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***He will bless those who fear Hashem, small and great alike (Ps 115,13):
Righteous and Wise Jewish Children in Josephus,
Rabbinic Sources and Inscriptions from Rome****

Traditionally, children are not associated with wisdom in Jewish thought like in other ancient cultures. This idea is best expressed in the famous verse of Kohelet: *childhood and youth are vanity* (Qohelet 11,10). As a matter of fact, wisdom belongs to mature people and implies the knowledge of the Law, something that is not required from a child. In contrast with this, children are described as being *hebel* (הֶבֶל), which means ‘breath’ but also ‘vanity, something that is insignificant and foolish’. Nevertheless, at the same time, the Talmud Bavli (bSanh 119b) quotes the opinion of Resh Lakish after Rabbi Yehuda haNasi according to which it is precisely only because of the *hābel* of schoolchildren that the world exists. This statement shows the ambivalent role of children in Jewish society while emphasising children’s innocence and the idea as well that children symbolise the future of the Jewish people, for they shall inherit its legacy and keep going on holding tight on Jewish values.

In the same spirit of Resh Lakish’s opinion, in some peculiar cases, ranging from the Second Temple period to Late Antiquity, we find children who prove to be individuals, almost exclusively boys, impressively gifted for their young age, thus depicted as mature and wise like adults and recognised as *ṣaddîqîm* (צַדִּיקִים). I shall shortly offer an overview of my sources and then identify elements of the wise child’s motive in each of them. This shall lead me to propose thought-provoking comparisons and confrontations with ‘pagan’ and early Christian sources that use the motive of the *puer senex*, pointing out to a Graeco-Roman influence. I shall end concluding with the specificities of the wise child in Jewish sources.

1. Young Moses in Flavius Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*

My first source dates back to the 1st century CE and is a passage from Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* (2.230-231), in which the Jewish historian de-

picts Moses' childhood and education (out of clarity, I have put in bold letters the relevant parts to our study):

σύνεσις δὲ οὐ κατὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν ἐφύετ' αὐτῷ τοῦ δὲ ταύτης μέτρου πολὺ κρείττων, καὶ πρεσβυτέραν διεδείκνυεν ταύτης τὴν περιουσίαν ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς, καὶ μαιζόνων τῶν ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς γενησομένων ἐπαγγελίαν εἶχε τὰ τότε πραττόμενα. καὶ τριετὶ μὲν αὐτῷ γεγεννημένῳ θαυμαστὸν ὁ θεὸς τὸ τῆς ἡλικίας ἐξῆρεν ἀνάστημα, πρὸς δὲ κάλλος οὐδεὶς ἀφιλότιμος ἦν οὕτως, ὥς Μωυσῆν θεασάμενος μὴ ἐκπλαγῆναι τῆς εὐμορφίας, πολλοῖς τε συνέβαινε καθ' ὁδὸν φερομένῳ συντυγχάνουσιν ἐπιστρέφεσθαι μὲν ὑπὸ τῆς ὄψεως τοῦ παιδός, ἀφιέναι δὲ τὰ σπουδαζόμενα καὶ τῇ θεωρίᾳ προσευσχολεῖν αὐτοῦ: καὶ γὰρ ἡ χάρις ἢ παιδικὴ πολλὴ καὶ ἄκρατος περὶ αὐτὸν οὔσα κατεῖχε τοὺς ὁρῶντας.

English translation by W. Whiston (1737):

Now Moses's understanding became superior to his age, nay, far beyond that standard; and when he was taught, he discovered greater quickness of apprehension than was usual at his age, and his actions at that time promised greater, when he should come to the age of a man. God did also give him that tallness, when he was but three years old, as was wonderful. And as for his beauty, there was nobody so unpolite as, when they saw Moses, they were not greatly surprised at the beauty of his countenance; **it happened frequently, that those that met him as he was carried along the road, were obliged to turn again upon seeing the child;** that they left what they were about, and stood still a great while to look on him; for the beauty of the child was so remarkable and natural to him on many accounts, that it detained the spectators, and made them stay longer to look upon him.

Strikingly, Josephus emphasises Moses' intellectual abilities that are far beyond his age by the use of comparative forms, such as κρείττων (better, superior), πρεσβυτέραν (greater) and μαιζόνων (bigger, greater). Going further than this, Josephus adds the promise of something greater to come, as though those already impressive features were only indicators of the exceptional prophet who Moses is meant to be, expressing the potential of the greatest prophet in Jewish history at such a young age, the same way a seed already contains all the features of the future tree: καὶ μαιζόνων τῶν ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς γενησομένων ἐπαγγελίαν εἶχε τὰ τότε πραττόμενα (and his actions at that time promised greater, when he should come to the age of a man).

Another interesting point is Josephus' depiction of Moses' physical appearance in order to convey the idea of his being superior to any other hu-

man being. As a matter of fact, Moses is described as having a supernatural beauty that captivates people, this being the hallmark of a person especially close to God. The term used is χάρις that refers to a person's charisma, more than κάλλος (that is used first in the depiction) or κόσμος would, a quality that suits a leader. In a Greek environment, such a peculiar beauty belongs to someone sent by the gods or who is himself a semi-god (which is disclaimed by the Torah in Moses' case); since χάρις also means favour, it may also emphasise that Moses' beauty is not human but truly a gift from God.

In her article, Ursula Westwood¹ stresses the underlying theological message of such a supernatural beauty, that is that God looks out for those who follow and obey him. In addition to this, it seems that pointing out Moses' beautiful aspect could have been a response to bad depictions of Moses in gentile sources, especially Tacitus and Quintilian as for the Roman world, and to the particular claim that he was a diseased, crippled leper.² Indeed, one should not forget the importance of Josephus' audience that was probably mainly composed by non-Jews whom Josephus tried to make re-think their assumptions of the most important leader of his people.³

2. The Young Jewish Prisoner in Rome in bGit, yHor and the Tosefta *Horayoth*

Also from the 1st century BCE, two rabbinic sources, one in the Talmud Bavli (bGit 58a = yHor 3,4; 48,2) and one in the Tosefta (tHor 2,5), tell us about the same episode involving a young Jewish boy – not named in the Tosefta and in the Yerushalmi – and a famous rabbi in Rome. This very episode displays similarities with Josephus' text, as we shall show, even though the scene is anchored in a fully different frame, that is in a dialogue between a prominent rabbi and a child in which the child proves to be extremely intelligent, mature and knowledgeable in Torah and Tanakh. I shall present the version told in the Bavli. As previously stated, the bold letters highlight the expressions of interest in our short study.

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן: מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן חֲנַנְיָה שֶׁהָלַךְ לְכַרְךָ גָּדוֹל שְׁבָרוֹמִי, אָמְרוּ לוֹ:
תִּינוֹק אֶחָד יֵשׁ בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִים, יָפֵה עֵינָיו וְטוֹב רוּאֵי וְקוֹצוֹתָיו סְדוּרוֹת לוֹ

¹ U. Westwood, "Moses in Josephus' Antiquities: Between Jewish and Greek Traditions", *The Ancient Near East Today* 11.11 (2023), accessed (19.12.2025) at <https://anetoday.org/westwood-moses-antiquities/>.

² A. Reinhartz, K. Shier, "Josephus on Children and Childhood", *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 41 (2012) 364-375.

³ Westwood, "Moses in Josephus' Antiquities".

תלתלים. הלך ועמד על פתח בית האסורים, אמר: "מי נתן למשיסה יעקב וישראל לבוזים?" ענה אותו תינוק ואמר: "הלא ה' זו חטאנו לו ולא אבו בדרךיו הלך ולא שמעו בתורתו". אמר: מובטחני בו שמוזה הוראה בישראל, העבודה! שאיני זו מכאן עד שאפדנו בכל ממון שפוסקין עליו. אמרו: לא זו משם עד שפדאו בממון הרבה, ולא היו ימים מועטים עד שהורה הוראה בישראל. ומנו? רבי ישמעאל בן אלישע.

English Koren-Steinsaltz translation (2015):

There was an incident involving Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya who once went to the great city of Rome, where they said to him: There is a child in prison with beautiful eyes and an attractive appearance, and his curly hair is arranged in locks. Rabbi Yehoshua went and stood by the entrance to the prison. He said, as if speaking to himself: "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?" (Isaiah 42:24). That child answered by reciting the continuation of the verse: "Did not the Lord, He against Whom we have sinned, and in Whose ways they would not walk, neither were they obedient to His Law?" Rabbi Yehoshua said: I am certain that, if given the opportunity, this child will issue halakhic rulings in Israel, as he is already exceedingly wise. He said: I take an oath by the Temple service that I will not move from here until I ransom him for whatever sum of money they set for him. They said that he did not move from there until he ransomed him for a great sum of money, and not even a few days had passed when this child then issued halakhic rulings in Israel. And who was this child? This was Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha.

In this *baraita*, the same emphasis on the child's beauty as in the previous source is to be found: the boy, a sexual slave in Rome who is no one else than the young future Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, in this later version of the story is portrayed as having *beautiful eyes and an attractive appearance* (יפה עינים וטוב רואי), a feature that seems to have been shared both by Graeco-Roman and Jewish sources in order to announce an out-of-the-ordinary child. The boy is then submitted to a test on his intelligence and knowledge of the Torah that will confirm that his interior beauty, *i.e.* his wisdom, is just as remarkable as his outlook.

The test consists in the first half of a verse in Isaiah (Is 42,24), a question, asked by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananyah, a leading *tanna*, to which the boy replies by giving the other half, that is the question's answer. However, this test that is linked with the common practice in Jewish tradition, especially in the rabbinic world, of asking a child about the verses of the Torah that he has just learnt bears here a major significance, for the content of the answer

resonates not only with the child's fate but, more broadly, with that of the whole Jewish people, that has been exiled because of their sins. The quotation of Isaiah, through the innocent mouth of the young boy, brings some comfort with the theological message that everything is in God's hands and maybe suggests the possibility of repentance. Furthermore, this aggadic passage assumes another meaningful dimension related to this specific context of a harsh exile, both on a personal and a national level. The boy is a sexual prisoner forcibly brought to Rome after the destruction of the Second Temple. This proves to be much more than a historical background, revealing a deeper, symbolic meaning: since Rome represents the heart of evil in the rabbis' eyes, Edom, the biggest enemy of the Jewish people, this tale manifests that, even in such a hostile atmosphere and such an impure place like Rome, located at the extreme opposite of Torah values, a Jewish child has managed to stay pure and connected to the Torah and he has preserved his wisdom, that is the ultimate Jewish wisdom.

Thus, on a higher level, the redemption of this young boy by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananyah and his return to Eretz Israel with the rabbi, which will eventually lead him to become himself a well-known Torah scholar in his own right, epitomises the redemption of the whole Jewish people, the way it preserved its identity throughout the exile and its return to its homeland. Therefore, this excerpt testifies to the way children are used in some Jewish sources, especially rabbinic ones, in order to embody and promote the Jewish people and its peculiarities and points out to the importance of children and their inclusion as a rabbinic medium.

3. The Wise Boys in the Epitaphs from the Jewish Catacombs of Rome⁴

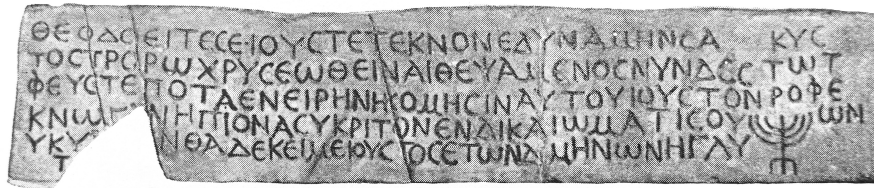
Such a phenomenon can also be perceived a little later in a few boys' epitaphs from the Jewish catacombs of Rome from the 3rd-4th century CE, showing a continuity of traditions between earlier rabbinic texts and some later epigraphical sources.

As it happens, in four epitaphs from the catacombs of Monteverde (JIWE II 25), Vigna Randanini (JIWE II 212 and 227) and a Roman unknown site (JIWE

⁴ The following abbreviations have been used: CIJ = J.-B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, vol. I. Europe, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana - Geuthner, Roma - Paris 1936; ICUR = *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*; IGUR = L. Moretti, *Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae*, Bardi, Rome 1968-1990, 4 volumes; JIWE II = D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, vol. II: *The City of Rome*, Cambridge University Press, 1995; NIV = *New International Version*.

II 556), epithets usually related to adults' qualities are to be found. I have provided here the transcriptions and pictures of these inscriptions, with my translations, following the EDR's reading.

JIWE II 25



(Photograph: CIJ, p. 279)

⟨ :columna I ⟩

Θεόδο=

τος τρο=

φεὺς τέ=

κνω γλ=

5 υκυτ[ά]=

τ[ω].

⟨ :columna II ⟩

Εἴτε σε, Ἰοῦστε τέκνον, ἐδυνάμην σα=

ρῶ χρυσέῳ θεῖναι θεψάμενος νῦν, δέσ=

ποτα, ἐν εἰρήνῃ κόμησιν αὐτοῦ Ἰούστον

νήπιον **ἀσύκριτον ἐν δικαιώματί σου** ([:menorah])

5 ἐνθάδε κείμε Ἰοῦστος ἐτῶν δ', μηνῶν η', γλυ=

⟨ :columna III ⟩

κὺς

τῶ τ=

ροφε

ῶν

If only I who reared (?) you, Justus, my child, could place you in a golden coffin. Now, Lord, let his sleep be in peace. (Welcome) the infant Justus, incomparable in (the keeping of) your ordinance. Here I lie, Justus, aged 4 years 8 months, being dear to my foster-father.

JIWE II 212



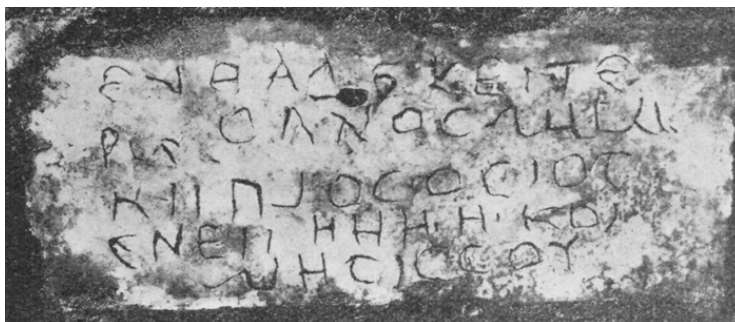
(Photo of left part: Olcott Epigraphy 412, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries. Photo of right part: courtesy of E. Laurenzi, February 2020)

((:menorah)) Ἐνθάδε κεῖτε

Εὐκαρπος νή=
πιος **δσιος**
φιλόνομος
5 ἐν εἰρήνῃ κοίμη=
σίς σου

Here lies Eucarpus, child, pious, lover of the Law. May your sleep be in peace.

JIWE II 227

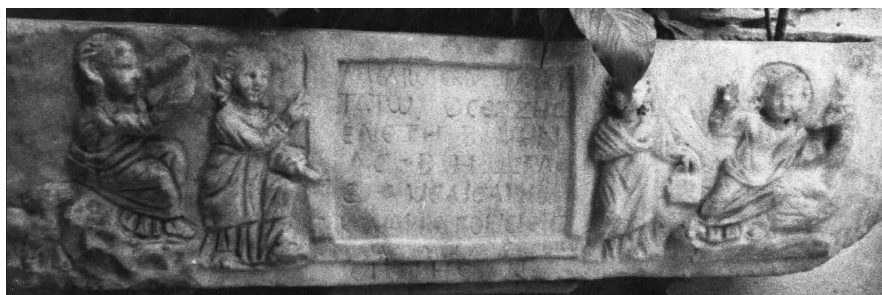


(Photograph: CIJ, p. 111)

Ἐνθάδε κεῖτε
 Ῥομανὸς (?) **ἄμεμ(πτος)** (?)
 νήπιος **ὅσιος**
 ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κοί=
 5 μησίς σου

Here lies Romanus (?), blameless (?), child, pious. May your sleep be in peace.

JIWE II 556



(Photograph: J. Dello Russo; after Ead., “The Monteverde Jewish Catacombs on the via Portuense”, *Roma Subterranea Judaica* 4, 2010, fig. 4)

Ἀμελίῳ τέκνῳ γλυκυ=
 τάτῳ ὃς ἔζησ=
 ἐν ἔτη β' μῆν=
 ας β' ἡμέρας
 5 εἴ· Ἀμέλις ἄρχω(ν)
 κὲ Μαρία γονεῖς τέ=
 κνῶ **ἀμμώμῳ** **όσεῖῳ**
 ἐποίησαν

For Amelius, their dearest child, who lived 2 years 2 months 5 days. Amelius, *archon*, and Maria his parents (had this) made for their child, irreproachable, pious.

In the inscriptions presented above, I have evidenced four epithets and one expression, in bold letters, that suit better adults than children: **ὅσιος** (pious), **φιλόνομος** (lover of the Law), **ἄμεμπος** (blameless), **ἀμμώμος** (irre-

proachable) and ἀσύκριτος ἐν δικαιώματί σου (incomparable in the (keeping of your) ordinance).

The adjective ὅσιος, that appears in three out of four inscriptions (JIWE II 212, 227 and 556), is used in the Septuagint to translate the terms תָּם (*tâm*, blameless), יָשָׁר (*yâšâr*, upright), חָסִיד (*ḥasîd*, faithful) and צַדִּיק (*šaddîq*, righteous), associated with the character of the righteous, «a person deserving of religious praise»⁵ and promised to a reserved fate.⁶ Ten Jewish Roman epitaphs of adults include ὅσιος, among them the epitaphs of three keypersons in their communities, a *pater synagogae* (benefactor, in JIWE II 209), a *grammateus* and *psalmodos* (scribe and cantor, in JIWE II 502) and a *prostates* (host and guide for foreign Jews in Rome, in JIWE II 373) stand out.

The terms ἄμεμπτος and ἀμώμος, almost synonyms, could also apply to a child who is innocent because of its young age, but, in the two inscriptions where they are to be read, both of them are combined with ὅσιος, which may imply an association of their innocence with their righteousness. Such a combination of ἄμεμπτος and ὅσιος is to be found in the epitaph of the *pater synagogae* Asterias (JIWE II 209), which confirms the idea that both adjectives are linked in this specific context.

The last pair of terms is composed by φιλόνομος and ἀσύκριτος ἐν δικαιώματί σου, that work as exact synonyms and stress the way Eucarpus' and Justus' lives strictly followed and adhered to the Jewish Law, like no other, out of pure love, as φιλόνομος suggests. This may well be explained by their very young age – Justus was only four years old and Eucarpus probably less than seven since he is called a νήπιος – that exempted them from any obligation of fulfilling all the *mitzvot* as adults would do. As a matter of fact, only the epitaph of Gaianus, a *grammateus* and *psalmodos*, describes the deceased as φιλόνομος, which suits more a man of such a high rank in his community than a child, whereas ἀσύκριτος ἐν δικαιώματί σου can be compared to φιλέντολος (lover of the commandments) that appears in three epitaphs of adults (JIWE II 240, 264 and 576), naturally committed to respecting the *mitzvot* according to Jewish tradition. The use of both terms therefore underlines the exceptionality of the two children, prematurely deceased before they could reveal the whole potential of their outstanding virtues.

⁵ S. Peels, *Hosios: A Semantic Study of Greek Piety*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2015, 45-49.

⁶ See more in M.-L. Rebora, “Ὅσιος καὶ ἄμεμπτος : portraits de jeunes défunts en *šaddîqîm* dans deux épitaphes d'enfants des catacombes juives romaines de Vigna Randanini”, *Semitica et classica* 14 (2021) 69-84, that examines Eucarpus' and Romanus' epitaphs.

At the same time, one should not overlook the context of those inscriptions, that is a funerary context. This means that, while commemorating those pure exceptional children, only four boys *ṣaddîqîm* out of around hundred children buried in the Jewish catacombs of Rome and other Roman sites, the commemorators also aimed at displaying the good religious education given to the boys by their family and their community. Furthermore, using the 'child *ṣadiq*' pattern was a way to emphasise on how great, pious and important those boys would have become, had they lived longer.

4. Confrontation with 'pagan' and Christian sources

The attribution of adult qualities in Jewish epitaphs seen above reminds us of the Roman pattern of the *puer senex*. I am not the first researcher to have drawn such a parallel and pointed out to Graeco-Roman influences over the use of a similar motive in a little series of Jewish Romans inscriptions, since Margaret Williams has already considered that Eucarpus' representation perfectly matches the *puer senex*.⁷ Notwithstanding, for the first time, this paper provides actual examples of Roman 'pagan' and Christian inscriptions of *pueri suenes* from the same period that can support this thought-provoking idea and broadens it to a whole range of Jewish sources, associating texts and epitaphs. As for Christian sources, I have also decided to bring one early Christian textual source with a Jewish background, an excerpt from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2,41-48), and one later Christian epigraphical source (ICUR 1978) that does not have any link with Judaism in order to show the evolution of the motive in Christian sources.

To start with, I would like to mention the origin of the *puer senex*, a motive that appears for the first time in Roman literature through Vergil's depiction of young Iule, Aeneas' son (*Aened.* IX, 311), as «a heroic soul beyond his years» (Theodore C. Williams trans.; Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston 1910), *ante annos animumque gerens curamque virilem* in Latin, in which the *ante annos* is reminiscent of Josephus' κατὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν in his depiction of young Moses. This cannot prove a direct Vergilian influence of Vergil on Josephus but does at least determine that Moses, as described by Josephus, is indeed a *puer senex*, for both sources share the same concept of the child's high maturity. But the context differs: Iule's maturity is revealed in a military context, during a parade, whereas the *puer senex* motive in Josephus applies to an intellectual frame.

⁷ M.H. Williams, "Image and Text in the Jewish Epitaphs of Late Ancient Rome", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 42 (2011) 328-350.

A ‘pagan’ epitaph from Rome (IGUR 426), estimated at the mid-2nd century or mid-3rd century CE, somehow seems to be closer to Josephus’ text, since it presents the portrait of a two-year-old boy, Marcus Aurelius Chrysippos, who is said to have «already had the thoughts of an old man» (my translation from the Greek: τὰς δὲ φρένας ἤδη γέρωνος), referring to his intelligence far beyond his few years of life. However, this *topos* is here pushed to the extreme with the explicit combination of extreme youth and extreme age (γέρων), ascribing to such a young child a precocity that is barely realistic.

IGUR 426

Θ(εοῖς) Κ(αταχθονίοις)
 Μ(ἄρκος) Αὐρ(ήλιος) Χρύσιππος
 τὴν μὲν ἡλικίαν ἐτῶν δύο
τὰς δὲ φρένας ἤδη γέρωνος,
 5 πολλοὺς μὲν εὐφρανε ζῶν, πολλοὺς δὲ ἡνίασεν ἀποθανών·
 Τοῦ δὲ θρέψαντος ἦν κύριος.
 χαιρέτω καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ τοῖς
 εὐφημοῦσιν αὐτὸν ἀναδιδότω

My translation:

Marcus Aurelius Chrysippos – 2 year-old-boy
Who already had the thoughts of an old man,
 He rejoiced many during his lifetime
 And his death was grieved by many as well.
 He was the lord of the person who nourished him.
 May he rejoice and may he send goodness to those who remember him.

If we now consider the Christian sources, we can perceive differences in their treatment of the *puer senex* motive according to their Jewish or non-Jewish background.

In my first source, taken from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2,41-48) and dated back to the 1st century CE, the Jewish background is self-evident through Jesus’ visit of the Temple of Jerusalem with his parents during Passover, in strict accordance with the Jewish Law about the *shalosh regalim* (the three pilgrimage festivals). By that time, Jesus is twelve years old, thus a little older than most children mentioned earlier, but still under the age of the commitment to the *mitzvot* though.

Despite this, separating from his parents, he sits with the doctors of the Law, teaches, asks questions and answers to the questions that he is asked, so

that all the people around him are stunned by the child's knowledge, even superior to that of the rabbis: «Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers» (NIV translation from the Greek: ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες οἱ ἀκούοντες αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῇ συνέσει καὶ ταῖς ἀποκρίσεσιν αὐτοῦ). This sentence reminds us of the way Josephus pictures people meeting young Moses and turning again upon seeing him. Nevertheless, what leads people to turn again is not Moses' intelligence but his great beauty. To some extent, this tradition seems to be an interesting combination between Moses' produced impression on the people around according to Josephus and rabbinic stories, such as the one told in bGit, yHor and in the Tosefta, of dialogues between rabbis and children that show their knowledge of the Law. Nonetheless, what unites all those sources is their depiction of gifted children who are heard by adults and are somehow already included into the adults' world, being accepted and recognised for their unique gifts.

The second source is an inscription from the 4th century CE, contemporary with the Jewish inscriptions from Rome, but without any Jewish background. The epitaph gives us an insight into the many impressive gifts of the child Dalmatius who, despite not living even seven years, taught himself Latin and Greek. There is no mention of any kind of religious qualities but only of rhetorical ones, which proves the influence of Graeco-Roman culture over later Christian inscriptions, whereas earlier ones, as our first source, were deeply influenced by and rooted into the Jewish world:

ICUR 1978

((pastor bonus cum oves)) / Dalmatio filio dulcissimo toti/us ingeniositatis ac sapienti/ae puero quem plenis septem an/nis perfrui patri infelici non licu/it **qui studens litteras graecas non / monstratas sibi latinas adripuit** et in / 't'riduo ereptus est rebus humanis III id(us) fe(b)r(uarias) / natus VIII kal(endas) apr(iles) Dalmatius pater fec(it) ((avis?))

My translation:

To Dalmatius, a son who was very sweet, a boy full of intelligence and wisdom whose company his father could not enjoy for seven full years and **who, while studying Greek, also learnt Latin by himself, without being taught by anyone**, but in only three days he was snatched from human life on the third day before the Ides of February. He was born on the eighth day before the calends of April. Dalmatius (his) father made (this).

5. Conclusion

Pueri senes in ‘pagan’ and later Christian sources put the emphasis on military, rhetorical, and literary qualities, following the model of the Graeco-Roman *paideia* that is to be found in Philo’s and Josephus’ descriptions of Moses, which suits a Hellenistic reading audience.

In contrast to this, in most Jewish sources, this pattern is used but in a deeply Jewish fashion that features religious qualities: piety, innocence, love for the Law and knowledge of the Law (also displayed in the Gospel of Luke), and the knowledge of the Tanakh (see bGit 58a). This allows most of our sources to underline the wisdom that is peculiar to the Jewish people, that distinguishes them from all the nations, the wisdom of the Torah that was given to all, small and great alike.

Thus, textual representations of children are used in order to insist on the distinct identity of the Jewish people compared to their neighbours, both ‘pagan’ and Christian, whereas sources like Philo’s and Josephus’ texts clearly highlight their knowledge of the Graeco-Roman culture and the way some Jews, mostly from the elite, were influenced by it.