

Philo's *De Opificio Mundi*
and the
Palestinian *Genesis Rabbah*

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1 Introduction

Philo Judaeus flourished in Alexandria during the latter half of the first century B.C.E. and the first half-century C.E. At that time, the Alexandrian Jewish community was very large—probably larger than the whole of Palestinian Jewry and perhaps forty percent of the total population of the Egyptian city.¹ Philo speaks of one million Alexandrian Jews.² His was one of the most influential Jewish families in the Hellenistic city; he and his brother are known to have involved themselves in the welfare of their community.³

Philo sets out in his extensive writings to demonstrate the superiority of Jewish philosophy over other philosophical systems current in his day. In his *De Opificio Mundi*, Philo interprets the Creation in Genesis in philosophic terms. “It should be read as a brilliant *tour de force* by which Philo wishes to amaze the gentile reader with the great amount of Hellenistic cosmology and metaphysics which he can read out of, really into, the first three chapters of Genesis.”⁴ In other works, the stories and commandments of the Torah are interpreted allegorically as teaching philosophical truths. To a large degree Philo was addressing himself with missionary intent to an audience unfamiliar with Judaism. From his works it is obvious that Philo had received a classical Greek education,⁵ and that he probably attended—and perhaps delivered—weekly sermons at the synagogue.⁶ It comes as no

¹Feldman, pp. 6–7, 215.

²*Flac.* 43.

³Y. Amir, p. 410.

⁴Goodenough, *Intro.*, p. 41.

⁵*Congr. Erud.* 72–76.

⁶Wolfson, *Revelation*, p. 1.

surprise, then, that Philo displays both a mastery of classical Greek sources and an intimate knowledge of the Bible in its Greek translation.

The Jewish communities in Palestine and Alexandria were in contact with each other. The Temple still served as the locus for Jews everywhere. Philo speaks several times of the magnificent and renowned temple at Jerusalem to which representatives went yearly despite the poor condition of the roads.⁷ He himself visited Jerusalem at least once.⁸ Josephus writes about the gift of golden gates that Philo's fantastically wealthy brother Alexander—the head of the Alexandrian community—donated to Herod's Temple.⁹ (The temple of Onias in Egypt is not even mentioned by Philo.¹⁰) Wealthy Jews from Alexandria travelled to Jerusalem and made donations to its institutions, and helped support poor Judaeans Jews.¹¹

One of the products of Palestinian literary activity was the Midrash, the collection of biblical exegeses, homilies, narratives, and perhaps allegories. The Septuagint contains many interpretations that are in accordance with rabbinic teaching; for this reason, Lieberman calls it “the oldest of our preserved Midrashim”.¹² The other Midrashim were compiled between the third and ninth centuries C.E. Of these compilations *Genesis Rabbah* is perhaps the oldest, and there is no doubt that it contains much older material.

Many scholars, beginning with Azariah dei Rossi in the sixteenth century¹³ have noticed parallels between Philo's writings and the midrashic literature. Ginzberg¹⁴ and Friedlander¹⁵ note numerous apparent parallels. Edmund Stein collected similarities in their respective treatments of biblical figures, notably Adam and Isaac.¹⁶ He sets out to show that Philo's allegorical interpretations are based on his historical interpretations, which in turn are akin to the Palestinian historical Midrash. Without the latter, Stein believes, Philo's allegorization would be meaningless.

Freudenthal brings several parallels, the majority of which he regards

⁷ *Leg. All.* II, 578.

⁸ Y. Amir, p. 410.

⁹ *Bell. Jud.* V. 5.

¹⁰ Bentwich, p. 19, and Belkin, *Philo*, p. 4.

¹¹ Feldman, p. 231.

¹² Lieberman, *Rabbinic Interpretation*, p. 50.

¹³ *Meor 'Enayim: Imre Binah*.

¹⁴ *Legends of the Jews*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1909.

¹⁵ *Rabbinic Philosophy*.

¹⁶ pp. 1–50.

as syncretic in Philo and borrowed by the rabbis.¹⁷ Bacher,¹⁸ following Graetz,¹⁹ suggests that Philo, via Origen, was the source for various parallel Midrashim. Others suggest that Hillel himself came from Alexandria²⁰ in which case he could have served as the bridge between the two cultures.²¹

Belkin²² finds similarities between Philo's interpretations of the laws and the Palestinian halakhah as well as between their aggadic interpretations. Bentwich²³ believes that Philo got his material from oral Midrashim that originated in Palestine. Katz²⁴ dismisses the suggestion that the variations between Scriptural quotations in Philo's writings and the Septuagint, the former often agreeing with rabbinic interpretation and Aquila, were in Philo's original. Wolfson, in his book on Philo,²⁵ claims that all four possible connections hold true: Alexandrians borrowed from the Palestinians, the Midrash probably borrowed from Philo, they both shared common sources, and both by similar methods arrived independently at similar innovations.

Recently, Bamberger²⁶ collected forty-one of what he believes to be the most convincing parallels between Philo and the Midrash. Some of the analogies are better than others, but from the cumulative evidence, he concludes that Philo must have, to some extent, borrowed material from Palestinian traditions.²⁷

Philo himself mentions oral traditions that he heard from the elders. He says, "These are the explanations which have come to our ears from the discussions of antiquities of divinely gifted men who have interpreted the writings of Moses in no cursory manner."²⁸ One of them is otherwise found only in the medieval Midrash Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer.²⁹ Philo says,³⁰

¹⁷ *Hellen. St.*, pp. 67–77.

¹⁸ *JQR*.

¹⁹ *MGWJ*, vol. 30, 1881, pp. 433 ff.

²⁰ Kaminka.

²¹ Ephraim E. Urbach, for example, discusses the parallel between the formulations of the negative form of the Golden Rule by Hillel and Philo in *The Sages* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1971, p. 526.

²² *Philo*.

²³ pp. 208 ff.

²⁴ *Philo and the Bible*.

²⁵ I, p. 91.

²⁶ *Philo and the Aggadah*.

²⁷ He does not always adhere to his own criteria for relevance; for example, his first parallel has Platonic elements.

²⁸ *Spec.* I, 2, 8.

²⁹ Bentwich, pp. 211–212.

³⁰ *Plant.* 30.

There is an old story composed by the sages and handed down by memory from age to age. . . . They say that, when God had finished the world, he asked one of the angels if aught were wanting on land or in sea, in air or in heaven. The angel answered that all was perfect and complete. One thing only he desired, speech, to praise God's works. . . . And the Father approved the angel's words, and afterwards appeared the race gifted with the muses and with song. This is the ancient story. . . .

The Midrash states,³¹

When the Holy One, blessed be he, consulted the Torah as to the completeness of the work of creation, she answered him: "Master of the future world, if there be no host, over whom will the King reign, and if there be no creatures to praise him, where is the glory of the King?" And the Lord of the world was pleased with her answer and forthwith he created man.

Such being the case we clearly cannot conclude that a Midrash is borrowed from Philo on the sole basis of the Midrash's later date of compilation.

In this paper, we shall concentrate on parallels between the Philonic and midrashic treatments of the Creation, the main sources being Philo's *De Opificio Mundi* and Midrash *Genesis Rabbah*. We shall attempt to pay particular attention to any literary difficulties in one or the other that may perhaps help shed light on the direction of influence.

2 The Architect

A much dealt with parallel is the analogy of God and the architect. To convince the reader that the world of ideas, through which God created the physical world, is not in any place, Philo presents an elaborate illustration of a king and his architect.³²

To speak of or conceive that world which consists of ideas as being in some place is illegitimate; how it consists we shall know if we carefully attend to some image supplied by the things of our world. When a city is being founded to satisfy the soaring ambitions of some king. . . [who] would fain add a fresh lustre

³¹Chap. 11.

³²*Opif.* 17-19.

to his good fortune, there comes forward now and again some trained architect who... first sketches in his own mind wellnigh all the parts of the city that is to be wrought out... Then by his innate power of memory, he recalls the images of the various parts of this city, and imprints their types yet more distinctly in it: and like a good craftsman he begins to build the city of stones and timber... , making the visible and tangible objects correspond in each case to the incorporeal ideas. Just such must be our thoughts about God.

Two parallels to Philo's illustration can be found in *Genesis Rabbah*: The first presents the notion that God created the world according to the design specified in the Torah.³³

amon [in "I was by him a nursling (*amon*)", Prov. 8, 30] is a workman (*uman*). The Torah declares: "I was the working tool of the Holy One, blessed be he." In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1, 1), "beginning" referring to the Torah, as in the verse, "The Lord made me as the beginning of his way" (Prov. 8, 22).

(The same Hebrew word is used for "workman" and "architect".) The second passage interprets the statement (Gen. 1, 26) "Let us make man", as follows:³⁴

With whom did he take counsel? R. Joshua b. Levi said: He took counsel with the works of the heaven and the earth... R. Samuel b. Nahman said: He took counsel with the works of each day... R. Ammi said: He took counsel with his heart. It may be compared to a king who had a palace built by an architect, but when he saw it it did not please him: With whom is he to be indignant? Surely with the architect! Similarly, "And it grieved him at his heart" (Gen. 6, 6). R. Jassi said, this may

³³ *G. R.* 1, 1.

³⁴ *G. R.* 8, 3-7, briefly repeated in 27, 4.

be compared to a king who did some business through an agent and suffered loss. . . . R. Joshua. . . said: He took counsel with the souls of the righteous. . . .

In comparing these three texts, a number of questions arise:

Why must Philo elaborate on the king's great ambitions when it is the architect who is the one with the plan in his mind? Philo does not think that God had anyone with him: "Who was there beside him."³⁵ Nor does Philo think that God created the world for his own glorification.³⁶ In fact, by the end of Philo's analogy, king and architect have been merged into one; the same language previously used to describe the king's plans, is later used for the architect's. Altogether, both king—"some king or governor"—and architect—"there comes forward now and again some trained architect"—are vaguely drawn by Philo.³⁷

Philo adds, "Such must be our thoughts about God," and goes on to support his view with the dramatic question, "For what other place could there be for his powers sufficient to receive and contain, I say not all but any one of them whatever uncompounded and untempered?"³⁸ If by "powers" here are meant the ideas, as it seems from the context, what value is there to the whole analogy? It certainly would not be impossible to put the architect's ideas onto paper, regardless of their size and grandeur. Surely Philo needs more than a rhetorical question to support his claim, contrary to Plato,³⁹ that the ideas do not reside in any place.

In the first Midrash, too, there appears to be no need for both king and architect, rather it is God the architect that looked at his plans the Torah and created the world. More striking, though, is the fact that an apparently opposite view to Philo's is being presented with the same analogy: In the Midrash, there are *written* plans—namely the Torah. The pre-existent Torah is two thousand years older than the world,⁴⁰ and was written in black fire on white fire.⁴¹ Whereas the craftsman of the Midrash must have his charts and scrolls, Philo's architect must have none.⁴² Thus, the same analogy is being used by the two sources in a diametrically opposed manner.

³⁵ *Opif.* 23.

³⁶ Wolfson, *Philo*, I, p. 244.

³⁷ *Opif.* 17.

³⁸ *Opif.* 19–20.

³⁹ Wolfson, *Philo*, I, p. 241.

⁴⁰ *G. R.* 8, 2.

⁴¹ *Jerusalem Talmud*, Shek. 6, 1.

⁴² See also Wolfson, *Philo*, I, p. 243, n. 11.

(It appears that Greek architects did not resort to written plans, while the Palestinian habit may have been different; cf. I Chronicles 28, 11–19: “And David gave Solomon. . . the plans of all that was in his mind. . . all in writing. . .” Note, however, the use of Greek terms in the Midrash for the “plans” and “diagrams”, though not for “architect”.)

In the second Midrash, the architect does have a separate role; he is God’s heart. Whether this heart was intended to be identified with God or not, is debatable. The other consultants suggested in the Midrash, e.g. the works of heaven and earth, are not God. The agent has no creative power of his own, but serves his master for his master’s sake; surely, he could not be compared with God himself. Thus, God’s heart, i.e. the architect, to which God’s anger is directed could conceivably refer to a created will.

In another Midrash, God is said to have created the world “with his three names: wisdom, understanding, and knowledge,” just as one man may be “architect, builder, and craftsman (*omnon*)”.⁴³ (All three terms are used in different midrashic passages.)⁴⁴ The implication is that it is the architect that should be identified with Wisdom, which is Torah.⁴⁵ If the various Midrashim are combined, then it would appear that God is to be identified with the king, God’s heart or Torah is the tool with which the world was created and corresponds to the architect, the ideas contained in that Torah are like the plans contained in the architect’s scrolls, and the world is the palace.

Philo can be interpreted similarly: There is a created Logos⁴⁶ which is not God.⁴⁷ The architect, or rather the mind of the architect, is the created Logos, and is distinct from God the king: “The world discerned only by the intellect is nothing else than the Word (Logos) of God when he was already engaged in the act of creation. For. . . the city discernable by the intellect alone is nothing else than the reasoning faculty of the architect in the act of planning to found the city.”⁴⁸ Thus, for Philo, as for the Midrash, it appears that the architect is the Torah, since Philo identifies the (created) Logos with the Torah.⁴⁹

To summarize, we have the following correlations:

⁴³ *Midrash Psalms* 50, 1.

⁴⁴ The first in *G. R.* 24, 1; the second in 1, 36; the third in 1, 1.

⁴⁵ *G. R.* 1, 1 identifies Torah and Wisdom. See below.

⁴⁶ *Opif.* 29. See Wolfson, *Philo*, I, pp. 204–210.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* I, p. 232.

⁴⁸ *Opif.* 24.

⁴⁹ Gershenson, p. 461; see n. 72 below.

<i>Philo</i>	<i>Analogy</i>	<i>Midrash</i>
God	King	God
Logos	Architect	Wisdom
Ideas	Plans	Contents of Torah
World	Buildings	World

Another Midrash⁵⁰ compares “Let us make man” (Gen. 1, 26) to a king who saw a large piece of stone and asked his advisors what to do with it. They suggest various things and finally God says, “I will make a statue for myself of it. Who then could hinder him?” In other words, God makes the decision alone and for his self glorification. “He alone created his world; he alone is glorified in his universe.”⁵¹ Philo, on the other hand, does not think that the world was created for God’s glory, but rather as an expression of goodness:⁵² “God... determined that it was meet to confer rich and unrestricted benefits upon that nature which apart from divine bounty could obtain of itself no good thing.” This perhaps implies that the above analogy was originally midrashic, and that Philo borrowed it despite the difference.

3 Hoshaya and Origen

Bacher⁵³ suggests that Rabbi Hoshaya—to whom the introductory remark to Genesis Rabbah is attributed—probably knew Origen, and heard of Philo from the Church Father. Bacher connects Hoshaya’s interpretation of the word *amon* (Prov. 8, 30) with the alternative unattributed interpretation according to which God, like a craftsman (*oman*), used the Torah as his plan when creating the world. Since Philo used the same illustration in his discussion of the world of ideas, Bacher concludes that Hoshaya must have heard this from Origen if he did not read Philo himself. However, the analogy of the architect is not clearly attributed to Hoshaya in the Midrash. Nor does Bacher take notice of the difference in the use the two make of this analogy, as to the place of the plans.

Interestingly, Hoshaya himself uses the Greek term “architect” in another parable.⁵⁴ Why then does he use the Hebrew *oman* here, if in fact he

⁵⁰ *G. R.* 8, 4.

⁵¹ *G. R.* 1, 4.

⁵² *Opif.* 23.

⁵³ *JQR*, pp. 357–360.

⁵⁴ *G. R.* 24, 1.

borrowed this analogy from Hellenistic writings? *amon* is translated “joiner” in the Septuagint, indicating that there was a reading *uman* in the original.⁵⁵

In support of an Hoshaya-Origen connection, Bacher⁵⁶ quotes the Midrash in the name of Hoshaya⁵⁷ that the angels wanted to say “holy, holy” when Man was created, i.e. they mistook Man for God. At that point, God clarified matters by putting Man to sleep. Bacher takes this Midrash to be a Jewish response to the deification of the man Jesus. However, such an interpretation is by no means obvious. Man was, after all, created in “God’s image”.

In further support of his view, Bacher claims that Origen was the “philosopher” who asked Hoshaya why God did not create man circumcised if such is his will.⁵⁸ It was Origen, says Bacher, who found circumcision particularly objectionable, and saw in its unreasonableness another indication of the need to allegorize the Bible. Hoshaya’s response, that all things created during the six days of creation needed perfection, Bacher takes as a satire on Origen—presumed by some to have been an emasculated catechist, as emasculation is an act much like circumcision and has moral perfection as its goal.

No echos of such satire, however, can be traced in the Midrash itself. Most of the arguments in the Midrash with the “philosophers” are brought vindictively and the answers to them are off-the-cuff answers intended to show the superficiality of the question. It is very common to hear after such dialogues the rabbi’s students asking him: well, this was the answer to him, but what is the real answer? At which point the rabbi comes up with his real interpretation.⁵⁹ As to the alleged emasculation of Origen, that view is no longer tenable, and Origen’s dislike of the circumcision rite would hardly make his emasculation more likely, if indeed the two are to be considered similar. Moreover, it was Justin,⁶⁰ long before Origen, who expressed his criticism of circumcision in the very way that Bacher attributes to Origen.

⁵⁵See Wolfson, *Philo*, I, pp. 267–268.

⁵⁶p. 359.

⁵⁷*G. R.* 8, 9.

⁵⁸p. 358.

⁵⁹E.g. *G. R.* 8, 8, and *Midrash Tehillim* 50, 1.

⁶⁰*Dial.* 19.

4 Logos

Numerous other midrashic texts can be related to those already mentioned. The Torah was the plan of Creation, said the Midrash; a few lines later, we are told that Torah is Wisdom. Freudenthal already noticed that the Targum Yerushalmi translated the first verse of Genesis: “With wisdom (bekhukma) God created. . . .”⁶¹ Thus, it need not necessarily be a written Torah that served as the blueprint, but rather some form of abstracted one.

We have seen that for Philo the ideas for Creation were in the Logos, and for the Midrash the plan of Creation was in the Torah. The Torah is called the working tool of God in the Midrash. Philo too calls the Logos a working tool.⁶² According to Philo, man was created according to the pattern of the Logos which is a pattern of God.⁶³

As Gershenson states,⁶⁴ “Philo’s identification of logos with Wisdom⁶⁵ and Torah⁶⁶ parallels the identification of Torah and Wisdom⁶⁷ and Word of God⁶⁸ in rabbinic literature and conforms to the roles assigned to each in Scripture and rabbinic sources.”

To what extent the rabbis referred to the Platonic Logos is unclear. Gershenson⁶⁹ and Wolfson⁷⁰ claim that the oft-repeated identification of *memra*, as used by the Targumim and Talmud, and the Logos, is in error. The term *logos* itself, along with all of Greek philosophic terminology, appear nowhere in rabbinic sources.⁷¹

There are, however, references in the rabbinic literature to notions that appear to be similar to the Logos. There is the Mishnaic saying,⁷² also appearing in various Midrashim, “With ten words (*maamarot*) the world was created.” S. Stein,⁷³ points to the old reading in the Haggadah: “He brought us out of Egypt. . . not by means of the word (*davar*).” The following passage

⁶¹p. 73.

⁶²See Wolfson, *Philo*, I, pp. 261–271.

⁶³Baer, p. 27, n. 3.

⁶⁴p. 461.

⁶⁵*Leg. All.* I, 65.

⁶⁶*Qu. Gen.* IV, 140 and *Migr.* 130.

⁶⁷E.g. Ben Sira 24.

⁶⁸Already in Psalms 119, 148.

⁶⁹p. 462.

⁷⁰*Philo*, I, p. 287.

⁷¹Wolfson, *Philo*, I, 92 and Lieberman, *Greek*, p. 130–131.

⁷²Avoth, 5, 1.

⁷³p. 38, n. 106.

occurs in the Midrash:⁷⁴ “. . . it follows that the upper waters are suspended by the word (*maamar*) This is one of the verses over which the son of Zoma raised a commotion: “He made” [the heavens]—how incredible! Surely it was by the word, [as it is written,] ‘By the word of the Lord were the heavens made’ (Psalms 33, 6).” Also, “The heaven, the heaven which he originally contemplated; The earth, the earth which he originally contemplated.”⁷⁵

We saw that Philo and the Midrash may be in disagreement as to whether the ideas have a place other than in God. Interestingly, both Philo and the rabbis use the term “place” to refer to God (*maqom* in Hebrew, *topos* in Greek). The Jewish origin of this designation has been shown.⁷⁶

Both Philo and the Midrash suggest that Creation was instantaneous. For Philo, the six days do not imply duration of time, rather “all things took shape simultaneously” .⁷⁷ There are also arguments in the Midrash regarding this. “Said Rabbi Nehemia, . . . on the very day [heaven and earth] were created they brought forth their generations Rabbi Judah countered: Yet surely it is written . . . ‘one day . . . a second day . . . a sixth day.’”⁷⁸ “Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel differ. Beth Shammai maintain: The thought [to create] was at night, while the action [came] by day; whereas Beth Hillel say: Both thought and action were by day. Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai observed: . . . In truth, thought [was] both by day and by night, while the action was at the standstill of the sun.”⁷⁹

Similarly, Bamberger⁸⁰ points to Philo’s statement,⁸¹ “God spoke and it was done—no interval between the two—or it might suggest a truer view to say that his word was deed.” In Genesis Rabbah⁸² Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman is quoted as saying, “The word of the Holy One, blessed be he, is equivalent to action.”

⁷⁴ *G. R.* 4, 2–7.

⁷⁵ *G. R.* 1, 13.

⁷⁶ A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, 1927, pp. 92–93.

⁷⁷ *Opif.* 13 and 67.

⁷⁸ *G. R.* 12, 4.

⁷⁹ *G. R.* 12, 14.

⁸⁰ p. 181.

⁸¹ *Sacr.* 65.

⁸² 44, 22.

5 Pre-existents

There is also the story in the Midrash⁸³ of the philosopher who asked Rabban Gamliel, “Your God was indeed a great artist (*tzayar*, perhaps a play on *yitser*—formed—in Gen. 2, 7) but surely He found good materials which assisted him: *tohu*, *bohu*, darkness, water, wind, and the deep?” Gamliel replied by quoting passages that demonstrate that each of these six substances was in fact created by God. These six substances correspond to six Platonic substances.⁸⁴ A similar Midrash⁸⁵ tells that God like a builder needed six materials which he first created as prerequisites. In another place the Midrash states that the six pre-existent things were all preceded by another, the Torah.⁸⁶ The beginning of Genesis Rabbah lists six different things that preceded the creation, two—the Torah and the Throne—were created, the other four were in God’s thought (= heart, cf. “thoughts of the heart”, Gen. 4, 5) to be created later. And the Torah preceded the Throne.⁸⁷ Another Midrash⁸⁸ states that three creations preceded the world: water which conceived and begot darkness; fire which conceived and begot light; spirit which conceived and begot wisdom.

Bamberger points to several parallel enumerations of seven things in Philo and the Midrash. One of them is the seven things that Philo says were created on the first day and the seven great works said to have been created on the first day in the early Book of Jubilees.⁸⁹ Philo says, “The Maker made an incorporeal heaven, and an invisible earth, and the essential form of air and void. . . . Next the incorporeal essence of water and of pneuma and, to crown all, of light.”⁹⁰ In Jubilees they are heaven, earth, water, angels and spirits, abysses, darkness, and dawn.⁹¹ Though Bamberger connects spirits with air,⁹² Philo says explicitly that air is the darkness mentioned in Genesis, “To the one he gave the name ‘darkness’ since the air when left

⁸³ *G. R.* 1, 9.

⁸⁴ Theodor on *G. R.* 1, 9.

⁸⁵ *G. R.* 1, 11.

⁸⁶ *G. R.* 1, 8.

⁸⁷ *G. R.* 1, 4.

⁸⁸ *Exodus Rabbah* 15, 22.

⁸⁹ pp. 160–161.

⁹⁰ *Opif.* 19.

⁹¹ *Jubilees* 2, 3.

⁹² On the basis of *Gig.* 6 ff.

to itself is black.”⁹³ Also,⁹⁴ “Right too is his statement that ‘darkness was above the abyss’ for in a sense the air is over the void.” Thus, “light” = “dawn”, “void” = “abyss”, “pneuma” = “spirit”, and “air” = “darkness”.

Nevertheless, in my opinion any alleged parallel from the number seven is weak. U. Cassuto has found numerous occurrences of “sevens” in the first chapters of the Bible.⁹⁵ The fact that the Midrash does the same proves nothing. It would seem that for Philo, the number seven assumes a disproportionate importance, even when compared with Pythagorean style speculations, on account of its prominence in Jewish Scripture and tradition. There is the Sabbath, seven weeks before Pentecost, the Sabbatical year, the Jubilee year, seven day holidays, purification rituals, and wedding celebrations, funeral rites, to mention only a fraction. But Philo is addressing here the gentile and is attempting to convince him as well of the significance of the number. Naturally, he resorts to illustrations from music, physiology, and arithmetic that are familiar to his audience and elaborates upon them.

From what we have seen so far, it seems that by pasting together several Midrashim—but only by pasting them together—Philo and Midrash can be shown to really correspond. According to the Midrash: God’s heart is the architect (the world of ideas) of the real world. Using six (or perhaps seven) created substances and the ideas in the Torah as blueprint, he put the world together in an instant. According to Philo: The created Logos, which is the Torah, contains the ideas that served as plans for an instantaneous creation from seven pre-existing created elements.

6 The First Days

Both Philo⁹⁶ and the Midrash⁹⁷ stress the difference between the first day of creation and the rest and the significance of the phrase “one day” (Gen. 1, 5). Bamberger⁹⁸ points out the parallel emphasis on the spirituality of the second day’s creation in Philo:⁹⁹ the heavens were created on the second day “by reason of dignity which heaven occupies among the objects of sense,”

⁹³ *Opif.* 29.

⁹⁴ *Opif.* 32.

⁹⁵ *From Adam to Noah.*

⁹⁶ *Opif.* 15.

⁹⁷ *G. R.* 3, 8.

⁹⁸ p. 158–159.

⁹⁹ *Opif.* 37.

and in the Book of Jubilees,¹⁰⁰ where it is stressed that only the firmament was created on the second day.

7 Sweet Water

Philo¹⁰¹ discusses Gen. 2, 6 and claims that Moses had the insight—which other philosophers did not have—to distinguish between ocean water and sweet water. Moses realized that sweet water is the very source of life by which the earth is bound together and without which the earth would dry and fall into pieces. Philo then goes into a detailed discussion of how moisture is at the core of growth. All seed is moist or needs moisture to grow; mother’s milk is likened to the rivers, the Greek terms for earth (yielding water) and mother (yielding milk) are related. “As Plato says, the earth does not imitate woman, but woman earth.”

Philo here is sensitive to the mention of the sweet water rivers watering the land: “and a spring went up out and watered all the face of the earth” (Gen. 2, 6). The Midrash too is interested in this same point, although the Hebrew has *ed* (translated “mist”) for “spring”.¹⁰² The verse, “All the rivers go to the sea and the sea does not fill” (Eccl. 1, 7), is brought to indicate that the earth was watered by rivers like the Nile.¹⁰³ The great importance of sweet water is referred to throughout the thirteenth chapter of Genesis Rabbah, e.g. “Three things are interdependent: land, man, rain.”¹⁰⁴ The Midrash¹⁰⁵ suggests that the “male” sweet water is received by the “female” land.

Philo’s suggestion¹⁰⁶ that the earth from which God made man, having just been severed from the mass of salt water, was “supple and easy to work” is very unphilosophical sounding. This must be taken in the context of Philo’s earlier¹⁰⁷ distinction between the life-giving sweet water that remained to wet the land and the inferior salt water that was relegated to the oceans. It is strongly reminiscent of the Midrash¹⁰⁸ on Gen. 2, 6–7 where

¹⁰⁰2, 4.

¹⁰¹ *Opif.* 131–137.

¹⁰² *ed* is interpreted “cloud” in *G. R.* 13, 12.

¹⁰³ *G. R.* 13, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *G. R.* 13, 3.

¹⁰⁵ *G. R.* 13, 13.

¹⁰⁶ *Opif.* 137.

¹⁰⁷ *Opif.* 131.

¹⁰⁸ *G. R.* 14, 1.

God is likened to a woman kneading her dough: just as she would first mix her batter with water, so also God first had the spring wet the earth and then formed man. For Philo the allegorist to even think of the need to make the earth easy for God to work with is surprising; while such a play on context (verses 6 and 7) and perhaps on words (*esah*—batter with *asah*—made) is typical for the Midrash.

There is another resemblance in the same context: The Midrash interprets, “When rain falls, it fashions the surface of the land.”¹⁰⁹ This corresponds to Philo’s stating that without water the earth would disintegrate. “For had it been left dry, with no moisture making its way. . . it would have actually fallen to pieces. It is held together partly. . . because it is saved from drying up and breaking off in small and tiny bits by the moisture.”¹¹⁰

A parallel with similar characteristics is cited by Bamberger¹¹¹ and others. Philo says regarding light and darkness that God “in his perfect knowledge of their mutual contrariety and natural conflict parted them from one another by a wall of separation.”¹¹² This parallels the Midrash¹¹³ “‘And he divided’ (Gen. 1, 4) connotes a literal division. Imagine a king who had two chiefs of the guards, one in command by day and the other in command at night, who used to quarrel with one another, each claiming, ‘I must have command by day’. Thereupon the king summoned the first and said to him, ‘So-and-so, the day shall be your province’; summoning the second he addressed him, ‘So-and-so, the night shall be your province’.” Bamberger notes that the description Philo gives is “strange coming from a philosopher who knew that darkness is merely the absence of light,”¹¹⁴ whereas it is natural for the rabbis who are playing on the word “called” in “God called the light day” and interpreting it as “called for service”, i.e. commanded.

8 Finest Mud

Philo says it is not likely that God used just any mud to make man with, but that he probably selected the finest from it all.¹¹⁵ The Midrash is also interested in the kind of mud (“earth” in Hebrew) used by God but suggests

¹⁰⁹ *G. R.* 13, 17.

¹¹⁰ *Opif.* 131.

¹¹¹ p. 158.

¹¹² *Opif.* 33 ff.

¹¹³ *G. R.* 3, 6.

¹¹⁴ Note, however, that “darkness” is air for Philo, *Opif.* 29.

¹¹⁵ *Opif.* 137.

that it was taken from the earth of the altar:¹¹⁶ “Let him be made from the place of his atonement, that he might stand (survive)”. The place of the altar is very important; it is referred to as the center of the world. It is the “place where speech went forth to the world, . . . the seat of the world’s dominion”.¹¹⁷

Although somewhat different in details, the idea underlying both Philo and the Midrash is that God used the best materials possible in making man. Philo’s version is perhaps demythologizing the Midrash. In any event, the form in which Philo gives the idea would be more palatable to his intended audience.

Similarly, the likening of land to mother in Philo is also reminiscent of “land flowing with milk”¹¹⁸ and the femininity of all Hebrew terms referring to land (*adama*=“land” is the feminine form of *adam*=“man”). His mention of Plato and the Greek words in that context may in fact be his way of showing the correspondence between the insights of Moses and the Greeks.

Both Philo and the Midrash tell how things were created mature.¹¹⁹ Philo marvels at the fact that the trees bore ripe fruit: “All were laden with fruit as soon as ever they came into existence. . . not unripe but at their prime.”¹²⁰ The Midrash points out that both fruit and man were fully mature at creation:¹²¹ “Adam and Eve were created as at the age of twenty.” As to why man was created last, the same answer (among others) appears both in Philo and the Midrash. Philo:¹²² “Just as givers of a banquet. . . do not send out summonses. . . till they have put everything in readiness for the feast.” Midrash:¹²³ “He first created his food requirements, and only then did he create him. . . . A tower full of good things and no guests—what pleasure has its owner?” Tosefta:¹²⁴ “To what is this like? To the case of a king who built a palace, inaugurated it, prepared a feast, and then invited guests.”

¹¹⁶ *G. R.* 14, 8.

¹¹⁷ *G. R.* 55, 7.

¹¹⁸ *Ex.* 3, 8.

¹¹⁹ Bamberger, p. 159.

¹²⁰ *Opif.* 40–42, cf. *Qu. Gen.* II, 47.

¹²¹ *G. R.* 14, 7.

¹²² *Opif.* 77 ff.

¹²³ *G. R.* 8, 6.

¹²⁴ *Sanhed.* 8, 9.

9 Naming the Animals

Regarding the naming of the animals by Adam, Philo says that this is a sign of Adam's royalty and wisdom, as he could see to the nature of each animal and named it accordingly.¹²⁵ In the Midrash¹²⁶ a story is told: When God wanted to create man he consulted the angels who asked "what is his nature?" to which God answered "his wisdom is greater than yours". To prove this God brought the animals before the angels and asked them to name them and they were unable to do so. He then brought the animals before Adam, and asked him to name them which he readily did. Then God asked him "and you, what is your name?" to which he answered "I should be called Adam as I was made of earth—*adama*". "And I, what is my name?" asked God, and Adam replied "you should be called Lord, as you are the lord of the whole land".

This story clearly shows that Adam's naming of the animals was considered by the rabbis a manifestation of wisdom, and brings two examples in which Adam names according to the nature of the object to be named.

10 Male and Female

Freudenthal¹²⁷ already noted the resemblance between the statements in the Midrash¹²⁸ to the effect that the first man was androgynous with statements in Philo¹²⁹ that also imply that man was bisexual or asexual. Baer¹³⁰ claims that both motifs are to be found in Philo. Wolfson¹³¹ has pointed out the similarity between Philo's speaking of the two natures of man and the midrashic view.

In *Genesis Rabbah* the following interpretations of "He formed" (*wayyizer*, with double yod, Gen. 2, 7) are found:¹³² "Two formations: of Adam and of Eve. . . . Two formations, of the heavenly and of the earthly. . . . Two formations, the good inclination and the bad inclination. . . ." Interpolated between the above statements are lengthy elaborations; regarding the sec-

¹²⁵ *Opif.* 148–150.

¹²⁶ *G. R.* 17, 4.

¹²⁷ p. 69.

¹²⁸ *G. R.* 8.

¹²⁹ *Opif.* 134, 151–152, *Leg. All.* II, 13.

¹³⁰ p. 38.

¹³¹ *Philo*, II, pp. 288–290.

¹³² *G. R.* 14, 2–4.

ond interpretation the Midrash goes on to say, “Two formations, of the earthly, he eats, drinks, procreates, excretes, and dies like the animals, of the heavenly, he stands upright, understands, and sees obliquely like the ministering angels. . . . The Holy One, blessed be he, said: Behold I will create him in image and likeness of the heavenly, while he will procreate of the earthly. . . . If I create him [only] of the heavenly, then he will live and not die. If I create him [only] of the earthly, then he will die and not live. . . .”¹³³ This passage is repeated on the verse “Male and female he created them” (Gen. 1, 27). The fact that this statement is brought to explain “male and female” indicates that the Midrash is interpreting “male” as rational and “female” as sensual. Combining all the similarly worded statements, it appears that the Midrash equates Adam = male = heavenly = rational = good = living, and Eve = female = earthly = animal = evil = dying.

Philo, in his allegorical interpretation¹³⁴ interprets the same verse as follows: “There are two types of men; the one a heavenly man, the other an earthly. The heavenly man, being made after the image of God. . . . The earthly one was corrupted out of matter.” Throughout his allegories,¹³⁵ Philo interprets male as the mind and female as the senses: “Mind corresponds to man, the senses to woman.”¹³⁶ Philo, as the Midrash, equates male with good and living:¹³⁷ “So in the soul too there are lifeless, incomplete, diseased, enslaved, female. . . movements. . . ; and on the other hand movements living, entire, male, free, sound, elder, good, genuine. . . .”

Just as the rabbis considered the senses useful, so did Philo.¹³⁸ The Midrash interprets “very good” (Gen. 1, 31) as referring to the “evil inclination”. “Why should it be considered very good?”, asks the Midrash. “Because without the evil inclination, no man would build a house, take a wife, or beget children.”¹³⁹ Deviating from his otherwise Platonic and Stoic denigration of the sensual, Philo says,¹⁴⁰ “Pleasure and desire contribute to the permanence of our kind. . . and so with the other passions.” Thus, Philo and Midrash agree even on this non-Hellenistic detail.

¹³³ *G. R.* 8, 11.

¹³⁴ *Leg. All.* I, 31.

¹³⁵ E.g. *Leg. All.* II, 38–39, 73, *Qu. Gen.* I, 25.

¹³⁶ *Opif.* 165.

¹³⁷ *Leg. All.* II, 97.

¹³⁸ Bamberger, p. 180.

¹³⁹ *G. R.* 9, 7.

¹⁴⁰ *Leg. All.* II, 7–8.

11 Conclusion

We have collected some strikingly similar elements in Philo and the Midrash. Yet there was nothing identical that would afford a conclusive proof of borrowing. We encountered Greek words in the Midrash. Surprisingly, Greek words were used for the architect's written plans though Greek architects are said not have written their plans and Philo is emphatic in denying his architect anything written. On the other hand, while the existence of "philosophic" ideas in Genesis Rabbah is well apparent, no Greek philosophical terminology is to be found anywhere in the Midrash. Only two Greek philosophers are mentioned by name in rabbinic literature: Epicurus, who became a symbol for all that is immoral or anti-scholarly, and Oenomaus, whose respect for monotheism and Jewish values, not his philosophy, put him in high regard among the rabbis.¹⁴¹ No mention of Philo is made in any Jewish writing—save Josephus—at least until the ninth century.

In some cases Philo may have taken his lead from the Septuagint translation which agrees with the midrashic interpretation at times where the former deviates from the Massoretic Hebrew version, such as may be the case for *afar* (dust) translated as "mud" (Gen. 2, 7), *ed* (mist) translated as "spring" (Gen. 2, 6), and *amon* (nursling) translated as "joiner" (Prov. 8, 30). Perhaps the idea of architect was suggested to Philo by the Greek *arche* for "beginning" (Gen. 1, 1).

On the other hand, Philo says explicitly that he is presenting the philosophy of Moses to the gentile, and mentions "old traditions" from which he borrowed. He makes the explicit equation of Torah and Logos, which we tried to show is the conclusion one would arrive at by putting together the various related Midrashim. For several parallels we were able to show that where Philo deviates from Hellenistic style he is found falling back on rabbinic interpretations that are at home in their midrashic setting.

It would seem reasonable, though not obvious, to believe Philo that he found thoughts akin to some of the Greek philosophic ideas in the Bible. This he was perhaps able to do by accepting the midrashic interpretations as explanations of what *is* in the text, just as he also believed his allegorical interpretations to be "in" the text. Philo took it upon himself to clothe those ideas he found in the Bible and its rabbinic interpretation for Greek consumption; even the smallest details were adapted. Thus the architect builds a city with gymnasiums and the like, rather than the midrashic palace;

¹⁴¹Lieberman, *Greek*, pp. 129–130.

the king inviting a guest for a meal becomes “givers of a banquet”, or better yet, by “those who provide gymnastic and scenic contests”. In the process Philo would paste together, as we did, relevant rabbinic interpretations on the subjects dealt with and reveal whatever philosophic truths he may find hidden as we have tried to recover.

Philo’s veneration and love for his Jewish heritage are no secret, and while he read much philosophy into Genesis, much of this “reading in” was already done for him by the rabbis from whom he is most likely to have learned directly, and from whose methods of interpretation allegorization is no great leap. Interestingly, Philo, himself, goes so far as to say that even the early Greek philosophers borrowed from Moses.¹⁴² If Philo was certainly wrong in suggesting that Greece borrowed from Palestine, perhaps these parallels indicate what it was that Philo saw as evidence of philosophical speculations among the Palestinian traditions.

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