

GANYMEDE AS THE LOGOS: TRACES OF A FORGOTTEN ALLEGORIZATION IN PHILO?

Philo's attitude to the mythologizing activities of the Greeks is well known.¹ In many passages he contrasts the practices of Greek writers unfavourably with that of Moses.² In one passage (*Conf.* 2 ff.), for example, he condemns those who see the Tower of Babel story as a reflection of that of Otus and Ephialtes' assault on Olympus; the truth, he asserts, is quite the contrary – the Greeks have borrowed the story from Moses.

On the other hand, Philo is himself prepared on occasion to allegorize figures of Greek mythology, though never explicitly on a subject of central doctrinal importance. For instance, he appears to be acquainted with the allegorization of various parts of the *Odyssey*. In his treatise *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* (*Congr.*), he makes use of the allegorization of the Suitors' mating with the handmaidens because they cannot gain Penelope, first employed, it seems, by the Cynic Bion of Borysthenes, but no doubt of wide currency by Philo's time, as a figure of those who cannot attain to Philosophy consoling themselves with *ta enkyklia* (e.g. *Congr.* 14–19). Again, the use here and there in his writings of compounds of the verb *νήχω*, 'swim', particularly *ἀνανήχομαι*,³ in connection with descriptions of our struggle through the storms and shipwreck of material existence, suggests his acquaintance with the allegorizing of Odysseus' shipwreck off Phaeacia in *Odyssey* V, where Homer employs this verb repeatedly.⁴ Other, more specific allegories include Scylla as *ἀφροσύνη*, a 'deathless evil' (*Od.* 12. 118), at *Det.* 178; Odysseus' escape from Charybdis (*ibid.* 219) at *Somn.* 2. 70, to symbolize our escape from the cares of mortal existence; and Castor and Pollux (*Od.* 11. 303) at *Somn.* 1. 150, as an image of the life of the *askêtês* or *prokoptôn*. He is familiar also with the equating of the Olympian Gods with the various elements, e.g. Zeus, *Aet.* 81; Hera, Demeter, Poseidon, Hephaestus, Hades, *Dec.* 54; Hades, *Heres* 45.

All this, as I say, is well enough known. One detail, however, which has not, I think, received notice is his apparent acquaintance with, and use of, an allegorization of Ganymede as the Stoic Logos. It is on the face of it strange that Ganymede should be pressed into service in this role, since Hermes normally fills it quite adequately in later Stoicism and Platonism.⁵ For Philo, however, Hermes represents only the planet Mercury (e.g. *Dec.* 54), never the Logos. The epithets which he favours in connection with the Logos are rather, if anything, those of Athena, sprung as she is from the head of Zeus. Her in turn he associates with the number Seven, which, following the Pythagoreans, he terms 'the motherless and ever-virgin maiden' (*Leg. All.* 1. 15) and 'motherless Victory and Virgin' (*Opif.* 100).⁶

¹ See especially the useful discussion of J. Pépin, *Mythe et Allégorie* (2nd ed. Paris, 1976), pp. 231–44.

² For example *Opif.* 1–2, 157, 170; *Leg. All.* 2. 19; *Det.* 125; *Gig.* 58; *Deus* 59; *De Prov.* 2. 109.

³ *Det.* 100; *Post.* 178; *Gig.* 13; *Conf.* 66, etc. Also *ἐπινήχομαι*, *Sacr.* 13; *Migr.* 125, etc. Cf. further *Virt.* 14, where (*κατακλύζεσθαι*) *ὑποβρύχιον* is reminiscent of *Od.* 5. 319, *ὑπόβρυχα*, though *Phaedr.* 248 A is also an influence.

⁴ *Od.* 5. 364, 375, 399, 439.

⁵ Cornutus, *ND* 16, p. 23, 16–22 Lang; Heraclitus, *Alleg. Hom.* 72. 4–19; Plotinus, *Enn.* 3. 6, 19.

⁶ cf. also *Ebr.* 61, where Sarah, as Sophia, is described as *ἀμήτωρ*, being sprung from a father, but no mother – *θήλεος γενεᾶς ἀμέτοχος*, a probable reminiscence of Athena's famous speech in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (734–41): *μήτηρ γὰρ οὐτις ἔστιν ἡ μὲν ἐγείνατο*, κ.τ.λ.

However, there is an aspect of Ganymede's activity which qualifies him well for this role, and that is his position as Zeus' wine-steward (οἰνοχόος). The image of the divine Logos as an outpouring from God, a continuous flow which brings constant order to all creation, may seem to call for some figure other than Hermes or Athena, neither of whom has traditionally anything to do with pouring.

There are three passages in particular in which Philo seems to make use of this allegory. In each case he does so allusively, as one would expect, but yet with sufficient specificity, as I hope to show, to make the allusion clear. First, at *Quod Deus sit Immutabilis*, 155–8, God's grace is compared favourably with the nectar and ambrosia of the Olympians, as he rains it down upon us:

Are we, upon whom God pours down like snow or rain, from above, the founts of his blessings, going to drink from a cistern, and seek out fiddling springs of water from beneath the earth, when the heavens unceasingly rain down upon us a food superior to the nectar and ambrosia of the myths?... (158) He is not, then, going to drink from a cistern, to whom God has granted unmixed draughts of intoxication, either from the hand of one of his servants among the angels, whom he has designated to be his wine-steward (οἰνοχοεῖν), or even from his own hand, without the mediation of anyone between the donor and receiver.⁷

Here we have not only the picture of God's grace raining down from above in the form of an intoxicating draught (designed to produce, no doubt, 'sober drunkenness'),⁸ but an angelic figure designated to pour it.

This figure reappears in a passage of the *De Somniis*, Book II, in the course of an exegesis of the dream of Pharaoh's chief wine-steward (ἀρχιουνοχόος, Gen. 40: 9–11). This figure has, of course, negative connotations for Philo, and his wine is evil. At *Somn.* 2. 183, however, Philo opposes to the wine-steward of Pharaoh, who stands for sensual existence, the wine-steward of God.

'Who, then,' he asks, 'is God's wine-steward? It is he who pours the libation of peace, the truly great High Priest who first receives the loving-cups of God's perennial bounties, then pays them back when he pours a libation of that potent undiluted draught, himself (ἐαυτόν).' For Philo, the figure of the High Priest (of whom the ideal example is Moses himself) is a mediator between God and man, a representation of the Logos immanent in the world.⁹ In 188 he is described as μεθόριος τις θεοῦ <καὶ ἀνθρώπου> φύσις, τοῦ μὲν ἐλάττων, ἀνθρώπου δὲ κρείττων; in fact, a μεσίτης between God and man (*Mos.* 2. 166) – an epithet, we may note, accorded by the Persians to Mithra, as Plutarch tells us in *De Iside et Osiride*, 369 E.¹⁰ A curious feature here, to which I shall return a little lower down, is that the draught which the wine-steward pours is specified to be nothing other than *himself*.

In a third passage, *Somn.* 2. 249, the imagery is more vivid yet. The Logos is here described as ὁ οἰνοχόος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ συμποσίαρχος, pouring cupfuls of true gladness into the intellect of the righteous man, and then, as at 183, himself actually becoming the drink that he pours (οὐ διαφέρων τοῦ πόματος, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἄκρατος ὢν), this drink being described as, among other things, τὸ γάνωμα¹¹ and τὸ χαρᾶς, τὸ

⁷ This translation, and that which follows, are Colson's, from his Loeb edition, with minor alterations.

⁸ For the concept of νηφάλιος μέθη, cf. *Opif.* 71; *Leg. All.* 3. 82; *Mos.* 1. 187; *Prob.* 13; always in the context of feasting and the dispensation of ἄκρατος. See H. Lewy, *Sobria Ebrietas* (Giessen, 1929).

⁹ For example *Fug.* 108–12; *Mos.* 2. 66–75. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* I, pp. 359–60.

¹⁰ διὸ καὶ Μίθρην Πέρσαι τὸν μεσίτην ὀνομάζουσιν. Plutarch portrays Mithra in this passage, in fact, as exercising priestly functions. Cf. R. Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 14–22.

¹¹ γάνωμα occurs also at *Plant.* 39, as 'the draught of unmixed wine' (γάνωμα ἄκρατον) which the follower of Moses may drain off at the banquet of God.

εὐφροσύνης ἀμβρόσιον. Without actually naming Ganymede, a thing which, as I have said, one cannot expect Philo to do, he could hardly make clearer the source of his imagery.

But if we grant that we have here an employment by Philo of an allegorization of Ganymede, two aspects of the situation are notable, if not troublesome. The first is that there is, so far as I know, no other surviving testimony to this allegory. The second is that the Ganymede myth is, after all, a rather disreputable one, such as one would think Philo would hesitate to attribute, even by suggestion, to the relationship between God and his Logos.

On the first question there is not much to be said. If Philo is the only surviving source for this allegory, then one can only recall that it is by no means the only instance in which he is our sole repository for a piece of Hellenistic lore. As to the second, it is possible that the allegorization was made palatable for Philo because it had actually been made some time before, and was by his time relatively well accepted, establishing thus a sanitizing filter between him and the original myth. One sign, perhaps, of such allegorizing is the circumstance that Ganymede had, by Hellenistic times at least, been identified by astronomers with the zodiacal sign of the water-carrier, and had thus assumed a role as cosmic pourer.¹²

But there is also a more exotic possibility which, however, I hesitate to mention, since the question of Iranian influences on Philo – and on Greek thought in general – is such treacherous ground. It is, nevertheless, a fact that in Avestan tradition the divine being Haoma is both an intoxicating liquor and the spirit which presides over and inhabits the liquor. Like the High Priest of *Somn.* 2. 185–9, this being seems to perform a demiurgic and mediating function in the universe, as indicated by his discourse with Zarathustra in the *Homa-Yasht*, where most of the blessings of human existence are attributed to him.¹³

In the unravelling of the sources of Philo's thought, nothing is simple. He is plainly in this case able to draw on imagery derived from the Old Testament, such as Pharaoh's chief wine-steward, and perhaps the banquet organized by Sophia for her followers at *Proverbs* 9:5 (though he never actually quotes the passage), but it is hard to deny, I think, that other influences are at work here as well – influences, however, which he would not wish to acknowledge explicitly. Whatever about Haoma or Mithra – identifications which I shall leave to bolder spirits than myself – Ganymede seems to stand before us, in the pages of Philo, as the Logos of God. If he has an advantage over Hermes or any other rival, it is, I have suggested, in his role as *pourer*, since this enables the Logos to be presented by Philo as a fountain. At *Spec. Leg.* 1. 303, for example, we find the Logos described as ἀέναος τῶν καλῶν πηγῇ, from which God rains down the virtues, 'a drink more immortalising than nectar'.¹⁴ Whether the allegorizing of Ganymede actually provoked the fountain-imagery so beloved of Philo – and later of the Neoplatonists – or vice versa, is not clear, but it is plain that, in Philo's case at least, they are closely connected.

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¹² *Homil. Clement.* 5. 17; *Ampelius* 2. 11; *Ps.-Eratosth. Catast.* 26, 30.

¹³ See R. C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi* (London, 1956), pp. 126–30.

¹⁴ cf. also *Sacr.* 64: ἡ πηγὴ τῆς σοφίας, ὁ θεός; *Cher.* 86; *Fug.* 198, commenting on *Gen.* 14:7, and *Jer.* 2:13. As the passage from Jeremiah serves to remind us, though, fountain-imagery as such is readily derivable from the OT.