

*The  
Cambridge Companion  
to*  
**PHILO**



EDITED BY  
**ADAM KAMESAR**

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
PHILO

The works of Philo of Alexandria, a slightly older contemporary of Jesus and Paul, constitute an essential source for the study of Judaism at the turn of the eras and of the rise of Christianity. They are also of extreme importance for understanding the Greek philosophy of the time, and they help to explain the onset of new forms of spirituality that would dominate the following centuries.

This handbook presents, in an unassuming format, an account of Philo's achievements. It contains a profile of his life and times, a systematic overview of his many writings, and survey chapters of the key features of his thought, as seen from the perspectives of Judaism and Greek philosophy. The volume concludes with chapters devoted to Philo's influence and significance.

Composed by an international team of experts, *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* gives readers a sense of the current state of scholarship and provides depth of vision in key areas of Philonic studies.

Adam Kamesar is Professor of Judeo-Hellenistic Literature at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.



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## THE WORKS OF PHILO: EDITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The standard modern edition of Philo's works in English translation, which also includes a facing Greek text, is that of F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker, and R. Marcus. It appeared in the Loeb Classical Library in ten volumes and two supplementary volumes between 1929 and 1962. All contributors to this *Companion* acknowledge their debt to this translation. Some have employed it when citing Philo directly, on occasion with some alterations, while others have provided their own translations.

The standard critical edition of Philo's works in the original Greek is that of L. Cohn and P. Wendland, which appeared in six volumes between 1896 and 1915. A valuable set of indices constitutes volume VII, which was prepared by H. Leisegang and was published in two parts in 1926 and 1930. All major modern editions of Philo, including that of Colson and Whitaker, are based on this one. Among such editions, those in German and in French are especially important, and the French edition also contains a facing Greek text. These two editions, published in multiple volumes over long periods, often contain extensive and valuable annotations. Full details of the editions, which are cited in abbreviated form in this *Companion*, are as follows:

- PCW      L. Cohn, P. Wendland, and S. Reiter (eds.), *Philonis Alexandrini Opera quae supersunt*, I–VII (Berlin 1896–1930)
- PAPM     R. Arnaldez, J. Pouilloux, C. Mondésert et al. (eds.), *Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie*, 1–36 (Paris 1961–1992)
- PCH      L. Cohn, I. Heinemann et al. (eds.), *Philo von Alexandria, Die Werke in deutscher Übersetzung*, I–VII (Breslau – Berlin 1909–1964)
- PLCL     F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker, and R. Marcus (eds.), *Philo*, I–X, Supplements I–II (Cambridge, MA 1929–1962)

There are also other important editions and commentaries of single works or groups of works. These are listed at the appropriate place in chapter 2.

Philo's works are usually cited by their Latin titles, sometimes in short form; for example, *De congressu* is the short form for *De congressu eruditionis gratia* (= *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*). There are also abbreviations for these Latin titles, which are often employed when specific references are given. The list of Philo's works, by alphabetical order of these abbreviations, is as follows:

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo (On Abraham)</i>
<i>Aet.</i>	<i>De aeternitate mundi (On the Eternity of the World)</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De agricultura (On Husbandry)</i>
<i>Anim.</i>	<i>De animalibus (On Animals)</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De cherubim (On the Cherubim)</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>De confusione linguarum (On the Confusion of Tongues)</i>
<i>Congr.</i>	<i>De congressu eruditionis gratia (On Mating with the Preliminary Studies)</i>
<i>Contempl.</i>	<i>De vita contemplativa (On the Contemplative Life)</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De decalogo (On the Decalogue)</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat (That the Worse Is Wont to Attack the Better)</i>
<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis (On the Unchangeableness of God)</i>
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De ebrietate (On Drunkenness)</i>
<i>Flacc.</i>	<i>In Flaccum (Flaccus)</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione (On Flight and Finding)</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De gigantibus (On the Giants)</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit (Who Is the Heir of Divine Things?)</i>
<i>Hypoth.</i>	<i>Hypothetica</i>
<i>Jos.</i>	<i>De Josepho (On Joseph)</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae (The Allegories of the Laws)</i>
<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium (Embassy to Gaius)</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami (On the Migration of Abraham)</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Mosis (On the Life of Moses)</i>
<i>Mut.</i>	<i>De mutatione nominum (On the Change of Names)</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi (On the Creation)</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De plantatione (On Noah's Work as a Planter)</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini (On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile)</i>
<i>Praem.</i>	<i>De praemiis et poenis (On Rewards and Punishments)</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Quod omnis probus liber sit (Every Good Man Is Free)</i>
<i>Prov.</i>	<i>De providentia (On Providence)</i>
<i>QE</i>	<i>Quaestiones in Exodum (Questions on Exodus)</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones in Genesim (Questions on Genesis)</i>

<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini (On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain)</i>
<i>Sobr.</i>	<i>De sobrietate (On Sobriety)</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis (On Dreams)</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus (On the Special Laws)</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	<i>De virtutibus (On the Virtues)</i>



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OTHER ANCIENT SOURCES: EDITIONS  
AND ABBREVIATIONS

The pseudepigraphic literature related to the Old Testament, including the *Letter of Aristeas*, as well as the fragments of the minor Judeo-Hellenistic authors, such as Aristobulus, are cited according to J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I-II (New York 1983-1985). Texts from Qumran and the *Damascus Document* are cited according to F. García Matinez and E.J.C. Tigchelaar (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, I-II (Leiden 1997-1998).

Books of the Bible are abbreviated as follows:

OLD TESTAMENT

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Neh	Nehemiah
Ps/Pss	Psalm(s)
Prov	Proverbs
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Zeph	Zephaniah

SEPTUAGINT (= LXX)

1-4 Macc	1-4 Maccabees
Sir	Sirach
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

NEW TESTAMENT

Matt	Matthew
Rom	Romans
1-2 Cor	1-2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1-2 Tim	1-2 Timothy
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1-2 Pet	1-2 Peter

Abbreviations of other ancient sources, such as Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the works of Greek and Latin writers, and rabbinic texts, follow P.H. Alexander et al. (eds.), *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody, MA 1999).

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ABBREVIATIONS OF PERIODICALS,  
REFERENCE WORKS, AND SERIES

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
CPJ	V.A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks (eds.), <i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i> , I–III (Cambridge, MA 1957–1964)
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GLAJJ	M. Stern (ed.), <i>Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism</i> , I–III (Jerusalem 1974–1984)
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HThR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JQR	<i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JThS	<i>The Journal of Theological Studies</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PRE	G. Wissowa et al. (eds.), <i>Paulys Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
PRSt	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
SBLSP	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SC	<i>Sources chrétiennes</i>
StPhAnn	<i>The Studia Philonica Annual</i>
StPhilo	<i>Studia Philonica</i>
SVF	H. von Arnim (ed.), <i>Stoicorum veterum fragmenta</i> , I–IV (Leipzig 1903–1924)
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>





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## INTRODUCTION BY ADAM KAMESAR

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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.

As just indicated, the structure of the volume is meant to be very straightforward: Part I: Life and Writings; Part II: Thought; and Part III: Influence and Significance. With any author, it is necessary to have some appreciation of his or her life and times. In the case of Philo, while we possess few details about him personally, there is a good deal of data concerning his family, social position, and historical setting. He played a key role in the events related to the violence between Greeks and Jews in Alexandria in 38 CE, and wrote about them in two surviving works. All of this material, to be reviewed in chapter 1, allows us to gain concrete insights into some of his positions and attitudes. The corpus of Philo's writings is especially large and complicated, and consequently may appear somewhat intimidating to the novice. Not only did Philo write in a variety of genres and for a variety of audiences, his writings have suffered some modifications and corruptions in the course of their transmission, in manuscript form, through the ages. This circumstance has led to further difficulties in understanding the structure and organization of the corpus, which seems to have been anything but haphazard. The survey in chapter 2 provides an introduction and a reasoned guide to the catalogue of Philo's writings. The majority of those writings, about three-fourths of the corpus, are dedicated to the exegesis of

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA 1972), II, p. 559.

Scripture. That is, for the most part, Philo does not set out his ideas in schematic treatises but proceeds according to the biblical text. His philosophy and religious beliefs emerge in the course of his exposition. Thus, the path to understanding Philo's thought must go through his biblical exegesis, because this is his primary mode of discourse. The objective of chapter 3 is to provide some background on Philo's approach to the Bible and on the basis and orientation of his exegesis, so that the reading of the exegetical works might prove less disconcerting.

Part II of the *Companion* is concerned with Philo's thought and its background. Chapter 4 is designed to provide a broad survey of Philo's biblical faith as understood in the setting of Second Temple or 'Middle' Judaism. There are a variety of contemporary sources that help us understand the Jewish context for Philo, and these include the deuterocanonical and pseudepigraphic works, the writings of Josephus, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. These sources often allow us to better appreciate the specific character of Philo's Jewish thought. In the view of some theorists, Judaism can be well described in terms of the threefold scheme, 'God, Torah, and Israel', and a close variation of this scheme provides the structure of chapter 4. The remaining two chapters in Part II are more in-depth treatments of the two chief spheres of Philo's thought as seen from the perspective of Greek philosophy. From the time of Xenocrates (396–314 BCE), it had been customary to divide philosophy into three branches: logic, physics, and ethics. In his treatise *Quod omnis probus liber sit*, § 80, where he is discussing the Essenes, Philo mentions these three parts of philosophy, and outlines the Essenes' attitude toward them. He indicates that they are completely unconcerned with logic, on the view that it is a kind of verbal sparring unnecessary for the attainment of virtue. With regard to physics, they focus only on the questions of God and creation, and disregard those parts of it that they consider to be beyond the grasp of man. To the ethical branch of philosophy, on the other hand, they devote intense study. This description of the primary interests of the Essenes could apply, with some nuancing, to Philo himself. Indeed, it is not improbable that he imposed his own perspective on them.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, chapters 5 and 6 of the *Companion* will cover, respectively, Philo's theology and his views on creation, and his ethics. In both of these chapters, full attention is given to the primary philosophical sources of Philo's thought, namely, Platonism and Stoicism.

Finally, Part III of the *Companion* is dedicated to Philo's influence and significance. As indicated above, while Philo is a figure worthy of study for his own sake, his writings are often read for the light they may

2 This perspective seems to have been derived from a source related to Ariston of Chios, *SVF* I.352.

shed on other areas of inquiry. In the present volume, those areas are defined by reference to literary *corpora*. Our contributors consider the relationship of the Philonic corpus to three other quite distinct *corpora* of ancient literature: the New Testament, the works of the Church Fathers, and the rabbinic writings. From a chronological perspective, the New Testament is the closest to Philo. While one perhaps cannot speak of a direct influence of Philo's written works on the New Testament authors, it is highly probable that Philo's ideas, possibly spread through the medium of the Hellenistic synagogues, did have some influence on the New Testament. In any case, it is beyond doubt that the Philonic corpus is one of the most important sources parallel to the New Testament and that it can illuminate many of its central ideas. The first chapter of Part III, chapter 7, will provide a convenient and systematic survey of some of the key points of contact between Philo and the New Testament. In the case of the Church Fathers, one may speak of an actual reception of Philo. Especially from the time of Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE) onward, the Christian writers adopted Philo almost as one of their own. It is through the Church Fathers, and especially through Origen and the 'Alexandrian' brand of exegesis and theology, that Philo exercised a massive influence on Western religious philosophy. For the Fathers also attempted to combine biblical revelation with Platonic philosophy, and it was therefore almost inevitable that they would take full advantage of the Philonic legacy. If Philo helps us understand patristic literature and thought, the reverse is also true. For the Fathers were Philo's readers in antiquity, and their understanding of his works has much to contribute to our own. Chapter 8 of the *Companion* illustrates in a detailed fashion how Philo's writings came to be a part of the early Christian tradition, and also looks at the question of why this was the case. Paradoxically, the rabbinic corpus stands at a greater distance from Philo. The Rabbis do not mention him at all, and any influence he may have exerted upon them seems to be indirect. Nevertheless, one should not suppose because of this that the works of Philo are not relevant for the understanding of rabbinic literature or vice versa. Quite the contrary. And one should be especially wary of the notion that the rabbinic writings are of too late a date to be of significance for the understanding of the Philonic corpus. While the contemporary critical approaches to the rabbinic writings are certainly in order, the fact remains that these writings preserve earlier traditions and, perhaps more importantly, modes of exegetical thinking. Indeed, the respective exegetical projects of Philo and the Rabbis have enough in common that the Philonic corpus and rabbinic literature may illuminate each other reciprocally. The great difficulties that

one sometimes encounters in attempting to understand either Philo or the Rabbis make that possibility a welcome circumstance. Such reciprocal illumination is based on points of similarity, and also on points of contrast. Chapter 9 of this *Companion* provides a survey of the entire question, both with regard to the general issues and with regard to some specific points of comparability.

The study of Philo is vibrant in many countries, as the list of contributors to the present volume attests, and is carried out in many languages. While there has been an effort to direct attention to bibliographical resources in English, there has also been reference, of necessity, to contributions in other languages.



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# I. Philo's Life and Writings



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