

Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the Writings of Philo

Yehoshua Amir

Introduction

In the present study we are concerned with the specific question of the place and treatment of Mikra within **Philo's** extensive oeuvre. General questions on the understanding of **Philo** will be touched upon only insofar they seem inescapably relevant to the difficult subject of **Philo's** views on **Scripture**.¹

We shall in this essay leave open the question whether **Philo** is to be regarded primarily as a philosopher, who uses the Bible as a **vehicle**² for a religious philosophy, nourished by Stoicism and Plato, which may be characterized as late **Stoic**³ or middle **Platonic**,⁴ or whether, on the contrary, he is to be seen as a Bible exegete who places both his general education⁵ and the entire mass of contemporary thought in the service of the absolutely true doctrine of Divine revelation, set down above all by Moses in the **Pentateuch**.⁶ To take these two possibilities as alternatives is, I think, to pose the question in a wrong way. Both ways of looking at the problem have their own inner justifications, and each complements the other. The truth is surely that **Philo's** thought-process oscillates between the two foci which were given him at the outset, namely the reliability of the word of Divine revelation as formulated by Moses, and the convincingness of the doctrine which emerged from the philosophical dis-

¹ A good survey of **Philo's** activity as a writer and a look into the world of his thought, can be found in **Borgen, 'Philo of Alexandria'**.

² Since the 19th century there has been a widespread notion among scholars, though as time goes on it takes milder and milder forms, that **Philo** was only using the biblical text as a pretext in order to pass Greek philosophical doctrines off as Jewish with the help of an artificial exegesis. His purpose has been variously fathomed as a wish to give the despised Jewish religion a little philosophical prestige in the eyes of a Hellenistic audience (Schwartz, in 'Aporien im 4. Evangelium', advocates this view in especially provocative form), or, on the contrary, as an attempt to make acceptable to a Jewish audience the suspect philosophy, and more than suspect mysticism, of the Hellenistic milieu (a position last taken by Goodenough in **By Light, Light**).

³ This classification is seen as the essential one by, e.g. I. Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung*.

⁴ This view has been emphatically followed through by Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*.

⁵ On this subject see Mendelson, *Secular Education*.

⁶ **Wolfson, Philo**, may be regarded as the most prominent representative of this view. The same orientation is demanded by **Völker, Fortschritt und Vollendung**, and worked out with strict consequence by Nikiprowetzky, *Le commentaire*.

cussions of his time. The movement between these two positions, neither of which is static – the biblical word is enigmatic and its meaning is yet to be found out, while philosophical discussion is still in flux- keeps his thought in perpetual suspense. A faithful retracing of **Philo's** thought process would have to show on the one hand how motifs which his exegetical method justify him in extracting from the biblical word, enrich his philosophically grounded mysticism and give it new shades of meaning, and how on the other hand in his interpretation of the biblical text he is guided by his philosophical-mystical commitment. If in the following treatment the first standpoint is somewhat obscured by the second, this is due solely to the limited task we have assumed here, namely to show how **Philo** deals with the biblical word.

Use of Mikra

THE DISTRIBUTION OF QUOTATIONS OVER THE BIBLICAL BOOKS

To find out how **Philo** employs quotations from Scripture in the Greek texts that have come down to us, we need only consult the Scripture Index contained in the edition of the text with English translation.⁷ A casual glance at the Index reveals the remarkable fact that while quotations from the Pentateuch alone fill 65 pages, only five pages suffice for the listing of quotations from all other parts of the OT, and there are no quotations whatever from the **Apocrypha** and the **Pseudepigrapha**.⁸ This disproportion will increase when in the following pages we see what familiarity with the exact phrasing of the Pentateuch **Philo** assumes on the reader's part in certain parts of his writings. When this is taken into account, the preponderance of the Pentateuch in **Philo's** use of the Bible becomes downright overwhelming.

Yet it would not be accurate to say that **Philo** completely dismisses the other parts of Scripture, or fails to regard them as holy books. **Philo's** concept of the Bible is clearly not that of the Samaritans, for whom only the Pentateuch is holy; at times he does make use of the Prophets and the Psalms as authorities. And while we have only a single quotation from the book of **Job**,⁹ his manner of quoting it leaves no doubt that he took his readers' knowledge and recognition of the book of Job for granted. Without committing ourselves on the subject of the 'canon', for which concept as such we have no evidence among Jews, it is

⁷ All references to Philonic texts are taken from the *LCL* edition, of which the 10 volumes by Colson and Whitaker in the years 1919-1962 include all the Greek texts that have been preserved, together with English translations, while the supplement volumes, edited by R. Marcus, 1953, contain the English translations of works which were preserved only in Armenian. The Scripture Index is in *LCL* 10, 189-268.

⁸ The index references to these books refer not to **Philo's** text, but to Colson's notes.

⁹ *Mut.* 48f quotes Job 14:4 (all other references are to Colson's notes).

safe to say that books belonging to the Prophets and Hagiographa were regarded by **Philo** as holy books, to be quoted as such.

What is not clear is why **Philo** so seldom quotes these books, and in particular why he fails to quote them in passages where a quotation from one of these sources would have fitted into **Philo's** train of thought better than the **Pentateuch** verses which he has to subject to a very cumbersome method of interpretation before they will serve his turn. Obviously the Prophets and **Hagiographa** have not the same status for him as the the Pentateuch. But the same is true for the Rabbis, who nonetheless did not hesitate to make extensive use of these books, and particularly in their interpretation of the Pentateuch. Heinemann gives a possible answer to the question: 'The reason is not that the other books were not yet all translated, or all recognized. (...) The scattered quotations which we do find show that such was not the case. Rather, **Philo** knows the Bible only from the worship service and from occasionally looking things up.'¹⁰ Now, this conclusion is based on circular reasoning, for Heinemann's conjecture as to the source of **Philo's** knowledge of these books is derived from **Philo's** sparse use of them. Still, he may have hit on the truth. In such a case we should also have to assume that in the Alexandrian synagogue no portions of the Prophets were read, which is by no means certain. The question whether **Philo** was able to read the books of the Bible otherwise than in Greek translation is likewise moot.

If we do not accept Heinemann's explanation, we may call to mind that in Hellenistic Judaism – to judge by the texts it has left behind – the figure of Moses was even more central than in the motherland. Evidence of this in **Philo** is the fact that although he is acquainted with other prophetic figures, when he deals with the concept of the prophet or friend of God he thinks first, and almost exclusively, of Moses. Thus wherever a word can be traced back to him he does so, bypassing all other sanctified words.

USE OF MIKRA IN THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF WRITINGS

The way in which **Philo** treats Mikra in one category of writings is not necessarily the way he treats it in another; we must therefore consider them separately.

(1) *Books not concerned with the Bible*

Only a few of the writings by **Philo** that have come down to us are not directly related to the Bible." Even these writings are not completely devoid of biblical references. Thus even in a purely academic discussion of the doctrines held by various philosophical schools concerning the indestructibility of the world, there is a reference to 'Moses the Lawgiver of the Jews' who in Genesis, the first

¹⁰ Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jiddische Bildung*, 527, n. 4.

¹¹ All **Philo's** writings on subjects other than Scripture which have been preserved in Greek are contained in *LCL* 9-10.

of his five holy books, taught that the world is imperishable; in support of this the first two verses of the Bible are quoted word for word.¹² In another treatise, written in the spirit of Cynic or Stoic ethics, he praises the Sage's unshakeable strength of character, citing as a reference the 'lawgiver of the Jews', concerning whom it is written: 'The hands of Moses were heavy'.¹³ On the other hand one is struck by the fact that when describing contemporary Jewish trends and conditions Philo gives expression to a strong Jewish religiosity yet does not refer to specific biblical sayings, even when describing the Therapeutic sect, whose members dedicated their entire lives to the study of the books of the Bible.¹⁴

All of Philo's other writings refer in various ways to Mikra. They fall into three groups, which we shall consider in turn.

(2) *The Exposition of the Law*¹⁵

The 'Exposition of the Law' reads the Pentateuch as Moses' book of law. Such an approach compels Philo to ask a preliminary question which he, as a Greek writer, could not evade: is a conception of the book as a law-code possible, from the literary-critical point of view?

The question occurs with regard to Genesis, beginning with the first chapter. Do such non-legislative elements have a legitimate place in a **lawbook**? Here Philo recurs to Plato's statement that a law needs a *proem*.¹⁶ As such a *proem* Moses placed his philosophy concerning the creation of the world at the entrance to his legislation, in order to make clear that what follows is not merely one among innumerable territorial law-codes, but rather that 'natural law', that 'law of the cosmos' which, according to the Stoic view, stands *idealiter behind* all local laws.¹⁷

A similar question confronts Philo when he comes to the stories of the Patriarchs. These he integrates into the law code with the help of the concept of 'unwritten law',¹⁸ which, according to a Hellenistic theory, is present as 'embodied law'¹⁹ in a perfect human being and precedes the written law as its archetype. As such, the figures of the Patriarchs are an integral part of the law itself.

¹² *Aet.* 19.

¹³ Prob. 29, after Exod 17:12.

¹⁴ *LCL* 9, pp. 103-69.

¹⁵ Borgen, 'Philo of Alexandria', 233-43: Exposition of the Law. Texts *LCL* 6-8; and additionally 1:1-137.

¹⁶ Plato, *Leges* 4, 723a; cf. Pfister, 'Die Prooimia'.

¹⁷ *Op.* 3. Here and in the following pages the reader will easily recognize that I differ with Borgen's ('Philo of Alexandria') view of Philo's basic tendency. In the cosmopolitanization of the concept of law I see rather a tendency to derealization of the concrete concept of the nation. This is not the place to explore this difference.

¹⁸ *Abr.* 267; on the history of this concept see Hirzel, 'Agraphos Nomos', lff. Whoever reads here that Abraham was not only 'one who obeyed the Law' but 'himself a law and an unwritten Statute', will agree with Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung*, 10, who insists that Philo has in mind here a different concept from the rabbinic Oral Tora, which one can **keep**, but not **be**.

¹⁹ *Abr.* 5. The passage continues: 'The enacted laws are nothing else than memorials of the life of the ancients', a notion which could scarcely be farther from the rabbinic conception.

The function of the biographies of the Patriarchs, as well as the loosely inserted treatise on Moses in two books,²⁰ is thus to depict ideal figures. In their organization they do not follow the pace and sequence of the biblical narratives; instead the material is arranged under several headings and represents a deliberate selection. In the biography of Moses the episode of Moses' sin is omitted, and of the numerous stories of the sins of the people in the desert, only the story of the spies is included in Philo's account.

The same is true for those portions of the series which are devoted to the laws proper. Philo does not attempt a complete presentation of the laws of the Pentateuch. The absence of some particular by no means justifies the conclusion that Philo forgot about it or overlooked it. For instance, when he deals with the Sabbath laws as a **whole**,²¹ he omits certain regulations which he mentions in other contexts, so that we cannot assume he did not know them. But a presentation without gaps is not what he is aiming for. Rather he is concerned with proving in detail that the law of Moses is perfect in itself and therefore identical with the law of the cosmos, the absolute Logos.

A law which is equivalent to the 'Logos' has to be built up 'logically', i.e. systematically. This is the reason for the arrangement of the entire, immense mass of legislation under the rubrics of the Ten Commandments, whose number corresponds to the number of categories in Aristotelian logic.²²

This attempt at systematization, which incidentally has no complete parallel in the rabbinic tradition, naturally compels Philo to take considerable liberties in regrouping his material, bringing together statements on related matters from widely-scattered contexts and adding interpretations of his own to emphasize the excellence of these laws, sometimes by comparison with those of other peoples.²⁴ Only in one instance does he make an exception to the systematic arrangement of his material: when he begins his treatment of individual laws with **circumcision**²⁵ because it is, as he says, 'an object of ridicule among many people'. The apologetic sense of the arrangement is clear: it is no use trying to place the other commandments in the correct perspective until he has disposed of a prejudice which might so repeal the (non-Jewish) reader as to prevent him from giving a fair hearing to the rest of his presentation.

Not much can be gleaned from this series in the way of direct textual exegesis. The Bible is presented, both narrative and legislation, mostly in free paraphrase; only rarely is it quoted verbatim. Heinemann,²⁶ at several points in his treatment of Philo's presentation of the law, calls attention to the fact that

²⁰ See Borgen, 'Philo of Alexandria', 234 n. 6.

²¹ *Spec.* 2:56-70. But cf. *Mig.* 91.

²² *Decal.* 30.

²³ See Urbach, *Sages* 1, 360ff.

²⁴ See esp. *Jos.* 42f. on the strictness of Jewish sexual morality in comparison with the Hellenic.

²⁵ *Spec.* 11:2ff.

²⁶ Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung* 421, the distinction between theft and robbery.

Philo's exposition implies certain definite interpretations of the legal concepts in the Pentateuch; but it does not inquire explicitly into the precise meaning of this or that legal concept. Verbatim quotations from the Bible and linguistic explication of these quotations occupy more space in the treatise 'On the Account of the World's Creation'* than in other parts of this series. This may be attributed to the fact that this treatise may also be regarded as the first part of another series, with which we shall deal presently.

A peculiarity of the series on legal exposition is that the reflections, which are generally guided by pragmatic considerations, are frequently interrupted by allegorical disquisitions which, while profound in themselves, could be omitted without prejudice to the general coherency. If anything these disquisitions detract from the coherency because in allegory the personality of the hero is lost, and it is precisely on the personality of the forefathers that their claim to be regarded as 'embodied law' rests! The inclusion of such passages leads us to suspect that the aspect under which the work of Moses is considered in this series is only of secondary importance to **Philo**, since even here he cannot refrain from pursuing the kind of thoughts that represent his essential nature.

(3) *Allegorical Commentary*

In this series the text of Mikra is treated quite differently. It is **Philo's** vast allegorical commentary, which despite its **volume**²⁸ accompanies only a part of Genesis with its explications. This time the character of the Pentateuch as law code is simply ignored. It is a legal document only in its literal meaning, which this second series leaves far behind. The subject here is not Mosaic legislation, but Mosaic philosophy.

The main effort of this philosophy is devoted to revealing the essential, 'spiritual' meaning behind the 'sensible'. The act of allegorization, which purports to bring out the meaning really intended by Moses, consists of divesting the thing named by the word of its concreteness, leaving an intrinsic meaning which is conceptual, abstracted from all spatial-temporal being, absolutely valid, eternal. Where the living human beings of biblical narrative are concerned, it is precisely their personality which must be eliminated: 'Now probably there was an actual man called Samuel; but we conceive of the Samuel of the Scripture, not as a living compound of soul and body, but as a mind which rejoices in the service and worship of **God**'.²⁹ Allegory can take the biblical

²⁷ Thus he deduces (Op. 15) from the use of the word **μια** and not **πρώτη** for the first day of Creation (Gen 1:5) that this day has a special status in relation to the following 5; thus he concludes, on the basis of an eccentric interpretation (Op. 25) of **κατ'εἰκόνα** (Gen 1:17), which he takes to mean 'in conformity to a similitude', i.e. a similitude once removed, that man (and **a potiori** the rest of creation) is not the image of God, but only the image of that image, i.e. of the Logos; and thus he insists (Op. 26) that 'beginning' in the first verse of the Bible is to be understood 'not in a chronological sense'.

²⁸ In **LCL** it takes up vols. 1-5. See **Borgen**, 'Philo of Alexandria', 243-45, who lists some further parts of this series which have not been preserved.

²⁹ **Ebr. 144.**

personalities only as sensible representations of certain spritual types. On this level of Bible interpretation it is irrelevant whether and when, historically speaking, a man called Samuel lived. It is quite possible for a certain type to appear in the Bible as **Laban**, and then again as **Jethro**.³⁰ Allegorical interpretation treats these figures as identical.

This explains the diffuse compositional character of this series. Nearly every treatise begins with one or more biblical verses, which are given in the **Septuagint version**.³¹ But the text itself is only a point of departure for a lengthy symbolic exegesis. **As we** have seen, this entails finding the announced theme in all kinds of different, widely separated biblical contexts. The disjointed thought-process which makes the reading of these works so laborious, is thus a necessary consequence of the inner presuppositions of the way of thinking that prompted this exegesis. The weight of symbolic meaning is borne by the isolate word, so that the exact wording of the text to be interpreted must be punctiliously attended to. In these works, then, **Philo** is addressing a reader who has in his head not only the law or the narrative in general, but the exact wording of the biblical text. Practically, only a Jewish reader would be able to follow the arbitrary stringing-together of biblical passages from widely varying contexts, without losing the thread.

With this method a single verse suffices to set the theme for an entire treatise; indeed the brief verse Gen 9:20 provides material for two treatises.³² In 'On Flight and Finding' the short story of Hagar in the **desert**³³ becomes the starting-point for the development of the deepest motif in **Philo's** conception of the human being.

Thus the verse is only the point of departure for an often widely-ramified train of thought which sometimes loses sight of the verse and does not come back to it.

(4) *Questions and Answers*

In the third series of his writings on the Bible, 'Questions and Answers',³⁴ **Philo** adopts the opposite procedure, keeping strictly to the form of the running commentary. The verses are discussed in biblical sequence, the discussion opening each time with questions that usually begin with 'Why does he say...' or 'What does he mean by ...' Here **Philo** limits himself in his answer to the verse under discussion and refrains from adducing further parallels. Most of the

³⁰ **Ebr.** 36ff. Jethro 36-45, and immediately afterward **Laban** 46-53.

³¹ Katz **Philo's Bible**, has established that those Bible texts which deviate from the Septuagint as handed down to us- particularly in the lemmata at the beginnings of treatises, which we find in some **Philo** manuscripts-do not go back to **Philo** himself, but were inserted into the text by later copyists.

³² **Agr.** and **Plant.**, both in **LCL 3.**

³³ Gen 16:11-12, treated in **Fug., LCL 5.**

³⁴ **LCL** Suppl 1-2. Cf. **Borgen**, 'Philo of Alexandria', 241-42. The text has been preserved only in an Armenian translation which is itself fragmentary. The supplement volumes contain R. Marcus' English translations of these texts without the Armenian, but with the addition of the few fragments of the Greek originals which have been preserved.

answers can be divided into two parts: in the first he gives the literal meaning of the verse, in the second he interprets it allegorically. In keeping with his basic attitude as exegete, **Philo** usually disposes of the literal meaning in a few words, while the allegorical interpretation may go on for several pages.

Here, then – in contrast to the great allegorical commentary – **Philo** has doubtless subordinated his own religious-philosophical thinking to his task as Bible exegete. It must be stated, however, that it is not the ‘Questions and Answers’ that define **Philo** as a Bible commentator, but rather the great ‘Allegorical Commentary’, in which his hermeneutic genius celebrates its most impressive triumph.

Authority of Mikra

MIKRA MORE THAN LITERATURE

We shall have to deal with the question of the degree to which **Philo’s** allegorical Bible interpretation is indebted to the Homeric allegory which originated in his native Alexandria. This way of interpreting the poet, which developed in close connection with Alexandrian philology, is a branch of that literary scholarship which regarded Homer as the perfect poet, learned both in science and in philosophy.³⁵ The task of the allegorist was to extract evidence for this from Homer’s text.

Although, as we shall see, **Philo** pursues the deeper mysteries of the biblical text with similar methods, he is still far from naming the work of Moses in the same breath with the Homeric epics. With a decisiveness whose pathos derives from the critique of poetry in Platon’s *Politeia*,³⁶ he draws a sharp distinction between Moses and poetry: art, like the Sophists, is concerned with seeming, Moses with being.³⁷ True, **Philo** thereby loses all sense of the aesthetic standard of biblical poetry; but that is only the lamentable reverse side of his philosophical sense of superiority.³⁸

Thus it is certainly no literary interest that leads **Philo** to devote almost his entire activity as a writer to Mikra. He regarded literature, which for the consciousness of that time also included historiography, as belonging to the preliminary studies³⁹ whose worth is only relative, in contrast to the study of absolute truth:

³⁵ On the interpretation, especially the allegorical interpretation, of Homer, see **Buffière, Les mythes d’Homère** and **Pépin, Mythe et allégorie**.

³⁶ See Ptpin, *ibid.* ch. 5: La réaction platonicienne, 112-24. Plato’s critique of Homer is in the *Politeia*, Books 2 and 3, and esp. book 10.

³⁷ For instance **Sac. 12; Det. 38**.

³⁸ I have noted an example of this in my *Studien*, 84 n. 4.

³⁹ To which the treatise *Cong.*, LCL 4, is devoted.

Nou doubt it is profitable, if not for the acquisition of perfect virtue, at least for the life of civic virtue, to feed the mind on ancient and time honoured thoughts, to trace the venerable tradition of noble deeds, which historians and all the family of poets have handed down to the memory of their own and future generations. But when, unforeseen and un hoped for, the sudden beam of self-inspired wisdom has shone upon us, when that wisdom has opened the closed eye of the soul (...) then it is idle any longer to exercise the ear with words (...) For truly it is sweet to leave nothing unknown. Yet when God causes the young shoots of self-inspired wisdom to spring up within the soul, the knowledge that comes from teaching must straightway be abolished and swept off. (...) God’s scholar, God’s pupil, God’s disciple (...) can not any more suffer the guidance of men.”⁴⁰

Thus science and art can form only an intermediate stage on the road to absolute truth. That is the subject of **Philo’s** exegesis of the story of the slave Hagar, who gives birth for her mistress Sara.⁴¹ In his exegesis **Philo** speaks in the first person and says that he has learned this and that science, ‘yet I took none of her children for my private use, but brought them as a gift to the lawful wife’,⁴² the mistress, who stands allegorically for Wisdom.

Mikra, then, must belong to the sphere of this wisdom, although simply to equate them, as some **Philo** commentators have done,⁴³ is to reckon without the fundamental non-concreteness of his thinking. We shall also have to deal with the question of how, in the above quotation, it can be taught both that wisdom is of God (and not of man) and that it is self-inspired.

It is in any case clear that the biblical word, in contrast to the irresponsible productions of poetic fancy, has authority. As to the source of this authority, this is not quite so transparent in **Philo** as in rabbinic Judaism. Wherever interpreters have tried simply to apply the categories of rabbinic Judaism to **Philo**, they have either left part of his statements out of consideration or have robbed them of meaning by refusing to take them literally. This was possible because **Philo’s** work contains unambiguous proof that he regarded the biblical word as of Divine origin; this seemed to ensure the identity of his views with those of the rabbis.

If we wish to reopen this question, we must begin by reexamining some of **Philo’s** statements on the Divine origin of the biblical word.

THE BIBLICAL WORD AS ORACLE

On what, according to **Philo**, is the authority of the biblical word founded? A

⁴⁰ **Sac. 78**.

⁴¹ Gen. 16:1-2.

⁴² Cong. 75.

⁴³ This is the view of **Wolfson, Philo** 1, 87ff. in his chapter, ‘Handmaid of Scripture’.

first answer to this question is provided by his designations for the biblical verse: he calls it an 'oracle'⁴⁴ or a 'logion';⁴⁵ the two in his usage are **synonymous**.⁴⁶ Both designations are derived from the language of Greek oracular institutions. In order to evaluate this usage correctly, we have to take into consideration that we do not find in **Philo** that avoidance of pagan vocabulary which marks both the Septuagint and other Jewish-Hellenistic literature; thus he does not hesitate to extol an overwhelming love of God as '**Olympian**'.⁴⁷ This insouciance must be attributed to the need to place the most resonant expressive resources of the Greek tongue at the service of religious fact and feeling; these resources are naturally most intimately bound up with paganism.

If we compare **Philo** with **Josephus** in this respect, we find that the latter uses the word 'oracle' 7 (8) times.⁴⁸ Four of the passages speak of pagans consulting the oracle. In one passage he tells of an oracular saying which became current, and which the Jews trusted so far as to wage war on Rome because of it.⁴⁹ In one (uncertain) passage Moses perhaps expects to bring word from God down from Mount **Sinai**.⁵⁰ But in the only two passages which are of interest for our discussion,⁵¹ biblical prophetic sayings, as such, are designated as oracles. These two sayings are naturally marked in the biblical original as words coming directly from God.

Philo, too, likes to speak of 'oracles' in connection with Bible texts where God is actually the speaker. Thus he enumerates four laws which, according to biblical report, came into being when Moses asked God and God gave him an answer via an '**oracle**'.⁵² When Moses asked to see God, he received an 'oracle' whose content corresponds to what is introduced in Exod 33:21 with the words: 'Thus spoke the **Lord**'.⁵³ Moses is commanded to tell Pharaoh: 'The people has received an oracle from **Me**',⁵⁴ meaning the command reported in Exod 3:18. Moreover, when he describes the giving of the oracle, **Philo** makes liberal use of the hieratic terminology of the Delphic Oracle: 'an oracle falls out'" for Moses, harking back to the archaic technique of drawing the oracle by lot; and Abraham 'is smitten by an **oracle**',⁵⁶ as in the ecstatic states of the Delphic Pythia.

⁴⁴ *χρησμός*; see on this Mayer, *Index Philoneus*, s.v.

⁴⁵ Both words are used synonymously in close proximity to each other, e.g. Mos. 157. *Spec.* 1:315. Another synonym is *θεοπρόπιον*.

⁴⁶ *λόγιον*; see *Index Philoneus*, s.v.

⁴⁷ *δλύμπιος*; see *Index Philoneus*, s.v.

⁴⁸ In one of the passages (Ant. 3:75) the manuscript versions give both *χρησμοί* and *χρησμοι*; the second reading is preferable.

⁴⁹ War 6:109.

⁵⁰ See n. 48.

⁵¹ Applied to biblical texts only in War 4:386; 6:109.

⁵² *Mos.* 2: 192.

⁵³ *Post.* 169.

⁵⁴ *Mos.* 1:73.

⁵⁵ *Post.* 69.

⁵⁶ *Abr.* 62.

Thus Colson is not quite methodically sound in frequently translating the Greek word not by 'oracle' but merely by 'command'.

But **Philo** is not always speaking of a word from God reported in the Bible, when he uses the word 'oracle'. When **Philo** speaks of the loaves of showbread in the sanctuary as 'arranged by oracle',⁵⁷ we may still take this as an exalted way of speaking of the Divine directions so prosaically set forth in Exod 29:29; but when he has a '**logion**' tell us that on the way to the sacrifice Abraham and Isaac walked **together**,⁵⁸ or that Aaron's rod swallowed up the **others**,⁵⁹ we are dealing with passages where God is not introduced as speaker. They can be called logia only because they are in the Bible; the **logion**, then, is the biblical verse as such. The fact of being written in the Bible suffices, according to **Philo**, to give a saying oracular status. 'The Divine **oracles**'⁶⁰ – i.e. the report in Exod 20:21 – 'say' that Moses entered into the mysterious darkness of the Godhead. Nevertheless the fact that he speaks of 'oracles' here in the plural may be taken as evidence of a reluctance on **Philo's** part to allow the word 'oracle' to rigidify into a simple synonym for 'Bible verse'. The word 'oracles' in the last-quoted example is applied to a single **verse**;⁶¹ in such cases 'the oracles' may be taken to mean the Bible as a **whole**.⁶² The use of the word 'oracle' in this paler sense, which had established itself in his writing, seems to have been what prompted **Philo**, in passages where the actual word of God is the subject, to redundancies like 'proclaimed **oracles**'⁶³ or even an 'oracle proclaimed (by God) in **person**'.⁶⁴ Such words from God are proclaimed not only by Moses, i.e. in the Tora, but also by prophets.⁶⁵ The verbs that designate the act of proclamation are applied both to the Godhead and to earthly proclaimers; @ the latter is thus both a receiver and a transmitter of oracles. How both sides of his function belong together is stated in the simplest possible way: 'Moses himself learnt it by an

⁵⁷ *Cong.* 168: *χρημοίς προστέταται*.

⁵⁸ *Mig.* 166; the same goes for *Ebr.* 82, where the verse cited immediately afterward is introduced as 'the oracles'.

⁵⁹ *Mig.* 85.

⁶⁰ *Mut.* 7.

⁶¹ E.g. *Mig.* 60, 108; *Heres* 21; *Fug.* 50.

⁶² This is especially evident in *Sobr.* 17, where *οι χρησμοί* repeats what had just been called *αί ιερώταται βίβλοι*.

⁶³ *χρησθέν λόγιον*, e.g. *Det.* 48; *χρησθέν θεοπρόπιον*, e.g. *Som.* 1:148 or *λόγιον θεσπισθέν Mut.* 13. If *Mut.* 34 speaks of a *χρησθέν επί του Ένώχ λόγιον* and *Som.* 1:64 of a *λόγιον χρησθέν επί Αβρααμ*, neither of which is the word of God in the text, then *χρησθέν* is here used not attributively, as an appositive, but **predicatively**, as a qualifier.

⁶⁴ *Mut.* 13.

⁶⁵ Of these Jeremiah (*Cher.* 49) is referred to by name; without naming them he also cites sayings of Hosea (*Mut.* 139), Isaiah (*Mut.* 169), and Zechariah (*Conf.* 62). It is worth noting that in the passage (*Cher.* 49) where he is named Jeremiah is called prophet, authorized hierophant, and one filled with God, so that he receives practically the same distinctions as Moses.

⁶⁶ On Moses as receiver of oracles see *Mos.* 2:176; *L.A.* 3:142; *Som.* 2:227; *Virt.* 63; on Moses as giver of oracles see *Fug.* 138; *Mos.* 2:269.

oracle and has taught us how it was'.⁶⁷ But it is not only Moses who exercises this double function. Concerning Jeremiah, Philo writes: 'I myself was initiated under Moses the God-beloved into his greater mysteries, yet when I saw the prophet Jeremiah and knew him not only *amystes* but a worthy *hierophantes*, I was not slow to become his disciple'.[@]

The title 'hierophant', here applied to Jeremiah, is one of Philo's standard designations for Moses. In *Hellas* this term referred to 'the foremost cult official in the Eleusinian rites',⁶⁹ i.e. the rites of the Attic mystery cult. Philo alternates this title with another which had been used since Homer for the *priest* of the oracle.⁷⁰ In examining Philo's conception of Moses, we shall have to come back to these pagan associations.

After all that has been said, it is almost self-understood that Philo consistently speaks of Mikra as 'holy Scripture', the 'holy books', and the *like*.⁷¹ It has been rightly pointed out that such terms were widespread in Hebrew usage, and probably had been since much earlier times; probably they had come with the Egyptian Jews from the *motherland*.⁷² What we have yet to do is to show how the particular nuance of this holiness in Philo differs from that in other views.

It is first to be said in any case that for Philo the fact that something is stated in Mikra is sufficient proof that it is so. After allegorically extracting a Stoic proposition from a Bible verse, he says, 'This is no invention of mine, but a statement made by the holy oracles'.⁷³ In another passage he writes that when the soul frees herself from all earthly things and clings only to God, then God grants her himself: 'This my affirmation is warranted by the oracle which says, "The Lord Himself is his portion"'.⁷⁴ The fact that the statement is made in a Bible verse guarantees its truth. Again and again a Bible verse is called to 'witness' for a claim.⁷⁵ This is most impressively stated when Philo explains that for God's ownership of the universe 'the oracle is a true witness in these words; "and the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for all the land is mine.", a clear proof surely that in possession all things are God's, and only as a loan do they belong to created beings'.⁷⁶ He returns to this in summing up: 'All things are God's possessions on the strength of true reasonings and testimonies which none may convict of false witness, for our witnesses are the oracles which Moses wrote in the sacred books'.⁷⁷ Since Moses wrote it in the sacred books, any objection would be absurd.

⁶⁷ *Det.* 86.

⁶⁸ *Cher.* 49.

⁶⁹ *PW* 2, 2 p. 1581.

⁷⁰ θεοπρόπος, see *Index Philoneus*, s.v.

⁷¹ See *Index Philoneus*, s.v. ἱερός.

⁷² Cf. *M. Shabbat* 16:1; *M. Yadayim* 3:5.

⁷³ *Mut.* 152.

⁷⁴ *Cong.* 134.

⁷⁵ Thus *Det.* 166; *Conf.* 94; *Fug.* 178; *Mut.* 39; *Som.* 1:231; *Som.* 2:220.

⁷⁶ *Cher.* 108f.

⁷⁷ *Cher.* 124.

In these last words, however, there is something that has a foreign sound for the reader versed in the writings of the Rabbis. Of course, the Rabbis too speak of the Tora as written by Moses. But its irrefutable truth does not rest for them on the fact that he wrote it. He was only permitted to write what God made him write, even when he himself rebelled against it.⁷⁸ And only because he submitted to this condition is the Tora unconditionally true for the Rabbis. Philo sees the role of Moses in relation to the Tora in a fundamentally different light.⁷⁹ In all the writing he devotes to Scripture, he treats Moses as the author. When he quotes a Bible verse, he says: Moses says. And that this saying does not only mean the obedient writer who has to write what he is told whether he accepts it or rebels against it, becomes evident when, concerning a passage which speaks of an oath taken by God, Philo asks: 'Why did it seem well to the prophet and revealer to represent God as binding himself by an oath?'⁸⁰ Thus when the biblical narrative poses a problem for Philo, he formulates his astonished question in the form: 'what was Moses thinking of, when he said this or that of God?' Such a question can obviously be asked only of an author who can determine how God is to be spoken of in this text.

How did Philo understand Moses' personal role as writer? We can gain some light on this matter from a remarkable exposition called forth by the verse 'And Abel became a Shepherd of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground'.⁸¹ Philo is struck by the sequence, as the younger Abel must have chosen his occupation after his brother. This is a violation of logic, 'But Moses sets no value on probabilities and plausibilities, but follows after truth in its purity'.⁸² This opposition between probability/plausibility and truth is of course a late echo of Socrates' debate with the Sophists in Plato's *Apologia*. What motive of truth it was that prompted Moses to dispense with plausibility, becomes understandable only from Philo's allegorical interpretation of the verses, which we need not go into. What is important for our purposes is the continuation of this sentence in Philo: 'And when he comes to God apart from all, he frankly says that he is not eloquent (here Philo uses a Greek word⁸³ which may also mean: plausible, standing to reason)'. The last sentence of course alludes to Moses' answer at the thornbush: 'I am not a man of words',⁸⁴ which is translated by the Septuagint, in one variant which Philo was evidently using, with this Greek

⁷⁸ *Gen. Rabba* 8:8, p. 61-62.

⁷⁹ See on the following the essay 'Moses als Verfasser der Tora bei Philon' in my book *Die hellenistische Gestalt*, 77-106.

⁸⁰ *Sac.* 94.

⁸¹ *Gen.* 4:2.

⁸² *Sac.* 12.

⁸³ εὐλογος.

⁸⁴ Apparently Philo's copy of the Septuagint had in this passage the variant εὐλογος, which is found in some Septuagint manuscripts. This reading was also used by the tragic poet Ezekiel, as we see from v.113 of the fragments of his tragedy.

word, so that the answer can read either 'I am not eloquent' or 'I do not speak plausibly'. Here not only is Moses named as the author of the Tora, but a stylistic peculiarity of the Tora text as we have it is causally connected with Moses as we know him through the Bible narrative itself. The authorship of the Moses we know is taken as an explanation for a certain trait that characterizes the style of the Bible.

Anyone acquainted with rabbinic Bible exegesis will immediately see that nothing could be more alien to the rabbis than this way of thinking. But still more immediately, we are faced with the question: how does the authorship of **Moses**,⁸⁵ which **Philo** assumes as a thing self-understood, consort with **Philo's** own view of the biblical word as 'oracle', for which we have just presented detailed evidence? In one of the passages quoted above, **Philo** himself drew a sharp distinction between instruction by God and instruction by human beings. Does not Moses' authorship imply a human, that is, if we maintain the sharpness of the alternative, a non-divine status for **Mikra**?

Here we find ourselves in a blind alley, from which we can exit only by seeing through the hasty conclusion which we drew by equating **Mikra** too directly with the Divine instruction which **Philo** enthusiastically praises. In the above quotation% the opposition between human and Divine teaching was accented in a very particular fashion:

When (. . .) the sudden beam of self-inspired wisdom has shone upon us, when that wisdom has opened the closed eye of the soul and made us spectators rather than hearers of knowledge, and substituted in our minds sight, the swiftest of senses, for the slower sense of hearing, then it is idle any longer to exercise the ear with words.

Here **Philo** distinguishes between human instruction, which is absorbed through the ear, and Divine instruction, which appears to the **eye**.⁸⁷ Divine wisdom as a ray of light perceived only by the eye rather than the ear preoccupies **Philo** quite intensively, especially in connection with the revelation at Sinai, where 'All the people saw the **voice**'.⁸⁸ In his allegorical commentary **Philo** writes of this verse:

The writer distinguishes things heard from things seen and hearing from sight, (. . .) making a very subtle distinction, for the voice dividing itself into noun and verb and parts of speech he naturally spoke of as "audible", for it comes to the test of hearing; but the voice of sound that was

⁸⁵ In my essay cited in note 79 I have adduced a large amount of further evidence for this view in **Philo**.

⁸⁶ In the quotation given above, n. 40, from *Sac.* 78.

⁸⁷ See my book, *Die hellenistische Gestalt, 143-53*, where I examine the notion of the visible voice in connection with the **Sinaitic** revelation.

⁸⁸ Exod 20:15, translated according to the text of the Septuagint.

not that of verbs and nouns but of God, seen by the eye of the soul, he rightly represents as "visible".⁸⁹

Thus for **Philo** the language of Divine revelation is not that which is articulate and can be grasped in the grammatical categories of verb and noun. To facetiously equate what 'God's scholar, God's pupil, God's **disciple**'⁹⁰ experienced with **Mikra** is to miss this dialectic between the audible and the visible word. In order to understand the precise nature of the holiness of **Mikra** in **Philo**, we must be very careful in our use of statements of this kind.

On what sources, then, shall we rely? First we must again recall that **Philo**, alone among Hellenistic Jewish writers, makes free use of pagan cult terminology. Not only does he designate the biblical word as an 'oracle', he also speaks of its proclamation as '**soothsaying**',⁹¹ and of its human carrier as hierophant, priest of the oracle, and prophet.⁹² We would do well, then, to cast a brief sidelong glance at certain views held in the pagan milieu concerning these phenomena of its religious life.

The main line of Plato's view of prophecy,⁹³ which **Philo** adopts to a considerable extent in his own **prophetology**,⁹⁴ seems to me less fruitful for the understanding of **Philo's** concept of Scriptural authority than the treatment of **mantic** utterance in the *Timaios*,⁹⁵ which in many respects contradicts Plato's other statements. Here, apparently following the practice of the **Delphic** oracle of his time, he makes a sharp distinction between the soothsayer who, in the grip of the god, can only utter incomprehensible sounds, and the insightful prophet, who, using his reason to the fullest, 'critically judges'% these sounds and extracts a reasonable meaning from them.

There is a passage in Plutarch⁹⁶ which points in somewhat the same direction. True, Plutarch lived two generations after **Philo**, but the thought which his work incorporates is partly of a much older date. Plutarch has one of the participants in his dialogue explain why the oracles assume an artless form which is unworthy of the god: this is because the oracles are formulated by the soothsaying priestess, who is a simple woman of the people: 'The voice is not that of a god, nor the utterance of it, (. . .) but all these are the woman's; he puts into her mind only the visions, and creates a light in her soul in regard to the future; for inspiration is precisely this'.

⁸⁹ *Mig.* 48.

⁹⁰ *Sac.* 79.

⁹¹ θεοπίζειν, see *Index Philoneus*, s.v.

⁹² On προφήτης cf. Fascher, ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ. Even the Septuagint could not manage without this word taken from the terminology of pagan cults.

⁹³ Fascher, *ibid.*, pp. 17-20, 66-70.

⁹⁴ Fascher, *ibid.*, 152-60.

⁹⁵ Plato, *Timaios* 72ab.

⁹⁶ κείναι.

⁹⁷ Plutarch, *De Pythiae Oraculis*, 397c.

Though their accounts differ in many respects, Plato and Plutarch concur on one point: they show that the concept of inspiration, as understood at many points in **Philo's** spiritual milieu, left room for autonomous linguistic activity on the part of the human being. Both authors assume that such autonomous activity does not detract from the authenticity of the Divine word which finds expression in the saying.

What is true of the oracle-priest would seem to apply with even greater force to the mystery priest, i.e. the hierophant. The hierophant is considered as the human representative of his god. As such, his task is to initiate those who approach into the mysteries of his God. Thus it is perfectly appropriate for **Philo** to invoke Moses as hierophant and to beg of him: 'Be our prompter and preside over our steps and never tire of anointing our eyes, until conducting us to the hidden light of hallowed words thou display to us the fast-locked lovelinesses invisible to the **uninitiate**'.⁹⁸

Elsewhere we are urged to call on Moses for help in order that 'as he learned when he did not know, he may teach us **too**'.⁹⁹

Moses, then, can assist us in fathoming the holy words, because they were given to him. He is both receiver and transmitter of the Divine teaching. As receiver he not only receives a knowledge of Divine teaching from without; he also receives from within a share of the Divine being, as **Philo** likes to explain in connection with the verse 'Stand thou here with Me'.¹⁰⁰ Thus for **Philo** the word of Mikra can be a word that comes to Moses and a word that proceeds from him, at one and the same time. Even the fact that in two **passages**¹⁰¹ the Tora conditionally refers to Moses as 'God' – a fact that the rabbis did their best to explain **away**¹⁰² – is enthusiastically welcomed by **Philo**.¹⁰³

This being so, what does **Philo** have to tell us about the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch? The answer is to be found in the second book of his 'Life of Moses', where he describes Moses' personality under three headings: Moses as lawgiver, priest and prophet. In the first part Moses is treated without reservation as the author of the law, with the excellence of the laws serving as proof of their author's outstanding human qualities. For the non-Jewish reader, to whom this treatise is primarily **addressed**,¹⁰⁴ such a line of reasoning would have seemed logical and quite sufficient; he had met with it in the biographies of other great lawgivers. But for us the critical point is reached only in the section on Moses as prophet, where **Philo** recurs to this theme. We approach this section with the question: is **Philo** going to present the Tora as a whole as a revelation which came to Moses and which he now has to interpret as prophet? If so, how is he

⁹⁸ Som. 1:164.

⁹⁹ Som. 2:1.

¹⁰⁰ Deut 5:31, e.g. Som. 2:227. This thought is clearly formulated in *MOS.* 2:190.

¹⁰¹ Exod 4:6; 7:1.

¹⁰² See for instance *Targum Onkelos* on both verses.

¹⁰³ See the Scripture Index to both verses, *LCL* IO.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Borgen*, 'Philo of Alexandria', 235.

going to reconcile this depiction with the first part's view that the lawgiver was able to devise so excellent a constitution for the people because of his own excellent character? Our questions are answered by the first sentence of this section: 'Now I am fully aware that all things written in the sacred books are oracles delivered through Moses; but I will confine myself to those which are more especially his'.¹⁰⁵ That is to say: If I were to take the title 'Moses as Prophet' in the broadest sense, I would really have (again) to discuss the Tora as a whole. But I shall **limit** myself here to those expressions of Moses' prophecy which belong here in an eminent sense. In order to understand this decision (which we find disappointing), we need a scheme of distinctions among prophetic **experiences**, which **Philo** promptly undertakes to supply.

There are, he says, three kinds of prophecy, the first of which he does not wish to discuss here. The first is undoubtedly the one which gives all the verses of the Tora the character of oracles; **Philo** defines it as an utterance 'spoken by God in His own person with His prophet for **interpreter**'.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps because **Philo** is not concerned here with this first category, but wants to get on to the third, he seems to have been somewhat careless in his definition; for if it is supposed to include the entire content of Mikra, we might object that God does not speak in the first person throughout the **Bible**.¹⁰⁶ More important, however, are the reasons he gives for skipping over this category:

The first kind must be left out of the discussion. They are too great to be lauded by **human** lips; scarcely indeed could heaven and the world and the whole existing universe worthily sing their praises. Besides, they are delivered through an interpreter, and interpretation and prophecy are not the same **thing**.¹⁰⁷

The praise and exaltation cannot conceal the fact that here **Philo** finds himself short of concepts adequate to his subject. According to the outline it is supposed to be one of the three kinds of prophecy; yet for the role attributed to Moses in this process, and called interpretation as a stopgap, 'prophecy' is not quite the right word.

But it is hardly possible to reduce the duality of Moses' position as receiver and author of the law to an exact formula. If the statement that all the words of the Tora are oracles really said all that is to be said, there would be no insuperable obstacles to describing how the Tora is received. But the truth is that the relationship between what comes to Moses and what he gives out cannot be disentangled. There is more of Moses' own personality in the Tora than the concept of him as interpreter can cover.

¹⁰⁵ *MOS.* 2:188.

¹⁰⁶ **Philo** here ignores the distinction which he himself makes (*Decal.* 18) between the Ten Commandments, which God proclaimed in person, and the other **commandments**, for which He used a prophet as interpreter. The two alternatives are here grouped rather carelessly together.

¹⁰⁷ *MOS.* 2:191.

Thus the biblical creation story is not simply a communication from God through Moses about what He did in the six days of Creation; rather it is an 'exalted **theology**'¹⁰⁸ formulated by Moses about the Creation. In order to understand it¹⁰⁹ we must, for instance, retrace the line of reasoning that led Moses to set a time of six days for the creation of the world, an act which in truth occurs outside the dimension of time.¹¹⁰ Moses was capable of this outstanding philosophical accomplishment 'both because he had attained the very summit of philosophy, and because he had been instructed by oracles in (...) Nature's lore'.¹¹¹ These two reasons, which **Philo** gives in paratactically juxtaposed clauses, can hardly have been intended by him to mean two separate processes; but he had no better linguistic means of conflating the intrahuman and the suprahuman aspects. This double determination of Moses' position makes it impossible for us to regard **Philo** as representing a clear-cut dichotomy which would place Moses, as the possessor of Divine wisdom, in opposition to the philosophers, who are dependent on human wisdom alone. Moses is for him **both** the receiver of Divinely proclaimed truth **and** a member of the **philosophic** gild. In a wide-ranging disquisition on the merits and demerits of drunkenness, **Philo** first gives the opinions of 'the other **philosophers**'¹¹² and then that of Moses. To be sure, Moses is of all philosophers the one who reached the peak of philosophy, and **Philo** will pronounce him right in any dispute with the rest. But this does not take Moses out of the category of philosophers.

He remains, similarly, in the category of lawgivers. **Philo's** whole **Exposition of the Laws** is dedicated to the proposition that the laws of Moses are the most excellent ever conceived by the human mind. If he speaks of them as laws 'which could not possibly have been conceived by the human mind without divine **inspiration**',¹¹³ this is not to deny that they were conceived by a human mind, only that this could have occurred without divine **inspiration**.¹¹⁴ Divine inspiration stands behind human thought, but does not replace it. The idea of friendship with God, whose content is the gift of participation in Divine being, is the connecting link. This alone makes it possible to understand how **Philo** can say in one breath, 'Oracles which are both words of God and laws given by men

¹⁰⁸ *op.* 12.

¹⁰⁹ To which the treatise *De Opificio Mundi* is devoted.

¹¹⁰ *op.* 13f.

¹¹¹ *Op.* 8.

¹¹² *Ebr.* 1; the same combination of words is to be found in *Gig.* 1; *Som.* 1:141. In *Abr.* 13: 'In the other philosophers and especially in the all-wise Moses' the philosophers and Moses are NOT contrasted but associated.

¹¹³ *Prob.* 80; note that the expression is modeled on Plato, *Leges* 7, 811c, where the **legislating** elders say of their own philosophical conversations that they were probably held 'not without inspiration from the gods'.

¹¹⁴ Similarly the legislative ideas of the elders in Plato (see preceding note) were considered human, despite the divine inspiration.

who are friends of God'.¹¹⁵ The words of God and the laws of friends of God, i.e. of Moses, are identical. They represent two ways of looking at the same thing. Whether I choose one formula or the other, the authority, the unimpeachable validity of the laws is guaranteed. The same goes for the doctrinal aspect of Mikra: whether I speak of the philosophy of Moses or simply of oracles, both are legitimate ways of confirming the authority of the word of Mikra.

What has led many scholars to portray **Philo** as the advocate of a fundamental dichotomy between (human) philosophical knowledge and (Divine) communication of absolute truth, is a line of thought most clearly expressed in the allegory of Hagar and Sara.¹¹⁶ In general this allegory is said to mean the subordination of general education to philosophy, but in one **passage**¹¹⁷ it is taken to mean, on a higher level, the subservience of **philosophia** itself to **sophia**. Moreover, **sophia** and **philosophia** (which means literally love of **sophia** or striving for **sophia**) are furnished with definitions familiar from Stoic teaching. If one then maintains the association of **sophia** with the figure of **Hokhma** (Wisdom) from the Hebrew Bible – a figure which since the book of **Ben-Sira**,¹¹⁸ as throughout rabbinic literature, had been identified with the Tora – then it is possible to read into **Philo's** allegory the doctrine of philosophy as 'handmaid of **Scripture**',¹¹⁹ in analogy to the famous formula of philosophy as 'ancilla **theologiae**' which was later developed by Christian theologians.

Tempting as this combination is, there are objections to it.¹²⁰ The concrete, mythologically-coloured figure of 'Tora', such as we find in rabbinic Judaism, is nowhere to be found in **Philo** and seems to me incompatible with a way of thinking which attributes only superficial importance to the concrete. But if this figure is missing, there is nothing on which to base the identification of Tora with 'Wisdom'.

On the other hand, **Leisegang** has shown¹²¹ that in **Philo** the attainment of **sophia** acquires for the first time the ecstatic meaning that reaches its highest expression in the philosophy of Plotinus. But from this ecstatic view which permeates his depiction of Moses as prophet, **Philo**, as we have seen, **excludes** the reception of the Tora, even though the Tora as a whole could be called an 'oracle', by distinguishing prophecy in the narrower sense from Tora. What the soul receives directly from God, that before which all human instruction must fall silent, is no longer a 'hearing' but a 'seeing', a 'light' which may be called a 'voice', but a voice which does not express itself in 'verbs and nouns' and so

¹¹⁵ *Det.* 13: τοὺς ἱεροφανθέντας λόγους μὲν θεοῦ, νόμους δὲ ἀνθρώπων θεοφιλῶν. Note that the two nouns **λόγους** and **νόμους** are covered by the one article **τοὺς** and therefore must denote the same quantity.

¹¹⁶ To which the treatise *De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia* is devoted.

¹¹⁷ *Cong.* 79.

¹¹⁸ *Sir.* 24:23.

¹¹⁹ Thus **Wolfson**, *Philo*, 1, 87ff.

¹²⁰ Cf. my book, *Die hellenistische Gestalt*, 185.

¹²¹ Cf. **Leisegang**, 'Sophia', 1025.

cannot be received discursively, still less written down as a text.¹²² As to how the gulf between an inspiration sublimed beyond the word and the nevertheless available and interpretable text is to be bridged, **Philo** himself refrains from all speculation. He offers us no theory to explain how words that are really ‘all oracles’ can at the same time express the opinions and wisdom of the ‘all-wise’¹²³ Moses himself. But it is methodically unsound to establish a harmony between the two positions by interpreting one of them away with inadequate means.

PHILO'S AUTHORITY: THE GREEK TEXT

Philo's appeal to the authority of Mikra contains yet a further complication with which we must deal in closing: the text from which he takes the truth imparted or mediated by Moses is not the Hebrew text of Moses himself, but its Greek translation. From a purely technical point of view this is to **be expected** of any author who writes in Greek; **Josephus** too always gives **his Bible** quotations in the Septuagint translation, though it goes without saying that, as a **priest from Jerusalem**, he has read the Hebrew original.

Nonetheless, **Philo's** situation is fundamentally different. Even if we assume that he knew enough Hebrew to consult the original – a question which is **highly controversial**¹²⁴ – he can have done so only very seldom. And this, given **the** kind of questions he asks of the text, is a far more serious matter for him than for **Josephus**. **Josephus** is concerned only with the content of the biblical stories, whereas **Philo's** allegorical commentary is, as we have seen, entirely founded on a sensitive investigation of the verbal formulations, of whose precise **and** deliberately-chosen rightness the interpreter is convinced, and whose fine nuances often have far-reaching exegetical consequences.

One example will suffice to illustrate how important the differences between linguistic versions can be for such interpretations. In the treatise ‘Who is the Heir of Divine Things’ there **is**¹²⁵ an exposition of the concept of ‘ecstasy’, an extremely important key concept for **Philo**. The interpretation starts from a verse which in the Septuagint reads: ‘About sunset an “ecstasy” fell upon Abraham and lo a great dark terror falls upon him’.¹²⁶ This word ‘ecstasy’, **Philo** tells us, has various meanings in Moses’ work:

Sometimes it is a mad fury producing mental delusion due to old age or melancholy or other similar cause. Sometimes it is extreme amazement at the events which so often happen suddenly and unexpectedly. Sometimes

¹²² See n. 86.

¹²³ πάνσοφος, e.g. Abr. 13.

¹²⁴ Wolfson's confident assertion (*Philo*, 1, 88); ‘His knowledge of Hebrew was such that he could himself without too much effort provide his own translation’ is shared by few. The latest discussion on the question: Sandmel, *Philo's Knowledge of Hebrew*’.

¹²⁵ *Heres* 249ff.

¹²⁶ Gen 15:12.

it is passivity of mind, if indeed the mind can ever be at rest; and the best form of all is the divine possession of frenzy to which the prophets as a class are subject.

Philo gives examples for each of these six meanings, taken from widely-differing Pentateuch verses in which ‘Moses’ uses the word ‘ecstasy’. The last-named meaning is the one **supposedly** represented in the verse from Genesis on which he **is commenting**. **How** important this compilation is for **Philo** becomes evident when we realize **that** he is here using the famous Platonic depiction of the different kinds of ‘mania’¹²⁷ as a model. But when we consult the Hebrew text we see **that** in the **passages**¹²⁸ quoted by **Philo** the word ‘ecstasy’ represents not **one** but five different words. Thus all this lofty train of thought is quite devoid of any ‘**Mosaic**’ textual basis.

Such examples could be multiplied ad libitum. They show that **Philo** uncritically **accepted** the Septuagint text he had before **him**¹²⁹ as identical with the Hebrew **Bible**. Otherwise he could not have extracted from it the deeper layers of Mosaic wisdom supposedly hidden in every fine nuance of word-choice.

This would make **Philo** the only interpreter in the two-thousand-year history of Jewish Bible exegesis whose hermeneutics were not – or at the very least not consistently – based on the Hebrew text. This makes him an exceptional and problematic figure for anyone who is at home in rabbinic literature, in the medieval commentaries, in the textual interpretations of the philosophers and kabbalists, or even in modern Jewish Bible scholarship. For the Jewish traditional consciousnesses ‘**Tora study**’ starts, by definition, from the masoretic text. No wonder, then, that Jewish scholars have tried again and again at least to soften **Philo's** position as an outsider, by showing that certain of **Philo's** interpretations make use of the Hebrew original and then going on to assume that it was always possible for **Philo** to refer to the Hebrew original, but that he had in general kept to the Septuagint out of consideration for his readers who did not know Hebrew. In the light of the above example we must approach such theses with skepticism.

In order to understand the trust **Philo** places in the Septuagint version, we must briefly consider:

1. the status of the Septuagint in Hellenistic Judaism generally;
2. **Philo's** own evaluation of the Septuagint.

(1) The status of the Septuagint among Hellenistic Jews may best be illumined by a comparison with the status of the Aramaic **targum** in the motherland. The name ‘Septuagint’ by which the Greek translation is conventionally designated goes back to a story which has come down to us in several versions,¹³⁰ according

¹²⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a ff.

¹²⁸ Gen 15:12; Deut 28:28f.; Gen 27:33; Gen 45:26; Exod 19:18; Lev 9:24.

¹²⁹ See above n. 31.

¹³⁰ The Jewish versions are: the *Letter of Aristeas*, *Philo*, *Mos.* 2:25-44; *Jos. Ant.* 12: 11-1 18.

to which this version is the work of 70, or more precisely 72, translators who traveled from Jerusalem to Egypt in order to translate the Pentateuch into Greek.¹³¹ Whether or not the main features of this story correspond to some historical event, all of its literary versions contain a liberal share of miraculous elements. We shall not attempt to settle the question whether the whole story should be dismissed as mere invention because of these elements. But one thing which has so far not been sufficiently considered in the discussion of this question, is that a story which seems to be essentially mythical gives an indication of certain dynamics behind the making of the myth. The Rabbis have no such myth to relate concerning Onkelos or the author of any other **targum**. The mere existence of this Hellenistic saga, adorned as it is with elaborate and picturesque detail, is evidence of the extraordinary importance with **Greek**-speaking Jews attached to their work of translation. Indeed, **Philo**¹³² tells us of a yearly festival with which the Jews of Alexandria commemorated the day on which, according to tradition, the translation was presented to King Ptolemy II.¹³³ For them, then, the publication of the Septuagint was a major historical event. Again we may compare this with the sparse information which we have on the making of the Aramaic **targums**.

Thus the Hellenistic Jews saw the Greek Bible not as an unfortunately indispensable aid to the understanding of the Hebrew Tora, but a treasure and source of pride in its own right. And this is not surprising, given the fact that Hellenistic society as a whole accorded to books (which meant, practically speaking, books in Greek) a prestige unprecedented in any earlier society. With their own book in hand, the Jews could move up to a respected position in this milieu; they now had a share in Greek literature which in the Hellenistic world meant world literature. This, at least, is how the Jews saw it, and the saga of a Bible translation commission led by a Hellenistic king is simply a palpable expression of this self-evaluation.

(2) Let us now turn to **Philo's** own account, in *Life of Moses*, 2: 26-44,¹³⁴ of how the Bible was translated into Greek. The account begins with the following curious remark:

¹³¹ For further details see Tov, above, pp. 164-65.

¹³² *Mos.* 2:41-44.

¹³³ In all probability this yearly celebration took place on the 8th of Tevet. In an undatable supplement to *Megillat Taanit* this date is included in a list of days on which one should fast, for on this day 'the Tora was translated into Greek in the days of King Ptolemy, and darkness came over the world for the space of three days.' This late tradition is in the spirit of the Rabbis, who regarded the Greek translation as a disaster; but it is likely that the calendar date we have here comes from an ancient tradition and designates the day which for **Philo** and his Alexandrian contemporaries was a day of rejoicing. Cf. *Megillat Taanit*, p. 201.

¹³⁴ This section has been closely analysed by Otte, *Das Sprachverständnis*, 32-43, in which, however, by a tricky way of translating, he burdens **Philo** with dimensions of existential philosophy of language, which the unprejudiced reader will hardly find in him.

In ancient times the laws were written in the Chaldaean tongue, and remained in that form for many years, without any change of language, so long as they had not yet revealed their beauty to the rest of mankind.

Our own logic would lead us to expect something like 'remained restricted to that language'. But the word-for-word meaning of **Philo's** sentence is that the language of the book **was** originally Hebrew (or as **Philo** likes to say, 'Chaldaean'), but **is** Hebrew no longer. Of course he knows that the original text continues to exist – later he refers to it – but now that the law of Moses can reveal its beauty to all humankind in the garment of the Greek language, the Hebrew is of no importance. He could hardly have expressed this estimate more bluntly than in the grotesque sentence we have just read. Only in the Greek version can the law become available to all of humanity and thus assume the position to which its excellence entitles it. Hence the 'importance and public utility of the **task**'¹³⁵ of translation. A great king undertakes the **work**,¹³⁶ and the high priest with whom he consults also favours the plan, reflecting that 'the King would not have taken on such a task without God's guiding **care**'.¹³⁷

Finally **Philo** comes to the work of the translators themselves, who are conscious of their mission to 'translate laws which were soothsaid in oracles'.¹³⁸ They concentrate utterly on 'bringing the soul alone into contact with the laws alone'.¹³⁹ Their activity is designated by verbs derived from 'prophet', 'hierophant', and 'enthusiasmos', the same words which **Philo** uses elsewhere in connection with Moses himself. In their choice of words, he tells us, they did not let themselves be led astray by the Greek language's wealth of synonyms; rather they found each time the one word that was equivalent to the Hebrew word, exercising a linguistic stringency which **Philo** equates with the unambiguous terminology of geometry or dialectics. That, in his view, is the explanation for the famous linguistic miracle: the versions of all 72 translators corresponded word for word, although they had worked independently of one another!

The clearest proof of this is that, if Chaldaeans have learned Greek, or Greeks Chaldaean, and read both versions, the Chaldaean and the translation, they regard them with awe and reverence as sisters, or rather one and the same, both in matter and words, and speak of the authors not as translators but as prophets and priests of the mysteries, whose sincerity and singleness of thought has enabled them to go hand in hand with the purest of spirits, the spirit of **Moses**.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ *Mos.* 2:28.

¹³⁶ *Mos.* 2:28-30.

¹³⁷ *Mos.* 2:32.

¹³⁸ *Mos.* 2:34.

¹³⁹ *Mos.* 2:36.

¹⁴⁰ *Mos.* 2:40.

It is scarcely conceivable that Philo would have maintained this extravagant opinion if he had had sufficient linguistic knowledge to compare the two texts in detail. What guarantees for him the congruence of the Septuagint with the Hebrew original, is the miracle of the different translators' word-for-word agreement.¹⁴¹ We must understand that this was no rhetorical exaggeration, but represents Philo's serious belief in the quality of this translation, however little our own critical judgment agrees with him; for this is the inner justification for Philo's use of the Septuagint. Of course, the Holy Scriptures were originally given in Hebrew; but now they are (also) available in Greek, and in the making of the Greek version the same prophetic forces were at work as in the Hebrew text. In the Greek version, too, every word was chosen with Divinely inspired accuracy, so that the exegete, probing the depths of meaning in every Greek word, has the same chance as the Hebrew exegete of arriving at the original truth which dictated the word.

With this the question whether Philo could read the Hebrew original becomes theologically irrelevant. Even supposing him capable— as some have¹⁴²— of offering his own translations rather than relying on the Septuagint 'out of consideration for his Greek-speaking readers', he would have had to refrain from so doing, unless he wanted to lay claim to the same supernatural gifts which, in his view, made the Septuagint possible.

Finally we may draw attention to the last words of the above quotation, which epitomize Philo's particular view of Scriptural authority. In certifying that the translators have adequately rendered the content of Mikra, he does not say that they have captured 'the word of God' but that they captured 'the spirit of Moses'. If all the words of the Bible may be called 'oracles', then certainly they must be the word of God; but to attribute them to 'the spirit of Moses' is also to do justice to them.

Exegesis of Mikra

PHILO'S BATTLE ON TWO FRONTS

We have already stated that Philo's exegesis is fundamentally double-tracked. Everything in the Bible is capable of, and indeed requires, both a literal¹⁴³ and

¹⁴¹ Scholars have pointed out that the story of the linguistic miracle is also found in the writings of the Rabbis, but it has not been noted that here the tables are turned. Thus in *Massekhet Soferim* 1:9 it is said of the sages who 'translated the Tora for king Ptolemy' that 'God put a counsel into the heart of each of them; they agreed together in one opinion and wrote the Tora for him, each one apart, and changed 13 passages in it', which the Rabbis then enumerate, pointing out where they deviate from the original (which for the Rabbis of course means the masoretic) text. Thus the Rabbis are aware of the linguistic miracle reported in the Greek sources, but they use it to point out not the congruence but the incongruence of the Greek with the Hebrew text.

¹⁴² See n. 124.

¹⁴³ ἱερτόν.

an allegorical¹⁴⁴ interpretation. In general¹⁴⁵ these two modes of interpretation are kept strictly separate; in innumerable instances, Philo tells us exactly when he leaves the ground of literal interpretation and ventures into allegory. Both ways of looking at Mikra are justified and necessary, and even where Philo is dissatisfied with the literal sense of a passage, he feels obliged to begin by conveying it.

In the literal sense the book of Moses, as we have seen,¹⁴⁶ is a book of laws, with narrative appendages. In the allegorical meaning it reveals itself as the teaching of God's transcendent being and of the soul's distance from and nearness to God. From the foregoing analysis it will be clear that both ways of interpretation are legitimate in his eyes, but that the two are not in balance. Philo repeatedly makes it clear that Moses' deepest concern was his religious-philosophical doctrine, which may be arrived at by allegorical interpretation.

Thus Philo as interpreter of the Bible is fighting, as it were, on two fronts: against the extreme allegorists who abolish the literal meaning of Mikra, and against the literalists, who do not want to go beyond the literal sense. Both these extremes he rejects; but given the predominance of allegorical interpretation in his thinking, we may expect him to take a more resolute position on the second front than on the first. Let us look at his confrontations with both extremes:

(1) Philo confronts the extreme allegorists explicitly in one passage. Characteristically, what is in question here is the literal meaning, not of the biblical narratives, but of the biblical laws. Let us see how the battle is conducted.

In the discussion of the promises God makes to Abraham when He commands him to leave his birthplace,¹⁴⁷ Philo comes to the words: 'I will make thy name great'.¹⁴⁸ On this he comments that while the name a person has, i.e. the good reputation he enjoys in society, is less important than his real moral standard, still it is 'a great matter and of much advantage to the life which we live in the body'. The way to preserve one's good name is to keep strictly to the way of life inherited from the fathers. However, 'there are some who, regarding laws in their literal sense in the light of symbols of matters belonging to the intellect, are overpunctilious about the latter, while treating the former with easygoing neglect (. . .) They ought to have given careful attention to both aims'. Philo chides them for behaving 'as though they were living alone by themselves in a wilderness, or as though they had become disembodied souls' and human society, in which they after all live, did not exist. 'These men are

¹⁴⁴ Especially ἀλληγορία and ὑπόνοια, see *Index Philoneus*, s.v.; of the rich literature on Philo's allegory we cite Stein, *Die allegorische Exegese*; Christiansen, *Die Technik*; Sowers, *Hermeneutics*; Heinisch, *Der Einfluss*, as well as the articles in the pertinent encyclopaedias.

¹⁴⁵ Only for the treatise *De Opificio Mundi* is this clear distinction not valid; this treatise was apparently written as the first piece both of the Exposition of the Laws and of the Allegorical Commentary. But the relation of literal and allegorical interpretation in this work would require a study to itself.

¹⁴⁶ See n. 15.

¹⁴⁷ *Mig.* 88-92.

¹⁴⁸ Gen 12:2.

taught by the sacred word to have thought of good repute, and to let go nothing that is part of the customs fixed by divinely empowered men greater than those of our time'. As examples of what he means, he mentions the Sabbath, the holidays, circumcision and the Temple service. Of the Sabbath he says: 'It is quite true that the Seventh Day is meant to teach the power of the Unoriginate and the non-action of created beings. But let us not for this reason abrogate the laws laid down for its observance, and light fires or till the ground or carry loads or institute proceedings in court', etc. 'We should look on all these outward observances as resembling the body, and their inner meanings as resembling the soul. (. . .) If we keep and observe these, we shall gain a clearer conception of those things of which these are the symbols; and besides that we shall not incur the censure of the many and the charges they are sure to bring against us'.

Thus **Philo** does *nut* say: these are the commandments, in black and white, this is what God has ordered you to do; you have broken the Law, therefore you are a sinner. Rather he says: Of course what is really commanded is in the realm of religious knowledge, and this you are following very well; all the same, you ought not simply to shrug off what has literally been said. Why not? We have heard two answers. First, by corporeally fulfilling the symbolic commandment you also come to a clearer understanding of it. This is an answer which, pursued to extraordinary depths, reverberates again and again through the history of Jewish thinking on the problem. But in **Philo** it is only a momentary idea, which receives no further development in his writings and indeed is not in consonance with his views on the relation between body and soul. Much more solidly anchored in his argumentation is the second answer: If you disregard the outward forms, you will acquire a bad reputation in the community to which you belong and want to belong. One must say that, coming from a thinker so imbued with the Stoic pride in the asocial self-reliance of virtues and the Socratic pathos of the opposition between being and seeming, such arguments make a very feeble impression. He 'censures' the radical allegorists, but his rebuke does not have much substance.

(2) On the other hand, his dispute with the literalists is scattered all over his oeuvre and surfaces on many occasions. A typical epithet for them is '**Micropolitans**',¹⁴⁹ or 'men of narrow citizenship', to whom he contrasts 'those who are on the roll of a greater country, even this whole world'. Their narrowmindedness is opposed by the Stoic doctrine of the cosmos as the only true home of the sage. Here **Philo** contents himself with claiming that the literal sense is insufficient; elsewhere he goes so far as to say that the idea that God literally planted a garden in Eden is irreligious,¹⁵⁰ 'as though God tills the ground and plants pleasures'.¹⁵¹ Relations with the literal meaning become especially tense

¹⁴⁹ μικροπολίται **Som.** 1:39.

¹⁵⁰ **Gen** 2:8.

¹⁵¹ **L.A.** 1:43. Other passages of this kind, whose literal interpretations **Philo** rejects, are listed by Shoyer, 'Alexandrian Jewish Literahsts' 272.

whenever God is spoken of in anthropomorphic terms. Moses, according to **Philo**, has two ways of talking about God, as he informs us in two contradictory verses,¹⁵² 'two leading statements about the Cause (= God), one that "God is not as a man"; the other that "He is as a man"'. Of these two statements only the first, naturally, is correct; the second is 'introduced for the instruction of the many', who can only be induced to follow the law through fear of an anthropomorphic God. One naturally acquires such a conception of God if one gives the literal meaning to many biblical statements on God, of which **Philo** cites examples. The literal meaning of these verses is thus not true, still there is a point to it: 'All such may learn the untruth, which will benefit them, if they cannot be brought to wisdom by **truth**'.¹⁵³ Here, then, the literal meaning is insufficient, even wrong; and yet it is not a simple misunderstanding of the text.¹⁵⁴ Those who do not go beyond it remain caught in a baseless mythological fiction, and that is irreligious.

The representatives of literal meaning do not always come off quite so badly. Thus if someone reads the story of the Tower of Babel as an account of the origin of different languages, 'I would not censure such persons, for **perhaps**¹⁵⁵ the truth is with them also. Still I would exhort them not to halt there, but to press on to allegorical interpretations'.¹⁵⁶ To the story of Jacob's placing a stone under his **head**¹⁵⁷ he responds – an exceptional thing for him – with a full appreciation of the literal content, before getting on with the allegorical interpretation: 'Our admiration is extorted', he writes, not only by the deeper meaning but also 'by the way in which the literal narrative inculcates (. . .) endurance'.¹⁵⁸

But the literal meaning as such cannot always be retained. The verse 'The strong current of the river makes glad the city of **God**'¹⁵⁹ cannot refer to the concrete city, for Jerusalem lies neither on the sea nor on a **river**.¹⁶⁰ 'Cain went out from the face of **God**'¹⁶¹ cannot be understood literally, since, first, God has no face, and, second, no one can escape his field of **vision**.¹⁶²

From here it is not far to cases where **Philo** destroys the possibility of literal comprehension in order to prove the rightness of allegory. Thus various motifs of the story of Paradise—the planting of the **garden**,¹⁶³ the creation of Eve from

¹⁵² **Deus** 52.

¹⁵³ **Deus** 64.

¹⁵⁴ **The** pragmatic justification of untrue statements is modeled on Plato, **Republic** 389b.

¹⁵⁵ **Wolfson, Philo** 1, 125 translates here not **perhaps** but **probably**, which is linguistically quite possible.

¹⁵⁶ **Conf.** 190.

¹⁵⁷ **Gen** 28:11.

¹⁵⁸ **Som.** 1:120ff.

¹⁵⁹ Thus **Psalm** 46:5 in the Septuagint translation.

¹⁶⁰ **Som.** 2:246.

¹⁶¹ **Gen** 4:16.

¹⁶² **Post.** 1ff.

¹⁶³ **L.A.** 1:43; **Plant.** 32.

a rib,¹⁶⁴ the speech of the serpent¹⁶⁵ – are shunted off into the realm of fable, to leave room for their allegorical interpretation. Yet such rebellions against the simple meaning are after all not to be taken seriously, as we can see by comparing such passages with the ‘Questions and Answers on **Genesis**’¹⁶⁶ in which these motifs are allowed their literal validity. At times **Philo** brings a Sophistic-sounding rhetoric into play even against legal prescriptions; but in the Exposition of the Laws these prescriptions are upheld, and sometimes even praised for their rational character.¹⁶⁷

We may conclude, then, that on the whole, despite certain escapades, **Philo** recognizes a dual meaning in Scripture, neither sacrificing the literal meaning to the allegorists, nor allowing the literalists to contest his right to allegorize.

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO LAYERS OF MEANING

This brings us to the question how the two layers of meaning in Mikra relate to each other according to **Philo**.

First let us see how **Philo** expressed himself on the subject. When he writes of the Therapeutic sect, ‘To these people the whole law book seems to resemble a living creature with the literal ordinances for its body and for its soul the invisible mind laid up in this wording’, he is basically describing his own position.¹⁶⁸ As we saw, he himself used the same image, when he admonished the radical allegorists to see the relation between the holiday and its concrete prescriptions as a relation between body and soul.¹⁶⁹ As a Platonist he of course attached a vastly greater importance to the soul than to the body.

In the account of the Therapists this image is followed by another: ‘Looking through the words as through a mirror the rational soul beholds the marvellous beauties of the **concepts**’.¹⁶⁸ The mirror is only an instrument for the perception of the object. This image suggests that the literal meaning is of no importance in itself, it is only intermediate to the perception of the one thing which is to be seen.

Elsewhere¹⁷⁰ the relationship between the two is likened to that between an object and the shadow it casts.-A shadow is not even an instrument which helps me to examine the object; it is merely an indication of the object’s being there.

¹⁶⁴ L.A. 2:19.

¹⁶⁵ *Agr.* 97.

¹⁶⁶ *Q. G.* 1: 14; 20-22; 32.

¹⁶⁷ In *Fug.* 108 he denounces the law of negligent homicide for inner lack of logic, yet in *Spec.* 3: 131ff. this same prescription is demonstrated to be reasonable. The freeing of certain categories of soldiers before the battle (Deut 20:5-8) is extensively **citicized** in *Agr.* 148-156 as senseless and immoral; in *Virt.* 28-31 it is explicitly praised as reasonable.

¹⁶⁸ *Cont.* 78. On the question of the reliability of **Philo**’s report on this sect in *Cont.* see the critical article of I. Heinemann, ‘Therapeutai’. The very objections against the reliability of his description reinforce the value of **Philo**’s explanations as evidence of his own attitudes.

¹⁶⁹ See above n. 148, *Migr.* 93.

¹⁷⁰ *Conf.* 190.

There is food for reflection in the fact that this image is used precisely in the passage where a literalist interpretation (of the Tower of Babel story as an explanation of linguistic difference) is recognized as correct as far as it goes.

In still another **passage**¹⁷¹ a biblical report of a dream is first presented as a ‘foundation’; then comes the ‘wise builder’, namely Allegory, to erect the building on it. Here the literal meaning is treated as the precondition.“*"

We see that these different images do not quite add up to the same notion of the relation between the two modes of exegesis. But all of them do suggest that **Philo** thought he could capture some kind of communication between the two methods he practiced. If we are right in this surmise, the next question would be to what extent his own work fulfills this notion.

It seems to us that it does so only very partially. True, it has been demonstrated that the Abraham of his Exposition of the Laws is the same Abraham whom we meet in his allegorical writings.¹⁷³ But this conclusion cannot be generalized. The Joseph of the allegorical writings is a problematic character, who is always in the wrong in the confrontation with his brothers; the Joseph of the biography of the Patriarchs is an ideal ruler.¹⁷⁴ The story of Cain, which provided material for four allegorical **treatises**,¹⁷⁵ is completely omitted from the Exposition of the Laws. Likewise in the latter Noah is dealt with, but only in connection with the **Deluge**,¹⁷⁶ which is not mentioned in the four allegorical treatises on Noah. On the other hand, **Enoch** figures in the biography of the **Patriarchs**,¹⁷⁷ but is completely forgotten in ‘The Posterity and Exile of Cain’. Thus it would hardly seem that the two ways in which **Philo** worked were coordinated with each other. We saw that when **Philo** cites a law in one of his allegorical **works**,¹⁷⁸ he does not base his speculations on its literal meaning; on the contrary, he has to dispose of the literal meaning before he feels he can use the text allegorically. The same goes for the narrative parts of Mikra: ‘Probably there was an actual man called Samuel; but we conceive of Samuel (...) not as a living compound of soul and body, but as a mind (...)’¹⁷⁹ Once we have scaled the heights of allegory – or in Platonic terms, of the idea – we are no longer dealing with a man named Samuel, but only with the species of soul-being which **is meant** by this figure. We need not deny the historical Samuel, but he is now irrelevant.

¹⁷¹ *Som.* 2:8.

¹⁷² This thesis follows in its essentials the contribution of Pépin, ‘Remarques’, 139.

¹⁷³ This thesis is worked out in Sandmel, *Philo’s Place*.

¹⁷⁴ This is shown in detail in Goodenough, *Politics*. The disputed political explanation which the author gives to the phenomenon need not concern us here.

¹⁷⁵ All contained in *LCL* 2.

¹⁷⁶ *Abr.* 27-47.

¹⁷⁷ *Abr.* 17-26.

¹⁷⁸ See above n. 167.

¹⁷⁹ *Ebr.*, 144; similarly on Terah *Som.* 1:58, on Isaac *Fug.* 167.

If I am seeing rightly, the same goes, as far as Philo is concerned, for Israel. Of course Israel is first of all the chosen people to whom he belongs. But Israel means 'beholding God'. Once we have reached the summit of religion and philosophy, Israel as a concrete reality becomes, in a manner with which existentialist thinking cannot sympathize, irrelevant in the face of the eternal reality symbolized by Israel, namely the contemplation of God.

THE CHARACTER OF PHILONIC ALLEGORY

Philo's trust in the allegorical method rests on a certain assumption concerning the possible content of the 'all-wise' Moses' divinely inspired wisdom. For a thinker of Platonic orientation such wisdom would have to transcend the world of the senses, ascend to the world of ideas, and, passing beyond even that, bring the mind in contact with the absolute God Who is exalted even above the world of ideas.¹⁸⁰ The literal sense of Mikra, with its earthbound stories and commandments, could not do this; therefore the teaching of the all-wise Moses must be something more than this. The text must be 'saying something else' (the meaning of the Greek words *allaagoreuein*), beyond the meaning comprehensible to everyone.

It was this assumption, no doubt, that set Philo on the way to *all-egory*, just as, some hundred years before, it had been developed by the Greeks for the reinterpretation of their mythological traditions. '* A few Jews had begun in recent years to apply the method to Mikra.¹⁸² The influence of the Greek exegetical tradition is particularly obvious where Philo simply takes motifs familiar from the interpretation of Homer and applies them to biblical motifs.¹⁸³ Nor is there anything contradictory in his also taking over many midrashic motifs from the motherland.¹⁸⁴ It has been shown that he occasionally also employs the rabbinic rules of interpretation; however, one should not forget that these rules themselves owe a great deal to Greek rhetoric.¹⁸⁵

The Stoic allegorists of Philo's time had a strong tendency to explain away whatever they found morally or religiously offensive in the old songs.¹⁸⁶ This tendency rubs off on Philo's way of thinking only occasionally, as when he writes, 'We shall avoid that which is unanswerable . . . , and for which we should not like to be held accountable, if we attempt to get at the secret physical

¹⁸⁰ Philo thus outdoes the Platonic ascent of Eros into the world of ideas by 'another yearning' which draws the soul above and beyond the world of ideas 'to the Great King Himself, see for instance *Op.* 71.

¹⁸¹ On the history of the Greek mythological allegory see, besides the books named in n. 35, Tate, 'History of Allegorism'.

¹⁸² On Philo's predecessors in the field of Jewish allegory see Haye, 'Philo's Reference'.

¹⁸³ On this see my book, *Die hellenistische Gestalt*, 119-28.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Stein, *Philo und der Midrash*.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Daube, 'Rabbinic Methods'.

¹⁸⁶ The leading Homeric allegorist Heraclitus, *Quaestiones Homericae*, 1, formulates this apologetic line: 'He would be entirely irreligious if he had said nothing in an allegorical way'.

meaning'.¹⁸⁷ What Philo here and in many places calls 'physical' was a direction in Homeric allegory which had originally attempted to read knowledge of modern physical science into the poets' words, but which in recent times had shifted to the final, supramundane ground of being. Hence Philo too calls the search for divine mysteries in the biblical word 'physical'. Whenever Philo takes issue with earlier Jewish allegories, it is invariably in order to fathom more deeply the 'physical' in this sense.

For instance, he tells us¹⁸⁸ that according to some the tree of life in Paradise means the human heart, 'since it is the cause of life and has been allotted the central place in the body'. That is why the tree stands 'in the middle of the garden'.¹⁸⁹ 'But these people should remember that they are setting forth a medical interpretation, not a physical one'. Instead he considers the central essence represented by the tree to be virtue. Again we clearly see the logic of his thought: an interpretation leading only to a piece of 'medical' information cannot represent the real meaning of the all-wise Moses' utterance, or of an oracle entrusted to him.

When at Abraham's death he is said to have been gathered to his 'fathers',¹⁹⁰ others take the 'fathers' to mean the four elements into which the dead body decomposes; but Philo tells us that the fathers are 'the incorporeal Logoi of the Divine world, whom elsewhere it is accustomed to call "angels"'.¹⁹¹ Here the exegesis of the biblical word has led Philo into the seldom-trodden territory of belief in immortality, since a purely physical process would not suffice to constitute what Philo calls a 'physical' teaching.

Philo is convinced that in such cases he is offering not only a deeper interpretation, but thereby necessarily a more correct one. Only when he has arrived at the real grounds of being can he be satisfied that he has indeed completed his methodological task, brought to light what Moses, the perfect philosopher, really meant. In this sense he feels indebted to science with its strict method, and speaks of the 'rules of the art'¹⁹² of allegory.

Still and all, his allegorical method never became a system of rules to be routinely applied. Occasionally he presents an interpretation in a tone which tells us that it came to him as a religious experience. In speaking of the two Cherubim which stand in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle," he first interprets them cosmologically as the two hemispheres of the sky. But then he continues:

¹⁸⁷ *Fug.* 106.

¹⁸⁸ *L.A.* 159.

¹⁸⁹ Gen 3:3.

¹⁹⁰ Gen 15:15.

¹⁹¹ *Heres* 281ff.; Q.G. 3:11.

¹⁹² οἱ τῆς ἀλληγορίας κανόνες, *Som.* 1:73.

¹⁹³ Exod 18:19f.

But there is a higher thought than these. It comes from a voice in my own soul, which oftentimes is god-possessed and divines where it does not know. This thought I will record in words if I can.¹⁹⁴

After this unusual prologue he then presents an interpretation which indeed leads us into the core of his religious thought. The Godhead is flanked by its two highest potencies, which are called sovereignty **and goodness**. **These** two are what the two Cherubim in the Holy of **Holies** represent:

This is not the place to discuss **Philo's** doctrine of the **two** highest potencies, or its obvious connection with the rabbinic doctrine of God's two **aspects**;¹⁹⁵ we are concerned only with the profoundly moving **way** in 'which this **doctrine** comes to him through exegesis, or goes into it. This is not the **only passage**, though it is the most impressive, in which he speaks of such an exegetical inspiration. But we must not lose sight of the fact that even in such exalted moments **Philo** feels his allegorical interpretation to be bound **by a strict** discipline which leaves no room for what is merely arbitrary and subjective.

Bibliography

A general bibliography on **Philo** is appended to **BORGEN**, 'Philo of Alexandria' in *Compendia* **II/2** (pp. 280-82).

As to the status of **Mikra** in **Philo's** work, **WOLFSON**, *Philo*, in his chapter 'Handmaid of Scripture' (1, 87-163) pleaded for an absolute opposition between the Bible as God's word and philosophy as a purely human endeavour. For restrictions against his view see **AMIR**, *Die hellenistische Gestalt*, 77-106. For a detailed study of the interrelation between the divine and the human aspect in the authorship of **Mikra**, the present writer could not rely on any previous research.

As to **Philo's** reliance on the Greek text of **Mikra**, see the diligent analysis of **OTTE**, *Dus Sprachverständnis*. **KATZ's** book (*Philo's Bible*) has a misleading title; it has no relevance to our subject.

The most comprehensive survey of **Philo's exegetics** was presented already by **SIEGFRIED**, *Philo von Alexandria als Ausleger*, complemented by his *Studien*. For **Philo's** versatility in the various parts of **Mikra** **HEINEMANN**, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung*, made valuable observations. His relation to rabbinic **midrash** has been studied by **STEIN**, *Philo und der Midrasch*.

As to **allegorical** interpretation, for the Greek background the reader may be referred to **BUFFIÈRE**, *Les mythes d'Homère* and **PÉPIN**, *Mythe et allégorie*. For **Philo's** connection with this background, see **AMIR**, *Die hellenistische Gestalt*, 119-28. His place in this Greek tradition is aptly formulated by **LEISEGANG**, *Der heilige Geist*, 160. His handling of this kind of exegesis is presented by **STEIN**, *Die*

¹⁹⁴ *Cher.* 27.

¹⁹⁵ **Hebrew:** הדין ומדת הרחמים n-m.

allegorische Exegese. **CHRISTIANSEN**, *Die Technik* delved into the philosophical presuppositions of this endeavour, found by her in Middle Platonism. For the room left by **Philo** for literal exegesis, see **SHOYER**, 'Alexandrian Jewish Literalists'.

Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in the Writings of Josephus

Louis H. Feldman

Josephus' Biblical Text

Second only perhaps to his significance as a historian' is Josephus' importance for our knowledge of the text and interpretation of the Bible in the first century. The question as to which biblical text or texts he had before him is complex, however, since there seems good reason to believe that he had access to three texts, one in Hebrew, one in Greek, and one in Aramaic; and his use of one or more of these texts appears to have varied from book to book in his paraphrase of the Bible in the first half of the *Antiquities*. The fact, moreover, that in Rome, where Josephus composed his *Antiquities*, Jews had settled in large numbers from all over the Roman Empire meant that Josephus, if he had any contact at all with these Jews, was brought in touch with various texts, at least in Greek, and diverse periphrases of these texts.

Strangely, despite Josephus' importance for the biblical text, no systematic study of Josephus' biblical *Vorlage* has been made, with the exception of Mez's study for Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. Assertions range from the statement of Tachauer that Josephus employed only a Hebrew text to that of Schalit² that Josephus used only the Greek Bible. The overwhelming majority of scholars,³ however, have taken an intermediate position, suggesting that Josephus used both, in addition to, perhaps, an Aramaic *targum*. What complicates the matter is that apparently at the time of Josephus there were a number of divergent Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible; and the presence of proto-Lucianic readings in the Dead Sea fragments of Samuel, in Josephus, and in his presumed contemporary Pseudo-Philo, would seem to confirm this situation.

The only published attempt to study this question for even a portion of the Pentateuch is Shutt's examination⁴ of the biblical names in Josephus' version of Genesis. He notes that in four cases Josephus' names follow the Hebrew text

¹ See Attridge, 'Josephus and His Works' 185-232.

² Mez, *Die Bibel*; Tachauer, *Verhältniss*; Schalit, *Namenwörterbuch*, 108. S. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*, 36, n. 45, concludes that of the twenty proofs cited by Schalit, 'Introduction', xxvii-xxxv, for Josephus' use of the Septuagint, only four are more than conjecture.

³ E.g., H. Bloch, *Quellen*; Schiirer, *Geschichte* 1, 80; Rahlfs, *Septuagintastudien*, 3, 80; Thackeray, *Josephus*, 81.

⁴ Shutt, 'Biblical Names', 167-82.