

## HOMER AND THE JEWS IN ANTIQUITY

Ahuvia Kahane

This essay comments on aspects of the relationship between Homer and Judaic culture in antiquity. In particular, the essay considers a variety of texts of Jewish provenance written in Greek hexameter verse – Homer’s own medium. These texts often attempt to mediate or adjudicate between the values of Homeric poetry (and thus, emblematically, of pagan culture in general) and Judaic culture and reveal the dynamics of cultural interaction with particular vividness. The paper argues that in many of the texts it is possible to observe a mechanism whereby, the greater the integrative effort or the claim to demonstrate a proficiency in both cultural domains, the greater the potential for an irreducible paradox and conflict of values. Such paradox has not been sufficiently recognized in previous scholarship, yet, the paper suggests, it is an important component of the cultural interactions between Hellenism and Judaism in antiquity.

The present study does not aim at a textual treatment of specific passages of either the Hebrew or Greek Bible. However, by tracing pointed aspects of the reception history of Homeric epic among Hellenistic Jews, the study hopes to shed some light on the intricate *mentalité*, cultural sensibilities, and intellectual milieu which underlies the practice of Jewish Hellenistic writers, translators of the Septuagint, and other scholars and authors of the Bible in the Hellenistic age.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the influence of Homeric scholarship on the translators of the Septuagint see, e.g., D. Weissert, “Alexandrian Analogical Word-Analysis and Septuagint Translation Techniques”, *Textus* 8 (1973), 31–44.

## 1

1.1 We begin with a well-known passage from the Talmud (*b. Menahot* 99b):<sup>2</sup>

שאל בן דמה בן אחותו של ר' ישמעאל את ר' ישמעאל כגון אני  
שלמדתי כל התורה כולה מהו ללמוד חכמת יונית קרא עליו המקרא  
הזה לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפִּיךָ והגית בו יומם ולילה צא ובדוק  
שעה שאינה לא מן היום ולא מן הלילה ולמוד בה חכמת יונית.

Ben Damah the son of R. Ishmael's sister once asked R. Ishmael, May one such as I who has studied the whole of the Torah in its entirety, learn Greek Wisdom? He [R. Ishmael] thereupon read to him the following verse, "This book of the law shall never leave your mouth, but you must think of it incessantly, both day and night" [Josh 1:8]. Go then and find a time that is neither day nor night and in that time learn Greek wisdom.

As elsewhere, the deontological content of this exchange seems, at first, as clear as the formal modalities of rabbinical *responsa* (question raises problem/response provides answer). It explains what a Jew must read and when. The rule is that one must read the Book of the Law *all* the time. Yet—this is often the essence of *midrash*—the well-wrought surface of the narrative is also the site of deeper polemic. It is precisely the question-and-answer and apparent "open-and-shut" structure of the scene that invokes its unresolved content.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion see, e.g., S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the I Century BCE – IV Century CE* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 100–114. Cf. idem, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the II–IV centuries CE* (2nd ed.; New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1965). Both books were reprinted as *Greek in Jewish Palestine / Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America Press, 1994).

1.2 The first sentence presents Ben Damah as nephew to the great Rabbi Ishmael, and thus as the younger man, **רך בשנים**, one might say. Ben Damah claims to have “studied the *whole* of the Torah *in its entirety*”, and now desires more. In reply, Uncle Ishmael quotes one of the most famous verses in the Bible, God’s dictum to Joshua upon entry into the Land of Israel: “This book of the law shall never leave your mouth, and you must read it both by day *and* by night (**והגית בה וליל ויומם**)”. R. Ishmael quotes these words—or rather, the Talmudic narrative places them in his mouth—precisely because they are constitutive. Every Jew (the words are performative: reading the verse, a Jew becomes a Reader, to whom the obligation applies), and certainly one who has read the whole of the Torah, knows that a Jew’s reading time is filled by one book, that is to say, is always fully “booked”. Ben Damah is thus shown to be a man *young* in years and *younger still* in wisdom.

This would have been the end of the matter, but for the fact that R. Ishmael provides a supplement: “Go then”, he tells his nephew, “and find a time that is neither day nor night (**שעה שאינה לא... ולא...**) and in that time learn Greek wisdom”. Notwithstanding a streak of comedy, the question of what a Jew should do with Greek Wisdom, and, more generally, the relationship between Judaism and Hellenic thought is a serious and much discussed matter. What the passage above suggests by way of a comment on “the right time”, and perhaps in a somewhat sublimating and abstracting manner on time itself, is that we are dealing with a conundrum: neither a straightforward separation of spheres or values, nor the possibility of harmonized integration.<sup>3</sup> In what follows I wish to comment on a small part of

<sup>3</sup> Reading the Talmud, as we shall in this essay, from “outside” the Rabbinic tradition and partly through its abstractions, I take my cue here, for example, from Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (London: Athlone,

this problem and the question of Greek Wisdom and the Jews. I propose to do so by considering some functions of Homeric poetry and its place in the context of the world of ancient Jewish writing and thought.

## 2

2.1 Homer, let me suggest, offers useful ground for testing of our conundrum. He may well have been many different things to different people. But his poetry was a “foundational text”, widely disseminated, studied, and cited as a canonical Greek text *par excellence* throughout all periods of Greco-Roman antiquity. He was almost universally regarded as “the wisest of the Greeks”, and his poetry as “the bible of the Greeks”.<sup>4</sup> More significantly, Homer was also the practical foundation of a Greek education in antiquity. Almost everyone who learned to read and write Greek did so with the aid of verses from

1990 [1962, 1976]), 68: “In no way do we wish to exclude from the reading of our texts the religious meaning that guides the reading of the mystic or naïve believer, nor the meaning that a theologian would extract. But we none the less begin with the idea that this meaning is not only transposable into a philosophical language, but refers to philosophical problems ... The laconic formulae, images, allusions and virtual ‘winks’ through which thought finds expression in the Talmud can release their meaning only if one approaches them from the angle of a concrete problem or social situation, without worrying about the apparent anachronisms committed as a result. These can shock only the fanatics for historical method, who profess that *it is forbidden for inspired thinking to anticipate the meaning of all experience* and that not only do there exist words that, before a certain time, are *unpronounceable*; but that there are also thoughts which, before a certain time, are *unthinkable*”.

<sup>4</sup> See M. Finkelberg, “Homer as a Foundational Text”, in eadem and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World* (Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 2; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 91–96.

the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.<sup>5</sup> “To be a cultivated Greek”, as one scholar says, “was, first and foremost, to be deeply versed in Homer. A legacy of the archaic period, knowledge of Homer would characterize Greek education throughout its history”.<sup>6</sup> Greek, of course, was an important language of official and learned discourses in Palestine, Egypt and their environs from the Hellenistic period. And, as various sources attest, many (or at least some) Jews in antiquity did, in fact, read and write Greek.<sup>7</sup> These basic points combined suggest that whatever the varied meaning of “Greek Wisdom” for Jews in antiquity, the term would have conventionally contained an emblematic reference to Homer and Homeric poetry.

2.2 Important as Homer’s role may have been as a representative of Greek (and more generally Greco-Roman) Wisdom, explicit references to his work in ancient Hebrew and Aramaic Jewish sources are not common. In the Talmud, for example, mention of **המירס** or **המירם**, if this is “Homer”, is attested only a few times.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly perhaps,

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., the evidence of Homeric papyri in the Ptolemaic period in S. West, *The Ptolemaic Papyri of Homer* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> H.I. Marrou, “Education and Rhetoric”, in M.I. Finley (ed.), *The Legacy of Greece: A New Appraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 191; and more generally Marrou’s *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’antiquité* (Paris: Seuil, 1960).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., H.B. Rosén, *L’Hebreu et ses rapports avec le monde classique: essai d’évaluation culturelle* (Paris: Paul Guethner, 1979); S. Schwartz, “Language, Power, and Identity in Ancient Palestine”, *Past & Present* 148 (1995), 3–47; W.V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 188, etc. Further below I discuss well known funerary inscriptions from Bessara (Beth Shearim) which, like other material remains in that cemetery, attest to the use of Greek by Jews.

<sup>8</sup> See A. Kohut, “Sifre Homeros, Books of Entertainment”, *JQR* 3 (1891), 546–548; idem (ed.), *Aruch Completum sive Lexicon Vocabula et Res Quae in Libris Targumicis, Talmudicis, et Midrashicis Continentur* (9 vols.; Vienna and New York, 1878–92;

on those few occasions when he is mentioned, the question of the propriety of reading his works, as emblems of Greek Wisdom in general, seems prominent. Hai Gaon, for example, speaks of “the books of *hmros*” (=Homer, with the addition of vowel pointing), explaining that the ספרי המרוס ספרים חיצונים של חכמת יונים שמם בלשונם הומרוס, “external books of Greeks are called, in their tongue, Homeros”.<sup>9</sup> In the *Aruch Completum*, Alexander Kohut says, “According to our rabbis, [*Homeros* is] a general name for *kophrim*”.<sup>10</sup> R. Akiba makes a finer distinction, between Homer and other books of forbidden alien knowledge, making some allowances for the former (*y. Sanh.* 10:1, 28a.; *b. Sanh.* 90a): “...he who reads the extra-canonical books such as the books of Ben Sira and the books of Ben La’anah [has no share in the world to come], but he who reads the books of Homer and all other books that were written beyond that is considered like one who is reading a secular document” (אבל ספרי המירס וכל ספרים) (שנכתבו מיכן והילך הקורא בהן כקורא באיגרת). Homer, in other words, seems to have similar status to a civil ordinance or a tax ruling, which do not transgress the sacred space of the Torah. Citing Qoh 12:12 Akiba argues that “casual reading is permissible, but intensive study is forbidden”. This would appear to be a reformulation of the biblical phrase: The book of the Law one must contemplate *all* of the time; Greek Wisdom can find its time in the interstice. Similarly, in tractate *Yadayim* (4:6, as above) we find that “proportionate to the love for [the Holy Scriptures] is their uncleanness. The books of Hamiram, which are not precious, do not convey uncleanness to the hands”. Homer’s position, then, is liminal. If he stands for the whole

repr. Jerusalem: Makor, 1969–70), 5:254–255, s.v. מרום. See also R. Patai, *The Jewish Mind* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> *Yadayim* 4:6.

<sup>10</sup> Kohut, *Aruch Completum* (above, n. 8), s.v. מרום.

of Greek Wisdom, then, presumably, there is some danger in reading his poetry. Yet, on a sliding scale of sacred and secular, Homer seems at least cautiously permissible.<sup>11</sup>

2.3 The liminal, of course, is not so easily defined, and one suspects that behind such conditional permit lie deeper and more complex anxieties. After all, it is patent that Homer's view of the world, even if interpreted broadly or allegorically, was, in its most basic features, not an easy complement to Jewish thought.<sup>12</sup> In Homer there is not one omnipotent, sovereign God, but many divinities. These are, in fact, rather fallible and flawed. They quarrel among themselves, quibble, complain, display cowardly behaviour, sexually seduce and deceive each other, and so on. At the beginning of the *Iliad*, for example, we are told that in the suffering of the Trojan War Zeus' "plan" is "fulfilled" (*Iliad* 1.5: Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή). Yet it is not clear, either in the text or to scholars, what this plan is, and whether it has any significant ethical components. Zeus, who is commonly described in Homer as "the father of men and gods" and as the one "whose power is the greatest" (*Odyssey* 5.8 and *passim*: οὗ τε κράτος ἐστὶ μέγιστον), is emphatically *not* an Almighty Creator. He has, for one, a father (Cronos), who, like himself has a father (Ouranos).

<sup>11</sup> See also *m. Yadayim* 4:6. For an overview of Greek Wisdom in the Talmud see e.g. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (above, n. 2), 100–114.

<sup>12</sup> See recent comments in J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 33; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999); S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999); E.S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 30; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998); M.H. Williams, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), etc.

Furthermore, in the multifaceted and at times contradictory web of local discourses that make up Greek myth and cultic narrative, Zeus, like his father, acquires his position of supremacy by usurping the authority of the “father” by gruesome and not-necessarily dignified means. Of Zeus’ proclivity for infatuation and illicit sexual union, often in bestial form, with mortal women and young boys, we say nothing.

The exact nature of man’s ethico-religious experience in Homer is a matter of considerable complexity and some contradiction.<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding, it is plainly very different from Abrahamic practice or belief. In Homer mortals honor the gods, *prima facie* at least, for fear of divine anger or in order to obtain practical benefits, and in any case, not with the sense of reverence which is fundamental to the later monotheistic traditions. At Aulis, prior to the events narrated in the *Iliad*, Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter to appease Artemis’ anger and allow the fleet to set sail for Troy. One could hardly compare this sacrifice, which was of course carried out, with Abraham’s הַנִּיחַ and his readiness to sacrifice Isaac, or with the Covenant which follows. I mention these elementary points merely to stress that radical irreconcilable differences between Judaism and Hellenism can never be completely elided.

2.4 It would seem, then, that Homer presented a distinct conundrum for the Jewish world in antiquity – an itch one could not scratch. On the one hand, his poetry and thought were sharply at odds with Jewish thought. On the other hand, it was difficult to expunge Homer

<sup>13</sup> See, in general, W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985); J.N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Greece & Rome: New Surveys in the Classics 24; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and more specifically e.g. F. Graf, “Religion und Mythologie im Zusammenhang mit Homer: Forschung und Ausblick”, in J. Latacz (ed.), *Zweihundert Jahre Homer-Forschung: Rückblick und Ausblick* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1991), 331–362.

from the sphere of thought in antiquity and to put him completely out of the Jewish mind. He was simply too much a part of Greek language and culture, and Greek was simply too close to the Jewish community.

### 3

**3.1** What, then, *are* we to make of Homer's place in Jewish antiquity? In the relative (but perhaps understandable) silence of Hebrew and Aramaic sources, we turn to the evidence provided by authors of Jewish provenance and affinity who wrote in Greek. Although not a homogenous group, such authors will have been, if only by virtue of their linguistic medium, somewhat *closer* to the Greek world, and to Homer, than the Rabbis or the readers of the Talmud. We may also make the general assumption that such authors were likely to have been a little *further removed* from Jewish prohibitions, and thus at some greater liberty to express their views

**3.2** Needless to say, first who come to mind are Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus. We shall presently consider each of these authors, but only briefly – in order to make a basic general point. The details of their relation to Homer and to ancient Homeric scholarship have been studied elsewhere. Also, although the issue of cultural allegiance is an urgent question for both Josephus and Philo, they occupy—by virtue of their canonical status—relatively stable “cultural positions”. Such accepted canonicity can mask, at least in part, more-puzzling and more dynamic aspects of the conundrum of the relationship between Homer and the Jews in antiquity. Following our brief comments on Philo and Josephus, we shall therefore seek our fortunes in other sources of a more ambiguous standing.

**3.3** Flavius Josephus (37 – c. 100 CE) is the great chronicler of the Jewish Wars. He lives in a world of Hellenized antiquity but as

a “Jew”, in some ways at least. He mentions Homer by name a handful of times, especially in *Against Apion*, his famous apologia for Jewish thought.<sup>14</sup> Thus, for example, arguing for the greater antiquity of Jewish culture relative to the Greeks, Josephus says that, culturally speaking, the legislators of Greek world, the ones who set its order (and thus by implication the order itself too) “appear to have been born but yesterday” (2.154). He argues that the Greek word for “law,” *nomos*, is “unknown in ancient Greece”. “Witness”, he says, “Homer [the oldest of the Greeks], who nowhere employs it in his poems”.<sup>15</sup> In Homer’s day, Josephus concludes, the [Greek] masses were governed by unwritten, often *ad hoc* circumstances (2.155). It would seem, then, that this Homer and his world are a convenient foil for marking the superiority of Jewish over Hellenic culture. The word *nomos*, “law”, is in this context inseparable from fundamental

<sup>14</sup> For Josephus and Homer see L.H. Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 27; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998), 172; J.M.G. Barclay, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 10: *Against Apion* (Brill: Leiden, 2007), 15; Z. Ritoók, “Josephus and Homer”, *AAntHung* 32 (1989), 137–152; M.Z. Kopidakis, “Réminiscences d’Homère chez Flavius Josèphe”, *Hellenica* 37 (1986), 3–25; J. Dillery, “Putting Him Back Together Again: Apion historian, Apion Grammatikos”, *CPh* 98 (2003), 383–390; E.E. Hallewy, “Biblical Midrash and Hoemric Exegesis”, *Tarbiz* 31 (1961/2), 157–169, 264–280 (in Hebrew).

<sup>15</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.154.5: ὅπου γε μηδ’ αὐτὸ τοῦνομα πάλαι ἐγινώσκετο τοῦ νόμου παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησι. καὶ μάρτυς Ὀμηρος οὐδαμοῦ τῆς ποιήσεως αὐτῷ χρησάμενος. The word *nómos* (from *némō*), “law” or “custom”, is never used in Homer, but *nomós* (also from *némō*), “pasture”, is used five times (twice more in adverbial form) and once (*Iliad* 20.249) in the sense of “range (of words)”. See Barclay, *Flavius Josephus* (above, n. 14), 255 *ad loc.* Zenodotus (3rd cent. BCE), an important early grammarian and Homer critic, did read the word *nomon* in *Odyssey* 1.3 in the sense of “habit” instead of the word “mind” (*noon*), and the word does appear in Hesiod (see *Op.* 388, 403. and fr. 322.1 [M-W]). Translations are from H.St.J. Thackeray, *Josephus*, I (LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1956).

juridical-religious concepts and from the Hebrew notion of ספר התורה, “the Book of the Law”. Earlier, in the first book of *Against Apion*, Josephus considers the question of literacy among the early Greeks. He famously comments that “it is highly controversial and disputed question whether even those who took part in the Trojan campaign made use of letters” (1.11). As commentators agree, Flavius must here be making specific reference to a much discussed passage in the *Iliad* (6.168), where Bellerophon is entrusted with tablets bearing “destructive signs” (σήματα λυγρὰ). Following known interpretations Josephus does not take these to be linguistic signs. Homer, he argues, was a poet who did not use writing (1.12).<sup>16</sup> Here again we see Homer as convenient foil. The use of writing and the lack thereof are juxtaposed as evaluative emblems of cultural and juridical codification (writing is, of course, narrativized and reified in the biblical tradition through the story of Moses on Mount Sinai and the inscription of the Tablets of the Law).

In these passages Josephus appears to voice a clear preference in regard to the question of Judaism and Hellenism. Yet, quite obviously, his medium for making these, and other judgments about Homer and Greek culture is not Hebrew, but Greek. Also, as often acknowledged, to argue that the word “law” is never used in Homer would

<sup>16</sup> *Against Apion* 1.11.6 – 1.13.1: περί τοῦ τὴν νῦν οὔσαν τῶν γραμμάτων χρῆσιν ἐκείνους ἀγνοεῖν. 1.12 ἄλλως δὲ παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν οὐδὲν ὁμολογούμενον εὐρίσκεται γράμμα τῆς Ὀμήρου ποιήσεως πρεσβύτερον, οὗτος δὲ καὶ τῶν Τρωϊκῶν ἕστερος φαίνεται γενόμενος, καὶ φασιν οὐδὲ τοῦτον ἐν γράμμασι τὴν αὐτοῦ ποίησιν καταλιπεῖν, ἀλλὰ διαμνημονευομένην ἐκ τῶν ἁσμάτων ἕστερον συντεθῆναι καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πολλὰς ἐν αὐτῇ σχεῖν 1.13 τὰς διαφωνίας. See Barclay, *Flavius Josephus* (above, n. 14), 16, *ad loc.* This is one of the few sources for the idea of Homer’s orality in antiquity. See also Dionysius Thrax, *Ars Grammatica* 1.1.9; Julius Africanus, *Kestoi* 18 (PMG 412; Julius also has an affinity to the Judaic world and to Palestine).

seem to attest to an intimate “philological” acquaintance with Homer’s works and Homeric scholarship.<sup>17</sup> The amount of time one spends with a book is a fundamental—one might even say formal—benchmark of one’s cultural-religious identity. A Jew *qua* Jew must spend all his time, both day and night, reflecting on the Book of the Law, while other books may only be safely handled through casual reading. It would seem, then, that the performative force of Josephus’s comments underpins his transgressive loyalty, even as their propositional content favours the Jewish world.<sup>18</sup>

3.4 Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – 50 CE) is perhaps the Jewish author who quotes Homer most often, indeed quite regularly.<sup>19</sup> Like Josephus, Philo is keenly aware of potential cross-cultural conflicts. Yet Josephus was a man often immersed in practical and immediate confrontation. He was not only a chronicler of the Jewish War, but one of its active participants. The narrative of conflict between

<sup>17</sup> Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible* (above, n. 14), 172: “Josephus is able to state that Homer *nowhere* employs the word *nomos*... which would perhaps indicate that he had studied Homer thoroughly...”. Cf. Barclay, *Flavius Josephus* (above, n. 14), 15 and the scholia to *Iliad* 6.168 (especially the “T” scholia). For further scholarship see above, n. 14.

<sup>18</sup> I leave aside the larger question of Josephus’ cultural identity. See, for example, P. Vidal-Naquet, *Flavius Josèphe ou du bon usage de la trahison* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); idem, *Flavius Josèphe et la guerre des Juifs* (Paris: Bayard, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Philo quotes Homer dozens of times; see index in F.H. Colson, *Philo* (LCL; London – Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 10:457–458. See also J. Amir, “The Relations between Philo and the Homeric Allegory”, *Eshkolot* 6 (1971), 35–46 (in Hebrew); P. Borgen and R. Skarsten, “Quaestiones et Solutiones: Some Observations on the Form of Philo’s Exegesis”, *StPhilon* 4 (1976–77), 1–15; A. Kamesar, “The *logos endiathetos* and the *logos prophorikos* in Allegorical Interpretation: Philo and the D-Scholia to the *Iliad*”, *GRBS* 44 (2004), 163–181; M. Niehoff, “Homeric Scholarship and Bible Exegesis in Ancient Alexandria”, *CQ* N.S. 57 (2007), 166–182.

Hellenism and Judaism is a narrative of his own life, too.<sup>20</sup> It is easy to understand why he should acknowledge the competition of Jewish and Hellenic cultures more openly. Philo too may have been involved in practical life, perhaps, for example, as a member of an Alexandrian embassy to the Emperor Caligula in 40 CE. Yet in his circumstance in late Ptolemaic Alexandria, he may have found it easier to invoke or refer to a world in which Judaic and Hellenistic cultural values are in more abstract, philosophical exchange. It is perhaps understandable that Homer sometimes appears as a more positive figure in Philo's cultural world.

In his essay *On Abraham*, for example, Philo says: "Just as we give the title of 'the poet' to Homer in virtue of his pre-eminence ... so too Moses gave the name of man<sup>21</sup> in pre-eminence to him who cherished hope and left unnoticed the many others as worthy to receive the same title" (10.1–11.1).<sup>22</sup> This Homer seems to be, not so much an antagonist of the Judaic world, but one of its interlocutors. Yet smoothing over cultural difference may also have the consequences of creating a sublimated fantasy. The problematic features of Homer's world, which are in some sense his most prominent attributes, seem to have been silently excised, but the operation is not always one

<sup>20</sup> Such isomorphism applies at the general level, and also in pointed examples. Vidal-Naquet, *Flavius Josèphe ou du bon usage* (above, n. 18), for example, argues that Josephus' narrative of war is modeled on the narrative of his own experience: the Massada narrative, for example, mirrors the events at Jotapata.

<sup>21</sup> The "man" in question is probably Enos. Cf. Gen 4:26. Translations are from F.H. Colson, *Philo*, V (LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> *Abr.* 10.1–11.1: καθάπερ γὰρ ποιητῆς Ὁμηρος, μυρίων ποιητῶν ὄντων, κατ' ἐξοχὴν λέγεται, καὶ τὸ μέλαν ᾧ γράφομεν, καίτοι παντὸς ὁ μὴ λευκὸν ἐστὶ μέλανος ὄντος, καὶ ἄρχων Ἀθήνησιν ὁ ἐπώνυμος καὶ τῶν ἐννέα ἀρχόντων ἄριστος, ἀφ' οὗ οἱ χρόνοι καταριθμοῦνται, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ τὸν ἐλπίδι χρώμενον "ἄνθρωπον" κατ' ἐξοχὴν ὠνόμασε τὰ πλήθη τῶν ἄλλων ἀφησυχάσας ὡς οὐκ ἀξίων 11 τῆς αὐτῆς προσρήσεως ἐπιλαχεῖν.

hundred percent successful. For example, in *On the Contemplative Life*, Philo discusses the virtues of a simple life, avoiding the pursuit of wealth. He cites (*Vit. Cont.* 17) Homer (*Iliad* 13.5-6), who says, that the Mysians, “men of perfect justice” (δικαιοτάτων ἀνθρώπων, perhaps one could translate צדיקים) live on nothing but mare’s milk.<sup>23</sup> The idea, argues Philo, is that injustice is bred by anxious thought for money and possessions, while justice is upheld by the opposite. Yet, as Philo will have known, milk-drinking Mysians are something of a “utopian” exception in the *Iliad*.<sup>24</sup> Homeric heroes are best known for their unbridled pursuit of loot and fame. Furthermore, Homeric heroes, far from surviving on a dairy diet, are famous for dining, almost exclusively, on roast red meat.<sup>25</sup> Invoking the Mysians thus triggers a precisely opposite, transgressive reading of Homer and can, perhaps, even be mapped onto the grid of Judaic dietary law as an act of impossible reconciliation.

<sup>23</sup> *Vit. Cont.* 17.1-8: τοῦτό μοι δοκεῖ καὶ Ὅμηρος αἰνίξασθαι ἐν Ἰλιάδι κατὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς τρισκαιδεκάτης ῥαψωδίας διὰ τούτων τῶν ἐπῶν· “Μυσῶν τ’ ἀγχεμάχων καὶ ἀγαυῶν Ἰππημολγῶν, γλακτοφάγων ἀβίων τε, δικαιοτάτων ἀνθρώπων,” ὡς τῆς μὲν περὶ βίου σπουδῆς καὶ χρηματισμὸν ἀδικίαν γεννώσης διὰ τὸ ἄνισον, δικαιοσύνην δὲ τῆς ἐναντίας προαιρέσεως ἔνεκα ἰσότητος, καθ’ ἣν ὁ τῆς φύσεως πλοῦτος ὄρισται καὶ παρευημερεῖ τὸν ἐν ταῖς κεναῖς δόξαις. The question of justice is obviously a prevalent theme. Cf. e.g. the question of the “law” in the discussion above, and, for example, in a very different form, in the case of the epitaph of *Ioustos* (= *Zadok*, “The Just”) in Beth She’arim, for which see further below.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., comments in R. Janko, *A Commentary on Homer’s Iliad*, ed. G.S. Kirk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4:42–43.

<sup>25</sup> For the Homeric hero see (amidst a vast literature) e.g. S.L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer’s Iliad* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985).

## 4

4.1 The perspectives and practices of canonical authors such as Philo and Josephus smooth over, at least in part, the conundrum of Homer and the Jews. To observe that conundrum better, it may be useful to consider ancient texts which, on the one hand, are of Jewish provenance, but, on the other, are further away from the canonical core and thus perhaps more openly enact the anxieties of a Judaeo-Hellenic interaction. Such texts can be found, for example, in the so-called “pseudepigrapha” (note the “falsity”, and thus the transgressive “impropriety” already implied in their labeling), as well as from scattered epigraphic and papyrological sources. Of these texts I have chosen a particular subset of examples, written in Homer’s own medium: Greek hexameter verse. Anything written in such form will inevitably invoke the name of Homer and Homeric poetry as its essential intertext. These texts thus constitute sites of a materialized, more-immediate interaction between Homer and the Jews. Being closer to Homer in their “raw” discursive substance, they offer particularly vivid illustration of paradoxical hybridity, acts of elision and transgression. As we shall presently see, in order to allow for contradicting values to co-exist, these texts must also embody a somewhat more shadowy, fragmented, twilight existence.

4.2 Philo the Elder—who has no relation to Philo of Alexandria—is a Jewish epic poet, perhaps from the 3rd–2nd cent. BCE.<sup>26</sup> He is not

<sup>26</sup> “We have nothing to indicate his date except that he was earlier than Alexander Polyhistor” (J.J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* [New York: Crossroad, 1983], 54). Philo is cited in Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 9, who probably depended on Alexander Polyhistor. For text, translation, discussion, and bibliography see C.R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, 2: *Poets* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 51–204. Cf. H. Attridge in J.H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday,

a well preserved author: only twenty four verses of his poem *On Jerusalem*, written in Greek hexameter, survive. Poetically, this is not an unfortunate loss. Philo writes in turgid, pompous style, whose purpose, as one scholar says, could only have been to shroud the author in “a cloud of mystical obscurities”.<sup>27</sup> Such obscurities lie at the core of our argument, of course.

The first fragment we possess from the works of Philo the Elder describes the *Akedah*, the Binding of Isaac. This example, like others below, deals with seminal themes, dichotomies, narratives, and moments in Jewish thought. In other words, it seems to reach right to the heart of the matter.<sup>28</sup>

αἰνοφύτων ἔκκαυμα βριήπυος αἰνετὸς ἰσχων  
ἀθάνατον ποίησεν ἐὼν φάτιν· ἐξέτι κείνου  
ἔκγονος αἰνογόνοιο πολύμνιον ἔλλαχε κῦδος.

...the praiseworthy mighty-shouter quenched the fire,  
and spoke his immortal word/promise. From that time forth  
the offspring of that awesome born one have won far-hymned praise.

1983–85) 2:781–84.; J. Gutman, “Philo the Epic Poet,” in R. Koebner (ed.), *Studies in Classics and Jewish Hellenism* (ScrHier 1; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1954), 36–63. Cf. the mention in Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.218, and Demetrius of Phaleron, *Fr.* 201.5 (Schwabe). For further references see, e.g., Collins, *ibid.*, 54, n. 161. Major studies, including, e.g., Holladay, Charlesworth, Collins, Lieberman, etc. obviously consider the inter-cultural position of Hellenistic Jews, but rarely allow for paradox as a positive critical modality. One can, perhaps, explain such preferences methodologically, in term of the history of ideas and the relations of such studies, e.g., to “antifoundational” critical traditions.

<sup>27</sup> Gutman, “Philo” (above, n. 26), 37.

<sup>28</sup> Holladay, *Fragments* (above, n. 26), 2:234, fr. 1.8-11; *Supplementum Hellenisticum* 681.5-7; Attridge in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha* (above, n. 26), 2:781. Translations are from Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*.

In the *Akedah* Abraham's faith in Adonai/Yahweh is so complete that he prepares to slaughter his only son Isaac at the altar, only to be stopped at the last moment by the word of God. In Philo's verse we learn of this moment in Homeric Greek: God, "the praiseworthy mighty-shouter quenched the fire, and spoke his immortal [or "deathless"] word/promise". "The praiseworthy mighty-shouter", βριήπιος αίνετός, is an adaptation of an epithet from the *Iliad*. In that poem (13.521) it describes Ares, βριήπιος ὄβριμος Ἄρης, the god of war, who, even by Homeric standards, is the most bloodthirsty and lawless of gods.<sup>29</sup> The essential feature of Homeric epithets, of course, is that they provide something of an inherent, deep characterization.<sup>30</sup> Ares, βριήπιος ὄβριμος Ἄρης, is in Homer a much-disliked, unpleasant divinity. In *Iliad* 5.31, for example, Athene, the goddess of wisdom and the law,<sup>31</sup> calls out to Ares: Ἄρες Ἄρες βροτολογιῆ μαιφόνε

<sup>29</sup> *Iliad* 13.520-22: ...ὁ δ' ἐν κονίησι πεσῶν ἔλε γαῖαν ἀγοστῶ. / οὐδ' ἄρα πῶ τι πέπυστο βριήπιος ὄβριμος Ἄρης / υἱὸς ἐοῖο πεσόντος ἐν κρατερῇ ὑσμίνῃ, "...and he fell in the dust and clawed the ground with his fingers. / But Ares the mighty shouter had yet heard nothing / Of how his son had fallen there in the strong encounter". Holladay, *Fragments* (above, n. 26), 2:256–257, n. 19, notes the Homeric reference, but his comments are blissfully ignorant of any intertextual conflict or paradox. The epithet, he thinks, "serves to render more dramatically the biblical account..." (267). Strangely, in the *Iliad* passage the death of Ares' son, Askalaphos is described. Is this something that links to an idea of compassion embodied in the phrase? If it exists, such a link would be almost impossibly convoluted, which in a sense confirms our point.

<sup>30</sup> There is some scholarly debate over the semantic function of epithets. But, for example, an epithet "swift-footed" is applied to Achilles to mark the fact that he ran around Troy, chasing Hector and ultimately killing him. See e.g. P. Vivante, *The Epithets in Homer* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> Famously represented as presiding over the court of justice in the *Eumenides*, the concluding play in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy and one of the emblems of the culture of law in Athens.

τειχεσιπλῆτα, “Ares, Ares, destroyer of men, blood-stained sacker of cities”. It may be that by using Homeric language Philo seeks laurels as a kind of Jewish Homer. But are we meant to think of Adonai as a kind of Jewish “destroyer of men”? Is the ethico-juridical moment of the “signing” of a covenant of life and restraint here marked by reference to a lawless “blood-stained” god who is a “sacker of cities”? Here, as in Philo of Alexandria, but arguably in much more transgressive formulation, we find the elision of a fundamental incompatibility, an elision that marks the slippage between Hellenic and Judaic culture and which brings together two otherwise mutually exclusive cultural, religious, and ethical domains.

In the next line we hear, in Greek hexameter, of course, of Adonai’s ἀθάνατον φάτιν, his “immortal promise”. This obviously denotes the promise given following the Sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:17-18) and presumably also the earlier Covenant, ברית בין הבתרים (Genesis 15) and the promise of eternity God gives to Abraham and his descendents (Genesis 17, especially vv. 7-8) marked by circumcision. Again, the expression ἀθάνατον φάτιν has distinct Homeric tenor – not only because of Philo’s choice of the hexameter medium but because of the words themselves. In Homer the adjective ἀθάνατος, “deathless”, i.e. “eternal” is always applied to persons, not to things. It marks the immortals, or, indeed, the (pregnant and tragic) resemblance of exceptional mortals to the gods. However, a closely related adjective, ἄφθιτον, “imperishable”, is used, with great effect, to describe words, for example. What ἀθάνατον is to a god, ἄφθιτον is to words that preserve the mortal hero’s deeds for all eternity, and specifically words of epic poetry – the “imperishable” essence of heroic fame.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Best known in the expression κλέος ἄφθιτον “imperishable fame” in *Iliad* 9.413. Such fame is preserved, and is effectively embodied in poetry. Cf. the phrase κλέα ἀνδρῶν (*Iliad* 9.189, 524; *Odyssey* 8.73), or the expression ὄου κλέος οὐ ποτ’

We should note that in Homer, such imperishable words are the only way for death-bound mortal heroes to overcome the essential condition of their mortality. It would appear that by calling Adonai's covenant an "immortal" word, Philo seems to recast the promise to Abraham in Greek terms, as some sort of eternal, divine Jewish poetry that transcends mortality.

But let us take a closer look at the second word describing this eternal covenant in Philo's verse. The noun φᾶτιν (from Greek verb φημί "to speak" or "utter words") is indeed a good Homeric word. Yet in Homer it means, not "word" in general, but indeed, specifically a "word of gossip" or "rumor", that is to say the fragmentary word or moment which is the mark of a whole, mostly ethically "unspeakable", tale – a tale of illicit desire, or improper unmeasured conduct, and so on, a tale, furthermore, which is distinctly *not* eternal and eternally true (*Odyssey* 6.29; 21.323; 23.362). Is Philo telling us, then, that a "deathless rumor", that is to say, "a bit of gossip that simply will not go away", is Adonai's reward to Abraham for his total devotion? Is Philo suggesting that the foundational ethico-religious moment of the Jewish faith, the seal of God's relationship with his people, is nothing but "rumor"? We can, of course, relegate Philo the Elder to the realm of bizarre marginalia. He exists in the distant periphery of the canon. Yet we could also argue that in principle, his practice with regard to Homer is simply a highlighted instance of the tensions that also effect Philo of Alexandria or Flavius Josephus.

4.3 Another poet who also writes in Greek hexameters and who is, in this sense "Homeric", is Theodotus. It is hard to say exactly who this man was (dating is almost impossible, but perhaps 2nd–3rd cent.

ἄλειται (*Iliad* 2.325; 7.91; *Odyssey* 24.196), etc. Holladay, *Fragments* (above, n. 26), 2:259, n. 21, makes no mention of Homer in his long discussion of this line. He translates, "he made his own voice immortal" (235).

BCE). He may have been a Samaritan from Shechem, or more likely, a Jew, perhaps living in Palestine. In any case, Theodotus wrote a poem on the subject, or with the title of *On the Jews*. Theodotus' very sparse remains (eight not very large fragments in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*, drawn from Alexander Polyhistor) deal with a biblical episode of desire and constraint – the breaking of a code of law and its (just?) restitution – the tale of the rape of Dinah (Genesis 34).<sup>33</sup> Dinah, of course, is the fine daughter of Jacob the Patriarch. Hamor, son of the king of the city of Shechem, sees her, and is smitten. His desire leads to rape. Hamor, however, is keen to marry the girl and a union is agreed with the Israelites, on condition that Hamor, his father, and all the males in Shechem are circumcised. The Shechemites fulfill their part of the bargain. However, two of Jacob's sons, Levi and Simeon, who vehemently object to the marriage, take this opportunity to pursue their cause. While the Shechemites are smarting (פֹּאֲבִים, Gen 34:25) from their operation, the two enter the city, kill Hamor, his father Sychem, and all the males, take the Shechemites' sheep, cattle, donkeys, and all that's in the city and in the fields, kill the warriors, send children, women into slavery, and take back Dinah, their sister.

All of this Theodotus tells in reasonably competent Homeric Greek hexameter verse. It is, in this case, an appropriate choice of medium.

<sup>33</sup> See Holladay, *Fragments* (above, n. 26), 2:51–204 with exhaustive (if inconclusive) discussions of provenance, date, etc.; F. Fallon in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha* (above, n. 26), 2:785–91. Citation in Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 9.22.1–11. See also J.J. Collins, "The Epic of Theodotus and the Hellenism of the Hasmoneans", *HTR* 73 (1980), 91–104 and idem, *Between Athens and Jerusalem* (above, n. 26), who speaks of "epic" but does not discuss Homer. Leaving questions of Homer and intertextuality out of the picture "softens" incompatible cultural references and arguably masks the role of paradox in cultural interactions.

Consider the basic lines of the biblical plot: An impetuous young prince abducts an irresistibly attractive woman of noble standing from her people; they, refusing to accept this act of transgression, go to war; the woman's kin destroy the offender's town, and take her back to her own. Needless to say, this is a good match for the underlying *story* of Homer's *Iliad*:<sup>34</sup> The Trojan prince Paris abducts the beautiful Helen; the Greeks go to war, sack the city of Troy and take Helen back. The versions differ vastly in length, of course (the *Iliad* is about 15,000 verses long; we have only forty seven Greek verses from Theodotus; the complete narrative, as it appears in the Old Testament, is contained within a single chapter). But one could hardly think of a more provocative intertextual relationship between pagan and Jewish materials.

At the center of both the Homeric and the Theodotean/biblical narratives are desirable women, Helen and Dina. Both women are cast in a bipolar role: as passive objects in a world of powerful men, and as the agents of men's destruction. This latter function is epitomized, in the case of both women, by their names. Helen's was etymologized by the Greeks as derived *hele-naus* Greek for "destroyer of ships".<sup>35</sup> The biblical name Dina is, quite appropriately, associated with the Hebrew word *dīn*, "law, judgment, sentence". In the Greek

<sup>34</sup> The *plot* of Homer's poem is, of course, more narrowly "the wrath of Achilleus", and the *Iliad* neither begins with the abduction of Helen, nor ends with the destruction of Troy. I am unaware that the analogy with the *Iliad's* plot, obvious as it is, is elsewhere noted in the scholarship. Holladay, *Fragments* (above, n. 26), for example, dedicates over one hundred and fifty learned pages to Theodotus. Yet, in an amazing feat of scholarly myopia, fails to note the plot analogy with Homer, even when discussing the tradition of epic poetry (*ibid.*, 67–68).

<sup>35</sup> See M. Kraus, *Name und Sache: Ein Problem im frühgriechischen Denken* (Studien zur antiken Philosophie 14; Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 1987).

of the Septuagint, for example, the name Dina, spelled *Dina* (Δίνα), has no apparent cognates and no obvious Greek meaning.<sup>36</sup> Yet in his Greek version (in the text as we have it) Theodotus seems to have made one small but indicative orthographic change. He has added an epsilon to the transliteration, thus changing the name of Jacob's daughter from *Dina* to *Deina* (Δείνα), that is to say, he has cast her name as the feminine form of the common Greek adjective *deinos* (-na, -non), "terrible, mighty, frightful".<sup>37</sup> The Greek *Deina* is, by her very name, a *femme-fatale*, like Helen, only Jewish. Yet not quite. We must allow for the potentially monumental consequences of this orthographic change. Let us assume, as we may fairly do, that something of the context of thinking about cultural interaction that we have already seen in the work of Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, also applies to Theodotus' milieu. As we have briefly seen above, Josephus' discussion of the question of antiquity, and in this sense of the "cultural seniority" of Hellenic and Judaic cultures respectively, were focused, not surprisingly, on the question of the "law" (*nomos*). The "law"—this hardly needs emphasis—is one of the pivotal concepts of Judaic thought, and certainly one that is often used to negotiate the differences between Judaic and Hellenic thought. It is within this broad ideological context, that, it seems to me, we can read the shift from *Dina* the woman whose name encapsulates the *din* or "law" that is the ethico-juridical core of Judaic ideology, to *Deina*, the name that seems to abandon "Jewish

<sup>36</sup> Unless one reads it as a dialectal form of *Dinê*, an "eddy" or "whirlpool" (of fate? desire?...). This may be intriguing in the abstract, but is implausible.

<sup>37</sup> Holladay, *Fragments* (above, n. 26), 2:115, fr. 4.7. *Supplementum Hellenisticum* 759.14. The text is Polyhistor's prose epitome, but the words in question may perhaps have something of a distant hexameter echo within them. Interestingly, there is a textual variant Δίναν (*Bion*) which also scans, with a long iota.

Law” to arbitrary “pagan might” – perhaps the very kind which, as we have seen above, Josephus, for example (and in this we may perhaps regard Josephus’ views as representative) underscores.

The Shechemites, like the Trojans, pay the price of their lawlessness (Polyhistor, *Frag.* 9.76, says they were ἀσεβείς, “impious”, which in a Jewish context would mean “not knowing the Law”). In Theodotus, when the killing of the Shechemites begins, we are privy to graphic horror, in verses which are an able and convincing patchwork of the words, phrases, and images that make up Homer’s gruesome battle scenes:<sup>38</sup>

ὡς τότε δὴ Συμεῶν μὲν Ἐμῶρ ἄρουσεν ἐπ’ αὐτόν,  
 πλῆξέ τε οἱ κεφαλὴν, δειρὴν δ’ ἔλεν ἐν χερὶ λαιῆ,  
 λείψε δ’ ἔτι σπαίρουσαν, ἐπεὶ πόνος ἄλλος ὀρώρει.  
 τόφρα δὲ καὶ Λευὶν μένος ἄσχετος ἔλλαβε χαίτης  
 γούνων ἀπτόμενον Συχέμ ἄσπετα μαργήναντα,  
 ἤλασε δὲ κληῖδα μέσην, δῦ δὲ ξίφος ὀξὺ  
 σπλάγχχνα διὰ στέρνων, λίπε δὲ ψυχὴ δέμας εὐθύς.

Thus then Simeon rushed upon Hamor himself  
 and struck him upon the head; He seized his throat in his left hand  
 and the let it go still gasping its last breath, since there was another  
 task to do.

At that time Levi, also irresistible in might, seized Sychem  
 by the hair; the latter grasped his knees and raged

<sup>38</sup> Holladay, *Fragments* (above, n. 26), 2:125, fr. 8.6-17 (Holladay’s line-numbering is bizarre: he seems to treat some longer hexameters as two [sic!] verses. For normal line divisions see H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parson’s text in *Supplementum Hellenisticum* 764.1-7.). See Holladay, *ibid.*, 198–204, nn. 132–150, for acknowledgement of Homeric references (but without comment on their possible implications). Translations are from Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*.

unspeakably. Levi struck the middle of his collarbone; the sharp sword entered his inner organs through the chest; and his life thereupon left his bodily frame.

Theodotus' text is not a literal repetition of Homeric verse, but it is distinctly Homeric in tone and vocabulary. He seems to have succeeded in recasting the biblical narrative in terms of the violent excess of the Homeric world. Does Theodotus, then, writing a Jewish Homeric epic seek to portray Levi and Simeon as Achillean heroes who are fighting for the glory of the battle and the immortality it confers rather than for justice? Or Adonai as a kind of Jewish Zeus (remember Zeus' proclivity to illicit love affairs, perhaps not insignificant in the context of *this* particular story)? Or, indeed, *Deina's* violation and the restitution of the Law as the consequence of unbridled and (as even the biblical tale seems to hint) unmeasured desire?

4.4 In antiquity Greek hexameter verse in general, and Homeric poetry, too, were always closely associated with another highly authoritative genre of inspired and ideologically important discourse: oracles and prophecies. The general importance of prophetic vision, the compression of historical events into a messianic time in the Old Testament, or indeed of the notion of ethical time in broader spheres of Jewish thought requires no comment here. These facts do, however, makes instantly explicit an important added potential force of using hexameter verse in a Judaic context.

Among many Greek hexameter texts containing oracles and prophecies, collections of so called Sibylline Oracles are of particular significance for us. The dates of these oracle texts are often difficult, if not impossible to determine, although there is some indication that the materials in our possession were composed perhaps from the second century BCE onwards over a wide time span, perhaps up to

the seventh century CE. Among these are several texts containing obvious Jewish elements, especially in the so called third and fourth books.<sup>39</sup> The third book, for example, beginning with its own version of the narrative of the Tower of Babel, is, in essence, an attack on paganism and a defence of (some form) of Judaic belief. Yet in this book, among much usual foretelling of calamities, we also find, for example, a prediction and a lament for the fall of Troy:<sup>40</sup>

Ἴλιον, οἰκτεῖρω σε· κατὰ Σπάρτην γὰρ Ἐρινύς  
βλαστήσει περικαλλές ἀείφατον ἔρνος ἄριστον  
Ἀσίδος Εὐρώπης τε πολυσπερὲς οἶδμα λιποῦσα·  
σοὶ δὲ μάλιστα γόους μόχθους στοναχάς τε φέρουσα  
θήσει· ἀγήρατον δ' ἔσται κλέος ἐσσομένοισιν.

Ilium, I pity you, for a Fury will sprout from Sparta  
a very beautiful, famous, most excellent shoot,  
leaving the widespread wave of Asia and Europe.  
It will bring lamentations and labors and groans  
and inflict them on you, but your fame will be ageless for future  
generations.

<sup>39</sup> R. Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and Its Social Setting* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); J.J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles" in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha* (above, n. 26), 1:317–472. Also idem, *Seers, Sibylls and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (JSJ Supp. 54; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 181–238. J. Lightfoot's recent book, *The Sibylline Oracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), deals directly with only the first and second books, but her bibliography (564–582) is very useful.

<sup>40</sup> *Sibylline Oracles* 3.414–18 (ed. Geffcken). See sparse comments in Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles* (above, n. 39), 230–234, and general view in 321–323. Translations are from Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*.

“Ilium”, says the text in a tone worthy of Jeremiah, “I pity you, for a fury will sprout from Sparta / a very beautiful, famous, most excellent shoot”. This, of course, is the beautiful Helen of Troy, wife to Menelaos, King of Sparta, who “will bring lamentations and labors and groans / and inflict them on you, but your fame will be ageless for / future generations”. We have here a clever reiteration of the first lines of the *Iliad* (1.1): “Tell me Muse of the wrath of Achilles, the destructive wrath that brought countless woes upon the Achaeans”. It also invokes the famous Homeric theme of “undying fame” (which we have already seen). The Oracle claims to predict nothing less than the most notorious events in the Greek “historical” past.

A few lines later the Oracle says:<sup>41</sup>

καί τις ψευδογράφος πρέσβυς βροτὸς ἔσσεται αὐτίς  
 ψευδόπατρις· δύσει δὲ φάος ἐν ὀπῆσιν ἐῆσιν·  
 νοῦν δὲ πολὺν καὶ ἔπος διανοίαις ἔμμετρον ἔξει,  
 οὐνόμασιν δυσὶ μισγόμενον· Χῖον δὲ καλέσσει  
 αὐτὸν καὶ γράψει τὰ κατ’ Ἴλιον, οὐ μὲν ἀληθῶς,  
 ἀλλὰ σοφῶς· ἐπέων γὰρ ἐμῶν μέτρων τε κρατήσει·  
 πρῶτος γὰρ χεῖρεσσιν ἐμὰς βίβλους ἀναπλώσει·  
 αὐτὸς δ’ αὖ μάλα κοσμήσει πολέμοιο κορυστάς,  
 Ἐκτορα Πριαμίδην καὶ Ἀχιλλέα Πηλείωνα  
 τοὺς τ’ ἄλλους, ὁπόσοις πολεμῆια ἔργα μέμηλεν.  
 καί γε θεοὺς τούτοισι παρίστασθαί γε ποιήσει,  
 ψευδογραφῶν κατὰ πάντα τρόπον, μέροπας κenoκράνους.  
 καὶ θανέειν μᾶλλον τοῖσιν κλέος ἔσσεται εὐρύ  
 Ἴλίῳ· ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἀμοιβαῖα δέξεται ἔργα.

There will be again a certain false writer (ψευδογράφος), an old man  
 Of falsified fatherland (ψευδόπατρις). The light will go out in his eyes

<sup>41</sup> *Sibylline Oracles* 3.419-32 (ed. Geffcken).

He will have much intelligence (νοῦν πολὺν) and will have speech well  
 proportioned to his thoughts (ἔπος διανοίαις ἔμμετρον)  
 Blended under two names [*Iliad* and *Odyssey*]. He will call himself a Chian  
 And write the story of Ilium, not truthfully (οὐ μὲν ἀληθῶς)  
 But cleverly (σοφῶς). For he will master my words and my metres.  
 He will be the first to unfold my books with his hands.  
 But he will especially embellish (κοσμήσει) the helmeted men of war,  
 Hector, son of Priam, and Achilles, son of Peleus,  
 And the others, whose concern are deeds of war.  
 He will also make gods to stand by these  
 Writing falsely (ψευδογραφῶν), in every way, about empty headed  
 (κενοκράνους) men.  
 To die in Ilium will be a great glory for them (κλέος ἔσσεται εὐρύ).  
 But he himself will also receive appropriate recompense.

Several characteristic of this text are, for our purposes, worthy of note:

First, the text makes simultaneous, contradictory judgments: On the one hand we find great efforts to discredit the “writer” as “false” (ψευδογράφος), as a man of “false provenance” (ψευδόπατρις), as “the portrayer of falsities” (οὐ μὲν ἀληθῶς, ψευδογραφῶν), about “empty headed” (κενοκράνους) men. At the same time this man has “great intelligence” (πολὺν νοῦν), “speech which is well-proportioned to thought” (ἔπος διανοίαις ἔμμετρον), he will “embellish” (κοσμήσει) his subject in a “wise manner” (σοφῶς) with the result that Ilium will win “imperishable glory” (κλέος ἔσσεται εὐρύ) and he himself will be “suitably recompensed” (ἀμοιβαῖα δέξεται ἔργα). It is as if the Oracle is saying, with what we suggest is characteristic paradox: “It’s bad, and I love it!”

Second, the Oracle sets itself up as the source and antecedent of the very text it cites. The transgressor poet, a blind man who, amazingly, can write stories and read books, will master the Oracle’s

words and metres (ἐπέων γὰρ ἐμῶν μέτρων τε κρατήσῃ) and “will be the first to unfold my books” (ἐμὰς βίβλους).

Third, the poet who is the subject of these verses, and who can only be Homer, nevertheless remains un-named. Such omission of the name of the author of “the Bible of the Greeks” may resonate with the Jewish prohibition of the naming of the divinity, who is, after all “the author” of the Bible. In any case, it should certainly be viewed within the general practice of the occlusion of the name of Homer in pagan literature. Such occlusion constitutes an important authorizing and sublimating mechanism.<sup>42</sup> We should note that the name Homer does not appear anywhere in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* themselves, nor, for example, in our earliest extant reference to the author of the Homeric poems, the Homeric Hymn to Apollo.<sup>43</sup> The Hymn speaks simply of a nameless blind man from Chios.<sup>44</sup>

The Sibylline Oracles’ occlusion of Homer’s name, then, resonates in harmony with a prominent pagan practice. We might add that an understanding of this practice of omission also resonates in at least some other Jewish sources. Philo, as we have seen above, suggests that “...we give the title of ‘the poet’ [i.e., without naming him, using the common noun instead of the proper name] to Homer in virtue of his pre-eminence...”.<sup>45</sup> The “un-named” one, it seems, can be more than one, and not necessarily Jewish.

<sup>42</sup> See A. Kahane, *Diachronic Dialogues: Continuity and Authority in Homer and the Homeric Tradition* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> *H.Apol.* 166–173.

<sup>44</sup> *H.Apol.* 73. See Kahane, *Diachronic Dialogues* (above, n. 42), 37 and n. 28, with further references.

<sup>45</sup> I offer Philo’s evidence as a general point only. As far as I can see, it is not possible to say whether such awareness was generally available, and if so where and during what periods.

The combined overall effect of these verses then, is a deeply contradictory web of mutually exclusive cultural positions, which will simply not reduce to a single statement of truth, a single sequence of temporal priority, to a single view of authority, or even to a single position in between Judaism and Hellenism.

4.5 It is impossible to pin down the precise date and contexts or the target readership of texts of this type. They do, nevertheless, represent a well attested, though not always sufficiently understood modality in the world of late antiquity. The lower one descends beyond the hallowed echelons of canonical literature, the more this modality becomes prominent. One finds it, for example, in so-called “magical texts” such as those collected in Preisendanz’s *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (better known in H.D. Betz’ translation, *Greek Magical Papyri*). This is a collection of strange cultural, religious, linguistic, and stylistic hybrids. A significant number of ancient magical texts are written in Greek hexameter verse or contain such metrical lines, often with some Jewish or Jewish-sourced material, and display comparable anxieties of influence, often with specific reference to Homer. Prominent among those (although not generally known except to specialists) is a fragment from the 18th book of a work called the *Kestoi* or “Magic Girdles”, by the 4th century anecdotal writer and chronologist Julius Africanus. The fragment offers a re-written version of the beginning of Homer’s *Odyssey*, book 11, and of Odysseus’ descent into the underworld in which Hellenic elements combined with numerous Egyptian, Gnostic and other “magical” themes. Africanus does not declare an open affinity to Judaism, but his text offers an interesting illustration of our principle of reconciled paradox. The text of our

fragment follows the known Homeric version quite closely, until Odysseus makes his “pantheistic” appeal:<sup>46</sup>

[κλυῖθι] μοι, εὐμειδῆς καὶ ἐπίσκοπος, εὖσπο[ρ’ Ἄν]ουβι  
 † ...αυλλιπαε παρευνεταωσι ρει † ...  
 [ἔλθ’ Ἐρ]μῆ, ἄρπαξ, δεῦρ’ εὐπλόκαμε χθόνιε Ζεῦ,  
 [κῦρς]αι δωσάμενοι κρηγήνατε τήνδ’ ἐπαιδῆν·  
 [δεῦρ’ Ἄι]δη καὶ Χθών, πῦρ ἄφθιτον, Ἥλιε Τιτάν,  
 [ἐλθέ καὶ] Ἴάα καὶ Φθᾶ καὶ Φρῆ νομοσώσω[ν],

[Hear] me, gracious and guardian, well-born [An]ubis;  
 [hear, sly] one, O secret mate, Osiris’ savior;  
 [come, Her]mes, come, robber, well-trussed, infernal Zeus;  
 grant [my desire], fulfill this charm.  
 [Come hither, Hades,] Earth, unfailing Fire, O Titan Helios;  
 [Come too,] Yahweh, Phthas, Phre, guardian of laws,

Interestingly, Africanus concludes his version of the text and his addition of the extravagant invocation with the following comment:<sup>47</sup>

Εἴτ’ οὖν οὕτως ἔχον αὐτὸς ὁ ποιητῆς τὸ περίεργον τῆς ἐπιρρήσεως  
 τὰ ἄλλα διὰ τὸ τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἀξίωμα σεσιώπηκεν, εἴθ’ οἱ Πεισι-  
 στρατίδαι τὰ ἄλλα συνράπτοντες ἔπη ταῦτα ἀπέσχισαν, ἀλλότρια  
 τοῦ στοίχου τῆς ποιήσεως ἐκεῖ ἐπικρίναντες † ἐπὶ πολλοῖς ἔγνων †·  
 ἄτε κύημα πολυτελέστερον ἐπικῆς αὐτὸς ἐνταυθοῖ κατέταξα· τήνδε  
 τὴν σύμπασαν ὑπόθεσιν ἀνακειμένην εὐρέσεις ἔν τε τοῖς ἀρχείοις  
 τῆς ἀρχαίας πατρίδος κολωνίας Αἰλίας Καπιτωλίνης τῆς Παλαισ-

<sup>46</sup> *P.Oxy.* 412: 22-27. For details see A. Kahane “The Literary Charms of *P.Oxy.* 412”, *Hyperboreus* 3 (1997), 319–335; idem, “Blood for Ghosts: Homer, Julius Africanus, and Ezra Pound”, *New Literary History* 30 (1999), 815–836. Translations (with minor changes) are from H.D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, I: *Texts* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

<sup>47</sup> *P.Oxy.* 412:45-54.

τίνης κὰν Νύση τῆς Καρίας, μέχρι δὲ τοῦ τρισκαιδεκάτου ἐν Ῥώμῃ  
πρὸς ταῖς Ἀλεξάνδρου θερμαῖς ἐν τῇ ἐν Πανθείῳ βιβλιοθήκῃ τῇ καλῇ  
ἣν αὐτὸς ἠρχιτεκτόνησα τῷ Σεβαστῷ.

...either Homer himself suppressed the magical part of the invocation in order to preserve the dignity of the speech. Or the Peisistratides, as they were stitching together the rest of the verses, cut out these because they considered them foreign to the work. † This is my opinion for many reasons. And so † I have myself inserted the lines as a rather valuable creation of epic poetry. You will find this whole document on the shelves in the archives of our former home town, the colony of Aelia Capitolina [Jerusalem] in Palestine, and in Nysa in Caria and, up to the thirteenth verse, in Rome near the baths of Alexander in the beautiful library in the Pantheon, whose collection of books I myself built for Augustus.

In other words, Africanus, keenly aware of matters of dignity, perhaps somewhat like the speaker in the 3rd book of the Sibylline Oracles, deliberately overrides the authority of Homer. He takes it upon himself to restore the integrity of the epic whole, in what one critic describes as a “bizarrerie déconcertante”.<sup>48</sup> What we must recognize is that such disconcerting anxieties represent a irreducible modality of cultural interaction.<sup>49</sup>

4.6 The range of sources that attest to this strange inter-cultural twilight zone between Hellenic and Judaic culture is fairly wide – although perhaps by nature difficult to classify with precision. Consider next the work of a Jewish author known as Pseudo-Phocylides (100

<sup>48</sup> J.-R. Viellefond, *Les “Cestes” de Julius Africanus* (Collection d’études d’histoire, de critique et de philologie 20; Florence: Institut français de Florence, 1970), 65.

<sup>49</sup> By “irreducible” here I mean that without mutilating the text we cannot reconcile its contradictions.

BCE – 70 CE?), to whom are attributed compilations of edifying adages.<sup>50</sup> The text offers various bits of useful general advice, in hexameter of course. This includes the suggestion (*Sententiae* 184–97) to “Give nature her due”, to “beget in your turn as you were begotten”, not to “prostitute one’s wife, or to have intercourse with the concubines of one’s father”. It strongly advises not to “cut a youth’s masculine procreative faculty”, not to “seek sexual union with irrational animals”, not to “outrage your wife by shameful ways of intercourse” or to transgress the “natural and lawful” limits of sexual activity by “intercourse of male with male” which displeases “even animals”. This rather practical list of prohibitions concludes with the flourish of a pleasant, more-abstract adage:<sup>51</sup>

Στέργε τεήν ἄλοχον· τί γάρ ἡδύτερον καὶ ἄρειον,  
ἢ ὅταν ἀνδρὶ γυνή φρονέηι φίλα γήραος ἄχρισ  
καὶ πόσις ἢ ἀλόχωι, μηδ’ ἐμπέσηι ἀνδιχα νεῖκος;

Love your own wife, for what is sweeter and better  
Than whenever a wife is kindly disposed toward her husband  
and a husband toward his wife...

<sup>50</sup> See P.W. van der Horst, “Pseudo-Phocylides”, in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha* (above, n. 26), 2:565–582; P.W. van der Horst, “Pseudo-Phocylides Revisited,” *JSP* 3 (1988 [appeared 1989]), 3–30; idem, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides: With Introduction and Commentary* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha 4; Leiden: Brill, 1997); K.W. Niebuhr, “Life and Death in Pseudo-Phocylides”, in A. Houtman, A. de Jong and M. Misset-van de Weg (eds.), *Empsychoi Logoi: Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 73; Leiden: Brill, 2008). Cf. also the text in D. Young, *Theognis, Ps-Pythagoras, Ps.-Phocylides, chares, Anonymi aulodia, fragmentum teleiambicum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1971).

<sup>51</sup> *Sententiae* 195–197 (Young). Translations are from Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*.

These last few lines are most likely an echo of some verses from Homer's *Odyssey* (6.182-184), that were quite famous in antiquity:

...οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον,  
 ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχητον  
 ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή· πόλλ' ἄλγεα δυσμενέεσσι,  
 χάρματα δ' εὐμενέτησι· μάλιστα δέ τ' ἔκλυον αὐτοί.

...For there is nothing greater and finer than this,  
 When a man and a woman live together  
 With one heart and mind, bringing joy  
 To their friends and grief to their foes.

Are we meant, then, to make the connection to Homer? If so, it must be to a fantasy figure very different from the normal "pagan" Homer. Recall the original Homeric context of these famous lines: Odysseus, with a well earned reputation for extramarital sexual affairs during 20 years away from home, is, in fact, in these lines sweet-talking the virgin princess Nausicaa, whom he has just met and whose help he desperately needs. He is, in these lines dropping heavy hints about how nice life can be for a man, perhaps such as himself, and a woman, perhaps like Nausicaa, together. It is true that Odysseus does not, in fact, follow up these words with an actual liaison with Nausicaa. But certainly with other women he encounters he is prone to intercourse. The real Homer's verse may be full of good advice, it may even ultimately endorse marital fidelity in the form of the union of Odysseus and Penelope. It does so, however, in a manner that deeply complicates and problematizes any of its intertexts, which is certainly not reducible to any simply intertextual mapping, and which could hardly be reconciled with the seemingly straightforward instructive objectives of Pseudo-Phocylides.

4.7 The paradoxes of inter-cultural texts are, as we have seen, intense, even when the surface formulation is apparently serene. Another example of this form of interaction is attested in Aristobulos, who wrote in the 2nd century BCE, and whose work essentially attempts “to relate Jewish tradition to Hellenic culture”.<sup>52</sup> Little remains of Aristobulos, but in the last fragment, discussing the Sabbath, we find Aristobulos arguing that (5.13-14):<sup>53</sup>

διασαφεῖ δὲ καὶ Ὅμηρος καὶ Ἡσίοδος, μετεिल्φότες ἐκ τῶν  
 ἡμετέρων βιβλίων ἱερὰν εἶναι. ... Ὅμηρος δὲ οὕτω λέγει·  
 ἑβδομάτη δῆπειτα κατήλυθεν. ἱερὸν ἡμαρ.  
 καὶ πάλιν·  
 ἑβδομον ἡμαρ ἔην καὶ τῷ τετέλεστο ἅπαντα  
 καί·  
 ἑβδομάτη δ' ἠοῖ λίπομεν ῥόον ἐξ Ἀχέροντος.

Both Homer and Hesiod, having taken information from our [i.e. Jewish] book, say clearly that the seventh day is holy ... And Homer speaks so:

“And indeed the seventh day returned, a holy day”

And again:

“It was the seventh day and all things had been completed”

And:

“And on the seventh morning we left the stream of Acheron”

These verses certainly *sound* Homeric, although they are not precisely replicated in our extant text of Homer. The second of these verses,

<sup>52</sup> C.R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, 3: *Aristobulus* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995); Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha* (above, n. 26), 2:831–842. Translations are from Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*.

<sup>53</sup> Aristobulos, *Fr.* 5.116-128; See Holladay, *Fragments*, 3:188–191; A. Yarbro Collins in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha* (above, n. 26), 2:831–842.

for example, bears a close resemblance to actual Homeric verse (*Odyssey* 5.262) where, using a metrically equivalent (and in this sense interchangeable) expression, reference is made to the fourth, *tetarton*, day and to the completion, by Odysseus, of the creation of his raft – with which he will leave the confinement of Calypso’s island: *τέταρτον ἡμᾶρ ἔην, καὶ τῷ τετέλεστο ἅπαντα*. “It was the fourth day, and all things had been completed”.

Something in the mechanics of the equation makes sense here: Odysseus, the creator (of a raft...), looks upon his labours (...) on the fourth day (rather than seventh...), sees it to be good, and might now decide to take his rest (earlier than usual...). But, of course, it is precisely the “sensibility” of such analogy that bears out the radical dissonance of the comparison, and any shared discourse. The point is not that such comparison cannot exist. It does indeed exist, but, very precisely, quintessentially, in dissonance.

The adjective “seventh” does itself appear in Homer, in both the forms *ἑβδόματος* and *ἑβδομον* in the context of the *Odyssey’s* language of travels. In the case of the first form we find: *ἑβδομάτῃ δ’ ἰκόμεσθα Λάμου αἰπὺ πτολίεθρον*, “On the seventh day we arrived in the lofty city of Lamos” (*Odyssey* 10.81), and *ἑβδομάτῃ δ’ ἀναβάντες ἀπὸ Κρήτης εὐρείης*, “On the seventh day we embarked and left wide Crete” (*Odyssey* 14.252). Both verses should discourage us from further enquiry and close study. In the first (10.81), the seventh day sees Odysseus and his men arriving in the land of the Laestrygonian cannibals. The second (14.252) tells how, after six days of feasting, idleness and rest, Odysseus’ men finally get to work and set sail on the seventh...

The second form, *ἑβδομον*, is part of the autobiographical narrative of Eumaios, Odysseus’ trusty swineherd, who is abducted by a Phoenician nursemaid. They travel six days, then a seventh by sea: *ἀλλ’ ὅτε δὴ ἑβδομον ἡμᾶρ ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε Κρονίων*, “But when Zeus son of Cronos

brought about the seventh day” (*Odyssey* 12.399 = 15.477), on which day the nursemaid dies and is thrown overboard. These pagan seventh days, if they are, as Aristobulos suggests, “holy”, must indeed be reckoned by a calendar in which “neither day, nor night” exist.

4.8 Before we draw the strings of our argument together, let us consider one more brief example, whose link with the material existence of Hellenized Jewish life is far more explicit. The text is that of a well known funerary epigram in Greek hexameter from the second or third century CE, inscribed in stone on a tomb in the ancient Jewish cemetery of Beth Shearim (Bessara):<sup>54</sup>

Κεῖμαι Λεοντείδης νέκυσ Σαφο[ῦς υἱὸς Ἰοῦ]στος,  
 ὃς πάσης σοφίης δρεψάμενος κ[αρπὸ]ν  
 λείψα φάος, δειλ[οὺς γ]ονέας ἀκα[χημέν]ους αἰε[ί],  
 αὐτοκασιγνήτους [τ]ε, οἴμοι, ἐ[ν οἷς Β]εσάρ[οις]  
 καὶ γ' ἐλθ[ῶν ε]ἰς Ἄδην Ἰοῦστο[ς ... αὐτ]όθι κεῖμα[ι],  
 σὺν πολλοῖσιν ἐοῖς, ἐπὶ ἤθελε Μοῖρα κραταιή  
 Θάρσει, Ἰοῦστε, οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος

I lie, Son-of-Leontius, a corpse, Ioustos son of Sapho,  
 Who, having plucked the fruit of all wisdom,  
 Left the light, and my poor parents grieving incessantly,  
 And my sibling, alas, in my Bessara (*Beth Shearim*)  
 And having gone to Hades, [I,] Ioustos, lie here,  
 With many of my [kin], since harsh Moira wanted it.  
 Take courage, Ioustos, no-one is immortal.

Like many ancient funerary inscriptions, pagan and Jewish, the text provides a compressed biography of the deceased. *Ioustos*, we should

<sup>54</sup> *Beth She'arim* inscription BS II 127 (*CIJ* Judaica 1161a[1].1). See M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz, *Beth She'arim, II: The Greek Inscriptions* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 45–51.

note, may be a Greek translation of the Hebrew *Zadok*, “the Righteous one”, a good Jewish priestly name, although also one with Hellenized resonance.<sup>55</sup>

Ioustos seems to have enjoyed life. He plucked, as he says, the fruit of all wisdom. Yet, harsh Moira decreed that he should go to Hades. It is a moving narrative, but somewhat problematic for one who is familiar with the Homeric world, and perhaps especially if he is a Jew. For, it seems that in Ioustos’ world, the last judgment has been reserved, not for *Adonai*, but for “Harsh Moira” (Μοῖρα κραταιή), the Greek and Homeric goddess of fate, or, more specifically, the personification of “that which is allotted to one at one’s birth”. This goddess, furthermore, sends Ioustos, not to any Jewish place of “after” life, but to Hades, the Greek underworld. An after-life existence, specifically in Hades is a well known feature of Homeric verse.<sup>56</sup> It would seem, then, that Ioustos ends up as a Jew in the pagan underworld, and might thus find himself in a curious cultural/religious limbo.

It is, however, the beginning of this epitaph that is of the greatest significance for us. Clearly Ioustos was a man of learning, who had “plucked the fruit of all wisdom”. He may have thus learned, like Ben Dama, “the whole of the Torah in its entirety”. However, given that the epigram is written in Homeric Greek hexameter, the references

<sup>55</sup> See B. Lifshitz, “L’hellénisation des Juifs de Palestine”, *Revue Biblique* 72 (1965), 529, but with additional dissenting evidence, e.g. in M.D. Herr, “External Influences in the World of the Sages in Palestine: Reception and Rejection (השפעות חיצוניות)”, in J. Kaplan and M. Stern (eds.), (בעולמם של חכמים בארץ ישראל: קליטה ודחייה), in J. Kaplan and M. Stern (eds.), התבוללות וטמיעה: המשכיות ותמורה בתרבות העמים ובישראל (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1989), 60–64 (in Hebrew).

<sup>56</sup> See Odysseus in the underworld in *Odyssey* book 11, as in the example, above, of *P.Oxy.* 412, or indeed the representations of the souls of Achilles and of Penelope’s slaughtered suitors in *Odyssey* book 24.

to Moira and to Hades, and so on, it is fair suggest that Ioustos plucked (or paid another to pluck in his name...) the fruit of Greek Wisdom and specifically of the wisdom of Homer. He has, we might say, been pursuing precisely that knowledge which R. Ishmael's nephew so clearly desires. To "pagan" Greek readers such "plucking of fruit" may seem like a pretty metaphor.<sup>57</sup> But the life of Ioustos, the Hellenized *Zadok*, will have also clearly reflected the consciousness of a Jewish life. *Zadok* was buried in a Jewish cemetery, where inscribed stars of David, menorahs, and the like, the graphic icons of the faith and the Law, are well-attested.<sup>58</sup> The visitors to this cemetery and the readers of his monument would have constructed their identities through the means of these icons, this space, these letters. And, indeed, it seems to me that no Jewish passer-by, reading *these* words, would fail to recall another, more-famous plucking of a fruit of wisdom, indeed, one might say, the most famous plucking of such fruit in all times. We are thinking, of course, of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, plucked by the First Man. It is hard to imagine that the story of Adam's transgression and banishment should fail to resound in Ioustos' words. The just *Zadok* seems to be proudly but perhaps unwittingly re-enacting his own private version of man's first disobedience and the banishment from Eden. Ioustos has, it seems, replayed Adam's transgression, with none other than Greek Wisdom, so named, in the role of the Fruit.

<sup>57</sup> Cf., e.g., Pindar, *Frag. Incert.* (Maehler-Snell) 209.1: σοφίας καρπὸν δρέπ(ειν) "...to pluck the fruit of wisdom". The idea of fruit on the trees as a symbol of life is common in Greek lyric.

<sup>58</sup> See N. Avigad, *Beth Shearim*, III (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1976).

## 5

Understanding the relationship between Greek and Jewish culture in antiquity is a broad topic which lies well beyond the boundaries of this essay. Yet it seems to me that on the basis of our evidence we can characterize one specific aspect of this problem - the relationship between Homer and the Jews. As we have seen, this relationship cannot be understood in terms of acts of homage and submission. Nor can it be reduced to acts of transgression. The closer one brings the disparate elements of this relationship together and tries to reconcile them, the more it seems that they can never mix, even as at various moments in antiquity they clearly *were* mixed. Turning back at the end of our enquiry to the tale of R. Ishmael, it would appear that he had answered his nephew's question with extraordinary precision, indeed, in the only way possible. The relationship between Greek Wisdom and Judaic thought, at least on the evidence of Homer and his place among the Jews, is an "unimaginable" relationship, which is, nevertheless, neither false nor imaginary. It is a relationship that can only exist, we might say, in a time which is neither of the day nor of the night. Regularized, normative cultural positions clearly "have no time" for such a "disconcertingly bizarre" (as Viellefondé called it) imaginary. It is not surprising, then, that those authors who have tried to put this imaginary to words have often been relegated to the domain of extra-canonical cultural peripheries and scholarly specialty. Yet on the force of the evidence, we could likewise say that normative cultural positions *do* have a time that is a *no-time*, an "unimaginable" time. The same anxieties which are attested in the non-canonical examples are also present, perhaps in mitigated form but present nevertheless, *within* the folds of the canon, as for example, in Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, and indeed,

sometimes with a disarming lighter tone, also within the *domain propre* of Jewish ethico-juridical practice – the Talmud.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Noam Mizrahi, Editor of *Textus*, for many helpful comments and suggestions and also to an anonymous referee.

**הומרוס והיהודים בעת העתיקה**

אהוביה כהנא

מאמר זה בוחן היבטים בזיקת היהדות להומרוס בעת העתיקה. המאמר מתמקד בטקסטים ממקורות יהודיים, או בעלי תוכן יהודי, הכתובים ביוונית ובמשקל הקסמטרי, וביניהם קטעים משירת פילון הזקן, המשורר האפי תאודוטוס, חזונות הסיבילות, פויקילידס, יוליוס אפריקנוס, וכן חרוזים הקסמטריים מבית הקברות היהודי בבית שערים. ההנחה היא שהשילוב בטקסטים אלה בין צורה הלנית לבין תוכן והקשרים יהודיים יכול לחשוף נקודות מגע ספציפיות ומתחים בין־תרבותיים כלליים, וכי העיון בשילוב זה עשוי לשפוך אור על היחסים שבין יהדות והלניזם בעת העתיקה. לדעת המחבר, בטקסטים רבים ניתן לזהות תהליך פרדוקסלי מהותי: ככל שגדל המאמץ להפגין חפיפה בין העולם היהודי והעולם ההלני, כן גדל הפוטנציאל לסתירה שאין ליישבה (לעתים קרובות אבסורדית) ולעימות בין ערכים נוגדים. המחבר מסכם כי תהליך פרדוקסלי זה אינו מודגש כל צרכו בספרות המחקר הקיימת, אך אפשר לנסח, למשל, בלשונו של ר' ישמעאל בתלמוד כמפגש המתרחש "בשעה שאינה מן היום ואינה מן הלילה". מדובר במרכיב חשוב במפגש שבין הלניזם ליהדות בעולם העתיק וביחסים שבין תרבויות בכלל.