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# PHILO THE EPIC POET

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## INTRODUCTION

*Philo* was a Greek poet and writer, the Hellenistic Jewish author of an epic poem in Greek hexameters on the history of Jerusalem. Alexander Polyhistor (circa 105–35 BCE) quotes several passages of the poem and he is the source of the extracts in Eusebius.

The Greek text for the excerpts of *Praeparatio Evangelica*, is from, "*Eusebius: Eusebii Caesariensis Opera*," Volume 1-2. Dindorf, Ludwig, editor. Leipzig: Teubner, 1867; the English text is based on the translations by Edwin H. Gifford (1903), or, for text shown in blue, on that of James H. Charlesworth (1985). (There are 13 lines in the excerpts of poems that Gifford presents in Greek.)

## AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

It is impossible to be precise about the time and place of Philo's composition. Both Josephus and Clement of Alexandria mention a Philo in connection with the historians Demetrius and Eupolemus; this Philo may, however, be different from the epic poet. Philo certainly lived before Polyhistor's literary activity and his association of the poet with the historians of the 3<sup>rd</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> Centuries BCE suggests that Philo may have lived in the same period.

The place of Philo's composition is uncertain; although the interest in Jerusalem in the fragments of the poem may be indicative of a Palestinian provenance, Jews everywhere had the same high regard for the sacred city. The literary character of the poem makes it more likely that it was composed in a centre of Greek culture such as Alexandria.

## FRAGMENT 1

EUSEBIUS, PRAEPARATIO EVANGELICA, 9.20.1

ΦΙΛΩΝΟΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

<sup>1</sup> Φησὶ δὲ περὶ τούτου καὶ Φίλων ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ τῶν περὶ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα,

ἔκλυον ἀρχεγόνοισι τὸ μυρίον ὥς ποτε θεσμοῖς  
Ἀβραὰμ κλυτοηχὲς ὑπέρτερον ἅμματι δεσμῶν  
παμφαῆς πλήμμυρε, μεγαυχήτοισι λογισμοῖς,  
θειοφιλῇ θέλγητρα. λιπόντι γὰρ ἀγλὰν ἔρκος  
αἰνοφύτων, ἔκκαυμα βριήπυος αἰνετὸς ἰσχων,  
ἀθάνατον ποίησεν ἐὼν φάτιν, ἐξότε κείνου  
ἔκγονος αἰνογόνοιο πολύμνιον ἔλλαχε κῦδος,

καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς· οἷς μετ' ὀλίγα ἐπιφέρει

ἄρτιχερὸς θηκτοῖο ξιφηφόρον ἐντύνοντος  
λήμματι, καὶ σφαράγιο παρακλιδὸν ἀθροισθέντος,  
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν χεῖρεσσι κερασφόρον ὥπασε κριόν,

καὶ τὰ τούτοις ἐπόμενα.

PHILO ON THE SAME

<sup>1</sup> Philo also speaks of this in the first book of his work Concerning Jerusalem:

*"A thousand times have I heard in the ancient laws how once marvellous with the bonds' knot, O far-famed Abraham, resplendently did your God-beloved prayers abound in wondrous counsels. For when you left the beauteous garden of dread plants, the praiseworthy thunderer quenched the pyre and made his promise immortal. From that time forth the seed of that awesome born one have won far-hymned praise."*

And the rest, to which after a few lines he adds:

*"As mortal hand readied the sword with resolve, and crackling (wood) was gathered at the side, he brought into his hands a horned ram."*

and the rest that follows this.

## FRAGMENT 2

EUSEBIUS, PRAEPARATIO EVANGELICA, 9.24.1

ΦΙΛΩΝΟΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΤΟΥ ΙΩΣΗΦ· ΑΠΟ ΤΗΣ ΑΥΤΗΣ ΓΡΑΦΗΣ

<sup>1</sup> Μαρτυρεῖ δὲ ταῖς ἱεραῖς βίβλοις καὶ Φίλων ἐν τῇ ἰδ' τῶν περὶ  
Ἱεροσόλυμα, λέγων οὕτως

τοῖσιν ἔδος μακαριστὸν ὅλης μέγας ἔκτισεν ἄκτωρ  
ὑψιστος, καὶ πρόσθεν ἀφ' Ἀβραάμοιο καὶ Ἰσακ,  
Ἰακώβ εὐτέκνοιο τόκος Ἰωσήφ, ὃς ὀνείρων  
θεσπιστῆς, σκηπτοῦχος ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ θρόνοισι,  
δινεύσας λαθραῖα χρόνου πλημμυρίδι μοίρης,  
καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς. ταῦτα καὶ περὶ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ.

PHILO CONCERNING JOSEPH. FROM THIS SCRIPTURE

<sup>1</sup> Philo also, in his fourth book, Concerning Jerusalem, testifies  
to the holy Scriptures, speaking thus:

*"For them the mighty lord of all the land A happy home prepared  
Who from the ancient stock of Abraham and Isaac  
Sprang, and Jacob rich in sons from whom came Joseph  
The wise interpreter dreams, on Egypt's throne bears the sceptre  
Much tossed erewhile by waves of fickle fate."*

And so forth. So much concerning Joseph.

## FRAGMENT 3

EUSEBIUS, PRAEPARATIO EVANGELICA, 9.37.1-3

ΦΙΛΩΝΟΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΤΩΝ ΕΝ ΙΕΡΟΣΟΛΥΜΟΙΣ ΨΔΑΤΩΝ

<sup>1</sup> Φησὶ δὲ ὁ Φίλων ἐν τοῖς περὶ Ἱεροσολύμων κρήνην εἶναι, ταύτην δὲ ἐν μὲν τῷ χειμῶνι ξηραίνεσθαι, ἐν δὲ τῷ θέρει πληροῦσθαι. λέγει δὲ ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ οὕτως

νηχόμενος δ' ἐφύπερθε τὸ θαμβηέστατον ἄλλο  
δέρκηθρον σὺν αἰοιδᾷ μεγιστοῦχοιο λοετροῖς  
ρέυματος ἐμπίπλησι βαθὺν ῥόον ἐξανιείσης,

καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς. <sup>2</sup> οἷς πάλιν ὑποβάς περὶ τῆς πληρώσεως ἐπιλέγει

ρέϋμα γὰρ ὑψιφάεννον, ἐν ὑετίοις νιφετοῖσιν  
ιέμενον, πολυγηθές, ὑπὲρ πύργοισιν ὄροισι  
στρωφᾶται, καὶ ξηρὰ πέδω κεκονιμένα, κρήνης  
τηλεφαῆ δείκνυσιν ὑπέρτατα θάμβεα λαῶν,

καὶ τὰ τούτοις ἀκόλουθα.

<sup>3</sup> εἴτα πάλιν περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀρχιερέως κρήνης καὶ τῆς ἀποχετεύσεως διέξεισιν οὕτως

αἰπὺν δ' ἄρ' ἐκπτύουσι διὰ χθονὸς ὑδροχόοισι  
σωλῆνες,

καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τούτοις ἔπεται.

Τοσαῦτα μὲν δὴ τὰ ἀπὸ τῶν Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Πολυίστορος.

PHILO CONCERNING THE WATERS OF JERUSALEM

<sup>1</sup> Philo, too, says, in his Account of Jerusalem, that there is a fountain, and that it is dried up in winter, but becomes full in summer. And in his first Book he speaks thus:

*"Above the swimmers is the most wondrous sight, another pool. Its sound, with that of the ruler's baths, fills the deep channel of the stream as it exits."*

And so forth. <sup>2</sup> Again, lower down he adds to these a description of the refilling:

*"For, flashing from on high the joyous stream, flooded by Rain and snow, rolls swiftly under the neighbouring towers, And spreading over the dry and dusty ground, far-shining Shows the blessings of that wonder-working fount."*

And the rest that follows.

<sup>3</sup> Then again, concerning the High Priest's fountain and the canal that carries off the water, he proceeds as follows:

*"A headlong stream by channels underground The pipes pour forth."*

And all that follows this.

Thus far then our quotations from Alexander Polyhistor.