

Questioning Traditions

Readings of Annius of Viterbo's Antiquitates in the Cinquecento: The Case of Judah Abarbanel

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Abstract

This article focuses on the philosopher Judah Abarbanel, best known as Leone Ebreo, and addresses the origin of his concept of (Jewish) tradition in his *Dialoghi d'amore* (1535). It analyses how he re-elaborates the controversial and multi-layered concept of tradition conceived by the Dominican friar Annius of Viterbo in his *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII* (1498). By showing how Judah is immersed in the antiquarianism and reformation programme of his time and also how he shares the same intellectual framework as his Christian contemporaries, this study argues that his re-elaboration of the Annian idea of Jewish tradition provides an intriguing example of how the authentication of an ancestral sacred past is not only instrumental in legitimating the superiority of Jewish antiquity, but also in creating a certain distance from it and bringing about a philosophical renewal of ancient authority.

Keywords

Leone Ebreo – Annius of Viterbo – tradition – history – antiquarianism – ancient wisdom – revelation – philosophy

1 Introduction¹

One of the major issues in interpreting the *Dialoghi d'amore* (*Dialogues of Love*) (1535) by Judah Abarbanel (ca. 1470–1534) is understanding in what way, and to what extent, Judah, as a Jew and a scholar in Italy, was rooted in his surrounding intellectual framework.² Undoubtedly, the relationship between Jewish and Christian intellectuals in early modern Italy was a complex, intense and, to a certain extent, contradictory and conflictual one. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, after their expulsion, Jews came to Northern Italy from France and Germany and to the Kingdom of Naples from Spain, the Spanish dominions in Southern Italy, and Portugal, establishing new communities alongside the local ones. However, blood libel cases, virulent predication by Franciscan friars, and a popular anti-Hebraism fuelled accusations, trials, restrictions, expulsions, and violent outbursts in a general climate of turbulence across all of Italy. For example, in Northern Italy, by the end of the fifteenth century, most of the Jewish communities were scattered in a few areas in the Northeast and Savoy territories, while in the Papal States, tougher restrictions were imposed from the pontificate of Pope Paul IV onwards. The unstable vicissitudes of the Kingdom of Naples severely affected the local Jewry and those who had converted to Christianity, resulting in a sequence

¹ This article was written during my Max Weber Fellowship at the Department of History and Civilisation at the European University Institute. I wish to thank my mentor at the European University Institute, Giancarlo Casale, and the HEC Writing Group at the Max Weber Programme for reading an early draft of this paper and for their helpful suggestions. I also owe my gratitude to Guido Bartolucci, who, during my previous postdoctoral research stay at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies in Hamburg, encouraged me to further investigate the reference to Annius's *Antiquitates* in the *Dialoghi d'amore*. Finally, I would like to thank my friend Duccio Guasti, who helped me with the translation of an intricate Latin passage of Annius's *Antiquitates*.

² Since the earliest studies of the *Dialoghi*, scholars have discussed whether it is a work of Jewish philosophy or a philosophical work written by a Jew. For example, Colette Sirat has argued that it is the latter: see Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge selon les textes manuscrits et imprimés* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1983), 450. In contrast, Julius Guttmann defined Judah as the only Jewish Renaissance philosopher: see Guttmann, *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (Munich: Reinhardt, 1933), 271. Giuseppe Veltri has shown that medieval, early modern, and modern Jewish scholars, including Judah himself, never referred to themselves as Jewish philosophers: see Veltri, *Alienated Wisdom: Enquiry into Jewish Philosophy and Scepticism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 106. Veltri's analysis was the starting point for my doctoral and postdoctoral studies, in which I examined Judah's relationship with Christian intellectuals both as a Jew and as a philosopher. I have also used this approach in this article.

of expulsions in 1496, 1510, 1514–1515, and 1541.³ Yet in this age of persecutions and the creation of ghettos in the Italian peninsula,⁴ exchanges between Jewish and non-Jewish intellectual groups crossed the formal socioeconomic fences and cultural boundaries established by Christian society.⁵ Considering the social conditions of the Jews, one of the thorniest questions in the field is whether Jewish intellectuals could actively participate in Renaissance intellectual life or whether they could only echo some of the intellectual

³ It is beyond the scope of this article to provide an exhaustive list of the vast literature on the social conditions of the Jews in Renaissance Italy. For an overview, see Marina Caffiero, *Storia degli ebrei nell'Italia moderna. Dal Rinascimento alla Restaurazione* (Rome: Carocci, 2014). For the Kingdom of Naples, see the seminal work by Nicola Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale. Dall'età romana al secolo XVIII*, reprint ed. (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1999). For Northern and Central Italy, see Shlomo Simonsohn, "La condizione giuridica degli ebrei nell'Italia centrale e settentrionale (secoli XII–XVI)," in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 11:1, *Gli ebrei in Italia. Dall'alto Medioevo all'età dei ghetti*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 97–120. For Rome, see Kenneth R. Stow, *The Jews in Rome*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1995–1997). For the persecution of converts or New Christians in Southern Italy, see, for example, Nadia Zeldes, "Legal Status of Jewish Converts to Christianity in Southern Italy and Provence," *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1–17, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/91z342hv>.

⁴ For a historical overview of the Venetian ghetto, see Riccardo Calimani, *Storia del ghetto di Venezia* (Milan: Rusconi, 1985); Giovanni Favero and Francesca Trivellato, "Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia in età moderna: Dati e ipotesi," *Zakhor. Rivista di storia degli ebrei d'Italia* 7 (2004): 9–50; Dana E. Katz, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017). For Venetian Jewry more broadly, see Cecil Roth, *Venice* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1930); Gaetano Cozzi, ed., *Gli ebrei e Venezia: Secoli XIV–XVIII. Atti del convegno internazionale organizzato dall'Istituto di storia della società e dello Stato veneziano della Fondazione Giorgio Cini* (Venezia, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 5–10 giugno 1983) (Milan: Edizioni Comunità, 1987); and Robert C. Davis and Benjamin C.I. Ravid, eds., *The Jews of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). On the Roman ghetto, see Attilio Milano, *Il ghetto di Roma: Illustrazioni storiche* (Rome: Staderini, 1964); Kenneth R. Stow, *Theater of Acculturation: The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); and the recent work by Serena di Nepi, *Surviving the Ghetto: Toward a Social History of the Jewish Community in 16th-Century Rome*, trans. Paul. M. Rosenberg (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

⁵ For the problematic issue of the Jews' official participation in the intellectual academies of their own time, see, for example, Giuseppe Veltri and Evelien Chayes, *Oltre le mura del ghetto. Accademie, scetticismo e tolleranza nella Venezia barocca. Studi e documenti d'archivio* (Palermo: New Digital Press, 2016). In the vast literature on Jews as both students and teachers in Christian universities, see, for example, Vittore Colomni, "Sull'ammissibilità degli ebrei alla laurea anteriormente al secolo XIX," *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 16, no. 6/8 (1950): 202–16; Robert Bonfl, "Accademie rabbiniche e presenza ebraica nelle università," in *Le università dell'Europa*, ed. Gian Paolo Brizzi and Jacques Verger, vol. 2, *Dal Rinascimento alle riforme religiose* (Trieste: RAS, 1991), 132–51; and Saverio Campanini, "Jews on the Fringes: Universities and the Jews in a Time of Upheaval (15th–16th Centuries)," *Annali di storia delle università italiane* 24, no. 1 (2020): 21–33.

transformations of the surrounding Christian intellectual environment within their own circles. Scholars have widely discussed whether, and in what way, we can properly speak of a Jewish Renaissance.⁶ Shifting from this perspective, I will ask whether Jewish intellectuals shared a common intellectual space, “a neighbourhood of the mind,”⁷ with Christian scholars during the Renaissance, despite social inequalities.

The present article will focus on a specific case and aims to show the features of this non-spatial and non-temporal intellectual community. It will shed light on the idea of tradition that was widely disseminated in the sixteenth century thanks to a work by the Dominican friar Annius of Viterbo (1437–1502), the *Antiquitates (Antiquities)* (1498), and will address the astonishing impact of this oeuvre on the Renaissance idea of an ancient Jewish (historical) tradition among Christian intellectuals, as well as the Jewish literati, to whom scholars have not paid much attention.⁸ The second section will introduce and frame this text and its success among Christian and Jewish scholars within the

⁶ See, for example, for a multidisciplinary overview, Giulio Busi and Silvana Greco, eds., *The Renaissance Speaks Hebrew* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2019); Robert Bonfil, *Cultural Change among the Jews of Early Modern Italy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Bonfil, “Lo spazio culturale degli ebrei d’Italia fra Rinascimento ed Età barocca,” in Vivanti, *Gli ebrei in Italia*, 413–73; Bonfil, *Les juifs d’Italie à l’époque de la Renaissance: Stratégies de la différence à l’aube de la modernité* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995); Bonfil, *Gli ebrei in Italia nell’epoca del Rinascimento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1991); Alessandro Guetta, *Les juifs d’Italie à la Renaissance* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2017); Guetta, *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era: Essays in Intellectual History* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014); Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959); David B. Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 252–79; Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri, eds., *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Giuseppe Veltri, *Il Rinascimento nel pensiero ebraico* (Turin: Paideia, 2020); Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb: Foundations and Challenges in Judaism on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

⁷ Here, I am using the expression employed by Lauro Martines when delineating the common intellectual space that humanist poets established by reading one another’s works and letters, despite their physical or temporal distance: see Lauro Martines, “A Neighbourhood of the Mind: Latin Poets in the Quattrocento,” in *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Anthony Molho*, ed. Diogo Ramada Curto, Eric R. Dursteler, Julius Kirshner, and Francesca Trivellato (Florence: Olschki, 2009), 1:211–34. Recently, Shulamit Furstenberg-Levi has referred to Martines’s terminology in order to explain the networks of the Accademia Pontaniana and the interactions and links between humanists in Naples, Rome, and Florence: see Furstenberg-Levi, *The Accademia Pontaniana: A Model of a Humanist Network* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–16.

⁸ An exception is Joanna Weinberg, “Azariah de’ Rossi and the Forgeries of Annius of Viterbo,” in Ruderman, *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture*, 252–79.

broader context of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century antiquarianism, while the following section will bring to the fore the case of Judah Abarbanel, best known as Leone Ebreo, and will focus specifically on his acquaintance with Annius's *Antiquitates* as a lens through which to enquire into his dialogue with the contemporary generation of Christian scholars. In the fourth section, I will explain how and why Judah employs the Annian notion of the Jewish tradition by suggesting an alternative interpretation of the function that this concept fulfils in his work. Overall, this article will contextualise Judah's reference to Annius's *Antiquitates* in the intellectual and religious landscape of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy. By situating Judah's work and his notion of tradition in a historical perspective, it will put forward the theory that Judah shared the same intellectual interests as his Christian colleagues and constructed his philosophical identity in response to and in dialogue with them. It thereby aims to broaden our understanding of Judah's *Dialoghi d'amore* and its intellectual context.

2 The Concept of Tradition(s) in Annius of Viterbo's *Antiquitates*

From the end of the fifteenth century, the Jewish and Christian literati alike began to read the *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium* (*Commentaries on the Works of Divers Authors Who Speak about Antiquities*). Best known as the *Antiquitates*, this work was published in Rome in 1498.⁹ Its author was the Dominican friar Giovanni Nanni, more famously known as Annius of Viterbo,¹⁰ and it was a sixteenth-century Latin bestseller. It is, however, a historiographical counterfeit, which includes translations of, and extensive commentaries on, ancient texts that were intentionally fabricated

9 See Giovanni Nanni, *Commentaria fratris Ioannis Viterbiensis theologiae professoris super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium* (*Commentaries by Friar Annus of Viterbo, Professor of Theology, on the Works of Divers Authors Who Speak about Antiquities*) (Rome: Eucharius Silber, 1498). In this article, I use the 1515 Parisian edition: Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII* (Paris: Jean Petit and Josse Bade, 1515). In the transcriptions and spelling of the Latin text, I have silently expanded all abbreviations, standardised punctuation, and italicised and capitalised book titles. All English translations from the Latin text are my own. Unless otherwise specified, words or brief phrases enclosed in square brackets in the English translation have been added to clarify the English text.

10 For his life, see Roberto Weiss, "Traccia per una biografia di Annio da Viterbo," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 5 (1962): 425–41; Riccardo Fubini, "Nanni, Giovanni (Annio da Viterbo)," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 77 (2012): 726–32, available online at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-nanni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

by its author. Early criticism of its legitimacy notwithstanding,¹¹ this forgery had an extraordinary influence on Renaissance conceptions of history and tradition. Indeed, Annius's work was reprinted in at least eighteen editions up to 1612, translated twice into the Italian vernacular in 1543 (reprinted in 1550) and 1583, and extensively used by numerous scholars throughout Europe and beyond.¹²

¹¹ Among the first scholars to denounce Annius's *Antiquitates* was Pietro Crinito (1474–1507) in his *De honesta disciplina* (1504) and Lefèvre d'Étaples (ca. 1455–1536) in his commentaries on Aristotle's *Politics* contained in the work known as the *Hecatonomia* (1506). On this criticism, see Walter Stephens, "When Pope Noah Ruled the Etruscans: Annius of Viterbo and His Forged 'Antiquities,'" *Modern Language Notes* 119, no. 1 (2004): *Italian Issue Supplement: Studia Humanitatis, Essays in Honor of Salvatore Camporeale*, 201–23, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2004.0152>. See also Eugène Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annius and Graecia Mendax," in *Classical, Mediaeval, and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman*, ed. Charles Henderson (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964), 2:293–310; Christopher R. Ligota, "Annus of Viterbo and Historical Method," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 44–56.

¹² Amongst the vast literature on Annius of Viterbo, for analysis of his work, sources, and intellectual context, see, for example, Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annius and Graecia Mendax," 293–310; Walter Stephens, *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 98–138; Stephens, "When Pope Noah Ruled the Etruscans," 201–23; Stephens, "From Berossos to Berossus Chaldaeus: The Forgeries of Annus of Viterbo and Their Fortune," in *The World of Berossos: Proceedings of the 4th International Colloquium on the Ancient Near East between Classical and Ancient Oriental Traditions* (Durham, 7th–9th July 2010), ed. Johannes Haubold, Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Robert Rollinger, and John Steele (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 277–89; Anthony Grafton, "Invention of Traditions and Traditions of Invention in Renaissance Europe: The Strange Case of Annus of Viterbo," in *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Ann Blair (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 8–38; Grafton, "Annus of Viterbo as a Student of the Jews: The Sources of His Information," in *Literary Forgery in Early Modern Europe, 1450–1800*, ed. Walter Stephens and Earle A. Havens (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 147–69; Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Riccardo Fubini, "Gli storici nei nascenti Stati regionali d'Italia," in Fubini, *Storiografia dell'umanesimo in Italia da Leonardo Bruni ad Annio da Viterbo* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003), 3–38; Fubini, "L'ebraismo nei riflessi della cultura umanistica: Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti, Annio da Viterbo," in Fubini, *Storiografia dell'umanesimo in Italia*, 291–331. For an overview of Annius's fortunes, see Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). For Annius's specific fortunes in sixteenth-century Florence, see Erik Schoonhoven, "A Literary Invention: The Etruscan Myth in Early Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 24 (2010): 459–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-4658.2010.00662.x>. See also Caroline S. Hillard, "Mythic Origins, Mythic Archaeology," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 69 (2016): 489–528, <https://doi.org/10.1086/687608>. For Annius's fortunes outside Europe, for example, in the Quechua historian Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, see Giuseppe

In his *Antiquitates*, Annius's main objective is to offer a providential reinterpretation of the local and territorial history of his city, Viterbo, and the surrounding region, Tuscia, by evoking their glorious Etruscan past and the superior splendour of the Etruscan culture over the Greek nation. Earlier medieval and humanist Christian historians had already acknowledged the role of the Etruscans alongside the Romans in the foundation of some Italian cities.¹³ Annius, however, claims the superiority of Italy's pre-Roman Etruscan past by establishing a Jewish foundation for Viterbo and other cities in Tuscia. By means of the meticulous fabrication of ancient archaeological and historical records, Annius's *Antiquitates* names the Etruscans as the direct heirs of an ancient and antediluvian tradition that the biblical patriarch Noah, whom he identifies with the pagan god Janus, handed down to them after settling in Italy: "Father Janus taught the Etruscans, his sons, physics, astronomy, divination, and ceremonials. He wrote rituals and committed everything to writing."¹⁴ Through invented chronologies and etymologies,¹⁵ Annius aimed to deprive the Greek historians of authority and to disclaim any revival of Greek models in contemporary political institutions in defiance of Hellenising humanists and historians.¹⁶ As Eugène Tigerstedt and Albano Biondi have pointed out,¹⁷ by rejecting the authenticity of Greek pagan historiography and tracing a sacred Jewish origin for the Etruscans, Annius serves not only the patriotic and regional objective of exalting his native town, but also the major religious and political purpose of envisioning a proto-Christian history of Italy and Europe: "In my writings, I speak out in favour of my birthplace and Italy, and, thus, of all Europe. I do not claim to have elegance or grace, but only the simple truth."¹⁸

Marcocci, *The Globe on Paper: Writing Histories of the World in Renaissance Europe and the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 80–111.

¹³ For an overview, for example, in the historiographical tradition on Florence, see Giovanni Cipriani, *Il mito etrusco nel Rinascimento fiorentino* (Florence: Olschki, 1980).

¹⁴ Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII*, 122b. The original text reads: "Janus pater Ianigenas Razenuos docuit physicam, astronomiam, divinationes, ritus, et rituales scripsit, et omnia litteris mandavit."

¹⁵ For Annius's chronographies, onomastics, and euhemeristic methods, see Ligota, "Annus of Viterbo and Historical Method," 44–56.

¹⁶ For Annius's criticism of Hellenising historians, see Riccardo Fubini, "L'umanista: Ritorno di un paradigma? Saggio per un profilo storico da Petrarca ad Erasmo," *Archivio storico italiano* 147 (1989): 435–508.

¹⁷ See Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annus and Graecia Mendax," 293–310; Albano Biondi, "Anno da Viterbo e un aspetto dell'orientalismo di Guillaume Postel," *Bollettino della società dei Valdesi* 132 (1972): 49–67.

¹⁸ This passage appears in the dedication letter to the Spanish monarchs in the *editio princeps* of the *Antiquitates* (1498); Nanni, *Commentaria fratris Ioannis Viterbiensis*. The

Among the works that Annius claims to have discovered, he includes the writings of Philo of Alexandria, Fabius Pictor, Metasthenes of Persia (his version of Megasthenes), and Berossus, a Chaldean priest and scribe from Babylonia. Berossus's *Defloratio caldaica (Chaldaic Collection)* is Annius's main forged text, which he uses to provide a comprehensive proto-Christian Jewish history of the entire Mediterranean.¹⁹ Under Berossus's authority, Noah becomes not only Janus and Vertumnus for the Etruscans and Latins, but also Proteus for the Egyptians and Ogyges for the Phoenicians:

The one who lived for seventy years before the first Flood, before Deucalion, and who was the ancient father of all gods and human beings after the Flood was properly called Noah. Then, before Deucalion, a man named Ogyges lived for seventy years before the Flood; [...] and the Latins give Janus Noah's own personal epithets [...]. Thus, Noah, Ogyges, and Janus are simultaneously the same person. But his proper name is Noah, because Ogyges, or Janus, and Proteus, who is Vertumnus, are only his appellations.²⁰

Noah represents the guardian of an ancient, prediluvian Jewish tradition—namely, that of the Chaldeans—that is more ancient than the Mosaic teachings and from which, in fact, the veracity of Moses's Genesis stems. Accordingly, as Annius declares, “it is not surprising that Berossus and Moses agree, since they drank from the same source.”²¹ The constellation of material evidence, public records, chronologies, and etymologies in Berossus's books lends historicity to Noah, purging him and his tradition of any mythological uncertainties and displacing, in a sense, both biblical and Greek authorities. By stressing Noah's historical authenticity, Annius also confirms the legitimacy and truthfulness

original text reads: “Ego in his meis scriptis pro patria et Italia, immo et Europa tota profit-eor. Ornatum vero et elegantiam non profiteor, sed solam et nudam veritatem.”

¹⁹ For the relevance of Berossus, see Walter Stephens, “*Berossus Chaldaeus: Counterfeit and Fictive Editors of Early Sixteenth Century*,” *Dissertation Abstracts International* 40 (1980): 1–24.

²⁰ Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII*, 104b–5a. The original text reads: “Nam qui praefuit primo diluvio ante Deucalionem annis septigentis, et pater antiquissimus deorum et hominum post diluvium, fuit nomine proprio dictus Noa. Porro ante Deucalionem annis septigentis praefuit diluvio Ogyges cognomine; [...] et ad idem Ianus epitheta propria Noae a latini tribuuntur [...]. Quare iidem et eodem tempore sunt Noa, Ogyges et Ianus. Sed Noa fuit proprium, Ogyges vero Ianus et Proteus id est Vertumnus sunt solum praenomina eius.”

²¹ Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII*, 107a. The original text reads: “Non est igitur mirum si Moyses et Berossus convenient, qui ex eodem fonte historiae combiberunt.”

of the knowledge that he taught to the Etruscans. Thus, he does not merely express a deep-rooted anti-Greek prejudice and extol the superiority of the Jewish historical tradition against the Greek one, but he also exalts an ancient Jewish sapiential tradition, a *prisca theologia* ("ancient theology"),²² by rejecting its Jewishness and conceiving it as both proto-Christian and a pre-figuration of the Roman Church: "I already dealt with the rest in the *Historia Hetrusca pontificia*, which I call 'pontifical' because it started with the *pontifex maximus* Noah, known as Janus, on the Vatican hill and returned once more subordinated to the pope and the Apostolic See."²³

The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century interest in historical chronologies and genealogies belongs to the Renaissance culture of antiquarianism. By fabricating texts and historical accounts as well as inscriptions and epigraphs, Annius's *Antiquitates* both satisfied the philological demand for ancient sources and pursued the theological and philosophical quest for the original sources of an ancient pre-Christian wisdom.²⁴ Although the *Antiquitates* soon came to be doubted, it is not surprising that Annius's account of Noah-Janus and his triumphal imagery of biblical-Etruscan mysteries became particularly popular as propaganda for legitimising political power and cultural supremacy

²² For the relationship between the Etruscan myth and *prisca theologia*, see Walter Stephens, "The Etruscans and the Ancient Theology in Annius of Viterbo," in *Umanesimo a Roma nel Quattrocento*, ed. Paolo Brezzi and Maristella de Panizza Lorch (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani; New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 309–22. For Marsilio Ficino's original concept of *prisca theologia*, which Annius revisited, see, among others, Michael J.B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* (Florence: Olschki, 1998), 1–49; Cesare Vasoli, "Da Giorgio Gemisto a Ficino: Nascita e metamorfosi della *prisca theologia*," in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Claudio Varese*, ed. Giorgio Cerboni Baiardi (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2001), 787–800; Vasoli, "Dalla pace religiosa alla *prisca theologia*," in *Firenze e il Concilio del 1439. Atti del convegno di studi (Firenze, 29 novembre–2 dicembre 1989)*, ed. Paolo Viti (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 3–25; Stéphane Toussaint, "Alexandrie à Florence: La Renaissance et sa *prisca theologia*," in *Alexandrie la divine*, ed. Charles Méla and Frédéric Möri (Geneva: Editions de la Baconnière, 2014), 2:971–90.

²³ Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII*, 152b. The original text reads: "Reliqua tractavimus in *Historia hetrusca pontificia*, quam iccirco pontificiam dicimus quod a pontifice maximo Noa qui et Ianus in Vaticano coepit, iterato ad pontificem maximum et sedem apostolicam subiecta redit." For the relationship between Annius and the papacy, in particular that of Alexander VI, see Giacomo Ferràù, "Riflessioni teoriche e prassi storiografica in Annio da Viterbo," in *Principato ecclesiastico e riuso dei classici: Gli umanisti e Alessandro VI. Atti del convegno (Bari, Monte Sant'Angelo, 22–24 maggio 2000)*, ed. Davide Canfora, Maria Chiabò, and Mauro De Nichilo (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2002), 151–93.

²⁴ For a partial discussion of this matter, see Nick Temple, "Heritage and Forgery: Annio da Viterbo and the Quest for the Authentic," *Public Archeology* 2 (2001): 151–62, <https://doi.org/10.1179/pua.2002.2.3.151>.

well beyond Viterbo. Especially in Florence, after the coronation of Cosimo de' Medici as duke of Tuscany in 1537, humanists belonging to the Accademia Fiorentina such Pier Francesco Giambullari (1495–1555) and Giambattista Gelli (1498–1563) promoted the myth of the city's biblical-Etruscan origins, stressing its independence and its cultural hegemony.²⁵ Similarly, the uniqueness of Florence's artistic production, as well as the superiority of the Florentine vernacular over the other vernaculars, was a dominant narrative among the humanists of the time, and the Etruscan myth, which Annius had contributed to spreading widely, encouraged these debates.²⁶

Among Jewish scholars, Azariah de' Rossi (ca. 1511–1578) selected and produced Hebrew translations of a wide range of authors and material from the 1554 Lyons edition of Annius's *Antiquitates* in his *Me'or Enayim* (*Light of the Eyes*) (1573–1575).²⁷ As Joanna Weinberg has stated, he "was no exception, nor was he the first or the last Jew to make use of the texts"²⁸ that Annius produced. In fact, before de' Rossi, Obadiah Sforno (ca. 1470–1550) had twice referred to Berossus when discussing Noah in his commentary on Genesis.²⁹ Like de' Rossi, Sforno appeals to Annius's *Antiquitates*. However, Annius's Christianisation of Jewish historical accounts creates a number of theoretical issues when shifting the perspective from Christian to Jewish scholars. Why did Jewish intellectuals use Annius's Christianising interpretations of Jewish history and the Jewish sapiential tradition, and why did they accept the authenticity of Annius's forgeries? In de' Rossi's case, Joanna Weinberg has suggested that the Annian

²⁵ See Hillard, "Mythic Origins, Mythic Archaeology," 489–528; Anne Moyer, "Historians and Antiquarians in Sixteenth-Century Florence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 177–93, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2003.0027>; Moyer, "Without Passion or Partisanship": Florentine Historical Writing in the Age of Cosimo I," in *History and Nation*, ed. Julia Rudolph (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 45–69; Mario Pozzi, "Mito aramaico-etrusco e potere assoluto a Firenze al tempo di Cosimo I," in *Le pouvoir monarchique et ses supports idéologiques aux XIV^e–XVII^e siècles*, ed. Jean Dufournet, Adelin Charles Fiorato, and Augustin Redondo (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1990), 65–76; and Schoonhoven, "A Literary Invention," 459–71.

²⁶ See Caroline S. Hillard, "Vasari and the Etruscan Manner," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 44 (2013): 1021–40; on language, see, for example, Lisa Saracco, "Un'apologia della *Hebraica veritas* nella Firenze di Cosimo I: Il *Dialogo in defensione della lingua thoscana* di Santi Marmochino O.P.," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 42 (2006): 215–46; Michael Sherberg, "The Accademia Fiorentina and the Question of the Language: The Politics of Theory in Ducal Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 56 (2003): 26–55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1262257>; and Paolo Simoncelli, *La lingua di Adamo: Guillaume Postel tra accademici e fuoriusciti fiorentini* (Florence: Olschki, 1984).

²⁷ See Weinberg, "Azariah de' Rossi and the Forgeries of Annius of Viterbo," 269.

²⁸ Weinberg, 258.

²⁹ Weinberg, 255–57.

fabrications “appealed to him because they could be used to emend or confirm Rabbinic tradition.”³⁰ Both Sforno and de’ Rossi intended their writings for a Jewish audience that was not necessarily familiar with the Latin text of Annius’s *Antiquitates*. It is therefore not difficult to imagine why, for example, de’ Rossi presents his arguments and sources as original and reliable in order to prove his arguments against the rabbinic authority.³¹ However, this is not the case for Abarbanel’s *Dialoghi d’amore*. In this text, we can trace the first employment of Annius’s forgeries by an Italian Jew for a Christian scholarly readership. Indeed, by writing his *Dialoghi* in the Italian vernacular,³² Judah addresses and challenges his Christian colleagues.³³ More specifically, I would argue that he employed the *Antiquitates* in order to engage with Christian scholars who could easily identify the *Dialoghi*’s references to Annius’s forgeries, as we will see in the next section. However, scholarship has not paid much attention to the *Antiquitates* as one of Judah’s essential sources and has thus failed to bring to light the role that its falsifications played in forging his philosophical identity.³⁴ Judah’s reading of the *Antiquitates* is thus an invaluable source for understanding the *Dialoghi* and the complex relationship between his philosophical project and the Christian intellectual production of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy.

³⁰ Weinberg, 268.

³¹ Weinberg, 269. For Azariah’s historical methods, see Salo W. Baron, “Emphases in Jewish History,” in *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses*, ed. Salo W. Baron (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 65–89; Baron, “Azariah de’ Rossi’s Historical Method,” in Baron, *History and Jewish Historians*, 205–39.

³² Here, I am referring to the theory that the *Dialoghi* was originally written in the Italian vernacular. See Barbara Garvin, “The Language of Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’amore*,” *Italia: Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli ebrei in Italia* 13–15 (2001): 181–210; James Nelson Novoa, “Appunti sulla genesi redazionale dei *Dialoghi d’amore* di Leone Ebreo alla luce della critica testuale attuale e la tradizione manoscritta del suo terzo dialogo,” *Quaderni d’italianistica* 30, no. 1 (2009): 45–66, <https://doi.org/10.33137/q.i.v30i1.8426>.

³³ This purpose clearly appears in both his *Dialoghi d’amore* and his Hebrew elegy *Telunah ‘al ha-Zeman* (*A Complaint against the Time*). For *Telunah ‘al ha-Zeman*, see Nahum Slousch, “Poésies hébraïques de Don Jehuda Abravanel (Messer Leone Ebreo),” *Revista de estudos hebreicos* 1 (1928): 1–22.

³⁴ François Secret was the first to notice that Judah had copied Annius while introducing the Noah-Janus couplet in his *Dialoghi*: see Secret, “Egidio da Viterbo et quelques-uns de ses contemporains,” *Augustiniana* 16 (1966): 377. Angela Guidi refers to Secret’s observation: see Guidi, *Amour et sagesse. Les Dialogues d’amour de Juda Abravanel dans la tradition salomonienne* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 135. A brief observation also appears in Damian Bacich, “Negotiating Renaissance Harmony: The First Spanish Translation of Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’amore*,” *Comitatus* 36 (2005): 136. I will further explore Judah’s Noah-Janus couplet in the next section.

3 Judah Abarbanel, Reader of Annius's *Antiquitates*: A Christian Source for an Ancient Jewish Tradition

Published posthumously in 1535, the *Dialoghi d'amore*,³⁵ a dialogical treatise on love composed of three dialogues, circulated widely among Christian scholars during the Cinquecento. After the *editio princeps*, sixteen editions of it were published in Italy between 1535 and 1607, and it was also soon translated into French, Spanish, Latin, and Hebrew.³⁶ Although it was mostly welcomed by the French, Spanish, and Italian Christian literati rather than by Jewish intellectuals, it is certainly true that Judah's work was an editorial success of the early modern period.³⁷ The details of the first publication are, however, quite scant. Although there is no clear evidence and the original manuscript is missing, we may presume that Judah wrote his *Dialoghi* in the Italian vernacular at the very beginning of the sixteenth century. The little we know places the drafting of the third dialogue between 1501 and 1512, depending on which

³⁵ In this article, all English translations from the Italian vernacular are my own. Unless otherwise specified, words or brief phrases enclosed in square brackets in the English translation have been added to clarify the English text. The critical edition of the Italian vernacular text used is Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. Delfina Giovannozzi (Rome: Laterza, 2008). For an alternative English translation, I have referred to Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, trans. Damian Bacich and Rossella Pescatori (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

³⁶ For a complete list of the Italian editions, see Carl Gebhardt, "Bibliographie," in Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore. Hebraische Gedichte. Herausgegeben mit einer Darstellung des Lebens und des Werkes Leones, Bibliographie, Register zu den Dialoghi [...] von Carl Gebhardt*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1929), 11–22. For the circulation of the *Dialoghi d'amore* in France, see Ulrich Köppen, *Die Dialoghi d'amore des Leone Ebreo in ihren französischen Übersetzungen: Buchgeschichte, Übersetzungstheorie und Übersetzungspraxis im 16. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979). For the Spanish circulation of the *Dialoghi*, see James Nelson Novoa, "An aljamiado version of Judah Abravanel's *Dialoghi d'amore*," *Materia giudaica* 8 (2003): 31–26; Nelson Novoa, *Los Diálogos de amor de León Hebreo en el marco sociocultural sefardí del siglo XVI* (Lisbon: Cátedra de Estudios Sefarditas Alberto Benveniste, 2006); Nelson Novoa, "From Incan Realm to Italian Renaissance: Garcilaso el Inca and his Translation of Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*," in *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carmine G. Di Biase (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 187–201. For the circulation of the text among the Jewish literati, see Guidi, *Amour et sagesse*, 34–42.

³⁷ For an overview, see Maria Vittoria Comacchi, "Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprova: La *renovatio* ficiiniana in un passo sulla creazione dei *Dialoghi d'amore* di Yehudah Abarbanel," *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 75, no. 3 (2020): *Dissenso ed eterodossia nel pensiero ebraico*, ed. Maria Vittoria Comacchi and Luigi Emilio Pischedda, 381–407, <https://doi.org/10.3280/SF2020-003002>.

manuscript we rely on as the manuscripts provide different dates.³⁸ In addition to this textual evidence, the manuscript tradition confirms that the work was already circulating in Italy—specifically, in Rome—in the second decade of the sixteenth century.³⁹

Accordingly, Judah might have read the 1498 first edition of Annius's *Antiquitates*, as he seems to show familiarity with it in the third dialogue at the point when the male character of the *Dialoghi*, Filone, explains the ancient theory of the cosmic cycles to Sofia, his disciple and beloved.⁴⁰ In this passage, Judah aims to demonstrate how ancient astrologers and theologians agree on the cosmological cyclic theory. He argues that the ancient astrologers supported their ideas about cosmic cycles by declaring themselves to be the heirs of an ancient Jewish wisdom; that is, a divine Adamic tradition.⁴¹

³⁸ For an updated history of all the manuscripts of the third dialogue and the issue regarding the date that occurs in the text, see Nelson Novoa, "Appunti sulla genesi redazionale dei *Dialoghi d'amore*," 45–66.

³⁹ On this issue, see Carlo Dionisotti, "Appunti su Leone Ebreo," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 2 (1959): 409–28; Vera Law, "Two More Arrighi Manuscripts Discovered," *The Book Collector* 27, no. 3 (1978): 370–79; and James Nelson Novoa, "A publicação dos *Diálogos de amor* de Leão Hebreu no contexto romano da primeira metade do século XVI," *Cadernos de estudos sefarditas* 6 (2006): 55–74.

⁴⁰ For the description of this theory in the *Dialoghi* and how it was developed by contemporary authors, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Yohanan Alemanno, and Isaac Abarbanel, see Brian Ogren, *The Beginning of the World in Renaissance Jewish Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). Marsilio Ficino was also familiar with this kabbalistic theory: see Guido Bartolucci, "Il *De christiana religione* di Marsilio Ficino e le 'prime traduzioni' di Flavio Mitridate," *Rinascimento* 46 (2008): 345–55. For an analysis of the philosophical context in which Judah situates this theory, see Comacchi, "Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprova," 381–407.

⁴¹ On the supposedly Adamic origin of any true wisdom as an attempt to "Judaise" Marsilio Ficino's *prisca theologia*, see Brian Ogren, "Leone Ebreo on *prisca sapientia*: Jewish Wisdom and the Textual Transmission of Knowledge," in *Umanesimo e cultura ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano. Convegno internazionale di studi* (Firenze, 10 marzo 2016), ed. Stefano U. Baldassarri and Fabrizio Lelli (Florence: Pontecorbo, 2017), 181–94. For an interpretation of this line of transmission in the *Dialoghi*, its sources, and Judah's idea of *prisca theologia* more generally, see Maria Vittoria Comacchi, "Yehudah Abravanel e l'eredità di Marsilio Ficino. La 'teologale sapienza' e il divino Platone," *Filosofia italiana* 15, no. 1 (2020): *Filosofia ebraica in Italia (XV–XIX secolo)*, ed. Guido Bartolucci, Michela Torbidoni, and Libera Pisano, 53–72, <https://doi.org/10.4399/97888255346344>. For *prisca theologia* among Jewish scholars, see Moshe Idel, "Prisca theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments," in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J.B. Allen, Valery Rees, and Martin Davies (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 137–58; Abraham Melamed, "The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Philosophy in the Renaissance: From Aristotle to Plato," *Jewish History* 26 (2012): 41–59, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10835-012-9156-4>.

Its antiquity thus certifies its legitimacy. Filone declares that this wisdom had been transmitted as an oral tradition from Adam to Enoch, Noah, Shem, Eber, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Levi, and thence to the kabbalists. Introducing this tradition, Judah emphasises Noah's central role in transmitting this wisdom as he taught both his son Shem and Abraham. As a matter of fact, he states that Abraham received this archaic wisdom from Shem and his descendant Heber, but that he also *saw* (*vidde*) Noah. The insistence on the antiquity of this oral tradition is of considerable consequence since Judah seems to separate it from the Mosaic account of the creation. The overt chronological framework from Adam to the kabbalists gives the primordial Jewish tradition a historical legitimacy that is in agreement with the Mosaic story, but independent of it. However, the chronological priority of the Adamic wisdom does not displace the Mosaic authority. On the contrary, as Filone says, Moses authenticated the Adamic tradition, which was received through a face-to-face divine revelation, writing it accurately and verifying it in the Torah:

[Sofia]: This coincidence [of theology] with astrology is a good demonstration [of the validity of this cosmic theory]. But tell me, did these astrologers receive this theory through their reason only, or through an authentic teaching?

[Filone]: I have already told you that [the astrologers] believe they are supported by reason when they say that the world is corruptible. But besides astrological evidence, it will be difficult [for us] to find any philosophical reasons due to limited time. However, both [astrologers and theologians] say that they received [this theory] through a divine teaching, not only from Moses, who gave us the Law, but from the first Adam. This teaching was an oral and unwritten tradition, called "Kabbalah" in Hebrew, which means "reception," and it was transmitted to the savant Enoch, and from Enoch to the famous Noah, who after the Flood was called Janus because he invented wine. Indeed, "Janus" means "wine" in Hebrew. And they represent him with two faces turned away from each other, because he lived before and after the Flood. He handed down this tradition, along with many other human and divine stories, to the wisest of his sons, Shem, and to his descendant, Eber. [Shem and Eber] were teachers of Abraham, whom his forefather and master Eber called "the Jew." Also, Abraham saw Noah, who died when Abraham was fifty-nine years old. Some say that this tradition from Abraham and his successors Isaac, Jacob, and Levi was transmitted to the Jewish savants called "kabbalists," who say that Moses, [who received] this tradition by means of divine revelation,

confirmed it not only orally, but also by writing the Holy Scripture, using proper and credible verifications in many passages.⁴²

Similarly, in his *Antiquitates*, Annius argues that according to Berosus's *Defloratio chaldaica*, Adam wrote the first history of the world after receiving it from God by revelation, and that Adam then transmitted the history of creation to Enoch, Enoch transmitted it to Lamech, and eventually Lamech transmitted it to Noah, who taught it to the Chaldeans. Accordingly, the Chaldean historical tradition, which posits the common antediluvian origin of Italy, Europe, and, to a certain extent, the Mediterranean,⁴³ predates the Mosaic narrative of the Jewish people. It is thus historically independent of Moses. In Annius's view, there is a striking similarity between Moses's books and the Chaldean accounts since Moses used the Chaldean documents as a historical source when writing the book of Genesis:

And Hieronymus rightly says that Moses followed [the Chaldeans in tracing the history from Adam to Abraham. And, as others believe, the Chaldeans acquired this historical account from the history of Adam. Adam was the first to write] about the world and its creation after receiving it by means of revelation and weaving the history of humankind up to Enoch, whom he left to continue the history. Then Enoch left Lamech, the father of the prophet Noah, to continue [writing it] and Lamech [left it to]

⁴² Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 235–36. The Italian vernacular text reads: "SOFIA. Non è poca dimostrazione questa concordanza d'astrologia. Ma dimmi, questi astrologi hanno avuto questo per ragione solamente o per disciplina autentica? FILONE. Già t'ho detto che a porre il mondo corruttibile credono essere accompagnati da ragione; ma ne la limitazione de' tempi, oltra l'astrologica evidenzia difficile saria trovar ragione filosofica. Ma l'uno e l'altro dicono avere per divina disciplina, non solamente da Moises, datore de la legge divina, ma fin dal primo Adam: dal quale per tradizione a bocca, la quale non si scrivea, chiamata in lingua ebraica *caballà* (che vuol dire 'recezione'), venne al sapiente Enoc e da Enoc al famoso Noè; il quale di poi del diluvio per sua invenzione del vino fu chiamato Iano, perché Iano in ebraico vuol dire vino, e il dippingono con due faccie riverse, perché ebbe vita innanzi il diluvio e di poi. Costui lassò questa, con molte altre notizie divine e umane, al più sapiente de' figliuoli, Sem, e al suo pronepote Eber, li quali furono maestri di Abraam, chiamato *ebreo* da Eber, suo proavo e maestro; e ancora egli vidde Noè, il qual morì essendo Abraam di cinquantanove anni. Da Abraam per successione di Isac e di Iacob e di Levi venne la tradizione, secondo dicono, a li sapienti degli Ebrei chiamati *cabalisti*: li quali da Moisè dicono per revelazione divina esser confirmata non solamente a bocca, ma nelle Sacre Scritture in diversi luoghi significata con proprie e verisimili verificazioni" (emphasis in original). For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 238–39.

⁴³ See Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII*, 104b–5a.

his son Noah. After the Flood, Noah thus left the Chaldeans [to continue it]. Abraham and the others wrote the truth about the history of humankind [having received it] from the Chaldeans. As Josephus claims against the grammarian Apion and in the first book of his *Jewish Antiquities*, the Phoenician Maseas and the Egyptian Hieronymus cite Moses as a witness of the Chaldaic tradition, since ancient Chaldaic history is very similar to Jewish history. Thus, it is not surprising that Berossus and Moses agree, since they drank from the same source.⁴⁴

Judah's Adamic tradition jibes with Annius's ancient Chaldaic history. However, Judah strives to stress its status as an ancient wisdom rather than a historical account, although, like Annius in his *Antiquitates*, Judah implies a historical foundation in order to demonstrate the chronological antiquity of Jewish wisdom. Also, in Judah's work, the Adamic tradition does not turn into a Mosaic tradition because Moses followed the Chaldeans in narrating the history of the world and humankind, but rather because Moses confirmed it, producing irrefutable evidence.⁴⁵ The postulate, far from displacing Moses's authority, enables Judah to distinguish an oral revealed tradition from one that is not only revealed face-to-face, but also verified, and written. Without any intention of doubting Moses's authority, Judah therefore emphasises the strength of his prophetic and scriptural voice.

If we keep these differences between Judah and Annius in mind, Judah's Adamic line and his explanation of the cosmic cycles seem to bear more than a passing resemblance to his father Isaac Abarbanel's (1437–1508/9) *Mif'ilot*

⁴⁴ Nanni, 106b–107a. The original text reads: “Et ideo non immerito Moyses dicitur a Hieronymo sequutus [Caldeos, ab Adam usque ad Habraam. Et, ut alii existimant, hii Caldei tenuerunt ex historia Adae, quia Adam scripsit pri]mus ex revelatione de mundi atque sui creatione, et texuit historiam gestorum usque ad Enoch cui prosequendam reliquit historiam. Enoch autem prosequendam reliquit Lamech prophetae patri Noae, et Lamech filio eidem Noae. Noa vero reliquit post diluvium Chaldaeis, a quibus Habraam et residui veritatem rerum gestarum scripserunt. Unde cum historia Chaldaica de antiquitatibus quam simillima est Hebraeae ac propterea Moyses pro teste adducitur a Masea phoenice et Hieronymo egyptio, ut asserit Iosephus contra Appionem grammaticum et in primo *De antiquitate iudaica*. Non est igitur mirum si Moyses et Berossus convenient, qui ex eodem fonte historiae combiberunt.” The long passage enclosed in square brackets in the Latin text and the English translation is an interpolation from the *editio princeps* of Annius's *Antiquitates* (see Nanni, *Commentaria fratris Ioannis Viterbiensis*, O3a.). The passage is missing in the 1512 and 1515 editions.

⁴⁵ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 235–36. The Italian vernacular text reads: “Da Moisè dicono per revelazione divina esser confirmata non solamente a bocca, ma nelle Sacre Scritture in diversi luoghi significata con proprie e verisimili verificazioni.” For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 239.

Elohim (Deeds of God) (ca. 1499) rather than to Annius's *Antiquitates*.⁴⁶ Isaac was a well-known biblical exegete and intellectual, and *Mif 'alot Elohim* outlines an Adamic line of wisdom, tracing the origin of Moses's assumptions about the world's creation back to Adam himself. Questioning whether the world was created, Isaac claims that Moses received this belief from Qehat, a disciple of Jacob, who heard it from Noah's son Shem, who learned it from Methuselah, who received it directly from Adam.⁴⁷ Although Judah knew his father's oeuvre, Moshe Idel has suggested the kabbalist Shem Tov ben Shem Tov (ca. 1390–1440) or medieval philosophers such as Judah ha-Levi (ca. 1075–1141) and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (ca. 1225–1295) as common sources for both Isaac and Judah.⁴⁸ Yet might Judah at least have had Annius's *Antiquitates* in mind, rather than only medieval Jewish texts or his father's work? Annius offers a model for giving historical legitimacy not only to Noah, but also to the religious belief of the creation of the world out of nothing. Even more importantly, the Dominican friar seems to be the first, as Walter Stephens points out, "to emphasize the role of the antediluvian Patriarchs in transmitting the *prisca sapientia* from its divine source to the more recent of the ancients."⁴⁹ Although we should spot some differences between Annius and Judah regarding their perception of Moses's authority and their description of the tradition, whether oral or written, it is worth recognising that Judah is astute enough to invoke Annius's authority in his *Dialoghi* in order to legitimise the chronological superiority of Jewish wisdom.

This passage of the *Dialoghi* may nevertheless be alternatively read as referring to the *Antiquitates iudaicae (Jewish Antiquities)* by the first-century Roman Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (ca. 37–100) rather than to Annius's *Antiquitates*. Specifically, in the first book of his *Antiquitates*, Josephus introduces Noah's life and provides details of the Flood in order to apologetically confirm the historicity of the Noachian account and thus the Jewish lineage of all the nations. The fact that Judah's father Isaac used a Latin translation of Flavius Josephus and a medieval Hebrew version of his works known as the *Sefer Josippon (Book of Joseph)*⁵⁰ in his commentaries and writings may perhaps

⁴⁶ On this tradition in Isaac's *Mif 'alot Elohim*, see Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280–1510: A Survey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 164–73. On Isaac's theory of cosmic cycles, see Brian Ogren, "La questione dei cicli cosmici nella produzione pugliese di Yiṣḥaq Abravanel," *Itinerari di ricerca storica* 20/21 (2006): 141–61.

⁴⁷ To read this passage of *Mif 'alot Elohim*, see Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 171.

⁴⁸ See Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 164–73.

⁴⁹ Stephens, "The Etruscans and the Ancient Theology," 318.

⁵⁰ This book is a summarised chronicle of Josephus's *Antiquitates iudaicae* and Pseudo Hegesippus's *De excidio hierosolymitano (On the Destruction of Jerusalem)*. For Isaac, see

point to a reference to Josephus's oeuvre in the *Dialoghi*. Despite some controversial issues in Josephus's work, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the *Sefer Josippon* retained its central role among Jewish readers as a compendium of information proving the superiority of Jewish erudition and history.⁵¹ More broadly, Josephus was one of the most published ancient historians in Latin Renaissance Europe, and he was employed in various capacities by the Christian literati, who found his works to be linguistically accessible, a significant historical source for biblical narratives, and a potential buttress against Josephus's co-religionists.⁵² For example, Annius himself relies extensively on Josephus's works as a historiographical model, and he names the Jewish historian more than any other author.⁵³ For our purposes, suffice it to say that in the *Antiquitates*'s passage on the Flood and the epithets of Noah, Annius

Michael Avioz, "The Place of Josephus in Abravanel's Writings," *Hebrew Studies* 60 (2019): 357–74, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hbr.2019.0001>. Yitzhak F. Baer has stated that Isaac was the first Jewish author to read Latin translations of Josephus's works: see Baer, "Don Isaac Abravanel and His Relationship to Problems of History and State" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 8 (1937): 241–59. However, Nadia Zeldes has recently shown that they were known to other Jewish scholars in Italy and Spain from before Isaac's time, such as Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol (ca. 1452–1528); see Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance: Christians, Jews, and the Hebrew Sefer Josippon* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 93–118.

- 51 On this matter, see Saskia Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption des Sefer Yosippon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 11–36, 93–118. For the debate around the reference to Jesus as the Messiah in the *Sefer Josippon* and the *Testimonium Flavianum*, see, among others, Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist According to Flavius Josephus' Recently Rediscovered "Capture of Jerusalem" and the Other Jewish and Christian Sources*, trans. Alexander Haggerty Krappé (London: Methuen, 1931), 93–112; Abraham A. Neuman, "A Note on John the Baptist and Jesus in *Josippon*," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23, no. 2 (1950/51): 137–49; Alice Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus: The Testimonium Flavianum Controversy from Late Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Antony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg "I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue." *Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2011), 203–9.
- 52 For Josephus's Christian reception, see Daniel Stein Kokin, "The Josephan Renaissance: Flavius Josephus and His Writings in Italian Humanist Discourse," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 47, no. 2. (2016): 205–48, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.5.11232>. For the reception of the *Sefer Josippon* among Christians, see Guido Bartolucci, "Marsilio Ficino e le origini della cabala cristiana," in *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, ed. Fabrizio Lelli (Florence: Olschki, 2014), 510–53; Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 37–92, 119–38. For the medieval reception, see Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); and Schreckenberg, *Rezeptionsgeschichtliche und textkritische Untersuchungen zu Flavius Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).
- 53 For an overview, see, among others, Grafton, "Invention of Traditions and Traditions of Invention in Renaissance Europe," 8–38; Stephens, "The Etruscans and the Ancient Theology," 309–22; Fubini, "Lebraismo nei riflessi della cultura umanistica," 291–331.

clearly draws his statements from Josephus's account, as confirmed by the specific distinction he recognises between Noah and Deucalion. More generally, Walter Stephens has noted the fundamental role played by Josephus's opposition between Jews and Gentiles in Annius's work. Annius strengthens this opposition and also the idea that the antiquity of the Jewish nation guarantees its superiority over the Greek culture, although—as I have suggested—he does Christianise the Jewish tradition.⁵⁴

While it is certainly possible that Judah was familiar with both either the *Antiquitates iudaicae* or the *Sefer Josippon* and his father's oeuvre, they do not seem an exact fit in this context. In the aforementioned passage of the *Dialoghi*, the ancient narratives that Judah ascribed to Adam and the kabbalists are in perfect agreement with Moses's account of the world's creation. Despite Judah's claims that the Mosaic revelation and verification confirm the ancient Jewish Adamic tradition, this archaic wisdom was independent of it. This brings us back to Annius's *Antiquitates* as the main source here, although Judah and Annius hold divergent opinions regarding Moses's authority.

Besides, the specific reference to Noah as Janus in the *Dialoghi d'amore* very clearly shows that Judah translated the passage from Annius's *Antiquitates*. While describing the Adamic line of transmission, Filone conflates the biblical patriarch Noah with the pagan god Janus. In Filone's own words, the reason Noah was called Janus is that after the Flood, he discovered wine, the Hebrew word for which is *yayin*. Filone then corroborates this argument regarding the correspondence between Janus and Noah by stating that Janus was usually depicted as a two-faced god, indicating Noah's two lives, one before the Flood and one after it:

This teaching was an oral and unwritten tradition, called "Kabbalah" in Hebrew, which means "reception," and it was transmitted to the savant Enoch, and from Enoch to the famous Noah, who, after the Flood was called Janus because he invented wine. Indeed, "Janus" means "wine" in Hebrew. And they represent him with two faces turned away from each other, because he lived before and after the Flood.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See Stephens, "The Etruscans and the Ancient Theology," 309–22.

⁵⁵ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 235. The Italian vernacular text reads: "Venne [...] al famoso Noè; il quale di poi del diluvio per sua invenzione del vino fu chiamato Iano, perché Iano in ebraico vuol dire vino, e il dipingono con due faccie reverse, perché ebbe vita innanzi il diluvio e di poi." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 238.

There are some references to Janus in the *Sefer Josippon*, and several Jewish scholars, including Isaac, also elaborate further on the Janus myth. While acknowledging Janus as the first king of Italy, the *Sefer Josippon* nevertheless conflates him with the biblical figure of Zepho, son of Eliphaz.⁵⁶ In the *Dialoghi*, the distinctive etymology of the name Janus and the different historical account of Noah-Janus, who taught his successors many other divine and human *notizie* ("stories"), prove that here, Judah is emulating none other than Annius's etymology, which we can read as follows:

In the end, Berossus imparts the reasons for the three epithets, Noah, Cam, and Tythea. Regarding Noah, [Berossus] says that he was called Janus, an epithet derived from the word *yayin*, which means "wine" in Aramaic and Hebrew, because Janus produced wine and was fond of it because he was the first who invented and drank it, as Berossus says. [Likewise,] both Propertius and Moses make it known to us [respectively] in an aforementioned text and in chapter ix of his Genesis, where Moses also names Janus after *yayin* [which means] "wine."⁵⁷

Judah's interpretation of Noah as Janus thus confirms that he references the *Antiquitates* in his *Dialoghi*. Paradoxically, he repeats a Christian mytho-historical theory in order to reinforce a larger Jewish paradigm. His contemporaries were undoubtedly able to identify a reference to Annius's forgeries in the aforementioned passage of the *Dialoghi*. As shown in the second section of this article, the friar's text circulated widely among Christian scholars from the end of the fifteenth century. What emerges from this quotation, therefore, is Judah's intention to challenge his Christian contemporaries' canonical view of a proto-Christian Jewish history and sapiential tradition by adopting a critical approach to the reading of a well-known Christian source. However, Judah's ability to rework Annius's *Antiquitates* challenges conventional Christianising interpretations of the Jewish tradition, as well as the Jewish tradition itself, revealing the extent to which Judah echoed, reinterpreted, and adapted various

⁵⁶ For the accounts of Zepho-Janus, see Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 93–118.

⁵⁷ Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII*, 115a. The original text reads: "Hoc ultimo loco Berossus de tribus cognominibus rationes tradit Noa, Cam et Tythea. De Noa dicit quod fuit illi tributum cognomen Ianus a Iain quod apud Arameos et Hebraeos sonat vinum; a quo Ianus id est vinifer et vinosus, quia primus vinum invenit et ineptius est, ut dicit Berossus et supra insinuavit Propertius et item Moyses *Genesis* cap. ix, ubi etiam Iain vinum Iani nominat."

ideas that fostered philosophical debates between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as I will discuss in the next section.

4 Questioning the Ancient Jewish Tradition in the *Dialoghi d'amore*

It is obvious that Judah employed Annius's *Antiquitates* to prove the superiority of the Jewish tradition. What is more, he digested it in order to bring about a philosophical renewal of this tradition. In other words, he was a willing defender of the Jewishness of the Jewish wisdom that was proto-Christianised by Christian authors like Annius, yet at the same time, he expanded the Jewish sapiential tradition by including a philosopher among the more recent of the Jewish ancients. By doing so, he not only challenged his Christian contemporaries, but also, somewhat unexpectedly, questioned any Jewish tradition that could not be verified by means of reason and intellect. A broader analysis of the theoretical framework in which Judah includes the quotation from Annius might show his critical stance towards the Jewish tradition more clearly.

Judah introduces the Adamic line when Filone tells Sofia about the ancient theory of cosmic cycles in order to demonstrate the agreement between Plato and Moses on the world's creation. It is precisely this context that assists us in situating Judah's elaboration of his source, while also helping us to understand how he revised the concept of the Jewish tradition. While recounting the kabbalistic theory of cosmic cycles, Judah introduces his readers to the idea of *scemita* (*šemittah*) and *iobel* (*yovel*). In this passage, he introduces the cyclical temporal process of the *šemittot*: every seven thousand years, the end of an epoch marks the dissolution and re-composition of the earthly or sublunar world. Then, according to Judah, in the fifty thousandth year, after seven *šemittot*, the entire universe, including the heavens, collapses and everything material degenerates once more into prime matter or Chaos before the renewed world begins again. This is the cycle of *yovel*:

[Theologians] say that [Moses's Holy Scripture] means seven revolutions of the inferior world in forty-nine thousand years, and that [God] communicates the divine ideas in the universal Chaos and recreates the whole universe. [...] They say that "the earth" means "Chaos," which Jews, Chaldeans, and other Gentiles in fact used to call "earth." And this means that Chaos must sprout generative things for six thousand years, and that [it] will rest in the seven thousandth year, when all things are mixed up together and lose any individual property. [...] Moses calls this seventh year *šemittah*, which means "dissolution." This means that the properties

of all things dissolve in the seven thousandth year, and all things return to the first Chaos. This *šemittah*, therefore, is like Saturday among the weekdays. [...] When seven *šemittot*, which correspond to forty-nine thousand years, have passed, the fiftieth year of *yovel*, which means “jubilee” in Latin and a return [to the original Chaos] once more, will necessarily come. [...] And [theologians] say that this jubilee means the fifty thousandth year in which the whole universe, both the heavenly one and the inferior one, will be renewed.⁵⁸

A careful reading of this passage shows significant details that confirm that Judah is alluding to the kabbalistic theory of cosmic cycles in order to justify the problematic issue of the Platonic prime matter: “Because Chaos is the eternal mother, we say that her sprouting [...] is eternal. This means that the inferior world is perpetually renewed every seven thousand years, whereas the heavens [are renewed] every fifty thousand years, when everything is renewed.”⁵⁹ Obviously, the Platonic theory implicitly negates the conventional religious belief that God created the entire universe out of nothing. Suffice it to say here that Judah makes Plato a disciple of ancient theologians who believed in the corruptibility of the inferior world every seven thousand years. By doing so, he seeks to put Plato’s beliefs—even those in contrast with traditional theology—in line with Adamic wisdom, and thus with Moses, whose

58 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 236–37. The Italian vernacular text reads: “Dicono che significa le sette rivoluzioni del mondo inferiore in quarantanove milia anni, e la nuova comunicazione delle idee divine ne l'universo caos e nella recreazione di tutto l'universo. [...] Dicono significare la terra il caos, il quale gli Ebrei sogliono chiamare terra, e ancora li Caldei e altri gentili; e significa che 'l caos debbe essere in germinazione de le cose generabili sei milia anni e il settimo riposare con tutte le cose confuse comunemente senza proprietà alcuna [...]. [...] onde chiama questo settimo anno *scemita*, che vuol dire *relassazione*, che significa la relassazione de le proprietà de le cose nel settimo migliaro d'anni e la sua redizione nel caos primo, e questa *scemita* è come il sabbato ne' giorni de la settimana. [...] quando saranno passate sette *scemita*, che sono quarantanove milia anni, si debba fare il quinquagesimo anno *iobel*, che in latino vuol dire iubileo, e redizione ancora [...]. [...] di sorte che in quell'anno le cose passate erano estinte, e principiava mondo nuovo per cinquanta anni, come il passato; il qual iubileo dicono che significa il quinquagesimo migliaro anno, nel quale tutto il mondo si rinnova, così il celeste come l'inferiore” (emphasis in original). For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 239–40.

59 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 233. The Italian vernacular text reads: “Essendo il caos eterna madre, la germinazion sua [...] poniamo eterna, cioè infinite volte successivamente l'inferiore di sette in sette milia anni, e il celeste con tutto che si rinnovi di cinquanta in cinquanta milia anni.” For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 236–37.

revelation confirms the Adamic tradition: “The ancient theologians before Plato, of whom he was a disciple, already said that the inferior world collapses and is renewed every seven thousand years.”⁶⁰ In the ensuing lines, Judah turns more specifically to the problematic explanation of God’s production of the eternal Chaos by juxtaposing Mosaic and Platonic narratives and conflating Plato’s philosophy with Moses’s revelation:⁶¹ “I like seeing you making Plato Mosaic and placing him among the kabbalists.”⁶²

By framing Plato in the field of the faithful (*fidi*) and mooring his philosophy, specifically his theory of the world’s creation, within the ancient Jewish tradition, Judah maintains that he is a follower or imitator of the Jewish elders, and thus of Moses. This could seem a rather negative designation if we do not read emulation as a value within the philosophico-theological and philological antiquarianism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Plato’s discipleship is indeed proof of his superiority over the corrupted degeneration of the present:

On the contrary, Plato, since he learned from the elders in Egypt, could hear more [than Aristotle], even if [his discipleship] did not allow him to grasp the hidden principle of the supreme wisdom or the first beauty. Thus, he made the supreme wisdom the second principle of the universe, dependent on the supreme God, the first principle of all things.⁶³

In particular, Plato’s affiliation with the antediluvian Jewish nation represents a means of counterattack against false theories and philosophies, such as the Peripatetics’ beliefs regarding the eternity of the universe. After clarifying the coincidence between Plato and Moses on the issue of the primordial Chaos, Sofia asks Filone whether Plato’s philosophical arguments can better resolve Aristotelians’ incorrect statements on this matter. Her question is designed to shift the attention from revelation to philosophical discourse. By maintaining

⁶⁰ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d’amore*, 232. The Italian vernacular text reads: “Già li teologi più antichi di Platone, de’ quali lui fu discepolo, dicono che ’l mondo inferiore si corrompe e rinnova di sette in sette milia anni.” For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 236.

⁶¹ See Comacchi, “Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprova,” 381–407.

⁶² Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d’amore*, 238. The Italian vernacular text reads: “Mi piace vederti fare Platone mosaico e del numero de’ cabalisti.” For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 241.

⁶³ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d’amore*, 330. The Italian vernacular text reads: “Ma Platone, avendo da li vecchi in Egitto imparato, poté più oltre sentire, se ben non valse a vedere l’ascoso principio de la somma sapienzia o prima bellezza, e fece quella secondo principio de l’universo, dependente dal sommo Dio, primo principio di tutte le cose.” For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 325.

the authority of tradition, to which he anchors the origins of Plato's philosophy, and the verified Mosaic revelation, which confirms the ancient Jewish wisdom and Plato alike, Judah revises the Adamic-Mosaic tradition itself. Accordingly, by excavating the lowest layers of Greek philosophy down to its deepest roots, he proceeds to build a philosophical wisdom, or rather a sapiential philosophy. This strategy, which alludes to Marsilio Ficino's *docta religio* ("erudite religion") or *pia philosophia* ("pious philosophy"),⁶⁴ entails positing Plato—once provided with legitimising Jewish origins—not only as the most recent of the truthful ancient theologians, but also and above all as the culmination of the ancient Jewish wisdom. The reason for this is that Plato's philosophy is nothing but a philosophised version of the antediluvian wisdom. It is indeed a theological wisdom, as Plato was the last of the ancient theologians, and for this reason, his philosophy corresponds completely to the Mosaic Law: "I remain a follower of Moses [following] the theological wisdom, because I embrace this second path [i.e., the Platonic path] as it is truly the Mosaic theology."⁶⁵ In his discussion of the world's creation, Judah thereby enhances the appeal and credibility of both Jewish wisdom and Plato's philosophy in response to the contemporaneous Neoplatonic debate and against the false Peripatetic theory regarding the eternity of the world. Following Plato means being a true follower of Moses, because the Platonic way is based on reason and intellect and does not depend upon the mere authority of the ancients. One need only look at the beginning of the conversation between Filone and Sofia on the prime matter to see how Judah turns a received sapiential authority into a philosophical wisdom that can be fully grasped and verified:

[Sofia]: Has the ancient adage that nothing can be made out of nothing been supported for any other reason than its having been approved and acknowledged by the ancients?

[Filone]: If there had been no other reason for supporting it, it would not have been acknowledged and approved by so many excellent ancients.

⁶⁴ On this matter, see Cesare Vasoli, "Ficino e la 'pia philosophia,'" in *L'Italia letteraria e l'Europa. Atti del convegno internazionale (Aosta, 20–23 ottobre 1997)*, vol. 2, *Dal Rinascimento all'Illuminismo*, ed. Nino Borsellino and Bruno Germano (Rome: Salerno, 2003): 129–49; Vasoli, "Ficino, la religione e i 'profeti' (1474–1482)," in *Laurentia Laurus. Per Mario Martelli*, ed. Francesco Bausi and Vincenzo Fera (Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici, 2004), 287–312.

⁶⁵ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 329. The Italian vernacular text reads: "Come ch'io sia mosaico ne la teologale sapienzia, m'abbraccio con questa seconda via, però che è veramente teologia mosaica." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 325.

[Sofia]: Tell me the reason, and let us abandon the authority of the ancients.

[Filone]: I will tell you [...] and you will see the reason why Plato was compelled to say not only that the world was made new out of nothing, but also that Chaos and the matter of the world were produced out of eternity by the supreme creator.⁶⁶

In sum, in his reading of Annius's *Antiquitates*, Judah seeks to vindicate the superiority of the Jewish sapiential tradition, which he can declare to be excellent thanks to its historical antiquity. However, Greek philosophy, which is conceived as comprehensively modern in authors like Annius, Isaac, or Flavius Josephus, is not always opposed to the Jewish revealed wisdom in the *Dialoghi*. On the contrary, Plato's newness, which is rooted in the Adamic-Mosaic tradition, unquestionably strengthens the ancient wisdom by means of reason and intellect. Before Judah, Marsilio Ficino incorporated the coincidence between philosophy and sacred religion into his ambitious programme of vigorous religious and philosophical *renovatio* ("reform").⁶⁷ Judah thus joins this debate and demonstrates a willingness to propose an alternative interpretation of the agreement between Moses and Plato from a Jewish perspective. Despite the differences, it is reasonable to attribute Judah's paradigm to Ficino's model of *pia philosophia*:

66 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 228. The Italian vernacular text reads: "SOFIA. Ha questo detto antico, che di niente nulla si fa, altra forza di ragione ch'essere approvato e concesso dagli antichi? FILONE. Se altra forza di ragion non avesse, non sarebbe così concesso e approvato da tanti eccellenti antichi. SOFIA. Di' quella, e lassiamo l'autorità de' vecchi. FILONE. Io tel dirò [...] e vedrai una ragione, qual costrinse Platone a porre non solamente il mondo di nuovo fatto, ma ancora il caos, e materia del mondo, *ab eterno* prodotto dal sommo creatore." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 232. For the production of prime matter out of eternity as an ontological state and not from eternity as a temporal condition, see Ogren, *The Beginning of the World in Renaissance Jewish Thought*, 218. For the *Argumentum in Timaeum*, the Ficinian source from which Judah draws material for his explanation of prime matter, see Comacchi, "Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprova," 381–407.

67 For Ficino's programme of *renovatio*, see Cesare Vasoli, "Il mito dei *prisci theologi* come ideologia della *renovatio*," in Vasoli, *Quasi sit Deus. Studi su Marsilio Ficino* (Lecce: Conte Editore, 1999), 11–50; Vasoli, "Dalla pace religiosa alla *prisca theologia*," 3–25; Vasoli, "Marsilio Ficino e la sua *renovatio*," in *Marsilio Ficino. Fonti, testi, fortuna. Atti del convegno internazionale* (Firenze, 1–3 ottobre 1999), ed. Sebastiano Gentile and Stéphane Toussaint (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006), 1–24; and Toussaint, "Alexandrie à Florence," 971–90.

Divine providence has decreed that many who are wrong-headed and unwilling to yield to the authority of divine law alone will at least accept those arguments of the Platonists which fully reinforce the claims of religion; and that irreligious men who divorce the study of philosophy from sacred religion will come to realize that they are making the same sort of mistake as someone who divorces love of wisdom from respect for that wisdom, or who separates true understanding from the will to do what is right.⁶⁸

5 Conclusion

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as a result of the political emancipation of German Jewry and the subsequent fear of assimilation into the dominant Christian culture, the German Jewish movement known as the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* declared the need for a new academic discipline, Jewish philosophy.⁶⁹ These German Jewish scholars conceived Jewish philosophy as the result of a critical investigation into the Jewish intellectual tradition. In the *Wissenschaft's* manifesto (1818), its author, Leopold Zunz, stressed the importance of achieving a historical awareness of the Jewish intellectual

68 Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, trans. Michael J.B. Allen, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1:11. The original text reads: "Hoc providentia divina decretum, ut et perversa multorum ingenia, quae soli divinae legis auctoritati haud facile cedunt, platonicis saltem rationibus religioni admodum suftagantibus acquiescant et quicumque philosophiae studium impie nimium a sancta religione seiungunt, agnoscant aliquando se non alirer aberrare quam si quis vel amorem sapientiae a sapientiae ipsis honore vel intellegentiam veram a recta voluntate disiunxerit" (Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 1:10).

69 The creation of Jewish philosophy as an academic subject has engaged scholars, at least in the last two centuries, in discussions that are still ongoing regarding the nature and even the very historical existence of a Jewish philosophy. See, for example, Raphael Jospe, "Jewish Particularity from Ha-Levi to Kaplan: Implications for Defining Jewish Philosophy," in *Paradigms in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Raphael Jospe (London: Associated University Press, 1997), 115–27; Daniel H. Frank, "What Is Jewish Philosophy?", in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1997), 1–8; Josef Stern, "What Is Jewish Philosophy? A View from the Middle Ages," in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies* 2017, ed. Bill Rebiger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 185–204; Dirk Westerkamp, "Quaestio sceptica disputata de philosophia iudeorum: Is There a Jewish Philosophy?", in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies* 2018, ed. Bill Rebiger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 3–14. For a bibliography on this issue, see Maria Vittoria Comacchi and Luigi Emilio Pischedda, "Prefazione," *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 75, no. 3 (2020): *Dissenso ed eterodossia nel pensiero ebraico*, ed. Maria Vittoria Comacchi and Luigi Emilio Pischedda, 367–79, <https://doi.org/10.3280/SF2020-003001>.

tradition.⁷⁰ As Giuseppe Veltri suggests, the premise of Zunz's declaration is "to identify Jewish philosophers in a historical sense—within the axes of time and place—and to situate their scientific knowledge amidst other contemporary achievements."⁷¹ In this article, I have proposed situating a specific Jewish intellectual work in its historical perspective; that is, within its proper contemporary intellectual context.

Yet Abarbanel never admits to quoting Annius's *Antiquitates*, nor does he mention any past or present Christian author by name.⁷² Concerning Judah's choice not to openly acknowledge his Christian sources, Shlomo Pines has suggested that it "may have been due to a personal decision or to a Judaeo-Spanish convention."⁷³ However, Judah does not mention his father or any other Jewish source from his time in his *Dialoghi*. The only exceptions seem to be Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol, who are in fact medieval Jewish sources. Furthermore, they are referred to using their Latin Christian pseudonyms, such as "Rabi Moise" and "Albenzubron."⁷⁴ A more credible explanation for this generalised absence of contemporary sources is Judah's overt and strong desire to appear superior to every philosopher of his time, which leads him to consider them unworthy of mention—least of all the Christian ones. This intent is clear in his *Dialoghi d'amore*, when, for example, he bitterly criticises allegorical interpretations of Plato's *Symposium* that differ from his own.⁷⁵ Also, Judah's exclusion of explicit references to both Jewish and Christian contemporary authors can be attributed to his idea that the only true wisdom is a hoary wisdom, the *antica sapienzia* ("ancient wisdom") or *teologale sapienzia* ("theological wisdom").⁷⁶ He attributes legitimacy and

⁷⁰ For Leopold Zunz and a complete bibliography, see Giuseppe Veltri and Libera Pisano, *L'ebraismo come scienza: Cultura e politica in Leopold Zunz* (Turin: Paideia, 2019).

⁷¹ Veltri, *Alienated Wisdom*, 111.

⁷² On this issue, see Shlomo Pines, "Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb? Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo's Doctrines," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 390.

⁷³ Pines, "Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb," 390.

⁷⁴ See Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 153, 233, 266, 327.

⁷⁵ Further evidence that Judah is alluding to contemporary sources here is his Italian translation of Diotima's teachings from Ficino's Latin *Convivium*: see Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 290–91. In this passage, Judah also refers to Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's reading of the *Convivium* in his *De pulchro* (ca. 1499). I will investigate Judah's acquaintance with Francesco Cattani da Diacceto further in a forthcoming article.

⁷⁶ On these two reasons behind Judah's "silence," see Maria Vittoria Comacchi, "Yehudah Abarbanel's Astromythology: In the Footsteps of Marsilio Ficino's *prisca theologia*," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 26, no. 2 (2020): *Marsilio Ficino's Cosmology: Sources and Reception*, eds. H. Darrel Rutkin and Denis J.-J. Robichaud, 437–52, <https://doi.org/10.19272/202004102006>.

significance to ancient astrological knowledge about the cosmic cycles as this theory matches a true *antica sapienzia*—namely, the Adamic tradition—which Moses confirms by means of revelation and verification and Plato confirms through reason. If this assumption is correct, the *Dialoghi d'amore* thus shows a subtle and precarious balance between revealed, sacred tradition and philosophical enquiry. Paradoxically, this puzzlingly philosophical and philosophical *redditus ad fontes* (“return to sources”) ensures the superiority of the past over the present, as well as a departure from the acceptance of authority inherited only through tradition. This synthesis between revealed tradition and philosophy emerges as a common thread in all Neoplatonic intellectual productions written between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In conclusion, Judah's use of Annius's *Antiquitates* echoes his relationship with the Christian authors and intellectual environment of his own time. His Jewish re-appropriation of a proto-Christian Jewish ancestral paradigm and his re-elaboration of the correspondence between religion and philosophy from a Jewish perspective was embedded somewhere between deep-rooted philological and philosophical Renaissance antiquarianism and an ambitious religious and theological programme of reform; that is, *renovatio*.⁷⁷ As I have shown in this article, it is precisely in this context that Judah's *Dialoghi* should be read and understood. The combination of a recondite Jewish past and the belief in a philosophical Neoplatonic renovation could be said to be based on the premises of an intense and sometimes stormy debate promoted by Christian and Jewish scholars alike. Further research on Judah's use of Christian sources will certainly help to broaden our understanding of the *Dialoghi* and its context and to frame the intricate “neighbourhood of the mind” shared by Jews and Christians throughout the Renaissance.

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⁷⁷ For this matter, see, among others, Cesare Vasoli, *Filosofia e religione nella cultura del Rinascimento* (Naples: Guida, 1988).

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