

“ἀγωνιάσωμεν”: Philo Judaeus, a Voice of a Colonized Nation

by

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Thesis directed by Professor Noel Lenski

This study argues that a long history of colonialism between the Jews and Romans, and the violence contained therein is reflected in Philo of Alexandria’s rhetoric. One goal of this study is to highlight mechanisms of Roman imperialism and colonialism. The other is to investigate Philo’s subtle threats in three texts within the context of the Jewish-Roman colonial relationship and violence in the first century and early second centuries AD. I approach my analysis with a close reading of Philo’s Greek and a chronological history of the major events between Jews and Romans around Philo’s time period, but with an emphasis on acts of violence and mechanisms of imperialism. I analyze the types of violence committed both against and by the Jews under Roman rule as types of violence associated with colonialism. I conclude that Philo Judaeus’ writings should be considered a voice of a colonized nation living under Roman rule.

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Introduction

Scholars have discovered violent rhetoric in certain works of Philo of Alexandria that have yet to be fully contextualized. This study argues that a long history of colonialism between the Jews and Romans, and the violence contained therein is reflected in Philo's rhetoric and should be considered a natural outflow of the colonial relationship rather than as a surprise or anomaly. Furthermore, I will explore the evidence as presented by Philo of the dynamics between the Romans, Greeks and Jews in Philo's Alexandria in the context of colonialism and argue that the colonial relationships can help scholars better understand the ethnic and national violence that occurred in Philo's Alexandria. One goal of this study is to highlight mechanisms of Roman imperialism and colonialism. The other is to investigate further Philo's subtle threats in three texts within the context of the Jewish-Roman colonial relationship and violence in the first century and early second centuries AD. I will approach my analysis with both a close reading of Philo's Greek as well as a chronological history of the major events between Jews and Romans around Philo's time period, but with an emphasis on acts of violence and traits of colonial systems. I'm especially concerned with the types of violence committed both against and by the Jews under Roman rule and understanding them as types of violence associated with colonialism. Once contextualized, Philo's threats should seem less out of place—violence between the two peoples was the norm, and Philo's threats and beliefs were very much a product of his times and colonialism.

Colonialism and Imperialism

This study proceeds from the assumption that colonialism is to be considered a system which harbors and nurtures violence. It is important to view colonialism and Roman imperialism as a system of relationships so that we don't fall into a morass of trying to discover

who originally instigated the violent events, and which group was most at fault for perpetuating the violence. Judging the actions of those who came before us is vital—but it is not productive to blame Roman power-lust for all violence against the Jews or to blame Jewish ideology for violent revolts against the Romans. It uses the following as a basic definition of Roman imperialism: *imperialism is a process of empire building and a worldview that focuses on domination*. It also understands that imperialism was a valid concept when applied to the Roman Empire, and assumes that it was not always beneficial to societies or within the context of world history.¹ Colonialism is a system used for expanding territorial control and power overseas. Since colonialism is rarely consented to on both sides, the process inherently usurps the power of the indigenous or local inhabitants already living on the land. Sometimes the local peoples are new to the territory or are still negotiating their communal functions and identity and therefore the colonial take-over is little opposed and can even be beneficial for the weaker group. But more often than not, colonization usurps and destroys nations. Since this happens against the will of the colonized, the usurpation happens violently. This violence is what we see in Philo's writings and in the historical records of Jewish-Roman relations. The primary texts used in this study are *In Flaccum* and the *Legatio ad Gaium*. I will in addition draw upon *De Somniis* when appropriate.

In Flaccum and the *Legatio ad Gaium* are anomalous historical treatises nestled among Philo's largely philosophical and exegetical corpus. *In Flaccum* is an account of the riots in Alexandria of 38CE and describes in great detail the violence committed against the Jews of Alexandria under Flaccus and his administration.² It provides a unique window into the first

¹ David J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 5, 23-26.

² Although the dating of the riots described in *In Flaccum* is not certain, it is generally agreed that they are those of the summer of 38 CE. The date of Philo's composition of the treatise is also uncertain, but I agree with Pieter W.

pogrom in Jewish history and of ethnic tensions in Alexandria in the first century CE. The first half of the treatise recounts Flaccus' beginning in Alexandria, and the riot from inception to end, while the remaining half of the treatise deals with a largely fictional account of Flaccus' downfall and death. The *Legatio ad Gaium* recounts the events that followed the riots of 38 CE. It redescribes some of the riots in Alexandria with a focus on Gaius' cruelty and hatred toward the Jews. Indeed the treatise begins with a lengthy description of Gaius' loss of sanity and rise to power. In addition it gives an account of Gaius' attempt to erect a statue of himself in the Temple in Jerusalem and concludes with an account of the Jewish embassy sent to negotiate with Gaius in Italy in either 39 or 40 CE.³

Some definitions of colonialism fail to include violence as an essential part of the system. Mattingly's definition is a bit sterile, though in all other respects accurate:

Colonialism is a more restricted term [than imperialism] that defines the system of rule of one people over another, in which sovereignty is operated over the colonized at a distance, often through the installation of settlements of colonists in the related process of *colonization*. Both words, of course, derive from the Roman term *colonia*, initially definable as a settlement of citizens in conquered territory.⁴

Whereas "imperialism" describes a drive for expansion and more power, "colonialism" is an account of a system that allows for imperial expansion and empire building.

There are numerous mechanisms by which imperialism can be carried out and they can be instructive of the presence of colonialism. Mattingly divides imperial mechanisms

van der Horst that the date was likely 40-41 CE. See introduction to Pieter W. van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus: The First Pogrom* (Brill: Leiden, 2003), 4.

³ Again, the dates are uncertain, but we know the embassy had to have been sent sometime between the riots of 38 CE and Gaius' death in 41 CE. E. M. Smallwood favors a date of the winter of 39 CE while van der Horst favors the date of the spring of 39 CE. See E.M. Smallwood, trans and ed., *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1970), 24 and van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus*, 9.

⁴ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*, 6-7.

into three sub-categories: intentional acts, systemic effects, and consequential acts.⁵ I've reproduced his Table 8.1, below for the purposes of our discussion:⁶

Intentional acts	Systemic effects	Consequential acts
Acts of conquest * Garrison deployments + Census taking + Tax settlements + Legal frameworks * Land confiscation and reassignment* Language of government * Enslavement * Recruitment + Exploitation of natural resources Operation of imperial economy *	Power imbalances * Legal inequalities * Abuses/corruption * Individual exploitation * Extortion Brutality * Surveillance * Opportunities Economic adaptations* Transgression of rule of law* Poverty* Racism*	Resistance (armed and cultural) * Behavior modifications+ Redefining of identity * Native agency * Cultural choices + Emergence of greater regional and community difference + Martyrism/mass suicide*

Many of these are applicable to the colonial relationship between the Romans and Jews. I've starred those that are addressed by Philo and placed a plus sign by those that are applicable to Roman-Jewish relations, but not addressed by Philo. My modifications/suggested additions to the table appear in bold. Many of these mechanisms are broadly defined and thus will be more narrowly and appropriately described below. Some of these mechanisms have already been observed and discussed in great detail by Philonic scholars and Roman historians; however, many of the mechanisms have been given only glib treatment or are yet to be acknowledged by scholars. This study will not only touch upon the mechanisms of imperialism previously analyzed by scholars by contextualizing them within a framework of colonial systems, but it will also provide additional and brand new analyses of mechanisms in Philo's treatises that have been given little or no attention in Philonic scholarship.

⁵ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*, 216.

⁶ Ibid.

Philo's Political Terminology and πολιτεία

Central to my argument is that the Jews of Alexandria viewed themselves as a nation and moreover the Romans occasionally acknowledged them as such. Philo makes it abundantly clear the Jews saw themselves not just as a religious group but also as an ethnic group that constituted its own nation. Philo uses the term πολιτεία when referring to the Jews of Alexandria. To best understand Philo's rhetoric and threats, it is important to analyze what precisely Philo means when he uses the term πολιτεία—the ways in which Philo politically conceives of the Jews is central to understanding his strong feelings for his people and against those who wish to hurt them. It is a term that goes back to ancient Greek and is thus historically subject to various meanings of which Philo was well aware and thus built upon.⁷ According to Kasher, Philo used the term to signify “government, management of the State, [and] statesmanship” as well as “community, body of citizens,” and also “regime, state,” and finally “constitution”.⁸ All these terms combined properly constitute the idea of a “nation”, and thus from now on in this paper I will translate πολιτεία using the broad term “nation” with the understanding that what we are talking about is a body containing all the things which Philo understood and signified when he used the term.

A vital component of Roman imperialism was colonization of physically weaker nations. An obvious sign of colonialism is the imbalance of power between two (or more) nations, regardless of claims that they existed symbiotically. Power imbalances were manifested in politics and society, and can readily be seen in the documented institutionalized violence and street violence of Alexandria. Power imbalances in the political arena are readily seen in *In Flaccum* and the *Legatio*, for example, when Philo discusses the violations against the *ta patria*

⁷ Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985), 358-59.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 359-361.

(ancestral customs) and *ta exaireta nomima* (special laws) of the Jews.⁹ Institutionalized and street violence are documented in Philo's historical works as well as in Josephus, and in collections of papyri documenting Alexandria during Philo's times and in the surrounding centuries.¹⁰

It is important to understand how the Jews functioned as a nation and saw themselves as an ethnic group with national claims and a special religion for several reasons. First, when we talk about a colonial relationship and the colonizer versus the colonized, it is best to know exactly how we are to define both sides. The colonizers were the Roman Empire, and the Jews the colonized, but what are we saying with these labels? With the understanding that the Jews were a nation, and not just a religious or ethnic group, the full impact of colonization on the Jews can be realized. An attack on their religion was an attack on their political freedom, and vice versa. Secondly, in modern times we often misinterpret the violent struggles between two nations for power, independence and incorrectly see a more powerful and sophisticated nation overwhelming a smaller and weaker group of people who ultimately relied on the stronger power at some point in our expanding world. I believe this is entirely the wrong way to conceive of the relationship between the Romans and the Jews in Alexandria, and with a full understanding of how the Jews were a nation, we can undermine any false assumptions about what occurred and its significance for the Jews. Finally, understanding how the Jews were a nation can also help us analyze their response to events and to what Philo is saying in his writings.

Relevant to the semi-sovereign status of the Jews was the existence of a Jewish *genarch*, *gerousia* and *archontes* in Alexandria. Philo tells of the former *genarch* at *In Flaccum*

⁹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁰ See V.A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, Vol 2, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960.

74 and of the newly installed *gerousia* at 74 and 80.¹¹ *In Flaccum* 80 indicates they were a Jewish senate highly respected among the Jewish nation (if not the rest of Alexandria), and *In Flaccum* 74 indicates there was likely more than one of this governing counselor body.¹² The use of the term *archon* is more telling. At *Legatio* 222, Philo uses the word ἄρχοντες to refer to Jewish magistrates.¹³ Although in 222 Philo refers to Gaius as του δεσπότης, throughout the *Legatio*, he refers to Gaius as *archon* five times.¹⁴ And in *In Flaccum*, Philo references Jewish ἄρχοντες at 76, 80, and at 117, but labels Flaccus as *archon* only once in section 123. Through his choice of language, Philo implicitly equates the ruler of Rome with political figures among the Jews of Alexandria. In some way Philo perceives a quality of equal station between Roman and Jewish rulers.

In addition, in the *Legatio*, at 192 and later at 369, after Philo narrates the Jewish embassy's visit to Gaius, he refers to himself (and the rest of the embassy) as *presbys*, the

¹¹ Translations by F.H. Colson. All translations of *In Flaccum*, *Legatio*, and *De Somniis* are from Colson.

¹² *In Flaccum* 74: τῆς γὰρ ἡμετέρας γερουσίας, ἣν ὁ σωτὴρ καὶ εὐεργέτης Σεβαστὸς ἐπιμελησομένην τῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν εἴλετο μετὰ τὴν τοῦ γενάρχου τελευτὴν διὰ τῶν πρὸς Μάγιον Μάξιμον ἐντολῶν μέλλοντα πάλιν [ἀπ'] Ἀλεξανδρείας καὶ τῆς χώρας ἐπιτροπεύειν, ὅκτῳ καὶ τριάκοντα συλλαβὼν τοὺς εὐρεθέντας ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις εὐθὺς μὲν δῆσαι κελεύει, καὶ στεῖλας καλὴν πομπὴν διὰ μέσης ἀγορᾶς πρεσβύτας δεσμίους ἐξηγκωνισμένους, τοὺς μὲν ἱμάσι, τοὺς δὲ σιδηραῖς ἀλύσεσιν, εἰς τὸ θέατρον εἰσάγει [...].

Our Senate had been appointed to take charge of Jewish affairs by our savior and benefactor Augustus, after the death of the ethnarch [ie. *genarches*], orders to that effect having been given to Magius Maximus when he was about to take office for the second time as Governor of Alexandria and the country. Of this Senate the members who were found in their houses, thirty-eight in number, were arrested by Flaccus, who having ordered them to be straightaway put in bonds marshaled a fine procession through the middle of the market of these elderly men trussed and pinioned, some with thongs and others with iron chains, and then taken into the theater [...].

In Flaccum 80: πῶς οὖν οὐ παγγάλεπον, τῶν ιδιωτῶν Ἀλεξανδρέων Ἰουδαίων ταῖς ἐλευθεριωτέραις καὶ πολιτικωτέραις μάστιγι τετυπημένων, εἴ ποτε ἔδοξαν πληγῶν ἄξια ἐργάσασθαι, τοὺς ἄρχοντας, τὴν γερουσίαν, οἱ καὶ γήρωες καὶ τιμῆς εἰσιν ἐπώνυμοι, κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος ἔλαττον τῶν ὑπηκόων ἐνέγκασθαι, καθάπερ Αἰγυπτίων τοὺς ἀφανεστάτους καὶ ἐνόχους τοῖς μεγίστοις ἀδικήμασιν;

Surely then it was the height of harshness that when commoners among the Alexandrian Jews, if they appeared to have done things worthy of stripes, were beaten with whips more suggestive of freemen and citizens, the magistrates, the Senate, whose very name implies age and honour, in this respect fared worse than their inferiors and were treated like Egyptians of the meanest rank and guilty of the greatest iniquities.

¹³ μεταπέμπεται δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἐν τέλει τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἱερεῖς τε καὶ ἄρχοντας, ἅμα μὲν δηλώσων τὰ ἀπὸ Γαΐου, ἅμα δὲ καὶ συμβουλευσὼν ἀνέχεσθαι τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ δεσπότης προσταττομένων καὶ τὰ δεινὰ πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν λαμβάνειν· He also sent for the magnates of the Jews, priests and magistrates, partly to explain Gaius's intentions and partly to advise them to accept the orders of their lord and master and keep before their eyes the dire consequences of doing otherwise.

¹⁴ See *Legatio* 51, 69, 119, 140, 256

technical term for an ambassador, which is normally defined as a political actor with the task of representing one sovereign nation to another.¹⁵ A. Kasher in his chapter “The Rights of the Alexandrian Jews according to Philo,” asserts the following well-researched findings from his own analysis:

Philo did not consider the Jews of Alexandria citizens of the Alexandrian *polis*, nor did he ascribe to them any desire to be such. He described their assiduity in safeguarding their rights as a separate body politic independent of the *polis*. If the Jews fought for equal rights it was for equal status of two parallel organizations, a status that endowed them with equal political and legal rights as individuals as well. That, for Philo, was the essence of the Jewish *politeia*.¹⁶

Kasher cites passages *In Flaccum* 47, 53, 80, 123; and *Legatio* 193, 194, 211, 265, 349, 363, 371 as his evidence for this claim, and I completely agree. He focuses on *In Flaccum* 53 and *Legatio* 371 as prime examples of the independent political-legal status of the Jews, or at least how Philo saw them.¹⁷

When then his attack against our laws by seizing the meeting-houses without even leaving them their name appeared to be successful, he proceeded to another scheme, namely, the destruction of our citizenship, so that when our ancestral customs and our participation in political rights, the sole mooring on which our life was secured, had been cut away, we might undergo the worst misfortunes with no cable to cling to for safety. For a few days afterwards he issued a proclamation in which he denounced us as foreigners and aliens and gave us no right of pleading our case but condemned us unjudged.¹⁸

Philo specifically explains at *In Flaccum* 53 that Flaccus attacked Jewish laws, ancestral customs, and political rights, not just their Alexandrian citizenship (although he attacked this too). Also significant is that there is no mention of religion per se in this passage. What Philo is

¹⁵ “embassy”, Dictionary.com

¹⁶ Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 234.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 234-36

¹⁸ Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν ἡ κατὰ τῶν νόμων πείρα εὐδοεῖν ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ τὰς προσευχὰς ἀρπάσαντι καὶ μηδὲ τοῦνομα ὑπολιπομένῳ, πάλιν ἐφ’ ἕτερον ἐτρέπετο, τὴν τῆς ἡμετέρας πολιτείας ἀναίρεσιν, ἵν’ ἀποκοπέντων οἷς μόνοις ἐφώρμει ὁ ἡμέτερος βίος ἐθῶν τε πατρίων καὶ μετουσίας πολιτικῶν δικαίων τὰς ἐσχάτας ὑπομένωμεν συμφορὰς οὐδενὸς ἐπειλημμένοι πείσματος εἰς ἀσφάλειαν. ὀλίγαις γὰρ ὕστερον ἡμέραις τίθησι πρόγραμμα, δι’ οὗ ξένους καὶ ἐπὶ λυδὰς ἡμᾶς ἀπεκάλει μηδὲ λόγου μεταδούς, ἀλλ’ ἀκρίτως καταδικάζων.

concerned about here is the attack on the Jews as a *πολιτεία* —not just as a religious group living in an ethnic melting pot.¹⁹

It cannot be ignored that in this same passage, Philo is appalled that the Jews were denounced as foreigners, but his assertions of the Jews as a *πολιτεία* would seem to indicate that the Jews were indeed from another nation and therefore foreign. Although the Jews were a separate *πολιτεία*, they were also long-time, legitimate, immigrant, residents of Alexandria and thus deserved certain rights as members of the community, even if foreign.²⁰ As *politai*, the Jews were an “intermediate class” between highborn citizens (*astoi*) and foreigners (*metoikoi*), and this status should have afforded the Jews special rights in the city.²¹ The Romans and Alexandrians legally should not have denied the Jews their rights to follow their own laws and customs. Because Flaccus was attempting to abolish the intermediate status of the Jews and downgrade them to *metoikoi*, the Jews lost certain rights and protections.²²

The idea of an intermediate status can be found in Philo’s terminology. Kasher points out how at *In Flaccum* 46-47 and *Legatio* 281-82 Philo explains that although the Jews living in Alexandria saw the city as its “homeland”, an adopted homeland is to be inferred, as he also states that all Jewish settlements outside of Jerusalem were colonies (*apoikiai*) of settlers whom he calls both ‘immigrants’ (*steilamenoi*) as well as ‘Jewish citizens’ (*oi politai Ioudaioi*).²³

¹⁹ For an example of the term “ethnic melting-pot” as a way modern scholars view Alexandria, see Geroge Hinge and Jens A. Krasilnikoff, editors. *Alexandria: A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot*. Aarhus DK: Aarhus University Press, 2009.

²⁰ Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 236-7.

²¹ Ibid., 239-242.

²² Ibid., 242-244.

²³ Ibid., 236-237. *In Flaccum* 46-47: ἥς αἰτίας ἔνεκα τὰς πλείστας καὶ εὐδαιμονεστάτας τῶν ἐν Εὐρώπῃ καὶ Ἀσίᾳ κατὰ τε νήσους καὶ ἡπείρους ἐκνέμονται μητρόπολιν μὲν τὴν ἱερόπολιν ἡγούμενοι, καθ’ ἣν ἰδρυταὶ ὁ τοῦ ὑψίστου θεοῦ νεὸς ἅγιος, ὃς δ’ ἔλαχον ἐκ πατέρων καὶ πάππων καὶ προπάππων καὶ τῶν ἔτι ἄνω προγόνων οἰκεῖν ἕκαστοι πατρίδας νομίζοντες, ἐν αἷς ἐγεννήθησαν καὶ ἐτράφησαν· εἰς ἐνίας δὲ καὶ κτιζομένας εὐθὺς ἦλθον ἀποικίαν στείλამενοι, τοῖς κτίσταις χαριζόμενοι. καὶ δέος ἦν, μὴ οἱ πανταχοῦ τὴν ἀφορμὴν ἐκεῖθεν λαβόντες ἐπηρεάζωσι τοῖς πολίταις αὐτῶν Ἰουδαίοις εἰς τὰς προσευχὰς καὶ τὰ πάτρια νεωτερίζοντες.

Therefore they settle in very many of the most prosperous countries in Europe and Asia both in the islands and on the mainland, and while they hold the Holy City where stands the sacred Temple of the most high God to be their

According to Kasher, other writers used these two terms in antiquity to refer to independent colonies.²⁴ The fact that the Jews of Alexandria paid a tax to Jerusalem confirms that they viewed themselves as citizens of the larger Jewish nation in addition to Alexandria.²⁵

Legatio 371 says much the same thing as *In Flaccum* 53, but without a discussion of Alexandrian citizenship. In this passage, Philo more explicitly states his concern over Jewish attacks by σύνοικοι in cities throughout the world where Jews also benefit from a certain double citizenship:

For if he should decide in favour of our enemies, what other city will keep tranquil or refrain from attacking its fellow inhabitants, what house of prayer will be left unscathed, what kind of civic rights will not be upset for those whose lot is cast under the ancient institution of the Jews? First upset, then shipwrecked, then sunk to the very bottom will be both their peculiar laws and the rights which they enjoy in common in every city.²⁶

Notice the strong rhetoric Philo uses in both passages to describe the devastation that the Jewish πολιτεία and πάτρια would incur if it were to lose its ability to function as a nation and enjoy its national customs and religion.

Philo uses a number of charged political terms in addition to πολιτεία in his treatises that are important for the present study: *ethnos*, *ta patria*, *nomos* and *ta nomima*, all of which can be found above in *In Flaccum* 53 and *Legatio* 371. *Ethnos* means “tribe” and “nation”

mother city, yet those which are theirs by inheritance from their fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors even farther back, are in each case accounted by them to be their fatherland in which they were born and reared, while to some of them they have come at the time of their foundation as immigrants to the satisfaction of the founders. And it was to be feared that people everywhere might take their cue from Alexandria, and outrage their Jewish fellow-citizens by rioting against their synagogues and ancestral customs.

²⁴ Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 236-7.

²⁵ *Legatio*, 156-7.

²⁶ εἰ γὰρ χαρίσαιο τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἐχθροῖς, τίς ἑτέρα πόλις ἡρεμήσει; τίς οὐκ ἐπιθήσεται τοῖς συνοικοῦσι; τίς ἀπαθῆς καταλειφθήσεται προσευχῇ; ποῖον πολιτικὸν οὐκ ἀνατραπήσεται δίκαιον τοῖς κοσμουμένοις κατὰ τὰ πάτρια τῶν Ἰουδαίων; ἀνατετράγεται, ναυαγήσει, κατὰ βυθοῦ χωρήσει καὶ τὰ ἐξάρετα νόμιμα καὶ τὰ κοινὰ πρὸς ἐκάστας τῶν πόλεων αὐτοῖς δίκαια.

and is used by Philo more often than πολιτεία.²⁷ It is used as a general term to label the collective body of the Jewish community. He uses this term to describe nations other than his own and when he invokes the vast population of the Jewish nation, whereas Philo uses πολιτεία when he is asserting a political status for the Jewish nation (ex. citizenship) and wishes to evoke other political connotations (ex. body politic). This is evidenced in several of the passages analyzed in this paper and many more not discussed here.²⁸ And when Philo refers to the Jew as a race, he uses the term *genos*.²⁹

Ta patria is properly defined as “ancestral customs” and is paired with *ethe* several times in the historical treatises.³⁰ T. Seland has already pointed out the gravity of ancestral customs to Philo, and *De Specialibus Legibus* 4.149-150 demonstrates this.³¹ Kasher explains: “The first and most important component of the politeia related to “ancestral customs” (*ta patria*) or “special laws” (*ta exaireta nomima*). [...] and Philo’s repeated explicit statements on the point [of these rights] show that in his view it was the juridical basis for the existence of

²⁷ Philo use *ethnos* 7 times in *In Flaccum* and 33 times in *Legatio*. *Politaea* is used twice in *In Flaccum* and 7 times in *Legatio*.

²⁸ See *In Flaccum* 1, 45, 53, 117, 124, 141, 170, 191 and *Legatio* 10, 19, 48, 116, 117, 119, 133, 137, 144, 147, 157, 160, 161, 171, 178, 184, 193, 194, 196, 207, 210, 214, 226, 240, 256, 268, 274, 279, 285, 287, 301, 347, 349, 351, 363, 373

²⁹ See *Legatio* 178 as one such example.

³⁰ See *In Flaccum* 43, 52-53 and *Legatio* 300 to name a few.

³¹ Van der Horst, *Philo’s Flaccus*, 137. *Spec. leg.* 4.149-150: “[Ancestral] customs are unwritten laws, the decisions approved by men of old, not inscribed by monuments nor on leaves of paper which the moth destroys, but on the souls of those who are partners in the same citizenship. For children ought to inherit from their parents, besides their property, ancestral customs which they were reared in and have lived with even from the cradle, and not despise them because they have been handed down without written record. Praise cannot be duly given to one who obeys the written laws, since he acts under the admonition of restraint and the fear of punishment, but he who faithfully observes the unwritten ones deserves commendation, since the virtue which he displays is really willed”. Translated by Colson.

ἔθνη γὰρ ἄγραφοι νόμοι, δόγματα παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν οὐ στήλαις ἐγκεχαράγμενα καὶ χαρτιδίοις ὑπὸ σιγῶν ἀναλισκόμενοι, ἀλλὰ ψυχαῖς τῶν μετεληφόντων τῆς αὐτῆς πολιτείας. ὁφείλουσι γὰρ παῖδες παρὰ γονέων <δίχα> τῶν οὐσιῶν κληρονομεῖν ἔθνη πάτρια, οἷς ἐνετράφησαν καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν σπαργάνων συνεβίωσαν, καὶ μὴ καταφρονεῖν, παρόσον ἄγραφος αὐτῶν ἡ παράδοσις· ὁ μὲν γὰρ τοῖς ἀναγραφείοις νόμοις πειθαρχῶν οὐκ ἂν δεόντως ἐπαινοῖτο, νοουθετούμενος ἀνάγκῃ καὶ φόβῳ κολάσεως, ὁ δὲ τοῖς ἀγράφοις ἐμμένων, ἐκούσιον ἐπιδεικνύμενος τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἐγκωμίων ἄξιος.

Also see Torrey Seland, *Establishment Violence in Philo and Luke: A Study of Non-Conformity to the Torah and Jewish Vigilante Reactions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

the Jewish community in Alexandria [...]”.³² And it was the Jewish religion that prescribed these customs and laws.

Now that we have an understanding of Philo’s vocabulary and how he defined the Jews of Alexandria as a nation, we can begin to analyze Philo’s evidence for a Jewish and Roman colonial relationship. As a whole, it is safe to conclude that the Roman Empire and the Jewish nation did not view their coexistence as harmonious or symbiotic. At *Legatio* 256, an interesting dichotomy is presented when Philo narrates Gaius’ reproach of Petronius while he was attempting to postpone the erection of a colossal statue of Gaius in Jerusalem:

You concern yourself with the institutions of the Jews, the nation that is my worst enemy; you disregard the imperial commands of your sovereign.³³

Through Gaius, Philo uses highly political terms in the above passage: τῶν νομίμων, ἔθνους, ἄρχοντος, and τῶν ἡγεμονικῶν. Of course we cannot assume that Gaius would have used these exact terms had he written his own account of the event. But Philo was certainly well acquainted with these terms and deemed them appropriate based on facts for Gaius’ fictive statement. It is not unreasonable to assume Philo had a firm notion of a very real “us” vs. “them” mentality of Gaius and the imperialistic regime. Philo here indicates that the laws and institutions of the Jewish nation were enemies to the imperialistic Roman ruler, and Gaius’ actions and harsh treatment of the Jews as recorded in the *Legatio* certainly reflect this attitude.

Through much of its history, the Roman Empire viewed the Jews as a nation. This assumption subtends Caesar’s and Tiberius’ respect for the religious and political rights of the

³² Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 239.

³³ μέλει μὲν γάρ σοι τῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν νομίμων, ἐχθίστου μοι ἔθνους, ἀλογεῖς δὲ τῶν ἄρχοντος ἡγεμονικῶν προστάξεων.

Jews.³⁴ At *Legatio* 156-58, Philo discusses Caesar's regard for the Jewish nation and their citizenship:

He knew too that they collect money for sacred purposes from their firstfruits and send them to Jerusalem by persons who would offer the sacrifices. Yet nevertheless he neither ejected them from Rome nor deprived them of their Roman citizenship because they were careful to preserve their Jewish citizenship also, nor took any violent measures against the houses of prayer, nor prevented them from meeting to receive instructions in the laws, nor opposed their offering of the firstfruits. Indeed so religiously did he respect our interests that supported by wellnigh his whole household he adorned our temple through the costliness of his dedications, and ordered that for all time continuous sacrifices of whole burnt offerings should be carried out every day at his own expense as a tribute to the most high God. And these sacrifices are maintained to the present day and will be maintained forever to tell the story of a character truly imperial. Yet more, in the monthly doles in his own city when all the people each in turn receive money or corn, he never put the Jews at a disadvantage in sharing the bounty, but even if the distributions happened to come during the Sabbath when no one is permitted to receive or give anything or to transact any part of the business of ordinary life, particularly of a lucrative kind, he ordered the dispensers to reserve for the Jews till the morrow the charity which fell to all.³⁵

Regardless of his motivations, Caesar respected the Jews' rights, customs, and needs and it may be that he would not have done so, or would have been less inclined to, if he believed that the Jews were an ethnic minority living among the Romans only by his grace. It could be argued that Caesar respected the Jews not because he believed that they were a nation, but because they were a community that posed no threat to the Romans, whereas Gaius was frightened by their potential power and autonomy. But it seems unlikely that Philo would have gushed over a Caesar that viewed the Jews as mere dependents and curiosities. Philo was a man of integrity who believed

³⁴ Philo spends a substantial amount of time discussing Gaius' predecessors and their exemplary behavior at *Legatio* 141-161.

³⁵ ἡπίστατο καὶ χρήματα συνάγοντας ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπαρχῶν ἱερὰ καὶ πέμποντας εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα διὰ τῶν τὰς θυσίας ἀναξόντων. ἀλλ' ὅμως οὔτε ἐξώκισε τῆς Ῥώμης ἐκείνους οὔτε τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν αὐτῶν ἀφείλετο πολιτείαν, ὅτι καὶ τῆς Ἰουδαϊκῆς ἐφρόντιζον, οὔτε ἐνεωτέρισεν εἰς τὰς προσευχὰς οὔτε ἐκώλυσε συνάγεσθαι πρὸς τὰς τῶν νόμων ὑφηγήσεις οὔτε ἠναντιώθητοῖς ἀπαρχομένοις, ἀλλ' οὕτως ὥσιντο περὶ τὰ ἡμέτερα, ὥστε μόνον οὐ πανοίκιος ἀναθημάτων πολυτελείαις τὸ ἱερὸν ἡμῶν ἐκόσμησε, προστάξας καὶ διαιονίους ἀνάγεσθαι θυσίας ἐντελεχεῖς ὁλοκαύτους καθ' ἑκάστην ἡμέραν ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων προσόδων ἀπαρχὴν τῇ ὑψίστῳ θεῷ, αἱ καὶ μέχρι νῦν ἐπιτελοῦνται καὶ εἰς ἅπαν ἐπιτελεσθήσονται, μῆνυμα τρόπων ὄντως αὐτοκρατορικῶν. οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῖς μηνιαίαις τῆς πατρίδος διανομαῖς, ἀργύριον ἢ σῖτον ἐν μέρει παντὸς τοῦ δήμου λαμβάνοντος, οὐδέποτε τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἡλάττωσε τῆς χάριτος, ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ συνέβη τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐβδόμης ἐνεστῶσης γενέσθαι τὴν διανομὴν, ὅτε οὔτε λαμβάνειν οὔτε διδόναι ἢ συνόλως τι πράττειν τῶν κατὰ βίον καὶ μάλιστα τὸν ποριστὴν ἐφεῖται, προσετέτακτο τοῖς διανεμοῦσι ταμιεύειν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις εἰς τὴν ὑστεραίαν τὴν κοινὴν φιланθρωπίαν.

in the holiness of the Jewish people and nation. In fact, at *Legatio* 152-54, although Philo does not use the term πολιτεία, it can be inferred into the passage by his usage of the term later in his discussion of Caesar at *Legatio* 156, and thus here Philo clearly describes Caesar's behavior as that of a ruler who impeccably respected the customs of other nations (even if only ultimately to benefit the Romans). Furthermore, at *Legatio* 240 Philo says the following of Gaius and his predecessors:

It may be that by this mission we shall persuade him, pleading in full either the honour due to God or the preservation of our laws undestroyed, or our right to be no worse treated than all the nations, even those in the uttermost regions, who have had their ancestral institutions maintained, or the decisions of his grandfather and great-grandfather in which they ratified our customs with all respect for them.³⁶

Philo uses many of his political terms in this passage (νομίμα, ἔθνῶν, τὰ πάτρια,) and the phrase ἐπισφραγιζόμενοι τὰ ἡμέτερα ἔθνη, and then explicitly states that a lineage of Roman emperors respected these Jewish rights and institutions. There is ample evidence that Philo at least believed that the Romans once respected the Jews as a nation, and that it would not be a mistake to infer that likewise the Romans viewed them as a πολιτεία for a significant part of history.

But the sovereignty of the Jews was never viewed as total—the Roman Empire always saw them as a group of people less equal to themselves. Furthermore, to the Romans and Alexandrians at the time of Philo's writings the Jews were foreign settlers (*metoikoi*), while the Jews saw themselves as citizens of the Jewish nation *and* of Alexandrian (*politai*).³⁷ In both views the Jews were still subject to the Romans along with the rest of the Alexandrians, yet it is hard to rationalize why the nation of Jews (as opposed to a mere group of settlers) were forced to be subject to the Romans.

³⁶ τάχα που πρεσβευσάμενοι πείσομεν, ἢ περὶ θεοῦ τιμῆς πως διεξελθόντες ἢ περὶ νομίμων ἀκαθαιρέτων φυλακῆς ἢ περὶ τοῦ μὴ πάντων καὶ τῶν ἐν ἐσχατιαῖς ἔθνῶν, οἷς τετήρηται τὰ πάτρια, ἔλαττον ἐνέγκασθαι ἢ περὶ ὧν ὁ πάππος αὐτοῦ καὶ πρόπαππος ἐγνώσαν ἐπισφραγιζόμενοι τὰ ἡμέτερα ἔθνη μετὰ πάσης ἐπιμελείας.

³⁷ Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 240.

Philo accepts the subjection of the Jews to Rome as the status quo, and as such, in his historical treatises he never expresses shock or surprise over having to beseech the Romans for basic national rights and protection. In other words, Philo never explicitly states that the Jews should not have had to consult with the Romans or satisfy them in order to conduct their internal affairs safely. His tone in *In Flaccum* and *Legatio* is that of a diplomat, reporter and apologizer, not as a hostile nationalist wishing to overthrow the colonizer. This does not mean Philo did not believe in violence or self-defense or in the sovereignty of the Jewish nation, but rather that we need to read the texts closely in order to discern these things.

Economic Exploitation

Now that we understand that the Jews of Alexandria constituted a *πολιτεία* and that Philo had a specific and purposeful vocabulary for describing the Jewish *πολιτεία*, we will begin our analysis of the mechanisms of imperialism by which the colonial relationship between the Romans and Jews actually occurred. For the remainder of this study we will be concerned with how Philo discusses these: what he says about them explicitly and implicitly, and how evidence from other sources corroborates his accounts.

Economic exploitation was a central mechanism of Roman imperialism.³⁸ This is a vast subject, but for our purposes we will focus on taxation, forced poverty and resource exploitation. Although taxes are only addressed indirectly in the *Legatio* and *In Flaccum*, a vivid description of tax collection as an excuse for the perpetration of extreme violence is given in *De Specialibus Legibus*, while Philo in the *Legatio* notes the relationship between taxes and civic rights. This is to be expected given that Roman imposed taxation must have had a significant

³⁸ See Chapter 5 of Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*, 125-145 for a convincing and extensive overview of Roman economic domination for the purposes of imperialism.

financial impact on the Jewish community of Alexandria. *In Flaccum* and the *Legatio* give ample and dramatic accounts of the forced poverty and resource exploitation of the Jews.

Taxation was a major means for the Romans to benefit economically from the Jews and was a significant hardship. The Roman Empire needed a massive amount of money to sustain its operations, in particular its military. Roman citizens were subjected to taxes, and so naturally its colonies were forced to pay tribute. Resource rich Egypt was targeted for the levying of taxes, which took on many forms and were relatively high.³⁹ Although views vary on the extent of change to preexisting Ptolemaic landholding and tax systems under Rome, it is generally agreed that Egypt was effectively exploited for the benefit of both the Roman state and the uppermost tier of local landholders.

The Jews residing in Alexandria and in Egypt paid common taxes, the poll-tax, and after 70AD, a “Jewish tax”.⁴⁰ The common taxes were imposed by the Romans upon Jewish and non-Jewish Egyptians alike and included such things as land-taxes, pasture fees, and bath taxes.⁴¹ This form of taxation in itself was not exploitative of them as an ethnos or subcommunity and is similar to modern models of taxation in the manner of user fees imposed by governments on their own people. However, the poll-tax and Jewish taxes were clearly ethnically targeted, and therefore would have been perceived as exploitative by the Jews who would have felt their negative consequences. The poll tax contained glaring inequalities, it imposed higher taxes on non-Roman and non-Greek peoples and at varying rates depending on the ethnic group and its relations with Rome.⁴² Citizens of Rome and Alexandria paid no taxes,

³⁹ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*, 136, 143.

⁴⁰ Victor A. Tcherikover, *The Jews in Egypt in the Hellenistic-Roman Age in Light of the Papyri* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1945), 13-16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14; Livia Capponi, *Augustan Egypt: The Creation of a Roman Province* (New York: Routledge 2005), 139-141.

katoikoi, *metropolitai* and the “inner urban elite” paid half of the poll tax, and the Egyptians paid it in full.⁴³ The poll tax was assessed with the help of the Roman census, which was a continuation of the Ptolemaic census and taxes.⁴⁴ Originally the term *laographia* simply referred to the Ptolemaic census, but under Roman rule the word became synonymous with the poll tax, reflecting the census’ primary purpose of informing the bureaucracy of tax eligibility.⁴⁵ The Roman *laographia* dramatically increased the amount of taxes (paid in cash) that the Alexandrians were forced to pay under the Ptolemies, and it was only applicable to males, a contrast to the *halike* and obol taxes, which applied to both men and women.⁴⁶ Although the exact monetary amount of poll tax paid by the Jews in Alexandria is unknown, in Upper Egypt documents show that the Jews were paying the same amount as the Egyptians, and it is clear that by the imposition of the poll tax, the Jews were not considered Roman or Greek citizens, but a class of citizens more akin to the Egyptians.⁴⁷ In other words, the growing Roman Empire discovered that the census and *laographia* were effective tools for exacting money from its subject nations and in the process for compounding their subjugation.⁴⁸ Indeed, according to L. Capponi, “Often, the census and poll tax were the first two measures that followed the Roman annexation of a foreign country, and thus carried a strong connotation of subjection to Rome.”⁴⁹

Following his conquest of Judaea, Vespasian imposed the Jewish tax in Egypt as well. The Jewish tax is significant in that it was imposed upon all Jews from the tender age of 3

⁴³ Capponi, *Augustan Egypt: The Creation of a Roman Province*, 92.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 84. Men aged 14-62 or 65 were obligated to pay the *laographia*, thought to have cost at least 12 drachmas annually. The *halike* was a salt tax, and it was levied at a rate of 1.5 drachmas and 1 drachma on males and females respectively. See *ibid.*, 138.

⁴⁷ Tcherikover, *The Jews in Egypt*, 14.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 138. For a more extensive treatment of taxes and their collection in Alexandria see Chapter 9 of Capponi, Livia, *Augustan Egypt: The Creation of a Roman Province*.

until the age of 60 or 62, and was meant to replace those contributions formerly sent to the recently destroyed Temple of Jerusalem.⁵⁰

In sections 156-7 of the *Legatio*, which we have already seen in our brief discussion of Caesar's treatment of the Jews, Philo provides evidence of the importance of taxes and their connection to citizenship. It is worth taking a second look at the passage:

He knew too that they collect money for sacred purposes from their first-fruits and sent them to Jerusalem by persons who would offer the sacrifices. Yet nevertheless he neither ejected them from Rome nor deprived them of their Roman citizenship because they were careful to preserve their Jewish citizenship also, nor took any violent measures against the houses of prayer, nor prevented them from meeting to receive instructions in the laws, nor opposed their offerings of the first fruits.⁵¹

From this passage we can see that taxes were a sacred duty as well as symbol of citizenship status. According to Philo, during Caesar's reign, all Jews sent money to the Temple in Jerusalem and to Rome, yet they were never entitled to the same privileges of a Roman citizen and would not have been welcomed in Rome as citizens. The imposition of the Jewish tax deprived Jews of their financial connection to their ethnic cult and diverted the capital—money capital but also symbolic capital—they would have paid to their god entirely to the Roman state. This was a powerful indicator of the increase in subjugation imposed after the Jewish War. Furthermore the Jews were required to pay more taxes than the Greeks and Romans who had citizenship privileges in Alexandria that the Jews did not, in particular, access to the esteemed gymnasias.⁵² This was insulting to the Jews who considered themselves peaceful and productive citizens of Alexandria.⁵³ Rome was always in need of more funds for building projects, and

⁵⁰ Tcherikover, *The Jews in Egypt*, 15.

⁵¹ ἡπίστατο καὶ χρήματα συνάγοντας ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπαρχῶν ἱερὰ καὶ πέμποντας εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα διὰ τῶν τὰς θυσίας ἀναξόντων. ἀλλ' ὁμως | οὔτε ἐξώκισε τῆς Ῥώμης ἐκείνους οὔτε τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν αὐτῶν ἀφείλετο πολιτείαν, ὅτι καὶ τῆς Ἰουδαϊκῆς ἐφρόντιζον, οὔτε ἐνεωτέρισεν εἰς τὰς προσευχὰς οὔτε ἐκώλυσε συνάγεσθαι πρὸς τὰς τῶν νόμων ὑφηγήσεις οὔτε ἠναντιώθη τοῖς ἀπαρχομένοις.

⁵² Tcherikover, *The Jews in Egypt*, 14, 19-22.

⁵³ See *In Flaccum* 86-94.

above all armies, and it was to these projects that the new funds were diverted.⁵⁴ However, it is hard to deny that the imposition of taxes on the Jews and other peoples subjugated by the Romans was a mechanism that reminded the colonized of their inferior hegemonic status and must have been psychologically degrading.⁵⁵ Money is a powerful and important resource, and a symbol of subjugation. The ability to control a nation's money should not be overlooked as a mechanism for oppressing and colonizing a nation, and this was doubly true with the imposition of the Jewish tax precisely because it redirected the annual tribute that had once symbolized their ethnic connection to the Yahweh cult in Jerusalem to the imperial power that was the agent of their repression.

The Jews suffered as a result of not just the financial burden and subjugation under taxes, but sometimes from the process of collection itself. Prior to Augustus, local "tax farmers" collected taxes, but the Augustan age saw an influx of tax overseers who were heavily controlled and protected by the regime.⁵⁶ These administrators were slaves, freedmen or procurators who supervised tax collections which were actually performed by subordinate imperial slaves and that likely worked in collaboration with Egyptian speaking tax-farmers.⁵⁷ In addition, despite the longstanding and relatively stable Alexandrian bureaucracy, it became standard procedure for the Roman army to accompany tax collectors as bodyguards and enforcers, and soldiers were not afraid to use violence to exact payments.⁵⁸ Philo describes a few instances of violence committed by tax collectors against insolvent Jews at *De Spec. Leg.* III 159-163:

⁵⁴ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*, 132-139. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 contain particularly interesting data.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 129-130.

⁵⁶ Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 132.

⁵⁷ Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 132-133, 136-137.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 134-35.

An example of this was given a little time ago in our own district by a person who was appointed to serve as a collector of taxes. When some of his debtors whose default was clearly due to poverty took flight in fear of the fatal consequences of his vengeance, he carried off by force their womenfolk and children and parents and their other relatives and beat and subjected them to every kind of outrage and contumely in order to make them either tell him the whereabouts of the fugitive or discharge his debt themselves. As they could do neither the first for want of knowledge, nor the second because they were as penniless as the fugitive, he continued this treatment until while wringing their bodies with racks and instruments of torture he finally dispatched them by newly invented methods of execution. He filled a large basket with and having hung this enormous weight by ropes round their necks set them in the middle of the market place in the open air, in order that while they themselves sank under the cruel stress of the accumulated punishments, the wind, the sun, the shame of being seen by the passers-by and the weights suspended on them, the spectators of their punishments might suffer by anticipation. Some of these, whose souls saw facts more vividly than did their eyes, feeling themselves maltreated in the bodies of others, hastened to take leave of their lives with the aid of sword or poison or halter, thinking that in their evil plight it was a great piece of luck to die without suffering torture. The others who had not seized the opportunity to dispatch themselves were brought out in a row, as is done in the awarding of inheritances, first those who stood in the first degrees of kinship, after them the second, then the third and so on till the last. And when there were no kinsmen left, the maltreatment was passed on to their neighbors and sometimes even to villages and cities which quickly became desolate and stripped of their inhabitants who left their homes and dispersed to places where they expected to remain unobserved. Yet perhaps it is not to be wondered at if uncivilized persons who have never had a taste of humane culture, when they have to collect the revenue in obedience to imperious orders levy the annual tributes not only on property but on bodies, and even on the life when they bring their terrors to bear upon these substitutes for the proper debtors.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ πρώην τις ἐκλογεὺς φόρων ταχθεὶς παρ' ἡμῖν, ἐπειδὴ τινες τῶν δοξάντων ὀφείλουν διὰ πενίαν ἔφυγον δέει τιμωριῶν ἀνηκέστων, γυναῖα τούτων καὶ τέκνα καὶ γονεῖς καὶ τὴν ἄλλην γενεὰν ἀπαγαγὼν πρὸς βίαν, τύπτων καὶ προπηλακίζων καὶ πάσας αἰκίας αἰκιζόμενος, ἵν' ἢ τὸν φυγόντα μηνύσωσιν ἢ τὰ ὑπὲρ ἐκείνου καταθῶσιν οὐδέτερον δυνάμενοι, τὸ μὲν ὅτι ἡγνόουν, τὸ δ' ὅτι οὐχ ἤττον τοῦ φυγόντος ἀπόρως εἶχον, οὐ πρότερον ἀνῆκεν, ἢ βασάνοις καὶ στρέβλαις τὰ σώματα κατατείνων ἀποκτεῖναι κεκαινουργημέναις ιδέαις θανάτου· ἄμμου σφυρίδα πλήρη βρόχοις ἐκδησάμενος ἀνήρτα κατὰ τῶν αὐχένων, βαρύτατον ἄχθος, ἰστάς ἐν ὑπαίθρῳ κατὰ μέσην ἀγοράν, ἵν' οἱ μὲν ἀθρόαις τιμωρίαις, ἀνέμῳ καὶ ἡλίῳ καὶ τῇ ἀπὸ τῶν παριόντων αἰσχύνη καὶ τοῖς ἐκκρεμαμένοις ἄχθεσι, βιαζόμενοι χαλεπῶς ἀπαγορεύωσιν, οἱ δὲ θεώμενοι τὰς τούτων τιμωρίας προαλγῶσιν· ὧν ἔνιοι τρανότερον τῆς διὰ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τὴν διὰ τῆς ψυχῆς λαβρόντες αἰσθησιν, ὡς ἐν τοῖς ἐτέρω σώμασιν αὐτοὶ κακοῦμενοι, τῷ βίῳ προαπετάξαντο ξίφεσιν ἢ φαρμάκοις ἢ ἀγχόναις, μεγάλην ὡς ἐν κακοπραγίαις νομίζοντες ἐπιτυχίαν τὴν ἄνευ βασάνων τελευτήν· οἱ δὲ μὴ φθάσαντες ἑαυτοὺς διαχρήσασθαι, καθάπερ ἐν ταῖς τῶν κληρῶν ἐπιδικασίαις, κατὰ στοῖχον ἡγόντο οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους πρῶτοι καὶ μετ' αὐτοὺς δεῦτεροι καὶ τρίτοι μέχρι τῶν ὑστάτων· καὶ ὁπότε μηδεὶς λοιπὸς εἴη τῶν συγγενῶν, διέβαινε τὸ κακὸν καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς γειτνιώντας, ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ ἐπὶ κόμας καὶ πόλεις, αἱ ταχέως ἔρημοι καὶ κεναὶ τῶν οἰκητόρων ἐγένοντο μετανισταμένων καὶ σκεδαννυμένων ἔνθα λήσεσθαι προσεδόκων. ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἴσως θαυμαστόν, εἰ φορολογίας ἔνεκα βάρβαροι τὰς φύσεις, ἡμέρου παιδείας ἄγευστοι, δεσποτικοὶ πειθαρχοῦντες ἐπιτάγμασι τοὺς ἐτησίους

Our modern senses find what is described above as appalling, excessive, and obviously unnecessary, and clearly Philo too was disgusted and viewed this treatment as wholly unjust. Indeed, Philo was showing his readers that the agents of the Roman Empire and of Roman imperialism were behaving in uncivilized ways. In these passages we see him appealing to his readers' higher morals and values of humanity in order to get his point across that the Romans were cruel and violent colonizers. Yet if we understand the collection of taxes as vital to the survival of a growing empire and as an important mechanism for subjugating colonized peoples, we can see how the Roman Empire deemed this sort of violence as necessary and justifiable.

Jewish poverty due to the seizure of homes and resources under the Roman government is described at length in *In Flaccum* and the *Legatio*. The instances are too numerous to reproduce individually here, but *In Flaccum* 55-57 is a detailed example:

Having secured this immunity what did they do? The city has five quarters named after the first letters of the alphabet, two of these are called Jewish because most of the Jews inhabit them, though in the rest also there are not a few Jews scattered about. So then what did they do? From the four letters they ejected the Jews and drove them to herd in a very small part of one. The Jews were so numerous that they poured out over beaches, dunghills and tombs, robbed of all their belongings. Their enemies overran the houses now left empty and turned to pillaging them, distributing the contents like spoil of war, and as no one prevented them they broke open the workshops of the Jews which had been closed as sign of mourning for Drusilla, carried out all the articles they found, which were very numerous, and bore them through the middle of the market-place, dealing with other people's property as freely as if it was their own. A still more grievous evil than the pillaging was the unemployment produced. The tradespeople had lost their stocks, and no one, husbandman, shipman, merchant, artisan, was allowed to practice his usual business. Thus poverty was established in two ways: first, the pillaging, by which in the course of a single day they had become penniless, completely stripped of what they had, and secondly, their inability to make a living from their regular employments.⁶⁰

ἀναπράττουσι δασμούς, οὐ μόνον ἐκ τῶν οὐσιῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκ τῶν σωμάτων, ἄχρι καὶ ψυχῆς τοὺς κινδύνους ἐπιφέροντες ὑπὲρ ἐτέρων ἐτέροις.

⁶⁰ οἱ δὲ λαβόντες ἄδειαν τί πράττουσι; πέντε μοῖραι τῆς πόλεως εἰσιν, ἐπώνυμοι τῶν πρώτων στοιχείων τῆς ἐγγραμμάτου φωνῆς· τούτων δύο Ἰουδαϊκαὶ λέγονται διὰ τὸ πλείστους Ἰουδαίους ἐν ταύταις κατοικεῖν· οἰκοῦσι δὲ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις οὐκ ὀλίγοι σποράδες. τί οὖν ἐποίησαν; ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων γραμμάτων ἐξώκισαν τοὺς

These passages describe acts of economic exploitation committed outside of the law, but according to Philo, not uncommon to the Roman government.⁶¹ Trends are the expulsion of Jews from their houses, the stealing and reselling of goods and personal belongings, the destruction of Jewish businesses and crafts, and the public display of the exploitation as a means of humiliation, which as far as we know, nobody with authority tried to stop. Philo tells us that the financial losses were significant, and we must take his word for it, for we have no other evidence. The fact that the pillagers reveled in their activities tells us that a deep-seated hatred of the Jews in Alexandria existed, and that the perpetrators intended to do them significant harm for their own benefit.

Ἰουδαίους καὶ συνήλασαν εἰς ἑνὸς μοῖραν βραχυτάτην. οἱ δὲ ἐξεχέοντο διὰ τὸ πλῆθος εἰς αἰγιαλοὺς καὶ κοπρίας καὶ μνήματα πάντων στερόμενοι τῶν ἰδίων. ἐκεῖνοι δὲ τὰς οἰκίας ἐρήμους καταδραμόντες ἐφ’ ἀρπαγὴν ἐτράποντο καὶ ὥς ἐκ πολέμου λείαν διενέμοντο, μηδενὸς δὲ κωλύοντος καὶ τὰ ἐργαστήρια τῶν Ἰουδαίων συγκεκλεισμένα διὰ τὸ ἐπὶ Δρουσίλλῃ πένθος ἀναρρήξαντες ὅσα εὖρον—πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ταῦτ’ ἦν—ἐξεφόρησαν καὶ διὰ μέσης ἀγορᾶς ἐκόμιζον ὥς οἰκείοις τοῖς ἀλλοτρίοις καταχρώμενοι. τῆς δ’ ἀρπαγῆς ἡ ἀπραξία κακὸν ἦν βαρύτερον, τὰς μὲν ἐνθήκας ἀπολωλεκότων τῶν ποριστῶν, μηδενὸς δὲ ἐωμένου, μὴ γεωργοῦ, μὴ ναυκλήρου, μὴ ἐμποροῦ, μὴ τεχνίτου, τὰ συνήθη πραγματεύεσθαι, ὥς διχόθεν κλήρου, μὴ ἐμποροῦ, μὴ τεχνίτου, τὰ συνήθη πραγματεύεσθαι, ὥς διχόθεν κατεσκευάσθαι πενίαν, ἔκ τε τῆς ἀρπαγῆς, ἐξουσίῳ μὲν ἡμέρᾳ γενομένων καὶ περισσευλημένων τὰ ἴδια, κακὸν τοῦ μὴ δεδυνῆσθαι πορίζειν ἐκ τῶν συνήθων ἐπιτηδευμάτων.

⁶¹ Another elaborate example is given at *Legatio* 121-122: ὥς γὰρ ἐκδοθέντας εἰς ὁμολογουμένας καὶ τὰς ἀνωτάτω συμφορὰς ὑπὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἢ πολέμῳ κατακρατηθέντας ἐκμανέσι καὶ θηριωδεστάταις ὀργαῖς κατειργάζοντο, ταῖς οἰκίαις ἐπιτρέχοντες, τοὺς δεσπότας αὐταῖς γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις ἐλαύνοντες, ὥς κενὰς οἰκητῶρων ἀποφῆναι. ἐπιπλα καὶ κειμήλια οὐκέτι ὥς ληστὰι νύκτα καὶ σκότος ἐπιτηροῦντες διὰ φόβον ἀλώσεως ἐκλεπτον, ἀλλὰ φανερῶς μεθ’ ἡμέραν ἐξεφόρουν ἐπιδεικνύμενοι τοῖς ἀπαντῶσιν, ὥσπερ οἱ κεκληρονομηκότες ἢ πριάμενοι παρὰ τῶν κυρίων. εἰ δὲ καὶ πλείους συνέθεντο κοινοπραγεῖν τῶν ἀρπαγῶν, τὴν λείαν ἐν ἀγορᾷ μέσῃ διενέμοντο, πολλάκις ἐν ὧσιν τῶν δεσποτῶν, κατακερτομοῦντες καὶ ἐπιχλευάζοντες. For treating us as persons given over by the emperor to suffer the extremity of calamity undisguised or as overpowered in war, they worked our ruin with insane and most brutal rage. They overran our houses, expelling the owners with their wives and children, and left them uninhabited. Then they stole the furniture and cherished valuables and, not needing now like robbers through fear of captures to watch for night and darkness, they carried them out openly in daylight and exhibited them to those whom they met as they inherited them or brought them from the owners. And if several agreed together to share the pillaging they divided the spoil in mid-market, often before the eyes of the owners, jeering and reviling them the while.

Racism

Historically, racism can almost always be found within colonial relationships.⁶² Racism against the Jews was notoriously rampant and spanned centuries.⁶³ For the Romans it justified their colonization of and violence against the Jews by objectifying them to the point of barbarism.⁶⁴ B. Isaacs wrote an important work on proto-racism in Rome and ancient Greece. With respect to the Jews, he finds that the Romans exhibited ethnic prejudice against the Jews rather than strict racism due to the fact that the Jews were viewed as “others” not for unalterable physical and environmental characteristics but because their religion and life-style were viewed as a threat.⁶⁵ This distinction may explain why wholesale genocide of the Jews was never seriously advocated or pursued, but the level and extent of violence against the Jews shows that ethnic prejudice can be just as noxious and destructive as racism.⁶⁶

Racism contributed to Roman identity formation and similarly affected and reshaped the identity of the colonized Jews.⁶⁷ The Jews and Egyptians competed for better rights

⁶² Important works that contain lengthy discussions of this phenomenon include Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 1963; Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965; and Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. Translated by Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer and Terry McWilliams. London: Routledge, 2001.

⁶³ For a history of racism and oppression against the Jews in the Hellenistic world I recommend: Collins, John, J. *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*. Livonia: Dove Booksellers: 2000; Schürer, Emil. *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus*. Edited and Introduced by Nahum N. Glatzer. New York: Schocken Books, 1961; Smallwood, E. Mary. *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976; and Tcherikover, Victor. *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959.

⁶⁴ Mattingly discusses an analysis written by B. Isaac on the *protoracism* of ancient peoples and nations on page 212: “This went deeper than merely being a deep antipathy or fear of foreigners. Isaac provides ample evidence to back up his claim that Roman (as well as earlier Greek) writers classified humanity in ways that made a sharp divide between their own innate superiority and often drew on crude stereotypes of the inferiority of the other. Several further characteristics shared with modern racism are also relevant. These models were sometime seen to be environmentally determined or influenced and also to be inherited and unchanging properties of the societies. Finally, the Romans in general saw migration and ethnic mixing as ultimately leading to degeneration and deterioration of the empire. The importance of the ideal of purity of descent is a repeated theme in Roman literature.” See Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 225-235.

⁶⁵ Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 482-83.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 477-78.

⁶⁷ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*, 211.

from the Romans. There was an ethnic hierarchy in Alexandria. Philo makes several accusations against the Egyptians of Alexandria in *In Flaccum*. His criticism of the Egyptians begins in section 17 and continues in 29, 33, 41, and 79. At 17 he calls them, “naturally excited by quite small and ordinary occurrences,” and at 29 claims “jealousy is part of the Egyptian nature [...]” and speaks of “their ancient, and we might say innate hostility to the Jews [...]”. Philo continues at 33 asserting “For the lazy and unoccupied mob in the city, a multitude well practiced in idle talk, who devote their leisure to slandering and evil speaking was permitted by him [Flaccus] to vilify the king [...]” and at 41 he echoes this statement about the Egyptian mob.

It should be of interest that Philo uses obviously racist language and ideas in his description of the Egyptians and in five different instances in this text alone. A few observations are warranted from Philo’s statements. First, it is clearly important to Philo that his readers understand that the Jews are not to be thought of as equal to the Egyptians, but superior. On the one hand, we can view this as a natural defensive stance considering the extent to which Jews were targeted in the city and the importance of hierarchy in Alexandria. But if we dig a little deeper and ask why Philo conceived of such ethnic hierarchies, we see that he is participating in a system of ethnic hierarchy and prejudice, which is integral to colonial systems. Philo’s attitude towards the Egyptians is unfortunate for its inaccuracy and hypocrisy. Yet colonial systems require ethnic prejudice, as it needs guidelines and justifications for its repressive and violent behavior against one community for the sake of another. In other words, the colonial mentality inculcates all participants—colonizers and colonized—in the chauvinistic assumptions that subtend the hierarchies it must naturalize in order to justify its systems of repression.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ See the works of Fanon and Memmi who provide excellent examples and analyses of this phenomenon as it was seen in colonial systems elsewhere in world history.

As was previously discussed, B. Isaacs wrote an important work on proto-racism in Rome and ancient Greece, and his conclusions with respect to the Jews is that the Romans exhibited ethnic prejudice against the Jews rather than strict racism and that this distinction may explain why wholesale genocide of the Jews was never seriously advocated or pursued. Upon a close reading of *In Flaccum*, I must say I disagree. Isaacs is correct with respect to the Jews of Rome, perhaps, but in Alexandria racism against the Jews was rampant as Philo explains. In section 44 he states that Flaccus effectively filled “the whole habitable world with racial conflict,” and in 48 after stating that the Jews were “*naturally* well disposed to peace,” he then explains with all sincerity that the destruction of Jewish meeting houses was akin to the destruction of the Jewish religion and thus the Jewish people. He thus interprets the repressive attacks of Rome’s tax and debt collectors as a form of ethnocide, a phenomenon common to colonial systems.

Shortly thereafter in section 53, Philo explains that after Flaccus and the Alexandrian government attacked Jewish laws, they next attempted to revoke the citizenship status of the Jews held in Alexandria. In section 55, the Jewish pogrom is described and in section 59, Philo provides the following prologue to his lengthy description of the extreme violence perpetrated against the Jews in sections 62-77:

But so excessive were the sufferings of our people that anyone who spoke of then as undergoing wanton violence or outrage would be using words not properly applicable and would I think be at a loss for adequate terms to express the magnitude of cruelty so unprecedented that the actions of conquerors in war, who are also naturally merciless to the conquered, would seem kindness itself in comparison.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ τοὺς δ’ ἡμετέρους διὰ τὰς ὑπερβολὰς ὧν ἔπαθον οὐδ’ ἂν εἴποι τις ὕβριν ἢ αἰκίαν ἐνδεδέχθαι κυρίοις χρόμενος τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, ἀλλὰ μοι δοκεῖ προσρήσεων οἰκείων ἂν ἀπορῆσαι διὰ μέγεθος κεκαινουργημένης ὀμότητος, ὥς τὰ τῶν πολέμων μὲν κρατησάντων, ἐκ φύσεως δ’ ἀσπόνδων εἰς τοὺς ἐαλωκότας, συγκρινόμενα τοῖς τούτων ἡμερώτατα ἂν εἶναι δόξαι.

Philo is exhibiting an understanding that the violence against the Jews was something long brewing, deeply poisonous and well organized. In other words, this was an extreme regime of systemic violence, the violence of a colonial system. In addition, in sections 81-83, Philo explains that the Jews were punished on the day when they wished to celebrate the birthday of the Augustan house alongside the other peoples of Alexandria and those under Roman rule. Typically punishments are postponed on this day. Yet the city sanctioned punishments of the Jews went on as if it were any other day. Again, this violation of customs and rules must stem from a deep, systemic violence. And finally in section 116 Philo declares that Flaccus had “resolved to exterminate utterly” the Jews. Throughout *In Flaccum*, Philo is describing conditions of racism verging toward genocide, not simply ethnic prejudice as Isaacs believes.

Philo's Threats

An erudite mouthpiece of the colonized Jews of Alexandria, Philo filled his historical treatises with threats aimed against the Romans and Alexandrians. P. Bilde, adding to the work of E.R. Goodenough, brings attention to the “barely disguised menaces against Rome” contained in both *On Flaccus* and the *Embassy to Gaius*, lurking behind Philo's apologizing and defense of the peaceful natures of the Jews.⁷⁰ To summarize the threats noticed by Bilde et al., and analyzed below, Philo warns that the Jews are powerful in number and religious zeal, and capable of bearing arms for their God. But there are more threats that scholars have failed to recognize as such, and they have yet to be understood as a response to colonialism. By no means are the threats entirely overlooked by scholars, but they have been discussed as an issue

⁷⁰ Per Bilde, “Philo as a Polemist and a Political Apologist: An Investigation of his Two Historical Treatises *Against Flaccus* and *The Embassy to Gaius*,” In *Alexandria: A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot*, edited by George Hinge and Jens A. Krasilnikoff (Aarhus DK: Aarhus University Press, 2009), 111-13. The work he refers to is: Goodenough, E.R. *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory: With a General Bibliography of Philo*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938.

of philosophy or historical genre, not as a symptom of colonial violence brewing. I argue that Philo's threats are a diagnostic indication of the existence of a colonial relationship between the Romans and Alexandrian Jews. These threats manifest as an invocation of God and δίκη as avenging punishers of those who wrong the Jews, God's chosen people and are analyzed below.

After Philo narrates the incident of Carabas and the Alexandrians mocking King Agrippa, at *In Flaccum* 36-42, Philo comments on the incident and Flaccus' reaction at 43 and gives us the first hint that he saw the Jews as a powerful nationalistic and religious force:

What then did the governor of the country do? He knew that both Alexandria and the whole of Egypt had two kinds of inhabitants, us and them, and that there were no less than a million Jews resident in Alexandria and the country from the slope into Libya to the boundaries of Ethiopia; also that this was an attack against them all, and that ancestral customs cannot be disturbed without harm [...].⁷¹

Philo continues in this vein from chapters 44-47, and then at 48 his tone changes from defense to offense:

Now the Jews though naturally well-disposed for peace could not be expected to remain quiet whatever happened, not only because with all men the determination to fight for their institutions outweighs even the danger to life, but also because they are the only people under the sun who by losing their meeting-houses were losing also what they would have valued as worth dying many thousand deaths, namely, their means of showing reverence to their benefactors, since they no longer had the sacred buildings where they could set forth their thankfulness.⁷²

Philo uses the words μυριάδων and μυρίων in these two passages to get across the large number of Jews residing in and around Egypt and describe how willing they would be to die for their

⁷¹ τί οὖν ὁ τῆς χώρας ἐπίτροπος; ἐπιστάμενος, ὅτι καὶ ἡ πόλις οἰκήτορας ἔχει διττοῦς, ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τούτους, καὶ πᾶσα Αἴγυπτος, καὶ ὅτι οὐκ ἀποδέουσι μυριάδων ἑκατὸν οἱ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν καὶ τὴν χώραν Ἰουδαῖοι κατοικοῦντες ἀπὸ τοῦ πρὸς Λιβύην καταβαθμοῦ μέχρι τῶν ὁρίων Αἰθιοπίας, καὶ ὡς ἡ πείρα κατὰ πάντων ἐστὶ καὶ ὡς οὐ λυσιτελεῖς ἔθνη πάτρια κινεῖν [...].

⁷² οἱ δέ—οὐ γὰρ ἔμελλον ἄχρι παντὸς ἡσυχάζειν καίτοι πεφυκότες εἶς πρὸς εἰρήνην, οὐ μόνον ὅτι παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις οἱ περὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἀγῶνες καὶ τοὺς περὶ ψυχῆς κινδύνους ὑπερβάλλουσιν, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ μόνοι τῶν ὑφ' ἡλίον ἅμα ταῖς προσευχαῖς ἀπεστεροῦντο τὴν εἰς τοὺς εὐεργέτας εὐσέβειαν, ὃ μυρίων θανάτων ἐτετίμηντο ἅν—οὐκ ἔχοντες ἱεροὺς περιβόλους, οἷς ἐνδιαθήσονται τὸ εὐχάριστον [...].

religion.⁷³ And in the *De Legatione ad Gaium*, at 190, Philo records his and the other four members of the embassy's reaction to Gaius' plan to put a colossal statue in the temple in Judaea: "Then gathered altogether in seclusion we bewailed the disaster personal to each and common to all and such thoughts as the mind suggested we discussed at length. For nothing is more ready of tongue than a man in misfortune. 'Let us struggle,' we said, 'to save us from delivering ourselves altogether to fatal acts of lawlessness'.⁷⁴ Bilde explains that Philo is implicitly making a threat at 190 because, "Philo elsewhere, more or less *incidentally*, tells us that the Jewish inhabitants in Jamnia pulled down the imperial altar, which the city's non-Jewish citizens had erected in honour of Caligula (*Leg.* 202). This view also seems to be confirmed by Philo's account of Caligula's statue project in Palestine."⁷⁵ Bilde continues, pointing out that a little later, at 209, Philo said the following about Petronius' dilemma as the intermediary between Gaius and the Jews: "Neither could he lightly undertake it, for he knew that the Jews would willingly endure to die not once but a thousand times, if it were possible, rather than allow any of the prohibited actions to be committed."⁷⁶ Notice that the language here is very similar to *In Flaccum* 48. Then at *Legatio* 214 Petronius is still contemplating the position of the Jews, and Philo here again mentions how many were in Egypt and in surrounding areas. At 215, Philo increases the stakes, still through the thought process of Petronius:

⁷³ Philo was likely exaggerating the number of Jews living in the area, but nevertheless recent scholarship suggests that at the very least 100,000 Jews were living in Alexandria, and countless more in the surrounding areas. See van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus*, 136.

⁷⁴ ἔπειτα συγκλεισάμενοι πάντες ἄθροοι ἰδίας ὁμοῦ καὶ κοινὰς τύχας ἐθρηνοῦμεν καὶ οἷα ὑπέβαλλεν ὁ νοῦς διεξῆμεν—λαλίστατον γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἀτυχῶν—· ἀγωνιάσωμεν ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ εἰς ἅπαν ταῖς ἀνιάτοις παρανομίαις ἀφεθῆναι.

⁷⁵ Bilde, "Philo as a Polemist", 111-12. At *Legatio* 202 Philo says: θεασαμενοι γὰρ καὶ δυσανασχετησαντες ἐπὶ τῇ τῆς ἱερᾶς χώρας τοῦ ἱεροπρεπεῖος ὄντως ἀφαινιζεσθαι καθαιρουσι συνελθόντες· For, when they saw it and felt it intolerable that the sanctity which truly belongs to the Holy Land should be destroyed, they met together and pulled it down.

⁷⁶ οὕτε ἐγχειρεῖν εὐμαρῶς· ἥδει γὰρ ἀνθ' ἐνὸς θανάτου μυρίους ἅν, εἴπερ δυνατόν ἦν, ἐθελήσοντας ὑπομεῖναι μᾶλλον ἢ περιδεῖν τι τῶν ἀπειρημένων δρώμενων.

To draw all these myriads into war against him was surely very dangerous. Heaven forbid indeed that the Jews in every quarter should come by common agreement to the defense. The result would be something too stupendous to be combated. But without this the inhabitants of Judea are unlimited in number. Their bodies are of the finest quality and their souls of the highest courage, preferring to die in defense of their national institutions, moved by a high spirit not as some of their slanderers would say barbaric but in very truth worthy of the free and nobly born.⁷⁷

It is striking in 215 how Philo enlivens the sense of threat and emotional passion by describing the bodies and souls of the Jews as fit for physical self-defense to the death. And at 216, Philo reminds readers of the large number of Jews living beyond the Euphrates who could be summoned to join the troubled Alexandrian Jews. I agree with Bilde and Goodenough that these cannot be interpreted as anything but threats, despite the fact that Philo also asserts in both historical treatises that the Jews were peaceful by nature and most certainly did not possess weaponry in their homes, not even defensive weapons.⁷⁸

Another way in which Philo consistently makes subtle threats is through his discussions of δίκη and punishments bestowed by God. This issue has been well treated by van der Horst in the context of locating Philo's historical works within a genre. *In Flaccum* is very much a “‘rhetorical’ historiography,” a style of historical writing not atypical in the ancient world that was meant to appeal to readers’ emotions and humanitarian values.⁷⁹ In addition, it was written in the tradition of early Jewish historical writings in which God eventually punishes evildoers against the Jews. This type of history has echoes in later Christian writings such as Lactantius’ *De mortibus persecutorum* and can be traced back to early Greek works

(*theomachoi*), the Torah, and the *Diasporanovelles* ‘3 Maccabees’ and the Greek translation of

⁷⁷ τοσαύτας μυριάδας ἐφέλκεσθαι πολεμίων ἄρ’ οὐ σφαλερώτατον; ἀλλὰ μήποτε συμφρονήσαντας τοὺς ἐκασταχοῦ πρὸς ἄμυναν ἐλθεῖν· ἄμαχόν τι συμβήσεται χρήμα· δῖχα τοῦ καὶ τοὺς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν κατοικοῦντας ἀπείρους τε εἶναι τὸ πλῆθος καὶ τὰ σώματα γενναιοτάτους καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς εὐτολμοτάτους καὶ προαποθνήσκειν αἰρουμένους τῶν πατρίων ὑπὸ φρονήματος, ὥς μὲν ἔνιοι τῶν διαβαλλόντων εἴποιεν ἄν, βαρβαρικοῦ, ὥς δὲ ἔχει τὰ ληθές, ἐλευθερίου καὶ εὐγενοῦς.

⁷⁸ *In Flaccum*, 86-96; *Legatio*, 225-45; Bilde, “Philo as a Polemist”, 111-12.

⁷⁹ van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus*, 11.

the ‘Book of Esther’.⁸⁰ In the *In Flaccum* God’s πρόνοια and δίκη are discussed often and stressed by Philo. He personifies Δίκη and concludes several sections with a reference to God’s habit of punishing those who harm the Jews.⁸¹

At *In Flaccum* 104 Philo introduces his conception of δίκη: “At this point justice, the champion and defender of the wronged, the avenger of unholy men and deeds, began to enter the lists against him.”⁸² At *In Flaccum* 107, Philo foreshadows Flaccus’ death by δίκη, and at 146 Philo explains that δίκη was at work when his worst enemies, Isidorus and Lampo, arraigned Flaccus.⁸³ At 115 and 190, Philo gets more explicit with the just violence of δίκη and even seems to revel in his gruesome telling of Flaccus’ death. In both passages he describes how justice takes “an eye for an eye”. At 115 Philo says of Flaccus: “Flaccus himself at Bassus’s orders, was led away by the soldiers. Thus it was from a convivial gathering that he made his final departure, for it was only right that a hospitable hearth should be the scene where justice first fell on one who had destroyed numberless hearths and homes of persons that had done no wrong.”⁸⁴ And at 190, Philo goes for macabre: “The whole place was flooded with the blood which poured out like a fountain from the many veins which one after the other were severed, while as his corpse was dragged into the pit which had been dug, most of the parts fell asunder as the ligaments which

⁸⁰ John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, (Livonia: Dove Booksellers) 2000, 110-12; van der Horst, *Philo’s Flaccus*, 12-13.

⁸¹ Ibid., 16-17. See *Flacc* sections 102, 104, 107, 115, 121, 125, 126, 146, 170 and 191 for references to πρόνοια, and *Flacc.* 104, 107, 115, 146, and 189 for personifications of δίκη.

⁸² ἐπὶ δὴ τούτοις ἤρξατο κονίεσθαι κατ’ αὐτοῦ ἢ ὑπέρμαχος μὲν καὶ παραστάτις ἀδικουμένων τιμωρὸς δ’ ἀνοσίων καὶ ἔργων καὶ ἀνθρώπων δίκη.

⁸³ Ταῦτ’ ἐμῆκνα, οὐχ ὑπὲρ τοῦ παλαιῶν ἀπομνημονεῦειν ἀδικημάτων, ἀλλὰ τεθναμακῶς τὴν εφορὴν τῶν ἀνθρωπείων δίκην, ὅτι οἱ ἐξ ἀρχῆς γενομένοι δυσφρονεῖς αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ ἐκ πάντων ἀπηχθάνετο καὶ ἐκληρώσαντο τὴν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ κατηγορίαν εἰς ἀνίας υπερβολὴν. “I have described these events at length, not in order to recall long-past iniquities but to extol the justice which watches over human affairs, because, to those who had been hostile to him from the first and of all his foes the most bitter it also fell to conduct his arraignment and so magnify his afflictions to the uttermost.” For more on Lampo and Isidorus, see *Flacc.* 128-35.

⁸⁴ ὁ δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν στρατιωτῶν τοῦ Βάσσου κελεύσαντος ἀπάγεται, τελευταίαν ταύτην ἀνάλυσιν ἐκ συμποσίου ποιησάμενος· ἔδει γὰρ ἅφ’ ἐστίας ἄρξασθαι τὴν δίκην κατὰ τοῦ μυρίου ἀνεστίους οἴκους οὐδὲν ἡδίκηκότεν ἀνθρώπων ἐργασαμένου.

bind the whole body together in one had been rent.”⁸⁵ The violence here needs no explication, but certainly it emphasizes the power of δίκη and Philo ends the entire treatise with an affirmation that God and δίκη prevail in the end and protect the Jews.⁸⁶

In the *Legatio*, δίκη makes less frequent appearances than in *In Flaccum*,⁸⁷ but at 107 Philo says of Gaius: “Every instrument of destruction he had provided with unstinted liberality whereby, had not his death at the hands of justice forestalled his use of them, all the most highly reputed part of the community in every city would already have perished.”⁸⁸ Similar to Philo’s version of the death of Flaccus, Philo believed Gaius’ death was an act of δίκη. Many of the themes of *In Flaccum* carry over into the *Legatio*, including δίκη, although it not the central focus of the latter treatise as it is in the former. I agree with van der Horst’s assertion that: “[...] the concepts of divine providence and justice are no sheer theoretical issues in *In Flaccum*, they play such a prominent role precisely because of the practical problems of the Alexandrian Jews: it is the horrible persecution that has undermined their faith in God’s providence and justice. Philo has set himself the task of restoring this faith.”⁸⁹ But I think it is well indicated that we can take his statement a step further and say that these concepts are also a part of Philo’s repertoire of subtle threats. The scholarly consensus is that *In Flaccum* was written for a Roman audience, if not also for Jews.⁹⁰ A Gentile reading the frequent references to δίκη and God’s *προνοια* in all probability would have perceived a threat that wrongdoers against the Jews will be avenged. In tandem with Philo’s threats with respect to the myriads of Jews, their tough bodies,

⁸⁵ καὶ ὁ μὲν τόπος ἅπας αἵματι κατερρεῖτο διὰ πλειόνων φλεβῶν, αἱ κατὰ μέρος διεκόπησαν, κρουνηδὸν ἐκχεομένῳ· συρομένου δ’ εἰς τὸν ὀρωρυγμένον βόθρον τοῦ νεκροῦ τὰ πλεῖστα μέρη διελύετο, τῶν νεύρων κατεσχισμένων, οἷς ἡ κοινωμία συνεδεῖτο πᾶσα τοῦ σώματος.

⁸⁶ van der Horst, *Philo’s Flaccus*, 243-44.

⁸⁷ Δίκη is only found twice in the *Legatio*, as opposed to 10 times in *In Flaccum*.

⁸⁸ πάντα τὰ φθοροποιὰ χορηγίας ἀφθόνοις παρεσκευασμένος, οἷς, εἰ μὴ ἔφθασε προαναιρεθεὶς ὑπὸ τῆς δίκης [χρησασθαι], κἂν τὸ ἐν ἐκάστη πόλει δοκιμώτατον ἤδη διέφθαρτο.

⁸⁹ van der Horst, *Philo’s Flaccus*, 17.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 15-16.

and fighting spirits, it also would have been clear that vengeance would be had by one or both of two forces: Gods or the Jews themselves.

A third type of threat found primarily in the *Legatio* is that of Jews committing suicide—martyrdom. This threat is mentioned numerous times, and it is surprising that Philonic scholars have never analyzed them. We will return to martyrdom later in a discussion of self-defense.

Violence

The Roman Empire was extremely violent. Mattingly eloquently articulates the immensity of its tendency:

Of course, Rome was not a unique instance of an ancient state that resolved problems of security with extreme violence against its neighbors. As Craige Champion notes, ‘The world of the ancient Mediterranean states, the world in which Rome existed, seems to fulfill the grimmest paradigms of state behavior proposed by international systems theoreticians.’ However, while we can debate the exactitude of figures given in the ancient sources, it is arguable that the scale of Rome’s martial effort and colonial violence was unprecedented in antiquity.⁹¹

Colonialism, and the Empire’s need to subdue competition bred violence and is a key mechanism of imperialism. The economic exploitation and racism against the Jews was violent, and arguably even necessitated violence, but there are many other ways in which violence occurred between the Romans, Alexandrians and Jews. Therefore it is worth further analyzing its different manifestations in this case and how Philo addressed them.

The political and cultural environment of Alexandria and a complex history of ethnic clashes turned out to be a dangerous combination of forces.⁹² Things came to a head in 38 CE and the result was atrocious violence committed against the Alexandrian Jews by the Greeks, Egyptians, and local Roman government. According to the events as they are narrated in Philo’s

⁹¹ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*, 23.

⁹² The scholarship on the environment and politics of Alexandria at this time are extensive. See the bibliography for a very small list.

In Flaccum, King Agrippa's visit to Alexandria was the event that instigated the violence that immediately followed.⁹³ Gaius had recently given Agrippa 1/3 of his grandfather's, King Herod, inheritance to be his kingdom. On his way to Syria, Agrippa stopped over in Alexandria. The Alexandrians were upset that a Jew could hold such power and decided to incite and enlist Flaccus by insisting that Agrippa's power was a threat to his own. Assured that Flaccus would turn a blind eye, the Alexandrians proceeded to make fun of the King in the local theater, first with farces and jests, and then by dressing up a madman, Carabas, as the King and hailing him as such.

The atrocities committed by the Alexandrians against the Jews were horrendous and recounted in great detail by Philo. The list of violent acts included the erection of statues in synagogues; the removal of the Jews from four of their five districts into one small area, i.e. the first Jewish pogrom; the issuing of a decree by Flaccus rendering the Jews foreigners by law and punishable in the courts without trial; starvation and disease in the pogrom that afflicted those left homeless due to its overflow; the plundering of homes and temples; the whipping of Jews with flogs meant for the Egyptians, a social class with less political rights than the Jews;⁹⁴ the marching of the *gerousia* into the theater to be publicly beaten, many to their death, crucifixions; live immolation; the dragging of women into public spaces, places they were not allowed in by custom, and in which they were forced to eat pork, and men too were dragged into the streets for these feedings; and finally torture on the wheel. Infants and children were not spared, and corpses were mutilated and paraded around unceremoniously.

It is clear a tremendous amount of long-standing hatred and fear had built up among the Alexandrian people prior to this eruption—the degree of violence and inhumanity are

⁹³ Philo, *In Flaccum*, 25-35.

⁹⁴ See E.M. Smallwood, trans and ed., *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1970), 6-11 for a concise explanation of the political status of the Alexandrian Jews.

symptomatic of something deep and long-standing.⁹⁵ Although not physically violent, years of propaganda against Jews planted some seeds of the violence of 38 CE, and should be considered violent for its extreme offensiveness and amount of distortion. Propaganda also intensified after the events of 38 CE, indicating that propaganda and physical violence were symbiotic. Manetho, writing in the third century BCE was no fan of the Jewish religion. Many of the unflattering stories he related, particularly those involving an impious and disease-spreading Moses (“Osareph”) in his anti-Jewish history, had already been around for quite some time.⁹⁶ In the second century BCE, Agatharcides of Cnidus and Mnaseas, both from Asia Minor, wrote that the Egyptians as a result of their superstitious Sabbath conquered Jerusalem, and that the Jews worshipped an asses’ head, respectively.⁹⁷ Josephus implicates Posidonius and Apollonius Molon in spreading misinformation about the Jewish religion, from which Apion, perhaps the most ferocious slanderer of the first century CE, obtained much of his information.⁹⁸ Apion was politically active in Alexandria from 38-41 CE and headed the Greek delegation that met with Gaius, and opposed the Jewish delegation led by Philo. In his five-volume work on the history of Egypt, Apion, like Manetho, describes Moses and the Jews as lepers, claimed the Sabbath originated because of a need for rest to combat a groin disease, accused Alexandrian Jews of being impious and foreign, worshipping the ass’s head, and sacrificing a Greek once a year to their god in addition to the bulls sacred to Egypt.⁹⁹ He criticized circumcision, abstinence from pork, and generally described the Jews as a bizarre and cowardly people.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ van der Horst, *Philo’s Flaccus: The First Pogrom*, 32-34; Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini*, 3.

⁹⁶ John, M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117 CE)*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark 1996), 33, 130.

⁹⁷ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁹ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 73.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

A few other anti-Jewish writers named by Josephus in *Contra Apionem* and not yet mentioned here are Chaeremon and Lysimachus.¹⁰¹ Several Roman poets, historians and philosophers should be added to the list as men who represented the Jews in a negative light, and it is likely they contributed to the anti-Jewish sentiment of educated Alexandrians as well, although they were not writing in Egypt or Asia Minor and it seems quite likely that they had less of an influence on the Alexandrians than Manetho and Apion.¹⁰²

After Gaius was assassinated in 41 CE, the Alexandrian Jews gained momentum from the good news and sought armed revenge against the Alexandrians.¹⁰³ The threat was serious enough to gain Claudius' attention, and he sent an edict that the Jewish Alexandrians be granted the rights they previously possessed before Gaius, but warned the Jews not to seek anything further, and things settled down for a little while.¹⁰⁴ Apion remained on the scene in Alexandria beyond 41 CE, and so it is little surprising that in 66 CE, another outbreak of extreme violence erupted between the Jews and non-Jews in Alexandria.

Of course the Romans were not strictly immoral and bloodthirsty. Mattingly reminds us that: "The Roman colonial elites, like those of these more recent ages, were generally perturbed by the signs of moral degeneration in their societies as a side effect of imperial power. The scientific and scholarly energy put into imperial justification was largely a post facto attempt by the imperial society at large to come to terms with what had happened in certain colonies."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 362.

¹⁰² Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 7-8.

¹⁰³ Josephus, AJ xix 278-79. The only other record of this incident is Claudius' letter, which can be found in: V.A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, Vol 2, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960, No. 153.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Also see Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini*, 3-7.

¹⁰⁵ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*, 33.

Jewish Resistance: Self-Defense and Martyrdom:

Scholars of many ethnicities and nationalities have examined resistance literature and its theoretical underpinnings for decades. D. Boyarin and J.C. Scott explore resistance literature in their respective works. Scott provides a broad and thorough analysis of resistance literature that is applicable to a wide range of scenarios and nations whereas Boyarin explores the usual subjects of Jewish literature, which include the Book of Esther, 2 and 4 Maccabees, and the Talmud. Although neither Boyarin nor Scott discusses the works of Philo specifically, both discuss theories and frameworks that are applicable to Philo's writings; indeed, they can show us that Philo was an author of resistance literature.

J.C. Scott finds four different types of resistance literature (RL).¹⁰⁶ The first is the closest to the literature of the colonizers—it uses their language, rhetoric, and attempts to appease. The second he calls the “hidden transcript” which is written outside the view and language of the colonized and gives the most oppressed an unrestrained voice. Boyarin believes that the Talmud is an example of this and classifies it as “trickster literature”.¹⁰⁷ He explains that this subversive text, “composed in a language that the conquerors did not know, provided a safe and private space within which to elaborate the transcript hidden away from the colonizer”.¹⁰⁸ The third type of RL falls somewhere in the middle of the first and second forms. Scott explains, “This is a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors. Rumor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms—a good part of the folk culture

¹⁰⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 18-19

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 46-48.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

of subordinate groups—fit this description”.¹⁰⁹ The fourth type of RL is “of open rebellion, the martyr’s speech.”¹¹⁰

Philo’s works cannot be classified as one of these four types of RL alone, but rather fall nicely into three of the four categories. Philo did not write in Hebrew, and there is no evidence to show that he even knew the language to any significant extent, thus RL type two is not applicable to Philo’s works.¹¹¹ However, Philo’s works certainly falls within the first type. He writes in Greek, and although this was the language he grew up with in Alexandria, it was highly regarded by the colonized, and marks the presence of the older colonization of the city by the Greeks. It is also generally agreed that the audience of Philo’s historical treatises was intended to be Romans and anyone with authority.¹¹² In addition, at times Philo seems to flatter his colonizers. For example at *Legatio* 285-287 Philo seems to be complimenting the Roman’s while making very small requests of them. Philo’s language can be viewed either as weak or tactful, and although this is a bit subjective it is clear he had an unflattering and perspicuous conception of the hierarchy of power in Alexandria and his place within it:

Some of your friends have had their homelands as a whole deemed worthy by you of Roman citizenship, and men who but now were slaves have become masters of others. The pleasure which this gracious action gives to those who have enjoyed it is felt quite as much if not more by those for whose sake it was done. I myself, being one of those who while knowing we have a lord and master have been chosen to rank among your companions, am in dignity inferior to few and in loyalty second to none, I might almost say the first. And though, because I am what I am and in view of the multitude of benefits with which you have enriched me I might perhaps have had the courage to beg myself that my homeland should obtain if not Roman citizenship at least freedom and remission of tribute, I have felt it would be overbold to ask for anything of the kind and only prefer the very modest request of a favour which you will lose nothing by giving and my

¹⁰⁹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 19.

¹¹⁰ Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 46.

¹¹¹ On Philo’s knowledge of Hebrew, or lack thereof, see Erwin R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 9.

¹¹² Bilde, *Philo’s In Flaccum*, 107-110. van der Horst believes that Jews were also part of Philo’s intended audience. See *Philo’s Flaccus*, 15-16.

country will best profit by receiving. For what greater boon can subjects have than the goodwill of their ruler?¹¹³

It is clear that the language here is neither abrasive nor abusive, and furthermore there is no historical evidence that Philo himself participated in any riots or other acts of violence. The only political activity we know for sure that he engaged in was the embassy to Gaius, and it is clear the Jewish leaders left in frustration having made little to no impact from their verbal negotiations which Philo portrays as respectful on their end (although Gaius comes off as prejudiced and disrespectful). There also is some disagreement in the secondary literature over whether or not a second and more militant embassy went to confront Gaius at a later date than Philo's embassy in order to represent a different part of the Alexandrian Jewish community's needs. At any rate, Philo often chose to write in a way that fits the first type of RL, and this fits what we know of his political activities.

Additionally, Philo wrote material that falls within RL type three. Goodenough highlighted many such passages from *De Somniis II*, in particular 85-90. He comments at length on these passages in his work *Philo's Politics* and it is not difficult to see that Philo is indirectly advising caution against a vicious and lethal aggressor. He first uses the symbolism of nature and sailors at sea to describe the enemy and the relation between the resister and oppressor, and then at 88-89 he asserts:

As well might we think it advisable to fight against the stinging scorpions and asps of Egypt and all other creatures possessed of fatal poison whose single bite carries

¹¹³ φίλων ἐνίων πατρίδας ὅλας τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς ἡξίωσας πολιτείας, καὶ γεγόνασιν οἱ πρὸ μικροῦ δοῦλοι δεσπότες ἐτέρων• καὶ τῶν ἀπολελαυκότων τῆς χάριτος μᾶλλον ἢ οὐχ ἦττον οἱ δι' οὓς γέγονεν ἡδοναί. καὶ γὰρ τίς εἰμι τῶν εἰδότεων μὲν ὅτι δεσπότην ἔχω καὶ κύριον, κεκριμένων δὲ ἐν τῇ τάξει τῶν ἐταίρων, ἀξιώματος μὲν ἕνεκα οὐ πολλῶν ὕστερος, εὐνοίας δὲ οὐδενὸς δεύτερος, ἵνα μὴ λέγω πρῶτος. διὰ τε οὖν τὸ πεφυκέναι καὶ διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν εὐεργεσιῶν, αἷς με κατεπλούτισας, θαρρήσας ἂν ἴσως αἰτήσασθαι τῇ πατρίδι καὶ αὐτός, εἰ καὶ μὴ τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν πολιτείαν, ἐλευθερίαν γοῦν ἢ φόρων ἄφεσιν, οὐδὲν ἀπετόλμησα τοιοῦτον αἰτήσασθαι, τὸ δὲ φορητότατον, χάριν σοὶ μὲν ἀζήμιον δοῦναι, τῇ δὲ πατρίδι λαβεῖν ὠφελιμωτάτην• τί γὰρ ἂν γένοιτο εὐμενείας ἡγεμόνος ὑπηκόοις ἄμεινον ἀγαθόν;

with it inevitable death—creatures whom we may well be content to tame with charms and ensure that they do us no grievous harm. Then are there not some men more fierce and malicious than boars, scorpions or asps, men whose spite and malice can only be avoided by using some method of taming and soothing them?¹¹⁴

And at 89-90, Philo draws upon Abraham, a symbolic wise man of the Jews to back up his claim: in certain situations it is wise to obey even evil men in order to ensure longtime survival and even victory:

And therefore we should find wise Abraham doing obeisance to the sons of Cheth, whose name means “removing,” when the fitness of the circumstances prompted him to do so. [...] it was just because he feared their power at the time and their formidable strength and took care to give no provocation, that he will win that great and secure possession, that prize of virtue, the double cave which is the most excellent abiding-place of wise souls: the cave which could not be won by war and fighting, but with reason shewn in subservience and respectful treatment.¹¹⁵

I agree with Goodenough’s analysis of these passages: that through disguise, Philo was referring to his Roman rulers and Egyptian adversaries, and although as apolitical realist he expressed much caution, this was largely a survival strategy and an expression of Judaic integrity—he did not respect his unjust rulers out of courtesy or submissiveness.¹¹⁶

This passage also seems to be a “grumbling,” a form of hidden complaint identified by Scott. He explains: “Usually the intention behind the grumbling is to communicate a general sense of dissatisfaction without taking responsibility for an open, specific complaint.

It may be clear enough to the listener from the context exactly what the complaint is, but, via

¹¹⁴ εἰ μὴ καὶ φαλαγγίους καὶ ἀσπίσι ταῖς Αἰγυπτίαις καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅσα τὸν φθοροποιὸν ἰὸν <ἐπιφέρεται> οὐδενὶ λυσιτελεῖς ἀνθίστασθαι, θάνατον ἀπαραίτητον τοῖς ἅπασι δηχθεῖσιν ἐπάγουσιν· ἀγαπητὸν γὰρ κατεπάδοντας καὶ χειροῇ ποιῶντας μηδὲν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν δεινὸν παθεῖν. εἴτ’ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἄνθρωποι τινες συῶν, φαλαγγίων, ἀσπίδων ἀγριώτεροι καὶ ἐπιβουλότεροι· ὧν τὸ ἐπίβουλον καὶ δυσμενὲς ἀμήχανον ἐτέρως ἢ τιθασείαις καὶ μελίσγμασι χρωμένους διεκδῦναι.

¹¹⁵ τοιγάρτοι ὁ σοφὸς Ἀβραὰμ τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ Χέτ—ἐρμη-νεύονται δὲ ἐξιστάντες—προσκυνήσει (Gen. 23, 7), τῶν καιρῶν τοῦτο δρᾶν ἀναπειθόντων. [...] ἀλλὰ τὸ παρὸν κράτος αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν δυσάλωτον ἰσχὺν δεδιὼς καὶ φυλαττόμενος ἐρεθίζειν, μέγα καὶ ἐχυρὸν κτῆμα καὶ ἀγώνισμα ἀρετῆς, σοφῶν ψυχῶν ἄριστον ἐνδιαίτημα, τὸ διπλοῦν σπήλαιον, ὃ μαχόμενον μὲν καὶ πολεμοῦντα οὐκ ἐνῆν, ὑπερχόμενον δὲ καὶ θεραπεύοντα τῷ λόγῳ, κομίζεται.

¹¹⁶ Erwin, R. Goodenough and Howard Lehman Goodhart, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory with a General Bibliography of Philo* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), 20-25.

the grumble, the complainer has avoided an incident and can, if pressed, disavow any intention to complain”.¹¹⁷ In the passage above, Philo expresses dissatisfaction with dangerous obstacles and heedless plans to fight them. If we agree with Goodenough and accept that Philo was referring to the Romans and the oppressed situation of the Jews in the passages above, Philo was grumbling his distaste for them (who likes deadly asps and scorpions?), yet cleverly he never once uses the word “Roman” or “oppressor” or even “Jew” but rather spoke allegorically.

Finally, Philo makes several statements that fall within RL type four. For example

In Flaccum 47-49:

And it was to be feared that people everywhere might take their cue from Alexandria, and outrage their Jewish fellow-citizens by rioting against their synagogues and ancestral customs. Now the Jews though naturally well-disposed for peace could not be expected to remain quiet whatever happened, not only because with all men the determination to fight for their institutions outweighs even the danger to life, but also because they are the only people under the sun who by losing their meeting-houses were losing also what they would have valued as worth dying many thousand deaths, namely, their means of showing reverence to their benefactors, since they no longer had the sacred buildings where they could set forth their thankfulness.¹¹⁸

More instances can be found in the *Legatio*. For example, section 117:

One nation only standing apart, the nation of the Jews, was suspected of intending opposition, since it was accustomed to accept death as willingly as if it were immortality, to save them from submitting to the destruction of any of their ancestral traditions, even the smallest, because as with buildings if a single piece is taken from the base, the parts that up to then seemed firm are loosened and slip away and collapse into the void thus made.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 154.

¹¹⁸ καὶ δέος ἦν, μὴ οἱ πανταχοῦ τὴν ἀφορμὴν ἐκείθεν λαβόντες ἐπηρεάζωσι τοῖς πολίταις αὐτῶν Ἰουδαίοις εἰς τὰς προσευχὰς καὶ τὰ πάτρια νεωτερίζοντες. οἱ δέ—οὐ γὰρ ἔμελλον ἄχρι παντὸς ἡσυχάζειν καίτοι πεφυκότες εὐ πρὸς εἰρήνην, οὐ μόνον ὅτι παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις οἱ περὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἀγῶνες καὶ τοὺς περὶ ψυχῆς κινδύνους ὑπερβάλλουσιν, ἀλλ’ ὅτι καὶ μόνοι τῶν ὑφ’ ἡλίον ἅμα ταῖς προσευχαῖς ἀπεστεροῦντο τὴν εἰς τοὺς εὐεργέτας εὐσέβειαν, ὃ μυρίων θανάτων ἐτετίμηντο ἄν—οὐκ ἔχοντες ἱεροὺς περιβόλους, οἷς ἐνδιαθήσονται τὸ εὐχάριστον [...].

¹¹⁹ παραχαράττοντες. ἐν δὲ μόνον ἔθνος ἐξαίρετον τῶν Ἰουδαίων ὑποπτον ἦν ἀντιπράξειν, εἰωθὸς ἐκουσίους ἀναδέχεσθαι θανάτους ὥσπερ ἀθανασίαν, ὑπὲρ τοῦ μηδὲν τῶν πατρίων περιδεῖν ἀναιρούμενον, εἰ καὶ βραχύτατον εἴη, διὰ τὸ καθάπερ ἐπὶ τῶν οἰκοδομημάτων ὑφαιρέσει ἐνὸς καὶ τὰ ἔτι παγίως ἐστάναι δοκοῦντα συμπίπτειν πρὸς τὸ κενωθὲν χαλῶμενα καὶ καταρρέοντα.

In a similar fashion in *Legatio* 192, Philo says the following in response to the new that a temple in a nearby town was destroyed by the erection of a statue of Zeus: “Well so be it, we will die and be no more, for the truly glorious death, met in defense of laws, might be called life.”¹²⁰ At *Legatio* 215 Philo reminds his readers that the Jews are numerous and that he would not recommend the so many Jews be goaded into taking their lives out of self-defense, and at *Legatio* 308, Philo makes a similar statement to 215,¹²¹ but more in the flavor of a heightened threat:

So greatly careful was the law-giver to guard the inmost sanctuary, the one and only place which he wished to keep preserved untrampled and untouched. How many deaths think you would those who have been trained to holiness in these matters willingly endure if they should see the statue imported thither? I believe that they would slaughter their whole families, women and children alike, and finally immolate themselves upon the corpses of their kin.¹²²

Philo comments on martyrdom enough times that it should be taken seriously as a threat, and in his analysis of RL types Scott refers to literary descriptions of martyrdom as the resistance literature of open rebellion. Indeed, I would argue that the passages above that fit into RL type four more directly advocate for an uprising against the Romans than any other in the *Legatio*, *In Flaccum*, and *De Somniis*, and I have yet to find any that are more inflammatory in any of Philo’s other works.

The expression of open rebellion through the threat of martyrdom is significant for several reasons. First, it is perhaps one of the least confrontational forms of advocating rebellion. It is a serious statement to threaten to kill yourself and/or your family members, but it

¹²⁰ ἀλλ’ ἔστω, τεθνηξόμεθα· ζωὴ γάρ τις ἐστὶν ὁ ὑπὲρ φυλακῆς νόμων εὐκλεέστατος θάνατος.

¹²¹ See pg. 28 and n.76 of this paper for the text and translation of *Legatio* 215.

¹²² τοσαύτη τις ἐστὶν ἡ περὶ τὰ ἄδυστα φυλακὴ τοῦ νομοθέτου μόνα ἐκ πάντων ἄβυστα καὶ ἄψανστα βουλευθέντος αὐτὰ διατηρεῖσθαι. πόσους ἂν οὖν οἶει θανάτους ἐκουσίως ὑπομένειν τοὺς περὶ ταῦτα ὥσιωμένους, εἰ θεάσαιντο τὸν ἀνδριάντα εἰσκομιζόμενον; ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκοῦσι γενεάς ὅλας αὐταῖς γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις ἀποσφάζαντες ἐπὶ τοῖς τῶν οἰκείων πτώμασιν ἑαυτοὺς τελευταῖον καθιερεῦσιν.

is many times more threatening to say you are going to kill your oppressor and their families. So by threatening Jewish martyrdom, Philo makes a safer threat than if he had called the Jews to arms against the Romans or Egyptians.

Second, martyrdom plays a key role in Jewish traditions of resistance that marks it as a unique and ethnically charged mode of self-assertion. Many scholars have already made a connection between Philo's rhetoric and 2 and 4 Maccabees. Of significance here is the call to martyrdom in the former, and the stories and instructions of martyrdom in the latter. I agree that Philo was likely influenced by these texts or by a text that predated both, and that a brief analysis of the similarities will prove instructive in understanding Philo's threats of martyrdom.

2 Maccabees is a narrative of specific events in Jewish history from 187 BCE-150BCE, a time when the Jews were subject to Greek tyranny and successfully fought back with violence and martyrdom.¹²³ 2 and 4 Maccabees were both written in Greek and although their composition cannot be dated precisely, it is thought that they were written immediately before and after Philo's time. The dates given for 2 Maccabees range from 124 BCE- 60CE and 4 Maccabees is thought to have been written somewhere between 70CE- 200CE.¹²⁴ Of particular interest are the stories of Eleazar, the seven brothers and their mother, and Razi, all of whom sacrificed their lives for the Jewish God and people. These stories compose a small part of the entirety of 2 Maccabees, but they are weighty in their importance, and they are the sole concern of 4 Maccabees. As the oldest Jewish texts known to devote so much space to martyrdom,¹²⁵ both are prime candidates for having inspired Philo's passion and ideas on the subject. The narratives in 2 Maccabees are told didactically—they are given with introductions,

¹²³ Jan Willem Van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 17.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 51, 73-78.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 26, 57-58.

conclusions, and intermissions that moralize what just occurred and give religious instruction, while the narratives repeated in 4 Maccabees are told more from the perspective and interests of philosophy.¹²⁶ The stories will not be repeated here, but it is worth speculating what aspects of the texts may have interested and influenced Philo. van Heten observes:

2 Maccabees' depiction of the martyrs' effective death is elaborated upon in 4 Maccabees. The author presents much more explicit terminology concerning the reconciliatory effects of the death of the martyrs. Like in 2 Maccabees, the death of the Maccabean martyrs is of fundamental importance for the Jewish people. The political views of the author, however, have become spiritualized. The martyrology in 4 Maccabees concentrates on the way of life of the Jewish people.¹²⁷

The authors of 2 and 4 Maccabees were not writing mere folklore. They were writing to instruct on both the practical and philosophical matters of martyrdom to the Jewish people and surely targeted an audience of not only the Jewish collective, but learned philosophers such as Philo.

Third, martyrdom is an easily accessible weapon for the colonized and the poor. No matter how destitute and abused a nation, except for some extreme situations involving ironclad surveillance, people always have their own bodies to use as weapons. One can always exert ultimate control over one's life in the end by choosing one's final moment, and for what cause that final moment will be spent.

How do we reconcile Philo's calls to conformity and to rebellion? Philo, like any intellectual, was not always consistent in his thinking and could change his opinion on matters depending on the situation and context, appropriately or not. But what is more likely at play here is that Philo was largely consistent in his thinking about resistance, but often had to cloak his opinions in various forms in order to protect his community and himself. As an intellectual, a

¹²⁶ Ibid., 24, 58.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 150.

rhetorician, and politically minded elder, he strategized. Scott aptly explains the process of conformity and the repression of rage often seen in colonized peoples:

It is plain enough thus far that the prudent subordinate will ordinarily conform by speech and gesture to what he knows is expected of him—even if that conformity masks a quite different offstage opinion. What is not perhaps plain enough is that, in any established system of domination, it is not just a question of masking one's feelings and producing the correct speech acts and gestures in their place. Rather it is often a question of controlling what would be a natural impulse to rage, insult, anger, and the violence that such feelings prompt. [...] Conformity in the face of domination is thus occasionally—and unforgettably—a question of suppressing a violent rage in the interest of oneself and loved one.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Let us now refer back to Table 8.1, which I reproduced and amended on page four. I asserted that the following mechanisms by which imperialism can be carried out are found in the works of Philo: acts of conquest, legal frameworks, land confiscation and reassignment, language of government, enslavement, operation of imperial economy, power imbalances, legal inequalities, abuses/corruption, individual exploitation, brutality, surveillance, economic adaptations, resistance (armed and cultural), redefining of identity, and native agency.¹²⁹ I added the following mechanisms to the table since they also can be found in Philo: transgression of rule of law, poverty, racism, and martyrism/mass suicide. I believe I have shown that all these

¹²⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 36-37.

¹²⁹ Enslavement is the only mechanism listed above not addressed in this paper. This is because enslavement of Jews in Alexandria did not occur in a systematic fashion, but yet it is discussed by Philo at *Legatio* 119 where he asserts that enslavement accurately describes the general state of the Jews under Gaius: Μέγιστος οὖν καὶ ἀκήρυκτος πόλεμος ἐπὶ τῷ ἔθνει συνεκροτεῖτο. τί γὰρ ἂν εἴη δούλῳ βαρύτερον κακὸν ἢ δεσπότης ἐχθρός; δοῦλοι δὲ αὐτοκράτορος οἱ ὑπήκοοι, καὶ εἰ μηδενὸς ἐτέρου τῶν προτέρων διὰ τὸ σὺν ἐπιεικείᾳ καὶ μετὰ νόμων ἄρχειν, ἀλλὰ τοι Γαίῳ πᾶσαν ἐκτετμημένου τῆς ψυχῆς ἡμερότητα καὶ παρανομίαν ἐζηλωκότος—νόμον γὰρ ἡγούμενος ἑαυτὸν τοὺς τῶν ἐκασταχοῦ νομοθετῶν ὡς κενὰς ῥήσεις ἔλυνεν— ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐ μόνον ἐν δούλοις ἀλλὰ καὶ δούλων τοῖς ἀτιμοτάτοις ἐγραφόμεθα τοῦ ἄρχοντος τρέποντος εἰς δεσπότην. So then a vast and truceless war was prepared against the nation [of Jews]. For what greater curse can a slave have than a hostile master? Subjects are slaves of the absolute emperor, and if this is not true of any of his predecessors since they ruled with moderation and observance of the law, it was indeed true of Gaius who had excised all kindness from his soul and zealously practiced lawlessness. For considering that he himself was a law, he abrogated those laid down by legislators in the several states, treating them as empty talk. And we were ranked not only as slaves but as the most degraded slaves when the ruler changed into a despotic master.

mechanisms were described by Philo, many in great detail, in his historical treatises *In Flaccum* and the *Legatio ad Gaium*, and furthermore that the mechanisms were indeed tools of imperialism contained within a colonial relationship between the Jews and Romans. I also investigated Philo's threats, both subtle and unequivocal, and find that they are a product of the colonial violence perpetrated against the Jews of Alexandria. Philo Judaeus' writings should be considered a voice of a colonized nation living under Roman rule.

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