

# Antiquity and Humanity

Edited by  
MARGARET M. MITCHELL  
and ADELA YARBRO COLLINS

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Mohr Siebeck

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Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy

*Presented to Hans Dieter Betz  
on His 70th Birthday*

Edited by  
Adela Yarbro Collins  
and  
Margaret M. Mitchell

Mohr Siebeck

*Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme*

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**“Denn wenn wir uns dem Alterthum gegenüber stellen  
und es ernstlich in der Absicht anschauen, uns daran  
zu bilden, so gewinnen wir die Empfindung, als ob wir  
erst eigentlich zu Menschen würden.”**

**JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE**



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## Editors' Preface

What perhaps most distinguishes Hans Dieter Betz's scholarship is its combination of amazing range with consistency of vision. Defying the traditional boundaries of the academy, Betz has made significant contributions in the fields of New Testament, classics, church history, theology, and history of religions. He is the author of landmark works that set specific early Christian writings into their Greco-Roman contexts (such as the magisterial and innovative trio of commentaries in the Hermeneia series, *Galatians*, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, and *The Sermon on the Mount*), and important editions and interpretations of ancient texts ranging from the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* to the Mani Codex, Orphic tablets and, most recently, the Mithras liturgy. The list of his publications in the appendix to this volume (pp.501–12) more than adequately testifies to this extraordinary record of intensive engagement with and incomparably insightful exegesis of ancient Mediterranean literature. What unifies this broad array of texts and studies is a mind fascinated with antiquity as the arena within which the fundamental religious, philosophical, ethical and practical issues of human life were articulated, examined, refined, and bequeathed to later generations. Betz is the consummate humanist, continually schooling himself and others in the arts of ancient learning.

Our title epigram from Goethe (who is, unsurprisingly, one of Betz's favorite authors) is chosen because it so keenly names the integrative motivation at work throughout his scholarly engagements: "For if we look upon Antiquity with the firm intention of educating ourselves, we are rewarded by the feeling that this is really the beginning of our true humanity."<sup>1</sup> Engagement with the research agenda historically articulated in the phrase "Antiquity and Christianity" has been Hans Dieter Betz's life-work (as signaled by the designation of the fourth volume of his *Gesammelte Aufsätze: Antike und Christentum*). The title of the present volume, *Antiquity and Humanity*, both honors his profound accomplishments among Christian sources and widens the lens to encompass the universal scope of his interests and expertise. Moreover, it is a reference to the humanity

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, maxim 660, from *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahren*, "Aus Makariens Archiv" (1829). The text printed as an epigram above is cited from Max Hecker, *Goethe: Maximen und Reflexionen* (Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft; ed. E. Schmidt and B. Suphan; vol. 21; Weimar: Goethe-Gesellschaft, 1907) 145–46. The English translation is that of Elisabeth Stopp, *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Maxims and Reflections* (New York: Penguin, 1998) 89.

of Hans Dieter Betz himself, a philosopher and theologian of the human condition, and a man of character, kindness, and generosity of spirit.

The present volume seeks to pay tribute to this remarkable modern humanist by bringing together the work of a spectrum of scholars of ancient religion and philosophy who are part of Prof. Betz's international circle of conversation. As editors we thought the best way to honor Dieter was to encourage contributors to engage and explore a great diversity of topics from the world of antiquity, but to do so, as he always has, through a close reading of some text. Hence the essays are organized according to broad categories of ancient religious and philosophical literature: Biblical and Hellenistic Jewish Literature, Early Christian Literature (The Synoptic Gospels, The Pauline Epistles, Other Early Christian Writings), and Greco-Roman Philosophy and Religion. These articles interact in some fascinating ways with Betz's hermeneutical approaches to ancient literature and culture, as well as with the specific conclusions of his scholarship – not always agreeing, but pushing toward greater clarity of understanding of ancient religion and philosophy on their own terms, and in terms of their impact on subsequent Western culture. All invite further conversation and point to significant areas for future research.

When in the spring of 1993 the editors explored the possibility of a *Festschrift* to honor Dieter's 65th birthday with Mr. Georg Siebeck of J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] Verlag, we unanimously decided (with the timely assistance of a tip from Christel Betz) that it would simply be premature to issue a *Festschrift* – which traditionally in the academy has signaled the culmination of a scholarly career – when Dieter was in fact in his prime. So a volume was planned for presentation at Dieter's 70th birthday, May 21, 2001 – a date which seemed very far off on the other side of the great millennium shift. But now that the 70th birthday is in sight, Betz still shows no signs of slowing down. In this year alone he has presented the prestigious Lietzmann lecture at the University of Jena and the Academy of Sciences in Berlin, which marks the first public airing of his masterful new translation and commentary on the Mithras liturgy from the Paris Greek Magical Papyrus, in addition to lectures and conferences in Lund, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Claremont. As Shailer Mathews Professor emeritus, Betz continues to teach and maintain a very active presence in the Divinity School and the Department of New Testament and Early Christian Literature at the University of Chicago. Hence, without waiting for him to stand still, we can merely say that we have arbitrarily picked this moment of birthday celebration in the course of a scholarly career still in mid-stride to pause and honor our greatly esteemed friend and colleague with a collection of studies to trigger further fruitful conversation.

The editors especially wish to express thanks to Mr. Georg Siebeck, who has been throughout our co-conspirator in this project, and has insisted on the highest standards for a volume to honor his treasured author, editor, and longtime

colleague. We also would like to acknowledge Profs. David Hellholm and Ithamar Gruenwald, who gave valuable input in the early planning stages and beyond. And we are most of all grateful to the authors of these essays – colleagues, friends, former students of Prof. Betz – who have produced scholarly arguments that we trust will advance research in a number of important areas, which is ultimately the only and best justification for this book. We would like to thank Dean W. Clark Gilpin and the Divinity School of the University of Chicago for financial support and other forms of encouragement for this volume throughout the long period of its execution. And we are also very pleased to acknowledge and thank our editorial assistants for this project, Robert Matthew Calhoun and Annette Bourland Huizenga, who brought not only diligence and competence to the meticulous tasks of proofreading and indexing, but also uncommon devotion to this project and its honoree. Jason Horn also gave excellent troubleshooting assistance on many occasions. And we would like to thank Mrs. Georgia Crowther for careful and most discreet administrative assistance throughout the process. Ms. Ilse Koenig in the production department at Mohr Siebeck has been a delight to work with, and has kept us carefully on schedule, for which we are especially grateful. While Dieter is not slowing down, *we* have had to meet a firm deadline to have this present ready for a certain birthday celebration in Chicago on May 21, 2001.

Adela Yarbro Collins  
Margaret M. Mitchell  
March, 2001



## List of Abbreviations

|         |                                                                                          |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AB      | Anchor Bible                                                                             |
| ABD     | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (ed. D.N. Freedman)                                       |
| ACS     | American Classical Studies                                                               |
| ACW     | Ancient Christian Writers                                                                |
| AGJU    | Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums                     |
| AJP     | <i>American Journal of Philology</i>                                                     |
| AnBib   | Analecta Biblica                                                                         |
| ANRW    | <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>                                        |
| AOAT    | Alter Orient und Altes Testament                                                         |
| APF     | <i>Archiv für Papyrusforschung</i>                                                       |
| ARW     | <i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft</i>                                                  |
| ATR     | <i>Anglican Theological Review</i>                                                       |
| BAGD    | Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> (1979) |
| BBR     | <i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>                                                    |
| BDF     | Blass, Debrunner and Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</i>                   |
| BETL    | Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium                                       |
| BFCT    | Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie                                            |
| BHT     | Beiträge zur historischen Theologie                                                      |
| BTB     | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>                                                        |
| BWA(N)T | Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament                                |
| BZAW    | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft                          |
| BZNW    | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft                          |
| CBET    | Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology                                          |
| CBQ     | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>                                                       |
| CBQMS   | Catholic Biblical Quarterly – Monograph Series                                           |
| CCSL    | Corpus Christianorum, Series latina                                                      |
| CIL     | <i>Corpus inscriptionum latinarum</i>                                                    |
| CJ      | <i>Classical Journal</i>                                                                 |
| ConBOT  | Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament                                                       |
| CP      | <i>Classical Philology</i>                                                               |
| CQ      | <i>Classical Quarterly</i>                                                               |
| CRINT   | Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum                                          |
| DDD     | <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> (ed. K. van der Toorn, et al.)      |
| DJD     | Discoveries in the Judaean Desert                                                        |
| DNP     | <i>Der Neue Pauly</i>                                                                    |
| DRev    | <i>Downside Review</i>                                                                   |
| EDNT    | <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>                                        |
| EKKNT   | Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament                                   |
| ERE     | <i>The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</i>                                           |
| EnJud   | <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>                                                             |

|         |                                                                                        |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| EPRO    | Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain                     |
| FB      | Forschung zur Bibel                                                                    |
| FRLANT  | Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments                  |
| GCS     | Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte              |
| GRBS    | <i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>                                              |
| Greg    | <i>Gregorianum</i>                                                                     |
| HDR     | Harvard Dissertations in Religion                                                      |
| HNT     | Handbuch zum Neuen Testament                                                           |
| HNTC    | Harper's New Testament Commentaries                                                    |
| HR      | <i>History of Religions</i>                                                            |
| HSCP    | <i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>                                          |
| HTKNT   | Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament                                    |
| HTR     | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i>                                                      |
| HUT     | Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie                                            |
| HWP     | <i>Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie</i> (ed. J. Ritter and K. Gründer)          |
| ICC     | International Critical Commentary                                                      |
| IG      | <i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>                                                           |
| Int     | <i>Interpretation</i>                                                                  |
| JAC     | Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum                                                    |
| JBL     | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>                                                  |
| JdI     | <i>Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts</i>                                |
| JECS    | <i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>                                              |
| JEH     | <i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>                                               |
| JHS     | <i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>                                                     |
| JJS     | <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>                                                       |
| JLW     | <i>Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft</i>                                               |
| JNES    | <i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>                                                 |
| JR      | <i>Journal of Religion</i>                                                             |
| JRS     | <i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>                                                        |
| JSHRZ   | <i>Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit</i>                             |
| JSJ     | <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i> |
| JSNT    | <i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>                                      |
| JSNTSup | Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series                           |
| JSPSup  | Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series                          |
| KEK     | Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)              |
| KlPauly | <i>Der kleine Pauly</i>                                                                |
| LCL     | Loeb Classical Library                                                                 |
| LIMC    | <i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i>                                    |
| LPGL    | Lampe, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i>                                                |
| LSJ     | Liddell, Scott, Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>                                  |
| MDAI(A) | <i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts (Athenische Abteilung)</i>     |
| NHC     | Nag Hammadi Codices                                                                    |
| NHS     | Nag Hammadi Studies                                                                    |
| NICNT   | New International Commentary on the New Testament                                      |
| NIGTC   | New International Greek Testament Commentary                                           |
| NovT    | <i>Novum Testamentum</i>                                                               |

|                  |                                                                                                                      |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NovTSup          | Novum Testamentum Supplements                                                                                        |
| NNF              | Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers                                                                                       |
| NTApoc           | <i>New Testament Apocrypha</i> (ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher)                                                |
| NTOA             | Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus                                                                                  |
| NTD              | Das Neue Testament Deutsch                                                                                           |
| NTS              | <i>New Testament Studies</i>                                                                                         |
| OBO              | Orbis biblicus et orientalis                                                                                         |
| OCD              | <i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> edition (ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth)                    |
| OLZ              | <i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>                                                                             |
| OrChrAn          | Orientalia Christiana Analecta                                                                                       |
| ÖTK              | Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar                                                                                   |
| OTL              | Old Testament Library                                                                                                |
| OTP              | <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> (ed. J.H. Charlesworth)                                                          |
| PCZ              | <i>Columbia Papyri III: Zenon Papyri</i> (ed. W. Westermann and E. Hasenoerhl)                                       |
| PGM              | <i>Papyri graecae magicae</i>                                                                                        |
| PG               | Patrologia Graeca (ed. J.-P. Migne)                                                                                  |
| PL               | Patrologia Latina (ed. J.-P. Migne)                                                                                  |
| PNTC             | Penguin New Testament Commentaries                                                                                   |
| PTS              | Patristische Texte und Studien                                                                                       |
| PW               | Pauly-Wissowa, <i>Real-encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>                                        |
| QRG              | Quellen der Religionsgeschichte                                                                                      |
| RAC              | <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>                                                                        |
| RAr              | <i>Revue archéologique</i>                                                                                           |
| RevQ             | <i>Revue de Qumran</i>                                                                                               |
| RGG <sup>4</sup> | <i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> , 4 <sup>th</sup> edition (ed. H.D. Betz, et al.)                        |
| RM               | Die Religionen der Menschheit                                                                                        |
| SBLDS            | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series                                                                   |
| SBLRBS           | Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study                                                          |
| SBLSP            | <i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>                                                                 |
| SBLTT            | Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations                                                                |
| SBS              | Stuttgarter Bibelstudien                                                                                             |
| SC               | Sources chrétiennes                                                                                                  |
| SCHNT            | Studia ad corpus hellenisticum Novi Testamenti                                                                       |
| ScrHier          | Scripta hierosolimitana                                                                                              |
| SD               | Studies and Documents                                                                                                |
| SEG              | <i>Supplementum epigraphicum graecum</i>                                                                             |
| SJLA             | Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity                                                                                 |
| SNTSMS           | Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series                                                                   |
| SUNT             | Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments                                                                              |
| SVF              | <i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> (ed. H. von Arnim)                                                                |
| SVTP             | Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigraphica                                                                        |
| TAPA             | Transactions of the American Philological Association                                                                |
| Tbü              | Theologische Bücherei                                                                                                |
| TDNT             | <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; ET ed. G.W. Bromiley)            |
| TDOT             | <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (ed. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren; ET ed. J.T. Willis, et al.) |
| THAT             | <i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> (ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann)                             |

## XVIII

*List of Abbreviations*

|               |                                                                       |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| THKNT         | Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament                       |
| TNTC          | Tyndale New Testament Commentary                                      |
| TRE           | <i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>                                  |
| TSAJ          | Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum                                |
| TU            | Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur |
| <i>TynBul</i> | <i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>                                               |
| TZ            | <i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>                                       |
| VC            | <i>Vigiliae christianae</i>                                           |
| VT            | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>                                              |
| VTSup         | Vetus Testamentum Supplements                                         |
| WA            | Martin Luther, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (the “Weimar” ed.)             |
| WBC           | Word Biblical Commentary                                              |
| WMANT         | Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament          |
| WUNT          | Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament                  |
| ZAW           | <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>             |
| ZBNT          | Zürcher Bibelkommentare/Neues Testament                               |
| ZNW           | <i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>             |
| ZPE           | <i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>                     |
| ZTK           | <i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>                           |

For abbreviations of Friedrich Nietzsche’s writings, see pp. 433–34.

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## Biblical and Hellenistic Jewish Literature



# Spells Pleasing to God

## The Binding of Isaac in Philo the Epic Poet

by

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The Book of Genesis, chapter 22, recounts the memorable story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac. This story received numerous embellishments in later Jewish tradition, many of them focusing on the merit of the deed, and shifting emphasis from Abraham to Isaac.<sup>1</sup> The degree to which these traditions influenced the New Testament is a matter of dispute.<sup>2</sup> They are mostly contained in late targumic and midrashic collections, although these may contain exegetical traditions of uncertain age. Only a few texts, however, that address the story of Abraham and Isaac, can be dated securely before the turn of the era. These generally emphasize that Abraham was faithful when he was tested.<sup>3</sup> The Book of Judith indicates that God tested not only Abraham but also Isaac.<sup>4</sup> The *Book of Jubilees*, written in Hebrew at some time in the second century BCE, claims that the idea of testing Abraham came from Mastema, prince of the fallen angels, just as Satan had proposed the testing of Job.<sup>5</sup> A recently published fragmentary text from Qumran, 4Q225, may be the earliest witness to the view that Isaac was a willing victim and encouraged Abraham in his deed.<sup>6</sup> This view is prominent in later (post-70 CE) literature, such as the *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo (32:2–3) and *Targum Neofiti*. In the *Targum*, Isaac asks Abraham to “bind me properly” lest he kick and make the sacrifice unfit. A similar request

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<sup>1</sup> S. Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (New York: Pantheon, 1967); J.L. Kugel, *The Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 302–9.

<sup>2</sup> See C.T.R. Hayward, “The Present State of Research into the Targumic Account of the Sacrifice of Isaac,” *JJS* 32 (1981) 127–50; B.D. Chilton, “Recent Discussion of the Aqedah,” in idem, *Targumic Approaches to the Gospels* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986) 39–49.

<sup>3</sup> Sir 44:20; 1 Macc 2:52; *Jub.* 17:17–18; 19:8–9. Kugel, *The Traditions of the Bible*, 308.

<sup>4</sup> *Jdt* 8:26–7.

<sup>5</sup> *Jub.* 17:15–18.

<sup>6</sup> G. Vermes, “New Light on the Sacrifice of Isaac from 4Q225,” *JJS* 47 (1996) 140–46; J.C. VanderKam, “The Aqedah, Jubilees, and PseudoJubilees,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders* (ed. C.A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 241–61.

is restored by the editors in a lacuna in 4Q225, when Isaac speaks to Abraham a second time, after his question about the sacrificial animal.<sup>7</sup> The restoration is plausible, but not certain. It may be that Isaac's willing participation was already implied in the remark in Judith that God tested him as well as Abraham.

## Philo's Epic

The concern for Isaac's consent, however, is not attested in the oldest allusions to Genesis 22, in Ben Sira or in *Jubilees*.<sup>8</sup> Neither is it attested in the passage that is the subject of this essay, a fragment of a Greek epic poem on Jerusalem by one Philo, who is otherwise unknown.<sup>9</sup> Since his work was excerpted by Alexander Polyhistor in the mid first century BCE,<sup>10</sup> he is plausibly dated to the second century. Philo is usually assumed to have written in Alexandria, like his more famous namesake, but some scholars place him in Jerusalem, the city about which he wrote.<sup>11</sup> Decisive evidence of his date and provenance are lacking.<sup>12</sup> Philo's poem is seldom noted in connection with the *Akedah*. This may be due in part to the obscurity of the poem, which, as we shall see, is often difficult to interpret. But it may also be due to the fact that Philo's construal of the *Akedah* is very different from anything that we find in the literature that originated in Hebrew or Aramaic.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> כַּפּוֹת אוֹתִי יִפֶּה, bind me well. Unfortunately only the initial כ is actually preserved in the manuscript. For the official publication see J.C. VanderKam and J.T. Milik, "Jubilees: 225.4 Qpseudojubilees<sup>a</sup>," in H. Attridge, et al., *Qumran Cave 4. VIII. Parabiblical Texts, Part I* (DJD 13; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 149–52.

<sup>8</sup> Despite some significant modifications, such as the introduction of Mastema, *Jubilees* stays very close to the biblical text. See VanderKam, "The Aqedah," 244–51.

<sup>9</sup> The fragments are preserved in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.20.1; 9.24.1; 9.37.1–3. Text and translation can be found in C.R. Holladay, *Fragments From Hellenistic Jewish Authors: II. Poets* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) 205–99; other translations in H.W. Attridge, "Philo the Epic Poet," *OTP* 2.781–4; N. Walter, "Fragmente jüdisch-hellenistischer Epik: Philon, Theodotos," *JSHRZ* 4 (1983) 139–53.

<sup>10</sup> J. Strugnell, "General Introduction, with a Note on Alexander Polyhistor," *OTP* 2.777–9.

<sup>11</sup> So B.Z. Wacholder, *Eupolemus: A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974) 282–83.

<sup>12</sup> See Y. Gutman, "Philo the Epic Poet," *SchHier* 1 (1954) 36–63; H. Lloyd and P. Parsons, *Supplementum Hellenisticum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983) 328–31; G.W. Nickelsburg, "The Bible Rewritten and Expanded," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (ed. M.E. Stone; CRINT 2.2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 118–21; E.S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 125–27; M. Goodman in E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (3 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986) 3.559–61.

<sup>13</sup> Philo the philosopher hews closely to the biblical story, but adds an apologia in response to comparisons between this and other stories of child-sacrifice (*Abr.* 167–99). He then adds an allegorical interpretation.

Philo's epic appears to have consisted chiefly of a recitation of the biblical history. The title as given by Polyhistor, Περὶ Ἱεροσόλυμα, already indicates an affinity with the literature of the Hellenistic age, which had strong geographical interests and was often concerned with the foundation of cities.<sup>14</sup> Hellenistic epics also show a predilection for obscure and *recherché* language.<sup>15</sup> In Philo's case this tendency results in some scarcely intelligible passages, since he did not in fact have a great command of the Greek language. The fragments that have survived deal with Abraham, Joseph, and the water supply of Jerusalem. The fragment on Joseph is said to be from the fourteenth book. This should probably be emended to the fourth;<sup>16</sup> even so, the poem must have been lengthy, since it presumably continued down to the Israelite occupation of Jerusalem. The extant fragments about Jerusalem, however, simply praise the loveliness of the city in summer when the streams are flowing. The theme is reminiscent of the biblical psalms: "there is a stream which gladdens the city of God."<sup>17</sup> Joseph is the lord of dreams who sat on the throne of Egypt. The final line is striking: δι-νεύσας λαθραῖα χρόνου πλημμυρίδι μοίρης ("spinning secrets of time in a flood of fate"). The reference to μοῖρα, "fate," may be included only for its bombastic resonance, but it is typical of the Hellenistic overtones of Philo's poem.

## The Fragment on Abraham

The most controversial fragment is that on Abraham. It reads as follows:

Ἐκλυνον ἀρχεγόνοισι τὸ μυρίον ὥς ποτε θεσμοῖς  
 Ἀβραάμ κλυτοηχὲς ὑπέρτερον ἄμμα τι δεσμῶν  
 παμφαῆς, πλήμμυρε μεγαυχήτοισι λογισμοῖς,  
 θειοφιλῇ θέλγητρά. λυπόντι γὰρ ἀγλαὸν ἔρκος  
 αἰνοφύτων ἔκκαυμα βρυήπτους αἰνετὸς ἴσχων

<sup>14</sup> Gutman ("Philo," 60–63) points especially to the analogy of the *Messēniaka* of Rhianus of Crete, who wrote in the second half of the third century BCE. Apollonius of Rhodes, author of the *Argonautica*, also composed the *Ktiseis*, a series of poems concerning foundation legends. P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 1.626, comments on the geographical interests of Apollonius as a typically Alexandrian feature. On the Hellenistic epic, see further Fraser, 1.624–49.

<sup>15</sup> See Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1.633–38 on the scholarly language of Apollonius. The most obscure example of Hellenistic poetry was the *Alexandra* of Lycophron, which was deliberately difficult to decipher. Philo has often been compared to Lycophron, but Wacholder (*Eupolemus*, 283) is surely right that Philo wished to be understood, since the fragment on Joseph is quite clear.

<sup>16</sup> So already J. Freudenthal, *Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhaltenen Reste jüdischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke: Hellenistische Studien 1–2* (Breslau: Skutsch, 1874–75) 100.

<sup>17</sup> Ps 46:4. Note also Ps 48:2, which claims that Zion is "the joy of all the earth," and cf. Philo's claim that it δείκνυσιν ὑπέρτατα θάμβεα λαῶν ("shows forth the greatest wonders of the peoples").

ἀθάνατον ποίησεν ἔην φάτιν, ἔξότε κείνου  
ἔκγονος αἰνογόνοιο πολύμνιον ἔλλαχε κῦδος

Then after omission of a few lines:

Ἀρτίχερος θηκτοῖο ξιφηφόρον ἐντύνοντος  
λήματι καὶ σφαράγιοι παρακλιδὸν ἀθροισθέντος  
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν χεῖρεσσι κερασφόρον ὥπασε κριόν.<sup>18</sup>

Although there have been relatively few discussions of these verses, there has been no lack of diverse interpretations. The range of readings may seen from a comparison of two current English translations, by Carl Holladay and Harold Attridge. Holladay renders as follows:

They unloosed the loins for our ancestors just as once (they were commanded) by the (divine) ordinances –  
O Abraham, (you are) renowned through the preeminent seal of the bonds  
Radiant (are you), overflowing with glorious thoughts –  
Divinely pleasing gestures. For this one who left the splendid enclosure  
Of the awesome race the praiseworthy one with a thundering sound prevented  
(from carrying out) the immolation,  
(And thus) he made his own voice immortal. From then on  
The offspring of that awesome child achieved much-hymned renown ...  
... as the strong-handed one bearing a sharp sword made ready  
With firm resolve, and a rustle at one side became stronger –  
But he placed in his hand the horned ram.

Attridge's translation is significantly different:

A thousand times have I heard in the ancient laws how once (when you achieved something)  
marvelous with the bonds' knot, O far-famed Abraham, resplendently did your  
god-beloved prayers abound  
in wondrous counsels. For when you left the beauteous garden  
of dread plants, the praiseworthy thunderer quenched the pyre  
and made his promise immortal. From that time forth  
the offspring of that awesome born one have won far-hymned praise  
... as mortal hand readied the sword  
with resolve, and crackling (wood) was gathered at the side,  
he brought into his hands a horned ram.

These translations do not exhaust the variety of interpretations of this passage, but they may serve to highlight the main points of dispute. All commentators accept that the final three verses refer to the sacrifice of Isaac. Several scholars, however, detect other referents in the opening verses.

<sup>18</sup> The text is cited from Holladay, *Fragments*, 2.234, 236, except that I do not follow his emendation of μυρίον to μηρίον in the first line, and of ὑπερτέρων to ὑπερτέρῳ in the second, and I read ἄμμα τι as two words rather than one.

## A Reference to Circumcision?

Ben Zion Wacholder claims that “the first book depicted God’s covenant with Abraham (circumcision).”<sup>19</sup> This line of interpretation originates with a suggestion of Mras, and also underlies Holladay’s translation.<sup>20</sup> The verb ἔκλυον is taken as equivalent to ἐξέλυον, “they unloosed.” Then μυρίον, ten thousand times, is emended to μηρίον, “thigh,” loosely rendered as “loins.” In defence of this translation, Holladay points to the LXX use of μηρίον for “loins” (e.g., Lev 3:4, 10, 15) although he admits that the singular is surprising. In any case there is no parallel for the phrase “they loosened the loins” as a way of referring to circumcision. But the emendation and strained translation are entirely unnecessary. With Attridge and most older interpreters, ἔκλυον should be taken as a second aorist of κλύω, to hear. Hence the straightforward translation of Attridge: “A thousand times have I heard in the ancient laws ....” The poet is speaking in the first person. The ancient laws are, of course, simply the Torah, not specifically the covenant with Abraham.<sup>21</sup>

## A Cord of Bonds

Both Holladay and Attridge take the word κλυτοηγές as vocative, and in agreement with Abraham, who is thought to be addressed in the passage: “O far-famed Abraham.” Holladay also takes παμφαές (radiant) and even πλήμυρρε (overflowing) as vocatives, although the latter word is not attested as an adjective.<sup>22</sup> Attridge takes παμφαές as a neuter adjective, used adverbially (“radiantly”) and πλήμυρρε as a verb, with θειοφιλή θέλγητρα as the subject. Both of these construals are problematic, however. Holladay leaves line 1, the supposed reference to circumcision, dangling, as he switches from third person to direct address, and takes πλήμυρρε as an unattested form. Attridge has to supply a line (“when you achieved something”) to make the transition to direct speech. These problems are resolved if we take Abraham as the subject of the finite verb πλήμυρρε: “I heard ... how once Abraham abounded in glorious thoughts.”<sup>23</sup> The forms κλυτοηγές and παμφαές then are not vocatives, but neuter accusatives, qualifying the noun ἄμμα, which means “cord,” or “something tied.”

<sup>19</sup> Wacholder, *Eupolemus*, 283.

<sup>20</sup> Holladay, *Fragments*, 2.235, 248–9. So also Walter, *Fragmente*, 148. See K. Mras, *Eusebius' Werke: 8. Die Praeparatio Evangelica* (GCS 43; 2 vols.; Berlin: Akademie, 1954) 1.506.

<sup>21</sup> Pace Holladay, *ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> Holladay here follows a suggestion of Walter.

<sup>23</sup> One manuscript, N, reads ἐπλήμυρρε, but the augment is often omitted in epic Greek.

The syntax of the passage has been obscured by the editors' reading of ἄμμα τι as one word rather than two, and consequently as a dative, and Mras's consequent emendation of ὑπέρτερον to ὑπερέτερω. If we read ἄμμα as an accusative of respect, however, the syntax of the passage is cleared up. The words κλυτοηχές and παμφαές then agree with ἄμμα, and θειοφιλή θέλγητρα is in apposition to it. (The plural is due to the plural δεσμών. Alternatively, θειοφιλή θέλγητρα may be read as an independent sentence with the verb implied: the spells were pleasing to God.)<sup>24</sup> The passage should be translated as follows: "Ten thousand times have I heard in the ancient laws how once Abraham abounded in glorious reasonings, with respect to the famous, surpassing, splendid cord of bonds, spells pleasing to God."

What then is this "cord of bonds" that is the occasion of Abraham's glory? The perverse determination of some scholars to find a reference to circumcision here is shown by Philippon's emendation of ἄμματι to αἷματι (blood).<sup>25</sup> Almost as forced is Holladay's suggestion that "bonds" would signify the enduring bond of the covenant between God and Abraham.<sup>26</sup> The most elaborate interpretation of the passage has been offered by Gutman, who argues that Philo's style finds its parallel in the Orphic hymns "in so far as there too the author's motive is apparently to shroud himself in a cloud of mystical obscurities."<sup>27</sup> He translates:

A thousand times have I heard how once (the spirit of) Abraham abounded in primeval doctrines, the far-echoing lofty and radiant link of chains; how (his spirit abounded) with wisdom of great praise, the ecstasy beloved of God. For when he left the goodly abode of the blessed born, the great-voiced Blessed One prevented the immolation, and made immortal His word, from which day much-sung glory fell to the lot of the son of the blessed born.<sup>28</sup>

On the basis of this rendering he proceeds to expound Philo's intention:

The Law of Israel is in his view one of the principal and basic elements in the cosmic process. This Law existed before the creation, but when the word came into existence the Law and its commandments served as that force of harmony which created order and rule, and fused the isolated parts of the cosmos into a process of unity, as they could not be fused without it. Men had no conception of the chains of this harmony in the cosmos – law and its regulations – till Abraham came and revealed them to humanity.<sup>29</sup>

This interpretation depends heavily on three elements, all of them doubtful:

First, it is said that Abraham "abounded in primeval doctrines." Gutman argues that this expression must refer to "codes or doctrines which preceded all

<sup>24</sup> This was suggested to me by Margaret Mitchell.

<sup>25</sup> L.M. Philippon, *Ezechiel des jüdischen Trauerspieldichters Auszug aus Egypten und Philo des Älteren Jerusalem* (Berlin: List, 1830) 62.

<sup>26</sup> Holladay, *Fragments*, 251.

<sup>27</sup> Gutman, "Philo," 37.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. Gutman emends πλήμυρε to ἐπλήμυρε and reads ἄμμα τι as two words. Then the two dative phrases, ἀρχεγόνοι ... θεσμοῖς and μεγαυχῆτοι λογισμοῖς, are in apposition and the two accusative phrases ἄμμα τι δεσμών and θειοφιλή θέλγητρα, are also in apposition.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

things and anticipated all creation, even the creation of the world,” and infers the Jewish idea of preexistent wisdom and the preexistent law.<sup>30</sup> However, it is not apparent that ἀρχέγονος necessarily implies existence before creation. In accordance with Philo’s generally bombastic style it may simply connote extreme antiquity. Again, θεσμοί are not automatically to be identified as the law of Israel. The parallel with λογισμοῖς suggests traditional wisdom. True, the Jewish law is identified with wisdom in other texts, but there is no clear reference to the Jewish law here, certainly not to the “book of the law of Moses.”<sup>31</sup> The point is simply that Abraham is informed by the most ancient wisdom.

Second, the phrase ἄμμα τι δεσμῶν is understood as “link of chains” in the light of Plato’s use of δεσμός in the *Timaeus*, where the heavenly bodies are linked by animate bonds.<sup>32</sup> Philo of Alexandria evidently drew on the Platonic tradition when he said that God was the δεσμός of the universe.<sup>33</sup> However, the cosmic sense of δεσμός depends on its context. In itself the word simply means bond. There is no explicit cosmic reference here.

Third, Gutman translates θειοφιλή θέλγητρα as “ecstasy beloved of God.” However, θέλγητρα means “charm” or “spell,” not an experience such as ecstasy.

A far simpler interpretation is readily available. In Gen 22:9, Abraham binds Isaac before he lays him on the wood. The binding is further highlighted in the Targum. Later tradition refers to the whole incident as the binding of Isaac or *Akedah*. With Attridge, we should recognize here a clear allusion to the binding of Isaac, which is in fact the subject of the entire fragment. It is the binding of Isaac, then, that is designated as θειοφιλή θέλγητρα.

Here again the commentators have been reluctant to take the text at face value. Attridge, who takes the phrase as the subject of the verb “abound” translates: “your God-beloved prayers.” But as he readily admits, θέλγητρα means charms or spells, and no prayers of Abraham are mentioned in Genesis 22. Holladay, who thinks the phrase refers to circumcision, recognizes the meaning “as a ‘charm’ in the sense of that which becomes a means of satisfying, or even appeasing God.”<sup>34</sup> But he is evidently uncomfortable with the magical overtones of “charms” or “spells” and so he translates “divinely pleasing gestures.” Yet spells are often associated with binding, if only in a figurative sense, and this association surely determines Philo’s choice of words in this passage.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 40–41. Aristobulus, who may have been roughly contemporary with Philo, identifies Torah with Wisdom and says that it existed before heaven and earth (*Praep. ev.* 13.12.11). The preexistence of wisdom is found in Prov 8:22 and the identification with the Torah in Sir 24:23.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase of Sir 24:23.

<sup>32</sup> Gutman, “Philo,” 44–45, referring to Plato, *Tim.* 38e.

<sup>33</sup> Philo, *Her.* 23.

<sup>34</sup> Holladay, *Fragments*, 252–3.

## The Remainder of the Passage

Before we reflect further on what Philo meant by referring to the binding of Isaac as “spells pleasing to God” a few problems in the remainder of the fragment remain to be addressed. The subject of the following sentence is βροῦντος αἰνετός, “the praiseworthy loud-shouting one,” presumably God. The adjective βροῦντος is used for Ares in the *Iliad*, but more generally evokes the motif of Zeus as thunderer. In the context here it represents an interpretation of Gen 22:11, where the angel of the Lord is said to call to Abraham from heaven. He thereby holds back the firewood (ἔκκαυμα ἱσχών), or prevents the burnt offering.<sup>35</sup> Simultaneously, God makes Abraham’s fame or reputation (ἐὴν φάτιν) immortal. The personal pronoun usually means “his own,” but is frequently used to refer to other persons in post-Homeric epics.<sup>36</sup> Holladay’s translation, “he made his own voice immortal” makes little sense. Attridge, translating “made his promise immortal,” sees a reference to Gen 22:16–18, where God promises to make Abraham’s offspring as numerous as the sand on the seashore. φάτις can mean a voice from heaven or an oracle, but God did not need to make his voice or oracle immortal; rather, the emphasis of the whole fragment is on the fame of Abraham and his son, and how that fame was acquired.

The prevention of the sacrifice is said to have happened for Abraham “when he had left the splendid enclosure αἰνοφύτων.” Attridge translates “the beautiful garden of dread plants” and thinks that the reference is to the wood that Abraham took with him to Mount Moriah. Holladay takes φυτόν in the secondary sense of “offspring” and translates “of the awesome race,” a reference to Abraham’s departure from Ur of the Chaldees.<sup>37</sup> The latter interpretation seems more satisfactory, since a garden of dread plants is never mentioned in the story of the *Akedah*, but the reference is obscure in any case.

The first passage cited concludes with the statement that the offspring of that awesome-born one<sup>38</sup> obtained much-hymned renown. Attridge thinks the “awesome-born” one is Isaac, because of the peculiar circumstances of his birth, but allows that a reference to Abraham is also possible. Walter, exploiting the similarity between αἰνογόνοιο and αἰνοφύτων, argues that the reference is to Abraham, as a descendant of the Giants.<sup>39</sup> In Gen 22:17 God promises to bless Abraham’s offspring (Israel). Here too the offspring is probably collective and the progenitor Abraham. “Awesome-born” is simply a bombastic epithet, in-

<sup>35</sup> Attridge translates “quenched the pyre,” but we need not assume that the fire had been lit.

<sup>36</sup> LSJ, 601. Cf. Hesiod, *Op.* 58; Apollonius Rhodios, *Argon.* 1.1113.

<sup>37</sup> So also Mras and Walter, who further identify the awesome race with the giants of Genesis 6.

<sup>38</sup> Not “awesome child,” *pace* Holladay.

<sup>39</sup> Walter, *Fragmente*, 149.