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***LEGUM ALLEGORIAE* – A POSSIBLE *PATTERN* OF
THE JUDEAN-ALEXANDRINE EXEGETICAL
DISCOURSE**

–ABSTRACT –

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Key words: Philo of Alexandria, allegory/allegorical discourse, Legum Allegoriae, paradigm, pattern, arcanization

Josephus Flavius in the 8th book of *Jewish Antiquities* when he describes the “dangerous” situation in which the Jewish found themselves when they entered into conflict with the local Greeks, he mentions that they looked for justice at the Roman Imperial Court. The one who led the mission of the Jewish representatives was none other than Philo of Alexandria (or Philo the Jew). This paradigmatic character had a key role both in the history of the Jewish people and in the cultural support of the Jewish teachings¹. As far as I am concerned, within this doctoral thesis I would like to mention from the very beginning the fact that I never meant to emphasize Philo’s role in the political matters because in the Romanian environment this subject was treated exhaustively in two other doctoral theses. I was more intrigued by another feature of this Alexandrine exegete that is the fact that many times, both in the Romanian and foreign environment, Philo is considered to be paradigmatic or constitutes a paradigm, for various cultural “dialogues”, but nobody explained in detail what exactly places him (or his work) within the discussions regarding paradigm. This was one of the reasons that determined me to investigate, in one of the chapters of this doctoral thesis, the relationship between the term *paradigm* and Philo of Alexandria. This perspective, I must admit, changed my perception upon the approach of Philo’s works. I considered that Philo deserves the statute of *paradigmatic character* because once his writings appeared there was a change of interpretative paradigm that manifested its influence both in the Jewish and in the Christian exegesis. But what intrigued me was the fact that I couldn’t understand at first why both the Jewish and the Christian eliminated Philo from their cultural memory, hiding his deserved merits both on a historical and hermeneutical level. In general, the Jewish don’t even accept him nowadays, while the Christians initiated a concentrated endeavour of rediscovering the importance of the exegetical valences that his works brought to the field of biblical hermeneutics. Among the first Christian authors that remarked the importance of this author’s works we mention Clement of Alexandria, Origen or Eusebius of Caesarea. They all agreed on the fact that Philo was one of the representative figures of the Jewish diaspora from Alexandria, in both political matters and in issues regarding

¹ Regarding this matter of the sending of Philo to Rome by the Judaic community from Alexandria in order for him to represent its interests, Philo himself refers to in: FILON DIN ALEXANDRIA, *Contra lui Flaccus. Ambasada către Gaius. Despre viața contemplativă* (București: Hasefer, 2005), 17-20.

his work and exegesis. One of the reasons for which his writings should be granted more importance, from the Christian perspective, consists of the fact that their author was “witness to the birth of the Christian Early Church” and the theory according to which Philo is called *bishop* is completely justified. But Philo was also witness of the middle period of Platonism, and this is present within his works, that is why on many occasions throughout this thesis I identified the platonic and sometimes Aristotelian correspondences for the symbols used by Philo. Regarding this matter, I cannot ignore the fact that most of the researchers promote the theory that: “either Plato philonizes or Philo platonizes”. Going through both foreign and Romanian bibliography, I came to the conclusion that Philo may be placed at the border between Christianity, Judaism and Hellenism and support the idea that he/his works constitute a paradigm for the three cultures I have mentioned.

Philo of Alexandria represents one of the models that combines within his works symbols from the Greek wisdom and the Jewish teaching, to unify them into a discourse with universal valences, drawing the attention of the Christian community. While he rejects questions that try to prove the corruptibility of the sacred texts, in the same time he presents in his own style possible solutions or teachings suitable for the rigorist biblical canons, adopted to Judaism. “Some of the Jewish exegetes approached the Scripture in parallel with the Homeric epopees, approaching for the first time in Judaism serious problems of textual critique”². By contrast with the previous quotation, there is a thesis proposed by F. Siegert, who supports that the textual critic was not affected by the Greek ideas. As for me, I am inclined to rescind this hypothesis and to support the former idea, because it is enough to bring as evidence Philo’s works that are in obvious disagreement with Siegert’s statements. Philo’s works are filled with Greek influence (symbols, myths, concepts, fields) but it is also necessary to be honest and accept the fact that only the literature of the alexandrine diaspora merged with the Greek element. The Jewish teaching had nothing to do with the “critical spirit of the Greek mind”³. Charles Bigg in one of his books observed that the first systematic attempt to harmonize the elements of the Judaic religion with the “conclusions of the human intellect had already been done in the learned circles of the Jewish

² Here there is a clear reference to Aristarchus. Maren NIEHOFF, „Homeric Scholarship and Bible. Exegesis in Ancient Alexandria,” *The Classical Quarterly* 57, 1 (2007): 166-182.

³ NIEHOFF, „Homeric Scholarship,” 166.

from Alexandria”⁴, and the name that was often mentioned in the approach of this problem was that of Philo of Alexandria.

Another element that I wanted to approach within this thesis and I consider that through my endeavour I initiated a possible future research that would result in numerous hermeneutical valences consists of the fact that I placed one of the numerous philonian works, *Legum Allegoriae* in the position of a possible *pattern* of the exegetical Judaic discourse. The main element of this *pattern* is from afar identified in the concept of *allegory*. An allegory is a “continuous metaphor”, an artistic device, a rhetorical figure that wishes to concretize and personify abstract concepts with the purpose to teach or to transmit a moral teaching. An allegory may consist of phrases, biblical fragments or to expand to the content of a book as is the case of *Song of Songs*.

In his writings, Philo used this device intensely, he developed it and took it to the next level, to a complex phenomenon, in which he integrated linguistic elements from the Greek rhetoric, he built on the structure that already existed in *Midrash*, *Genesis Rabah* and *Talmud* *and in general in the works of the rabbis, where the Judaic teaching was still presented in the form of questions and answers), and on a symbolic level he took elements identified both in the Judaic Torah but especially in the Greek Septuagint, to unify them all in a single hermeneutical discourse with an allegorical character. The writing in which one may identify this exegetical discourse with allegorical valences is obviously *Legum Allegoriae*. I chose to offer to this work the premise of a possible pattern because in its construction one may identify the elements that I have described previously. However, the work interconnects with the other philonian writings and with the previous writings that belong to other writer (from the Judaic and Hellenistic environment) and it shapes certain typologies thus becoming an example for Christian writings after Philo. Here we have a transfer of meanings between Judaism, Hellenism and Christianity, all valorized through the allegorical method, within an exegetical, allegorical discourse, which has as a work hypothesis the biblical text from Genesis (Gen 2:1-3:19). This *Allegorical commentary* shapes, on a symbolic level, the image of Alexandria, “in which existed and influenced one another, migrating towards each other and contributing to the evolution of the other, two old cultural models and peculiar par excellence in their essence, a philosophical one,

⁴ Charles BIGG, *Creștinii platonicieni din Alexandria* (București: Herald, 2008), 8.

based on the exercise of reason and the other one theological, based on the exercise of piety and faith and on the Covenant with God YHWH”.

In order to sketch the image of *Legum Allegoriae* from the perspective of a pattern I stopped on several specific notions, such as the construction of the discourse mainly allegorical or on the essential themes that have the role to interconnect this treatise with the literature identified in the paradigms pre and post-philonian⁵. Nevertheless this treatise has its well established place in the identification of Philo’s paradigm. I must mention that in this context the words *paradigm*⁶ and *pattern* had an important role in the research endeavour because of the fact that they delimited from a scientific point of view constitutive elements to valorize *Legum Allegoriae* (its author included) both within the philonian treatises and in connection to the Judaic, Greek and Christian literature of the first centuries. I considered that this perspective of the approach can be completed with the introduction within the equation of the philonian paradigm, of an analysis of the evolution of philonian influences over the medieval literature. In this point I was preoccupied with the relationship between RamBam and *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Interpretative paradigms, even though they overlap, also result in a scientific revolution, and of course this principle was applied to the dynamic relationship between the exegetical-allegorical discourse practiced by Philo and the same type of discourse, but this time improved with elements of theosophical Kabbalah, Gematria and mainly, Jewish mystics used by the medieval author Moses ben Maimon. However, the two authors have numerous common interferences on the exegetical level, and the central element that creates a connection between the two is the biblical text, the hypothesis from which they both start their interpretative endeavours. All these finally converge to a single one, with the valences of a universal interpretative discourse. I consider that the universality of the biblical message was in fact the motivation from which both Philo of Alexandria and RamBam started.

Within this doctoral thesis I compiled from a structural point of view a separate “chapter” in which I focused on the technical elements imposed by this text. These aspects are important because, from a methodological point of view they structure the content of a work and they help

⁵ This time I use the term *paradigm* with the meaning identified by Thomas KUHN, *Structura Revoluțiilor Științifice* (București: Editura științifică și enciclopedică, 1976).

⁶ Here it is enough to mention the Greek origin of this term, identified by PLATON, in *Republica* 7, 515a-b. as opposed to Plato, who uses this term to designate the “world of ideas”, Khun focuses on a different use of this word, which also involves a scientific revolution and community. Thomas S. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 174.

identify the key elements, the work hypothesis and the objectives that led to the result of the research.

From a methodological point of view, the thesis is structured on five chapters and several subchapters. I initiated the research from particular, respectively from the notion of *allegory*, to general in the direction of the term *pattern* and *paradigm*. To exemplify this direction, from a methodological point of view, I chose an author renowned for his allegories, namely Philo of Alexandria and one of his works, *Legum Allegoriae*, which fits this theme perfectly⁷.

On the first chapter of this thesis I approached *allegory* on a terminological level especially from the point of view of the definition (morphologically and syntactically), and then I focused on the peculiarities that allegory involves in a sacred text (“biblical allegory”). In the second chapter I took my research endeavour to concrete examples and I chose to exemplify the immixture of this concept (“allegory”) in the exegetical works of Philo of Alexandria. I chose this author because he is acknowledged as allegorical par excellence, and his *Legum Allegoriae* exemplifies in an authentic manner all the interferences of this concept. In the third chapter I focused especially on the philonian treatises and the manner in which they connect with *Legum Allegoriae*. I considered a very important subject the debate on the place that *Legum Allegoriae* occupies within the philonian works. Starting with the fourth chapter I created a “break” on the level of the discourse, introducing within the scheme another concept, that of *pattern*. Although at a first lecture of the content of this thesis it seems there is a fissure between the first three chapters and the last two, this is a superficial view. The term *pattern* is in fact more than a concept, it is a phenomenon that generates its own methodology, it incorporates many other elements amongst which allegory. But the element that leads to the connection between *allegory* and *pattern* is constituted, in my perspective, by Philo’s work, *Legum Allegoriae*. In a deductible manner, if *legume Allegoriae* integrated within the structure of the philonian discourse the concept of allegory, it will also compose, on a general level, a set of elements that form a *pattern* in the Judaic culture. In the last chapter (chapter 5) I was interested by this theme of the pattern and by the manner in which it is perceived/assumed by the contemporary Judaism, respectively its relationship with the process of *arcanization/super-arcanization*.

⁷ The scheme I put together has as starting point (A) the concept of *allegory* and as ending point (B), the concept of *pattern*. In order to come to this final point we also must go through other “mobile” elements, respectively A1 represented by Philo of Alexandria and A2 represented by *Legum Allegoriae*. I will later on use this scheme to integrate other elements such as Judaic exegesis before and after Philo and especially matters that refer to Greek wisdom (e.g. Rhetoric).

Within the structure of this doctoral thesis, at the end of each chapter I tried to introduce a conclusion section in which I present the main directions of research that I promoted within the chapter and subsequently through the means through which these may converge towards a thorough research.

Initially, I started from the idea according to which, biblical allegory occupies a central place both in the Judaic and Christian exegesis. Subsequently, while the research evolved, I became aware of the fact that this premise is wrong and that in the end biblical allegory is not different from the literary one, at a conceptual level. In fact, allegory is unique from the point of view of the definition, but the manner in which it is used depending on the chosen texts is different. In order to support this hypothesis I used the exegetical texts of Philo of Alexandria, especially *Legum Allegoriae*. His manner of using the allegory in the process of interpretation constitutes an important key in deciphering the significances that a sacred text from the Old Testament involves.

The work hypothesis from which I start in writing this thesis is that according to which *Legum Allegoriae* by Philo of Alexandria is a true allegory and in the same time it combines elements that transform it into a *pattern*/model of the Judean-Alexandrine exegetical discourse, and on a general level, places Philo on the position of a paradigmatic figure.

“Preserving the writings of Philo of Alexandria, that were mostly neglected by the Jewish and the heathen, depended exclusively on the Christian Church. His works were regarded with enthusiasm and thoroughly searched when it was observed that his doctrinarian ethical system and his manner of interpreting the Old Testament were in complete agreement with the Holy Scriptures of the Christian Church”⁸.

This is the prolegomena that initiates the monumental work of Philo’s writings, signed by Cohn and Wendland and published almost a century ago, which determines me to ask myself whether this argument is also supported in contemporaneity. Two pagan authors from the Antiquity are most often identified with the ones who came into direct contact with Philo’s writings, namely philosophers Numenius and Plotinus. Neo-pythagorean Numenius, left from Apamea in Syria, and the period during which he started to be famous is considered to be at the middle of the 2nd century. Regarding this author, analyzing the information presented by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromateis*, I consider there shouldn’t be any doubt regarding the fact that he

⁸ L. COHN și P. WENDLAND, *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, 6 vol (Berlin: 1896-1915).

was interested by the Judaic symbols and tradition in general. The statement regarding Plato, namely that he was nothing else but “a Moses speaking in the Attic dialect”⁹, his references to genesis 1:2 and four more possible references to Judaic traditions indicate the seriousness of his research related to Judaism. Writing against Celsus, Origen mentions Philo and Numenius within the same paragraph. However, early proof to this respect is missing because most of Numenius’ works are lost. Whittaker, when he says that Numenius referred to the supreme god through the Greek word, from the Septuagint, bases on the relationship between him and Philo. The fact that Numenius was familiarized with Philo’s writings cannot be supported with proofs, but there is no doubt regarding his respect and appreciation towards the syncretistic approach practiced by the Jews from Alexandria. Other researchers such as Wanszink and Van Winden state that Numenius studied Philo’s works for sure¹⁰. But here there are researchers who have a different position, disapproving this approach, stating that this preoccupation regarding the interest that Numenius might have shown for Judaism is exacerbated and unrealistic.

Philo was a remarkable philosopher, an exegete that manifested courage and openness towards other cultures. His message, a universal one, aimed to decipher, to reveal the hidden meanings of the sacred text, both for Jews and for the Greek and then for Christians. Now I can state firmly that this is “a paradigmatic figure” that generated “a scientific revolution”. From this point of view, I don’t think that the cultural decision of the rabbis to isolate Philo and his treatises was not correct. Even though they don’t acknowledge his merits, personally, I couldn’t ignore his influence in terms of exegesis that this Alexandrine had even in Antiquity. From a phenomenological point of view, the appearance of several commentaries that focused mainly on extracting symbols, ideas and concepts influenced by various Greek philosophies, from the biblical text, is partly due to Philo’s treatises. In this point I identified the central element which determined me to consider Philo a *paradeigma*. Surely, Philo is such an interpreter and he was described by Gerald Burns as “a radical interpreter”¹¹.

Philo is not just a deeply intuitively spirit but he is also a spirit that works methodically and structured. As I presented his writings within this thesis, these do not occur randomly, but they are interconnected through various aspects of linguistic, structural or symbolical nature.

⁹ CLEMENT ALEXANDRINUL, *Stromata I, XXII,150,4* in *PSB* 5, trans. Dumitru Fecioru (București: EIBMBOR, 1982).

¹⁰ J.H. WASZINK, „Porphyrios und Numenios,” in *Porphyre, Entretiens Hardt 12* (1966): 50.; Van Winden, *Calcidius on Matter: his Doctrine and Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 123.

¹¹ Gerald BRUNS, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 83-103.

These are not just interconnected but they also present transfers in meaning, creating a unity at a semantic level. Significantly, this is the role that Philo consecrated to allegory. Three books which, from a thematic point of view initiate their exegetical approach adopting as hypothesis the biblical text converge towards a discourse-*pattern* with universal valences, framed allegorically. Allegory within the three philonian treatises, according to Erwin Goodenough, enters in an ample phenomenon “a mystical Judaic current, anti-rabbinic in its nature, and which uses symbols”¹². It is interesting the fact that from a historical point of view, revolutionary “hermeneutical phenomena” from the philonian works would have had all the chances in the world to remain isolated and to not influence any interpretative environment of manifestation. However, to be realistic, we may identify “philonian” influences within the subsequent exegetical discourses both in Judaism and in Christianity.

I cannot ignore the fact that Philo was contested both by his rabbi fellows and in contemporaneity, and to my surprise, even in the Romanian space where, his writings are not integrally translated yet and there are serious hiatuses between the international and the Romanian literature regarding this author. Thus, Rodica Pop, in one of her articles states that “...Philo wants to prove the importance of the Judaic culture by attributing the paternity of the fundamental ideas to Moses, and in philosophy to Plato he grants the statute of replica – a superior one, it is true, but still a replica. However, Philo ends by using Plato’s frames of thinking to comment on the sacred texts, without managing to convince us of the sin of plagiarism that the Athenian philosopher had committed”¹³.

As for this statement, I would like to create a “polemical” frame and oppose her statements with my own, considering that these vehement ideas against Philo’s thinking are unjustified. Firstly, Philo did not intend in his writings to “convince us of a plagiarism attributed to Plato”. In his works, Philo tried to discover the hidden meanings of the biblical text and he tried to create a direct contact of the people from the diaspora with this sacred text. The exegete from Alexandria doesn’t use within his writings only Plato’s thinking or the Hellenist current to explain the biblical texts, on the contrary, he manifests his intention to valorize the paternity of the teachings and figures characteristic to Judaism. I consider that Rodica Pop perceived Philo of Alexandria and his works in a completely erroneous manner.

¹² Erwin GOODENOUGH, *By Light, Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935). 46.

¹³ R. POP, „Platon,” 657.

To conclude to everything I said previously, although I am aware of the fact that sometimes I resorted to my own reasons and arguments to support the statement in the title of the thesis, without having a concrete bibliographical support to this respect, I present my hope that this research, which is in an initial state, will be encouraged or at least accepted by the “scientific community”¹⁴. I am aware of the fact that Philo and his works have several valences that are yet uncovered in the Romanian theology and maybe on an international level I didn’t get into contact with all the elements that are decisive in sketching Philo’s personality, but, I hope that at least I revised once more the fundamental bibliography regarding this paradigmatic personality.

¹⁴ An element which Kuhn emphasized in the discussion regarding the paradigm.

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