον for the Tent and Temple's altar (e.g., *Ant.* 8.13, 88).³²

Figure 6.9: *The Altar of Sacrifices according to Antiquities 3.149-150*. Illustration by Gabriel Costa

Josephus writes that the altar was set up in front of the Tent. In placing the altar before the cult site, he departs from the biblical account. In Exodus, the altar is located in front of the courtyard's entrance, and the basin between the Tent and the altar (40:6-7), whereas in Josephus, it is the basin that stands before the courtyard's entrance (*Ant.* 3.114). Josephus' reordering of the appurtenances in the courtyard could be explained in light of his own experience as a priest in the Jerusalem Temple, or possibly with a view to Graeco-Roman altars. The Roman architect Vitruvius writes that altars should face east and sit lower than the cult images within the temple, 'so that those who make supplication and sacrifices may look up at the deity' (*De arch.* 4.9.1 [Rowland]). Although Roman temples appear to have had no fixed orientation, Josephus' account agrees with Vitruvius' instruction.³³ The altar was not only placed on the east side of the courtyard but was also set up in front of the Tent, so that the priests could perform the sacrificial ceremonies while looking at the cult site, where the deity dwelt.

³² Philo uses both terms for the altar of sacrifice (*Mos.* 2.94, 106; *Spec.* 1.233).

³³ For the east-facing position of altars in Vitruvius, see McEwen 2003: 174.

Unlike the furniture within the Tent, the altar was made of wood and covered with a coat of bronze.³⁴ The altar measured five cubits on each side and three cubits high (2 x 2 x 1 m). It was adorned with gold – even though the biblical account reports nothing about the precious metal³⁵ – and equipped with plates of bronze, ‘similar to netting in its grating.’ Given that the base of the altar did not lie exactly underneath, the ground received the fire that fell from the brazier (3.149). Josephus does not refer to the bronze rings, the wooden poles overlaid with bronze, or the horns on the four corners of the altar (Exod 27:2, 4, 6-7). Particularly with regard to the horns, it is not clear why Josephus omits the ornaments in this version of the incense-altar and the altar of sacrifices, but he mentions them in the Herodian altar of sacrifices (*J.W.* 5.225). The LXX and Philo also refer to them (*Spec.* 1.231, 233).

Josephus concludes the account by explaining that the utensils associated with the bronze altar were made of gold, including wine jugs (οἰνοχόαι), offering-cups (φιάλαι), censers (θυῶσκις), and mixing-bowls (κρατήρσιν). All these vessels were placed opposite the altar (3.150). That the utensils were made of gold and were located opposing the altar is Josephus’ addition. The biblical text notes only five types of vessels, made of bronze (pots, shovels, basins, forks, and firepans) without giving their location (Exod 27:3 NRSV). Naomi Cohen notes that the utensils mentioned by Josephus are not found in the Hebrew text of Exodus, and only offering-cups (φιάλαι) occur in the LXX. Moreover, the location of the utensils ‘over against the altar’ are of the type suitable for ‘the burning of the incense and the making of libations rather than the “shovels, basins, and flesh-hooks” of brass found in the biblical text which are essential appurtenances of animal sacrifice’ (1964: 322-323).

As with the other items mentioned in the Tent’s courtyard, there is nothing specific in what Josephus states to allow one to affirm with certainty that he intends any cosmological symbolism in the altar of sacrifices. It seems that his focus is only on the Tent and everything related to the ritual performed within it. Philo, on the other hand, writes about the Pythagorean meaning of the height of the altar (*QE* 2.100), the horns on the four corners as the cardinal points (2.101), and the bronze material as denoting the earth (2.102).³⁶

6.5 The Priestly Garments

³⁴ Likewise, the basin was made of bronze (3.114).

³⁵ Robertson suggests that Josephus has in mind the altar of Solomon’s Temple (1991: 80-81).

³⁶ Although Plutarch does not refer to the Tent’s altar of sacrifices, he does link bronze material to the air (*Mor.* 395d). Whether this understanding was commonplace in Josephus’ own day, we cannot say for sure.

The characterisation of the priestly and high priestly attire is by far the longest and most colourful account in *Antiquities* in which cosmological connotations appear prominently. Josephus seeks to convince his audience of the attire's function as a vehicle of connection between the Most High God and humankind. As the only delegate of God on earth, the high priest wears fine clothing with its rich embroidery and manifold ornaments, meant to indicate the universal power of God.

In Josephus' description of the Tent from *Antiquities* 3.108 to 3.187, his explanation of the priestly vestments occupies two-fifths of the narrative.³⁷ The depiction of the priestly raiment has two particularities. For most of the account, Josephus shifts the verbs from the past to the present tense. When describing the structure of the Tent and its furnishings, Josephus uses the past tense. However, when characterising the priest's clothing: (1) he shifts to the present, implying that the vestments are still in use, even though there is no Tent/Temple at the time Josephus is writing; and (2) he employs a total of fifteen Aramaic and Hebrew words to refer to items of the priestly vestments.³⁸

As Josephus explains it, there were vestments both for the priests (ιερείς), whom the Judeans term 'chaanaeae (χαναναίαις)', and the high priest (ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς), whom the Judeans denominate an 'anarabaches (ἀραβάχην)' (3.151).³⁹ While the ordinary priests' apparel was constituted of four linen garments (breech, tunic, belt, and cap), the high priest's wardrobe had the most elaborate apparel, which comprised not only the four first linen garments of the ordinary priests, but also four more garments and accessories (tunic, ephod, breastplate, and golden crown).⁴⁰

6.5.1 Vestments of the Priests

³⁷ In our count, from a total of 3,297 words (Niese's *editio maior*) used for the portrayal of the Tent, 1,342 words are related to the priests' clothing.

³⁸ Annette Weissenrieder recently suggested that Josephus employs Aramaic intending to set up the language as a priestly language, 'implying that its use dates back to the time of the tent...In other words, he is deliberately shifting to Aramaic out of the everyday world and representing it to outsiders as a priestly language in use ever since the days of the tent...establishing the era of the tent...as an ideal time' (2017: 168). It seems, however, a hasty conclusion to draw from this scant evidence, given that Josephus nowhere in his composition claims Aramaic to be an official priestly language.

³⁹ The words *chaanaeae* and *anarabaches* are Josephus' Hellenised version of the Aramaic *kahanya* (priests) and *kahana rabba* (high priest) (Thackeray 1930: 387).

⁴⁰ The biblical account refers to six high priest's garments in Exod 28:4. In the Mishnah, 'the High Priest ministers in eight pieces of raiment, and a common priest in four—in tunic, drawers, turban, and girdle. To these, the High Priest adds the breastplate, the apron, the upper garment, and the frontlet. In these were the Urim and Thummim inquired of; and they were not inquired of for a common person, but only for the king, for the Court, or for one of whom the congregation had need' (*m. Yoma* 7:5 [Danby]).

In contrast to the biblical account (Exod 28:1-43), Josephus begins the vestments' description with the set of apparel prepared for the ordinary priests, and gives a substantial explanation of this. He writes that before the priest performs the 'sacred rites (ταῖς ἱερουργίαις)' he goes through a 'ritual of purification (ἀγνεῖαν)' prescribed by the Law. After the purification ceremony, the priest starts dressing himself:

First of all, he puts on the so-called *machanases* (μαναχάσιν).⁴¹ This has as its meaning a pair of drawers (συνάκτιρα). It is loin-cloth covering the genitals, artfully fashioned, sewn from finely spun linen (βύσσου κλωστής), with the feet fitting into it just as into trousers. It ends above the waist and terminates at the flank, around which it is drawn tight (3.152 [Feldman]).

Given that the biblical text only mentions linen undergarments (LXX Exod 28:42 περισκελῇ λινῷ) that reached from hips to thighs, Josephus may be using his own experience as a priest in the Jerusalem Temple for details in the description of the breeches. There is no apparent cosmic symbolism in the garment, but since it was made of linen, it could signify the earth (3.183). Moreover, garments made of linen were considered holy among the Egyptian priesthood and characterise heavenly beings in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (Haran 1985: 1974).

Over the breeches, the '[priest] wears a linen garment of a double texture of fine linen (σινδόνης βυσσίνης)'. The item 'is called a *chethomene* (χεθομένη), and this signifies "of linen." For we call linen *chethon* (χέθον).'⁴² Josephus describes the garment as 'a chiton reaching to the feet (ποδῆρης χιτῶν), encircling the body and with tight-fitting sleeves around the arms' (3.153 [Feldman, modified]). That the ordinary priests wore a chiton (or *tunica* in Latin), that falls over the feet is Josephus' own remark. The LXX records only a chiton (χιτῶν) without giving its length (Exod 28:40). Josephus may have intended to enhance the dignity of the garment, because he had possibly once worn one when in service in the Jerusalem Temple (*J.W.* 1.3) (fig. 6.10). He also writes that 'the chiton is nowhere folded, but it has a wide opening at the neck and, by means of strings hanging from the border both at the breast and the back is tied fast above each shoulder.'⁴³ It is called *massabazane* (μασσαβάνης)' (*Ant.* 3.156 [Feldman, modified]).⁴⁴ Josephus does not assign any cosmic symbolism to the garb, but it can be inferred that the linen textile indicates the earth (3.183).

⁴¹ From the Hebrew *miknesaim* (dual) (Thackeray 1930: 387).

⁴² The words *chethomene* and *cheton* are transliteration of the Aramaic *ketōneth* (tunic) and *kitan* (linen). Thackeray notes the relation that Josephus could have traced between the word *chethomene* and the Greek χιτῶν used by Josephus below (1930: 388).

⁴³ For more details on the tunic, see Shlezinger-Katsman 2010: 367-368.

⁴⁴ From the Hebrew *mishbezeth* (checker-work) (Feldman 2000: 273, n. 404).

Figure 6.10: Conjectural portrait of *Josephus' priest* (*Ant.* 3.152-158). Drawing by Gabriel Costa

Josephus introduces the third accessory as a parenthesis in his account of the chiton. While the Hebrew text of Exodus briefly describes this item as a ‘sash of fine twisted linen, and of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, embroidered with needlework’ (39:29 NRSV; see also 28:4, 39-40)⁴⁵, Josephus gives an extensive and detailed account of it:

They gird it on at the breast, drawing around a little above the arm-pit the belt (τὴν ζώνην), which has a breadth of about four fingers, woven coarse-meshed so as to seem like the skin of a serpent

⁴⁵ The LXX refers only to the sash in Exodus 28:4, 39-40.

(λεβηρίδα...ὄφεως). Flowers (ἄνθη) are woven into it embroidered with scarlet and purple (φοίνικι καὶ πορφύρῃ) together with hyacinth and fine linen (ὑακίνθου καὶ βύσσου), but the warp alone is fine linen. Taking the beginning of the winding at the breast and going around again, it is tied and streams at length up to even the ankles so long as the priest is performing nothing, for thus it presents a beautiful appearance to those who see it. But when it is necessary to attend seriously to the sacrifices and to conduct the service, in order that he may not be hindered in his work by its movement, he throws it over his left shoulder and carries it (3.154-155 [Feldman]).⁴⁶

The word used by Josephus to refer to the belt (ἡ ζώνη), is the same employed in the LXX and Philo (*Mos.* 2.144). Nevertheless, he writes that Moses called the item *abaneth*,⁴⁷ and in his days, it is termed *hemain* (ἐμίαν), ‘having learned it from the Babylonians’ (3.156).⁴⁸ While Philo writes that the belt was used by the priests ‘to keep them unrestricted and readier for the holy services, by tightening the loose folds of the chitones’ (2.144), Josephus is not clear about the function of the item; it appears, however, that the belt was basically decorative (Robertson 1991: 218). Because of its type of woven fabric, Josephus writes that it has the appearance of a ‘serpent’s skin (λεβηρίδα...ὄφεως)’. In addition to this fauna motif, Josephus writes that flowers were woven into it, decorated with scarlet, purple, hyacinth, and fine linen. Pausanias writes that on the golden robe of the chryselephantine statue of Zeus at Olympia are embroidered lily flowers (5.11.1-2).

The place of the belt around the priests’ breast finds a parallel in the portrayal of heavenly beings in Revelation, as well as in some representations of Mithras. In Revelation 1:13 is said that the Son of Man (υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου) stands in the midst of seven golden lampstands (ἐπὶ λυχνίας χρυσαῖς) and is clothed in a long robe (ποδήρη) with a golden belt across his chest (πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν). This scenario indicates the view of a priest officiating in the Holy Place. Elsewhere, the author describes seven angels (ἐπὶ ἄγγελοι) coming from the heavenly temple and dressed in pure bright linen (λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρόν), with golden belts around their chests (περὶ τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσαῖς) (15:5-6). Given that both the excerpts allude to a temple, they may be inspired by the figure of a Judaean priest in the first century CE. Some depictions of Mithras also represent him with the accessory. The Mithraeum at Marino, for instance, shows a large fresco of Mithras in royal red dress with a golden girdle around his chest. A marble relief found at Nesce (Italy) and a red relief in sandstone found in Neuenheim (Germany) also depict the Iranian god wearing the same accessory (Aune 1997: 94).

⁴⁶ A significant difficulty with Josephus’ depiction of the belt in *Antiquities* is that it is different from the item referred in *War* (5.232). Also, the description of this priestly belt does not appear elsewhere in the surviving Judaean literature. Thus, we cannot say for sure whether Josephus is drawing from a Judaean source or if this is his own creation.

⁴⁷ From the Hebrew *abnet* (Exod 28:4, 9).

⁴⁸ Feldman notes that when Josephus mentions Babylonians, he is referring to the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew word, as is also found in rabbinic literature (2000: 273, n. 401).

As part of his detailed cosmological interpretation of the priestly attire, Josephus declares that the belt, like the other clothing and the Tent's fabric, in being made of four materials, indicates the nature of the four basic elements:

The pieces of cloth woven of four materials indicate the nature of the elements (τὴν τῶν στοιχείων φύσιν). The fine linen (βύσσος) appears to indicate the earth (τὴν γῆν) because from it the flax grows; and the purple (πορφύρα) indicates the sea (τὴν θάλασσαν) that has been reddened by the blood of the fishes. The hyacinth (ὁ ὑάκινθος) serves to indicate the air (ἀέρα), and the crimson (ὁ φοῖνιξ) would be a symbol of fire (πυρρός) (3.183 [Feldman]).

We have dealt at length earlier in Chapter Five with this cosmological concept, which Josephus employs for his portrayal of the Babylonian tapestry (*J.W.* 5.213-214). The only difference here is that Josephus equates the purple with the sea by mentioning the blood of the fishes. Oliver Gussmann suggests that Josephus appears to connect the fine linen (earth) and purple (sea) to the third day of the Genesis creation account (2008: 388). Even though Josephus' audience is aware that '[God] established the earth, pouring out the sea around it' on the third day (1.31 [Feldman]), it is not clear whether Josephus wants to replay the creation narrative here in the Tent's textiles.

The fourth and last item of the ordinary priest's apparel is the cap. Again, Josephus' description of the item exceeds the detail of the biblical texts, which mention only a cap made of linen (Exod 39:28). Josephus writes about a 'peakless cap (πίλος ἄκωνος)' that covers most of the priest's head and is made of fine cloth (σινδών), usually linen. This *masnaephthes* (μασναεφθῆς)⁴⁹ is fashioned to resemble 'a headband of linen web (στεφάνη...ὑφάσματος λινέου)' fastened around the priest's forehead (3.157-158). Thackeray notes that the Hebrew word indicates in the biblical account the hat of the high priest, whereas here Josephus refers to the ordinary priests (1930: 390-391). It seems that the use of this terminology to refer to the ordinary priest's cap was well-established in Josephus' own day. The Mishnah, for instance, does not distinguish between the item worn by the priest and that worn by the high priest (*m. Yoma* 7:5; see also Robertson 1991: 219-220).

6.5.2 Vestments of the High Priest

After concluding the description of the ordinary priests' clothing, Josephus writes that the high priest is equipped in like manner, 'omitting none of the things that have been mentioned

⁴⁹ From the Hebrew *miznepheth*.

previously.’ However, the high priest wears over the apparel cited a second ‘full-length chiton (χιτώνα...ποδήρης)’ made of one piece of material and of ‘hyacinth colour (ὑακινθου)’.⁵⁰ It is called ‘meeir (μεεῖρ)’ in Hebrew.⁵¹ The chiton is bound tightly with a belt (ἡ ζώνη) similar in colours to the belt of the first tunic mentioned, except for the gold interwoven in the high priest’s belt (3.159) (fig. 6.11). While the Hebrew text of Exodus does not specify the length of the high priest’s robe, it is not entirely clear why Josephus adds this particular detail for the high priest’s tunic. Other Judaeans writers, including the *Letter of Aristeas* 96, *Wisdom of Solomon* 18:24, and *Revelation* 1:13, employ the same term.

Around the hem of the high priest’s chiton were sewn fringes ‘in colour imitating the manner of pomegranates (πόων), and hung down, as well as golden bells (κώδωνες χρύσειοι) with great attention to beauty, so that midway between two bells there hung a pomegranate, and between the pomegranates a little bell (κωδώνιον)’ (3.160 [Feldman]).⁵² While Josephus mentions fringes resembling pomegranates without giving their colours, the Hebrew text of Exodus refers to ornaments in the shape of pomegranates in blue, purple, and crimson yarns (28:33). In this way, Josephus may be agreeing with the Greek text, which describes fringes like pomegranates: ‘And you shall make on the hem of the undergarment below little pomegranates, as it were (ὥσει) a flowering pomegranate tree’ (28:29). Whereas the biblical account notes that the ornaments served to give a warning sound when the high priest was going into the Holy Place to minister before God, and when coming out (Exod 28:35), Josephus is silent about its purpose.

The ‘high priest’s chiton (τοῦ ἀρχιερέως χιτών)’, with its elaborate and precious ornaments, receives detailed cosmological treatment. Because the tunic is made of linen, it ‘signifies the earth (ἀποσημαίνει...τὴν γῆν)’. The hyacinth indicates ‘the vault of heaven (τὸν πόλον)’. The bells and pomegranates attached to its hem are related to natural phenomena: the pomegranates resemble ‘lightning (ἀστραπαῖς)’ and the bells through their sound ‘thunder’ (βρονταῖς) (*Ant.* 3.184). Josephus’ relation of the hem’s ornaments with lightning and thunder may be connected with the understanding of natural phenomena as the direct activity and manifestation of God.⁵³ His readers were already familiar with this idea. In the episode of God’s descent on Sinai, Josephus writes that ‘violent winds, rousing impetuous rain, came sweeping down, flashes of lightning

⁵⁰ While the biblical text only records woven work in the opening for the head, Josephus is in accord with the rabbinic tradition (*Yoma* 72b; see also Feldman 2000: 274, n. 418).

⁵¹ *Me’il* (Exod 28:31 ‘robe’).

⁵² Josephus’ extra remarks about the little bell between the pomegranates do not find any parallel in the surviving Judaeans literature.

⁵³ Raphael Patai proposes a different explanation for Josephus’ cosmological reading of the bells and pomegranates. According to him, the sound-effects of the bells may be related to a rain-making ritual. The interpretation of the pomegranates as lightning may be associated with the light flashing from them (1947: 117).

(ἀστραπαὶ) caused fear to those who watched, and thunderbolts (κεραυνοὶ), having been poured down, revealed the presence of God' (3.80 [Feldman]). Josephus perhaps also wished to equate God with the most important deity of the Graeco-Roman tradition; the Greeks called Zeus 'God of Lightning and of Thunder (ἀστραπαῖος...καὶ βρονταῖος)' ([Aristotle] *De Mundo* 401a12). For the Romans, Jupiter Tonans ('Thunderer') has power over thunder and lightning (Silius, *Pun.* 17.474-8; Suet. *Aug.* 29.3).⁵⁴

The most distinctive item of the high priest's apparel is worn upon the hyacinth chiton and is called, in Hebrew, the ephod (ἐφώδην). Josephus explains that it is fashioned like the Greek garb ἐπωμίς.⁵⁵ In Greek literature, this term denotes the part of the women's tunic that is tied on the shoulder by a brooch (LSJ). The ephod is made of a piece of woven fabric the size of a cubit (0.4 m). It is made of different colours and golden threads, with an open space at mid-breast, and fitted out with sleeves. According to Josephus, it was made to have the appearance of a 'chiton (χιτὼν)' (3.162). Elsewhere, he reads the ephod, or 'outer vestment (ἐφαπτις)', as 'the nature of the universe (τοῦ παντὸς τὴν φύσιν), which it seemed best to God to be made up of the four elements (τεσσάρων), interwoven with gold (χρυσῷ), in conception, I think, of the sunlight (αὐγῆς), which is available to all' (3.184 [Feldman]).

There are a few things we should consider here in relation to the cosmic reading of the ephod. First, Josephus chooses to use the term ἐφαπτις here and in 3.185 to replace the word ἐπωμίς for the ephod. In Greek literature, ἐφαπτις was used to describe a soldier's cloak or mantle (Polyb. 30.25.10). Secondly, Josephus mentions God's creation of the universe from the four elements. This remark could invoke in Graeco-Roman readers' minds the Demiurge of Plato's physical cosmos.⁵⁶ In *Timaeus*, Plato remarks that the cosmos came into existence by the creator-God's use of earth, air, fire, and water (31a-32d, 69c).⁵⁷ Thirdly, Josephus associates the gold woven into the high priest's clothing with 'sunlight (αὐγῆς)'. The Greek word can indicate not only the light of the sun, but also splendour and brightness. Josephus appears to underscore the shine of the garments to emphasise the transformation experienced by the high priest when performing the sacred rituals before God, which brought upon the high priest the glory of the divine.⁵⁸ Josephus also seems to align the role of the high priest with the sun. A Roman reader familiar with Ciceronian texts would understand this connection easily: 'The sun is the leader (*dux*), chief

⁵⁴ Both natural phenomena could also be understood as human or God's voice (Plut. *Vit. Per.* 156; Ps 18:13; Job 37:4-5; Mark 3:17; Rev 19:6).

⁵⁵ The term is employed in the LXX Exod 28:4 and Philo (*Mos.* 2.110-111).

⁵⁶ As previously noted, Josephus appears to assimilate the Judaeian god with Plato's Demiurge.

⁵⁷ Oliver Gussmann indicates that Josephus borrows the four-element theory from the Stoics (2008: 386), when in fact, as observed in Chapter Two, the formulation is credited to Plato and rooted in Empedocles' ideas.

⁵⁸ A comparable case appears in *Joseph and Aseneth* (Warren 2014: 138-140).

(*princeps*), and director (*moderator*) of the other lights, the mind and balance (*temperatio*) of the universe, of such size that it illuminates and fills all with its light' (*Rep.* 6.21 [Fott]).⁵⁹

Figure 6.11: Conjectural portrait of *Josephus' high priest* (*Ant.* 3.159-178). Drawing by Gabriel Costa

⁵⁹ In Plato's *Republic*, the philosopher introduces the sun as a metaphor for the Good in his discussion of the training of the philosopher-kings. Plato says that after they completed their long period of studies and 'proved their excellence throughout in their work and understanding must now be brought to the final goal and be made to raise the radiance (τὴν...αὐγὴν) of their soul and look at that which brings light (φῶς) to all. And when they have seen the Good itself, using that as their model they must each in turn put the state and its inhabitants and themselves in order...' (540a-b [Emlyn-Jones and Preddy, LCL]).

Josephus writes that in the mid-chest gap of the ephod, there is an item with the dimension of a span (22 cm). It was embellished with gold and colours similar to the ephod and was called the *'essen* (ἔσσην), which in Greek means 'oracle (λόγιον)'. This is, however, the function of the accessory, rather than a description. Josephus borrows the term from the LXX Exod 28:23, which in its turn calls the item 'the oracle of judgment (τοῦ λογιῶν τῆς κρίσεως)'. According to Josephus, the *essen* is worn over and fastened to the empty space of the ephod by gold rings (κρίκων χρυσέων) at each corner, and hyacinth thread (ράμματος ὑακίνθου) is used to bind the rings together. 'Two sardonyxes (σαρδόνυχες) fasten the *epomis* with a clasp on the shoulders, having each a golden end extending over them, being useful for [holding] the pins.'⁶⁰ On the sardonyxes are engraved in Hebrew the twelve names of Jacob's sons. Each precious stone bears the name of six sons, with the elder on the right shoulder. While the Hebrew text of Exodus attributes the oracular properties to the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate (28:30),⁶¹ Josephus ascribes oracular abilities, as observed above, to the whole structure of the accessory (3.164-166 [Feldman]).

On the breastplate are also attached twelve stones, which seem to have unearthly origins given that they are 'outstanding in size and beauty, an ornament not obtainable by men because of the exceeding size of its value.' The gemstones are arranged into four rows of three stones each and attached to the fabric with gold wires, 'doing so in order that they should not slip out.' Josephus then lists the stones of each breastplate's row: 'The first triad is sardonyx, topaz, and emerald; the second includes carbuncle and jasper and sapphire; jacinth begins the third triad, then amethyst, third agate, being the ninth in the whole series; and chrysolite is the first in the fourth row, and after it onyx, then beryl, this being the last' (3.166-168 [Feldman]).

On each gemstone is engraved the name of one of Jacob's sons, and the names appear 'according to the order in which each of them was born.' Because of the weight of the breastplate, Josephus explains that two extra-large golden rings were added to the support. They 'went into the web at the border of the *essen*, where it came up to the neck.' These rings were entwined with gold cords, which went through to the top of the shoulders and fit into another ring sewn to the hem of the ephod at the back side.⁶² On the breastplate was sewn a belt (ζώνη) that was similar in colour to the first belt described in *Ant.* 3.154, along with gold. This belt, 'after going around, was

⁶⁰ The Hebrew and LXX texts diverge on the specification of the stone. While the Hebrew text of Exodus gives onyx, the Greek text refers to emerald (σμάραγδος) (28:9).

⁶¹ The LXX Exodus 28:30 refers to the Urim and Thummim as 'the disclosure and the truth' (τὴν δῆλωσιν καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν). For Philo's remarks, see *QE* 2.116 and *Mos.* 2.113.

⁶² Natalio Fernández Marcos explains that Josephus' editorial additions are included 'to prevent the breastplate from slipping under the weight of the gems' (2006: 333).

tied again at the seam and hung down. Golden sheaths took upon up the tassels at each end and encompassed them all' (3.169-171 [Feldman]).

Josephus omits here any explanation of how the high priest's breastplate worked, but elsewhere he gives some details. He explains that '[Moses] left behind no starting-point for the evil deeds of prophets, if indeed there should be some such to abuse the dignity of God, but entrusted to God as sole ruler to be present at the sacred rites whenever He wished or not to be present.' He explains that the sardonyx on the high priest's 'right shoulder shone, with a radiance flashing and appearing to the one furthest away, although previously this was not present in the stone.' In Josephus' view, this was not the most extraordinary thing about the breastplate, 'for through the twelve stones that the high priest wore upon his breast stitched into the *essen*, God previously communicated victory to those about to go to war.' When the radiance flashed from all the twelve stones, they knew that 'God was at hand to aid them.'⁶³ Josephus also reports that the *essen* and the sardonyx ceased to function two hundred years before he wrote *Antiquities*, 'since God was displeased at the violation of the laws' (3.214-218 [Feldman]).⁶⁴ Considering Josephus' own remarks, John Hyrcanus I (c. 175 BCE – 104 BCE) seems to be the last person blessed with the gift of prophecy, at about the time the stones ceased to function as oracles (*Ant.* 13.282-283, 299-300; see also *J.W.* 1.68-9).

Josephus explains that '[Moses] set the *essen* in the middle of the outer vestment (μέσον...τῆς ἐφαπτιδος) in the manner of the earth (γῆς), for it has precisely the middle place (τὸν μεσαίτατον τόπον)' (3.185 [Feldman]). He sustains the geocentric model here, viewing the earth as the centre of the universe. The geocentric model, anticipating the Ptolemaic system, was the prevalent description of the cosmos in the Graeco-Roman period. Although the theory was standardised in the second century CE, as a result of the observations of the Alexandrian astronomer Claudius Ptolemy (e.g., *Almagest* 1.5 [H17-20]), its roots go back to the pre-Socratic philosophers. In the fourth century BCE, the theory is suggested in Plato's works (e.g., *Leg.* 616b), but his pupil Aristotle develops an elaborated earth-centred cosmology. For those philosophers, the earth is motionless and lies in the middle of the cosmos. All the other planets, the moon, and the sun revolve around it (*Arist. Cael.* 296b; see also Fraser 2006: 13-34).

⁶³ In his repeated attempt to trace parallels between the Tent and the temple at Delphi, Robertson states that the high priest's breastplate functioned 'very much like that of the Delphic oracle which was consulted, among other questions, with questions having to do with the outcome of battles. The Greeks who would most honour this custom would be the ones who honoured the oracular powers of the Pythian priestess at Delphi' (1991: 230-231). While the utterances appear to apply to both oracles, Josephus refers to a high priest's accessory used by God to communicate his will, whereas the Delphic Pythia herself uttered prophecies under divine possession (*Plut. Mor. De Pyth. or.* 5.397.7).

⁶⁴ Two hundred years before the completion of *Antiquities* would be about the time of John Hyrcanus' death in 104 BCE. See Feldman 2000: 289, n. 574.

We also learn regarding the belt (ζώνη) of the breastplate, that '[Moses] signifies the Oceanus (τὸν ὠκεανόν), for it, indeed, encloses everything' (3.184 [Feldman, modified]).⁶⁵ Once again, we find Josephus replicating the typical knowledge of cosmic geography of his time, which was understood by his audience. The prevailing view in the Graeco-Roman period was that the inhabited world was an island encircled by the sea, called Oceanus (ὁ ὠκεανός) (e.g., Hdt. 4.36; Strabo 1.1.8; Sen. *Oedipus* 504). Such an idea appears as early as the Homeric texts. In the *Iliad*, Oceanus is described as having enormous strength and deep-flowing waters, from whom all rivers and the entire sea have their waters (21.194), but it is the depiction of the shield of Achilles by Homer that holds our attention. According to the poet, the defensive armour was forged by Hephaistos and had the great power of the river Oceanus depicted around its outermost rim (18.606-607).

The two sardonyx stones on the shoulders which '[Moses] fastened with a brooch onto the garment of the high priest indicate the sun and the moon (τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην)' (3.185 [Feldman]).⁶⁶ Josephus does not make clear why the stones could evoke the heavenly bodies, but Pliny's account of sardonyxes is noteworthy. The Roman author states that the sardonyx was esteemed in Rome and worn by the upper class, including the *princeps* Claudius. When describing the colours of the gemstone, Pliny explains that it has 'a layer of carnelian (*sarda*) resting on a layer of white (*candore*), that is, like flesh superimposed on a human finger-nail, both parts of the stone being translucent' (*HN* 37.23.85 [Eichholz, LCL]). This explanation suggests that Josephus' readers may have understood the association of the colours of the stone with the sun (carnelian) and the moon (white).

Josephus explains that his reader could understand the twelve gemstones on the breastplate as a portrayal of the lunar months of the year, as well the twelve signs of the zodiac: 'whether someone would want to understand the months or the same number of the stars, which the Greeks call the circle of the zodiac, he would not err in his interpretation' (3.186 [Feldman]).⁶⁷ For Robertson, Josephus' remark on the zodiac 'is suggestive that he believed the heavenly bodies played some role in the revelation of Divine providence, or at least that he wished to draw on his pagan readers' belief in the influence of the stars, in order to make them think well of... the High Priest's breastpiece' (1991: 270).

⁶⁵ For other references to Oceanus in Josephus, see *J.W.* 2.363, 374; 3.107.

⁶⁶ Even though Philo recognises that some think of the gemstones (emeralds) as the sun and the moon, he prefers to read them as the two hemispheres of the sky (*Mos.* 2.122).

⁶⁷ Building on the work of the seventeenth-century Egyptologist Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, R. Charles connects each one of the signs of the zodiac with a specific precious stone known in the Graeco-Roman period (1920: 2: 167). Although the correspondence is possible, no further evidence has been found in ancient sources (Osborne 2002).

It appears, however, that the twelve zodiacal signs in the high priest's breastplate underscore God's supreme control of the stellar movements. With this cosmological interpretation, Josephus seems to suggest that the worshipper of God would find assurance in revering a deity who was unaffected by astrological fate.⁶⁸ As his audience will observe all over *Antiquities*, God is the father of all (2.152; 5.97; 12.23), creator of all creatures (4.262; 12.22), and lord and king of the universe (1.72; 4.40; 14.24; 20.90). He is in control of everything and everyone (4.41; 2.129; 5.109; 6.131; 8.108; 12.20-21; 17.128). Besides, given that Josephus ascribes oracular abilities to the breastpiece, his Roman audience may have understood the accessory as an astrological tool for the prediction of human events, with the difference, however, that God, and no other celestial forces, revealed his will through the device.⁶⁹

Priestly breastplates were known in Rome. Titus Livius writes that the priests of Mars, called *Salii*, were distinguished by their embroidered tunic and over it a bronze breastplate (*aeneum pectori*; 1.1.20). It could also be that Josephus' audience would recognise in the high priest's breastplate a Roman muscle cuirass, like those connected with the Roman *principes*. The famous cuirassed statue of Augustus at Prima Porta (fig. 6.12), for instance, appears to depict Augustus' god-like dominance over the earth and heavens, including the Sun-god Sol in his quadriga, the Moon goddess Luna, the god Caelus (personification of Sky), and the goddess Tellus Mater (Earth). In Paul Zanker's view, 'the astral gods, with their perpetual rising and sinking, symbolise eternity. Together with the sky god and the Earth goddess, they emphasise the cosmic character of space and time on the relief' (1988: 188-192; see also Price 1986: 185-186).⁷⁰ Moreover, the representation of deities with a starry cuirass was known in the Eastern part of the empire. A relief found in Dura-Europos displays the god Aphlad wearing a breastplate covered in brilliant stars (Moralee 2004: 80).⁷¹

The high priest's cap (ὁ πῖλος) is the last item commented on by Josephus. He explains that the cap was similar to that of the ordinary priest, but made of hyacinth (ὑακίνθου) embroidery and worn above the first cap. The accessory was surrounded by 'a golden crown (στέφανος

⁶⁸ See, for example, this explanation for the zodiac on the representations of the Ephesian Artemis (Arnold 1989: 28).

⁶⁹ That astrological knowledge was closely linked to priestly circles is manifest in Hellenistic Egypt, where, 'during this period, astronomy and astrology remained subjects of the highest interest within the native Egyptian priesthood serving the traditional Egyptian gods' (Von Lieven 2020: 411). Concerning the pioneering of the Judaeans to astrology/astronomy, Josephus elsewhere explains that the patriarch Abraham was responsible for introducing Egyptians to astronomical lore (*Ant.* 1.167). See Feldman's remarks on this tradition in the Graeco-Roman period (2000: 64, n. 538). For the presence of astrological doctrines within Judaeans communities of Palestine, see Popović 2007; Jacobus 2015.

⁷⁰ Alternatively, Indra Kagis McEwen suggests that the Prima Porta cuirass portrays the appearance of the *princeps*' body in the world (2003: 250-275).

⁷¹ A headless statue of a Julio-Claudian *princeps* found in the theatre of Caere in Etruria wears a cuirass displaying a solar design motif (Champlin 2003: 119).

χρύσεος), forged in a threefold row (τριστιχίαν),⁷² and blooming above it a golden calyx (κάλυξ χρύσεος), recalling a plant called in Aramaic *saccharon* (σακχάρω), or Greek henbane (ὕος κύαμος) (3.172).⁷³ It was on the model of this plant that the ‘crown (στέφανος) was forged extending all the way from the nape of the neck to each of the two temples [of the head].’ The calyx, also called the *ephielis* (ἐφιελίς), did not cover the forehead. Josephus also mentions a golden plate on which were engraved the most ‘sacred letters with the name of God (ιεροῖς γράμμασι τοῦ θεοῦ)’ (3.178 [Feldman]).⁷⁴

Fig. 6.12: *Augustus of Prima Porta*. Photo by the author

⁷² There is no crown in the biblical text. It only refers to a plate of pure gold (πέταλον χρυσοῦν καθαρὸν; LXX Exod 28:36).

⁷³ At this point, Josephus interrupts his narrative for an excursus on the characteristics of henbane. He justifies the detailed description with the admission that some of his readers are ignorant of the features of the plant (3.173-177). The henbane (*Hyoscamus niger*) was a hallucinogenic plant used in the Eastern Mediterranean for medicinal (sedation and pain relief) and ritual purposes (probably within the mystery rites) (Gicheva-Meimari 2011: 359-381).

⁷⁴ Elsewhere Josephus states that God revealed to Moses his name. However, the name was not for men's ears, and he, Josephus, was forbidden to speak about it (2.276).

Josephus explains that the high-priestly headgear seems to him a symbol of 'heaven, which has been fashioned to be hyacinth. Otherwise, the name of God, adorned with a headband – and that of gold – would not have been set upon it, on account of the radiance in which the Divinity most rejoices' (3.187 [Feldman]). Although Josephus does not give further details of this symbolic approach, a Roman reader might have understood the interpretation of the accessory as representing heaven not only because of its colour, but also by the design of the crown in the shape of a henbane's calyx could suggest the sun's rays.⁷⁵

Robertson suggests that Josephus was influenced in his description of the three-tiered crown by Philo, 'who found mystical Divine symbolism in the number three' (1991: 236-237). Although Philo refers to the symbolism of the number three for God (*QG* 4.2), in his description of the high priestly attire, he mentions only a single crown (*Mos.* 2.116). Considering that no other ancient source known to us describes the high priest's headgear in such terms, Étienne Nodet suggests that Josephus is referring to a type of crown worn by the high priest in his own lifetime and which he projects onto Moses' time (1990: 161, n.6). Josephus could also be idealising the high priest's crown for his audience. The threefold row design could indicate God's dominance over the three cosmological regions: sky, earth, and sea. The use of multiple crowns as a statement of authority over several areas has been known since ancient Egypt. Under the Ptolemaic dynasty, those ornamental headdresses were one of the few Egyptian features still occurring in Greek-style royal images (Stanwick 2002: 34-35).

The use of honorary crowns and diadems by priests was a practice common in the Graeco-Roman period (Henig 2005: 123-124). Crowns were sacred to the gods, and they were an appropriate item worn by the priests to perform rituals before the deities. Wreaths were sacred because they symbolised the gods whom the priests served. They could be made of flowers or precious metals, such as gold, which was considered the appropriate expression of divinity (Stevenson 1995: 257-263). For Josephus, the high priest's golden crown was a symbol of divine glory. The radiance of the golden headgear evoked the presence of God upon the high priest.⁷⁶

As a whole, for Josephus, the entirety of the cosmos is contained within the high priest's clothing. Following the prevailing worldview of the first century, Josephus assigns each piece of the clothing to a region of the universe. Thereby, he provides us valuable information about the cosmological understandings of his own audience. The ephod with its breastplate and belt is the

⁷⁵ In some Orphic verses, Zeus's head is comparable to the heavenly regions: 'the sky is his head, the stars his hair, and the sun and moon his eyes' (Cornford 1997: 55).

⁷⁶ On the use of Hellenistic-style radiate crowns by Hellenistic kings and Roman *principes*, see Thonemann 2015: 156-158.

centre of this cosmological geography. Made of exquisitely woven material, they indicate the basic elements of nature. The breastplate, worn over and fastened to the space in the middle of the ephod, corresponds to the earth that stands in the centre of the universe. The belt of the ephod encloses everything, as Oceanus encircles the earth. On the breastplate are twelve gemstones representing the constellations seen in earth's night sky. While the linen chiton reaching to the feet characterises the earth, the second, hyacinth chiton, in the manner of the vault of the heaven enfolding the earth, encloses the first chiton. The embroidered figures on the border of the hyacinth chiton resemble natural phenomena that occur in the Earth's atmosphere. The upper part of the apparel represents the heavenly regions. The two sardonxyes fastened on the shoulders signify the two brightest and largest objects in our Earth's sky, the sun and moon; the cap and the golden crown indicate heaven, the place where God dwells.⁷⁷ The influence of Stoic ideas on the conception of the high priest as a microcosm are evident here. 'For the Stoics, man is a microcosm copying the macrocosm of the universe. There is a "sympathy" between celestial and earthly realities which imply a unity of the whole and a solidarity of the parts' (Hadas-Lebel 2012: 170).

6.5.3 Clothing Imagery in the Graeco-Roman period

The examination of relevant literary and archaeological evidence indicates that in the Graeco-Roman period, royal and divine robes could carry a rich set of symbolic meanings. One of the oldest pieces of evidence found in Greek literature, for instance, occurs in Homer's *Iliad*. Homer depicts the shield forged by god Hephaestus to Achilles as bearing an image of the universe. The poet writes that Achilles' armour was made of five layers, and on it, Hephaestus placed several ornaments:

He made the earth (γαῖαν) and the sky (οὐρανόν) and the sea (θάλασσαν) and the unwearied sun (ἡέλιόν) and the full moon (σελήνην) and all the constellations with which the sky is crowned – the Pleiades (Πληϊάδας) and the Hyades (Ύαδας) and mighty Orion (Ὠρίωνος) and the Bear (Ἄρκτον), which men also call the Wagon (Ἄμαξαν), which always goes around in the same place, watching Orion' (18.478-489 [Powell]).

The Heraclitus who was probably Josephus' contemporary reads Homer's characterisation of Achilles' armour allegorically: 'In forging the Shield of Achilles as an image of the revolution of the cosmos (τῆς κοσμικῆς περιόδου...εἰκόνα), he has shown by clear evidences how the universe originated, who is its creator, and how its different parts were formed and separated.' For

⁷⁷ For a slightly different explanation of the high priestly attire, see Feldman 2000: 281, n. 485; Gussmann 2008: 393-394.

Heraclitus, the shield's bronze, tin, silver, and gold indicated the four elements (τὰ τέτταρα στοιχεῖα). The spherical shape of the weapon hinted at the cosmic circle (τῆς κοσμικῆς περιόδου), and the five layers of the shield denoted the zones of the cosmos (τῷ κόσμῳ ζώνας) (*All.* 43-50 [Russell and Konstan]).⁷⁸

In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the Roman author richly describes, from his protagonist's mouth, the clothing of the goddess Isis as mirroring the cosmos. Lucius, the leading character, in a dream sees Isis in all her splendour. He says that a crown woven with different flowers encircled the top of the goddess' head. At the midpoint of the crown, above her forehead, 'a flat round disc like a mirror – or rather a symbol for the moon (*lunae*) – glistened with white light (*candidum lumen*).' The right and left side of the crown were adorned with snakes and ears of wheat. Her robe was made of sheer linen (*byssu tenui*) of many colours (*multicolor*), 'here shining with white brilliance (*albo candore lucida*), there yellow with saffron bloom, there flaming with rosy redness.' Lucius, however, was perplexed by 'a deep black cloak gleaming with dark sheen, which was wrapped about her, running under her right arm up to her left shoulder, with part of its border let down in the form of a knot; it hung in complicated pleats, beautifully undulating with knotted tassels at its lower edge' (11.3 [Hanson, LCL]).

He adds that 'along the embroidered border and over the surface of the cloak glittering stars (*stellae... coruscabant*) were scattered, and at their centre the full moon (*semenstris luna*) exhaled fiery flames.' On the hem of the robe, 'a garland of flowers and fruits of every kind was attached to it with an inseparable bond.' Isis presents herself to Lucius as a 'mother of the universe (*rerum naturae parens*), mistress of all the elements (*elementorum omnium domina*), and first offspring of the ages (*saeculorum progenies initialis*); mightiest of deities (*summa numinum*), queen of the dead (*regina manium*), and foremost of heavenly beings (*prima caelitum*).' As a goddess who has power over all the cosmic regions, she says: 'with my nod I rule the starry heights of heaven (*quae caeli luminosa culmina*), the health-giving breezes of the sea (*maris salubria flamina*), and the plaintive silences of the underworld (*inferum deplorata silentia nutibus meis dispense*)' (11.4-5 [Hanson, LCL]).⁷⁹

In some representations of the god Mithras, his attire depicts cosmic imagery, as in the Mithraeum Barberini in Rome (fig. 6.13). In the painting, Mithras wears Persian trousers and a Phrygian cap in blue, along with a mantle in dark red. The mantle, designed as the celestial sphere,

⁷⁸ Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* seems to indicate a similar treatment in his portrayal of the cloak of the Greek hero Jason (1.721-767; see also Shapiro 1980: 263-286).

⁷⁹ The cosmic prerogatives of Isis are also highlighted in an inscription found in Maroneia (Thrace) and dated to the second or first century BCE. See Martzavou 2012: 267-291.

is decorated with seven stars scattered over it. The fresco in Mithraeum at Marino, in its turn, displays stars in all of Mithras' clothing, including cap, tunic and, cloak. Modern scholars have taken the blue colour in the attire as the symbol of the sky, and the red colour as the burning sky or ether. The cloak represents the vault of heaven with the seven planets. In some other representations of Mithras, the trousers are adorned with small rosettes, which are the symbol of the sun (Sánchez 2012; 125; see also Clauss 2001: 84).⁸⁰

Figure 6.13: *Fresco from Mithraeum at Marino*. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The Aphrodite of Aphrodisias (fig. 6.14) is another example of an existing tradition of representing deities with universal powers in the Graeco-Roman period. The statue presents the goddess in a long chiton enclosed by a stiff *ependytes* that is ornamented in four horizontal layers. On the first, upper layer is depicted the Three Graces. On the second are represented Selene and her brother Helios. The third shows Aphrodite mounted on the mythical Capricorn (sea-goat) and followed closely by a dolphin. On the lowest stratum are three Erotes offering incense. Those four zones are regarded as the power of Aphrodite over the four cosmic regions. The Three Graces, symbols of fertility and growth, represent the earth. Selene, the goddess of the Moon, and her

⁸⁰ In Late Antiquity, the god Attis is described with a Phrygian cap adorned with stars of the visible sky (Julian. *Or.* 5.165c; see also 5.171a).

brother Helios, the Sun god, represent the sky. Aphrodite riding over the waves on the sea-goat represent the sea, and three Eroses burning incense, a typical motif found on funerary reliefs, suggest the underworld. Even though this cult image was conceived in Anatolia in the late Hellenistic period, it was widespread in Josephus' time (Edwards 1996: 58; Ridgway 2002: 115-116).

Figure 6.14: *Marble cult-statue of Aphrodite of Aphrodisias*. Photo by the author

Not only deities and heroes were depicted wearing the cosmos. Hellenistic kings and Roman *principes* are also said to have garments that imitated the nature of the universe and evidenced their own god-like power. Plutarch, for instance, writes that King Demetrius Poliorcetes had an extravagant supply of cloaks, headpieces, and shoes made of hyacinth threads and gold. One 'cloak (χλαμύς)' in particular was a splendid creation in 'the likeness of the cosmos (εἰκασμα τοῦ

κόσμου)’ and ‘the vault of heaven (οὐρανόν)’ (*Vit. Demetr.* 414-5).⁸¹ Suetonius and Pausanias write about a golden diadem of the Sun god, purple garment, and a cloak adorned with golden stars (*stellis aureis*) worn by Nero after celebrating his Olympic victories (Paus. 2.17.6; Suet. *Ner.* 25.1). Those fancy dresses made known the universal authority of those rulers.⁸²

6.6 The Placement of the Tent

Josephus does not mention anything about the position of the Tent within the Hebrew camp in his description of the cult site. In another place, however, he writes about the arrangement of the tribal camp and locates the Tent in the centre of the area. He remarks that the Tent was built in the middle of the twelve tribes, with three tribes setting up their tents on each side of the cult site. The priests’ tents surrounded the Tent, and after them, the Levites (fig. 6.15). Josephus also comments that the Hebrew camp resembled a city with roads laid out through the centre. When the cloud – which indicated God’s presence – rose from over the Tent, the Hebrews broke camp for a new journey. When the Tent was to be moved, trumpets gave four signals indicating which group of tribes by cardinal direction should move forward. ‘Then the tent, being dismantled, was carried midway between the six tribes going in front and the six following, and all the Levites were around the Tent’ (3.289-290, 293-294 [Feldman]).

Feldman notes similarities between Josephus’ description of the Hebrew camp here and the Roman camp described in *War* 3.82-83 (2000: 320, n. 876). While the Hebrews’ wilderness camp arrangement could evoke in Roman readers the conventional parameters of a military camp, they may also have thought about the ideal city-state Magnesia, proposed by Plato in the *Laws*. There, the philosopher provides information about the foundation of a city and cult site that appears to echo in Josephus’ account:

He [lawgiver] must have established the city as nearly as possible in the centre of the country, while at the same time choosing a place which in terms of natural advantages has all the things a city needs...Next, he is to divide it into twelve parts, after first setting aside a part sacred to Hestia, Zeus, and Athena, giving it the name “acropolis”, and encircling it with a wall; this is to be the hub from which he carves out his twelve parts both for the city itself and for the whole country (745b [Griffith]).

⁸¹ Athenaeus writes that the heavens were woven into the cloak’s king, having the stars and the signs of the zodiac embroidered in gold (*Deipn.* 12.535e-f).

⁸² Diogenes Laertius states that the Cynic philosopher Menedemus (ca. third century BCE), who used to say ‘he had come from Hades to detect transgressions, and would go back and report to the deities below’, worn ‘an Arcadian hat embroidered with the twelve signs of the zodiac’ (6.102 [Mensch]).

For Plato, the spatial organisation of a city should be arranged so that the centre should have a sacred space for the gods, and this centre should be surrounded by twelve parts and tribes, as he writes later. Plato regards this division as sacred, indicating ‘the months and the revolution of the universe’ (771b). It, therefore, seems that the arrangement of the Platonic city mirrors the universe. Dominic O’Meara shows that in later Platonic thought, the legislator of a state must follow ‘a model, comparable to the model which the world-maker, the demiurge, looks when making the world;’ such a model is related to ‘the order of the universe’ (2017: 117-118). If Josephus’ readers associated the description of the Tent within the Hebrew camp with the Platonic city, they likely perceived the site’s arrangement as having cosmological connotations.

Fig. 6.15: *The Hebrew Camp*. Drawing by Petrus Cunaeus. *La république des Hebreux*. Vol. II. Amsterdam: Pieter Mortier, 1705.

6.7 Summary

Our assessment of those texts shows Josephus' attempt in *Antiquities* to provide a vivid description of the prototype to the Jerusalem Temple. The Tent was a holy place worthy of the greatness of God to whom it was consecrated. As observed elsewhere, the cult site symbolises the universe which was created by God, and that is maintained by him. The internal arrangement of the Tent, for instance, was designed to resemble the cosmological dimension of God's power over the three cosmological realms. Josephus also gives lengthy commentaries on the symbolism of the Tent's furnishings, which he compares to constellations, the movement of the planets, and the elements of nature. The priest and high priest's apparel, with its elaborate ornaments, receives similarly detailed treatment. As the high priest is the only delegate authorised by God on earth, his clothing reiterates the power of the deity over the cosmos.

Josephus' remarks on the Tent should be read in the light of a widespread tendency in Graeco-Roman cultures; Josephus follows other eastern thinkers who attempt to place their deities in a worldwide context. This, in turn, relates to the advance of Roman power at the turn of the era. In *Antiquities*, the Tent exhibits the universal power of the Judaeen god through its arrangement, appurtenances, and priests' apparel and is constructed by God's direct order through the giving of the Laws to Moses, the most outstanding legislator who ever lived. As a result, Judaeen worship fits into the universal cosmic order.

Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks

The aim of this thesis has been to consider how Flavius Josephus elaborated his explanations of the Jerusalem Temple's cosmological symbolism. Josephus, who as a Judean priest had experienced the Temple first-hand, as well as its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE, explores the relevance of the cult not only for the Judeans but also for the nations scattered throughout the world in all his surviving compositions. Overall, Josephus seeks to convince his readership that the Judean god is not only a national and local deity, but the Most High God, the supreme ruler of the entire universe, who once established the Temple in Jerusalem as the centre from where he exercised authority over the world and its peoples. Given that the Judean high priest is the only mediator between God and humans and offers prayers and sacrifices on behalf of humanity, the worship offered in the Temple had a beneficial effect for the whole inhabited world.

In this context, the Jerusalem Temple, and its prototype the Tent, shine in Josephus' *Judean War* and *Judean Antiquities* as symbolic of the cosmos. Considering that the Temple was the place where God chose to dwell and from which he controlled human affairs, the cult site, its personnel, ritual practices, and implements embodied the universe as created and sustained by God. Josephus shows his Roman audience that the Temple reflects the vastness and greatness of heaven and earth. Therefore, Josephus' symbolic understanding of the Jerusalem Temple should be understood in light of the powerful Judean deity he sought to depict.

Some modern scholars have overlooked the historical context of Josephus' cosmological interpretation of the Jerusalem Temple. The historical context in which Josephus worked, the style of presentation he adopted, and the expectations of his readership should be considered when studying his writings. Josephus' Temple-as-cosmos idea is in continuous dialogue with his historical milieu. Josephus' appealing to audiences in Rome is all the more impressive when we consider that several Roman buildings in the Imperial Age were read or constructed as mirroring the structure of the universe. Imperial Rome, like as Josephus' Jerusalem Temple, was considered by some the centre of the cosmos.

Although numerous cult sites and buildings were described or constructed in Antiquity, including the Ancient Near East, as symbols of the cosmos, I have argued that Josephus' cosmological interpretation of the Temple relates to a distinctively Graeco-Roman tradition of philosophical origin. In Chapter 2, we surveyed the advance of ancient Graeco-Roman cosmology, observing the main philosophical schools and their contributions to the development of a

tradition, notable in early imperial Rome, that seeks to emphasise the centrality of their buildings by referring to cosmic concepts such as the Platonic idea of the structure of the cosmos including the four elements, the Stoic conception of the cosmos as a temple and the sympathy between heavenly and earthly realities, and the Pythagorean number symbolism and the theory of the harmony of the spheres.

In view of the use of those philosophical arguments, I showed that the imperial buildings along with their *principes* had more than just a local power and significance, with authority and influence that extended over the *oikoumene* and cosmos. Just like the Hellenistic kings, the Roman *principes* evidenced through their building projects, the centrality of their power and the beauty and harmony of the cosmos as the best model for the socio-political order. Thus, Rome goes on to be portrayed as the centre of the cosmos. As we observed in the second part of Chapter 2, several monuments set up in Rome were described as images of the universe and supported the idea of Rome's power as having become universal.

Given that Josephus devoted himself to literary pursuits in Rome and that his texts certainly appealed to a local audience in the capital, the Jerusalem Temple symbolism would make sense to his readership. Josephus drew on a pool of common ideas current in the Graeco-Roman period with which he assumes his readers are familiar. As Rome acted as a powerful centre and unifying force for the Roman people, Josephus posits the Temple in Jerusalem as the centre of Judaeian worship, as well as an institution which unifies worshippers who came from widely scattered places throughout the *oikoumene* to join in the veneration of the Most High God.

The superiority of the Judaeian god to the other deities of the Graeco-Roman Empire is not only found in Josephus' writings. As shown in Chapter 3, other residents of the Empire, in the periods both prior and subsequent to Josephus, also portrayed their national deities as having universal power. This is mainly evident in the communities of the eastern Mediterranean where gods and goddess were usually depicted wearing the cosmos. Those communities attempt to make sense of their cultures in face of the advance of Roman power. Texts, images, and objects produced within those communities account for the supremacy of their *poleis'* patron deity. Thus, the assimilation of those deities with a universal and powerful god offers us a broad view of the eastern communities and their interactions with the great power of the moment.

As we observed in Chapter 2, Josephus was by no means alone in his perception of the Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor the Tent as an image of the universe. Indeed, several Judaeian thinkers from Palestine and the Diaspora interpreted the cult site along with its furnishings, services, and priestly raiment as representative of the cosmos, Philo and Josephus

are among the most prolific writers to detail about the cosmological connotations of the Temple. Some modern scholars favour the view that the Temple-as-cosmos idea goes back to biblical times, but this idea relies too much on presupposition and overlooks what the original writers say. It is true that in the societies around the people of Israel, several temples represented the elements of the cosmos, but we cannot with certainty state whether or not the biblical writers shared the same tradition. What we can say is that the cosmological understanding of the Jerusalem Temple by Judaeans seems to be part of a common understanding widely shared by Graeco-Roman communities, and that in the case of the Judaeans it was intended to give prominence and legitimacy to their culture and tradition. Thus, Josephus' assertions have to be considered an example of intercultural encounters in the Graeco-Roman period.

In his first work, *Judaean War*, Josephus seeks to convince his Roman audience of the importance of the recently destroyed Jerusalem Temple for Judaeans and humanity in general, despite its use as a headquarters for the rebels fighting against the Romans, in the hope that the cult site would be restored someday. Josephus invites his readers to imagine themselves among the worshippers who came from the four corners of the world to revere a powerful God who regulates the whole universe from Jerusalem. As seen in Chapter 5, the Temple's location, design, decoration, and functions all indicated the majesty and splendour of God and the relevance of the services performed within the building for the harmony, security and balance of the *oikoumene*. Moreover, if the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 CE, it was God who used the Romans, at least temporarily, to purge with fire the pollution caused by the rebels (*J.W.* 5.19; 6.109-110). Even though Josephus makes it clear in *War* that the Romans had authority over the inhabited world, God was superior to this earthly power, because his supremacy and dominion extended over the universe. And if Tyche has now passed to the Romans, it is due only to God's favour (*J.W.* 5.367). Only God establishes and ousts the rulers of the world. He is the ultimate dispenser of justice, guardian of order, and sovereign of the cosmos.

Even though Josephus devotes a lengthy excursus (5.136-247) to the description of the layout of the Jerusalem Temple as he knew it, he does not present a detailed account of the cosmological meaning of the cult site. As demonstrated before, Josephus singles out only a few features of the sacred building, including the entrance to the sanctuary, textiles, vessels, and the priestly vestments. Due to the historical nature of *War*, Josephus' structure of the composition imposes certain constraints on what he could explore at any length. This may be why the long description of the Herodian Temple in *War* occurs only in the digression that appears right before his account of the siege of Jerusalem by Titus in 70. Josephus apologises for digressions and also

puts off to a future work a study of Judaeen customs and their origins (5.237). Perhaps he did discuss those topics in another work, but if so, it has not survived.

Given that the format of *War* imposed restrictions on the cosmological interpretation of the Temple, Josephus may have written only what served his purpose, omitting details that he did not find relevant. It is also possible that where Josephus does not clearly assign cosmological meaning to the arrangement and objects of the Temple, his readership would have recognised a symbolic approach, given the similarities between the Jerusalem Temple and other cult sites and monuments in Rome.

In Chapter 6, we observed that Josephus gives a detailed account of the cosmological meaning of the Tent, the precursor to both the Solomonic and Herodian Temples in Jerusalem, in his *Judaean Antiquities*. Besides presenting the wilderness Tent as the only dwelling place of God on Earth, and therefore a miniature of the cosmos, Josephus states that the cult site was constructed in accordance with the Laws given to Moses by God. He also stresses that the Judaeen Laws conform to the nature of the universe created by God (*Ant.* 1.24). Thus, the Judaeen traditions would fit into the universal cosmic order. Here, Josephus, as with many of his predecessors, presents Judaeen customs in the light of Greek philosophy.

A Roman reader of Josephus' *Antiquities* would recognise in those assertions elements indicating the superiority of the Judaeen constitution to other existing constitutions. The debate in the Graeco-Roman period was concerned with the existence of a constitution that could reflect the law of the universe. Josephus claims that the cosmic order is made manifest in Judaeen Laws and practices. Given that the plan of the Tent was built up in agreement with those Laws, it would be understandable that the ritual practices performed within the cult site conform to the universal law established by God. As a dwelling place of God, the arrangement of the Tent pointed to the universal extension of His power; therefore, everything within is in 'imitation and representation of the universe' (*Ant.* 3.180).

In contrast to his descriptions in *War*, Josephus gives a comprehensive explanation of the Judaeen cult site as a miniature model of the cosmos (*Ant.* 3.108-187). Thus, when Josephus describes the physical structure of the Tent, its appurtenances, and the priests' apparel, he also explains that everything within is in 'imitation and representation of the universe' (3.180). For him, the plan of the portable temple was designed to resemble the cosmological geography; the types of material used to weave the Tent's textile portion indicate the basic elements of nature from which God made the universe; and the Tent's vessels and component parts represented the elements of the cosmos. While Josephus' cosmological narrative of the Tent and furnishings

enhance the atmosphere of an honourable and worthy cult site, it is his description of the priests' and high priest's wardrobes that is emphasised.

The portrayal of the priests' clothing is by far the longest and most colourful account in *Antiquities* in which cosmological associations appear conspicuously. Josephus carefully describes each item of clothing as a symbol of the universe. Given the power and prestige of the high priest, and his role as the only representative of God on earth, Josephus gives special attention to his portrayal of this sumptuous and elaborate apparel. For him, the high priest is a microcosm whose clothes reflect the image of the universe. Josephus offers a good deal of insight into what was current and common knowledge in his own day when assigning each piece of the high priest's clothing to a region of the cosmos. Thus, the high priest's fine clothing, with its luxurious embroidery and manifold ornaments, evidences that God is a deity of the whole universe, which he created and sustains.

Considering the rich cosmological portrayal of the high priest's garment by Josephus and other Judaeans, it appears that the tradition of reading the Temple cosmologically developed first around the figure of the high priest, who is prominent not only in performing the rituals within the Temple but also in civil matters during the Graeco-Roman period, as can be seen in the high priests' portrayals in Jesus ben Sira, *Letter of Aristeeas*, and the Wisdom of Solomon. By Philo's time, the interpretation had become developed enough to include cult-site structure and appurtenances as well as previous versions of the Temple. This suggestion may be supported by the elaborate cosmological treatment of the high priest's attire in both Philo and Josephus, which would imply a tradition that grew over a long period of time and reached its zenith around the turn of the era. Moreover, since the universalist portrayal of the Temple clearly relates to a Graeco-Roman tradition, Judaeans may feasibly have assigned cosmic interpretation to the Jerusalem Temple first, later also applying it to the Tent.

Furthermore, Josephus' 'failure' to allude to the cosmic aspect of the Solomonic (8.61-98) and Herodian (15.380-425) Temples in *Antiquities* does not indicate that he disregards those versions of the building. Considering that Josephus first describes the Herodian Temple in *War* and the author's view of the building as a successor of other structures that had been located on the same site, it is possible that the thinker does not feel a need to describe the cult site as the symbol of the cosmos anew in *Antiquities*.

As an heir of this Judaeans tradition of reading the Temple/Tent symbolically, Josephus was aware of the interpretations made by his predecessors, as some of his symbolic approaches seem to indicate. To what extent Josephus is dependent on exegetical precursors for his cosmological

treatment of the Temple/Tent is very difficult to say. He may have drawn upon Judaeon sources where they were available, including Philo. But this does not mean Josephus is just a preserver and repeater of an existing tradition on the Temple-as-cosmos idea; he is also a knowledge producer in his own right. His account is a socio-cultural product that reflects the spirit of his time and can only be comprehended within the social milieu in which it is produced.

Overall, this thesis has shown the relevance of the Jerusalem Temple in the compositions of the Judaeon-Roman Flavius Josephus and in what way his portrayal of the cult site, services, furnishings, and, priests' clothing attempts to express their relevance for both the Judaeans and humanity in general. The deity once worshipped there was not merely a national god but the Most High God whose power extends over the whole earth and universe. In an apologetic tone, Josephus seeks to convince his Roman readers of the superiority of the deity worshipped in the now temporarily ruined Temple and the excellence of Judaeon Laws and customs.

Although a good deal of information is provided in this thesis on the cosmological meaning of the Jerusalem Temple and its prototype the Tent in Josephus' *War* and *Antiquities*, much work remains to be done on the accounts of the Temple and its different layouts in which a cosmological reading is not clearly evident, such as the description of the Solomonic and Herodian Temples in *Antiquities's* Books 8 and 15. Apart from those studies in Josephus' writings, few investigations treat this subject adequately in other Judaeon thinkers, such as Philo, whose works are the only ones to give a comprehensive treatment of the Temple-as-cosmos idea. Finally, this investigation should also act as a source of valuable information for people interested in the cosmological symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple in ancient times and may provide a reference point for future studies or projects.

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Nederlandse samenvatting

Flavius Josephus, de Joodse geschiedschrijver uit de eerste eeuw, geeft in zijn geschriften een levendige beschrijving van de Tempel in Jeruzalem en zijn voorganger, de Tabernakel. Een van zijn meest fascinerende beschrijvingen van de Tempel is de karakterisering ervan als model van de kosmos in *De Joodse oorlog* 5.207-237 en *Joodse Oudheden* 3.108-187. Josephus schrijft bijvoorbeeld dat het type materiaal dat gebruikt werd om het textiel van de tempel te weven, de basiselementen van de natuur laat zien. De driedeling van de Tabernakel weerspiegelt de kosmologische geografie: het land, de zee en de lucht. De kandelaar en de twaalf broden binnen de cultusplaats stellen hemellichamen voor en de priester gewaden geven de aard van het universum weer. Het doel van dit proefschrift is daarom het verduidelijken van de kosmologische interpretatie van de Tempel in Jeruzalem in de geschriften van Josephus.

Het proefschrift laat zien dat de kosmologische interpretatie van de Tempel/Tabernakel door Josephus begrepen moet worden in het licht van de machtige Joodse God die hij wenste af te beelden. Josephus streeft ernaar zijn Romeinse publiek ervan te overtuigen dat God niet alleen een lokale godheid is, maar de opperheerser van het gehele universum, die eens de Tempel vestigde als midden van waaruit hij gezag uitoefende over de wereld en haar volkeren. Door gebruik te maken van filosofische elementen, laat Josephus zien dat de Tempel het universum vertegenwoordigt als geschapen en onderhouden door God. Vanuit dit perspectief zien we Josephus in dialoog met een gerenommeerde Romeins-keizerlijke traditie van symbolische weergave van gebouwen als beelden van de kosmos.

Curriculum Vitae

Born in Rio Branco on March 24, 1988, Joabson Pena received his bachelor and licentiate degree in History from the Federal University of Mato Grosso (2006-2010). Afterwards, he completed his master's degree at the same university (2010-2012). During the research period, he was accepted as a Visiting Graduate Student at the University of Toronto (2011). Since 2012 he has been working as a high school government teacher. Prior to commencing at the University of Groningen (2016), he was based at the University of Aberdeen (2015-2016), where his PhD studies began. Both his master's and PhD researches were developed with the financial support of the Brazilian agency CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel).