

Jesus' Family and their Genealogy according to the Testimony of Julius Africanus¹

CHRISTOPHE GUIGNARD

Like many other Christian writings of the first three centuries, Julius Africanus' *Letter to Aristides* is known to us only through Eusebius of Caesarea.² This work dating from around the second quarter of the 3rd century is a key document for uncovering early efforts to reconcile the genealogies of Jesus according to Matthew and Luke. Most notably, Africanus sets out for the first time one of the most popular explanations for their diverging accounts. To summarize briefly, Jacob, Joseph's father according to Matthew, and Heli, his father according to Luke, were born from two successive unions of a woman named Estha, first with a descendant of Salomon, then with a descendant of Nathan. Therefore, Jacob and Heli were brothers, but of two different lines. The Levirate Law (Deut 25.5–10) could apply to them: when Heli died childless, Jacob married his widow to secure a descendant for his brother. The child born from that union was Joseph. According to that explanation, Matthew's genealogy is the natural one, whereas Luke's is the legal one. In this way, any contradiction between their accounts would be eliminated.

In this study, I want to examine a more neglected aspect of the *Letter to Aristides*, namely the elements concerning “the relatives of the Lord according to the flesh”, or the “Desposynoi”, and their use of a family genealogy. Africanus' testimony on this point has received little attention from scholars – and certainly much less than it deserves. The most notable exception is Richard Bauckham, who is the one who has best seen the im-

¹ I am indebted to Jan Rückl and Thomas Naef for their help with OT and Qumran texts and to Alessandro Bausi for his help with Ethiopic. Last but not least, Ronda Léchaire-Callahan kindly read over the English text.

² EUSEBIUS cited various portions of the letter in his *Historia ecclesiastica* and in his *Evangelical Questions*. The complex problems of the transmission of the text, which I tackle in my edition (*La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide sur la généalogie du Christ: analyse de la tradition textuelle, édition, traduction et étude critique* [TU 167], Berlin – New York, NY: de Gruyter, 2011), can be put aside for the present study, since I shall deal with a passage that is transmitted only in the *Historia ecclesiastica*.

portance of Africanus' testimony; we will examine his proposals in the following pages.³

I. The Traditions Used by Africanus and their Origin

In order to establish the validity of the levirate-solution he has presented, Africanus in fact appeals not only to exegetical arguments, but also to traditional materials. The levirate-solution itself, which has come to be known by posterity as "Africanus' solution", is not strictly speaking Africanus' solution but a solution that Africanus is familiar with by means of a tradition. The text itself makes this clear when Estha is introduced. Since her name is accompanied by the following comment: "For *tradition asserts* that this was the woman's name" (τούτο γὰρ καλεῖσθαι τὴν γυναῖκα παραδέδοται, § 16). However, this is only a passing indication: the levirate-story is not expressly introduced as a tradition. Note also the passive form of παραδέδοται: Africanus does not reveal the origin of the tradition to which he refers. His discretion on this point contrasts sharply with the emphasis he puts thereafter on the testimony of the Desposynoi, which he invokes in order to establish the authority of the levirate-story. It will be useful to quote the whole passage (§ 19–22 = Eus., *H.E.* I, 7, 11–14):⁴

19. Nor indeed is this (i.e. the levirate-solution) incapable of proof, neither is it a rash conjecture. At any rate the kinsmen of the Saviour after the flesh, whether to magnify their own origin or simply to state the fact, but at all events speaking truth, have (also)⁵ handed down the following account (εἴτ' οὖν φανητιῶντες, εἶθ' ἀπλῶς ἐκδιδάσκοντες, πάντως δὲ ἀληθεύοντες, παρέδοσαν καὶ ταῦτα): Some Idumean robbers attacking Ascalon, a city of Palestine, besides other spoils which they took from an idol temple of Apollo, which was built near the walls, carried off captive one Antipater, son of a certain Herod, a temple-slave (ἱεροδούλου). And as the priest was not able to pay the ransom for his son, Antipater was brought up in the customs of the Idumeans, and afterwards enjoyed the friendship of Hyrcanus, the high priest of Judea. 20. And being sent on an embassy to Pompey on behalf of Hyrcanus, and having freed for him his kingdom from the grasp of Aristobulus his brother, he was so fortunate as to obtain the title of procurator of Palestine. And when Antipater was treacherously slain through envy of his great good fortune, his son Herod succeeded him, who was afterwards appointed king of Judea at Anthony and Augustus's instigation by a decree of the Senate. His sons were Herod and the other tetrarchs. These accounts are given also in the histories of the Greeks.

21. But as up to that time the genealogies of the Hebrews had been registered in the public archives, and those, too, which were traced back to the proselytes – as, for example, to

³ R. BAUCKHAM, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990.

⁴ The translation used here and below is that of S.D.F SALMON (*ANCL* 9, 2nd part, pp. 168–170), slightly modified.

⁵ I shall discuss below the appropriateness of translating καὶ by "also."

Achior the Ammanite, and Ruth the Moabitess, and the mixed crowd which left Egypt along with the Israelites – Herod, knowing that the lineage of the Israelites contributed nothing to him, and goaded by the consciousness of his ignoble birth, burned the registers of their families. This he did, thinking that he would appear to be of noble birth, if no one else could trace back his descent by the public register to the patriarchs or to the proselytes, and to that mixed race called *geiorai*. 22. A few careful people, however, having private records of their own, either by remembering the names or by getting at them in some other way from the archives, pride themselves in preserving the memory of their noble descent; and among these happened to be those already mentioned, called *Desposynoi*, on account of their connection with the family of the Saviour. And these coming from Nazareth and Cochaba, Jewish villages, to the other parts of the country, set forth the genealogy in question from the Book of the Days <and from ...>⁶ as far as they could trace it.

Unlike the levirate-story, the testimony of the *Desposynoi* is clearly introduced as traditional material (*παρέδοσαν καὶ ταῦτα*, § 19). This different way of introducing traditional material raises the question of the link between the levirate tradition and the *Desposynoi* tradition. It is a key problem for both the interpretation of the letter and the evaluation of the traditional material Africanus hands down. The issue is dependent on the understanding of the formula *παρέδοσαν καὶ ταῦτα* and can be summarized in this way: does the levirate-story, which reconciles the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, come from the *Desposynoi* like the story about Herod? Two interpretations are possible *a priori* and lead to quite different conclusions.

The idea of a common origin for both traditions is frequently found among translators and readers of Africanus' text. The trend is a very old one, since the ancient versions of Eusebius' *Church History* already attest to this understanding. Rufin translates the passage in question as follows: "The relatives of our Lord themselves according to the flesh (...) transmitted that (i.e. the story of the levirate marriage), adding also this (...)" (*ipsi haec salvatoris nostris secundum carnem propinqui ... tradiderunt, addentes etiam haec, quod ...*).⁷ The Syriac translator shared a similar understanding,⁸ as did a good many modern translators. Upon first examination, this understanding seems to be imposed by the wording of the text: at first sight, the natural translation of *παρέδοσαν καὶ ταῦτα* would be "have

⁶ On this lacuna, see below, p. 15.

⁷ RUFINUS, *Historia ecclesiastica* I, 7, 11.

⁸ "Die von dem Geschlecht unseres Erlösers im Fleisch oder seine Bekannten (...) überlieferten [es] und mit diesem auch das (...)" (I, 7, 11; transl. E. NESTLE, *Die Kirchengeschichte des Eusebius aus dem Syrischen übersetzt* [TU 21/2], Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1901, p. 22).

handed down this tradition *also*.”⁹ But this interpretation creates significant problems of comprehension and makes Africanus’ reasoning rather odd. The problem can be summarized as follows:¹⁰ when Africanus announces that he will explain the discrepancy between the genealogies, he confidently states that he will put forward the “real story of what happened” (τὴν ἀληθῆ τῶν γεγονότων ἱστορίαν, § 9). Yet, in his conclusion, he is much less confident (§ 23):

Whether, then, the case stands thus or not, no one could discover a more obvious explanation (εἴτ’ οὖν οὕτως εἴτ’ ἄλλως ἔχοι, σαφεστέραν ἐξηγήσιν οὐκ ἂν ἔχοι τις ἄλλος ἐξευρεῖν), according to my own opinion and that of any sound judge. And let us turn our attention to it, although it is without proofs, because we have nothing more satisfactory or true to allege upon it (εἰ καὶ ἀμάρτυρός ἐστι, τῷ μὴ κρείττονα ἢ ἀληθεστέραν ἔχειν εἰπεῖν). The Gospel, however, in any case states the truth.

How is the fact that Africanus appears more reserved regarding his solution to be accounted for? Indeed, his attitude is impossible to understand so long as one assumes that the levirate-story comes from the Desposynoi. For, when he introduces the Herod-tradition, Africanus states the truthfulness of the Desposynoi (πάντως (...) ἀληθεύοντες, § 19). If that is so, why should he assert later that the solution provided by the levirate-story is without proof (ἀμάρτυρος)?¹¹ If the two traditions have the same origin – the family of Jesus themselves –, how could Africanus on the one hand claim that the Desposynoi are entirely trustworthy when they explain how they saved their family genealogy, and at the same time confess that the authority of the levirate-story is not unquestionable? In light of these observations, it would appear significant that Africanus invokes the testimony of the Desposynoi only when he comes to justify his solution for the discrepancy of Jesus’ genealogies, and not when he expounds the solution itself. If he could have appealed to this weighty testimony, why did he not do so? Therefore, one might come to the following conclusion: in fact, Africanus cannot do so because the two traditions he uses do not have the same origin. A closer reading of the text supports this conclusion. The relationship between the levirate-solution and its justification by the Desposynoi tradition is far less linear than appears at first glance. The phrase: οὐδὲ μὴν ἀναπόδεικτον ἢ ἐσχεδιασμένον ἐστὶ τοῦτο. τοῦ γοῦν σωτήρος οἱ κατὰ σάρκα συγγενεῖς κτλ. should not be translated with: “Nor indeed is

⁹ See H.J. LAWLOR – J.E.L. OULTON, *Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea: the Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, London: SPCK, 1927, vol. 1, p. 21 (italics mine).

¹⁰ For a more complete discussion of the problem, see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, pp. 394-398.

¹¹ On the meaning of this adjective, see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, pp. 313, n. z.

this incapable of proof, neither is it a rash conjecture. *For* the kinsmen of the Saviour after the flesh ...”, as did, for example, Salmon – and many others – , but: “*At any rate* (γούν), the relatives of our Lord according to the flesh ...”

Finally, the idea of a common origin of the levirate-story and the Desposynoi-tradition rests entirely on the understanding of the phrase παρέδοσαν καὶ ταῦτα as “have handed down this tradition *also*” – and, as a result, the first tradition, too. But this argument is only superficially sound. As a matter of fact, there is no need at all to give καί the meaning of “also” (with all the consequences it entails for the understanding of Africanus’ reasoning). The *Letter to Aristides* offers several examples of such a καί with a weakened value – a usage that is well attested in other authors.¹² A single example will be sufficient here.¹³ When Africanus seeks to find exegetical support for the levirate-solution, he interprets the phrase ὡς ἐνομίζετο, which Luke inserts at the beginning of his genealogy (3.23), as his way of pointing out that he indicates the legal filiations; in order to underline the evangelist’s remark, he writes parenthetically, καὶ γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο προστίθησι (§ 18).¹⁴ Obviously, Africanus had not previously mentioned another addition by Luke – , anyway, there is no similar comment in his genealogy. So καὶ τοῦτο in this passage means simply “this very (remark)” and not “this (remark) *also*.” There is no reason to understand καὶ ταῦτα in § 19 any differently, since the assumption that καί has the force of “also” raises major interpretative problems.

So an important conclusion can be established: *the levirate tradition and the Desposynoi tradition do not have the same source*. Indeed, the Desposynoi tradition does not directly prove the first tradition. Instead, it is adduced to support it indirectly, since it shows that Jesus’ family treasured their genealogical traditions. Moreover, the idea that the relatives of Jesus explained (ἐξηγησάμενοι, § 22) his genealogy was of particular interest to Africanus: reading this phrase with the questions of his own day in mind, he understood it as referring to the problem of the discrepancy between Matthew and Luke.¹⁵ So, although he could not formally establish that the levirate-story, which he knew from some Jewish Christian source,

¹² See J.D. DENNISTON, *The Greek Particles*, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1996², pp. 316ff., and J. HUMBERT, *Syntaxe grecque* (Tradition de l’humanisme 8), Paris: Klincksieck, 1960³, § 728.

¹³ For further examples, see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, p. 90.

¹⁴ The second καί is omitted by some manuscripts, but it must evidently be kept as *lectio difficilior* (see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, p. 39).

¹⁵ As BAUCKHAM rightly observes (*Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 361), this is clear from the fact that Africanus’ statement, that no one could find a better explanation (ἐξηγήσιν, § 23) than his own, echoes ἐξηγησάμενοι in the preceding sentence (§ 22). On the real meaning of the participle in his source, see p. 12.

originated within Jesus' family, in his view the Desposynoi tradition made that plausible. But, since he was incapable of demonstrating this, he was forced to confess that his solution was ἀμάρτυρος and to appeal in the end to an argument of authority: "In any case the gospel speaks the truth" (§ 23).

Insufficient attention has often been paid in reading § 19 to the logic of Africanus' reasoning. As a result, most scholars have failed to recognize the full extent of the interest of the Desposynoi tradition, because they evaluated it in the light of an attempt at harmonization such as the levirate tradition represents.¹⁶ But in actual fact, the Desposynoi tradition has nothing to do with the problem of the discrepancy between Matthew's and Luke's genealogies of Christ. It is worth a closer analysis. At any rate, we can be sure that Africanus would not have invented the Desposynoi tradition, since it meets so imperfectly the needs of his demonstration.

II. The Desposynoi Tradition: Materials from and about the Desposynoi

The Desposynoi tradition is a body of traditional materials with two distinct components: on the one hand, elements attributed to the Desposynoi (interrupted at the end of § 20 by a comment of Africanus'); on the other, information about the Desposynoi, which forms a sort of appendix (§ 22). The materials handed down by the Desposynoi explain how they were able to preserve genealogical traditions; the supplementary information concerns the sources they used in establishing their genealogy and their use of it during their travels in Palestine.

To account for the particular shape of Africanus' second tradition, one has to suppose that he used an intermediary source, obviously a written one. For Africanus speaks of the Desposynoi using the past tense (παρέδοσαν, § 19; ἐτύχωνον, § 22), which means that he did not hear their testimony personally. Bauckham cites other considerations that substantiate the existence of a written source.¹⁷ First, "Desposynoi" is not Africanus' own term, since he does not use it when he introduces his second tradition (§ 19) and he finds it necessary to explain it (§ 22). Secondly,

¹⁶ My analysis of this point is in agreement with BAUCKHAM's, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 357 (who, admittedly, does not abandon the assumption that Africanus presents the first tradition as descending from the relatives of Jesus, but does maintain the difference in their value by making a clear distinction between them: Africanus would have put together two quite distinct traditions relating to Jesus' family and their genealogy; see *ibid.*, pp. 62, 121, n. 201, and 355f.).

¹⁷ See *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 361.

Africanus seems not to have understood entirely accurately the tradition he reproduces. For example, he probably adopted the reference to the “Book of Days” – which I shall return below – from his source, without any precise notion of what that book was. To these pieces of evidence one can add the appearance of a rare Aramaic loanword which Africanus also feels the need to explain: τοὺς τε καλουμένους γειώρας (§ 21)¹⁸. Moreover, its application to the “mixed crowd” of Exod 12.38, not otherwise attested, is perhaps to be explained by the influence of a Palestinian targumic tradition, since these people are labelled with the same term (גִּיּוּרִין) in the text of Targum Neofiti I. Obviously, Africanus’ source must be a Jewish Christian one, but in the absence of any concrete evidence, it would not be useful to speculate on its identity.¹⁹

Certainly, the use of a source does not imply that Africanus copied it slavishly. Indeed, the style of § 19–22 is similar to Africanus’ own style. This suggests that he reworded his source in part at least, especially in the narrative section. Moreover, to a certain extent the precision of the historical details of § 20 could be due to Africanus’ knowledge of the matter, since he had probably already carried out some research on the history of Judea while working on his *Chronographiae*.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is certain that Africanus’ source already contained substantial information on Antipater and the rise of Herod, as shown by his comment on the agreement between the tradition of the Desposynoi and the Greek histories at the end of § 20.²¹ As for the information regarding the relatives of Jesus, the observations made above about the use of the term Desposynoi and the reference to the “Book of the Days” support Bauckham’s statement that Africanus is closely following his source in these lines.²²

Therefore, Africanus’ source on the one hand incorporated the tradition of the Desposynoi, probably transmitted in oral form and, on the other hand, joined to it information about this group that was available to the source. Thus, when Africanus writes: τοῦ (...) σωτήρος οἱ κατὰ σάρκα συγγενεῖς (...) παρέδοσαν καὶ ταῦτα (§ 19), he already reproduces a piece

¹⁸ There is no reason to doubt the text of this passage, as did Schwartz and Reichardt (see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, p. 311f).

¹⁹ On this issue, see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, p. 400 n. 37.

²⁰ I assume that the *Letter to Aristides* was written after the *Chronographiae* (see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, pp. 382–384, or ID., “Julius Africanus”, in B. POUDERON [ed.], *Histoire de la littérature grecque chrétienne*, vol. 2 [forthcoming]). One of the extant fragments concerns Herod (*Chronographiae*, F89, ed. M. WALLRAFF, in *GCS N.F.* 15, Berlin – New York, 2007).

²¹ However, the reference to Herod’s sons was probably added by Africanus himself as a link with the Gospels, since Herod the Tetrarch (or Herod Antipas) appears in the narratives of Jesus’ ministry (and, in Lk 23.6–12, of the Passion).

²² *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 361.

of information provided by his source.²³ In other words, Africanus hands down a tradition about the Desposynoi that contained a tradition attributed to the Desposynoi themselves. As stated above, the identity of this source remains obscure, but obviously it had access to quite specific information. As is clear from the fragments of his *Chronographiae*, Africanus carried out his research properly.²⁴ His concern for the problem of Christ's genealogy prompted him to do thorough research, which led him to find the levirate-story on the one hand and the tradition about the Desposynoi on the other hand. Since he probably worked in Palestine, he could have had special access to Jewish Christian documents or traditions.²⁵

III. Materials Attributed to the Desposynoi

The materials which constitute the tradition of the Desposynoi itself combine elements that are obviously of different origins and dates. In fact, even though the two stories are closely associated, it is important to distinguish between the one concerning Herod's origin (§ 19–20) and the other the burning of the Jewish genealogies (§ 21). While not created for this purpose, the first acts as a point of departure for the second by explaining why Herod needed to destroy the official registers.

1. Herod's Origin

As Josephus states, the Herodian dynasty came from Idumaea.²⁶ However, the idea that he was from Ascalon circulated among Jews, as attested by Justin Martyr.²⁷ As Herod was generally regarded as an Idumean – and

²³ On the other hand, εἴτ' οὖν φανητιῶντες, εἴθ' ἀπλῶς ἐκδιδάσκοντες, πάντως δὲ ἀληθεύοντες is better understood as a comment by Africanus.

²⁴ See e.g. *Chronographiae* F34 and F93.

²⁵ Like F. WILLIAMS (*The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis. Book I (Sects 1–46)* [NHS 63], Leiden – Boston, MA, 2009, p. 53, n. 50), I assume that Epiphanius' parallel text about Herod's origin (*Panarion* 20, 1, 3–5) does not attest an independent use of the same source, but is fundamentally based on Eusebius' information (*Historia ecclesiastica* I, 6, 2–3; 7, 12) – and thus depends on Africanus' report. Nevertheless, some diverging details in Epiphanius' text are difficult to explain without the use of a secondary source.

²⁶ According to JOSEPHUS, Herod' grandfather (whom he calls Antipater) was an Idumaeon (*Antiquitates Iudaicae* XIV, 8; *De bello Iudaico* I, 123). This version is generally accepted by scholars. In fact, SCHALIT'S analysis (see below) makes very unlikely any attempt to give credence to the Ascalon tradition handed down by Africanus, such as that made by N. KOKKINOS, *The Herodian Dynasty: Origins, Role in Society and Eclipse* (JSPSup 30), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, pp. 100–112 and 138f.

²⁷ *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 52, 3. Somewhat surprisingly, Justin talks of Herod ἀφ' οὗ ἔπαθεν (*scil.* Christ). If one is not to emend the text or regard these words as a gloss, it

thus a proselyte –,²⁸ the advocates of the Ascalon version had to explain how he was in fact from that city, whose hostility towards Jews is attested by Philo and Josephus.²⁹ This origin also implied that he was from a pagan family. Thus, it is very probable that the Jewish tradition Justin alludes to corresponds to the one Africanus hands down or at least derives from it. Whatever the case, the Desposynoi tradition about Herod's origin contains details that presuppose a Hebrew substrate and of a very early date, as demonstrated by Abraham Schalit.³⁰ It will be useful to go over the major results of his analysis.

Schalit showed that the tradition handed down by Africanus does not simply attribute a pagan origin to Herod by linking him with the Hellenistic city of Ascalon. It is much more subtle and defamatory and turns out to be of a midrashic nature. Indeed, the qualification of Herod's grandfather as a *ἱερόδουλος* means not only that the king descended from a pagan family of slaves, but also, in the Near-Eastern context, from a sacred prostitute. This calumny is clearly deduced from a midrashic interpretation of Ascalon's name, whose consonants (אשקלון) may be read as אִישׁ קָלוֹן, "man of shame". The allusion to sacred prostitution is obvious since קָלוֹן not only means "shameful parts," "nudity" or even "brothel," but also applies to an idol or a pagan temple. So the story of Herod's Ascalonite origin must be regarded as a polemical, political midrash based on the name of the city. Schalit shows how this invective was probably a response to Herodian propaganda, which, on the one hand, granted to the Antipatrids a Judeo-Babylonian origin and, on the other hand, attempted to disqualify the Hasmonaeans by attributing an illegitimate origin to them. In turn, the supporters of the latter attacked the Antipatrids by tarnishing their origin in the worst way possible. Schalit places this exchange of invectives in the first years of Herod's reign, before Alexandra's death – obviously because she was the Hasmonaeans' strongest supporter at the court (she was executed in 28 BC after having attempted to take power and, beyond that date, the slightest expression of opposition was put down with bloodshed). This

probably has to be recognized that Justin confuses Herod the Great and Herod Antipas (see G. ARCHAMBAULT, *Justin. Dialogue avec Tryphon* [Textes et documents pour l'étude historique du christianisme 11], Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1909, p. 232, n. 3). Anyway, this problem is of little interest to us, since Herod Antipas is Herod the Great's son and Justin evidently speaks of the paternal origin.

²⁸ Idumaea was converted to Judaism after being conquered by John Hyrcanus, circa 127 BC (see e.g. N. KOKKINOS, *The Herodian Dynasty*, pp. 88–94).

²⁹ PHILO, *Legatio ad Caium* 206; JOSEPHUS, *De bello Iudaico* III, 10.

³⁰ A. SCHALIT, "Die frühchristliche Überlieferung über die Herkunft der Familie des Herodes: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Invektive in Judäa", in *ASTI* 1 (1962), pp. 115–120 and 132–143.

chronological dating is likely and, in any case, the story handed down by the Desposynoi was clearly forged before Herod's death (4 BC).

It is obvious, therefore, that the story about Herod's origin, rooted as it is in the political conflicts of 1st century Judaea, was originally independent from the second part of the Desposynoi tradition. With regard to the latter, it serves private interests by explaining how a Jewish family was able to keep reliable genealogical information despite the absence of public registers.

2. *The Burning of the Jewish Genealogical Records*

Apart from an allusion in the *Cave of Treasures*,³¹ no other ancient source speaks about a destruction of Jewish genealogies by Herod, even though such a deed would have sparked reactions of outrage among his subjects. For this reason, the information is quite improbable. Admittedly, Josephus was familiar with several generations of his genealogy, stating that he found it in official registers (ἐν ταῖς δημοσίαις δέλτοις),³² but his is a special case, since he was from a priestly family: the importance the priests gave to the purity of their line is well known (That being so, it was virtually impossible for Herod to destroy the genealogies of the priests. Thus, in any case, the testimony of Josephus cannot count as a decisive argument). Furthermore, other factors challenge the reliability of the information. In so far as his Idumaeian origin was a political problem for Herod, because it made him a proselyte, he would have gained nothing by destroying the (supposed) genealogical registers. Since he was claiming a Judeo-Babylonian origin, falsifying the archives would have been a more suitable tactic than making them disappear. Although the tradition concerning the

³¹ *Cave of Treasures* 44, 5f. (CSCO 486); see also the more complete text of ms. Mingana syr. 32 (quoted and translated by A.S.-M. RI, *Commentaire de la Caverne des Trésors: étude sur l'histoire du texte et de ses sources* [CSCO.Sub 103], Leuven: Peeters, 2000, pp. 421f.). Though it is generally assumed that this parallel derives from Africanus, a direct link between the two texts is questionable (see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, p. 310 n. s); but, in any case, the *Cave of Treasures* almost certainly draws the information from the same tradition.

³² *Vita* 1, 1–6 (citation from § 6). If one admits the authenticity of Josephus' claim (which is not unproblematic from a chronological standpoint), one has to assume that he consulted the registers he mentions before 70, because these archives most probably were destroyed with the Temple (see S.J.D. COHEN, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome. His Vita and Development as a Historian* [Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 8], Leiden: Brill, 1979, pp. 107f., n. 33; regarding the location of the priestly genealogical archives in the Temple, see S. LIEBERMAN, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the I Century BCE–IV Century CE* [Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 18], New York, NY: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962², p. 172).

burning of the genealogies reflects an awareness of Herod's legitimacy problem – and makes it even worse by supposing an Ascalonite origin – its basic presupposition betrays an ignorance of the way Herod himself attempted to deal with it. Certainly, he did not try to bring everyone down to the same level and deprive every Jewish family from a claim to nobility, but on the contrary, by the invention of a Judeo-Babylonian origin, he sought to link his family with the Judean elite.³³

These observations lead to the conclusion that this story was created a long time after Herod's reign. However, it should not be dated too late either, since it faithfully transmits a very early narrative about the Antipatrid origin. Was this story forged by the Desposynoi to assert the authenticity of their family genealogy? It is certainly possible. However, since its purpose is to explain the preservation of the genealogy by *some families*, that is not as obvious as is generally assumed by scholars. Certainly, for the Desposynoi, including themselves among a small group of families who preserved their genealogical data would have been a clever way to strengthen the reliability of their own genealogy. Nonetheless, one cannot disregard the possibility that they adopted a justification created by others.

IV. Information about the Desposynoi

In all likelihood, Africanus' information about the Desposynoi belonging to the families who kept their own genealogical records reflects a claim of the Desposynoi themselves. On the other hand, as observed earlier, the remaining part of Africanus' report cannot be regarded as originating from this group, at least not in its entirety. Instead, it constitutes information held by the source that handed down their tradition:

(...) οἱ προειρημένοι, δεσπόσυνοι καλούμενοι διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸ σωτήριον γένος συνάφειαν ἀπὸ τε Ναζάρων καὶ Κωχαβὰ κωμῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν τῇ λοιπῇ γῆ ἐπιφοιτήσαντες καὶ τὴν προκειμένην γενεαλογίαν ἔκ τε τῆς Βίβλου τῶν ἡμερῶν <...> ἐξ ὅσον ἐξικνοῦντο ἐξηγησάμενοι (§ 22).

Whereas the New Testament and other early Christian texts convey information about the relatives of Jesus, only Africanus' source hands down the name δεσπόσυνοι.³⁴ It is clear that Africanus found this designation in his

³³ I strongly disagree with BAUCKHAM's conclusion whereby he assumes that the destruction of any public records of leading families (especially Davidic) "is entirely credible, even if the tradition reported by Julius Africanus exaggerates it" (*Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 360).

³⁴ I agree with J.E. TAYLOR, *Christians and the Holy Places: the Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 36, n. 61, regarding the fact that the

source since, as Bauckham remarks, he does not use it when composing freely (cf. § 19); given that he needs to explain it, we can assume that this term belonged to Palestinian Jewish Christian circles.³⁵ The adjective δεσπόσυνος, a somewhat rare word, implies the designation of Jesus as δεσπότης.³⁶ Since it is not a standard Christological title, it is highly significant that one of its few occurrences in the New Testament is found in the Epistle of Jude (τὸν μόνον δεσπότην καὶ κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, v. 4).³⁷

1. The Geographical Issue

As for the geographical information about the places of residence of the Desposynoi and their travels, it has been one of the most discussed problems of Africanus' text. The debate concerns the locality of Kokhaba. Some scholars have sought to identify the place Africanus refers to as a place in Transjordan, which Epiphanius of Salamis describes as a Nazorean and Ebionite center.³⁸ This problem is linked to the question of the time to which Africanus' information relates (a matter to which I shall return later), and the chronological presuppositions mentioned above have tended to distort the geographical debate.³⁹ In actual fact, the identification with Epiphanius' Kokhaba is compatible only with a late date. Hence, when Epiphanius' testimony is appealed to in order to evaluate the historical reliability of Africanus' information, there is a risk of circular reasoning.⁴⁰ For this reason, it is better to solve the question of the position of

only other occurrence (JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homiliae in Ioannem* 21 [20], 3; PG 59, 132, l. 31) depends on Africanus' text.

³⁵ *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 62 and 361.

³⁶ TAYLOR'S very strange assumption that the Desposynoi were not Christians (*Christians and the Holy Places*, pp. 32–34) must be dismissed as totally unlikely: why would non-Christian Galileans pride themselves about their blood relationship with Jesus and travel around Palestine to make it known? Her case depends basically on a very weak argument *e silentio*, i.e. that Africanus does not state that the Desposynoi were Christian. However, given the importance of the “Brothers of the Lord” and other relatives of Jesus in the Early Church, it was probably superfluous to make explicit the fact that the Desposynoi were Christians. Moreover, the explicit link between this designation and the σωτήριο γένος and the context of missionary travels make it clear.

³⁷ On this verse, see BAUCKHAM, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 302–307. Like him, I regard τὸν μόνον δεσπότην καὶ κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν as applying only to Christ (cf. the absence of the article before κύριον). 2 Pet 2.1, where the same title is given to Jesus, depends on this verse.

³⁸ *Panarion* 29, 7, 7; 30, 2, 8f.; 30, 18, 1.

³⁹ Cf. BAUCKHAM, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 62f.

⁴⁰ G. LÜDEMANN seems not to have avoided this danger; see his *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989, pp. 123–127 (cf. below, p. 19).

Kokhaba on the sole basis of the latter's text. Since the problem has been discussed in detail by R. Bauckham, I will offer only a brief summary.⁴¹

Already rejected by Harnack, the identification of Africanus' Kokhaba with Epiphanius' rests only on the homonymy between a Jewish Christian center and one of the residences of the Desposynoi.⁴² However, there is another Kokhaba (today Kaukab), twenty kilometers from Nazareth, which is easier to reconcile with Africanus' information.⁴³ Africanus speaks of both as Jewish villages. As Knopf observed, this implies that they were located in Palestine.⁴⁴ This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that they were points of departures for travels "to the other parts of the country" (τῆ λοιπῆ γῆ), i.e. Palestine. Since Africanus' phrase opposes Nazareth and Kokhaba to the rest of the country, it applies much more naturally to two neighboring places than to one in Galilee and one in Batanea – a region that is, moreover, located at the very edge of historical Israel. Consequently, the Galilean location is by far the most probable one.

2. *The Desposynoi and their Family Genealogy*

As noted above, the way Africanus understood the tradition he hands down was determined by his concern to reconcile Matthew's and Luke's genealogies – a concern he attributes to Jesus' own family. However, as Bauckham observes: "The tradition itself was not concerned with the issue of the two divergent genealogies, but assumes a single family genealogy."⁴⁵ Hence, it is necessary to seek the original meaning of the information of Africanus' source.

The most puzzling question relates to the "Book of the Days" (βίβλος τῶν ἡμερῶν). As far as I know, four interpretations have been put forward:

1. The Syriac translator of Eusebius' *Church History* understood the phrase to refer to a genealogical register. In later times, Valesius explains it in the same way: "Per librum dierum intelligit Africanus Ephemeridas, quas paulo ante ἰδιωτικὰς ἀπογραφὰς appellavit."⁴⁶

⁴¹ See *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 62–66.

⁴² For a possible explanation of this homonymy, see BAUCKHAM, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 64–66.

⁴³ See A. HARNACK, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1908, vol. 2; p. 102, n. 3; B. BAGATTI, *Ancient Christian Villages of Galilee* (SBF, Collectio Minor 37), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2001, pp. 101–104

⁴⁴ R. KNOFF, *Das nachapostolische Zeitalter: Geschichte der christlichen Gemeinden vom Beginn der Flavienndynastie bis zum Ende Hadrians*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1905, p. 14.

⁴⁵ *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 361f.

⁴⁶ H. VALESIIUS, *Eusebii Pamphili, Socratis Scholastici, Hermiae Sozomeni, Theodorigi et Euagrii, item Philostorgii et Theodori lectoris quae extant historiae ecclesiasticae ...*, ed. G. READING, Cantabrigiae: Typis Academicis, 1720, p. 25, n. 3.

2. Since Sachs,⁴⁷ however, scholars generally assume that the expression echoes the Hebrew title of Chronicles (whose first book begins with 9 chapters of genealogies), i.e. דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים (סִפְר), literally: “(Book of the) Words of the Days”.⁴⁸

3. Another suggestion has gone unnoticed: J. L. Teicher suggested that the “Book of the Days” could be the same as the “Book of the Division of the Days (Seasons)” (סִפְר מַחֲלָקוֹת הַיָּמִים) mentioned in the *Damascus Document* (p. 16, 3 Schechter).⁴⁹ Teicher underlines the similarity between this title and the way the book of *Jubilees* is named in the *incipit* and *explicit* of its Ethiopic version:⁵⁰ “The words regarding the divisions of the times”.⁵¹ So the “Book of the Days” would be a name for *Jubilees*.

4. In the interests of thoroughness, Harnack’s interpretation must also be mentioned: he thought that the “Book of the Days” contained information about Herod’s origin along with a genealogy of Jesus.⁵²

As stated above, the very fact that Africanus simply reproduces the mysterious title of βίβλος τῶν ἡμερῶν without any comment or explanation is a clue that he is closely following a source. At the same time it also suggests that he did not identify this book with either Chronicles or *Jubilees* (which he also knew⁵³). It is probable that this reference was no clearer to him than it is to the modern reader.

The final suggestion misinterprets the role of the “Book of the Days”: the text grants it no other function than to be the source of the Desposynoi’s genealogy. The third suggestion is more interesting, but rather inconclusive. Indeed, it rests only on rough similarities. Teicher imagined that since Eusebius’ citation is lacunose, Africanus’ original text could be referring to the “Book of the Division of the Days,” but it is no more than a rash supposition. Certainly, there is a lacuna in the text, since the presence of τε in the phrase ἔκ τε τῆς βίβλου τῶν ἡμερῶν implies that a second ele-

⁴⁷ M. SACHS, *Beiträge zur Sprach- und Alterthumsforschung: Aus jüdischen Quellen*, 2. Heft, Berlin: von Veit, 1854, p. 156.

⁴⁸ It is possible that Rufin already understood Africanus’ reference in this way (see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, p. 66, n. 254).

⁴⁹ This title is also attested, but fragmentarily, at Qumran (4Q271, fr. 4, col. 2, l. 5).

⁵⁰ J.L. TEICHER, “The Damascus Fragments and the Origin of the Jewish Christian Sect”, in *JJS* 2 (1951), p. 139; the identification of the book referred to in the Damascus Document as *Jubilees* was already suggested by S. SCHECHTER, *Documents of Jewish Sectaries. Vol. 1: Fragments of a Zadokite Work*, New York, NY: KTAV, 1970, p. LV, n. 3.

⁵¹ Transl. Vanderkam, CSCO 511, pp. 1 and 327.

⁵² *Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius*, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1897, vol. 2/1, p. 651, n. 2.

⁵³ See H. GELZER, *Sextus Julius Africanus und die byzantinische Chronographie*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1885, vol. 2/1, pp. 249–297

ment has disappeared, before or, more probably, after it.⁵⁴ Now, Teicher's suggestion that something could be missing between βίβλου and τῶν ἡμερῶν would imply a second lacuna. Such a hypothesis would be unnecessarily complicated⁵⁵. Admittedly, the Ethiopic text offers an interesting parallel with this phrase, since the word translated by "times" is the plural of the word "day" (*mawā'al*, which has the sense of "period, era, time"⁵⁶). Thus, on this point, the correspondence with ἡμερῶν in Africanus' text is good. However, *mawā'al* can translate χρόνος or καιρός as well as ἡμέραι.⁵⁷ Even if we suppose that *mawā'al* translates the word ἡμερῶν in the (now lost) Greek *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic version – which seems not to be the most likely hypothesis – the Damascus document suggests that the Hebrew title of *Jubilees* had not "day" (יום), but "time" (תע). Since Africanus' source probably reflects a Semitic *Vorlage*, there is no evidence that "Book of the Days" was ever a title for *Jubilees* in Hebrew or Aramaic,⁵⁸ despite the wide variety of titles by which this book was known.⁵⁹ In favor of the first understanding, one could cite the usage of "days" with the meaning of "lifetime" in Hebrew and Greek. Thus, the basic equivalence proposed by Valesius between βίβλος τῶν ἡμερῶν and ἰδιωτικὰς ἀπογραφὰς cannot be completely ruled out. However, βίβλος τῶν ἡμερῶν would be more naturally understood as the title of a literary work rather than the designation of a register.

The second interpretation is much more appealing. However, Sachs, who cites no parallel, goes too far when he speaks of "wortgetreue Uebersetzung" to describe the correspondence between βίβλος τῶν ἡμερῶν and דְּבַרֵּי הַיָּמִים. In fact, the Greek phrase does not correspond literally to the Hebrew expression, and the phrase סֵפֶר הַיָּמִים, a retroversion of βίβλος τῶν ἡμερῶν into Hebrew, is attested neither at Qumran (where there is no Ara-

⁵⁴ See GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, p. 67.

⁵⁵ If there is a need to correct the text, it would probably be better to replace ἡμερῶν with μερῶν, since μέρος could be a possible translation of תֵּלְקָמָה. But one would expect a more complete or explicit title.

⁵⁶ W. LESLAU, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopian)*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987, s.v. *wa'ala*.

⁵⁷ See A. DILLMANN, *Lexicon linguae aethiopicae*, Lipsiae: T.O. Weigel, 1865, col. 925–926.

⁵⁸ Since ἡμέρα sometimes means "time," especially in Biblical Greek (see G. DELLING, art. "ἡμέρα", in *TDNT* 2 [1964], p. 947), ἡμερῶν would be a possible translation of תֵּלְקָמָה, but not a likely one.

⁵⁹ The most common titles in Greek are "Jubilees" and "Little Genesis" (see R.H. CHARLES, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis* [Translations of Early Documents Series 1, 4], London: SPCK, 1917, pp. ix f.)

maic equivalent either)⁶⁰ nor in the rabbinic literature.⁶¹ The designation of Chronicles as the “Book of the Days” is attested only later, several times in Jerome (*liber dierum*)⁶² and once in Rufin.⁶³ The only – and not unproblematic – Greek parallels I found are in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. In the list of canonical books of the Apostolic Canons, the books of Chronicles are referred to as Παραλειπομένων τῆς βίβλου τῶν ἡμερῶν δύο (βιβλία).⁶⁴ In itself, this designation seems rather to mean that the books of Chronicles are “things left behind of the Book of the Days,” so that the “Book of the Days” should rather be indentified with the books of Kingdoms (1 Sam through 2 Kgs). However, in II, 22, 3, we find a reference to 4 Kingdoms and τῆ δευτέρα τῶν Παραλειπομένων τῆ τῶν ἡμερῶν. Since the citation that follows associates 4 Kingdoms 21.1–17 with parts of 2 Paralipomena 33, the second reference is clearly to Chronicles. Moreover, strange as it may be, the expression does not make the “(Book) of Days” depend on Παραλειπομένων, but seems rather to cite the latter as a specification or as an alternative.⁶⁵ Even though these references are somewhat confused, the fact that they appear in passages of the *Constitutions* that have different sources suggests that they were added by the compiler himself.⁶⁶ Thus,

⁶⁰ I consulted M.G. ABEGG, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance. Vol. 1: The Non-Biblical Texts from Qumran*, part 2, Leiden: Brill, 2003 (and also the *Accordance* software [version 7.1, Tulsa, OK: Oak Tree Software, 2006] for the Hebrew texts).

⁶¹ I consulted *Bar Ilan's Judaic Library* (version 15, Suffern, NY: T.E.S., 2007).

⁶² *Aduersus Iouinianum* II, 4 (PL 23, 301C); *Commentarii in Isaiam* I, 1, 21 (CCSL 73, 21, 18); etc. (on the various titles of Chronicles in Jerome, see P. LARDET, *L'Apologie de Jérôme contre Rufin: un commentaire* [VCSup 15], Leiden: Brill, 1993, p. 225).

⁶³ *Expositio Symboli* 35, 5 (CCSL 20, 170, 5).

⁶⁴ *Constitutiones Apostolicae* VIII, 47, 85.

⁶⁵ It would be tempting to emend τῆ to ἧ, but the existence of a somewhat divergent parallel in VIII, 47, 85 suggests that such a solution may be simplistic.

⁶⁶ This was apparently FUNK's idea (*Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, Paderbornae: Ferdinand Schoeningh, vol. 1, 1905), since he underlined τῆ τῶν ἡμερῶν in II, 21, 8, which indicates an addition by the *Constitutions'* compiler to the text of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (see his prolegomena, p. XLVI). Yet R.H. CONNOLLY (*Didascalia Apostolorum*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929, p. 69) and other editors regard these words as part of the original text, supposing that they were misunderstood and placed at the beginning of the biblical extract by the Latin and Syriac translators, whose citations begin respectively with *in diebus* and “in those days” (transl. A. VÖÖBUS, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* [CSCO 402], Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1979, p. 80). It is strange, however, that two independent translations should resolve the problem in the same way. It is even less understandable on the Syriac translator's part, since he used the Hebrew title and translated Παραλειπομένων with “words of the days.” The contrary hypothesis is more likely: the original Greek text of the *Didascalia* had the usual title of Chronicles (Παραλειπομένων) and ἐν ἡμέραις at the beginning of the biblical citation; the compiler of the *Constitutions* suppressed this strange introduction and added τῆ τῶν

references to Chronicles as the “Book of the Days” seem to be significantly later than Africanus’ source and have a learned flavor. As well as a shortened form of the Hebrew title, they could be explained as a re-emergence of an archaic title, which otherwise would be attested only in Africanus’ text. It is very difficult to settle the argument. All in all, the second interpretation remains the most likely one, but given the lack of conclusive evidence, the question of the identity of the “Book of the Days” in Africanus’ source has to remain open.

Another difficulty of § 22 is the meaning of τὴν προκειμένην γενεαλογία (..) ἐξηγησάμενοι. Most modern translators understand προκειμένην as “aforesaid”; as such, it would be a reference to the first tradition of the letter. Bauckham rightly objects that the genealogy strictly speaking was not previously mentioned.⁶⁷ Such an interpretation is, indeed, very problematic – not only because it implies the highly unlikely hypothesis of a common origin for the two traditions Africanus uses, but especially because the first one is a narrative, and not a genealogy. It could hardly be labelled with this term. Moreover, Africanus uses another word to refer to it: ἱστορία (§ 9). Bauckham’s alternative proposal, however, is also problematic. He understands literally: “which was before them,” whence: “the genealogy they had [from the family tradition].”⁶⁸ The transition from the (well attested) literal meaning to that of “they had” appears to be forced. In any case, it should be supported by further examples. A more natural understanding of προκειμένην can be found in the use of the participle with the meaning of “to be under discussion”:⁶⁹ Africanus simply means “the genealogy in question,” i.e. the genealogy of Christ, which is the subject of his letter. Accordingly, this detail did not come down from his source, as Bauckham seems to suppose, but was added by Africanus. Yet, it clearly does not betray the meaning of the source. Indeed, the genealogy the Desposynoi used in their travels is obviously Jesus’ and not their own (insofar they differ from each other). Thus, τὴν προκειμένην γενεαλογία (..) ἐξηγησάμενοι does not necessarily imply that the Desposynoi interpreted a genealogy they received from family tradition: it could also mean that they used this genealogical tradition to expound Jesus’ descent. “To interpret” or “explain” is evidently a possible meaning of ἐξηγέομαι. In that context, however, it obscures the sentence. Thus Bauckham, who adopts this understanding, has to concede that the meaning is not so obvi-

ἡμερῶν, in the same way as he probably added τῆς βίβλου τῶν ἡμερῶν to his (now lost) source in VIII, 47, 85.

⁶⁷ *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 362.

⁶⁸ *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 359 and 362.

⁶⁹ Cf. H.G. LIDDELL – R. SCOTT – H.S.JONES, *A Greek-English lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, s.v. πρόκειμαι, 3b.

ous.⁷⁰ True, Africanus himself invites this understanding by using ἐξήγησις immediately afterwards (§ 23).⁷¹ At the same time, as Baukham himself rightly observes, this link is established by Africanus to suggest that the Desposynoi *interpreted* the genealogy with the aid of the narrative that constitutes the first tradition of his letter.⁷² Yet, if we draw together all the consequences of this observation, there is no need to give ἐξηγησάμενοι the meaning Africanus was willing to give to it.

Thus, another meaning of ἐξηγέομαι deserves consideration: “tell at length” or “relate in full.”⁷³ The context favors this possibility: since the text mentioned the means by which some families kept their genealogical traditions, it is more appropriate that it should point out the sources of the Desposynoi’s genealogy, instead of indicating how they explained it. Moreover, with the latter meaning the family tradition would at one and the same time constitute one of the main sources of Jesus’ genealogy and also serve to explain it. Yet, what else could it contain if not the very names it is meant to explain?⁷⁴ Furthermore, the phrase ἐς ὅσον ἐξικνούντο does not apply very well to an interpretative effort, but much more to that of producing a far reaching list.⁷⁵ On the other hand, these difficulties disappear if τὴν προκειμένην γενεαλογία (...) ἐξηγησάμενοι refers not to an explanation of Jesus’ genealogy, but to its tracing by the Desposynoi instead.

This analysis allows us to draw an important conclusion: *according to Africanus’ source, the Desposynoi built up a genealogy (of Jesus) that probably reached far into Old Testament history.* It was elaborated from two distinct sources: firstly, from the “Book of the Days,” which could be Chronicles or some other lost historical source, and secondly, from the family tradition (oral or written), for the most recent generations, naturally. As the first part of the tradition indicates, they also sought to establish its reliability by means of the story of Herod. Africanus’ text does not allow

⁷⁰ *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 362. He goes so far as to suppose that Africanus misunderstood his source. Admittedly, the presence of a lacuna does create some difficulty, but there is no major problem if one interprets προκειμένην and ἐξηγησάμενοι in line with my suggestions.

⁷¹ See p. 5 and n. 15.

⁷² *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 361.

⁷³ H.G. LIDDELL – R. SCOTT – H.S. JONES, *A Greek-English lexicon*, s.v., III; cf. also G.W.H. LAMPE, *A Greek Patristic Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, s.v., C.

⁷⁴ If the “Book of the Days” is Chronicles, the same problem exists: how could these books or the genealogies they contain help to explain Jesus’ genealogy?

⁷⁵ On the meaning of this phrase, see GUIGNARD, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide*, p. 392, n. 20. It is worth noting that in a rather unexpected way BAUCKHAM tends to refer it to the “tracing of the genealogy” (*Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 362; italics mine).

us to determine if this genealogy was in oral or written form, but given the complexity of such a list, the latter is likely. The context of its transmission, however, seems to be a purely oral one.

V. The Historical Setting of the Desposynoi Tradition and its Value

Which era is reflected by the information given by Africanus' source? In the last decades this problem was discussed first by Lüdemann,⁷⁶ then, with opposite conclusions, by Bauckham and Skarsaune. Lüdemann's radical and somewhat arbitrary form of criticism dismisses most of Africanus' information as redactional, but rests on tenuous foundations, since it depends entirely on the hypothesis of Kokhaba being in Batanea: as stated above, that is very unlikely. Moreover, it comes up against a serious difficulty: Africanus certainly would not forge a history that so poorly serves his interests.⁷⁷ Accordingly, Africanus not only collected information about the Desposynoi, but also a tradition that was attributed to them. This conclusion is confirmed by the results of the analysis of the tradition of the Desposynoi: as already mentioned, the story about Herod is deeply rooted in a Jewish setting.

This would be entirely coherent with Bauckham's observations pointing to an early date for the Desposynoi's activity:

In its context it is natural to take the sentence about the travels of the desposynoi as referring to the first Christian generation in the earliest period of the church, or at least as referring to a period from that time onwards. In that case its reliability can be supported from its coherence with Paul's information about the brothers of the Lord. (...) The reference is to the same missionary travels which are presupposed as well-known by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:5 (...)⁷⁸

Bauckham also notes that whereas 1 Cor 9.5 mentions only the Brothers of the Lord, the tradition known to Africanus probably refers to a wider circle of relatives. These important observations are certainly clues to an early setting of this material. However, since the Desposynoi's activity could have extended over several generations, the parallel with 1 Cor 9.5 does not provide strong chronological evidence. Accordingly, it is also necessary to search for clues in the material attributed to the Desposynoi themselves, as O. Skarsaune recently did. He observes that the tradition of the

⁷⁶ LUEDEMANN, *Opposition to Paul*, pp. 124f.

⁷⁷ See p. 6.

⁷⁸ *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 61f.

Desposynoi sets Herod's non-royal and even non-Jewish origin against Jesus' Davidic descent:

This is a point which Africanus makes nothing of, he adds, but which makes excellent sense in a pre-70 Galilean setting, and perhaps some years beyond 70 as well. (...) The original setting of this polemic has every chance of being Galilee, ruled by the Herods pretending to be legitimate Kings of the Jews (Agrippa I ruling the whole territory in 41–44; Agrippa II in part 50–94).⁷⁹

Indeed, even if the question of Herod's legitimacy is not made explicit in the tradition as Africanus handed it down to us, it certainly had a polemical dimension. Accordingly, the death of Agrippa II, the last monarch of the Herodian dynasty, can be regarded as a *terminus ante quem*. The story about Herod's Ascalonite origin could have survived in Galilee, whose territory remained in the hands of his dynasty after Judea and Jerusalem came under Roman dominion. However, Agrippa I's reign over Palestine would provide another possible and even more likely context for the resurgence of this anti-Herodian story in some Jewish circles,⁸⁰ especially among the Jewish Christian community. Given his measures against the leaders of the Jerusalem Church, echoed in Acts 12, the Jewish Christian circles had reasons to be hostile towards him.⁸¹

In the discussion about the historical setting that the Desposynoi tradition reflects, another important element has so far been neglected: the story about the burning of the Jewish genealogies or, more precisely, the reason for which the Desposynoi refer to it. Indeed, this was possible only in a context in which no public genealogical registers existed, since otherwise it would not have been possible to speak about their destruction by Herod the Great. Therefore, if such registers existed until the First Jewish War, the tradition of the Desposynoi would necessarily originate after 70.

In 1st century Judaism, the existence of genealogical records is attested for the priestly families. As for the existence of public registers for the lay

⁷⁹ O. SKARSAUNE, "Fragments of Jewish Christian Literature Quoted in Some Greek and Latin Fathers", in O. SKARSAUNE – R. HVALVIK (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: the Early Centuries*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007, p. 359.

⁸⁰ The anecdotes narrated by JOSEPHUS, *Antiquitates Iudaicae* XIX, 332 (see D. R. SCHWARTZ, *Agrippa I. The Last King of Judaea* [TSAJ 23], Tübingen: Mohr, 1990, pp. 124–130) and in mSot 7.8 (relating to Agrippa I and not to Agrippa II, cf. KOKKINOS, *The Herodian Dynasty*, p. 282, n. 67) imply that his foreign origin posed problems for him.

⁸¹ On Agrippa I's persecution of the Church, see SCHWARTZ, *Agrippa I*, pp. 118–124 and 208–212; G. THEISSEN, "Die Verfolgung unter Agrippa I. und die Autoritätsstruktur der Jerusalemer Gemeinde. Eine Untersuchung zu Act 12, 1–4 und Mk 10, 35–45", in U. MELL – U.B. MÜLLER (eds.), *Das Urchristentum in seiner literarischen Geschichte. Festschrift für Jürgen Becker zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZNW 100), Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999, pp. 263–289, esp. pp. 273–280.

families, the problem has been discussed with contradictory conclusions by Jeremias and Johnson.⁸² Jeremias seeks to establish the existence of lay genealogies in oral or written form, private and public. The latter, however, pointing to the lack of explicit and undisputed references to written genealogies, is reluctant to admit the existence of such records. On the contrary, he raises the possibility of the oral transmission of genealogical data over several generations. It is not necessary here to settle that argument, but only to underline that Jeremias' emphatic conclusion about the existence of public records should not be read as pertaining to a kind of civil registration, but only the presence of *some genealogical information* in official archives that could help the laymen to establish their descent. Thus, even if Jeremias is right in postulating the preservation of such information in the public archives, especially those of the Temple, the (otherwise unattested) records of the descent of all Jewish families, as the story of their burning by Herod would imply, are legendary. Accordingly, if there were no public records of lay genealogies that would have been destroyed during the First Jewish War, the information Africanus' source received about the Desposynoi may well reflect a pre-70 context.

These observations contradict the idea that the point of the tradition of the Desposynoi is to explain why there was no official genealogy of Jesus.⁸³ In a context where there were no public records, it would have been a normal situation. The Desposynoi's purpose was more likely to be to defend the value of their own tradition: they set their genealogy on an equal footing with those of the great families who kept such information. It was probably all the more necessary since, even if they really were of Davidic descent, nothing indicates that they enjoyed a high social status. The credibility of their own tradition was further strengthened by stating that, until Herod, the genealogies of the Israelites were kept in public records.

Thus, the information handed down by Africanus' source fits very well with a 1st century Palestinian setting – more probably before the Jewish War than after it, since the context the Desposynoi tradition seems to reflect is that of a Jewish society that is still strong and deeply rooted in the country. Indeed, the material attributed to them implies a strict hierarchy among the Jews, depending on whether they were native Israelites or proselytes. It shows the care with which the aristocratic families preserved the

⁸² J. JEREMIAS, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: an Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969, pp. 275–283; M.D. JOHNSON, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies, with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (SNTSMS 8), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988², pp. 99–108.

⁸³ See BAUCKHAM, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 360. JOHNSON, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, p. 103, provides a better analysis of this aspect.

memory of their noble descent and attests to the enduring hostility of some circles toward the Herodian dynasty. The information concerning the travels of the Desposynoi are also consistent with a pre-70 setting: they imply a mission directed toward Jews – as shown by the role given to Jesus’ genealogy – but, above all, still centered on Palestine. All these elements suggest that the tradition Africanus hands down may reflect the missionary activity of the relatives of Jesus around the middle of the 1st century, at the time when Paul alludes to the travels of the Lord’s Brother’s (1 Cor 9.5). The tradition of the Desposynoi, along with some information about them, was then integrated into some document, which can broadly be located in the 2nd century. It was probably very rare and we owe our knowledge of it purely to Africanus’ special interest in the issue of Jesus’ genealogy. The reliability of the information transmitted by Africanus is suggested by its apparently Jewish Christian origin and by the Semitic substrate that it implies. It is coherent with what we know from the New Testament or from Hegesippus about the role Jesus’ relatives played in earliest Christianity – despite the record in the gospel tradition of his brothers’ initial reluctance toward his ministry (Jn 7.5).

In early Christianity, it was a widely accepted belief that Jesus “was descended from David according to the flesh” (Rom 1.3). Thus, it is not surprising that his family claimed to be Davidic. Outside the New Testament, this claim is echoed by Hegesippus: he tells of Jude’s grandsons summoned to appear before the emperor as being Davidic, and of Simeon, son of Clopas, accused of being Davidic and a Christian.⁸⁴ These stories are tinged with legend, but undoubtedly reflect an actual claim of Jesus’ relatives. The claim was probably legitimate since it was never contested in the first centuries, even though it would have been a very convenient way to delegitimize Jesus and Christianity.⁸⁵ Although this is implicit in Africanus’ text, it is clear that the noble origin whose memory the Desposynoi carefully preserved was their descent from the “House of David,” even if they did not represent a prominent branch of it. Indeed, the existence of some genealogical memory linked to the figure of David among Jesus’ relatives is entirely credible.⁸⁶ Therefore, the information about the constitution of a genealogy by the Desposynoi and its use in their (missionary) travels is probably reliable.

⁸⁴ Ap. EUSEBIUS, *Historia ecclesiastica* III, 19–20; 32, 3–6.

⁸⁵ See JEREMIAS *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 290f.; on the whole issue, see R.E. BROWN, *The Birth of the Messiah: a Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (ABRL), New York: Doubleday, 1993², pp. 505–512.

⁸⁶ Cf. BAUCKHAM, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, p. 360. Another example of genealogical memory is provided by Paul (Phil 3.5).

In these circumstances, it is tempting to make a suggestive, but unverifiable connection with data from the rabbinic tradition. Some scholars read a saying attributed to Simeon b. Azzai, who belongs to the second generation of the Tannaim, as expressing the charge of illegitimacy concerning Jesus, one that is common in rabbinic sources.⁸⁷ His opinion is cited in a discussion on the definition of a bastard (ממזר) in mYev 4.13.⁸⁸

R. Simeon b. Azzai said: I found a family register in Jerusalem and in it was written, 'Such-a-one is a bastard through [a transgression of the law of] thy neighbour's wife' ...⁸⁹

At the beginning of the 2nd century, the reference to a register seen in Jerusalem is naturally understood as a reference to a register seen before 70 – thus unverifiable. If there really is an allusion to Jesus here, one is tempted to read this statement as an ironic reaction to the genealogical arguments of the Desposynoi and especially to Herod's supposed destruction of genealogical registers.

VI. The Desposynoi Tradition and the Genealogies of the Gospels

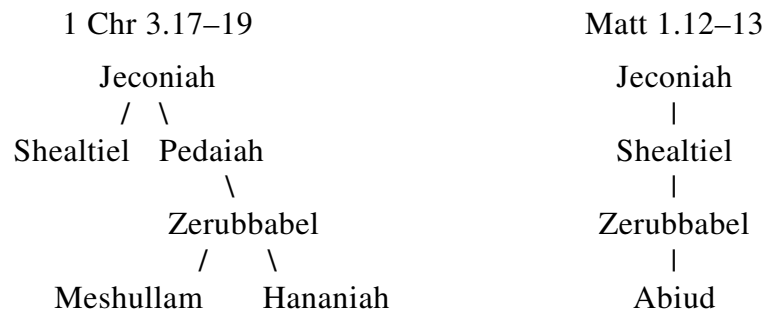
A more fundamental issue is that of a possible link between the genealogical tradition of the Desposynoi and one of the two different genealogies that are included in the canonical gospels. Indeed, if a genealogical tradition existed in Jesus' family, it is likely that it is the source of one these texts.

At first sight, a relationship with Matthew's genealogy would seem more likely, since Matthew is a Jewish Christian gospel. Furthermore, if the "Book of the Days" has to be identified with Chronicles, one may note that, in particular, Mt 1.12–13 corresponds well to 1 Chr 3.17–18; indeed, the latter text is doubtless the source of this part of Matthew's list from Jeconiah to Zerubbabel, since it is the only Old Testament text that establishes that the latter was of Davidic descent:

⁸⁷ See BROWN, *The Birth of the Messiah*, pp. 534–537.

⁸⁸ See JOHNSON, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, p. 105, n. 3, with references to further literature.

⁸⁹ Trans. H. DANBY, *The Mishnah*, Oxford: University Press, 1933, p. 225.



The divergence on Zerubbabel's father is easy to explain as a correction by Matthew or his source, since in all the other Old Testament instances Zerubbabel is presented as the son of Shealtiel.⁹⁰ Thus, one could perfectly well regard Matthew's list as resulting from the combination of the Chronicler's genealogical data up to Zerubbabel and some list going back to a certain Abiud.⁹¹ Accordingly, one could possibly see here the link between the "Book of the Days" and Jesus' family own genealogy that Africanus' source supposes. Such a hypothesis would go against the general scholarly tendency to regard Luke's genealogy as more trustworthy than Matthew's (at least in the postexilic section).⁹² Indeed, the evangelist's choice to follow the line of the kings of Juda is obviously the product of a theological construct, but it does not preclude having recourse to a list with some historical value for the last part of his genealogy. Thus, while the hypothesis that this text derives from the genealogical tradition of the Desposynoi would rest on very tenuous evidence, at the same time it would not pose any difficulties with regard to the information transmitted by Africanus.

As for a connection between Luke's genealogy and that of the Desposynoi, this hypothesis is more promising, but at the same time, is beset with more difficulties. It was advocated by Bauckham, who bases his argument on the links existing, on the one hand, between Luke's list and Jude and, on the other, between this writing (which he regards as authen-

⁹⁰ Ezra 3.2, 8; 5.2; Neh 12.1; Hag 1.1, 12, 14; 2.2, 23. Cf. G. MUSSIES, "Parallels to Matthew's Version of the Pedigree of Jesus", in *NovT* 28 (1986), p. 35.

⁹¹ For another suggestion about components of the Matthean genealogy, see BROWN, *The Birth of the Messiah*, pp. 69f. (and the criticism by W.D. DAVIES – D.C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988, pp. 165–167).

⁹² See, in particular, JEREMIAS, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 294, and the references he gives in n. 87.

tic)⁹³ and the milieu of Jesus' family. His carefully argued thesis is notably based on some important insights:⁹⁴

– Luke's genealogy, which comprises 77 generations, is built upon a scheme of eleven "weeks" of seven generations. The Davidic descent is inserted within an apocalyptic pattern covering the whole of world history.

– This structure is inspired by the Henochic literature. 1 En 10.12 counts 70 generations between the binding of the fallen angels and the judgment. Furthermore, the binding of the angels takes place in the generation after Henoch's, thus after the first week of world history, which corresponds to the first seven generations from Adam to Henoch.

– Since the 77th generation, to which Jesus belongs, corresponds to that of the judgment, the genealogy implies the same expectation of the parousia within the generation of Jesus' contemporaries as the *logion* of Mk 13.30. Accordingly, this genealogy was composed in that generation.

Jude happens to be the only Christian writing of the 1st century that shows an interest in the Henochic literature. Most notably Jude 6 alludes to 1 En 10.12 and Jude 14 cites Henoch as "the seventh from Adam." "It is rather remarkable," Bauckham observes, "that in the mere twenty-five verses of his letter Jude makes contact with the two most essential foundations of the sabbatical structure of the genealogy." Thus, Jude would point to the origin of the Lukan genealogy in early Christianity by attesting to the connection between Jesus' family and their genealogical tradition and the Henochic inspiration of the Gospel list.⁹⁵

By and large, Bauckham's argument is carefully substantiated.⁹⁶ By drawing a distinction between a traditional genealogy of Nathan's line and its secondary reworking according to the 77 generations scheme, he is able to acknowledge some historical value in Luke's genealogy without deny-

⁹³ See *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 171–178. Many scholars regard Jude as pseudepigraphical; see, for example, J. FREY, "The Epistle of Jude between Judaism and Hellenism", in K.W. NIEBUHR – R.W. WALL (eds.), *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009, pp. 309–329.

⁹⁴ See *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 315–326 and 375–378.

⁹⁵ BAUCKHAM, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 363f.

⁹⁶ In particular, BAUCKHAM's point stands up to a possible objection made on the grounds that the pattern of 77 names of the Lukan genealogy implies the use of the Septuagint – which would be difficult to reconcile with the idea that it would originate among the relatives of Jesus for the sake of a mission among Palestinian Jews. First, the name of Kainam (Lk 3.36) is not only found in the Greek text of Gen 11.13, but also in *Jubilees* (see R. BAUCKHAM, "More on Kainam the Son of Arpachshad in Luke's Genealogy", in *EThL* 67 [1991], pp. 95–102). Similarly, BAUCKHAM shows that the mistake that led to taking the Aramaic word *rēša* ("prince"), originally a qualification of Zerubabel, as a personal name could be made by an Aramaic speaker, as *'asir* ("captive"), which qualifies Jechonias in 1 Chr 3.17, was misinterpreted in the same way by the Greek translator (*Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, pp. 328f.).

ing the artificial nature of some of the data. Moreover, one of the weakest points of the argument, namely the assumption of the authenticity of Jude, seems not to be essential to it since, even if the letter is pseudepigraphical, the choice of this rather marginal figure implies some kind of relationship between the author's circle and Jesus' family – a hypothesis that is strongly supported by the probable connection between the use of δεσπότης in Jude 4 and the name δεσπόσυνοι.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, if we have to assume that the “Book of the Days” is Chronicles, this reconstruction faces a considerable difficulty, already noted by Skarsaune:⁹⁸ a reference to Chronicles is not compatible with the idea that the Desposynoi's genealogy was of a Lukan type, since Lk 3.24ff. differs so patently from that of 1 Chr 3 that Jeremias considers that the author of the first text did not know Chronicles.⁹⁹ The issue is all the more problematic for Bauckham's argument since the Chronicler's genealogies do not help to explain any of the special features of the Lukan text (the Admin – Arni – Amminadab succession, v. 33;¹⁰⁰ the presence of Kainam, v. 36, as in Gn 11.13 LXX and *Jubilees* 8.1). In fact, if the Desposynoi's genealogy passed through the line of Nathan, a reference to Chronicles as one of its sources makes little sense. However, as shown above, the identification of the “Book of the Days” with Chronicles is debatable. Additionally, given the force of Bauckham's argument, it ought not to be maintained as a decisive objection. Moreover, if one is really to see a reference to Chronicles in Africanus' text,¹⁰¹ this could possibly be regarded as a mere supposition on the part of his source about the documents used by the Desposynoi to construct their genealogy.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ See p. 12.

⁹⁸ “Fragments of Jewish Christian Literature”, p. 360, n. 117.

⁹⁹ *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 295. The only important agreement between Lk 3 and 1 Chr 3 concerns the belonging of Zorobabel to the Davidic line (see above), but there is no clue as to a direct influence of the latter text on the former.

¹⁰⁰ For the textual variants, see M. WOLTER, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, p. 173.

¹⁰¹ Teicher's proposal, however, would be perfectly coherent with Bauckham's opinion, since the use of *Jubilees* is a possible explanation for the mention of Kainam in Lk 3.36 (see n. 96), but it still lacks sufficient evidence.

¹⁰² If the Lukan genealogy really derives from Jesus' family, would the evangelist have this in particular in mind when he claims to have “carefully (ἀκριβῶς) investigated everything from the beginning (ἄνωθεν)” (Lk 1.3)? On ἄνωθεν, see the remarks of I.I. DU PLESSIS, “Once More: The Purpose of Luke's Prologue (Lk I 1–4)”, in *NovT* 16 (1974), pp. 267–269.

VII. Conclusion

The result of our analysis is a paradoxical one. The Lukan hypothesis is more suggestive, but not unproblematic, whereas the Matthean one is without any evidence, or any objection. Thus, without further evidence, a definitive conclusion cannot be reached. Nevertheless, the idea that Luke's genealogy reflects that of Jesus' family seems to be the more probable one, since the links evidenced by Baukham between this text and Jude, and between Jude 4 and the name of the Desposynoi, can hardly be casual. Furthermore, any attempt to establish a connection between Matthew's genealogy and that of the Desposynoi has, at the same time, to account for the constitution of Luke's genealogy at a very early date in a circle close to the one that produced Jude.

However, the value of Africanus' testimony for the study of earliest Christianity exceeds the particular issue of the origin of one of the Gospel genealogies. Based as it is on an early and apparently well informed source, it is of particular interest because it sheds light on Galilee – a region that remained outside the scope of Acts and about which so little is known regarding the development of Christianity in the 1st century – both with regard to the missionary activity of Jesus' relatives and the role his Davidic descent played in it. Far from being a result of late theological developments, as assumed by some scholars,¹⁰³ the *genre* of the texts handed down to us by Matthew and Luke probably appeared very early and accompanied the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah in Jewish circles.

¹⁰³ See e.g. JOHNSON, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, pp. xx and 254.