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Hiding One's Tolerance: Cyril of Alexandria's Use of Philo

Introduction

Cyril of Alexandria (c. 378–444) lived in times when it was beginning to be difficult and even dangerous to adhere to some other creed and cult than orthodox Christianity in the Roman empire.¹ The first Christian 'heretic' to be executed by Christian rulers, Priscillian of Avila, met his death in 386.² The emperor Theodosius I outlawed all 'pagan' cults in 392, and Christian monks murdered the famous philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria in 415.³

The one in Alexandria seems to have been regaining its earlier vitality by the turn of the fifth century, but then the legal position of the Jews started to erode.⁴ Judaism began to be referred to as a *superstitio* instead of a *religio* by 416, and not only temples but synagogues too began to be attacked, and although this was outlawed, a prohibition against repairing and constructing synagogues was put in place in 423.⁵

The paradox at the centre of this essay is that, despite his own strong anti-Judaism, Cyril, bishop of Alexandria from 412 until his death, stood firmly in the Platonically oriented Alexandrian theological tradition that owed so much to a Jew, Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – c. 50 CE). It is my main thesis that Cyril, in spite of never mentioning Philo, very probably both used his works and was aware of his Jewishness. Although Cyril had great difficulties tolerating the contemporary Jews, he had to face – and conceal as best as he could – the fact that he had a theological debt to Philo. He had to hide his tolerance of him.

The structure of the argument is as follows: After an overview of Cyril's attitude towards Judaism, I take a look at those Jewish sources besides the Old Testament that Cyril does acknowledge using. Then, a very brief history of the utilization of Philo's ideas among the Alexandrian Christian thinkers up to Cyril is sketched. I then move on to discussing what evidence there is concerning Cyril's knowledge of and direct dependence on Philo. Lastly, conclusions are drawn and the need for further research discussed.

Cyril on Contemporary Jews and the Jewish Law

Like many other early Christian authors, Cyril was a profoundly anti-Jewish theologian.⁶ The change of the official mood with regard to Judaism in the early fifth century suited very well his theological concerns about the Jews, but the downgrading seems to have been too modest for him. Soon after becoming bishop in 412 Cyril's anti-Jewish actions went beyond what the law permitted. A Jewish-Christian conflict turned

¹ I thank David T. Runia and the anonymous peer reviewer for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

² Chadwick, *Priscillian*.

³ Cyril himself may have had something to do with the lynching of Hypatia, but there is no hard evidence (Haas, *Alexandria*, 307–14; Russell, *Cyril*, 208).

⁴ Wilken, *Mind*, 50; Haas, *Alexandria*, 113–16.

⁵ Russell, *Cyril*, 12.

⁶ According to Wilken, *Mind*, x, Cyril's 'attitude toward Jews borders on the irrational [...] [he] had little but contempt for the Jews.' According to Kerrigan, '[t]here is scarcely a page on which he does not lash the Jews for their infidelity to God; he never fails to exploit the slightest allusion susceptible of being twisted into a description of their hostility to Christ and his Church' (*Interpreter*, 385).

violent, and Cyril took the lead in confiscating the synagogues for the church and let the mob drive the Jews out of their homes and pillage their property.⁷ The prefect Orestes, from whom the Jews may have expected help, was unable to maintain law and order.⁸ There is evidence of Cyril being criticized for insulting (λοιδορία) the Jews; at least he defends himself against such a charge in his *Easter letter* for the year 416 (*Epistula paschalis* 4.4.22–23).

For Cyril's theology, the fact that there still *were* Jews was 'a standing reproach'.⁹ For him, the recognition of Jesus as the saviour and the Old Testament went hand in hand, and since the Jews failed to do the former, they could not lay claim to the latter.¹⁰ From Cyril's viewpoint, the correct, 'spiritual' reading of the scriptures meant a specifically *Christological* reading, whereas literal meaning was attributed to Judaism (see below). Yet not only allegorical exegesis but also linking it with the basic dualism of the Platonic worldview, as Cyril does, go back to Philo – a Jew.¹¹ The two-level model itself is explicitly embraced by Cyril who quotes Plato's classic statement in *Timaeus* 27d–28a of that which always *is*, having no genesis, and that which never is, being in the state of continual *becoming*, and declares these to refer to God and the creation (*Contra Julianum* 1.30.11–22). He frequently uses the standard Platonist vocabulary of intelligible (τὰ νοητά) and sense-perceptible things (τὰ αἰσθητά), e.g., 'We will reckon the sense-perceptible manna to be a type of the intelligible. And the intelligible manna signifies to us Christ himself, whereas the sense-perceptible one, at any rate, indicates the earthlier discipline of the law' (*In Joannem* 1.463.10–13).¹² The lower level is thus that of history, sense objects, Mosaic legislation – and of the Jews! –, the higher, of the mystery of Christ and the intelligible realm.

Cyril's basic attitude towards the Jewish law can be expressed using Paul's words in Gal 3:24: 'the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came', paraphrased and elaborated on by Cyril in *Commentary on Isaiah* 70.960.48–54.¹³ Cyril's attitude towards circumcision is a good example. For example, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (here exegesis of 1:13), Cyril writes, 'we understand our spiritual circumcision (τὴν ἐν πνεύματι [...] περιτομήν) to have been prefigured originally in their physical version' (*In Joannem* 1.135.25).¹⁴ Cyril continues later (*In Joannem* 1.628 ff. on John 7:22–23), after discussing Gen 17:9–14 and Rom 4:11,

For wishing to unteach the Jews their delight in glorying in the flesh (Gal 6:13), he writes again: 'For a Jew is not (a Jew) visibly, nor is circumcision visible in the flesh. Instead, (a Jew is) he who is a Jew in concealment, and circumcision (is) of the heart, in spirit (and) not in letter. The praise for it

⁷ See Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.13 and Wilken, *Mind*, 54–57; Russell, *Cyril*, 7–8; Haas, *Alexandria*, 299–304.

⁸ There had been an extent of mutual support between the Jews and the Alexandrian authorities in the 4th and early 5th century (Russell, *Cyril*, 7–8).

⁹ As described by Russell, 14.

¹⁰ Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, 177; Wilken, *Mind*, 16.

¹¹ Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, 28, 125–31.

¹² My tr. for εἰς τύπον τοῦ μάννα τοῦ νοητοῦ τὸ αἰσθητὸν λογιούμεθα. καὶ τὸ μὲν μάννα τὸ νοητὸν αὐτὸν ἡμῖν κατασημαίνει τὸν Χριστὸν, τὴν δὲ γε παχυτέραν τοῦ νόμου παιδείαν τὸ αἰσθητὸν ὑπαινίττεται.

¹³ Tr. NRSV as all quotations from the New Testament if not otherwise indicated.

¹⁴ Tr. P.E. Pusey like for all quotations from *In Joannem* 1 if not otherwise indicated.

(comes) not from humans but from God' (Rom 2:28–29).¹⁵ Does he not hereby persuade them to [...] conceive of [circumcision] as something greater and spiritual? (*In Joannem* 1.629.30–630.10)

Cyril comments on the circumcision of Jesus (Luke 2:21–24) in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. In addition to the fact that the rite indicated Jesus's Jewish lineage and signified baptism he brings up a further point:

And, thirdly, it is the symbol of the faithful when established in grace, who cut away and mortify the tumultuous risings of carnal pleasures and passions by the sharp surgery of the logos of the faith, and by ascetic labours (οἱ τῶν σαρκικῶν ἡδονῶν καὶ παθῶν τὰς ἐπαναστάσεις τῷ τμητικῷ τῆς πίστεως λόγῳ καὶ πόνοις ἀσκητικοῖς ἐκτέμνουσι καὶ ἀπονεκροῦσιν); not cutting the body, but purifying the heart, and being circumcised in the spirit, and not in the letter. Their praise, as the divine Paul testifies, needs not the sentence of any human tribunal, but depends upon the decree from above. (*In Lucam* 72.500.13–22)¹⁶

These representative examples contain clear and explicit presence of Pauline supersessionist ideas of circumcision in Cyril. However, Paul's views do not explain the literally 'ascetic' twist Cyril here and in some other texts gives to the symbolic meaning of the rite. The allegorization of circumcision as cutting away pleasure and passion comes ultimately from Philo.¹⁷ If Cyril was aware of this, he had a problem. Philo could not be fitted into his dichotomy of Jewish literalness vs. Christian spirituality, a fact that, if recognized, would have undermined the case for not tolerating anything Jewish. What is clear is that Cyril is drawing on the Alexandrian exegetical tradition. Whether there is specific evidence for Cyril's direct dependence on Philo is a question to which I will return below.

Cyril's Explicit Use of Jewish Sources

Cyril mentions the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37 – c. 100) by name twelve times. On one occasion, Cyril explicitly reveals his awareness of Josephus's Jewishness (*Contra Julianum* 6.30) and yet (in an earlier work) calls him 'eminent and wise' (*Commentarius in xii prophetas minores* 2.455.19).¹⁸ Importantly, Cyril only utilizes Josephus as a source for historical information. Being posterior to Jesus, Josephus could have been accused of not accepting him as the Messiah, had his theological views been discussed.¹⁹

¹⁵ My tr. of the verses from Rom, οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐν σαρκὶ περιτομή, ἀλλ' ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαῖος, καὶ περιτομή καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι, οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ.

¹⁶ Tr. Payne Smith.

¹⁷ See below.

¹⁸ On Josephus in Cyril, see Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, 308–9.

¹⁹ The following comparison of Josephus and Philo by Rogers is worth noting: 'Had Philo been used [by Early Christian authors] primarily as a source of Hebrew history or of Judaism at the time of Jesus, as Josephus was, he never would have been "converted" [i.e., adopted in the Christian tradition]. As it is, Philo's biblical exegesis rarely contrasts with early Christian doctrines and his allegorism is specifically at odds with the Christian construal of "Jewish" interpretation as biblical literalism.' (*Didymus*, 34).

Another thing to note is Cyril's use of exegetical 'Hebrew traditions' ('Εβραίων παράδοσεις) or 'treatises' (ἐκδόσεις).²⁰ It is striking that Cyril not only openly uses but also commends these. For example: 'But I think that for a more accurate interpretation of what was said above it is necessary to say this too: Hebrews say – thus (we have) again the traditional explanation – that when Nebuchadnezzar had pillaged both Judaea and all the other lands [...] ' (*Commentarius in xii prophetas minores* 2.110.6–9).²¹

These traditions – in many cases taken from the Targums – were mediated to Cyril by Jerome, Eusebius and Origen.²² Cyril seems to have regarded them as relatively ancient, because he always says they are 'of the Hebrews' – never 'of the Jews', which is the term he uses of his contemporaries. For comparison: Paul describes himself as a Hebrew in Phil 3:5, a verse Cyril invokes against a hypothetical Jewish argument that Paul belongs to the Christians and not the Jews (*Epistula paschalis* 4.5.47–48). Hence, the term 'Hebrew' seems to be for Cyril a positive reference to the more distant past, unlike 'Jew'.²³ This could be the explanation for why Cyril could present the Hebrew traditions in a positive light – apparently without the fear of (being suspected of) extending any kind of recognition to contemporary Jews.

Philo in the Alexandrian Theological Tradition

To contextualize the task of separating, in Cyril, the general Philonic tradition from specific influences, it is warranted to include a brief description of the extent and ways of the utilization of Philo's exegetical and theological ideas among Christian thinkers associated with Alexandria from the late 2nd century up until Cyril's time.²⁴ The first Christian author to explicitly and extensively use Philo's writings is Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215). Although Clement takes over many exegetical themes and theological ideas from Philo in the almost 300 passages in the *Stromateis* alone where he uses him, he only mentions Philo's name four times, calling him twice 'the Pythagorean' and never mentioning his Jewishness.

Of the a little more than a hundred places where Origen's (c. 185 – 254) utilization of his Jewish predecessor is clearest, 80 per cent deal with exegesis or allegory, the rest being concerned with theological and philosophical themes. But in Origen, too, there are only three instances of Philo's name. Origen expresses his appreciation but does not explicitly state that Philo was a Jew, although this can be taken as implied through the mentions of his having written about the law of Moses (*In Matthaei* 15.3,

²⁰ On Cyril's use of these traditions, see Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, 309–22; Abel, 'Parallélisme'.

²¹ My tr. for Χρῆναι δὲ οἶμαι πρὸς διασάφησιν τῶν προειρημένων ἀκριβεστέραν κακεῖνο εἰπεῖν. Ἑβραῖοί φασιν· ὡς ἐκ παραδόσεως δὲ πάλιν ὁ λόγος· ὅτι πορθήσας τήν τε Ἰουδαίαν καὶ ἀπάσας δὲ τὰς ἄλλας χώρας ὁ Ναβουχοδονόσορ [...]

²² See Kerrigan's conclusions in *Interpreter*, 319–22. As for Cyril's ability to acquaint himself with the writings of Jerome, who wrote in Latin, Russell (*Cyril*, 71) argues that in Alexandria it would not have been difficult to have (portions of) his works translated into Greek.

²³ The situation was similar among Christian authors more generally, although 'Jew' too could be used without any prejudice; see the illuminating discussion in Runia, *Church Fathers*, 39–45. Philo as well seems to make a distinction between Jew and Hebrew. For instance, he calls the translators of the LXX Hebrews (*Mos.* 2.32), whereas the end result was still in Philo's time celebrated annually by the Jews (and others, 2.41). In *Legat.* 194 Philo clearly includes all contemporary Jews under the term Ἰουδαῖοι.

²⁴ For a recent overview of Philo's connection with Alexandrian scholastic tradition, see Rogers, *Didymus*, 10–16, 25–48; see also Runia, *Christian Literature*; Runia, *Church Fathers*; Runia, 'Patristic Tradition'; van den Hoek, *Clement*; van den Hoek, 'Philo's Influence', and the references to research literature in all these works on which the following is based. On the probable knowledge of Philo on the part of the earlier, Valentinian Christians, see Runia, *Christian Literature*, 119–31; Auvinen, 'Valentinians'.

Contra Celsum 4.51). Origen took his copies of Philo's treatises with him when he moved to Caesarea, where there is proof of their presence in the episcopal library at the turn of the fourth century. Through Origen, they also ended up in the hands of Eusebius of Caesarea (265 – 340) in whose writings Philo's name appears more often than in any other's, around twenty.²⁵ Eusebius sees no reason to abstain from mentioning that Philo was 'Hebrew'.²⁶ He never calls Philo a 'Jew'. He relates that Philo met Peter in Rome, and he is the first author to allege that Philo's *De vita contemplativa* is a description of the life of an early *Christian* monastic community (*HE* 2.17). The latter contributed to Philo's admission to the Christian 'hall of fame' and probably to the legends of Philo as a Christian, even a bishop.²⁷ Jerome explicitly justifies his inclusion of Philo 'the Jew' ('Philo Judaeus') in his *De viris illustribus* with Eusebius's (whom he does not mention in this context) claim.²⁸

Philo kept on being read in Alexandria too. There is reason to see not only some Origenian but also certain Philonic ideas behind the teachings of the presbyter Arius (256 – 336).²⁹ Yet the fierce opponent of both the Arians and the Jews, the Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 298 – 373), nowhere in his polemical writings turns the utilization of Philo against Arius. Rogers says about Athanasius, 'It would not be surprising if he in fact conscientiously attempted to discard whatever Philonism he may have known, even if he could not escape it entirely.'³⁰ This is very relevant in the context of Cyril too. What Philonism these bishops could not avoid they had to tolerate. The avoidance was made difficult by the fact that what had begun to emerge was a theological, especially exegetical, tradition 'in which Platonism and Philonism [were] so thoroughly integrated that characteristic themes, terms, and language appear in nearly every other sentence.'³¹ Opting out of all Philonic influence was no longer possible without a radical break with the past.

The Arian controversy did not yet lead to widespread condemnation of Origen, whose legacy was cherished by 'the last great teacher' of the Alexandrian tradition, Didymus the Blind (c. 313 – c. 398).³² Didymus, appointed head of the Alexandrian catechetical school by Athanasius (who says nothing of Philo), mentions Philo with an appreciative tone nine times, more often than any other non-biblical name.³³ Again, there is no mention of Philo being a Jew (or a Hebrew). The number of passages where

²⁵ See the list in Runia, 'Patristic Tradition', 278–79 which excludes some of the merely passing references.

²⁶ See *PE* 1.9.20, 7.13.7, 7.17.4, 7.20.9, 11.14.10, 11.15.7, 11.23.12; *HE* 2.4.2.

²⁷ For references, see Runia, 'Patristic Tradition', 283.

²⁸ 'Philo the Jew, an Alexandrian of the priestly class, is placed by us among the ecclesiastical writers on the ground that, writing a book concerning the first church of Mark the evangelist at Alexandria, he writes to our praise' (*Vir. ill.* 11, trans. Richardson).

²⁹ Arius can in fact be characterized as 'a more traditional Alexandrian than the "orthodox" leaders who condemned him' (Rogers, *Didymus*, 38).

³⁰ Rogers, *Didymus*, 39.

³¹ Runia, *Christian Literature*, 243. Runia says this about the tradition in which Gregory of Nazianzen (c. 319 – 390) stood. Milner speaks, without mentioning Philo, of 'the growing awareness of the previous tradition of biblical commentary, which had [in Cyril's time] developed so far as to call into question further exposition' ('Treatment', 93).

³² The characterization comes from Runia, *Christian Literature*, 197.

³³ Rogers, *Didymus*, 9.

Philonic influence can be detected comes close to 300 in Didymus's Genesis commentary alone.³⁴ Soon after the death of Didymus, the Origenian controversy broke out. Importantly, it became clear that being charged with Origenism could be dangerous, even life-threatening. Cyril's uncle and predecessor as bishop, Theophilus (d. 412, bishop since 385, no references to Philo), was forced to anathematize Origen by desert monks who had come to the city enraged by the Origenian-style condemnation of anthropomorphism in the Bishop's Easter letter for the year 399.³⁵

It is only Isidore of Pelusium (365 – 435), who was probably educated in Alexandria, who explicitly mentions Philo's Jewishness in two of his four direct references to him.³⁶ It may be significant that in the two letters where Philo is introduced as a Jew, he is used precisely *as a Jew* in a theological argument against contemporary Jews – an avenue that, in principle, stood open for Cyril as well. In *Ep.* 2.143, when discussing Philo's exegesis of Gen 9:6 ('in the image of God I made the human being') Isidore twice says Philo came 'into conflict with his own religion' and approached the Christian concept of Trinity when he spoke of the Logos as 'second'.³⁷ Even though Philo 'fail[ed] to reach perfection' with his Logos doctrine, 'nevertheless he did gain a conception of another person'.³⁸ Philo is favourably compared with 'the uneducated teachers of the Jews' who hold fast to 'speaking about God [as] a single person'.

I then come to Cyril. He does not reproduce Eusebius's theory regarding the *De vita contemplativa*, and he also ignores the view, passed on by Jerome in his preface to the Latin translation of Wisdom of Solomon, that some consider Philo to be the author of that book (PL 28.1308A). He opts for the traditional attribution to Solomon (e.g., *In Joannem* 2.500.27, *In Lucam* 72.828.28).

Cyril uses Philonic language and concepts, but this need not indicate anything else than adherence to the Alexandrian tradition. For instance, although Cyril adopts the Philonic notion of the *death of the soul* declaring it to be the 'true' death as opposed to the 'common' and 'natural' in very much the same way as Philo does, there are in (ps.-)Origen and Eusebius parallels that are even closer to Cyril.³⁹ Likewise, Cyril uses several of the few dozen so-called *verba philonica* (a term introduced by Runia to denote words coined by Philo that appear in early Christian writers dependent on him), but in none of the cases is he the first

³⁴ Ibid., 209. For his analysis of Didymus's direct references to Philo, see *ibid.*, 75–118.

³⁵ O'Keefe, 'Introduction', 8–13; Haas, *Alexandria*, 263–64.

³⁶ In addition, Isidore utilizes Philo anonymously in fourteen other letters in his corpus of 2000 epistles. The two where Philo is brought in as a Jew are 2.143 and 3.19. Additionally, he is mentioned in 2.270 and 3.81. In the TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/>) the work number is 2741.003. For other allusions to Philo by Isidore identified by scholars, see Runia, *Christian Literature*, 205 n. 112.

³⁷ Runia, *Church Fathers*, 164 is probably right in saying that this is a reference to QG 2.62, where Philo asks, 'Why does (Scripture) say, as if (speaking) of another God, (ὡς περὶ ἑτέρου θεοῦ) "in the image of God He made the human being" and not "in His own image"?' Philo's answer runs, in part, that 'nothing mortal can be made in the likeness of the most high One and Father of the universe but (only) in that of the "second God", who is His Logos'. (Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of Philo's texts are from Colson, Whitaker, and Marcus.) Pace Runia (among others), I would hesitate to declare that Philo here 'explicitly describes the Logos as τὸν δεῦτερον θεόν' (*ibid.*). He nowhere else does that, and, in my view, it is more likely that despite the variation of terminology he is referring to the expression 'another god' in his own question.

³⁸ For the text, translation and commentary of this and four other letters of Isidore, see Runia, *Church Fathers*, 155–81.

³⁹ Cyril, *Expositio in Psalmos* 69.841.19, cf. 881.24; Philo, *Leg.* 1.105–108; (ps.-)Origen, *Fragmenta in Psalmos* 1-150, comment on Ps. 22:4 LXX (the work is marked as 'Dub.' in the Origenian corpus of the TLG); Eusebius, *Commentaria in Psalmos* 23.217.40–46, cf. 23.929.1–10.

one to do so.⁴⁰ The interpretation of the name Israel as ‘the one who sees God’, first attested in Philo and then used by numerous Christian authors, is found several times in Cyril too.⁴¹

Cyril explicitly expresses his respect of previous exegetical tradition in, e.g., his prefaces to the commentaries on the twelve minor prophets (*Commentarius in xii prophetas minores* 1.1.7–13) and Isaiah (*In Isaiam* 70.9.23–12.4). Yet he mostly refrains from naming the exegetical sources he so values. According to Milner, ‘Cyril is unlikely to have much desire to associate himself explicitly’ with many of his predecessors, whereas ‘by preserving their anonymity, Cyril is able to present himself as heir to the tradition of biblical commentary as a whole.’⁴² Cyril refers to, e.g., Eusebius (whom he used a lot) only two times in total, whereas the names of Origen and Didymus do not occur at all.⁴³ And yet Cyril does testify to the fact that ‘many of Origen’s exegetical opinions were still held in honour at Alexandria [even though] Cyril does not copy him in slavish fashion’.⁴⁴ Cyril does not mention Jerome, the most important previous commentator on whom he frequently and directly, but also selectively, depends.⁴⁵ Philo fits this general pattern very well.

It is thus no wonder that, regardless of usage, the name Philo meets us nowhere in Cyril. It may be illuminating to compare him to Ambrose (c. 347 – 397), the Bishop of Milan. Ambrose only mentions Philo one single time, criticizing him for giving, as a Jew, a moral (and not a spiritual) interpretation of Gen 2:15 (*De paradiso* 4.25). Yet it is Ambrose who made more extensive first-hand use of Philo’s works (about 600 instances) than any other Christian writer, making in five exegetical treatises the Philonic material the very framework of his own contribution.⁴⁶ Like Athanasius and Cyril, Ambrose too had a markedly negative attitude towards the Jews, and he never disclosed his abundant utilization of Philo.

⁴⁰ For Runia’s list of seventeen words, see his *Christian Literature*, 108–9. Of these, I would exclude πρωτόπλαστος, which occurs in Wisdom of Solomon and Jubilees, and add νεκροφορέω, αἰθεροβατέω, συνδιαϊωνίζω, and μοναστήριον. In addition, the words ἀπεικόνισμα, βελτιόω, ἐπελαφρίζω and κοσμοπολίτης, with some cognates, occur just once or a few times before Philo and exhibit a trajectory of usage so similar to the *verba* that he is likely to have been the source of their spreading. For example, ἐπελαφρίζω (‘make easy to bear’) occurs once in a fragment from Aristotle, then seventeen times in the Philonic corpus followed by five occurrences in total in Origen, Oribasius, Eusebius and ps.-John Chrysostom, and six in Cyril’s Easter letters.

⁴¹ For example, *Commentarius in xii prophetas minores* 2.28.22, 2.142.12, *Commentarii in Matthaeum (in catenis)* 11.6; Philo, *Leg.* 3.186, *Somn.* 1.171, *Praem.* 44 etc.

⁴² Milner, ‘Treatment’, 87–88, 93. She mentions Origen, Didymus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Apollonarius – and even Jerome, who, though he had been in good terms with Bishop Theophilus and a student of Didymus, was not an entirely uncontroversial figure. On the often anonymous use of sources in Christian biblical commentaries more generally, see Rogers, *Didymus*, 49–58.

⁴³ For the references to Eusebius, see Cyril’s *Expositio in Psalmos* 69.1017.42, 1032.18. Kerrigan’s index of names contains close to 400 references to Jerome. On Cyril’s use of sources more generally, see Grant, ‘Greek Literature’; Milner, ‘Treatment’; Riedweg, ‘Citations’. For comparison, the words θεός, Χριστός and Παῦλος appear almost 25,000, over 10,600 and c. 2,200 times, respectively, in Cyril. Somewhat amazingly, Cyril mentions Plato almost ninety times. But it has to be noted that with only two exceptions (*In Joannem* 2.309.5 and *De sancta trinitate dialogi i–vii* 524.33), these references occur in the *Contra Julianum* where Cyril specifically delves into Greek thought.

⁴⁴ Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, 427.

⁴⁵ Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, 435–39.

⁴⁶ Runia, *Christian Literature*, 292, 295 citing Lucchesi, *L’usage*, 127–28 (*non vidi*). Ambrose can even be used in text-critical study of the Philonic text; see examples concerning Philo’s *Fug.* in the apparatus of the critical edition of Philo (Cohn, Wendland, and Reiter, *Philonis Opera*) and an application in Yli-Karjanmaa, ‘Call Him Earth’, 281.

Cyril's Conscious Use of Philo

Cyril's use of Philo has not been subject to much research.⁴⁷ As already mentioned, beginning the task the easy way, looking up the instances of the name of Philo in Cyril's vast corpus (more than 2.3 million words in the TLG), is barred by there being none. The question thus becomes if such observations can be made for which direct usage of Philo is the most feasible explanation. My investigation is based on TLG searches, and thus much depends on the search terms and parameters used. The results must be considered preliminary.

To start with the basics: Is it safe to assume that, given Philo's position in the Alexandrian tradition and the explicit references to him by Clement, Origen, Eusebius, Didymus, Jerome and Isidore, Cyril must have been aware of Philo? I think it is, but it is not necessary to merely assume this. At *Contra Julianum* 7.19, Cyril explicitly refers to Clement ('an eminent man fond of learning') and his *Stromateis* and paraphrases 1.23.153.4;⁴⁸ Philo and his *De vita Mosis* are mentioned by Clement in the previous sentence. The reference in *Str.* to the biography of Moses would have told Cyril that Philo was a Jew. And as discussed, Philo's Jewish descent was reported by authors Cyril knew and used.⁴⁹

Admittedly, however, the *Contra Julianum* is a late work, composed probably in 439–441.⁵⁰ Might not Cyril have been ignorant of Philo, and even of Clement, until he began to compose his massive refutation (*Contra Julianum*) of the apostate emperor's *Contra Galileos*, which is the only work where he mentions Clement? This is possible. Perhaps Cyril's awareness of (having used) Philo grew over time. Nevertheless, in his notes to Cyril's *Easter Letters* for the years 414 and 417 O'Keefe refers to the influence of either Clement or Eusebius, and of Philo, 'probably mediated through Clement', in the context of certain exegetical solutions.⁵¹

In what follows, I discuss three examples where Cyril seems to use Philo, either directly or through a mediating source but consciously: Hebrew etymologies, the exegeses of the two accounts of the creation of the first human being, and the allegorical understanding of circumcision. The purpose of the discussion is to build the case that Cyril utilized Philo knowing him to be a Jew. What this means in terms of tolerance will be discussed in the concluding section.

⁴⁷ Kerrigan juxtaposes some of Cyril's biblical interpretations with Philo's; see, e.g., *Interpreter*, 155–66. At a general level, he notes (p. 417) that Cyril's 'exclusively Christian' interpretations clearly differentiate him from the exegesis of 'Philo, Josephus and writers dependent on them.' Wilken, *Mind*; Russell, *Cyril*, do not discuss the possible use of Philo by Cyril.

⁴⁸ A similar appreciative characterization appears in the tenth book (10.21) together with a quotation from Clement's *Protr.* 3.44.4.

⁴⁹ Of Eusebius's mentions of 'Philo the Hebrew', *Praeparatio evangelica* 1.9.20 is closest to a citation by Cyril who quotes from section 29 of the same chapter in *Contra Julianum* 6.30.

⁵⁰ Russell, *Cyril*, 190.

⁵¹ O'Keefe, 'Introduction', 39 (*Epistula paschalis* 1.2), 87 (*Ep.* 5.3).

Etymology

The etymologies of at least the names Eliezer, Damascus and Hagar do not occur in the same or a similar form in any Greek author between Philo and Cyril. To begin with the first two, the meanings of the names of Moses and Sepphora's two sons are discussed in Exod 18:3–4. The name of Eliezer (אֱלִיעֶזֶר, literally 'my God is help') is justified with Moses's statement, 'for the God of my father was my help, and he delivered me from the hand of Pharaoh'.⁵² What makes his case even more intriguing is that both Philo and Cyril invoke the etymology in the context of Gen 15:2 where Abraham deplores that in the absence of an heir 'the son of Masek, [his] female homebred, this Damascus Eliezer' will inherit him. The meanings Philo gives these names are 'from a kiss' for Masek (*Her.* 40), 'blood of a sack' for Damascus (*Her.* 54) and 'God is my helper' for Eliezer (*Her.* 58). Cyril only gives two, 'kiss of blood' for Damascus and 'help and aid coming from God' for Eliezer (*Glaphyra in Pentateuchum* 69.117.6–8).⁵³

The interpretation of Damascus is a little awkward in the light of Philo's. A search of the TLG brings up no instances of these etymologies that could plausibly be considered links between the two authors. The probable solution is found in Jerome's Latin *De nominibus hebraicis*, which records the meanings 'drink of blood or kiss of blood or blood of sacks' for Damascus.⁵⁴ Even if Cyril is dependent on Jerome's work, here he was very probably aware of using Philo. This is because Jerome begins the whole work with the statement that 'Philo, a most eloquent Jew, is also by Origen's testimony confirmed to have put forth a book containing Hebrew names and their etymologies, coupled side by side in alphabetical order'.⁵⁵ The book contains many etymologies used by Philo, but Jerome's information regarding its provenance is probably inaccurate, as this would have required greater skills in Hebrew than what scholars usually think Philo had.⁵⁶ The Philonic connection, if real, was probably some other, e.g., that he was reputed to have utilized it.

The case of Hagar is similar but not identical. Philo's interpretation of the name is 'sojourning' (παροίκησις; *Leg.* 3.244, *Sacr.* 43, *Congr.* 20), which Cyril repeats in *Glaphyra in Pentateuchum* 69.116.35. Again, Jerome too records the meaning 'foreigner' (*advena*; *Nom. hebr.* 23.819A). This time, there is a single intervening source in Greek as well, Clement in *Str.* 1.5.31.1 – but it so happens that this is one of the four

⁵² All the translations from the LXX are from Pietersma and Wright (eds.), *NETS* with occasional small modifications. Surprisingly, what also connects Philo and Cyril, besides the etymology itself, is explicitly quoting Ex 18:4 in Greek. No-one else does that except Philo in *Her.* 59 and Cyril in *De adoratione* 68.280.22–23 (which is not, however, the work where he discusses the etymology in its own right). Rajak's characterization of the etymology of Eliezer as a 'well-known case' must apply to some other language and/or time period (although her subject is the Philonic etymologies); 'Knowledge', 178.

⁵³ Cyril does not quote Ex 18:4 here; the Greek expression is ἀντίληψις καὶ ἐπικουρία ἡ παρὰ Θεοῦ.

⁵⁴ My tr. for 'sanguinis potus siue sanguinis osculum uel sanguis sacci'; *Nom. hebr.* 23.821D. For Eliezer, see 831E.

⁵⁵ My tr. for 'Philo, uir disertissimus Iudaeorum, Origenis quoque testimonio conprobatur edidisse librum hebraicorum nominum eorumque etymologias iuxta ordinem litterarum e latere copulasse.' I thank Outi Kaltio for help with the Latin; the rendering is mine.

⁵⁶ Rajak wishes to keep the door open for Philo's possible authorship and 'a decent knowledge of the original language' while admitting that the definitive answer to this question may be unattainable ('Knowledge', 187).

places where Clement explicitly refers to Philo. It is thus quite unlikely for Cyril to have arrived at this etymology without thinking it derives from Philo.⁵⁷

The Creation of the Human Being in Genesis 1 and 2

The relationship between the two descriptions of the creation of the first human being in Genesis 1 and 2 has given rise to much exegesis. Philo treats this material in several ways. He sometimes keeps the accounts separate, sometimes conflates them, and interprets them in either protological or universal terms.⁵⁸ Cyril's fusing the two accounts by speaking of receiving the image of the divine nature (Gen 1:27) and the breath of life (2:7) as, in effect, one and the same thing corresponds to Philo's conflate scheme (e.g., *In Joannem* 1.182.25–31, 2.485.17–22, 3.135.15–20; *De adoratione* 68.145.55–148.2; Philo, *Plant.* 18–19, *Her.* 56–58; cf. *Opif.* 139). Furthermore, Cyril is apparently fond of the terminology of sealing and stamping (σφράγις, χαρακτήρ, σημαίνω etc.) in this context, so typical of Philo (*Opif.* 139; *Leg.* 1.31–38, 1.61, 3.95; *Det.* 83; *Plant.* 18, 44).⁵⁹ Cyril's language is so close to Philo's that it is difficult to find a better match for either of them than what they are to each other. A search of the TLG for εἰκὼν within fifteen words of both πνοή and ζωή (to locate passages where both Gen 1:27 and 2:7 are discussed) yields Philo and Cyril, and between them two authors (Eusebius and John Chrysostom) who do not use the language of sealing or stamping in the texts that come up.⁶⁰ Let us look at the pair of texts where Cyril is closest to Philo:

Our great Moses averred the rational (λογικῆς) class of soul to be a genuine coinage of that divine and invisible Spirit (τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀοράτου πνεύματος), signed and impressed by the seal of God (σημειωθὲν καὶ τυπωθὲν σφραγίδι θεοῦ), the stamp (χαρακτήρ) of which is the eternal Logos. For he says, 'God inbreathed into his face a breath of life,' so that it cannot but be that the one who receives is made in the likeness of the one who sends forth. Accordingly we also read that the human being is 'in accordance with the Image of God'. (Philo, *Plant.* 18–19)

And indeed, he who compiled the first book for us – Moses, who above all men was known to God – says, 'And God made man, in accordance with the image of God he made him.' But that through the Spirit (διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος) he was sealed unto the divine image (εἰς εἰκόνα τὴν θείαν κατεσφραγίζετο), himself again taught us, saying, 'And inbreathed into his face a breath of life.' For the Spirit at once began both to put life into His formation and in a divine manner to impress (ἐνεσήμενεν) His own stamps (χαρακτῆρας) thereon. Thus the most excellent artificer God, having formed the reasonable (λογικόν) living creature upon the earth, gave him the saving commandment. (Cyril, *In Joannem* 1.182.24–183.2)

⁵⁷ Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, 322 says Cyril bases his geographical etymologies in the *De adoratione* on Philo and Origen. I think there too Jerome is the probable mediator.

⁵⁸ For a summary with further references, see Yli-Karjanmaa, 'Call Him Earth', 253–57. With a protological interpretation I mean one that maintains the protological orientation of the biblical text, whereas a universalising one extracts general truths from a protological text.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of many of the Philonic passages mentioned in this paragraph, see Yli-Karjanmaa, 'Parallels'.

⁶⁰ Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 7.10.9.9–10; John, *In Genesim (homiliae 1-67)* 53.104.7, *In Psalmos 101-107* (spurious) 55.641.29.

In addition to the shared terminology, both Philo and Cyril appeal to Moses, and both speak of 'spirit' in addition to the 'breath'. Philo does not define the role of the spirit very exactly here, but in a later passage (*Plant.* 44) it is instrumental just like in Cyril: the first human being was 'stamped with the spirit (χαραχθεὶς πνεύματι) in accordance with the image of God'.

Earlier in the commentary Cyril uses similar vocabulary as above (ἐνσημαίνω, κατασφραγίζω, ἀρχέτυπος) in connection with Gen 1:27 at 1.133.12–19 and with Gen 2:7 at 1.138.24–139.7. The latter passage (exegesis of John 1:14a) is worth citing from as a possible witness to Cyril's 'dialogue' with Philo:

But when he was punished for his transgression, he rightly heard the words, 'You are earth and to earth you shall return' and was stripped of the grace. The breath of life, that is, the Spirit who says 'I am the life', departed from the earthly flesh and the living being succumbed to death through the flesh alone, since the soul was preserved in its immortality, with the result that it was to the flesh alone that the words 'You are earth and to earth you shall return' were addressed.⁶¹

This statement on Gen 3:19 reads like a retort to Philo, who in *QG* 1.51 asks, 'What is the meaning of the words, "Until you return to the earth from which you were taken"? For the human being was moulded not only from the earth but also from the divine spirit.' Philo builds his allegory both here and in *Leg.* 3.252–253 assuming God's words are addressed to Adam's soul too, and from this he derives the notion which I have called the *corporealization of the mind*, i.e., its (or the soul's) vicious orientation towards the sense-perceptible realm and the body.⁶² In *Leg.* 3.252 Philo uses the biblical returning to earth as an opportunity to hint at reincarnation – a move that Cyril probably found most objectionable, if he was aware of it.⁶³

Circumcision

The comparison of Cyril's allegorical understanding of circumcision with Philo's begins along lines similar to what was done in the previous section, by looking at cases where the two exegetes stand closer to each other than to anyone else. Subsequently, one longer text by Cyril is discussed.

It was noted above that alongside Cyril's Pauline, Christologically oriented understanding of circumcision there is another, ethical, even ascetical interpretation: cutting away the foreskin symbolizes the excision of pleasures and passions. Cyril is once again picking up terminology that is more prominent in his Jewish predecessor than in the intervening Christian authors. In fact, even a combination as general as that of circumcision and pleasure brings up a link specifically between Cyril and Philo. Searching the

⁶¹ Tr. Russell, *Cyril*, 105. There is another, highly intriguing aspect in Cyril's discussion that can only be mentioned here. He seems to give the 'breath of life' of Gen 2:7 a *soteriological* interpretation in a way that is, to my knowledge, only paralleled by 1 Cor 15:45 and especially Philo's *Leg.* 1.31–32 (on which see Yli-Karjanmaa, 'Call Him Earth').

⁶² For corporealization as a driving force of reincarnation in Philo's thought, see Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo*, 70–79.

⁶³ See Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo*, 76–77. I have not been able to locate any references to reincarnation in Cyril's *oeuvre*.

TLG for ἡδονή within 15 words of either περιτομή or περιτέμνω produces, first, Philo (*Migr.* 92, *Spec.* 1.8–9, *QE* 2.2), then two cases that are not relevant, and then Cyril (*In Joannem* 1.631.24, 1.642.28, 1.643.15, 2.550.2; *Glaphyra in Pentateuchum* 69.485.1).⁶⁴ Only some aspects of these can be discussed.

Philo directly deals with the allegorical significance (σύμβολον, αἰνίσσομαι etc.) of circumcision, whereas Cyril is often less explicit. But, e.g., when discussing Joshua's 'circumcis[ing] the sons of Israel with flint knives' (Josh 5:1) Cyril says that this 'indicat[es] to us through an enigma (αἰνιγματωδῶς ἡμῖν σημαίνων) the circumcision in Christ which is "not made by hand" (Col 2:11) and by which death is defeated. This is the noetic circumcision of evil and the making away with badness and pleasure' (*Glaphyra in Pentateuchum* 69.484.55–485.2).⁶⁵

There are some closely linked expressions, e.g., Philo's 'the excision of pleasure and all passions (ἡδονῆς καὶ παθῶν πάντων ἐκτομήν)' (*Migr.* 92) and Cyril's 'cutting away pleasure (τὰς [...] ἡδονὰς ἀποτέμνειν)' and 'the cutting away of our passions (τὴν τῶν παθῶν ἀποτομήν)' (*In Joannem* 1.642.28–29, 643.21, 644.5).⁶⁶ Before Cyril, only Philo speaks of 'the cutting away of passions' (παθῶν ἐκ-/ἀποτομή) in the context of circumcision.

A further pair of passages exemplifies yet another feature not found so clearly in any author between Philo and Cyril: the combination of discussing pleasure and the wordplay on περιτομή and περιττός ('excessive').⁶⁷ Philo writes:

For since among the love-lures of pleasure the palm is held by the mating of man and woman, the legislators thought good to dock the organ which ministers to such intercourse, thus making circumcision the figure of the excision of excessive and superfluous pleasure (αἰνιττομένοις περιτομήν περιττῆς ἐκτομήν καὶ πλεοναζούσης ἡδονῆς), not only of one pleasure but of all the other pleasures signified by one, and that the most imperious. (*Spec.* 1.9)

Cyril's point is the connection he sees between the Sabbath rest and circumcision:

Since then the rest on the seventh day signifies freedom and rest from all wickedness, and cessation from sin, and circumcision in spirit means (σημαινούσης) [...] being freed from superfluous lusts, and overmuch pleasure (τῶν περιττῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν ἀπαλλάττεσθαι καὶ ἡδονῆς τῆς πλείονος) [which]

⁶⁴ The intervening cases are Clement, *Paed.* 2.10.95.2 and John Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Philippenses [homiliae 1-15]* 62.257.8. In both the word referring to circumcision is part of a biblical quotation (Ezech 34:9 and Phil 3:3, respectively), and in neither is any kind of non-literal interpretation of the rite offered. Such interpretations do occur in Clement, who, e.g., in *Str.* 5.4.19.4 speaks of 'those devoted to God' who had 'circumcised the desires of the passions (τοῖς περιτετμημένοις τὰς τῶν παθῶν ἐπιθυμίας)'.

⁶⁵ My tr. for τὴν ἀχειροποίητον ἐν Χριστῷ διὰ περιτομὴν αἰνιγματωδῶς ἡμῖν σημαίνων, ὅφ' ἦν καὶ ἡττάται θάνατος, ἥπερ ἐστὶν ἡ νοητὴ τῆς κακίας περιτομή, φαυλότητός τε καὶ ἡδονῶν ἀπόθεσις.

⁶⁶ Cyril's commentary on John contains an exceptionally rich dose of the ethical interpretation of circumcision: e.g., 'shaking off (ἀποσεΐσασθαι) one's passions' (1.643.10), 'cutting off (ἀποτομή) of our passions' (1.643.21, 1.644.5) and 'be[ing] released (ἀπαλλάττεσθαι) from our passions' (1.643.24–25). Other examples are taken up in the text.

⁶⁷ A TLG search for περισσός and ἡδονή within 20 words of περιτομή only brings up the two passages I discuss and a few later ones. περισσός and περιτομή do occur in Rom 3:1 (but the former in the sense of 'advantage') and its commentaries but this has no direct bearing on the idea in Philo and Cyril, getting rid of immoderate pleasure.

clearly results in rest from evil, we shall find not only that circumcision in no way breaks the law respecting the Sabbath. (In *Joannem* 1.641.26–642.4)

Once again, despite partly different focus, there is significant terminological overlap specifically between Cyril and Philo.

There is a longer exposition of circumcision in Cyril's *Easter Letter 6* (for the year 418) which in my view can plausibly be read as evidence for his familiarity, and, again, even for some kind of dialogue with, Philo's ideas about the rite.⁶⁸ In what follows, I summarize Cyril's argument and present parallels from Philo. The Bishop takes circumcision as one example of the things which the Jews 'take pride in' and in which they have 'the description of a good reputation (εὐδοκίμησις)' (6.7.8–9). While this was perhaps generally true, it is worth noting that in Philo's famous text against the 'pure allegorists' who neglect, *inter alia*, circumcision and concentrate exclusively on the allegorical interpretation of the Mosaic legislation, his main concern seems to be the damage done to the reputation of allegorists (*Migr.* 86–94).⁶⁹ He emphasizes 'fair fame (εὐφημία) as a great matter and one of much advantage (πολλὰ [...] ὠφελοῦντος)' (§88) and exhorts the pure allegorists 'to have thought for good repute (χρηστῆς ὑπολήψεως)' (§90). His criticism is mild and exhibits, to cite Collins, a 'tolerant tone'.⁷⁰ He was clearly willing to extend a degree of recognition to the pure allegorists – he, e.g., in no way questioned their Jewishness – although he could not agree with their policy of non-compliance to the literal observation of the commandments.

Cyril wants to clarify 'what benefit may come from being circumcised, or what advantage (τὸ ὠφελοῦν) the Legislator offers us from it' (*Epistula paschalis* 6.7.17–19), since in the absence of benefits the practice is ridiculous (γελοῖότητος οὐκ ἄμοιρεῖ). The benefits from vs. ridicule of circumcision seems to have been an issue four centuries earlier as well, for Philo reports that circumcision is 'an object of ridicule (γελωμένου) among many people' (*Spec.* 1.1–2). To counter this, he enumerates four traditional reasons for and two symbolical meanings of the practice (1.4–11), tacitly agreeing with Cyril that circumcision needs justifying reasons to avoid ridicule. As if aware of this, Cyril remarks, 'But I suppose that the Jews themselves will agree that if nothing good is signified by the circumcision of the flesh, it will prove to be ridiculous in itself' (6.7.42–44). Cyril continues that if circumcision were necessary, God would be burdening the body with 'some vain excrescences (περιττώμασι)'. Again, Philo had indeed argued that the foreskin is 'superfluous in procreation' (*QG* 3.48).⁷¹

Cyril continues by calling the human mind (νοῦς) 'by nature the most fertile (γονιμώτατον) of all things' (*Epistula paschalis* 6.8.1–2). This juxtaposition of the mind and the male sexual organ that 'nature uses (ὑπηρετεῖται) for procreation (πρὸς γένεσιν)' (6.7.20–21) corresponds to Philo's view that circumcision

⁶⁸ The Letter is found in the TLG under the number 4090.177. Below, I use Amidon's translation.

⁶⁹ The whole discussion stems from the allegorization of God's gift of a *great name* to Abraham in Gen 12:2. But see, e.g., Barclay, 'Paul and Philo' for a more social understanding of Philo's concern. I do agree with Barclay (p. 540), that it is better to call these allegorists 'pure' rather than 'extreme'. Their allegories are the same as Philo's.

⁷⁰ Collins, 'Symbol', 172.

⁷¹ *QG* belongs to that part of the Philonic corpus which survives, apart from Greek fragments, as a 6th-century Armenian translation only. Based on the equivalents the translators are known to have used, the Armenian word for 'superfluous', աւելորդ, is likely to translate the Greek περιττός; see Awatik'ean, Siwrmēlean, and Awgerean, *NBHL*, 1.395.

‘assimilates the circumcised member to the heart. For both are framed to serve for generation (πρὸς γένεσιν παρεσκεύασται), thought (νοημάτων) being generated by the spirit force in the heart, living creatures by the reproductive (γόνιμον) organ’ (*Spec.* 1.6).⁷² Philo is not ascribing cognitive faculties to the heart but utilizing Stoic phraseology and alluding to it as the possible place of residence of the mind. He immediately returns to the more typical, Platonizing language when he elaborates, ‘the unseen and superior element to which the concepts of the mind (τὰ νοητά) owe their existence should have assimilated to it the visible and apparent’. In Philo’s thought, this element is none other than the mind (νοῦς).

In his letter, Cyril does not connect circumcision with abolishing passions or pleasure.⁷³ Instead, the thing to be removed is *forgetfulness* which ‘spreads over [the mind] like a veil [...] [and] produces in us an earthly mentality instead of a spiritual one, and thus displays the human being as full of every impurity’ whereby ‘that which by nature engenders (τίκτειν) what is fairest of all is troubled by the ignorance (ἀμαθίαις) thence arising’ (*Epistula paschalis* 6.8.5–19). For Philo the problem is *pleasure*, but that too leads to impurity (*QG* 3.46, 52), and he associates the hardheartedness, which must, according to Deut 10:16, be circumcised, with ignorance (ἀμαθία, *Spec.* 1.306).⁷⁴

Cyril reiterates (II. 23–27):

But when we have shaken off the forgetfulness concerning what is better, and cut off (ἀποτέμνοντες) the errors resulting from it like some superfluous excrescences (περιττωμάτων ἐκδρομάς), we will maintain within ourselves our male and completely fertile (γονιμώτατον) mind free from all wickedness and naked (γυμνόν) of the evils arising from vice (τῶν ἐκ πονηρίας κακῶν).

Philo would have raised no objection. Compare his *QG* 3.46:

For that which is, one might say, naturally male in us is the mind, whose superfluous growths (ἄνωγειναι) it is necessary to cut off (ἡστυαίνειν) and throw away in order that it may become pure and naked (ὑπερῶν) of every evil (ἁρμολογία) and passion (ἡμολογία).⁷⁵

⁷² In *QG* 3.48 too Philo speaks of ‘two generative (organs)’. The idea does also occur in Didymus who compares ‘remov[ing] something from the organ serving generation (ὕπηρετοῦντος γενέσει)’ to the circumcision of the *heart* as ‘throw[ing] away the whole reasoning power, friend of the generation of thought (γενέσει τῆς νοήσεως)’ (*Fragmenta in Psalmos [e commentario altero]* 31. 8–10).

⁷³ Morgan has argued that ‘Though [Cyril] interprets [circumcision] in a variety of ways, he always does so within a soteriological framework’ (‘Circumcision’, 202). I agree about the variety, but the link to salvation is quite indirect in some, ethically oriented texts (as above). Morgan does note (p. 212) the ethical dimensions besides the eschatological one.

⁷⁴ Niehoff calls Deut 10:16 ‘the only Pentateuchal reference to circumcision as a metaphor’ (‘Circumcision’, 96.). But there is another one in the Septuagint in Lev 26:41, and the Masoretic Text has further cases, at least Ex. 6:12, 30 concerning the lips (referred to by Niehoff on p. 112) and Deut 30:6, the heart.

⁷⁵ No Greek fragment survives for *QG* 3.46. Based on the known cases of equivalents, ‘superfluous growths’ probably translates περιττὰς βλάστας *vel sim.*, whereas the verb ἡστυαίνειν may render at least τέμνω, ἀποτέμνω, ἐκκόπτω and ἀποκόπτω (Awatik’ean, Siwrmēlean, and Awgerean, *NBHL* 1.395, 1.513, 2.57). The words for ‘evil’ and ‘passion’ also have several options (*NBHL* 1.571, 1.17) but, based, e.g., on the Armenian translation of Philo’s *Leg.* (2.46), the probable

It is Cyril's conviction that the literal command of circumcision covers the 'theoretical' like a veil (*Epistula paschalis* 6.9.21–22); it needs to be removed, not the foreskin. Although Philo in *Migr.* 94 implies that the allegorical understanding is 'great' and the literal 'small', he does not advocate abandoning the latter.

As a final point, I want to mention that both Philo (*Migr.* 92, *Spec.* 1.10–11, *QG* 3.45; cf. 3.48) and Cyril (*Epistula paschalis* 6.8.26–34, *In Joannem* 1.643.24–26) warn against the human delusional belief in one's own powers in the context of circumcision, although the issues at stake vary. For Philo the point is 'the impious conceit, under which the mind supposed that it was capable of begetting (γεννᾶν) by its own power' (*Migr.*, similarly elsewhere). Cyril says that having banished evil 'we will stand confidently before God', but 'by no means, however, will we present ourselves, any more than the newborn baby brings itself to God' – that is the work of Christ. Likewise, Cyril says in *In Joannem*: 'to be released from our passions (πάθος) is surely not in our own power, but is verily the fitting work of Christ who suffered (παθόντι) for us'. Did Cyril get from Philo the inspiration to bring up this theme? The judgement will depend, in part, on how strong the cumulative evidence for Cyril's general awareness of Philo's works is assessed to be. One further indication in favour of Cyril's directly consulting Philo on circumcision is that in a fragment from book 11 of the *Contra Julianum* Cyril quotes the definition of self-conceit (οἷσις as in *Spec.* 1.10 and the Greek fragment of *QG* 3.48) as 'excision of progress' (προκοπῆς ἐκκοπή) and calls this 'a widely spread saying' (76.1057.45–48). While the definition occurs in Isidore of Pelusium as well (*Ep.* 1647.4), the more likely source is Philo who also records it as 'an old saying' at *QG* 3.48.⁷⁶

In his letter, Cyril is far from copying Philo's exegesis or following his train of thought as such. He, e.g., fully ignores the traditional reasons for circumcision Philo gives in *Spec.* 1. This is, however, to be expected, for commenting on them individually would have been unnecessary given Cyril's stance that any valid reason for circumcision would imply a mistake by the Creator. In any case, Cyril is cultivating notions and terminology that he would have found in Philo, if he had read his works. The assumption that he had is, in my view, the most plausible explanation for the terminological connections noted in this essay that link the two thinkers more closely with each other than with anyone else.

Conclusions and Further Research

I would like to put forward the following hypothesis for explaining the observations made above regarding Cyril and Philo. Philo was a problematic figure for Cyril because he fell between stools. He was not an ancient authority like Plato who could be cited rather freely if need be, nor was he a Josephus that could be mined for historical information, and openly as a Jew at that. Nor was Philo someone whom Cyril could accuse of denying Christ *because of* literal, 'Jewish' exegesis. Cyril also did not want to grant him the epithet 'Hebrew' that could have made it possible to name and cite him just like the Hebrew traditions he sometimes advocates. Yet Cyril had to face the fact Philo had secured a place in the Alexandrian traditional exegesis and become a sort of semi-Christian. Cyril, however, knew no such category.

Greek words were κακία and πάθος, a combination that occurs many times in Philo. For ἀντὶ, the *NBHL* only mentions γυνός (2.254).

⁷⁶ Isidore's letter is found in 2741.002 in the TLG.

Cyril was, then, in a situation where he could neither simply dismiss or condemn Philo wholesale as a Jew nor stop using his theology. But he also did not want to acknowledge the debt the Alexandrian tradition owed to Philo, nor get caught citing or using him in an evident manner. If this picture is correct, it can be asked how else Cyril *could have* used Philo except by utilizing the useful bits of exegesis and his allegorical interpretations and notions but never quoting directly; sometimes correcting and always adapting what he adopted?⁷⁷

The observations presented in this essay only scratch the surface of the matter. Further research is needed to confirm, and establish the extent of, Cyril's direct use of Philo – ideally by scholars who are thoroughly acquainted with the works and thought of both authors and their sources. Only thus will it be possible to trace the chain of mediation of old ideas and identify the emergence of new ones. Kerrigan has already made a useful contribution by describing and juxtaposing numerous exegetical solutions used by Cyril and other exegetes.⁷⁸ This work should be continued and elaborated.

Further research into Cyril's direct use of Philo is likely to be a laborious but rewarding task. Cyril, for all his theological problems with Judaism, found in the writings of the Jewish allegorist things that he did not want to leave unused. But he did not extend any recognition to Philo. Was Cyril afraid that doing so would have undermined the hostility towards his Jewish contemporaries that was such a constitutive element in his theology? This possibility raises questions about the *Jewish* reception of Philo: had he not already been abandoned to the Christians several centuries earlier?⁷⁹ It is not at all obvious that the Jews in Alexandria would have identified with Philo or given much weight to his views in a dispute where he was appealed to by the Christian party.⁸⁰

But if the fear for such “leaking” of recognition through Philo to the Jews of Cyril's own time was not the issue, what was? I can only speculate, but perhaps Cyril was held captive by his rigid view of Judaism as erroneous and let *it* – and not the Philonic ideas he utilized – define his attitude towards Philo the man. In this way he also upheld and even fortified the border between Judaism and Christianity, a border that passed right *through* Philo in a manner with which Cyril must have felt most uncomfortable. Had Cyril been able to appreciate the Philonic heritage as a Jewish component in his own thinking, he might have been open to other things as well that could have served to bridge Jews and Christians instead of separating them.

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⁷⁷ Much of this seems to apply to Cyril's relation to Origen as well.

⁷⁸ Kerrigan, *Interpreter*, *passim*; e.g., 389-434.

⁷⁹ We have no clear evidence of explicit Jewish awareness of Philo between Josephus (late 1st century) and Azariah de' Rossi (16th century); see Runia, *Christian Literature*, 12–16, 32–33.

⁸⁰ It can be speculated that such appeals, used by Isidore, simply did not work and Cyril was aware of that.

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