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DOI:

[doi:10.1017/S0075435820000556](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075435820000556)

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Taylor, J. (2020). Review: Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2018). Pp. xi, 323. ISBN 9780300175233 ; Francesca Calabi, Olivier Munnich, Gretchen Reydam-Schils et Emmanuele Vimercati (eds), *Pouvoir et puissances chez Philon d'Alexandrie (Monothéismes et philosophie 22; Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015)*. Pp. xiv, 388. ISBN 978-2-503-56637-5. . *JOURNAL OF ROMAN STUDIES*, 110, 225-227. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S0075435820000556>

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Review

MAREN R. NIEHOFF, *PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 323. ISBN 9780300175233. \$38.00.

FRANCESCA CALABI, OLIVIER MUNNICH, GRETCHEN REYDAMS-SCHILS and EMMANUELE VIMERCATI (EDS), *POUVOIR ET PUISSANCES CHEZ PHILON D'ALEXANDRIE* (Monothéismes et philosophie 22). Turnhout: Brepols, 2015. Pp. xiv + 388. ISBN 9782503566375. €65.00.

Maren R. Niehoff's 'intellectual biography' of Philo functions as an elegant entry into the mind of the Alexandrian philosopher. It also presents a new paradigm for understanding his work. Not only does N. give a sound introduction to Philo for those who may not know him well, but she deftly provides rich insights for those that do.

She traces the way Philo — hitherto deeply enmeshed in an inward, transcendental type of Platonic philosophical Judaism — had a shock awakening of sorts in the pogrom against the Jewish community in Alexandria at the time of the Roman governor Flaccus in 38 C.E. He was then no longer a reclusive philosopher but a public figure: he served as Jewish ambassador to Rome, on a lengthy mission eloquently described in the *Embassy to Gaius* (38–41 C.E.). From allegorical commentary, he turns to historiography. Philo's audience becomes Graeco-Roman, and he moves into a Roman mode, describing actuality and using Stoic concepts and strategies.

N. initially shows how Rome affected Philo in the immediate aftermath of his embassy, grounding her analysis in how Philo's new perspective plays out in historical works (Part I: chs 2–4). The later philosophical works are distinguished by reading Philo's writings in the light of his intellectual positions in the historical works, as are a series of treatises titled the *Exposition of the Law*, beginning with *On the Creation* (explored in Part II: chs 5–8). Only after demonstrating how closely Philo aligns his subjects with topics current in Rome in these later treatises (c. 40–49 C.E.) does she then move back in time (Part III: chs 9–12).

After this pivot, N. considers what went before: the very much more ahistorical, allegorical, philosophical works of the *Allegorical Commentary*, likely beginning with a lost work on Genesis 1 (see Appendix 2). This series of treatises was written in the years 10–35 C.E., in an introspective mode, with Philo's readers being the educated, allegorical interpreters among his own Jewish community. A reader may wish to dip forward to 'Appendix 1' in which the list of such works is shown.

This is a book written by someone who knows Philo very well. It is founded on a clear historical footing, and it helps us guard against seeing his works as part of a large generic Philo soup. Philo changed. He moved away from a spiritual Platonism to a somewhat more ethical Stoicism, and from a kind of contemplative philosophy to a practical variety, engaged in the world.

Within this new paradigm, N. does her job of exploring Philo intellectually, not only fathoming his mind but also contextualising him. Throughout, she incidentally notes his relevance for understanding Hellenism (e.g. the Second Sophistic, which Philo anticipates), Christianity and Judaism, particularly in her Epilogue (242–4). This is very important, because Philo today tends often not to find a place within academic curricula, whether Theology, Jewish Studies, Philosophy or Classics, and yet he is so highly relevant to all these disciplines. Interest in Philo is burgeoning, as N. notes (2), and one hopes that N.'s work may encourage Classics departments at least to consider appointing a dedicated Philonist.

One may wonder whether at times the shift from Platonism to Stoicism is presented slightly too strongly, since Philo always blended both (with Pythagoreanism as well), on the basis that Moses is the origin of all philosophy, but the shift in emphasis is clearly proven. Such is the success of N.'s work here that when we then read what has come before in Philonic studies, her insights prompt many reflections.

Pouvoir et puissances chez Philon d'Alexandrie addresses the question of *dynamis* in Philo's work. It is a strong collection of nineteen essays that grew out of a conference in 2011, and includes excellent contributions by leading Philo scholars, including N. herself. They all focus on the theme of both power (*pouvoir/potere*) and the divine powers (*puissances/potenze*), flowing on from the work of Cristina Termini.

N.'s perspective makes one ask new questions and see the relevance of certain observations. For example, in 'The Bible's First War: Philo's Interpretation of the Struggle for Power in Genesis 14' (111–27) we turn to a later work in the *Exposition of the Law* series, *On Abraham*, in the capable hands of Ellen Birnbaum. The fact that N. has now classified it as a work with a Roman audience in mind makes sense of Birnbaum's observation that Philo curiously has the senses working against the passions, in Stoic terms, unlike the Platonic view where the senses and passions work together against mind (121). Birnbaum's conclusion, that 'powers on earth and within the soul are not in themselves sufficient. Instead, to secure and maintain their power, what is required is the even mightier power of God' (125), sits perfectly with the audience N. construes.

Giulia Sfameni Gasparro takes up the theme of Philo and the power of Rome in the historical treatises in 'Filone e il potere di Roma: l'identità religiosa ebraica nell' *In Flaccum* e nella *Legatio ad Caium*' (141–58), showing how Philo presents Judaism by using a rich repertoire of literary and religious allusions from the wider Graeco-Roman world. Paralleling N.'s observations, Gasparro notes how Philo tends to endorse a euhemeristic approach to the Augustan Roman imperial cult, which could have functioned positively as a way to create a space of understanding between Judaism and paganism, in contrast to how it in fact took shape in its blasphemous form under Gaius.

Cristina Termini, the scholar whose work was so seminal to the theme of the collection, examines a text based on Deut. 17:14–20 in which Moses seems to be presented as a kind of Hellenistic king, in 'Il mio scettro è il libro dell'*Epinomide* (*Spec.* 4.164): monarchia divina e democrazia nello *speculum principis* di Filone di Alessandria' (175–90). Here the king submits to the Law in the form of the *Epinomis* he transcribes and carries (Deuteronomy, not a summary) with God as the sole true sovereign. The ruler is therefore subject to a democratic control, in the form of the law. One cannot help but wonder about Philo's Roman audience here also.

In 'La *dunamis* philonienne et l'idée de puissance dans la pensée romaine de son époque' (159–74), Carlos Lévy discusses the Latin concept of *potestas*, showing how the use of *potestas* in Middle Platonic (Greek, conceptual) terms is late in Roman philosophy; *potestas* is rather more about imperial power. Philo uses this concept but inserts it into a cosmological and theological perspective that ultimately emphasises the universal power of God. Many a Stoic philosopher would agree.

In "'Unsociable sociability': Philo on the Active and the Contemplative Life' (305–18), Gretchen Reydams-Schils rightly notes a difference in the way Joseph is depicted in *On Joseph*, as an example of the active (political) life, as opposed to *On Sleep* or *Questions and Answers on Genesis* (4:74), where the presentation is much more negative and Platonic, favouring the contemplative life. The point she makes of Philo's ultimate emphasis on the integrated Stoic life is well made. Again, we may now say: this is yet another example of how much Philo was changed by Rome.

Niehoff's own contribution, 'The Power of Ares in Philo's *Legatio*' (129–39), provides a prequel to what she would articulate fully in the book (and see 64–5), showing how in *Embassy* 112–13 Philo resourced Roman understandings of Mars in creating (via a rare Greek word) a fitting Stoic-style etymology for Ares, in order to critique Gaius in a way that would be understood by his Roman audience.

As for the other contributions, it is impossible here to provide a comprehensive treatment. In 'La puissance de Dieu chez Philon. Lexique et thématique' (1–35), Monique Alexandre explores the semantic field of words indicating 'power'. Manuel Alexandre Jr examines the 'Twofold Human Logos in Philo of Alexandria: The Power of Expressing Thought in Language' (36–59). This twofold Logos is a divine transcendent entity and one which acts as creative and ruling power in the universe paralleled in humanity by the reasoning capacity of the mind and the power to express that thought in language. Alexandre particularly explores the latter, the 'supreme power in man', and how it functions in rhetoric.

With the study of 'Puissance de la parole. Louer Dieu d'«une bouche que rien ne freine» (*Her.* 110), (61–77), Valéry Laurand examines the concept of *parrhesia*, free speech, from its Greek political origins, to find in Philo that in human terms it is problematic, and it should be ultimately the action of the (human) *logos*, in honouring God, as we see in *Who is the Heir* 110. Angela Maria Mazzanti,

in ‘La centralità del logos come componente antropologica in Filone di Alessandria. Natura e funzioni fra protologia e genesi della storia umana’ (79–96), returns to the study of the *logos* within humanity, showing how Philo connects the divine *Logos* with the human *logos*, the Logos with the divine Law, reflected in the ideal human *nomos*. Francesca Calabi, in ‘Il potere regale di Dio e le sue crepe in Filone di Alessandria’ (97–110), explores how Philo could assert that the world is governed by God, given human refusal to obey the divine, manifested not only in Eve, but in the story of the Tower of Babel.

There are several worthy articles that specifically deal with the metaphysical powers delineated by Philo, the titles of which speak for themselves: Marta Alesso, ‘La complessità della teoria Filoniana delle potenze nel *De Fuga et Inventione*’ (191–202); Jérôme Moreau, ‘Outil exégétique ou enseignement métaphysique? Les puissances de Dieu dans les *Quaestiones in Genesim* (4.1–19)’ (203–17); Olivier Munnich, ‘Les puissances divines dans les *Lois spéciales* de Philon d’Alexandrie’ (219–43), before we return to earthly matters in David T. Runia’s lucid study, ‘Philo of Alexandria on the Human Consequences of Divine Power’. Runia eschews the ‘top-down’ approach to the powers (looking at them in terms of Philo’s doctrine of God) to consider what it means to experience the divine powers, positively and negatively. Esther Starobinski-Safran, in ‘La doctrine philonienne des puissances et la doctrine kabbalistique des sefirot. Essai de comparaison’ (255–76), concludes that the Kabbalistic writings explicate what Philo suggests implicitly. Gregory E. Sterling, in ‘When Virtue is Impossible’ (277–91), importantly explores the problem of the ‘untreatable’ souls, effectively dead, in a universe under God’s control.

With ‘Filosofia e allegoria in Filone di Alessandria. Questioni di metodo’ (293–304), Roberto Radice defines how (Stoic) philosophy and allegorical biblical exegesis serve Philo’s presentation of the transcendent God with supreme powers, universal yet consistent with Jewish identity. Finally, we reach back in time, with ‘Filone e il concetto presocratico di “potenze”’ (318–34). Lucia Saudelli takes us from *On the Unchangeableness of God* 10 to Empedocles, *inter alia*, showing how Philo appropriated the Presocratic concept of ‘powers’ as qualities and/or forces of Nature, even though he does not cite such sources explicitly.

Both these books can be understood as addressing Philo’s perspectives on worldly power as well as his metaphysical insights into the power(s) of God. In a sense, N. somehow shows how these powers affected the man as he attempted to define them in his philosophy. That is quite an achievement.

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doi:10.1017/S0075435820000556