

philosophy. The volume concludes with a section devoted to Philo's influence and significance.

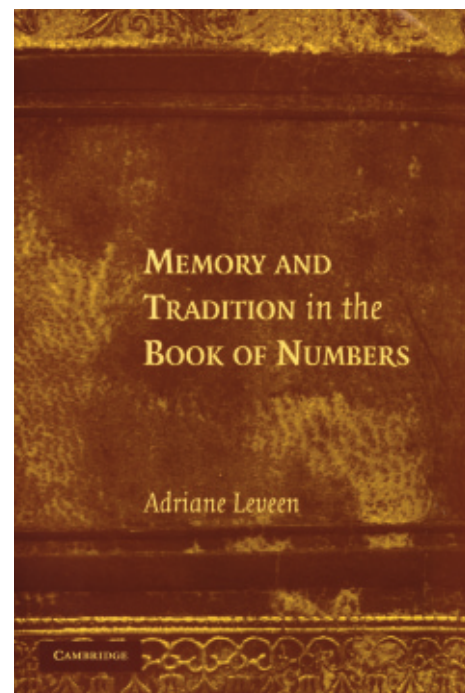
Philo of Alexandria (ca. 15 BCE – 45 CE) stands at the crossroads of three great civilizations of antiquity: the Judaic, the Greek, and the Christian. Philo's primary heritage was that of biblical Judaism, but in the form it had taken on in the Diaspora of the Hellenistic world. His chief literary medium was biblical exegesis, but he sought to interpret the Scriptures by reference to the most advanced and sophisticated systems of thought of the times, which were those of Greek philosophy. In theology and what was called 'physics,' the system of primary importance for Philo was that of Platonism, and in ethics that of Stoicism. However, Philo's attempt to assimilate biblical and Greek thought often finds closer parallels in the Christian world than in a Jewish or a pagan environment. Indeed, Philo came to be appreciated more by the later Christian Fathers than by the Rabbis or the Greek philosophers of the Roman imperial age. In view of his background and influence, the writings of Philo are of fundamental importance for the understanding of Judaism, for the history of Greek philosophy, and for the study of early Christianity.

Within the context of the history of Greek literature as well, Philo appears to have lived across the span of the eras in more than simply a chronological sense. For in his writings he assumes many guises and, in a manner of speaking, emerges as a representative of different epochs. At times he is a man of science or a practitioner of the technical disciplines such as grammar and advanced literary study as they had developed in Hellenistic times. At other times, his moralizing diatribes and rhetorical displays have much in common with the popular philosophical literature of the early imperial age. And finally, his Platonistic religiosity and focus on the quest for the transcendent

would appear to presage certain forms of spirituality that we encounter in later antiquity, in the Hermetic literature, in the Chaldean Oracles, and in Gnosticism. Of course, Philo's erudition was vast and he drew on an extraordinary array of sources. He knew not only secular Greek literature, but also owed much to a previous tradition of biblical exegesis, no doubt that of Greek-speaking Judaism, which he characterizes only in the most general of terms, without naming names. In fact, Philo's dependence on earlier authorities was such that some would study him, as A.D. Nock has put it, 'primarily as a source rather than as a man' (*Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* [1972], II, p. 559). Nevertheless, this circumstance alone cannot account for the great variety in the Philonic corpus. It must also be put down to the breadth of Philo's interests and horizons and to his versatility as a writer. His works represent a most interesting specimen of Greek literature.

Philo's bicultural heritage in Judaism and Hellenism, however, and even his proximity to Christian thought can make him a perplexing author to read. And the sheer bulk and variety of the Philonic corpus make it a difficult sea to navigate. Thus, the role for an up-to-date handbook of this sort. Of course, a handbook of moderate size cannot address all the aspects of Philo's works, nor can it be a substitute for reading those works directly, which, it may be acknowledged, is not always an easy or pleasant experience. But this *Companion* endeavors to supply some essential introductory information in a clear and unassuming format that can turn that experience into less of a struggle. While it is introductory, the *Companion* goes beyond the elementary level. The chapters are intended to provide not only a sense of recent progress in the scholarship on Philo, but also a certain vision of the topics under consideration. ■

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## Memory and Tradition in the Book of Numbers

Adriane Leveen, Cambridge University Press, 2008

In this book, Adriane Leveen offers an imaginative rereading of the fourth book of Moses. Leveen examines how the editors of Numbers crafted a narrative of the forty-year journey through the wilderness in order to shape the Israelite understanding of the past and influence the world-view of future generations. Leveen's book explores religious politics, the complexities of collective memory, and the literary strategies used by the editors of Numbers to convince the children of Israel to accept priestly rule. Leveen considers how this process took place in the face of the horrifying memory at the heart of the Book of Numbers: the death of an entire generation of Israelites in the wilderness, struck down before their children's eyes by divine decree.

As the site of oppression and of God's liberating acts, Egypt should obligate the people in the present to live a future life in accord with God's plans for them. This is the assumption of the first section of Numbers. They take unfamiliar steps forward in an unfamiliar terrain towards the one site worth possessing – the promised land. The path is dedicated to a new life as God, Moses, and the priests lead them.



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<b>Retreat:</b> . . . . .	<b>Going Forward:</b>
The Past . . . . .	The Future
The popular voice . . . . .	The voice of God and Moses
Egypt as the desired object . . . . .	The Promised Land
Abrogates obligations to God . . . . .	Under obligation to God
The familiar, old life . . . . .	An unfamiliar, new life of Israelite law an practice
Slavery . . . . .	Liberation
Egyptian delicacies . . . . .	Manna
Punishment . . . . .	Reward
Retracing of steps . . . . .	Reaching the borders of Canaan
Death in unmarked graves . . . . .	Life for the new generation

The food and water found on the way are the signs of Divine providence. God, the guide through the wilderness, is also the predominant speaker. The realm of this section is the ideal, as the people live up to the demands placed upon them.

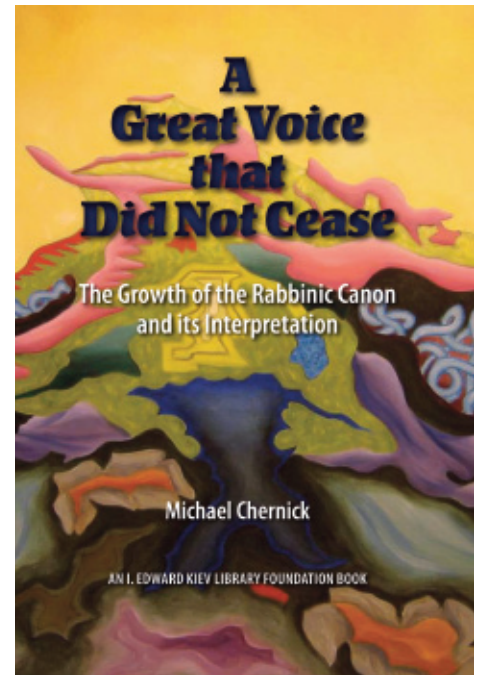
Yet Egypt renders God's aims in the present impossible. Egypt comes to represent a series of opposite images. Along the Egyptian axis are the voices of the people, through their complaints and the recounting of their old life. This is an axis of the concretely real and known: familiar food, familiar conditions and even a familiar relationship of ruler and oppressed. The people carry the vestiges of their lives in Egypt into the wilderness. To destroy Egypt, God must destroy the generation. Thus the axis of Egypt becomes the arena of death, as the people, now doomed to retrace their steps, end in unmarked graves in the Wilderness. This dichotomy is embedded in the larger narrative as illustrated by the chart above.

The two opposing series create an impassable divide between the Egyptian past and the promised future in the new Land. They also highlight the gap between an ideal, near abstract vision of what should be versus an unflinchingly honest depiction of how actual humans are likely to behave. Only a later hand, with access to both traditions, could organize the tales of the wilderness in order to develop and highlight those distinctions, preserving a record of the Wilderness Period as both ideal and its opposite, unrelentingly harsh and disappointing. Yet it does not stop there. As we will see, the editors of Numbers use those distinctions to creatively and strategically chart a way out of the wilderness...

The wilderness suggests a vista of wide open territory, free from unwelcome reminders of past lives and sorrows – a territory wonderfully situated for a newly forming, newly hopeful people. Recently liberated from oppression, in the wilderness Israel could shape itself into God's people, in the image offered by Moses and Aaron. They are close – very close – to accepting that vision, becoming that people. Overflowing with gifts for the tabernacle, contentedly following the pillars of fire and of smoke, listening to the sons of Aaron blow the trumpets. Suddenly, memories of their former lives, tastes and smells of Egyptian delicacies, haunt and overcome them. Cries and longings lead to rebellion and death. The rest of Numbers suggests that the visionary promise of its opening can only come into being by forcing an entire generation to watch the destruction of its elders, slowly but relentlessly over forty years. To give birth to new possibilities, Israel must reject its past. But such a rejection is exceedingly difficult, even after disappointment replaces desire. In the cries of Reuben and Gad Moses hears the futility of using the past at all. But they reassure him. They have in fact learned the lessons of their

parents. So too do the editors hear memories and longings that worry them. They too face the futility of relying on the past. Yet they reach the same conclusion as Moses. They accept the necessary and inevitable use of memory in fulfilling their most pressing agenda – shaping the story of the past in such a way as to lead the present audience forward into its future. ■

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**A Great Voice that Did Not Cease: The Growth of the Rabbinic Canon and Its Interpretation**

Michael Chernick, Hebrew Union College Press, 2009

Hermeneutics may be described as the development and study of theories of the interpretation and understanding of texts. They are essentially the lenses through which interpreters view the material they interpret. In this seminal study, Michael Chernick demonstrates how hermeneutical methods confronted the difficulties that arose for the Rabbis when various literary and logical problems appeared in scriptural texts and later in rabbinic texts. Given the Rabbis' theological, literary, and rhetorical concerns, these reading strategies were adopted to obviate the problems the texts presented.



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