

Pieter W. van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus. The First Pogrom. Translation, Introduction and Commentary*. Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series 2. Leiden: Brill, 2003. xii + 277 pp. ISBN 90 04 13118 3.

This monograph is the second volume in the important new series of commentaries on the works of Philo of Alexandria. The series is meant to address scholars specializing in Philo as well as more precursory readers of select Philonic treatises. The editors, Gregory Sterling and David Runia, thus hope to provide a detailed commentary which will also place Philo into the broader context of other disciplines, such as Classical Studies and Christian theology. While the first volume fulfilled these aims well,¹ the present one is somewhat more disappointing. While the author applies a lot of learning to Philo's treatise, he does not sufficiently integrate the information. A commentator should present alternative views as objectively as possible, but should still maintain an independent perspective. Other views should be evaluated, not just reported. This delicate balance is often missed with the result that the commentary lacks the necessary clarity in order to guide the reader. Furthermore, fundamental issues arising from the text are thus not resolved, but different views are presented at different times.

First, van der Horst tends to quote other scholars to an excessive degree without integrating the results of their research into his overall commentary. The reader is sometimes left with the question why a particular work was adduced in the first place. For example, a quotation of ten lines from A. Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue* (Stockholm, 2001) receives only the following comment: 'This novel and provoking thesis cannot be discussed here, but it runs counter to the present consensus (which is not to say that it is wrong)' (148). It seems that a work which is quoted at such length deserves to be evaluated.

Secondly, on the level of content a similar lack of integration becomes visible. In the Introduction van der Horst acknowledges recent interpretations of Philo's work which stress the importance of the Egyptians as Philo's ultimate Other and point to the significance of Philo's overwhelmingly positive image of the Romans as benefactors and friends (17). While this recent scholarship is enthusiastically embraced, it has not been consistently applied. Other images about the conflict between Jews and Greeks keep resurfacing. On 148, for example, van der Horst speaks of Philo's hope that the Jews 'could live in peace with their Greek neighbours'. A similar line is followed in the explanation of the circumstances that led to the pogrom in Alexandria. Van der Horst gives ample space to this issue in his Introduction, favouring Tcherikover's interpretation which identifies specific political circumstances rather than anti-Semitism as a major factor (19-33). While Tcherikover, however, focused on the struggle for citizenship in which Jews and Egyptians saw each other as competitors, van der Horst stresses Jewish support for the Roman rise to power and ultimate conquest of Egypt (20-21). 'In the eyes of the Greeks', van der Horst explains, 'the Jews had furthered the decline of their city from a royal residence and head of a sovereign state to a mere provincial capital. Alexandria's glory was gone, and the Greeks felt humiliated by the Jews, a sentiment that was probably shared by the Egyptians of the city' (21). The visit of king Agrippa to Alexandria is highlighted in this context. Van der Horst stresses the provocation which it represented so that Greeks and Egyptians felt frustrated by 'these unbearable separatists' (33). Van der Horst concludes that the 'Alexandrian Jews sided with the Romans, sensing that they would gain privileges by that, which was true, but the price was high' (ibid.). These interpretations do not reflect Philo's perspective on the issues of his time. In addition, the Egyptian tradition of 'Judeophobia' should have been discussed more seriously. Peter Schäfer's recent monograph on the topic could have been helpful here.² Instead, van der Horst returns to the older notion of anti-history that the Egyptians supposedly wrote against the

¹ See my review in the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35, 2004, 336-39.

² *Judeophobia. Attitudes towards the Jews in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, 1997.

Biblical exodus story. These works, he explains, may have been provoked by the anti-Egyptian flavour of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The value of the present volume lies in two factors: 1) it provides a fresh translation that is far more readable than the old-fashioned English of the Loeb edition; 2) it provides a wealth of references to secondary literature.

Maren Niehoff

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Yuval Shahar, *Josephus Geographicus. The Classical Context of Geography in Josephus*. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 98. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004. 305 pp. ISBN 3 16 148256 5.

This is a case in which, in a way, the 'context' earns more attention than the 'text'. As his title makes clear, the author proposes to deal with 'the Classical context of geography in Josephus'; and indeed slightly more than two thirds of his work surveys some well-known tendencies in Greek and Latin geography, while 'Josephus Geographicus' enters the stage only in chapter 6 (190). Taking what seems a metaphor most appropriate for such a study, we might say it feels almost as if one must travel through several centuries and compositions — from Homer to Pliny — in order finally to reach the Promised Land. And this 'promised land' appears to be rather exotic in the primary sense of 'very different or unusual and striking'.

But first things first. The book is constructed in chronological order, presenting a survey of the role of geographical descriptions particularly in historiographical compositions. Within this chronological framework, Shahar highlights specific aspects relevant to each of the authors under inspection.

Chapter 1 surveys Greek approaches to geography first apparent in the Homeric epics and later transmitted into traditional historiographical writing through the mediation of geographical descriptions in 6th century BCE Ionian works. Shahar discusses three characteristics of Greek geographical descriptions as they appear mainly in the works of historians and Strabo. These are the geographical, political and cultural idea of the *oikoumene*; the emphasis put on non-Greek lands and people in deference to Greek regions of the world (*barbarike* being more elaborate than *Hellenike*); and linear methodology using natural lines as co-ordinates on a verbal map.

Shahar enumerates Homer's significant role as a fourth foundation alongside the three mentioned, but it seems that while the three others have to do with actual methodology and, in a way, disciplinary axioms, Homer's role falls into a different category perhaps of inspiration or model and thus should be defined separately from the three criteria. Moreover, while the three aspects are manifest in all Greek and Latin 'geographies',¹ Homer's inspiration is somewhat faded (Thucydides) or non-existent (Romans) in some of them.

Homer is definitely Strabo's great Muse, and the relationship between Strabo and Homer is indeed essential to the understanding of the scholarly orientation of the Augustan geographer.² Shahar notes that 'Homer ... is not merely a source of information, but is a methodological source

¹ I use 'geographies' in the sense of geographical descriptions and surveys although generally they appear in historiographical contexts. This distinction and interaction are thoroughly discussed and analysed in K. Clarke, *Between Geography and History. Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World*, Oxford 1999.

² The discussion could benefit also from three studies by A.M. Biraschi: 'Strabone e la difesa di Omero nei Prolegomena', in *Strabone. Contributi allo studio della personalità e dell'opera*, 1, ed. F. Prontera, Perugia 1984, 127-53; 'Strabone e Omero. Aspetti e problemi della tradizione omerica nel Peloponneso di Strabone', in *Strabone e la Grecia*, ed. A.M. Biraschi, Naples, 1994, 23-57; 'Omero e aspetti della tradizione omerica nei libri straboniani sull'Asia Minore', in *Strabone e l'Asia Minore*. eds. A.M. Biraschi and G. Salmeri, Naples, 2000, 45-72.