SARAH J. K. PEARCE

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Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament
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Studies in Philo's Representation of Egypt

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For my beloved mother,

Catherine May Patricia Dowling
(1932–2002)

But al shal be wel,
And al shal be wel,
And al manner of thing shal be wele.

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As a post script to the writing of this book, I would like to record my thanks to Mag Kushner, who prepared the indexes.

Sarah J. K. Pearce

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Abbreviations

Philo

Abr.	*De Abrahamo*
Aet.	*De Aeternitate Mundi*
Agr.	*De Agricultura*
Cher.	*De Cherubim*
Conf.	*De Confusione Linguarum*
Congr.	*De Congressu Quaerendae Eruditionis Gratia*
Contempl.	*De Vita Contemplativa*
Decal.	*De Decalogo*
Deo	*De Deo*
Det.	*Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Solet*
Deus	*Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit*
Ebr.	*De Ebrietate*
Flacc.	*In Flaccum*
Fug.	*De Fuga et Inventione*
Gig.	*De Gigantibus*
Her.	*Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit*
Hypoth.	*Hypothetica (Apologia pro Iudaeis)*
Ios.	*De Iosepho*
Leg.	*Legum Allegoriae* I–III
Legat.	*De Legatione ad Gaium*
Migr.	*De Migratione Abrahami*
Mos. I–II	*De Vita Mosis* I–II
Mut.	*De Mutatione Nominum*
Opif.	*De Opificio Mundi*
Plant.	*De Plantatione*
Post.	*De Posteritate Caini*
Praem.	*De Praemiis et Poenis*
Prob.	*Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*
Prov.	*De Providentia*
QE I–II	*Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum* I–II
QG I–IV	*Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim* I–IV
QGE	Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus
Sacr.	*De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*
Sobr.	*De Sobrietate*
Somn. I–II	*De Somniis* I–II
Spec. I–IV	*De Specialibus Legibus* I–IV
Virt.	*De Virtutibus*

Other Works

ABD	D. N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 volumes, New York, 1992.
Ant. I–XX	Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* I–XX
Ap.	Josephus, *Contra Apionem*
b.	Babylonian Talmud
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford, (1907), 1955.
BGU	*Berliner griechische Urkunden*
B. J. I–VII	Josephus, *De Bello Judaico* I–VII
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinum*, 1863–
CPJ	V. Tcherikover, A. Fuks and M. Stern, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 volumes, Jerusalem, 1957–1964.
DGE	*Diccionario Griego-Español*
De Is. et Osir.	Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*
DK	H. Diels and W. Kranz (eds), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 3 volumes, 6th edition, Berlin, 1951–1952.
Ep.Arist.	*Aristeae Epistulae ad Philocratem*
Frg.	*Fragmenta*
GLAJJ	M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 volumes, Jerusalem, 1974–1984.
HALOT	L. Koehler, and W. Baumgartner (eds) (revised edition W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Leiden, 2001.
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin, 1873–.
JSHRZ	W. G. Kümmel et al (eds), *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. S. Jones (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon, with a Revised Supplement,* 9th revised edition, Oxford 1996.
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
Nat. D.	Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*
OCD^3	S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition, Oxford, 2003.
Od.	Homer, *Odyssea*
OGIS	*Orientis Graecae Inscriptiones Selectae*
OTP	J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Volume I, London, 1983; Volume II, New York, 1985.
NRSV	*New Revised Standard Version*
P.Cair.Zen.	C. C. Edgar, *Zenon Papyri*, 4 volumes, Cairo 1925–1931.
P.Leiden	C. Leemans (ed.), *Papyri Graeci Musei Antiquarii Lugduni-Batavi*, Leiden, I, 1843, Nos A–U.
P.Oxy.	*Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 1898–
P.Vindob.	*Papyrus Vindobonensis*
PP	*Prosopographia Ptolemaica*

P.E.	Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*
R.E.	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa and W. Kroll (eds*), Real-Enzyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart, 1890–1980.
RSV	*Revised Standard Version*
SB	F. Preisigke et al, *Sammelbuch griechischen Urkunden aus Ägypten*, 1915–
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, 1923–.
Sel.Pap.	A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri* I–II, London/Cambridge, MA, 1932.
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*
TDNT	G. Kittel (translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 volumes, Grand Rapids, MI 1964–1976.
ThWAT	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds), *Theologische Wörterbuch zum alten Testament*, 1970–.
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

Editions and Translations

Citations from the Greek Bible (LXX) are from A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta, id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, Stuttgart, 1935. Citations from the traditional Hebrew Bible or Masoretic Text (MT) follow the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*[3], Stuttgart, 1987. For translations of Greek and Latin texts, including Philo, I have normally used the Loeb Classical Library editions, with some modifications. For the translation of Philo, I have also been guided by the translations in the German, French and Italian editions of his works. For the Armenian translations of Philo's works, I have normally cited Marcus' English translation of the *Questions and Answers* in the Loeb Classical Library; for *de Animalibus*, I have relied on the edition by A. Terian, *Philonis Alexandrini De Animalibus: The Armenian Text with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Chico, CA, 1981.

Introduction

And the Lord pronounced all these words, saying: 'I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods but me' (Exodus 20.1–3).

Within a hundred years of Alexander's conquest of Egypt, the Pentateuch (the Hebrew *Torah*) had been translated into Greek in Alexandria. Of great antiquity, the writing down of these five books of divine revelation was attributed to the prophet Moses. Their translation into Greek was celebrated by Alexandrian Jews as a great gift to the Greeks, and an acquisition desired by no less a figure than the king of Egypt, Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Undoubtedly, however, the first place of honour for these writings was among the Greek-speaking Jews of Egypt. This was their foundation document, in which were contained the narrative histories of their ancestors, the origins of the people of Israel, the fulfilment of God's promises of land and posterity to Abraham and his descendants; here were the divine laws whose observance meant life and blessing to their followers. For Greek-speaking Jews of this era, the Greek Pentateuch was the source for interpretation and reflection on the meaning of these ancient traditions for new generations.

Egypt is very much a central feature of the landscape of the Pentateuch. Beginning with Abraham, the narratives are predominantly stories of journeys, migrations from one home to another, with the final goal of arrival and settlement in the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. In this broad perspective, the Pentateuch presents an ambivalent picture of Egypt in relation to the ancestors. From Abraham to the Exodus under the leadership of Moses, Egypt represents a major stage in the ancestors' travels. In the narratives of Genesis, Egypt has a friendly face, offering hospitality and survival in times of famine. Here Abraham and his descendants enrich themselves; Joseph rises to be Pharaoh's viceroy, and his father Jacob-Israel brings the rest of his family to settle in the land of Egypt. But in terms of the final goal of the ancestral journeys, Egypt is always a place that draws the ancestors away from the Promised Land, the land to which God first directed Abraham; all those who arrive in Egypt have travelled there from the Promised Land – driven by famine or, in the case of Joseph, sold into slavery.

The Book of Exodus articulates in the starkest terms that Egypt can be no permanent home for the descendants of Israel. In this vision of Egypt, they are

an oppressed people, whose very future is in doubt under Pharaohs who threaten to wipe out the male line and who stand in the way of God's demand that the descendants of Israel must leave Egypt. By the end of the first fifteen chapters of Exodus, the people of Israel has left Egypt for good, delivered from oppression by the mighty power of the God of Israel, and led by his prophet Moses. From here on, the traditions of the Pentateuch reiterate the people of Israel's commitment to the God who brought them out of Egypt; that obedience to God's commands means that Egypt must be left behind; there must be no return to Egypt.

It is intriguing to consider what these traditions meant for the Jews of Egypt in antiquity. The existence of Jewish settlements in Egypt is attested from a very early period in the history of Judaism, but the greatest period of expansion belongs to the Hellenistic period. All the indications are that, from the foundation of the Ptolemaic kingdom (305 BCE), Jews came in great numbers as immigrants, settling in many different parts of Egypt. By the first century CE, a conservative estimate puts their number at more than 10% of the total population of the country. How could they, then, be faithful to laws that demanded no return to Egypt? What did it mean to be the children of Israel who had not gone out of Egypt? What was the significance of the Egypt of the Pentateuch for them?

To answer such questions, we are remarkably fortunate to have the testimony of Philo (c. 20 BCE – c. 50 CE), an Alexandrian Jew, born and brought up in the capital of Roman Egypt, a political representative of the Jews of Alexandria, and the author of three extensive series of commentaries on the Greek Pentateuch. He is perhaps best known to historians for his descriptions of violent attacks on the Jews of Alexandria and the desecration of their prayer-houses in CE 38; and for his part in an embassy to the emperor Gaius Caligula, to speak for the rights of Alexandrian Jews. However, Philo is a crucial witness, not just to the experiences of Jewish life in this setting, but to the world of early Roman Egypt in general. As historians of early Roman Egypt and Alexandria are well aware, we have access to very few voices from inside the country; Philo is the best we have. He is also the only Jewish writer of antiquity who may be located, without any equivocation, in Alexandria or, indeed, in any other part of Egypt. While the details of his life are few, we know much more about Philo than any of the other Jewish authors thought to have been based in Hellenistic or Roman period Egypt.

As a commentator on Jewish Scripture, Philo is also one of the most valuable sources for the interpretation of Egypt and Egyptians in the Pentateuch. The prominence of this subject in Philo's writings reflects the central place of Egypt in the Pentateuch itself. However, he not only writes very extensively about the significance of Egypt, but he does so in ways that are for the most part remarkable for their originality when compared with the surviving literature of ancient Judaism.

What sets Philo apart from other Jewish authors in antiquity, more than anything else, is the vast scale of his learning and admiration for the intellectual

culture of Greece. Philo's distinctive contribution to the interpretation of the Pentateuch is to articulate its meaning in terms drawn from Greek literature, and from Greek philosophy. Above all, Philo favours the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture, in which the world depicted in the Pentateuch is treated as the source of symbols of a deeper reality, whose meaning is explained in the language of philosophy. At the most profound level of truth, Philo's Pentateuch reveals the journey of the soul, its gradual migration from the material world to its original home in the heavenly realm. The places and people of the Pentateuch symbolise different stages of that journey, different states of the soul in progress. In this framework, Egypt always represents the material sphere, 'the land of the body' which the soul must leave to arrive at its God-given destiny. This symbolic interpretation of Egypt dominates Philo's interpretation of Egypt, the Egyptian people and all things Egyptian throughout his writings.

The purpose of this book is to offer the first extended treatment of Philo's representation of Egypt, exploring the significance of Egypt as a symbol of 'the land of the body'. The area for investigation covers all of Philo's writings, and therefore includes not only his exegetical commentaries on the Pentateuch, but also the historical-political treatises and, though of relatively minor significance for this study, his philosophical works. Chapter One deals with general matters of Philo's context. What factors are likely to have shaped his world-view? The analysis begins with a survey of the historical context of Philo's world, the political setting of early Roman Egypt, the particular situation of Philo and the Jews of Alexandria, and his sense of Alexandria and his relationship to the wider Jewish world. This is followed by an introduction to Philo as writer, focusing on his cultural and intellectual setting, his education in Greek literature and philosophy, his work as a philosophical interpreter of the Pentateuch, and what ideas about Egypt were available in the Greek and Jewish literature that may also have been available to Philo. This section also includes an introduction to Philo's writings as a whole, the likely character of his readership, and his methods of working.

Chapter Two examines what Philo means by the term 'Egyptian' when he applies it explicitly to contemporaries. The meaning of 'Egyptian' in the complex political, social and cultural world of the Hellenistic and Roman periods has been the subject of much discussion in recent scholarship, and in order to try to understand the possible range of meanings available to Philo, I begin by sketching an overview of material relevant to the first century CE. The second part of this chapter analyses Philo's references to the 'Egyptian' in the two historical-political treatises which explicitly address contemporary events (the *In Flaccum* and *De Legatione ad Gaium*). Why does he stress the difference between contemporary 'Egyptians' and 'Jews'? Why does he identify the enemies of the Jews with 'Egyptian' characteristics or beliefs? Is it correct, as some leading scholars have argued, that Philo holds key evidence to the reality of bitter hostil-

ity between Egyptians and Jews in Alexandria that led to the outbreak of massive violence against Alexandrian Jews in CE 38? And why does Philo emphasise the role of wicked 'Egyptians' at the court of the emperor Gaius?

Chapter Three begins the analysis of Philo's interpretation of the Egypt of the Pentateuch. In this chapter, the focus is on what Philo, as allegorical interpreter, makes of the place of Egypt in the Pentateuch. The analysis begins by examining the wider context in which Philo presents Egypt as representing 'the land of the body': Philo's evaluation of the body; the techniques used by Philo to achieve the symbolic identification of Egypt with the body; what, if anything, he owes to other Jewish exegetes for this interpretation; and the role of the Pentateuch and other traditions in its construction. There follows a detailed discussion of Philo's treatment of the Pentateuch's Egypt in the migrations of the ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, Moses and the Exodus generation who make the first Passover offering.

Chapter Four considers what Philo makes of the Egyptians of the Pentateuch, focussing especially on the symbolic value accorded to the Pharaohs, the Egyptian overseer whose killing is the first act attributed to the adult Moses, the Egyptian sophists with whom Moses and Aaron do battle in the wonder-working contest before Pharaoh, and Hagar, the Egyptian mother of Abraham's first son. In each case, Philo's interpretations are considered against the wider context of the presentation of these figures in the Pentateuch and other sources of early Jewish tradition.

Other chapters explore some of the major themes associated with Philo's interpretation of the Egyptians of the Pentateuch. In Chapter Five, the discussion centres on Philo's elaboration of the theme of Egyptians as wicked hosts and the contrasting commitment of Abraham, Joseph and Moses to the laws of hospitality. Why does Philo single out Egyptians, more than any other people, as guilty of violating their duties towards guest-strangers? Why does he insist, again and again, that hospitality, even in the most trying circumstances, is a fundamental principle of Mosaic tradition? The analysis of Philo's presentation is accompanied by a detailed examination of the cultural contexts and traditions – from Homer to the Pentateuch – which inform Philo's articulation of hospitable behaviour and its converse.

The remaining chapters focus on Philo's evaluation of Egyptian religion, focussing on two areas: the veneration of the Nile and animal worship, both of which he associates with the apparently unprecedented formulation 'Egyptian atheism'. Chapter Six begins with a survey of Nile veneration in Philo's Egypt, and what may be known about how this practice was regarded by its devotees and by outsiders. There follows a detailed discussion of Philo's treatment of Nile veneration, exploring what 'Egyptian atheism' means in this context, and what drives Philo to take a severely condemnatory stance on this religious practice. Chapter Seven considers the evidence for animal worship in Philo's Egypt, its

significance for its practitioners, for outsiders to Egypt, and its evaluation in early Jewish tradition. Finally, Chapter Eight examines Philo's treatment of Egyptian animal worship. How does his philosophical evaluation of animals as 'irrational beings' affect his understanding of those who treat animals as gods? How does he show that condemnation of animal worship is fundamentally grounded in the Pentateuch when, on the surface of things, Moses does not appear to have written on this subject? Why does Philo, uniquely in the context of ancient Jewish tradition, identify the worship of the Golden Calf as 'Egyptian'? To what extent does Philo's evaluation of animal worship represent something really new among the voices of the ancient world?

I. Previous Scholarship

In researching this subject, I have been very fortunate in being able to draw on the rich resources of earlier work by scholars of Philo and early Judaism, Egyptologists, classicists, and ancient historians. On the particular question of Philo's interpretation of Egypt, however, there has been little attention to the subject – work in this field extends, at most, to a handful of articles or individual chapters and notes on various aspects of Philo's interpretation.[1] Of these, most of the more substantial discussions are engaged with questions of Philo's account of Jewish identity and non-Jewish others in relation to this identity. In his 1988 study of Philo's Jewish identity, Alan Mendelson examines Philo's evaluation of contemporary Jews, Greeks and Egyptians.[2] As regards Egyptians, Mendelson's starting point is Philo's contempt for the Egyptian gods and religious practice. Philo's low evaluation of Egyptians in his allegorical commentary on Scripture is, according to Mendelson, in keeping with his negative approach to Egyptian

[1] In addition to the articles discussed in this section, valuable notes and more extended discussions of Philo's representation of the Egyptians include: E. R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, Oxford, 1962, 151–152; A. Pelletier, *Contre Flaccus*, Paris, 1967, 170–171; E. Starobinsky, on *De Fuga* 180; V. Nikiprowetzky on *De Decalogo* 76; R. Barraclough, 'Philo's Politics. Roman Rule and Hellenistic Judaism', in H. Temporini and W. Haase (eds), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (*ANRW*): *Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* II.21.1: *Religion* (*Hellenistisches Judentum in römischer Zeit: Philon und Josephus*), Berlin/New York, 1984, 418–553 (484); P. Borgen, 'Philo and the Jews in Alexandria', in P. Bilde et al (eds), *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt*, Aarhus, 1992, 122–137; E. Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes*, Atlanta, GA, 1996, 103–105, 123, 179; D. I. Sly, *Philo's Alexandria*, London/New York, 1996, esp. 20–21, 112–113; P. Schäfer, *Judeophobia. Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, MA, 1997, 138–145; P. Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: an Exegete for His Time*, Leiden, 1997, especially 23–24, 158–175, 179–188; E. S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, Cambridge, MA, 2002, 64–65; P. W. van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus: the First Pogrom. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Leiden, 2003, especially 17–18, 105–106, 172–173.

[2] A. Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity*, Atlanta, GA, 1988, 116–122.

religion. Mendelson also highlights particular charges which Philo makes against Egyptians: inhumanity, impiety, inhospitality and licentiousness. These are all charges, Mendelson emphasises, which were also made against the Jews in antiquity: 'Philo', concludes Mendelson, 'has simply turned the tables, shifting the target of calumny from his own people to the one which was lower down the social scale'.[3] Particular attention is drawn to evidence in Philo's writings which suggests mutual hostility between Jews and Egyptians in Philo's world: 'Philo slips with such ease into passages which defame Egypt, its people, and its religion, that one wonders how common this mode of thought was within the Jewish community'.[4] Indeed, Mendelson speculates that Philo's view of the Egyptians may represent an attitude which contributed to the breakdown of relations between Jews and Egyptians, expressing the view that 'the Egyptians provided much of the brawn which was directed against the Jews in the pogrom of the year 38 CE'.[5] In contrast with the Egyptians, Mendelson argues that Philo has a more positive view of the Greeks, though he clearly maintains the superiority of the Jews by virtue of their religious beliefs and practices.

In an important article published in 1992, Koen Goudriann suggests that Philo's negative attitude towards the Egyptians was part of an ethnic strategy for defining the distinctive nature of Jewish identity in Roman Egypt, where 'Egyptians' were identified with the non-citizen class (and therefore 'Egyptian' identity was bound up with a status that was socially, economically, and culturally inferior to the Roman and Greek citizens of Egypt). Philo's portrait of Greeks is regarded as 'neutral' by comparison.[6]

The origins of my own work in this area go back to a short study which explored questions of local patriotism in the writings of Philo.[7] I argued there that Philo's evidence bespeaks a strong sense of attachment to Alexandria and of great pride in this city as his fatherland; and that his devotion to Jerusalem as the holy city which houses the Temple does not detract from Philo's commitment to Alexandria as a proper home for the Jewish community to which he belongs.[8] In this context, I distinguished between Philo's symbolic interpretations of the Egyptians of the Pentateuch and his representation of Egyptians in contemporary

[3] Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity*, 117–118.

[4] Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity*, 121–122.

[5] Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity*, 121.

[6] K. Goudriann, 'Ethnical Strategies in Graeco-Roman Egypt', in P. Bilde, T. Engberg-Pedersen, L. Hannestad and J. Zahle (eds), *Ethnicity in Hellenistic Egypt*, Aarhus, 1992, 74–99 (82).

[7] S. J. K. Pearce, 'Belonging and not Belonging: Local Perspectives in Philo of Alexandria', in S. Jones and Pearce (eds), *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period*, Sheffield, 1998, 79–105.

[8] I subsequently developed this point in a further article examining the significance of Philo's description of Jerusalem as the mother-city of the Jews: S. J. K. Pearce, 'Jerusalem as "Mother-City" in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria', in J. M. G. Barclay (ed.), *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire*, London/New York, 2004, 19–37.

Alexandria. In both areas, I concluded that Philo's representation of Egypt and Egyptians is predominantly negative, and that he tries consistently to differentiate the Jews and their ancestors from contemporary Egyptians and from the Egyptians of the Pentateuch. I agreed with Goudriann that Philo's denigration of Egyptians may have been, 'at least in part, a political strategy in the historical circumstances of early Roman Egypt'.[9] I left open the question of to whom he was trying to appeal in making a strong differentiation between Jews and Egyptians: whether he wrote as an act of self-affirmation for members of his own class within the Jewish community or hoped to persuade a wider audience including non-Jews.

Our most substantial treatment to date of Philo's understanding of Egypt and Egyptians appears in Maren Niehoff's study of *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, published in 2001. The overarching argument of this original and stimulating work is that Philo presents Jewish identity in such a way as to persuade members of the Jewish elite in Alexandria to identify with the values of the Roman ruling class. She emphasises, in particular, the influence of 'the contemporary Roman discourse' on Philo's thinking. In this context, Niehoff devotes a chapter to showing that Philo's view of the Egyptians as 'the ultimate Other' reflects similar attitudes in contemporary Roman thinking on Egypt.[10] Of all peoples, she argues, only the Egyptians are placed by Philo in diametrical opposition to the Jews and their ancestors. She observes that 'While being Jewish, Roman and Greek are for him complementary identities, one can in his view never be both an Egyptian and a Jew'.[11]

Niehoff's approach does a great service in reminding us to think about the wider context in which Philo operates. But has she identified the right context for illuminating Philo's thought about Egyptians? As others have noted, Niehoff's emphasis on the Roman influences in Philo's construction of Egypt and Egyptians is problematic.[12] Given the complex and varied nature of 'Romanisation', it is not easy to decide what constitutes a distinctively 'Roman' perspective, even at an elite level. Nor is it clear how far Philo himself was familiar with Roman literature. As Ellen Birnbaum remarks, 'If, in fact, Roman writers were important to Philo, why does he almost never mention them, preferring instead to draw upon the Greeks?'[13] There is a great deal that we do not know about Philo, and, crucially, one of the areas for which we lack evidence is the extent to

[9] Pearce, 'Belonging and not Belonging', 80.

[10] M. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, Tübingen, 2001, 45–74.

[11] Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity*, 45.

[12] E. Birnbaum, 'Review of Maren Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*', *The Studia Philonica Annual* 14, 2002, 186–193; J. M. G. Barclay, 'Review of M. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*', *Journal of Jewish Studies* LIV, 2003, 154.

[13] Birnbaum, 'Review of Maren Niehoff', 191.

which Philo and other members of the social and scholarly elite in Alexandria were 'Romanised' and what that might mean.

Finally, in an article published in 2004, Carlos Lévy rightly observes that Roman views of Egypt represent a range of different attitudes, positive and neutral as well as negative.[14] Can one then say, with Niehoff, that Philo's negative approach is to be identified with a distinctively Roman perspective? Lévy allows the possibility that Philo might have acquired such knowledge from contemporary culture, without necessarily needing to read Latin.[15] Lévy agrees to some extent with the view that local circumstances in Alexandria, and increased community tensions under Roman rule, have given a particularly aggressive tone to Philo's portrayal of Egyptians.[16] But he also rightly insists that Philo's position on Egyptians is not just the product of this situation, but one that is profoundly shaped by the traditions of the Pentateuch and the philosophical interpretation of migrations from Egypt as symbols of moral or spiritual progress. Lévy's observations are particularly valuable for their emphasis on the fundamental nature of the Pentateuch's influence in Philo's thinking about Egypt and Egyptians. Other elements of his argument are more controversial; for example, the great emphasis given to Philo's not quoting a passage from Deut.17.16b, forbidding the Israelites from going to Egypt. Philo's failure to quote this passage, I suggest, arises out of his interests in explaining Scripture rather than speaking of his personal situation.[17]

II. Approach of this Study

In approaching Philo, I have tried to follow two basic principles, which have been tried and tested by some of the leading Philo scholars of past and present. My first principle is that Philo must be understood, first and foremost, from his own works. The entire Philonic corpus has been included in the search to identify all examples where Philo refers or alludes to Egypt or Egyptians.[18] For the most part,

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[14] C. Lévy, '"Mais que faisait donc Philon en Égypte?" À propos de l'Identité Diasporique de Philon', in A.M. Mazzanti and F. Calabi (eds), *La Rivelazione in Filone di Alessandria: Natura, Legge, Storia,* Pazzini, 2004, 295–312 (297).

[15] Lévy, 'Philon', 297, n. 6.

[16] Lévy, 'Philon', 298.

[17] Lévy, 'Philon', 305; see further below 91, n. 58.

[18] On method in reading Philo: V. Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire de l'Écriture Allégorique chez Philon d'Alexandrie: son Caractère et sa Portée; Observations Philologiques,* Leiden, 1977, esp. 236–242; D.T. Runia, 'How to Read Philo', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40, 1986, 185–198; idem, 'The Structure of Philo's Allegorical Treatises: a Review of Two Recent Studies and some Additional Comments', *Vigiliae Christianae* 38, 1984, 209–256 (esp. 237–238); both reprinted in idem, *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, 1990, Aldershot, Hampshire, 1990; Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism*, 14–16. Word searches of all Philonic material in Greek are based on the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (*TLG*) database; and the printed concordance of Philonic words in P. Borgen, K. Fuglseth and R. Skarsten, *The Philo*

Philo's writings are devoted to the interpretation of Scripture, and it is certainly in this context that we will find most of his discussions of Egypt.[19] As an interpreter, he is committed to uncovering the significance behind the words of the Pentateuch, whose deeper and truest meaning is hidden to all but a few initiates. If we are to begin to understand Philo as interpreter of Scripture, we must always begin from his starting point, which is the text to be interpreted. What are the particular questions raised for Philo by a particular text? What is it in Scripture that leads Philo to explain things as he does? In the broader context of particular treatises, what are the wider exegetical themes that frame the specific discussion?

For Philo, as Valentin Nikiprowetzky brilliantly observes, Scripture is 'continually the expression of the truth and Philo's authentic thought appears in extracting the truth from Scripture'.[20] Once we have established what the text is and the exegetical problem with which Philo is engaged, the next step is to consider how Philo seeks to extract truth from Scripture and to make its meaning accessible. This means attending to the exegetical techniques used by Philo to identify those aspects of the text which help to reveal its secrets. It also requires that we take into account the different ways in which Philo uses external material to interpret the meaning of Scripture. Philo is like other Jewish exegetes of antiquity in using Scripture to explain Scripture; the meaning of a passage in the books of Moses may be illuminated by recourse to another. Philo is also the greatest exponent of a tradition which uses the language and concepts of Greek literature and philosophy to articulate the meaning of Scripture to his readers. Questions of Philo's debt to other Jewish interpreters, and the nature of his readership, are also of great importance, but take us into more speculative territory. We will come back to these issues in our discussion of Philo's intellectual contexts.

My second guiding principle is that, in so far as is possible, we should try to understand Philo in relation to the wider context in which he lived and worked. As E. R. Goodenough insisted, 'If we would understand Philo himself we must first come as near as we can to understanding him as he expected a contemporary reader to understand him. We cannot isolate the unique in any individual until we have first recognised what was not unique in him at all'.[21] Philo must be read with what Goodenough calls 'a constant sense of comparison'. For the purposes of this study, great emphasis is put on a comparative, contextualising approach, in order to illuminate the possible influences on Philo's thinking about Egypt and Egyptians and the extent to which he represents a really original perspective.

Index: a Complete Greek Word Index to the Writings of Philo of Alexandria, Grand Rapids, MI/Leiden, 2000. For scriptural verse searches, the best available tool is the Index Biblique in *Biblia Patristica: Supplément, Philon d'Alexandrie*, Paris, 1982.

[19] Αἴγυπτος (Egypt): 187 occurrences (18 in non-exegetical works); Αἰγύπτιος (Egyptian): 78 occurrences (8 in non-exegetical works); Αἰγυπτιακός (Egyptian): 21 occurrences (5 in non-exegetical works).

[20] Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire*, 239.

[21] Goodenough, *Introduction*, 22.

Contextualisation also brings many challenges. In many crucial areas, we simply do not have sufficient evidence to draw more than a very fragmentary picture of the world in which Philo operates. Who were his teachers? For whom did he write? There is much that we would like to know about Philo to which he does not give clear answers. In many ways, however, it is the everyday experience of Alexandria and Egypt that is the hardest part of Philo's world to enter. As regards Philo's own evidence, most of his writings are devoted to the interpretation of the Pentateuch; others are concerned with topics in philosophy. This is not the stuff of straightforward reflections on the contemporary context in which Philo worked. Even in the writings explicitly concerned with contemporary events, Philo's approach is highly interpretative. In addition, we have the problem facing any historian of first-century Alexandria: the absence of sources. In contrast with parts of the Egyptian countryside, no papyrus remains were recovered from Alexandria itself, and only one major collection relating to the city survives from elsewhere.[22] For the most part, archaeology has to speak for those who lived and worked in the city.[23] Otherwise, for written evidence about first-century Alexandria we are largely reliant on the witness of visitors and outsiders.

Before Philo, the evidence about Jews in Roman Alexandria and the rest of Egypt is meagre indeed: those few papyri of this era which are identified as Jewish rarely speak directly of Alexandria, and there is a severe lack of useful archaeological or epigraphic evidence; otherwise we must rely largely on the retrospective outsider view of the Jewish historian Josephus and references in the even later rabbinic literature. Much of the Jewish Greek literature that has survived from antiquity has been associated with Alexandria, and understood as speaking of that world; but without clear evidence of its authors' identity (much of this literature is pseudonymous) or of chronology, let alone place of composition, it is notoriously difficult to pin this material down to time and place.[24] In this context, Philo must be a very valuable insider witness to the world of first-century Alexandria and Egypt, whatever the limits of the view he offers.

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[22] *BGU* IV, 1050–61, 1098–184.

[23] F. Goddio et al (eds), *Alexandria: the Submerged Royal Quarters*, London, 1998.

[24] See further the valuable discussion by James Carleton Paget, 'Jews and Christians in Ancient Alexandria from the Ptolemies to Caracalla', in A. Hirst and M. Silk (eds), *Alexandria Real and Imagined*, Aldershot, 2004, 143–166 (143–146). Papyri identified or associated with the Jews of Egypt and/or Alexandria of the early Roman period are collected in V. Tcherikover and A. Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* II, Cambridge, MA, 1960, nos 142–153; for more recently published papyri see J. Mélèze-Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian*, second edition; Princeton, NJ, 1997, 249. Jewish Inscriptions of Egypt are collected in W. Horbury and D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt, with an Index of the Jewish Inscriptions of Egypt and Cyrenaica*, Cambridge, 1992. Of those inscriptions exactly dated to the period from the Augustan settlement to Philo's era, only one is associated with Alexandria, and there is considerable controversy as to whether this inscription – which refers to an *archisynagogos* – is indeed Jewish: see further Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions* no.18.

Chapter 1

Philo's Contexts

I. Historical Context

Introduction

Philo was the child of a new era, as far as the political order is concerned. In 31 BCE, Octavian (with the title Augustus from 27 BCE) had defeated his political rivals in the East, Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII, pursuing them from Actium to Alexandria. The city fell to the Roman army on the 3rd August, 30 BCE. Cleopatra avoided the humiliation of appearing in Augustus' triumph by committing suicide. The queen's descendants were not trusted to rule in her place: her son by Julius Caesar was killed; her children by Mark Antony survived, but not as the successors to their mother's kingdom. Cleopatra's death marked the end of nearly three hundred years of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt.[1]

For Philo, it is clear, the Ptolemaic era is a thing of the past; like other fallen empires, the end of the dynasty exemplifies the impermanence of the mortal condition:

> For nothing at all anywhere has remained in the same condition; everywhere all has been subject to changes and vicissitudes. Egypt once held the sovereignty over many nations, but now is in slavery (νῦν ἐστι δούλη) … Where is the house of the Ptolemies, and the fame of the several successors whose light once shone to the utmost boundaries of land and sea?[2]

Philo actually refers very little to the Ptolemies. Like other Jews before him, however, he gives special praise to Ptolemy II Philadelphus by virtue of his role in commissioning the translation of the Hebrew Torah into Greek.[3] For Philo,

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[1] For overviews of the history of early Roman Egypt: A. K. Bowman, 'Egypt', in Bowman, E. Champlin and A. Lintott (eds), *Cambridge Ancient History vol. X: the Augustan Empire, 43 BC–AD 69*, second edition, Cambridge, 1996, 676–702; N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, Oxford, 1986, reprinted Atlanta, GA, 1999.

[2] *Ios.* 135–136; cf. *Deus* 174: 'The breath that blew from Egypt of old was clear and strong for many a long year, yet like a cloud its great prosperity passed away'.

[3] *Mos*. II.29–30; cf. the *Letter of Aristeas* (*Ep. Arist*.), esp. 9–41; see further below, 27–28. Other Philonic references to the Ptolemies are rare and not always very positive: *Prob*. 125 (on a scholar's contempt for one of the Ptolemies); *Legat.* 138–139 (on the Ptolemies as part of the same people who deified not only their rulers but wild animals). A more positive view of Philo's thinking on the Ptolemies is taken in Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria*, 30.