the map is once referred to in one of the chapters, which leaves the reader perplexed. This odd omission in an otherwise exceptionally error-free text could easily be rectified in a subsequent edition.

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This learned volume defines a challenging and important topic and investigates it from a fresh and original angle. Maren Niehoff looks at affinities between the way the Bible is handled in Hellenistic Jewish writing, so far as this can be ascertained, and the scholarship of the surrounding culture; that is to say, the Alexandrian civilization of the third century BCE to the first century CE, the culture that in its earliest manifestation brought to the West the very idea of scholarship. Embedding the Jews within this wider canvas – with complete justification – she sets herself the task of disentangling and explaining in terms of direct influence specific similarities on the level of textual study and exegesis between biblical and Homeric interpretation. This is a tricky enterprise for a number of reasons. On the one hand, scholarship, in the ancient world as today, tends in its nature to be a closed world and its methods and language are often technical and abstruse. Popular presentations do play a part in Niehoff’s study, but mainly as spin-offs from the high scholarship. On the other hand, academic reasoning generally rests upon the standard principles of logic and inference, so that to spot a kinship of method between disparate scholarly enterprises is not necessarily to demonstrate dependence. Niehoff presses hard on the commonality of arguments from inconsistency and implausibility, but these would seem to be near universal measures of the veracity or otherwise of a story.

All this becomes even trickier here because of a dearth of evidence on both sides. We have entirely lost key Hellenistic works, even the famous *Pinakes* of the Alexandrian poet-librarian Callimachus, widely regarded as the first library catalogue. A central figure in Niehoff’s intellectual gallery is Aristotle (at least in terms of his literary criticism), and yet we know more, perhaps, than she would admit about how this wide-ranging and foundational philosophical and scientific giant was received in Alexandria. As for the Jewish side, Philo is the only Alexandrian-Jewish exegete to have reached us in the shape of complete tracts rather than short fragments, and he comes near the end of the tradition, well into the Roman period. Parts 2 and 3 of Niehoff’s book are in fact largely about Philo, leaving just three chapters for the earlier literature, one of which is centred on a rather different kind of
prose narrative, the pseudonymous text we call the *Letter of Aristeas*. Philo’s predecessors as biblical interpreters wrote profusely in the various Greek genres of history, chronography, philosophy, epic poetry, tragedy and so on, but they survive only in the shape of citations (or apparent citations) that were incorporated into the Christian authors Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea, who of course were writing centuries later. In many cases, the Jewish-Greek material reached them only via an intermediary, the indefatigable late republican Roman collector of ethnographical data Alexander Polyhistor. Josephus’ *Antiquities* and *Against Apion* add some further items to the store. As a result, we know nothing of the social role or function of these Jewish works. Niehoff directs her attention particularly to the historian Demetrius and the philosopher Aristobulus. At one point, she concludes that the latter must have produced a popular version of his serious scholarly endeavours, but the evidence is simply not available. All these complications may explain why a project of this kind has not been taken on in a systematic fashion until now.

Niehoff brings to bear on the question a specific body of material, the manuscripts, papyri and excerptors that incorporate portions of the Homeric commentaries of the great Alexandrian scholars, sometimes at several removes, it should be said. Thus, of the multifarious scholarly endeavours of Ptolemaic Alexandria mapped in Peter Fraser’s compendious *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, and no doubt variously influential on the city’s Jewish culture, Niehoff focuses on the particular genre of textual recension (and to a lesser extent literary commentary). Allegorical readings play only a minor part, a welcome departure from the well-trodden areas of Philonic scholarship, as does exegesis of the moral or historical aspects of scripture, and of the *realia*. This purposeful demarcation goes together with a shift in emphasis from Plato as chief philosophical precursor, to Aristotle, who assumes considerable importance in Niehoff’s understanding.

The central criterion in textual criticism is the truth and correctness of what is found in the received version. If consistency or verisimilitude is lacking, the critical question arises of how to evaluate the text and how to handle it. This tight agenda gives Niehoff’s enquiry purchase. Yet it by no means frees her of dependence on conjecture. On the contrary, the works of her chief Alexandrian protagonist, the foundational Homeric commentator Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 216–144 BCE), are known to us entirely at second hand – a serious problem that might perhaps have been signalled more clearly by Niehoff. The same is true of Aristarchus’ illustrious forerunner, Zenodotus of Ephesus, the first head of the Alexandrian library, who flourished about a century earlier; he supposedly introduced the *obelus* (dagger) as a critical mark to indicate a textual corruption, and Niehoff tracks down in Aristobulus the Jewish philosopher the implied use of this device. Fragile as the evidence is, brilliant classical scholarship over several generations has opened up remarkable possibilities.
That this investigation could be conceived at all is thanks to such labours as Stephanie West’s edition of the Ptolemaic papyri of Homer; Erbse’s magisterial seven-volume edition of the scholia on the *Iliad*; and, most directly and crucially for this enterprise, the ongoing, meticulous reconstructions of Aristarchus by the young scholar Francesca Schironi.

One reason why it makes sense to look for precise connections between the Jewish and the Greek methods of handling a text is that the Jewish-Greek authors work entirely on and from their foundational, normative and ubiquitous text, the Torah (in the ‘old Greek’), while Homer’s authoritative role among the Greeks was not dissimilar. Both legacies necessitated and elicited a rich exegetical scholarship. How far the two master texts are comparable in status and function within their textual communities remains to my mind an open question. It is not the concern of the work under review, but Niehoff has more or less simultaneously edited a fine conference volume on *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters* (2012), and Margalit Finkelberg in particular addresses the topic there and elsewhere. In this book, the issue is not Homer as Bible, but rather Bible as Homer.

Niehoff has long stood out for her courage and inventiveness as a scholar, and here her modus operandi is indeed bold. She proceeds by means of the hypothetical reconstruction, from internal evidence, of lost precursors, debating partners and opponents to the Jewish-Greek writers she wants to understand. These reconstructed contexts supply perspective and meaning for statements that otherwise stand isolated, and the ‘colleagues’, whether of Demetrius or, later, of Philo, are the vital link between two worlds of discourse that are only apparently separate. In particular, the lost debates with Philo were, on Niehoff’s reconstruction, conducted according to the principles of Aristarchian textual criticism, and the opponents were especially wedded to his rather stringent criticism. So, when objections or possible alternative views are criticized within the Jewish texts, or simply registered, these are concretized and personalized by Niehoff. Indeed, the ghostly presence of ‘colleagues’, representing alternative schools, lurks wherever there is a report of disagreement. Thus, for example, those who are said to dismiss the historicity of the tower of Babel, in Philo’s *de Confusione Linguarum* 2–3, are attributed to a distinct trend in Alexandrian scholarship that was dedicated to examining a foundational text from within itself and to expose myths. Moreover, while scoffers denigrate the tower story as impossible, Philo saves it; in doing so, his method is paralleled by that of a fragmentary Homeric commentator who, in disagreement with Aristarchus, speaks up for the dubious Greek myth of the Aloeidai who piled Mount Pelion on Mount Ossa (indeed a nice parallel to the Babel story). Both the scholiast and Philo insist that the action in question, while censured in the text as mad and wicked, was a feasible feat and they stress its acceptance as such in the received tradition (pp. 79–81). The tissue of linked arguments is in
this case elaborate and complicated. At other times, the mere insistence in the biblical text on a particular, perhaps unexpected, point induces suspicion on Niehoff’s part that the opposite position was quite widely held by contemporaries or precursors, and such suspicion tends, through slippage in the writing, to harden into established fact. The divisions could be less than collegial: Philo applies to the critics some very strong terms, brandishing words such as ‘blame’, mōmos, and ‘calumny’, diabolē (the latter used nineteen times by Philo, equally of intra-Jewish interpretive quarrels and of Gentile slanders on Jews; p. 126). Some of these polemical types, Niehoff conjectures, might even have been adherents of Apion (p. 127). It seems that Philo, for his part, could be rude too: ‘if they did not offer positive solutions to problems of redundant style, Philo fervently dismissed them and their work’ (p. 117).

The hidden authors of the disagreements are, further, assigned to tendencies that are fairly consistently defined as conservative versus radical (e.g. p. 20, re Ezekiel ‘the tragedian’); and those categorizations too are then treated and discussed as though fully attested. These diverse ‘colleagues’ and opponents are major presences throughout Niehoff’s study, which indeed might be said to be dedicated to bringing them to life.

The biggest group come at the end of the story. They are Philo’s disputatious colleagues, represented in the fragment of de Confusione Linguarum on the Tower of Babel and in de Abrahamo as severe critics of Abraham. For Niehoff they are, none the less, ‘serious Jewish scholars’ of the Bible (p. 100), universalistic and outward-looking in their view of the world, and particularly well-versed in Greek literature. In relation to Philo’s Allegorical Commentary series, they are described as ‘Jews holding opposing views with whom he seeks dialogue’. In the Question and Answer series (surviving in Armenian and in incomplete form), they are apparently personally ridiculed by him, and it is argued that it is because a popular rather than a scholarly audience is here addressed that the engagement is less polite and more vituperative (pp. 154–5).

Philo’s final series of commentaries (according to the chronology of Philo’s works here followed), the Exposition of the Law, taken by Niehoff to have a non-Jewish audience, is less central to the study, for ‘he no longer works with the text’. She finds in those Philonic books an occasional return to problems of verisimilitude tackled elsewhere, while the residual allusions to colleagues suggest the possibility that questions congenial to the great philosopher had been raised by a new set of discussants and answered in ways that he might even have found convincing (e.g. at Spec. 1.214). At any rate, by this late stage in his career Philo has become, Niehoff stresses, ‘a rather authoritative teacher’. Moreover, the temper of the times is such that he needs to defend the Jews against current prejudices, in the face of a negative image presented by the anti-Semitic Alexandrian politician and Homeric scholar Apion (who figures only in passing in this book), as well as by others.
Niehoff pursues her lines of argument with impressive tenacity. She finds unexpected linkages, even occasionally on the verbal level where a term used by a Jewish-Greek writer echoes an Aristarchian technical term. Thus, *diaskeuazein*, to make an interpolation, is notably used in *Aristeas* to express the ban on adding anything to the Torah translation that has just been accomplished (p. 23), while the use of the less unusual concept *euprepes*, appropriate, ascribed by Philo to his polemical colleagues, is perhaps a less secure indicator of Aristarchan influence (pp. 127–8). Niehoff works extremely hard to prove her points, rarely detained by counter-arguments, but drilling down into the text in front of her with perhaps one or two *comparanda*. Inevitably, there is some sleight of hand. If the evidence on Demetrius the chronographer does not work into the theory, his fragments are divided between two different hypothetical authors of the same name (pp. 53–5).

Wording has sometimes to be forced to extract the desired meaning. For example, on child sacrifice (pp. 99–102), it is slightly misleading to suggest that the quarrelsome critics are said to ‘strongly disapprove’ of the act. Nor do they appear to be arguing for a more lenient take on Abraham’s action in the *akedah* (p. 109), but rather to be saying that Abraham’s act was nothing special and in fact was paralleled in all sorts of societies and contexts: it is not easy to see how an idea of historical progress can be extracted from this comparison. Again, reference to ‘detailed inquiry’ on the part of the impious critics of Moses hardly means that these critics have to be scholars engaged in ‘systematic scholarly inquiry’ (p. 127), while ‘being in the habit’ of reading something in a particular way does not have to imply engagement in the scholarly process of ‘regular exegetical activity’ (pp. 116–17).

A number of larger ideas and claims are offered in the course of the book that are likely to elicit lively discussion and in some cases controversy. It is crucial for Niehoff to posit a wide diversity of thought within Alexandrian Jewry. The Aristarchan connection requires that the climax of Jewish intellectual life in Alexandria be placed firmly in the mid-second century BCE (and this goes with acceptance of such a date for the *Letter of Aristeas*; p. 19). This gives a perfectly plausible picture, but some may feel that the exigencies of the argument tend to colour the historical picture.

When it comes to Philo, the leading theme is his conservatism vis-à-vis the current scriptural interpretation. He represents orthodoxy. The point is that when Philo meets possible objections he is meeting those of radical ‘colleagues’. By showing commonalities with Greek literature, one can show, it is claimed, that the colleagues had well-developed stances on key academic questions such as mythology versus truth, how to deal with an implausible or contradictory story, and the evolution of the Jewish religion as presented by Moses. The ‘quarrelsome critics who attack everything and prefer censure to praise’, in *de Abr.* 178, are in reality ‘judging the biblical heroes by their own criteria rather than idealizing them’ (p. 100). As to the content of the
disagreements, where Philo refers to a biblical text being criticized, behind this criticism we are encouraged to spot a proposal for emendation or *athetēsis* (deletion), determined by those two fundamental criteria for assessing the authenticity of a text – redundancy of expression and contradiction. The methodology is reconstructed in terms of Aristarchan textual criticism as we can suppose it to have proceeded (pp. 112–29). In other words, Niehoff is ascribing to these radical critics what would seem to be an extraordinary readiness to mess with the Torah text, truly remarkable for Jews even in a pre-canonical age of scriptural fluidity.

Even in the *Allegorical Commentary* series, Philo’s special contribution was, on this reading, to situate his allegorical approach within the critical scholarly methods of the age. Yet again judgements are controlled by the criteria of contradiction and verisimilitude. Only right at the end of his life, with the imperfectly preserved *Question and Answer* series (thus dated), when Philo has acquired a sympathetic audience and no longer needs to justify allegory, is he able to move in a world of other allegorists, speaking sometimes of alternative allegorical interpretations at times (e.g. on the tree of life, p. 156) and to abandon ‘the prevalent method of Homeric and earlier biblical scholarship’.

The unspoken assumptions behind Niehoff’s forceful reconstruction are worth spelling out. In the first place, it has to be supposed that educated Hellenized Jews would be acquainted with the fairly esoteric world of the Homeric recensions of Homer and with the scholarship of the select few in the Museum’s ‘gilded cage’. When laying out her agenda, Niehoff herself admits that ‘the academic methods developed and discussed at the Museum… remained without visible impact among the broader populations of Hellenistic Egypt.’ She none the less needs to suppose, and is content to assert, that Jews were part of Aristarchus’ original audiences at the Museum (pp. 13–14).

On the general cultural front, Niehoff is certain that Stoicism was less significant in Alexandria than has been thought, bolstering her claim that Aristotelianism was supremely important: ‘the Aristotelian tradition in Alexandria will emerge as more influential than has so far been recognized’ (p. 14). This Aristotle, however, is consistently understood as a literary critic. We are not told about much else in Aristotle’s vast contribution, whether to empirical studies, speculation or philosophy, to justify the larger assertion. While approaches are repeatedly dubbed ‘Aristotelian’, this Aristotle is featured essentially as the generator of the question-and-answer mode of discussion and as the defender of literary licence (to put it crudely) in the face of inflexible critiques based on the absence of veracity or verisimilitude. And this question-and-answer procedure is taken to be the key to Aristotelian poetics essentially on the basis of a single chapter (25) of the *Poetics*, together with fragments of the philosopher’s six-volume *Apothemata Homeric* (see p. 84; also one paragraph on p. 9, and more on p. 41). On the other hand, Stoic interpretation is
unquestioningly defined as allegorical and etymological.

This is a book written in an academic mode that presupposes a good deal of background knowledge in several areas and therefore does not make easy reading. There is little by way of introduction of the dramatis personae. The potted history of philosophy in the introduction (p. 15) offers highly compressed observations on the likes of Antiochus (of Ascalon) and on the development of Stoicism. All sorts of cultural products make bit-part appearances with hardly any introduction or explanation, for example the Derveny papyrus (*sic*; p. 63).

A more coherent introductory presentation and contextualization of the book’s main subject, the Alexandrian critics and their interpretative methods, would have been particularly welcome. As to their specific manoeuvres in textual criticism, the explanation is divided between chapters 2, 4 (p. 112 n.1) and 7, leading to some repetition, especially when the same techniques are discussed anew in connection with Philo. It would also have been helpful to have laid out in front of the reader texts such as the mythological anecdotes analysed in chapter 5, both to facilitate comprehension and to enable each to make up his or her own mind. A small irritation is that many cross-references in the footnotes are so unspecific that following them up becomes a major chore.

I want to conclude, however, on a positive note. In spite of some qualifications, this energetic volume drives home effectively and emphatically a number of points that we would do well to keep in mind. There can be little doubt, overall, that Jewish-Greek Bible-based literature developed in parallel with Alexandrian culture and that in its scholarly dimensions it is not unrelated to Alexandrian scholarship. Moreover, in general, we must accept that there existed in Alexandria a community of Jewish readers, interpreters and critics of Philo, as well as of certain of his predecessors: Philo cannot simply have been debating with himself and anticipating objections that he himself worried about. There were surely also to be found within Jewish Alexandria critics of the biblical narrative who found parts of it ridiculous, argued against it, and were quite prepared to be condemned as ‘impious’. These rationalists, above all, must have responded to Alexandrian thought and they would have been aware of the commentators on Homer, some of whose sceptical approaches were not dissimilar to their own. Radical treatment of a canonical text was evidently an option, but this was not to Philo’s taste.

Thus far at least, we can readily follow Niehoff. And we can also say, without hesitation, that to have put flesh on the dry bones of two great, interlocking literatures, to have created a succession of intricate scenarios of their possible interaction out of deeply intractable material and on complicated territory, is a fine achievement and a significant contribution to our understanding.

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