

## Philo the Wise in the Armenian Medieval Tradition

Olga Vardazaryan (Yerevan)

The Armenian medieval commentaries, especially the preambles to the scholia<sup>1</sup> (նախադրութիւնք) and the hypotheses (պատճառք)<sup>2</sup> have preserved remarkable utterances concerning the person of Philo, his writings and exegetical method. The school folklore, reflected in scholia, knows Philo as ‘the most wise’, ‘the great and wise’, ‘the great philosopher’ and so on. Outside of the Armenian literary tradition such reverence has witnessed rather seldom. The encomiastic epithets perpetually sounded in classrooms of the monastic schools, impressed an audience more wide, than it could be done by simple writing of any kind. In the same way functioned the legend about Philo constructed by Armenian commentators.

There are three main branches of the legend: 1) the plot acquainting Philo with Apostle Peter, 2) the theme of the converting and baptizing Philo by Apostle John, 3) a thin line connecting Philo to Jacob the Brother of the Lord. As for the first motif, it had developed from the phrase in “Ecclesiastical History” by Eusebius (HE II, xvii, 1). The Armenian scholiast expands this communication with fictitious dialogue between Philo and Peter, patched of the phrases borrowed from Bible or alluded to it. The general meaning of this passage is Philo’s insisting on his remaining faithful to the Law and his displeasure because of illiteracy of the Jesus’ disciples. But the story is presented not as an isolated one. It is necessary to make a contrast with the second part of the legend – the success of the Apostle John in preaching God as Love and persuading Philo to embrace Christianity. The source of the second narrative is the apocryphal *Vita Ioannis* translated into Armenian with some retouching. In the Armenian version of *Vita*, in contrast with the Greek original, Philo ceased to be a follower of the literalism in commenting the Law. This change allowed the unknown scholiast to identify the character of apocrypha with Philo Alexandrinus. This confusion occurs only in the Armenian school tradition, but the tale about the Philo’s baptism was not commonly accepted even in this milieu.

Telling about the community of the ‘therapeuts’ in his treatise *On the Contemplative Life* Philo, as we learn from the Armenian doctors, proved to had the Jerusalem Church established by Jacob in his mind. But in order to arrange the acquaintance between Philo and the community led by Jacob the scholiasts needed to solve the problem of time and place. ‘Therapeuts’ had to be brought to Egypt. Due to Eusebius, the Armenian commentators knew that the community left the City after Jacob’s dead just before the siege and found refuge in Transjordan (HE III,5). But the scholiasts make them go not there but in the opposite direction - to the Sinai and Upper Thebaid and ascribe to them the foundation of the most famous monastic societies. Several details of this narrative and some parallels - the Syrian *Canons of Marutha of Maipherqat*, in which Philo’s letters to Jacob concerning monasticism are mentioned<sup>3</sup> and especially Epiphany’s narration about ascetic settlement near Lake Mareotis (Haer. 29. 1-7, cf. 30.2) - demonstrate that this version of the legend is not entirely Armenian. On the whole, the name of Jacob the Brother of the Lord acts as an indicator revealing Philo to be associated by the Armenian commentators with messianic sects of Palestine.

---

<sup>1</sup> Published in: O.Vardazaryan, The Armenian Scholia to the Works by Philo of Alexandria, The Historical-Philological Journal, Yerevan, 2005, №1 (168), 185-206, Appendix, 196-201.

<sup>2</sup> O.Vardazaryan, The ‘causes’ of the Writings by Philo: texts and studies, Proceedings of the Yerevan State University of Linguistics after V.Brusov, Social Studies, vol. 3, Yerevan, 2005, 185-233. There are four hypotheses concerning Philo: Anonymous A, Anonymous B, David Kobayrec’i’s and ‘Cause to Philo’. The ‘Cause’ by Mxit’ar Goš to the treatise *On Providence*, which always accompanies the Anonymous B and Kobayrec’i in the *Book of Causes*, is in fact a preamble to the scholion

<sup>3</sup> *The Canons ascribed to Maruta of Maipherqat and related sources*, translated by Arthur Vööbus, CSCO, vol. 440, Scr.Syri 192, 1982, 9.