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Book Review

Naomi G. Cohen. *Philo's Scriptures: Citations from the Prophets and Writings: Evidence for a Haftarah Cycle in Second Temple Judaism*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism Series. November 2007, Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., Hardcover, 278pp. ISBN: 9004163123

Naomi G. Cohen taught for many years at Tel-Aviv and Haifa Universities and is presently a Senior Research Fellow at Haifa University. She has published both on Philo and on Jewish Liturgy, including her book, *Philo Judaeus: His Universe of Discourse* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995).

A methodical monograph, *Philo's Scriptures* elucidates core issues important to the study of ancient Judaism. It explores in meticulous detail the roles of Philo within his Hellenistic Judaic community and the nature of learning in that community's academies. Through painstaking examinations of the textual records in the works of Philo, this study also determines aspects of the development of the Judaic synagogue practice of reciting selections from the biblical prophets, known as the *Haftarot*. Thus the main readership for this book includes students of Philo of Alexandria, of Hellenistic Judaism, Bible scholars, researchers of Midrash, and those interested in the development of Jewish liturgy.

Our knowledge of the setting of Philo within Hellenistic Judaism has been interpreted by other writers over time according to a series of independent methodologies and assumptions. For all scholars, Philo represents a paradigm of a Hellenized Jew. Philo maintains in his writings a clear commitment to Judaism and a broad mastery of the eclectic Hellenistic philosophical and exegetical traditions of his day.

Where Cohen differs in her interpretation of Philo is in her avoidance of imposing any overarching interpretive framework on the evidence, letting, rather, the textual witness speak for itself. That type of effort, of course, does not produce a totally seamless and cohesive narrative about the Philonic setting. The monographs of others, like the notable scholars Erwin Goodenough and Harry Wolfson, depict a synthetic Philonic worldview or philosophy. That kind of high-level approach placed Philo into a broader context, either within Hellenistic religions, in the case of Goodenough, or within the Western philosophical tradition, in the instance of Wolfson.

Both of those schools of thought about Philo provided accurate readings of subsets of the evidence from the corpus of Philo's writings. Indeed those approaches are synthetic in two senses, as both unifying the evidence and in constructing artificial views of the man and his work, at the same time.

Specifically, Good enough sought to show the connections of Philo to hypothetical mystical religions of Hellenistic Jews. This was a way to justify and explain the emergence of Christianity from within the realm of Hellenized Judaism. And Wolfson, in particular, sought to cement for Philo a cornerstone position in the development of all of Western

philosophy. Cohen, by contrast, has no such grand ambitions for defending the significance of this resilient and seminal thinker. Hence, Cohen provides in this study a less overarching and more authentic reading of part of the textual record. Cohen's monograph is therefore one of great lasting value that will not easily be revised along with the next trend in scholarly methods.

At the heart of this monograph, Cohen turns her sharply focused scholarly microscope on our knowledge of the origins and development of the *Haftarah* cycle within early Judaism. To be sure, the record of evidence on this question is scant at best. Additionally, I have opined elsewhere (cf. my book, *God's Favorite Prayers*, Teaneck, 2011, pp. 21–23) that speculation about the origins of liturgical rituals normally bears little fruit for those who wish to plumb the spiritual meanings of the practice within a faith system. Liturgical rituals seek for themselves timelessness, not historical specificity. And that, by definition, obscures our ability to plumb the historical record of their development.

Cohen is clear up front that there are a meager number of textual artifacts pertaining to this question of *Haftarah*, or no *Haftarah*, in Philo's time and place. Nevertheless, the ritual of scripture-reading in synagogue life is a crucial problem to ponder. Later rabbinic communities gave high priority to the Torah over the prophets. Christianity, in New Testament texts, professes a high reliance on ideas and contents found previously in prophetic works and an antipathy at best for many of the Torah traditions. Clearly, the details of Cohen's research and her conclusions on this topic, which we review here, have ramifications for understanding Philo, his time, later rabbinism and early Christianity. We turn next to review the details of Cohen's monograph.

It is indeed remarkable that although Philo quoted extensively from the Pentateuch, his works contain a mere forty-six references to the Prophets and Writings. Cohen provides a convincing explanation for each of these citations. Her conclusions corroborate the thesis that Philo availed himself of lexicographic aids and midrashic material and, further, that even though the language of their composition was mainly Hebrew/Aramaic, he used them in Greek translation. Cohen additionally identifies a circle engaged in esoteric philosophical allegorization of Scriptures, with which Philo associated, and she finds that the specific quotations from the Prophets point to the existence, already in the first century C.E., of a traditional Judaic *Haftarah Cycle* in synagogue ritual.

In Cohen's first chapter, "The Man Philo as a Product of his Time," she discusses aspects of those biblical verses outside of the Torah that Philo cites in his works. She deals first with the selection of verses that Philo uses.

The results of this analysis indicate that the major texts *treated* by Philo are confined to those with which his readers would have been familiar from their worship, including Psalms. Philo devotes his attention to the liturgical texts, using lexicographic aids and midrashic commentaries that are seen to have been at his disposal (p. 2). That Philo *chose* to devote himself exclusively to works directly related to the synagogue liturgy is not surprising, for these must have been the works that interested the educated and religiously committed members of the Alexandrian Jewish community. His audience, Cohen says, was "... the educated element of the contemporary Jewish community who found intellectual and emotional satisfaction in the weaving of their Hellenistic frames of reference into the traditional Jewish texts and to which Philo encouraged them to be unconditionally committed" (p. 2).

In Cohen's second chapter, "How Philo Quotes the Pentateuch" she asserts that, "...although Philo was familiar with the separate names of the Pentateuchal books, it was the Pentateuch as a whole which served as his conceptual unit, as his point of reference... individual passages were not looked upon by him as belonging specifically to one or another of the pentateuchal books, but to the Pentateuch as a whole, and the free association between widely separated passages is therefore not surprising" (p. 52).

In Cohen's chapter, "A Traditional *Haftarah* Cycle," she enters into the core of the intent of this monograph. Her stated goal is, "...to show the overwhelming degree of correlation between Philo's rare citations from the Prophets and the traditional *Haftarah* string 'Admonition, Consolation, and Repentance' (פורענותא, נחמה ותשובה). These are the *Haftarah* recited between the 17th of Tammuz and the Day of Atonement (=Yom Kippur)..." (p. 55).

This conclusion about the early origins of a cycle of synagogue readings is entirely original. As Cohen says:

Our findings respecting Philo's citations from the Latter Prophets provides hitherto unnoticed evidence for the existence, already in Philo's day, of at least the beginnings of this cycle—thus antedating the *Pesikta*, and of course the BT as well, by centuries. And while the NT contains the earliest explicit mention of the custom of reading *Haftarah* after the Torah reading, it is not clear from there, whether, or perhaps to what extent, the passages alluded to there were considered traditional pericopes. (pp. 57–8)

She further finds that:

an overwhelming degree of correlation between the verses quoted by Philo and the *Haftarah* between the 17th of Tammuz till after the Day of Atonement, which placed the historical memory of the trauma of the destruction of the First Temple as an integral part of the call to repentance, cannot but be significant. Can there remain any doubt respecting the existence of at least the beginnings of this cycle of *Haftarah* long before the destruction of the Second Temple? (p. 69)

In Cohen's chapter, "Citations from the Latter Prophets," she concludes that other evidence further supports her hypothesis:

Four out of the five citations from Isaiah are found in one of the special *Haftarah* of 'Admonition'.... Two of the three citations from Jeremiah... are found in the *Haftarah* to *Parashat Mas'ai* (Num. 33–36 / Jer. 2:4–28; 3:4) that is read on the second of the three Sabbaths of Admonition which immediately precedes *Tishbe'Av*.... And finally, for the sake of completeness it should be noted that the only other citations from the Latter Prophets found in Philo are those from Hosea and Zechariah, which are found in the *Haftarah* to *Shabbat Shuva* (the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and the Day of Atonement). (p. 102)

Cohen presents another conclusion of her research in chapter five, “Citations from the Former Prophets and Chronicles.” She explains regarding the sources of Philo’s interpretations, “. . . the weight of the evidence points both to a lexicon as well as to a written allegorical source that Philo has woven into the fabric of his composition, and it appears that while Philo has read these works in Greek translation, their original language must have been Hebrew or Aramaic” (p. 137).

In Cohen’s chapter six on Philo’s eighteen citations from the Book of Psalms, she sets out to see “. . . what can be learned from a comparison of the Psalms quoted by Philo with those used today in liturgical contexts” (p. 153). She does find several instances worth noting, but no overarching pattern of congruence. Similarly, in the next chapter (seven), Cohen finds no definite motif in the six verses from the Book of Proverbs in four different passages and a single reference to the Book of Job.

In Cohen’s eighth chapter, she provides her, “most tantalizing finding . . . the discovery of what, following Philo’s own lead, I shall term the ‘Allegorical Circle of Moses,’ or ‘The Confraternity of Moses’” (p. 175). Cohen explains that, “This was apparently a group of *scholars, teachers, students and disciples*, who engaged in esoteric philosophic allegory of the Pentateuch with a special branch devoted to Scripture as a whole” (p. 175).

Cohen somewhat qualifies her findings on her newly hypothesized source of interpretations. She concludes that, since respecting several of the non-pentateuchal citations Philo has identified his source as coming from a member of this group, we may assume that the rest of the material did not stem from there. She elaborates in the final summary of the book that regarding this circle, “I found indications both of the moment of Philo’s enthusiastic discovery of this group as well as of his growing dissatisfaction and eventual sharp break with it” (p. 196).

In addition to the expected rich bibliography and thorough indexes, Cohen appends to the monograph scholarly notes on related subjects. These include observations on: “Pantokrator and Lord of Hosts;” “Philo and the Contemporary Italian Rite;” “LORD and GOD in the Septuagint, Philo, and in Rabbinic Midrash;” “Philo’s Terminology for the books of Judges and Kings;” as well as materials on, “Ps. 46(45):5 (V Somn. 2.246) and Zohar ii 63b and 98b;” “A Possible Allusion / Echo of Prov. 8:22–23 in VIII Virt. 62;” and a discussion of “Prov. 8:22–23 in Philo and in Genesis Rabbah.” The book also provides charts of Philo’s citations from the Prophets and Writings.

I conclude with a high recommendation. This volume is a scholarly achievement of both breadth and depth. It makes important contributions to topics in Philonic scholarship, in Jewish liturgical development, and in pre-rabbinic biblical hermeneutics.

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