

“Peter Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica*: Pursuing the *veritas historiae* Through the Works of Josephus”

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Abstract: *Petrus Comestor’s Historia Scholastica is a broad biblical rewriting composed ca. 1160 in the milieu of the cathedral school of Paris and the abbey of St. Victor. Also known as the ‘popular Bible’, it was considered a pivotal biblical manual until the mid-16th century, as the over 800 extant manuscripts show. For his wide-ranging work, Comestor uses a variegated pool of sources, among which one of the most important is Flavius Josephus, known to Comestor through its Latin translation. The use of Josephus in the Historia is unique in its extent and has received some scholarly attention, but further research ought to be made. This article highlights how Comestor not only uses the Jewish Antiquities to fill in the gaps in the biblical narrative, for example integrating the account of the Binding of Isaac with indirect speech between father and son extrapolated from the Antiquities, but also compares them with the Vulgate and the Septuagint, granting them the same authority to establish the historical truth of biblical history. Passages from the Historia Genesis and Exodi are analyzed to show how Comestor goes out of his way to reconcile Josephus’ account and the Vulgate, showing the remarkable authority which the Jewish historian has in his eyes.*

I Introduction

Although separated by more than a thousand years, Josephus’ *Antiquitates Judaicae* (93–94 CE)¹ and Peter Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica* (1160s)² have a lot in common. Both works retell biblical stories, following the chronology of the events from Creation to the

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¹ The Greek text of Josephus’ *Antiquitates Judaicae* is quoted according to Niese, *Flavii Iosephi opera*; the Latin version follows Blatt’s edition: Blatt, *The Latin Josephus*. For the Latin text of *Antiquitates* books VI–XX and the *Bellum Judaicum*, I rely upon Vct (*Victoriensis*, Bnf lat 14361), since it was produced in the 12th century, probably in Saint Victor, and its readings are very close to the version of the text used by Comestor. The *Historia Scholastica* has not yet been completely edited. The only edition to date is Sylwan’s work on the *Historia Genesis*, see Sylwan, *Petri Comestori Scolastica Historia*. Despite the commendable work by Sylwan, Clark’s findings on the production of the *Hist. Schol.* mean that her edition does not bring us to the closest form of the text Peter wrote. For criticism of Sylwan’s approach to the manuscripts, see Clark, *How to edit Peter Comestor*, 83–91. I have therefore consulted the two earliest extant manuscripts: P (Paris, BNF, lat. 16943, copied in 1183) and V (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, lat. 363, copied in 1180–83).

first decades of the Common Era. Both authors adapt scriptural text and traditional material, according to their own narrative pattern, also adding *excursus* on Graeco-Roman history and mythology. Though each has a different readership in mind, both Comestor and Josephus combine text and commentary in a narrative format, pursuing the *veritas historiae*.³ Both of them even divide their works into twenty books, although they choose to organize the material by different criteria.⁴ By merging biblical paraphrase with historiography and legends, Comestor's *Historia* became a "Medieval best-seller", copied and translated all over Europe, and read as a basic manual for theological studies until the 16th century.⁵ Today there are more than 800 extant manuscripts of the *Historia*, ranging in date from the 12th to the 16th century,⁶ that attest to the book's prodigious success.

As Geiger noted,⁷ the *Historia* is like a Christian version of the *Antiquitates*. Josephus is, in fact, a significant source of material for Comestor: he provides official and reliable Jewish exegesis,⁸ he recognizes the importance of Jesus,⁹ and most of all he fills important gaps in the biblical narrative. The pivotal role of Josephus as a source is evident from the astounding number of times Josephus' name appears in the *Historia*: Schreckenberg counted 393 instances,¹⁰ though there are passages where Comestor uses Josephan material anonymously which probably escaped the count. Comestor's debt to Josephus is profound, especially to the *Antiquitates*, although not exclusively, since some chapters of

Since Clark argues that V in particular has a text very close to the one Langton and his students were using in the 1170s, I rely upon it for Comestor's text. See Clark, *The Making of the Historia Scholastica*, 157–162. Translations from Greek and Latin are my own.

- ² Clark's studies on Comestor and Langton demonstrate that Peter started working on the *Historia* very early in the 1160s, perhaps even earlier, but also that he continued working on his opus with the help of his students, especially Stephen Langton. See Clark, *The Making of the Historia Scholastica*, 162–183.
- ³ "Pro veritate historiae consequenda" are Comestor's words in his epistolary prologue (V, fol. 7ra). In this programmatic preface the author mirrors Hugh of St. Victor's discussion on history and embraces Hugh's conception of history as narrative and as expression of the literal sense of the Scriptures. See Clark, *The Making of the Historia Scholastica*, 24–29.
- ⁴ Comestor organizes the material according to the division of the biblical books, whereas Josephus uses other principles. For example, Josephus ends the first book of the *Antiquitates* not with the death of Joseph, as does the biblical book of Genesis, but with the death of Isaac. Comestor points out the difference in the division of the two books in *Hist. Gen.* 81 (V, fol. 32ra). Moreover, also in *Hist. Ex.* 31 (V, fol. 46ra) Comestor mentions that Josephus' second book ends after the account of the crossing of the Red Sea, shortly after the middle of the biblical book of Exodus.
- ⁵ For an overview of the popularity of the *Historia*, see Morey, *Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase*, 6–35.
- ⁶ Sylwan, *Petri Comestori Scolastica Historia*, XXXI–XXXII.
- ⁷ Geiger, "Historia Judaica", 125–145.
- ⁸ Kletter, "The uses of Josephus", 218.
- ⁹ See *Hist. Ev.* 29 (V, fol. 173rb–va), where Comestor quotes the famous *Testimonium Flavianum* (*Ant.* XVIII, 63–64). The controversial authenticity of the *Testimonium* is the subject of a long and still open debate: see Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*.
- ¹⁰ See Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition*, 147–149.

the *Historia* also contain material from the *Bellum Judaicum*.¹¹ Comestor quotes Josephus for a number of reasons:¹² for etymologies; for geographical and chronological information; as a source for narrative passages to improve the storytelling, or to investigate the psyche of biblical characters; and as a valid alternative version of the text provided by the Vulgate. Furthermore, as Karp observed,¹³ Josephus' work makes a significant contribution to Comestor's style as well, providing both exegetic perspectives and historical material.

Recently, in his article "Peter Comestor: the Christian Josephus",¹⁴ Clark highlighted how Josephus is Comestor's most important source for reworking the scriptural narrative. By analyzing some passages from the *Historia Genesis*, Clark shows not only how deeply Comestor's narrative was influenced by the *Antiquitates*, but also how great a homage Comestor paid to his predecessor by imitating him in many ways. Comestor's appreciation for Josephus is particularly evident when he uses the *Antiquitates* in juxtaposition with Scripture. He is often ready to combine the Vulgate with Josephus, who is a source of unquestioned veracity about historical events, both those narrated in the Bible and those not. But anyone who has read a few pages of Josephus knows that his narrative differs from Scripture in many places, despite his famous claim to "neither add nor omit anything" from the Hebrew books.¹⁵ Discrepancies between the Scripture and the *Antiquitates* do not escape Comestor's attention and he deals with these divergences by trying to give them a coherent explanation. In this article I examine some passages from the *Historia* in which Comestor justifies substantial differences between his two most important sources.

As Kletter has noted,¹⁶ Comestor is interested in comparing different traditions, and for this he matches various biblical and non-biblical texts. Comestor cites the text of the Bible in several versions, namely the Vulgate, the *Vetus Latina*, and the Greek Septuagint reported through second-hand sources.¹⁷ He makes extensive use of the *Glossa Ordinaria*,¹⁸ and he draws inspiration and material from his own teacher Peter

¹¹ See for example *Hist. Gen.* 53 (V, fol. 23va), on the destruction of Sodom: here Comestor describes the peculiarity of the place where the city of Sodom used to be, by combining information from *Ant.* I, 203 and *Bell.* IV, 476–485.

¹² See the different types of use of Josephus in Comestor's *Historia Genesis* noted by Feldman in Feldman, *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, 322–324.

¹³ Karp, "Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*", 183–184.

¹⁴ See Clark, "Peter Comestor: The Christian Josephus".

¹⁵ Josephus' promise of having faithfully translated the Hebrew Books into Greek without adding or omitting anything occurs in several passages of the *Antiquitates*: see *Ant.* I, 17; II, 347; IV, 196; IX, 208; IX, 214; X, 218; XIV, 1; XX, 260–263.

¹⁶ Kletter, "The Christian Reception of Josephus", 375.

¹⁷ See Clark, *The making of the Historia Scholastica*, 115–116.

¹⁸ See Clark, *The making of the Historia Scholastica*, 43–48; 84–109. See also Clark, "Peter Comestor's *Historia Genesis*", 135–170.

Lombard.¹⁹ In the prologue Comestor states, “in this work, my mind ruled the pen, so that I would not depart from the words of the Fathers, even though novelty is beloved, and flatters the ears.”²⁰ This programmatic statement proclaims the work a compilation of previous authoritative texts. As Gellrich explains,²¹ the *Historia* resembles many Medieval works, like encyclopedias and *summae*, that try to build a seamless connection from past to present, recollecting and relying on the *auctoritas* of past authors. Josephus’ *Antiquitates* are not only part of the *dicta Patrum* from which Comestor claims not to depart – Josephus is also the main interpreter of the historical sense of the Scripture. In the wake of Clark’s work, I would like to expand the horizons of the reception of Josephus in the *Historia* by presenting further aspects of Comestor’s use of the *Antiquitates* in his masterpiece. Where Clark analyzed some passages of Abraham’s story in which Comestor blurs the line between the Vulgate and the *Antiquitates*, I would like to comment on some extracts in which Josephus’ authority is called into question, and his account is compared to that of the Vulgate and the Septuagint. I would also like to show the originality of Comestor’s reception of Josephus by comparing it with the use of other Jewish sources in the *Historia*, and the reception of Josephus himself in the works of other Parisian scholars of the 12th century, like Richard and Andrew of Saint Victor. I am especially interested in illustrating how Comestor deals with his main sources when they contradict each other and how he justifies his refusal to reject Josephus’ version, even when it does not correspond with that of the Vulgate.

I begin by analyzing the account of the Binding of Isaac in *Hist. Gen.* 58 as an iconic example of Comestor’s reception of Josephus to supplement the Vulgate. I then compare the use of Josephus in the *Historia* with that of other Jewish sources, and with the use which other Victorine scholars made of Josephus. Finally, I show how Comestor deals with passages in which the *Antiquitates* and the Vulgate present contradictory information, and how Comestor attempts to explain these contradictions so that none of his authoritative texts is discredited.

2 The Binding of Isaac: a combination of Ant. I, 225–232 and Gen 22

The *Historia Genesis*²² and *Exodi* are very rich in Josephan quotes, which can be found in almost every chapter. We come across Josephus’ name 80 times in the *Historia Genesis*, a number all the more striking when we consider that Jerome is mentioned only 28 times, and Augustine and Methodius only 12 times each.²³ The use of Josephus is also

¹⁹ See Clark, “Peter Comestor and Peter Lombard”, 85–142. Clark has recently identified a set of lectures on the Bible which served as source for Comestor and may belong to Peter Lombard himself: see Clark and Benson, *Stephen Langton’s Prologues*, 1–150.

²⁰ *Hist. Schol.* Prol. (V, fol. 7ra): “In quo sic animus stilo imperavit, ut a dictis Patrum non recederem, licet novitas favorabilis sit et mulcens aures.”

²¹ Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*, 43.

²² Comestor’s *Historia Genesis* is most studied. See in particular: Clark’s analysis (Clark, “A study of Peter Comestor’s method”); Sylwan’s critical edition (Sylwan, *Petri Comestoris Scolastica Historia*); Lazzarini’s Italian translation and comment: Comestor and Lazzarini, *La Genesis*.

²³ See Sylwan, *Petri Comestori Scolastica Historia*, XIX.

significant in the *Historia Exodi*, where his material is found in 40 out of 78 chapters. We will examine excerpts from Genesis and Exodus, as these two books are particularly rich in Josephan material, allowing us a glimpse into Comestor's method, and an understanding of his use of Josephus as a complement to Scripture.

Comestor organizes his narrative as a parallel reading of the Scripture and the *Antiquitates*. The two texts are intertwined and combined, complementing each other, with each serving sometimes as main text, sometimes as gloss. In his rewriting of the Pentateuch, the narrative is developed equally by the words of Moses and Josephus, as if Comestor granted them the same *auctoritas* to establish historical veracity. Comestor believes Moses wrote the Law and refers to him very often, when quoting the Vulgate. In fact, he says in the epistolary prologue that he will start his story *a cosmographia Moysi*,²⁴ that is, from Moses' description of the universe in Gen 1. When he compares the Vulgate with the *Antiquitates*, Comestor refers to the works by calling them by their authors' names, Moses and Josephus. Sylwan points out that Comestor places Josephus' text on the same level as the biblical text.²⁵ She takes as an example *Hist. Gen.* 88, in which Comestor juxtaposes two sentences, one from the *Antiquitates* and one from the Vulgate: "For he [*sc.* Joseph] was afraid they [*sc.* his brothers] would commit by chance something against him too (*Ant.* II, 99), so he put them in prison for three days (Gen 42:17)."²⁶

The *Historia* contains even more striking examples. Consider the passage where Comestor supplements the Vulgate with Josephus in the account of the Binding of Isaac (Gen 22), narrated in *Hist. Gen.* 58 (V, fol. 24vb–25rab). Comestor builds the story by juxtaposing phrases from the Vulgate and the *Antiquitates* to provide a more organic narrative than that found in the Bible, and to give greater psychological depth to the characters. First, Peter cites Josephus for Isaac's age, a detail lacking from the Bible.²⁷ Second, the detail about Abraham not sharing his true intentions with anybody also comes from the *Antiquitates*: "Then Abraham", writes Comestor, "*woke up at night* and, without telling anyone what he intended to do, *saddled his donkey*."²⁸ This passage is built by merging *lemmata* from the Vulgate (Gen 22:3, marked in italics) and from Josephus (*Ant.* I, 225).²⁹ While Josephus specifies that Abraham hides his plan from his wife and servants because he is afraid that they might try to prevent him from following God's

²⁴ *Hist. Schol.* Prol. (V, fol. 7ra).

²⁵ Sylwan, *Petri Comestori Scolastica Historia*, XXII: "le texte de Joseph est mis sur le même plan que le texte biblique."

²⁶ *Hist. Gen.* 88 (V, fol. 34va): "Timebat enim ne forte et in illum aliquid deliquissent, et tradidit eos vincetos custodie tribus diebus."

²⁷ *Hist. Gen.* 58 (V, fol. 24vb): "Post haec dum habitaret in Bersabee et Ysaac, ut dicit Iosephus, viginti quinque annorum esset, dixit illi Dominus.", "After these things happened, when Abraham lived in Bersabee and Isaac, as tells Josephus, was twenty-five years old, the Lord said to him etc." Cfr. *Ant.* I, 227.

²⁸ *Hist. Gen.* 58 (V, fol. 24vb): "*Abraham ergo de nocte consurgens nemini quod facturus erat indicans stravit asinum.*" Cfr. *Ant.* I, 225.

²⁹ *Ant.* I, 225: "Abraham [...] celans coniugi dei praeceptum, et quam ipse habuisset de caede filii voluntatem, sed neque servorum cuiquam hoc palam faciens, ne forte deo parere prohiberetur, sumens Isaac cum duobus servis et quae erant ad sacrificium necessaria imponens asino ibat ad montem.", "Abraham [...] concealing from his wife God's command, and that he himself had made the resolution to kill his son, but also not revealing it to any of his servants, lest he be held back by chance from obeying God, he took Isaac with two servants and putting on a donkey the things necessary for the sacrifice proceeded to the mountain."

command, Comestor chooses a more concise solution, as he often does. He summarizes Josephus' text, by simply saying that Abraham does not reveal to anyone his decision to sacrifice his son. The information inserted by Comestor inside the biblical verse is in fact sufficient to explain why none of the protagonists, not even Sarah, tried to keep Abraham from his murderous intent. The continuation of the chapter illustrates Comestor's use of the *Antiquitates* to complement the Vulgate even more clearly. Josephus, Comestor writes, reports Abraham's speech to Isaac before the intended sacrifice:

Moreover Josephus reports the words that the father says to the boy: since [Isaac] came into the world in an extraordinary way by God's will, so by God's will was it necessary that he should also depart from it in an extraordinary way. God, indeed, had judged [Isaac] worthy to die not by disease, or war, or any kind of human suffering, and instead [had decided] to summon his soul unto Himself with prayers and sacrifices, and [Abraham said] that God would have him [*sc.* Isaac] resurrected³⁰ to fulfill His promises. And so Isaac willingly approached the altar and his death.³¹

By paraphrasing *Ant.* I, 228–232,³² Comestor offers the reader the reasons that lead father and son to embrace the sacrifice, giving psychological vividness and moral justification to the problematic episode of the Binding of Isaac. Abraham's speech does not solve the problematic nature of the episode. It shows, however, the inner reasoning that leads him to the tragic decision to sacrifice his own son. The moral justification emerges from the fact that Isaac *libens* (willingly) agrees to be sacrificed. He is not a mere object of the scene, but an acting protagonist.

Furthermore, Comestor modifies the text, by condensing the prose and making it more refined and incisive. Where Josephus dramatizes the narrative by adding a long direct speech between father and son, in melodramatic tones, Comestor summarizes

³⁰ This idea does not come from Josephus, but most likely from Paul (Heb 11:17–19). In fact, short after Josephus' quote, Comestor mentions Alcuin (*Interr. et respons. in Gen. PL* 100, col. 545 B–C), who reports Paul's thought about Abraham's faith in the resurrection of Isaac.

³¹ *Hist. Gen.* 58 (V, fol. 24vb–25ra): “Refert autem Iosephus verba patris ad puerum dicentis quia sicut ex voluntate Dei ingressus fuerat in mundum mirabiliter ita et ex Dei voluntate necesse erat egredi ei mirabiliter quem Dominus quidem dignum iudicasset non egritudine, non bello, non aliqua passione humana vitam finire, sed cum orationibus et sacrificiis animam ipsius ad se vocare et quod suscitarer eum ob implendas promissiones. Et sic Ysaac libens accessit ad aram et mortem.”

³² Cfr. *Ant.* I, 228–232: “Dicit ad filium: ‘O puer, quem innumeris votis optavi a deo mihi coferri [...] quia dei voluntate tuus pater sum factus, et denuo secundum eius placitum te repono [...] Natus ergo morere, non communi modo hanc vitam egrediens, sed a patre proprio oblatus deo patri cunctorum ob legitimum sacrificium. Reor enim quia te dignum iudicaverit nec aegritudine nec bello nec qualibet alia passione, quae solent hominibus accidere, hanc vitam liberare, sed cum orationibus et sacrificiis tuam animam suscipere, et apud se nihilominus obtinere.’ [...] Isaac autem [...] accessit ad altare pariter et ad caedem.”
“Abraham said to his son: ‘Son, with countless prayers I asked God to grant you to me [...] since I became your father by God's will, once more I set you back to His will [...] Therefore, it is necessary that you die the same way you were born, by leaving this life not in an ordinary way, but offered by your own father as a rightful sacrifice to God, the father of everything. In fact, I think that He judged you worthy of being freed of this life not through a disease or a war or any other human suffering that usually happens to men, but rather [He wished] to summon your soul to Himself with prayers and sacrifices, and just as much to keep it close to Himself.’ [...] And Isaac [...] approached the altar and as well the sacrifice.”

and sticks to the essential. By doing so he enhances the pathos. Comestor also adds some stylistic finesse: the chiasmus *ex voluntate Dei . . . ex Dei voluntate*, the reiteration of the adverb *mirabiliter* that highlights the extraordinary life and death of Isaac, the accumulation by polysyndeton. Lastly, it is worth mentioning the iconic brevity of Isaac's voiceless answer, which produces a result even more powerful than the original: *Et sic Ysaac libens accessit ad aram et mortem*. ("And so Isaac willingly approached the altar and his death").

This passage suffices to show how Comestor relies on Josephus to enrich the Vulgate. Comestor does not merely cite the *Antiquitates* – he transforms the text and makes it part of his own narrative.

3 Josephus and other Jewish sources in the "Historia"

Even though Comestor's use of Josephus is distinctive, other Christian scholars of 12th-century Paris also rely on the Jewish historian. Kletter³⁴ affirms that Josephus has a "quasi-biblical status" for Andrew of Saint Victor, whose use of the Jewish historian is not as extensive as Comestor's.³⁵ Andrew does not cite the *Bellum*, for instance, where Comestor does. Josephus seems to have held the highest authority as a source in Saint Victor's school: so that Andrew prefers him over patristic authorities.³⁶ Nevertheless, this extensive reliance on the Jewish historian was not universally approved in Saint Victor. In *De Tabernaculo* Richard warns his readers, perhaps his fellow scholars, not to believe everything Josephus wrote, but only the things he himself had seen, or reported through reliable sources.³⁷ Josephus is useful, but not always truthful, according to Richard of Saint Victor. Comestor seems to have a completely different opinion, and perhaps this is one of the reasons he defends Josephus' account and tries to reconcile it with the Bible.

Furthermore, unlike his colleague Andrew, who mentions Josephus together with other Jewish sources,³⁸ Comestor cites him separately from the *Hebraei*, whether they present the same information or not, as one can see in some passages of his comment on Exodus. Consider his comment on the distribution of the Ten Commandments on the Tablets of the Law: "In fact, Josephus says [there were] two [commandments] on each Tablet of the Law, and the Hebrews five."³⁹

³³ For exhaustive information about the 12th century, see Benson and Constable, *Renaissance and Renewal*.

³⁴ Kletter, "The Christian Reception of Josephus", 375.

³⁵ Berndt counts twenty references to Josephus in Andrew's commentary on Heptateuch. See Berndt, *Les interprétations juives*, 200–202.

³⁶ See Leowe, *The Medieval Christian Hebraist of England*, 238.

³⁷ *De Tabernaculo* V (PL 196, 214): "Libenter recipiatur Josephus in his quae per experientiam novit, vel ex authenticis scripturis colligit. Nam ubi aliter sentit, confidenter ei Exodum praefero, vel quoscunque libros in canone reperio."

³⁸ See Grabois, "The *Hebraica Veritas*", 613–634.

³⁹ *Hist. Ex.* 40 (V, fol. 48ra): "Josephus duo et Hebraei quinque in utraque." At *Ant.* III, 101, by contrast, Josephus says that there were five commandments on each Table.

In another example, Comestor illustrates the decoration on the Table for Bread⁴⁰ by reporting the description of some *Hebraei* with whom Josephus seems to disagree:

However, as the Hebrews say, those engravings [on the Table for Bread] were similar to images of kings, and they say that prophetically there were as many images made as there would be future kings of Jerusalem, from David to Sedechiam. But Josephus seems to mean that there was not another frame in it [*sc.* on the table], if not this embossed and reticulated crown.⁴¹

Moreover, Josephus is the only Jewish source with explicit attribution in the *Historia*.⁴² Comestor uses a generic *Hebraei* to refer to some undefined Jewish sources, very often quoted through intermediaries like Jerome or perhaps Andrew. In *Hist. Ex.* 32,⁴³ for instance, when Comestor compares different explanations of the miracle of the bitter water made sweet (Ex 15:22–27), the Jewish exegesis (*Hebraeus dicit*), possibly derived from Andrew's *Expositio in Exodum* 15, 25,⁴⁴ is quoted separately from Josephus and anonymously.

Although his use of Jewish material is ample, the fascinating question of whether or not Comestor had direct contact with Jewish scholars remains unresolved due to lack of evidence. Smalley⁴⁵ argues that very often when Comestor writes *Hebraei* or *Iudaei* he is actually quoting Andrew or Hugh, whom she proved to have been in mutual exchange with Jewish scholars in Paris about literal and historical exegesis.⁴⁶ She admits, however, that she could not find all the references. Shereshevsky⁴⁷ has hypothesized direct collaboration between Comestor and his Jewish sources, but his theory was rejected by

⁴⁰ Ex 25:23–25: “Facies et mensam de lignis sethim habentem duos cubitos longitudinis et in latitudine cubitum et in altitudine cubitum ac semissem et inaurabis eam auro purissimo faciesque illi labium aureum per circuitum et ipsi labio coronam interrasilem altam quattuor digitis et super illam alteram coronam aureolam.”, “And you are to make a table of Setim-wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide and a cubit and a half high, and to cover it with the best gold, and to make a gold edge all around it and for the very frame an embossed crown, four fingers high, and above it another golden crown.”

⁴¹ *Hist. Ex.* 48 (V, fol. 50vb): “Erant autem, ut aiunt Hebraei, celature ille quasi imagines regum et propheticæ tot ibi sunt ymagines facte quod reges futuri erant in Ierusalem a David usque ad Sedechiam. Tamen Iosephus videtur velle non fuisse in ea labium aliud nisi hanc coronam interrasilem et reticulatam.” See *Ant.* III, 139–142.

⁴² See Geiger, “Historia Judaica”, 125–145.

⁴³ *Hist. Ex.* 32 (V, fol. 46rab): “Hebraeus dicit quod illud lignum naturaliter amarissimum erat et ut mirabilior innotesceret vis divina, amarum additum amaro dulcedinem operatum est. Iosephus videtur velle quod aquae vitium hoc contraxerint quia immotae semper fuerant.”, “The Hebrew says that rod was by nature extremely bitter, and—so that the more miraculous divine power became known—the sweetness was made by adding bitter to bitter. It seems Josephus means that the waters had this flaw because they had been always unmoved.” See Andreas, *Exp. In Ex.* 15, 25 and *Ant.* III, 7–8.

⁴⁴ Andreas and Lohr, *Expositionem super Heptateuchum*, 123.

⁴⁵ See Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 179–180.

⁴⁶ See Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 149–172. For more information about Christians and Jews in the 12th century, see Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century*; and Schoenfeld, “Twelfth Century Literal Bible Commentaries”, 509–516.

⁴⁷ See Shereshevsky, “Hebrew Traditions in Peter Comestor”, 268–89.

Lachs,⁴⁸ who claims that Comestor used second-hand material, yet Lachs also admitted that some of his Jewish sources are unknown. But Shereshevsky's hypothesis was then supported by Grabois,⁴⁹ who suggests that Comestor may have had contacts with the masters of Rashi's school during his sojourn at Troyes before 1165. In fact, the *Historia* reveals that Comestor knew Jewish commentary traditions very well, as some of the references to the *Hebraei* in his comment on Exodus and on Leviticus reflect the content of rabbinical commentaries, like those of Rashi, Rashbam, or Rabi Yosef Bekhor Shor.⁵⁰ It is of course hard to tell whether Comestor obtained this information via direct contact with Jewish scholars, or rather through other sources, for instance, converted Jews who could read Hebrew.

Whether directly or indirectly, Comestor makes extensive use of Jewish material, and of Josephus in particular. Yet Josephus is somehow separated from other Jewish sources, which in fact remain anonymous. This anonymity may be a sign of Comestor wanting to distance himself from the opinion of the Jews, or a sign that he is in fact quoting from contemporary Jews. Smalley⁵¹ herself says that Peter follows the medieval practice of borrowing information from contemporary authors without acknowledging them. But when it comes to Josephus Comestor quotes him by name almost every time he uses him as a source. It is very common for Peter to use more than one source to write a passage, but to acknowledge only Josephus' authorship. One of the most iconic examples of filling in the gaps in the Biblical text is the insertion of the story of Moses' Ethiopian wife,⁵² which Comestor draws from *Ant.* II, 238–53, the *Glossa Ordinaria* (*Gloss. in. Ex.* 2, 9–11), and other unknown sources.⁵³ Comestor not only includes episodes from the *Antiquitates* that are completely absent from the Vulgate, but he also defends Josephus' account where it disagrees with the Bible. I will now present some passages in which Comestor tries to reconcile the *Antiquitates* and the Vulgate, when they report contradictory information.

4 The Antiquitates, the Vulgate and the Septuagint in comparison

When Comestor deals with an inconsistency between his sources, he often stops and tries to solve it, faithful to his exegetical and historical purpose of transmitting the truth of history. Sometimes he manipulates the words of the Vulgate so that they better fit Josephus' account, or he adapts Josephus' version to the scriptural text. This need to

⁴⁸ See Lachs, "The sources of Hebrew traditions", 385–386. More recently, Geiger have also taken this view: see Geiger, "Historia Judaica".

⁴⁹ See Grabois, "The *Hebraica Veritas*", 625.

⁵⁰ See for example Comestor' description of how a proper fine flour offering should be made by the priest in *Hist. Lev.* 5 (V, fol. 59va), that reports very closely Rashi's and Rashbam's account of the oblation in Shelomoh and Herczeg, *The Torah: with Rashi's commentary*, 20–21; Samuel and Lockshin, *Rashbam's Commentary on Leviticus and Numbers*, 19.

⁵¹ See Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, 179–180.

⁵² *Hist. Ex.* 6 (V, fol. 40rab).

⁵³ See Balfour, "Moses and the Princess", 1–16; and Potestà, "Insegnare nelle *scholae*", 97–108.

answer every question and to iron out the contradictions is an example of what Gellrich⁵⁴ describes as the mythological thought of the Middle Ages. This mythological thinking is expressed in “preoccupation with oneness, totality and the presence of meaning as absolute.”⁵⁵ It is a specific structure of thought that finds a place for everything, creating a seamless connection between past and present by carrying on the tradition of past authors. This need to catalogue and explain everything emerges plainly in a book like the *Historia*, in which Comestor makes clear that there is just one universal history that embraces all of humanity under the guidance of God. For this reason, Comestor tries to reconcile the internal inconsistencies of the Bible itself through the use of numerous sources, among which Josephus’ name stands out. I think this need to smooth out every contradiction between the *Antiquitates* and the Vulgate is not only a consequence of what Gellrich calls Medieval mythological thought, but also a sign of how crucial an authority Josephus is in the eyes of Comestor. In what follows, I analyze specific excerpts from Comestor’s work, in which he compares Josephus’ text with the Vulgate and the Septuagint. From these passages we will be able to see how Comestor uses Peter Abelard’s method not only to explain a problematic passage in the Vulgate, but also in the *Antiquitates*.

In the prologue of his *Sic et Non*, written in 1121, Abelard explains how one should deal with the differences or the contradictions found within the Holy Scriptures or the Holy Fathers’ writings. But he makes a distinction between the Old and New Testaments, and everything that was written after. He paraphrases Augustine’s *Contra Faustum* XI, 5:

In the case of the Scripture, if the writer raises an absurdity, one cannot say that the author of this book strayed from the truth at this point, but either the manuscript is corrupt, or the translator has made a mistake, or you are failing to understand it. But, in the case of the works of subsequent writers that are contained in countless books, if they happen to disagree because they are not comprehensible as they were written, in this case the reader or listener has free choice to approve of what they have found pleasing, or attack what has offended them.⁵⁶

In this text, Abelard explains how one should act when a scriptural passage presents something problematic. Abelard warns that one should not say that the writer made a mistake, but rather try to solve what at a first sight seemed illogical. He explains a strategy which has its roots in Philo of Alexandria’s scholarship on the writing of Moses.⁵⁷ When the Church Fathers, for instance, had to deal with different versions of the same biblical

⁵⁴ Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*, 39–43.

⁵⁵ Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*, 41.

⁵⁶ *Sic et non*, Preface: “Ibi si quid veluti absurdum moverit, non licet dicere: auctor huius libri non tenuit veritatem; sed aut codex mendosus est, aut interpretes erravit, aut tu non intellegis. In opuscoli autem posteriorum quae libris innumerabilibus continentur, si qua forte propterea dissentire, quia non ut dicta sunt intelliguntur, tamen liberum habet ibi lector auditorve iudicium, quod vel approbet quod placuerit vel improbet quod offenderit.”

⁵⁷ This method has its indirect origin in Aristotelian scholarship on the writings of Homer: see Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria*.

passage, arising from discrepancies between the manuscripts or divergent translations,⁵⁸ they did not judge any of the variants less valuable than the other and instead pursued a common explanation of them all, providing a univocal interpretation of the text. While writing the *Historia*, Comestor pursues the *veritas historiae*, as stated in the prologue, hence when the *Antiquitates* and the Bible seem to be at odds he cannot deny the differences between them, but rather tries to find a historical interpretation that can fit them all.

There are many examples where Comestor applies Abelard's method, assuming that an incomprehensible word in the Bible must be justified and explained. In explaining such problematic words, Comestor bears in mind that the same word can have different meanings, according to the context, as Augustine himself also affirms. In some chapters of the *Historia*, Comestor applies Abelard's method to Josephus as well. In fact, there are numerous passages⁵⁹ in which Josephus is compared with the Vulgate or the Septuagint since he provides different information to them, and Comestor does not hide this from the reader, but rather justifies the discrepancies between the texts, even if his reasoning may strike us as unconvincing. For example, in the case of Rebecca's father (Gen 24), Betuel, the *Antiquitates* and the Vulgate present conflicting information: in the *Antiquitates* Betuel is dead (*Ant.* I, 248), whereas in the Vulgate he is alive and speaks (Gen 24:50–52). Comestor makes the reader aware of this problem:

But one shall notice that Josephus relates that Betuel was already dead and the girl, still a virgin, was under the custody of her mother and brother; and that the girl had revealed in advance the news of her father's death, to the servant at the well, who had asked her who her parents were. But, up to this point, Moses also seems to have implied that, by that time, the girl had already lost her father, since he said before: the young woman ran into her mother's house (Gen 24:28). Perhaps here [*sc.* Gen 24:50–52] her mother is called by the name of the father, because she now expresses the father's will, passed on to her before he died, about their daughter's marriage; it can be in fact that he wanted to marry her off to a man of his own family.⁶⁰

It is clear that in this case Comestor reinterpreted Moses' account to fit Josephus' words. Note also that Comestor does not question the truth of Josephus' words, but rather tries to adapt the biblical version to that of the *Antiquitates*. From Comestor's point of view, then, Josephus' text here provides the correct historical reading and interpretation of the biblical text: the name Betuel is not to be understood as literally referring to the

⁵⁸ See Bona's comment on Gregory the Great exegesis of Lk 15:8 in Bona, "Non solo Origene e Gerolamo", 219–220.

⁵⁹ See *Hist. Gen.* 31, 33, 60, 62, 65, 74, 75, 76, 79, 86, 89, 90; *Hist. Ex.* 25, 29, 34, 51, 54, 59, 64.

⁶⁰ *Hist. Gen.* 60 (V, fol. 25vb): "Sed notandum quod Iosephus dicit Batuelem iam defunctum esse et virginem in custodia matris et fratris esse, et de morte patris predixisse puellam quaerenti ad puteum cuius esset filia, etiam Moyses usque ad huc videtur voluisse eam nec habuisse patrem cum superius dixit: Cucurrit puella in domum matris. Forte nomine patris vocatur hic mater, quia mandatum patris de filia tradenda quod ei reliquerat decedens nunc exposuit. Potuit enim fieri ut generi suo eam delegasset." See *Ant.* I, 248.

father, but rather to the mother, as Josephus tells it. Because Comestor is interested in explaining to the reader the historical truth of the events, he must clarify whether Betuel was alive or not. But, at the same time, he seems unwilling to countenance the idea that one of his texts may be wrong. For this reason, he offers a literal exegesis of the passage contending that both Moses and Josephus meant the same thing. This can also be seen as an example of Comestor's tendency, as an exegete, to prefer the *sensus* over the *littera*, as observed by Berndt.⁶¹ By saying that the *mater* is called by the name of the father, one may say that Comestor chooses the *sensus* of the biblical text over the *littera*. This happens not only when it comes to biblical reading, but also when analyzing Josephus, as it can be seen in the passage we will examine next.

In *Historia Genesis* 65 Comestor avoids the literal interpretation of Josephus' words to solve another disagreement between the sources. In doing so, he attempts to legitimize Josephus' text, even though it contradicts the biblical one: "So [by the time the twins, Esau and Jacob, were born] when Isaac was sixty, Abraham had another fifteen years left to live. We say this because Josephus so affirms: Then, after Abraham's death, Isaac's wife conceived etcetera (*Ant.* I, 257), and perhaps he uses the term 'death' referring to the point when Abraham stopped procreating, since his body had become completely barren."⁶²

This passage is another example of Comestor's exegesis: he provides a further *sensus* to the *littera*, this time of the *Antiquitates*. *Death* should be read as *infertility* so that, even if the two texts differ on the literal level, they present the same meaning. It also highlights the undisputed *auctoritas* which Josephus had in Comestor's view, so that he cannot be proven wrong, even by Moses. Another peculiarity of this paragraph is the use of *et cetera*.⁶³ Comestor reports only the first words of *Ant.* I, 257, as if the rest of the passage were well known to his audience. Normally, Comestor uses *et cetera* for biblical quotation, for which the first words suffice to identify the passage he is dealing with. There is only one other case in the *Historia* in which Comestor writes *et cetera* for a non-biblical text: *Hist. Ev.* 37 (V, fol. 175va). Here, to identify a sermon of the bishop Maximus of Turin, he writes, *Maximus episcopus in sermone qui sic incipit: 'cum plura nobis et cetera', sic ait*, ("The bishop Maximus, in the homily that begins this way: 'when there are many things for us etcetera', he says so"). In this case, Comestor is explicitly indicating the beginning of the homily to help his audience identify it. It is interesting that this method is also applied to the *Antiquitates*, since it presupposes that Comestor's readers have a close familiarity with the work, or at least have it at hand and can find the passage from the opening words alone. In many Latin manuscripts of the *Antiquitates*

⁶¹ See Berndt, *André de Saint-Victor*, 102–104.

⁶² *Hist. Gen.* 65 (V, fol. 27ra): "Itaque sexagenario Ysaac restabant adhuc Abrahe quindecim anni ad uitam. Hoc ideo diximus, quia Iosephus sic ait: Porro post mortem Abrahe concepit uxor Ysaac et cetera, mortem eius forte appellans quando iam penitus effeto corpore generare desiit: ipse enim textus littere non esse dictum per recapitulationem indicat." See *Ant.* I, 257.

⁶³ It appears in both manuscripts V(fol. 27ra) and P(fol. 18va).

copied in France between the 11th and 13th century,⁶⁴ the passage about Abraham's passing away is marked with *marginalia* like *mortus Abraham* or something similar.⁶⁵

With the two examples above, we have seen how Comestor adapts Moses' words to Josephus' text and vice-versa, so that both versions retain their validity. When Comestor cannot provide a satisfying literal exegesis to justify the scriptural text and Josephus' version, he hypothesizes that the discrepancy is caused by *vitium scriptoris*, a copyist's mistake:

Rising up before dawn, with his wives and children and all his possessions [Jacob] went across the Jaboc ford (Gen 32:22). Josephus says he would have crossed a stream named Jaboc (*Ant.* I, 331). In the Book of Genesis we read that Jacob, while praying because he was afraid of his brother, had said: "I crossed that Jordan with my staff, and now I am returning with two hosts (Gen 32:10)." Perhaps it was the Jordan he crossed, and since it is a gravelly torrent there, it was called the Jaboc ford. It may also be that, due to a copyist's error, *Jaboc* is read instead of *Jacob* and the name *Jaboc ford* would have been coined from that passage at that point.⁶⁶

In this passage, Comestor deals with Gen 32:22, but also quotes Gen 32:10, which he previously omitted, in order to present his own exegesis of the toponym *vadum Iaboch*. As Clark notes, when addressing some discrepancy in the scriptural narrative, as he does in this paragraph, "Comestor has to decide in the context of a narrative."⁶⁷ This means that he cannot interrupt the flow of his account to give various and extensive explanations, as do other exegetes who write in different formats.⁶⁸ Once again, Comestor strives to reconcile Josephus' account with the Bible. This time, he finds a solution in the scriptural text itself, by combining Gen 32:10 with Gen 32:22. By noting that Josephus describes the Jaboc as a stream, Comestor suggests that it might be the Jordan itself, as in Gen 32:10, but called "Jaboc ford", as in Gen 32:22, because it narrows at this particular point, as Josephus says. Comestor attempts in giving a philological explanation for the toponym *vadum Iaboch*, by conjecturing a copyist's mistake at some point of the textual

⁶⁴ David Levenson and Thomas Martin call this family of manuscripts "Group E" in their recent article on the revised classification of the Latin exemplars of Josephus' *Antiquitates*. See Levenson and Martin, "A Revised Classification of Manuscript Groups", 93–98.

⁶⁵ I thank Anthony Ellis and Judith Mania for their exemplary work on the *marginalia* found in the manuscripts of the Latin text of the *Antiquitates*.

⁶⁶ *Hist. Gen.* 76 (V, fol. 31ra): "Consurgensque ante diluculum traduxit uxores et filios cum omnibus ad se pertinentibus per vadum Iaboch. Iosephus dicit quod torrentem nomine Iaboch transierit. In Genesi legitur, cum orasset Iacob timens fratrem dixisse: In baculo meo transivi Iordanem istum, et nunc cum duabus turmis regredior. Forte Iordanis erat quem transivit et, quia ibi calculosus est torrens, dicebatur vadum Iaboch. Forte autem vitio scriptoris pro Iacob Iaboch legitur et ex transitu illo sortitum est nomen vadum Iaboch."

⁶⁷ Clark, "Peter Comestor: the Christian Josephus", 15.

⁶⁸ Clark, "Peter Comestor: the Christian Josephus", 15.

tradition, but it is not clear whether he envisages this taking place in the Bible or in the *Antiquitates*.⁶⁹

In other sections of his work, Comestor not only quotes Josephus alongside the Vulgate, but also in parallel to the Septuagint. Observe how he clarifies Jacob's statement at Gen 31:7 about the length of time he worked for Laban:

And Jacob said: [...] "You know that [Laban] *deceived me and changed my reward ten times* (Gen 31:7)." The LXX writes "for ten years", to be understood as "for ten cycles", because the alteration of the money happened in six years. In fact, Josephus says that the duration of the whole period when Jacob stays with Laban lasted twenty years (see *Ant. I*, 309).⁷⁰

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. First, we see that Comestor places the Vulgate, the Septuagint and the *Antiquitates* on the same hierarchical level, comparing them and trying to match their meaning at the same time. Second, Comestor quotes Josephus as evidence of the duration of Jacob's stay with Laban, rather citing the Vulgate, as if this information were not available in the biblical text. In fact, the twenty years of service are also found in the Vulgate version of Gen 31:41. Comestor may have quoted Josephus here because he is glossing a passage from the Septuagint, which was written in Greek as were the *Antiquitates*. As a matter of fact, Comestor knows that Josephus originally wrote in Greek. He states so clearly in *Historia Danielis* 4: "Here Josephus says that he himself translated (*transtulit*) the Hebrew Books into the Greek language (see *Ant. X*, 218)."⁷¹ Josephus' statement may have reassured Comestor of his reliability as an interpreter of the historical exegesis. Josephus affirms, indeed more than once, that he "translated" (he uses *μεθερμηνεύω/interpreter* or *μεταφράζω/transfero*) the Hebrew Books faithfully into the Greek language. In the preface Josephus writes, "Now, I have undertaken the present work, believing it will appear to all the Greeks worthy of their study; because it will contain all our antiquities, and the constitution of our government, as interpreted (*μεθερμηνεύω/interpreter*) out of the Hebrew Scriptures."⁷² He is so preoccupied with reassuring his audience of his integrity as an historiographer that he reiterates his statement in *Ant. X*, 218 (a passage mentioned by Comestor at *Historia*

⁶⁹ See Comestor and Lazzarini, *La Genesi*, 392–393. Nevertheless, we know that it is not a *vitium scriptoris* in the textual tradition of the *Antiquitates*, for the original Greek text has the same *lectio* as the Latin: *Καὶ χεϊμάρρον τινὰ Ἰάβακχον λεγόμενον διαβεβηκότων* (*Ant. I*, 331, ed. Niese).

⁷⁰ *Hist. Gen.* 74 (V, fol. 30rb): "Et ait [Iacob]: [...] Scitis quia circumuenit me et mutauit mercedem meam decem vicibus (Gen 31:7). LXX dicunt decem annis vel intelligendum est decem annis decem circumvolutionibus, quae denaria mutatio in sex annis facta est. Dicit enim Iosephus quod omne tempus quod fuit Iacob cum Laban viginti annorum fuit." Recall that Comestor's reference to the Greek text of the Septuagint probably comes from the *Glossa Ordinaria* (*Gloss. In Gen.* 31), which in turn quotes Jerome, but it carries a mistake: Jerome in fact wrote *decem agnis* (of ten lambs, translating LXX: τῶν δέκα ἀμνῶν) and not *decem annis* (for ten years) as written in the *Glossa*.

⁷¹ *Hist. Dan.* 4 (V, fol. 139vb): "Hic dicit Josephus quod libros Hebraicos ipse in Graecum transtulit eloquium."

⁷² *Ant. I*, 5: Ταύτην δὲ τὴν ἐνεστῶσαν ἐγκεχείρισμαι πραγματείαν νομίζων ἅπασι φανείσθαι τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν ἀξίαν σπουδῆς: μέλλει γὰρ περιέξειν ἅπασαν τὴν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀρχαιολογίαν καὶ διάταξιν τοῦ πολιτεύματος ἐκ τῶν Ἑβραϊκῶν μεθερμηνευμένην γραμμάτων.

Danielis 4): “I have plainly guaranteed those that think me defective in any such point or complain, and I have told them in the beginning of this history, that I intended to do no more than translate (μεταφράζω/*transfero*) the Hebrew Books into the Greek language, and promised them to explain those facts, without adding anything to them of my own, or taking anything away from there.”⁷³ The verb μεθερμηνεύω (translate), chosen here by Josephus, is used in other texts which also deal with Hebrew traditions translated into a foreign language: for instance, in the Greek prologue of Ben Sirah and in the *Letter of Aristeas* (38). Nevertheless, it is clear that Josephus’ work is not a translation as we understand it today. If his declaration of intent may look misleading today, Feldman has argued that the words μεθερμηνεύω and μεταφράζω do not simply mean “translate”, but also involve an act of interpretation.⁷⁴

In fact, Josephus’ *Antiquitates* provides a very free retelling of the sacred text. He also adds a great deal of extra-biblical material, presumably from other Jewish works, or from oral traditions which he perhaps genuinely considered part of “our antiquities” or “our records” (ἀναγραφαίς, *Ant.* I, 17), and hence worthy of inclusion in his narrative. Inowlocki⁷⁵ suggests this as one explanation for Josephus’ promise to “neither add nor omit anything”: not only the written Bible, but the entire Jewish tradition was considered part of the ἀναγραφαί. Even if the *Antiquitates* are not a translation as we understand it, Josephus’ statement expresses his intention to transmit what he thinks is the true history of his people. In fact, as Inowlocki argues,⁷⁶ by the standards of Josephus’ own days, his work should be viewed as a type of citation, even if he modifies the Scriptures, since faithfulness to the *sensus* of a text in antiquity was more important than faithfulness to its *littera*. Inowlocki shows that Josephus sees his work as an interpretation, in this resembling other Greek and Latin authors,⁷⁷ for whom translation was not to transfer a text from one language to another, but rather to rewrite the content and reimagine the artistic value of that text so as to transmit its essence.

What did Comestor make of Josephus’ claim to have translated the Hebrew Books? Might he think of the *Antiquitates* as being a free translation of the Old Testament? Comestor speaks about biblical translation in some passages of his work, although he does not make any theoretical statements about what a good translation might be. In the preface of the *Historia Libri Esther*, for instance, Comestor writes: “Jerome, by request of Paula and Eustochium, translated the Book of Esther from Hebrew into Latin, and since the text in Greek was corrupted he clarified it through various editions from the

⁷³ *Ant.* X, 218: Καὶ γὰρ εὐθὺς ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς ἱστορίας πρὸς τοὺς ἐπιζητήσοντάς τι περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἢ μειψομένους ἰσφαλισάμεν, μόνον τε μεταφράζειν τὰς Ἑβραίων βίβλους εἰπὼν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα γλώτταν καὶ ταῦτα δηλώσειν μήτε προστιθεὶς τοῖς πράγμασιν αὐτὸς ἰδίᾳ μήτ’ ἀφαιρῶν ὑπεισχημένος.

Vct, fol. 115vb: “Nam in ipso historiae meae principio propter eos qui questionem faciunt, autem in aliquo culpae nituntur astruxi, dicens translaturum me libros hebraicos in graecum eloquium, et hos uolentibus aperire, neque adicere ipse aliquid seorsum neque subtrahere me permittens.”

⁷⁴ Feldman, *Josephus’ Interpretation of the Bible*, 44–46.

⁷⁵ Inowlocki, “Neither Adding nor Omitting Anything”, 50–51.

⁷⁶ Inowlocki, “Neither Adding nor Omitting Anything”, 48–49.

⁷⁷ Inowlocki, “Neither Adding nor Omitting Anything”, 54.

archives of the Hebrews, and translated attentively word-for-word (*et diligenter transtulit de verbo ad verbum*).⁷⁸ Hence, Comestor presents Jerome's Vulgate as a literal translation. In fact, when he quotes the Latin text of the Pentateuch, he speaks about "Moses' words" and not the words of Jerome. In the *Historia Libri Esther*, while speaking about Ptolemy Philadelphus (*Hist. Est.* 7), Comestor tells the story of the creation of the Greek Old Testament. He uses the verbs *interpretor* and *transfero* to talk about the translation work of the Seventy, although he does not give any indication of how literal he thinks it is.

Even though Comestor does not perceive the *Antiquitates* as a literal translation of the Old Testament, he clearly views Josephus as authoritative as a biblical text at the level of historical exegesis. In fact, we have seen that Comestor goes out of his way to have the *Antiquitates* and the Vulgate coincide on the literal interpretation. Furthermore, he follows the methods which Peter Abelard suggested when dealing with the Bible, as expressed in his treatise *Sic et non*.

As a final example I will discuss the episode in which the aged Jacob suggests bringing gifts to Joseph in Egypt (Gen 43): "Take some of the best fruits of our land, some resin [...] Perhaps he [*sc.* Moses] called *resin* the balsam. In fact, Josephus puts balsam at the beginning of the list of gifts, and he does not speak about the resin."⁷⁹ From this passage we can clearly see how Comestor uses the *Antiquitates* to provide a correct reading and literal exegesis of the Vulgate, to give the reader with a convincing explanation of a problematic word. Comestor does not hide the differences between Josephus' text and the Vulgate. Instead, he applies his exegetical method and glosses the Vulgate with Josephus. He is not afraid of problematizing the text: he knows from Abelard, and from Augustine before him, that "there are many words with various meanings, but the same words—if used in the proper way—can convey different meanings in different passages."⁸⁰

5 Conclusions

Even though Josephus was widely read, relied upon, and quoted by twelfth-century exegetes, at Paris and elsewhere, Comestor's treatment of the Jewish historian is unique in its extent. As we saw in Comestor's account of the Binding of Isaac, he supplements the Vulgate with the *Antiquitates*, by using Josephus' account to fill in the gaps in biblical stories. He not only incorporates Josephus' words in his own narrative, alongside the biblical text, but he also quotes him by name in many places, granting him undisputed authority. Comestor seems to know Jewish traditions quite well, but treats Josephus as a separate entity, since he quotes the *Antiquitates* entirely separately (and often in contrast

⁷⁸ *Hist. Est.* 1 (V, fol. 152ra): "Librum Esther transtulit Ieronimus ad petitionem Paulae et Eustochii de Hebraeo in Latinum et quia in Graeco corruptus erat per varias editiones revelavit eum de archivis Hebraeorum, et diligenter transtulit verbum ad verbum."

⁷⁹ *Hist. Gen.* 89 (V, fol. 35ra): "Sumite de optimis terre nostre, modicum resinae [...] Forte balsamum sic vocavit, Iosephus enim in principio munerum unguenta balsami posuit, et resinam tacuit." See *Ant.* 118.

⁸⁰ *Sic et Non*, Preface.

to) the traditions which he ascribes rather vaguely to the *Hebraei*. Furthermore, although the *Antiquitates* and the Vulgate differ in a number of places, Comestor never questions the truth of Josephus' version, but rather tries to give an exegetical explanation in order to show the reader that both texts, though different at first sight, actually report the same story. By doing so, Comestor puts Peter Abelard's method into action, applying it not only to the Sacred Text, as Abelard had intended, but also to the *Antiquitates*. When Comestor interrupts the narrative flow and goes out of his way to reconcile Josephus' account and the Vulgate, he shows the remarkable authority which the Jewish historian had in his eyes. Moreover, the fact that he collates corresponding passages from the Vulgate, the Septuagint and the *Antiquitates*, and brings them all into harmony, so that the reader could know and understand the biblical episode as thoroughly as possible, shows that he places the three texts on the same hierarchy when it comes to establishing the *veritas historiae*, Comestor's primary goal.

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