

Finn Damgaard

Philo's *Life of Moses* as “Rewritten Bible”

Normally, Philo's works are not included in the discussion of the phenomenon of “Rewritten Bible”, since most of his writings consist of allegorical interpretations and commentaries. I shall argue, however, that at least one of his writings, the *Life of Moses*, can be seen as an example of this phenomenon.

In contrast to many other rewritten Jewish texts, Philo is quite explicit in defending and legitimizing his Biblical rewriting. Philo claims at the outset that he has learned the story of Moses, “both from the sacred books, the wonderful monuments of his wisdom which he has left behind him, and from some of the elders of the nation”, and he moreover argues that he believes himself “to have a closer knowledge than other of his life's story” (1.4).

The literary form of the *Life of Moses* belongs to the tradition of Graeco-Roman biography. For Philo, Moses' “action accorded with his words, so that speech and life were in harmony” (1.29). In the *Life of Moses*, Philo is accordingly interested in the narrative traditions concerning Moses' life. Especially in the first book of the *Life of Moses*, Philo largely interprets the Pentateuch narratives by implicit rewriting. Philo rewrites the Jews' flight from Egypt in such a way that is substantiates the Jewish claim for citizenship in Alexandria. He removes the “theology of the land” and the Biblical paradigm of exile and return from his rewritten version of the Pentateuch narratives and claims that the migration did not have as its goal the land of Canaan. If the Pentateuch's opposition to Egypt signifies a strong disapproval of any Egyptian Diaspora community, indicating that Israel cannot truly serve God in Egypt such as several interpreters have recently suggested, Philo's rewriting actually rehabilitates Egypt as a place of residence. Philo's imagined Jewish Diaspora community is not defined by its country of residence, but by its spiritual progress towards virtue and the knowledge of God.