

Philo's Sabbath: A Study in Philo's Jewish Law

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Introduction

Even with its initial mention in the Bible, the laws pertaining to the Sabbath combine not only purely technical elements such as the injunction against lighting fire but also “positive” requirements that have a spiritual/emotional or even psycho-physic aspect, such as the requirement to “rest” or “delight” on the Sabbath. This latter aspect of the Sabbath brings to the fore Philo’s Hellenistic context, as the definitions of “rest” and “delight” are heavily related to the issue of body-and-soul. At least in theory, this issue marks one of the differences between Palestinian and, later, rabbinic Judaism on the one hand, and Hellenistic Judaism on the other. We find that Philo does indeed represent a Hellenistic approach insofar as he creates a clear divide between body and soul, describing the Sabbath as a day dedicated exclusively to the soul. However, while Philo does not seem to reflect the consensus in rabbinic sources (if such a consensus exists), neither are his views alien to the Rabbis' world. Our study reveals not only a textual basis, similar to *midrash*, but also a theoretical foundation for Philo's Sabbath, which is deeply rooted in Hellenistic concepts propounding that one should dedicate his life to spirituality and philosophy as opposed to fulfilling ones bodily needs.

The main argument of this paper is that even though Philo was definitely influenced by Roman and Greek ideas, ideas which are reflected in his account of the Sabbath, as we shall demonstrate, his rendition is an integral part of Jewish law during Late-Antiquity. The similarities we find between Philo and other halakhic corpora suggest that the Greek-speaking Jews were part of the Jewish cultural world, of their time.

Some methodological remarks:

This study of Philo's Sabbath is part of a larger project on Philo's Jewish law. Any study of Philo's law raises serious methodological and historical questions. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss these issues. Instead, I will begin with summarizing the main assumptions upon which this study is founded:

1. Even though Philo did not write an explicit code of — but rather an apology for-- Jewish law, he is a very reliable source for Jewish law during the Second Temple period. The fact that he generally takes the details of the practice itself for granted and focuses on the rationale behind it, gives him even more credibility when he does choose to share certain legal details.
2. Any discussion of Philo's law should take into account Second-Temple and Rabbinic sources as a frame of reference, for two main reasons: A. The divide between Palestinian Judaism and Hellenistic Judaism in Philo's time is artificial from both a cultural and a geographical point of view.¹ B. The study of the Dead sea-Scrolls has firmly established that while there was a chronological gap of several centuries between Second-Temple Judaism and rabbinic literature, a comparative study of these corpora may yield important insights into the field of the development of Jewish law.²
3. While any similarity found between Philo and other Second-Temple or rabbinic sources in practice-- or in exegetical methods, or biblical interpretation-- may

¹ On the prominence of Greek culture in Palestine during the Second-Temple period see for instance L.I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence*. The Samuel & Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.

² See for instance Y. Zussman, "The Research of the Development of Halakha and the Dead Seas Scrolls – Preliminary Reflections in Light of 4QMMT", *Tarbiz* 68 (1989): 11-76. (Hebrew).

not warrant a historical conclusion with respect to the question of shared traditions, influences etc., such similarities still can provide us with valuable insights on issues like the development of Jewish law, the relationship between Hellenistic Judaism and Palestinian or rabbinic Judaism, etc.

The Significance of the Sabbath

The Sabbath is probably the most discussed practice in Philo's writings. In his work on Philo's Jewish identity, Alan Mendelson argues that according to Philo there are five main Jewish practices, which are central in defining one's identity as Jewish. These include the observance of the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, the dietary laws, circumcision, and refraining from intermarriage. According to Mendelson, these practices are the basis of Philo's "orthopraxy". The violation of these laws would thus render an individual to be considered divorced from the Jewish community.

Mendelson is right in identifying the centrality of these practices in Philo's writing and thought. However, it seems that he fails to provide coherent and consistent criteria which will enable us to examine why *these* specific laws and not others constitute this "orthopraxy".

In a work dedicated to the Sabbath in Philo's writing, Weiss rejects Mendelson's argument relating the centrality of Sabbath observance in Philo's thought. He argues that: "It would seem that such a "cornerstone" would require a sizable treatise."³ However, in my opinion, there is no reason to question the centrality of the Sabbath

³ H Weiss, *Philo on the Sabbath*, **SPA III** (1991), pp. 88.

observance for the Jews in Alexandria. Philo refers to the Sabbath probably more than any other practice throughout his writings. Weiss, himself, asserts that Philo was very adamant in advocating for the Sabbath for both communal and other reasons, which Weiss seems to regard as external and not essential to Philo's thought.⁴

Perhaps rather than talking about a systemized Orthopraxy, we should consider the practices which Mendelsson identifies as markers of Judaism simply because they were perceived as such by both Jews and Gentiles. In other words, the great prominence of these practices is not necessarily the result of an internal belief in their essential intrinsic value, but rather in the acknowledgment both internally (by Jews) and externally (by Gentiles) that these practices are unique to-- or commonly observed only by-- Jews.⁵ Thus, in order to understand Philo's motivations and rhetoric in describing Jewish Law, it is important to examine what he was likely to have known about how Gentiles perceived these Jewish practices.

To begin, we can turn to Philo himself. Setting aside, for the moment, Philo's testimony of the general appreciation that Gentiles expressed regarding the Jews, we have evidence of several other accounts, which have more credibility. For instance, when Philo and the Jewish delegation met with Gaius Calligula, Gaius mocked the Jewish delegation asking, "Why do you refuse to eat pork?"⁶ Earlier, in *The Embassy*, Philo demonstrated that Augustus, like other Gentile leaders, was very cautious not to

⁴ Weiss, *Philo on the Sabbath*, pp. 85-86.

⁵ This does not mean the as far as the hierarchy these practices make it to the top of the list as one can imagine a system which has clear rules of defining one as part of the group but having other beliefs or practices at the center. For example in any army there is a set of symbolic practices which serve as markers of the army as a group or society such as uniform, flags etc. however one would not define the army as a system which places the observance of these practices as its' end goal..

⁶ *Legatio ad Gaium* 361.

abuse the Jewish institutions. He claimed that Augustus knew that the Jews “have houses of prayer and meet together in them, particularly on the sacred Sabbaths”⁷ and that when the authorities in Rome would distribute grain to the local population, Augustus was cautious not to prevent the Jews from receiving their share because it was the Sabbath.⁸

Elsewhere, as an example for the great appreciation of the Jewish code of law by Gentiles, Philo notes the Sabbath and the Day of Atonement (*Moses 2, 20-24*). In his account on Jewish Law in *contra apionem* Josephus singles out the Jewish practices which seem to be the most known to Gentiles:

*For there is not any city of the Grecians, nor any of the barbarians, nor any nation whatsoever, whither our custom of resting on the seventh day hath not come, and by which our fasts and lighting up lamps, and many of our prohibitions as to our food, are not observed.*⁹

What is just as important for our purposes is that the main Jewish practices which Philo and Josephus underline as familiar to, and as they argue, appreciated by, Gentiles are quite similar to those pointed out by Gentile writers. Thus, when Greek or Roman writers describe the Jewish practices they, by and large, focus on the Sabbath, abstention from intermarriage, the dietary laws and circumcision.¹⁰ Therefore, it is not surprising that Philo would put a special emphasis on these practices, making an apology for their rationale, their ethical value, and their centrality to the Jewish people. If Philo wrote for a Gentile audience, this would have served as a defense for the

⁷ *Legatio ad Caium*, 156.

⁸ *Legatio ad Caium*, 158.

⁹ *Contra apionem* 39

¹⁰ On the allegations against the Jews with respect to the Sabbath, circumcision, dietary laws, and separatism see for instance L.H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, New Jersey: 1993, pp. 125-167. See also E. Gruen, *Rethinking The Other In Antiquity*, Princeton: 2011, pp. 183. J.J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, Grand Rapids & Cambridge: 2000, pp. 8.

practices for which Jews were not uncommonly mocked and scorned. And, if Philo wrote for Jews, it would have made perfect sense to focus on the practices which both Jews and Gentiles recognize as markers of the Jews' "otherness". After all, most of these practices, by their very practical nature, could have created a barrier between Jews and Gentiles, making social connections difficult to achieve. Thus, it is clear to see that Jewish identity is shaped both internally and externally by these practices.

The Sabbath According to the Bible

In order to determine the typical Philonic nature of Philo's portrayal of Jewish law, we must determine what should be considered a practice rooted in a simple reading of the Bible, allowing that such an assertion may be somewhat subjective, and put that aside. It is, rather, extra-biblical components that are primarily subject to our speculation on the processes, be they exegetical, social or ideological that yielded new practices and legal concepts.

Although the Sabbath is mentioned in the Bible many times, the details of its observance are quite limited. Generally, the Sabbath is characterized positively by "resting", or, negatively, by abstaining or ceasing from performing "work" (*melacha*). In two legal texts the Pentateuch is more specific. According to Exodus 35.3 it is prohibited to light a fire on the Sabbath. A more general prohibition is found in Exodus 34.21 which

forbids agricultural activities: “Six days you shall work and on the seventh day you shall cease. In plow time and in harvest you shall cease.”¹¹

In addition, there are two narratives, which were understood in various Jewish sources as reflecting specific prohibitions. Exodus 16, which tells the story of the *Maana*, includes the prohibition “let no one go out from his place on the seventh day” (Ex. 16.19),¹² and Numbers 15.32-36. According to this narrative a man guilty of gathering wood on the Sabbath was stoned to death, following God’s direct orders. Apparently, the prohibition of gathering wood in the narrative is strongly connected to the specific prohibition of lighting fire.

In addition to the Pentateuch, there are other references to the observance of the Sabbath in the Bible, which could have been used as a source for formulating the Sabbatical norms. Indeed, as Kamesar writes: “as far as canon is concerned, Philo’s Bible is essentially the Pentateuch, or Pentateuch. Philo comments on Pentateuchal books only, and even his citations of books from other parts of the conventional canon are proportionately few.”¹³ Yet, this does not mean that we should rule out any influence of these sources, directly or indirectly, on formulating Philo’s Jewish law.

The rabbinic concept of *shevut*

¹¹ All translations from the Pentateuch are based on Robert Alter’s translation. For the rest of the Bible I relied on the NRSV translation.

¹² In its original context this prohibition seems to be part of the prohibition to collect the *manna* on the seventh day, but to collect a double portion on Friday instead. However, it was understood, as early as the Second Temple period, as a restriction on movement during the Sabbath. For instance, the Damascus Document states: “one shall not walk outside of his town (a distance of) a thousand cubits” (CD 10.21). This prohibition is clearly based on an understanding of Exodus 16.19 as a general restriction, rather than a prohibition concerning the gathering of the *manna* which was exclusive to the period of wandering in the desert.. See L. H. Schiffman. *Law, Custom and Messianism in the Dead Sea Sect*, Jerusalem: 1993 (Hebrew), pp. 99.

¹³ Kamesar A., “Biblical Interpretation in Philo”, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. pp. 71-72.

One reference to the Sabbath made a significant mark on Second Temple concepts of the Sabbath. This is the statement in Isaiah 58.13:

If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth.

This source does not give a clear description of the ideal Sabbath observance, and thus requires interpretation if one wishes to derive any practical norms from it. The Amoraic interpretation of Isaiah 58.13 as the source for the rabbinic concept of *shevut*, which during the Tannaitic period pertains to actions forbidden on the Sabbath because they are considered day-to-day activities.¹⁴ This category is reflected in the writings of Philo's contemporaries from the Judean desert.¹⁵

This is significant for several reasons. First, the idea of *shevut* reflects the notion that not all the Sabbath ordinances derive from the injunction against performing work. In addition, they reflect the notion of hierarchy within the system of Sabbath laws; according to this system some laws belong to the more important category of "work", and so the consequence of violating these laws is death, while other laws are of lesser weight, and so the implication of violating them is not as harsh. When we turn to

¹⁴ Later defined as *uvdin dechol* i.e. "every-day deeds", and forbidden even though they do not fall into the category of "work" forbidden on the Sabbath, i.e. *melacha*. According to the Damascus Covenant, this principle dictated abstaining from wearing day-to-day garments but rather wearing fresh, clean, cloths on the Sabbath. Schiffman, *idem* pp. 114, suggests that the source for the sects' requirement to wear clean garments on the Sabbath might in fact be Isaiah 15. This requirement appears in the *bavli* as well, and is explicitly based on Isaiah 15: "If you honor it, not going your own ways" (*this means*) let your Sabbath clothing be not like your weekday clothing (*bavli* Shabbat 113a)."

¹⁵ V. Noam and E. Qimron, "A Collection of Sabbath Laws from Qumran and its Contribution to the Study of Early Jewish Law", *Tarbiz* 74.4 (July 1, 2005) 521–522 (Hebrew). On *shevut*, see Y.D. Gilat, "The Development of the Shevuth Prohibitions on Sabbath", in: *Proceedings of the Tenth World Jewish Studies Congress*, Jerusalem: 1990, pp. 9-16.

examine Philo's account of the Sabbath, we will ask to what extent these Second-Temple categories apply to Philo as well.

Another prohibition which was later categorized as *shevut* in Tannaitic literature is the injunction against commercial activities. Unlike the vague statement in Isaiah, this prohibition is explicit. Amos 8.5 tells that even the poor would refrain from commercial activity on the Sabbath but would cry: "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale?"¹⁶

Philo's version of the Sabbath

1. Particularism and Universalism

¹⁶ Similarly, In Nehemia 13.15-22 we are told of Nehemia's brawl with those people who were involved in commercial activity in Jerusalem during the Sabbath. As in the episode narrated thereafter, i.e. dealing with Nehemiah's targeting of intermarriage, it is unclear whether his opponents were consciously-- and purposely-- transgressing against Biblical law or whether they simply adhered to a different, more lenient, version of that law. Although any (late) Second-Temple reader of the text noted above would infer from it that commercial activity is strictly forbidden on the Sabbath, Just as in the episode dealing with the *manna*, it seems that these offences are not perceived as deeds, which should warrant capital punishment. Therefore, it could be argued that even in the Bible itself there is a category of Sabbath observances of lesser weight to which the decree "those who profane it are doomed to die" (Exodus 31.14) does not apply. However, as late as the Amoraic period, there is still a dispute as to whether injunctions which would not warrant capital punishment in case of violation are to be considered part of Biblical law or as an addition by rabbinic authorities. See Gilat, *Studies*. pp. 254.

Philo discusses the Sabbath in several contexts, and underscores its centrality in the Jewish practice of his time. He introduces the Sabbath in his overview of the Decalogue with a peculiar statement:

*The fourth commandment deals with the sacred seventh day, that it should be observed in a reverent and religious manner. While some states celebrate this day as a feast once a month, reckoning it from the commencement as shown by the moon, the Jewish nation never ceases to do so at continuous intervals with six days between each.*¹⁷

In this text, Philo, in fact, makes a bold statement, according to which the Sabbath is a universal holiday. What is particular to the Jews is only in the special details of their Sabbath. Of course we do not know of any “Sabbath” celebrated in other religions of his time. The question is, what is Philo referring to and in what sense do these festivals correspond to the Sabbath? We do know that the Greeks used to hold monthly festivals; as Plato testifies:

*There are twelve feasts to the twelve gods who give their names to the several tribes: to each of these they shall perform monthly sacrifices and assign choirs and musical contests, and also gymnastic contests, as is suitable both to the gods themselves and to the several seasons of the year.*¹⁸

However, if this is what Philo has in mind, what is the purpose of making this connection between what seems to be two very different practices? The difference between the Sabbath and the Greek monthly celebration becomes even clearer as Philo continues to describe the Jewish practice:

¹⁷ De Decalogo 96.

¹⁸ Laws, 8.828b.

*He bade those who would live as citizens under this world-order follow God in this as in other matters. So he commanded that they should apply themselves to work for six days but rest on the seventh day and turn to the study of wisdom, and that they thus had leisure for the contemplation of the truths of nature they should also consider whether any offence against purity had been committed in the preceding days, and exact from themselves in the council-chamber of the soul, with the laws as their fellow-assessors and fellow examiners, a strict account of what they had said or done on order to correct what had been neglected and to take precaution against repetition of any sin.*¹⁹

This description of the Sabbath as a day of contemplation and repentance hardly resonates with the monthly festival described by Plato. In fact, in his account of Jewish festivals, Philo does include a Jewish monthly holy day, although he does not provide many details as to the nature of this festival. Indeed, the only connection between the two festivals (i.e. the Sabbath and the Greek monthly festival) seems to be that they are both fixed in the calendar in a way which is disconnected from (or at least does not primarily depend on) the agricultural year, historical events, or life-cycle events, which are frequently the basis for many festivals in all religions and cultures.

In no way does Philo try to obscure the difference between the Jewish holiday and the Greek one. Before his account of the laws of the Sabbath in “The Special Laws”, Philo describes “the daily festival” which is enjoyed by all those who adhere to a life of prudent philosophers. Such men, according to Philo, “in the delight of their virtues, naturally make their whole life a feast.”²⁰ Philo contrasts this “feast” with the Greek and

¹⁹ De Deacalogo 98.

²⁰ De Specialibus Legibus II 46.

Barbarian style of celebration. It is the fate of the “wicked man” to always be miserable.²¹

For with the first he blurts out matters of secrecy which call for silence, while in his greed he fills second with viands unlimited and strong drink in great quantities, and as for the third, he misuses them for abominable lusts and forms of intercourse forbidden by all laws²²

In this description Philo is clearly critical of the Greek way of celebrating their festivals in order to contrast it with the Jewish practice. This explains why Philo compares the Sabbath to the monthly festival in the first place. The comparison between the two festivals adds to the universal significance of the Sabbath and underlines the superiority of the Jewish practice. Having a day of rest is not unique, Philo would claim. Many cities have a day of rest, a festival. What is unique is the way in which the Jews celebrate their festival.

Another aspect of the Sabbath as a universal holiday is rooted the bible’s own words. The Pentateuch provides two explanations for the requirement to rest on the Sabbath. According to the more universal Decalogue in Exodus, this is because God rested on the seventh day of Creation. However, according to the particularistic version of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy, the reason is that “you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm ...”²³. Philo’s incorporation of the two different versions reflects

²¹ It should be noted that Philo does not rule out the of Greeks’ or Barbarians’ ability to distance themselves from the crowds and live a contemplative life as “the closest observers of nature” (*Spec. Leg.* 2.45). His critique is of what Philo describes to be the typical manner of celebrating festivals in the Gentile world.

²²De Specialibus Legibus II 50.

²³ Deuteronomy 5.14.

an attempt to universalize the Sabbath as well, as we will show below. Philo's universal approach towards the Sabbath has practical implications as well, and stands in deep contrast to other Second-Temple views, which continued to exist later in rabbinic sources.²⁴

2. A day of rest for the slave

An additional difference between the two versions of the fourth commandment is that in Deuteronomy there is a strong emphasis on the servants' enjoying a day of rest as well, through the addition of the sentence "so that your male slave and your slave girl may rest **like you**".²⁵ It is not surprising that Philo chose the more universal version saying that the Sabbath "may properly be called the birthday of the world, as the day on which the work of the Father, being exhibited as perfect with all its parts perfect, was commanded to rest and abstain from all works."²⁶ But what is striking is that when Philo describes the actual laws of rest, he takes a very restrictive approach towards the "use" of servants during the Sabbath (**banning any use of slaves whatsoever**), which seems to be based on Deuteronomy rather than Exodus.

According to Philo, during the Sabbath it is not permitted to have a servant perform a service, even if the master is permitted to perform the same action by himself,²⁷ "to teach the masters and men an admirable lesson. The masters must be

²⁴ Jubilees 2.71-21. See Y.D. Gilat, "The Sabbath and its Laws in Philo's Writings", *Beit Mikra* 38.3 (1992) [Hebrew], 281-220. As Gilat notes, Philo emphasizes the universal aspect of the Sabbath not only with respect to Non-Jews but even with respect to animals and plants.

²⁵ Deuteronomy 5.13.

²⁶ De Specialibus Legibus II 59.

²⁷ It seems unlikely that Philo is referring here to forbidden work. See H. Weiss, *Philo on the Sabbath*, SPA III (1991), pp. 87-89. I agree with Weiss that Philo's description of the day of rest for the slave is consistent with Philo's ideas about the Sabbatical but as I will argue below there is also a textual basis for this practice.

accustomed to work themselves without waiting for the offices and attentions of their menials [...].”²⁸

The use of slaves during the Sabbath was a halakhic issue addressed by various Late-Antiquity sources, and so provides us with an opportunity for a comparative analysis, underlining Philo’s unique approach. Belkin argued that Philo’s practice is in dispute with Tannaitic law and in agreement with “Zadokite law”.²⁹ Today we know that the “Zadokite Law” Belkin was referring to was, in fact, the Damascus Document from Qumran which reads as follows: “let a nurse not carry an infant [to go out or come in on the Sabbath. Let no one contend?] with his slave or his maidservant on the Sabbath”.³⁰ However, contrary to Belkin’s suggestion, the law in CD has nothing to do with the issue of the use of servants during the Sabbath, leaving Philo’s law, to our knowledge, unique and unprecedented.

²⁸ De Specialibus Legibus II 67.

²⁹ S. Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law* (New York: 1942) pp. 203-204.

³⁰ 4Q270 Fragment 6 Col. V lines 16-17 (translation by A.J. Baumgarten). The Hebrew reconstructed text and translation are based on D. Perry & E. Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader* (Leiden; Boston: 2004) v. 1. The different textual variants including the fragments from the *genizah* are almost identical in this context. Belkin could not have been aware of the real origin of what Solomon Schechter called “the Zadokite Document”, as Belkin’s work preceded the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, but regardless, it seems that his reading of the originally Qumranic law in the context of the prohibition against making servants work during the Sabbath is very questionable. Reading the laws which precede clarify that the law forbidding the nurse to carry an infant has nothing to do with the fact that the servant is performing work for her master, but rather it is part of the regulations limiting the carrying of different objects from private spaces to public spaces and vice versa. This action is known in rabbinic literature as *hotsa’ a*. Indeed before the reference to the nurse, the document lists different objects, such as spices, which are forbidden to be carried from one space to the other, and different spaces which are considered distinct spaces, such as a house (*bayit*) and a booth (*sukkah*) see *Idem* Lines 13-15: [let him] not bring it out of his house. Let] no one [carry (things) from the house to the outside and from outside into the house; and if] he be in [in a Sukkah,] let him not carry out of it nor bring [into it. Let him not open a scaled vessel on the Sab[bath. Let him not move rocks or earth in a dwelling house. Moreover, the list of prohibitions, which includes the restriction on carrying a baby by a nurse, seems to consist primarily of actions that belong to the category mentioned above, i.e. *shevut*. Hence, for instance, line 18 in this fragment states: “Let no one desecrate the Sabbath for the sake of property and profit on the Sabbath”. There is one law which seemingly does not belong to the realm of *shevut* in this text, and that is the prohibition on sacrificing an offering on the Sabbath which is not the daily offering (line 20-21). However it appears at the end of this list, a fact which makes the categorization of the other laws as *melakha* as well, rather than *shevut*, less likely, although not impossible.

Before we turn to Philo and the midrashic exegesis, it is worth noting that not only is Philo's stringent law (in its restrictive approach towards using gentile slaves) not parallel to other sources, but it seems to be in tension with the way Philo describes the very purpose of the Sabbath. In a paragraph which seems to be an apologetic response to non-Jewish accusations according to which the Sabbath reflects a Jewish laziness, Philo states:³¹

*On this day we are commanded to abstain from all work, not because the law inculcates slackness ... its object is rather to give men relaxation ... Further, when He forbids bodily labor on the seventh day, He permits the exercise of the higher activities ... For the law bids us take the time for studying philosophy and thereby improve the soul and the dominant mind.*³²

If the whole purpose of the Sabbath is to rest in order to be free for Philosophy and self-reflection, why take a legalistic approach that does not allow for an exhaustive use of this day of rest? I would argue that this is based on an interpretation of the version of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy. As noted above, the Deuteronomy version is more elaborate in describing the resting of different members of the household: children, slaves, aliens and even the livestock. The text compares the slaves to the master: "so that your male slave and your slave girl may rest **like you**." What appears to be a Deuteronomic addition to the version in Exodus is documented in the LXX version as well: "ἵνα ἀναπαύσῃται ὁ παῖς σου καὶ ἡ παιδίσκη σου ὥσπερ καὶ σύ". If there is an exegetical basis to Philo's law in this context, it seems to lie in the expression "like you".

³¹ Such as the accusation made by Seneca, that the Sabbath wastes a seventh of every Jew's life. On Philo's response against the accusations made by pagans that the Sabbath reflects foolishness, idleness and misanthropy see D. Boesenberg, *Philo's Description of Jewish Sabbath Practices*, SPA XXII (2010) pp. 156-158.

³² De Specialibus Legibus II 60-61.

The literal meaning seems to convey a general moral principle such as - “the servant should rest just as the master should”. Such a principle is strongly connected to the next verse “And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt [...]”.³³

As the Pentateuch does not provide practical instructions, Philo chooses to read the expression in a “hyper-literal” manner, which conveys a practical-- rather than a moral-- idea.³⁴ The slave should rest “**just** as you do” i.e. in **the same way** that you do. And so, just as the master does not perform services for his servant, it is prohibited to request that the servant do any service for his master. At this point I do not wish to claim that Philo himself is the source of this interpretation, but I would argue that the practice Philo is promoting is based on a *midrashic* reading of the text.³⁵

To sum up, although Philo bases his overall description of the Sabbath on the Universal, Exodus, version of the Decalogue, his practice is shaped by Deuteronomy. Since, as argued above, this practice seems to contradict the main purpose of the Sabbath according to Philo, i.e. to focus on the study of Philosophy and introspection, it seems that this is an example for an interpretation which shapes the practice (*midrash yozzer*) rather than an interpretation which supports an existing practice (*midrash*

³³ See for instance Nachmanides on Deut 5. 14 (my translation): “... to clarify that during the Sabbath he is obligated to let his slave rest because “you were a slave and God has relieved you, and so will you relieve your slave” and the reason is that when your slave and slavegirl will rest like you, you will remember that you yourself were a slave..”. “באר כי בו יצוה במנוחת העבד כמוך בעבור שהיית עבד והניח לך' והשם, וגם אתה תניח לעבדך, והנה טעמו כשינוח עבדך ואמתך כמוך תזכור כי עבד היית וגו'”

³⁴ Similarly, although the constitution of the United States has remained almost unchanged for centuries, the practical implications of its general principles are constantly challenged and occasionally changed by the Supreme Court, perhaps especially in issues regarding equality.

³⁵ And by this I am not claiming that there was a “pool of *midrashim*” from which both Rabbinic traditions and Philo himself drew their teachings. My argument is about the nature of the reading and not the historical origin of the reading.

mekayem).³⁶ The combination of Exodus and Deuteronomy demonstrates Philo's work as an interpretation of the Bible, similar to what we see in *midrash*, i.e. scripture is not read linearly, but rather verses from one place interpret and alter the meaning of verses located in different parts of the bible.

As noted above, although we do not have a parallel example for Philo's law in other second Temple sources, we do have a Tannaitic source that bases its *midrash* on the same interpretive methods. Moreover, in both cases, the Exodus Decalogue serves as the context for interpreting the Deuteronomy Decalogue:

*“and your slave and your slave girl” is it possible that the scripture refers to a Hebrew slave and slave girl? It says “so that your male slave and your slave girl may rest like you” (this means that) there is a slave or slave girl who is not like you, and who is that? A (gentile) slave and slave girl dwelling (with you).*³⁷

According to this midrash, the expression “like you” (*kamocho*) comes to emphasize that not only are Jewish slaves to rest on the Sabbath, but also those who are not “like you”, i.e. Gentiles, should be “like you” on the Sabbath. This interpretation is very similar to the interpretation reflected in Philo as they are both based on a hyper-literal reading of the words “like you”. The fundamental difference is that the *mekhilta* reads “like you” as referring to the ethnic identity of the subject, whereas Philo (or Philo's tradition) reads

For a summary of the different views on whether *midrash* was used in order to determine the *Halakha* see M. Halbertal, *Interpretive Revolutions in the Making, Values as Interpretive Considerations in Midrashei Halakha*, Jerusalem: 1997 (Hebrew) pp. 13-15.³⁶ This distinction is also dependent, in this case, on whether this law is “Philonic” in origin as well, or is merely an expression of an existing halakhic tradition. If the latter is the case, it is definitely possible that this reading of the text merely supported a practice which originated from considerations other than interpretive ones. However, it is still likely that whatever the origin of this law, it was influenced by this midrashic reading of *kamokha*.

³⁷ *Mekhilta of Rabbi Simeon ben. Yohai, Yitro 20, 20*. According to Y.N Epstein & E.Z Melamed, *mekhilta d'rabbi shimon bar yohai, according to manuscripts from the genizah and midrash hagadol*, Jerusalem: 1970 (Hebrew), pp. xxv Epstein asserts that this is the latest of Tannaitic *midrash hallakha*. The text reads: ועבדך ואמתך יכול בעבד ואמה העבריים הכת' מדבר כשהוא אומר למען ינוח עבדך [ואמתך] כמוך יש עבד ואמה שאינו כמוך ואיזה זה עבד ואמה התושבים

“like you” as referring to the type of work the subject is allowed to do.³⁸ It is plausible that for Philo, or Philo’s source for this law, it was obvious that Gentile slaves deserved a day of rest on the Sabbath, and so was able to learn a different message from this hyper-literal reading of the biblical text.

The emphasis that Philo puts on the Sabbath as a day of equality is also reflected in Philo’s short reference to the Sabbath in *De Praemiis et Poenis*. In a paragraph discussing the future Redemption, Philo asserts that this redemption will come only after the sinners pay the price for their offences, “making the tasks which they impose continuous and unbroken [...] instead of granting to men who are in absolute truth were their brethren, children of one mother, their common nature, the appointed holiday after every six days.”³⁹ Thus, according to this passage, violation of the Sabbath is a failure to grant other people (probably slaves) a day of rest.

3. Forbidden work

In addition to restrictions on relying on servants, obviously, a large portion of the Sabbath observance had to do with actions one is not allowed to perform during the on this day. Compared to other Second-Temple and Rabbinic sources, Philo’s account of the practical implications of the prohibition of performing any work on the Sabbath is very sparse. However, it could provide us with valuable observations on the theoretical basis of Philo’s legal system. In *De Vita Mosis* II.211, in the context of the narrative of

³⁸ In fact the next question later in the *midrash* is what are the restrictions on slave work during the Sabbath, and all the different views offered assume that there is not an identity between the master’s restrictions and the gentile-slave restrictions.

³⁹ *De Praemiis et Poenis* 153-155.

the sin of “the wood collector” (Num. 15.32-36), Philo gives a general description of the laws of the Sabbath:

abstaining from work, and from profit-making crafts and professions and business pursued to get a livelihood, and enjoy a respite from labor released from weary and painful care.

Later on Philo explains why the “wood collector” was sentenced to stoning:

[...] He often forbids the lighting of a fire on the seventh day, regarding it as the primary activity; and, if this ceased, he considered that other particular activities would naturally cease also. But sticks are the material of fire, so that by picking them up he committed a sin, which was brother to and of the same family as the sin the sin of burning them. And his was a double crime; it lay first in the mere act of collecting, a defiance of the commandment to rest from work, secondly in the nature of what he collected' being materials for fire which is the basis of the arts.⁴⁰

In this explanation, Philo addresses a difficulty which arises from the fact that, as mentioned above, throughout the Pentateuch the obligation to cease from working on the Sabbath is described very generally, except for the case of the prohibition of lighting fire, expressed both explicitly in a legal text, and implicitly in the narrative of “the wood collector”, in addition to a general prohibition on agricultural work. Philo offers an interpretive solution: The Pentateuch puts an emphasis on lighting fire because, in essence, all tools with which one performs work are either produced by using fire or are fashioned by using tools which were made by fire.⁴¹ In this way, Philo also equates

⁴⁰ Moses, ii, 219-220.

⁴¹ Similarly in *De Specialibus Legibus* ii, 60. Philo explains that the use of fire is specifically prohibited “being the beginning and seed of all the business of life; since without fire it is not possible to make any of the things which are indispensably necessary for life, so that men in the absence of one single element,

lighting fire with other types of work. Moreover, Philo asserts that in collecting kindling, one performs two transgressions: performing an act that is connected to fire as well as “collecting what should remain unmoved”.

There are several possibilities as to what Biblical prohibition Philo has in mind here, and each has other Second-Temple parallels: The prohibition against plucking on the Sabbath, which would easily be considered an example of the Pentateuchal injunction against agricultural work (Exodus 34.21);⁴² the prohibition against handling tools which are used to perform forbidden work;⁴³ or perhaps Philo is referring here to the prohibition against moving any object from place to place, known in rabbinic literature as *tiltul*.⁴⁴ Another possibility is that this is forbidden as part of the general requirement to abstain from work on the Sabbath.

One of the characteristics of rabbinic law is the tendency to formulate Jewish law into categories. This approach can be defined as “formalistic,” as it looks at the category a certain action falls into rather than its practical aspects or implications. Arguably, in his version of “the wood gatherer” narrative, Philo shows signs of a formalistic perception of

the highest and most ancient of all, are cut off from all works and employments of arts, especially from all handicraft trades, and also from all particular services.”

⁴² Targ. Yona. *Aqar gisiin*. Also Bavli Shab. 96b.

⁴³ Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law*, 198-199. According to Belkin, Philo is in agreement here with the pre-Tannaitic Halakha which forbade handling tools which are used for forbidden types of work as a Biblical prohibition, as opposed to rabbinic Halakha, which considered this to be merely a rabbinical prohibition. However, Belkin’s textual basis for this understanding of the historical context is problematic. Belkin understands the abstention from fighting on the Sabbath in I Mac 2.33-38 as a result of the “Zealous’ people’s” preference to die rather than to block their cave with stones or throw stones at their enemies. However, this seems simply to reflect the view that any martial activity is prohibited on the Sabbath. Belkin also relies on the Bavli (Shab. 123b, see also Tosefta Shab. 1.14): “In former days only three utensils were permitted to be handled on the Sabbath [...] subsequently more were allowed”. The Amora R. Hanina is quoted as saying that this law is from the days of Nehemia [בימי נחמיה בן חכליה [נשנית משנה זו]]. The use of the term “mishna” in the context of Nehemia is ironic in itself as it refers to a “mishna” i.e. a rabbinic injunction in a Biblical context. Thus it is impossible to any draw conclusions from these texts other than that according to the Tosefta sometime before the Tosefta’s time there were more restrictions on carrying utensils on the Sabbath.

⁴⁴ Bavli Shab. 96b

Jewish law. That is, instead of understanding the practice of the Sabbath literally as the requirement to abstain from work and from kindling fire, Philo thinks in categories: “moving what is not to be moved,” has nothing to do with the effort involved in the action, or the way it is effectively “work”.

Another example of this formalistic thinking is Philo’s “slave-law” discussed above: According to this law, “rest” is not defined as a lack of exertion, as Philo himself describes this day as a day which might be the most exhausting to some masters, a day during which the masters need to do things on their own:

“The masters must be accustomed to work themselves without waiting for the offices and attentions of their menials [...] but, use the different parts of their body with more nimbleness and shew a robust and easy activity.”⁴⁵

Thus, “work” and abstention from work are not a matter of effort versus rest; but rather work is what we do to gain “external profit”, whereas rest is what we do in order to improve our character. As we will see below, this view of the Sabbath is emphasized in Philo’s portrayal of the Sabbath as a day of introspection and learning.

4. Hierarchy within the laws of Sabbath

One of the purposes of our study is to determine Philo’s place in the development of Jewish law. Having discussed one aspect of Jewish law, i.e. formulating Jewish law into categories, we are interested in other aspects of Jewish law as they appear in rabbinic literature. One of these concepts is hierarchy. Rabbinic law makes

⁴⁵ De Specialibus Legibus ii 67.

distinctions between different levels of obligation within the system of law. Often, but not always, these different levels are determined by the authority of the source of the law such as biblical vs. rabbinic etc. Is it possible to identify this line of thought in Philo?

Before moving to the “Slave-law”, Philo continues by making quite a surprising remark according to which “it would seem that his further enactments were given for the sake of the more disobedient who refused to pay attention to his commandments”.⁴⁶ It seems that this statement expresses the notion that the laws of the Pentateuch have some sort of hierarchy; in this case, the Sabbath includes not only rules which are at the core of the practice, but in addition, also involves rules which are intended to address the problem of the weakness of human nature.

It is tempting to draw a line between this notion and the rabbinic concept of *gezerah* or *gader*, “fence”, i.e. the notion that the system of law also includes laws which are necessary only in order to prevent transgressions of more important laws. In *De Vita Mosis*, Philo does explicitly state that not all types of work have the same weight during the Sabbath, although they are all prohibited:

“A special distinction was given to the sacred seventh day, for, since it was not permitted to do anything on that day, abstinence from works great or small being expressly enjoined [...].”⁴⁷

However, even if we were draw generalizations from Philo’s remark, the outcome would still be quite distant from the rabbinic conceptual world. Let’s use the slave-resting-law as an example. First of all, as we have argued, this law is based on an

⁴⁶ De Specialibus Legibus ii 66

⁴⁷ De Vita Mosis I, 205

interpretation of the text, whereas in rabbinic sources, “fences” are usually the result of rabbinic decrees rather than part of Biblical law.⁴⁸ Second, it is unclear how refraining from using the aid of servants would help to avoid the violation of other sabbatical observances. It seems that the purpose here is to tackle the problem from a different angle. Philo's point seems to be that people who are not capable of learning the lessons of the Pentateuch through the other Sabbath observances or by focusing on the study of philosophy ought to learn their lesson through their own hard work, especially on the Sabbath.

Philo's emphasis on the didactic role of the Sabbath is consistent with Philo's admiration in his portrayal of ascetic groups such as the Therapeutae and the Essens in his *De vita contemplativa* and *Quod omnis probus liber*, who, according to Philo, lead a life of self-restraint (ἐγκράτεια). This aspect leads us to our next subject in Philo's version of the Sabbath.

5. Sabbath as a day of contemplation and study

Notwithstanding the discussion above, the most distinctive feature of the Philonic Sabbath in his portrayal of the Sabbath from the practical aspect is that it is a day dedicated to intellectual activity. Many scholars have already noted the agreement

⁴⁸ This is represented for instance in *mishnah avot* 1.1. “they said three things – be moderate in your rulings, train many disciples and make a fence for the Pentateuch”. However, there are also Rabbinic traditions which attribute the “fence” to the Pentateuch itself (Avot De’Rabbi Natan a, 2): “what fence did the Pentateuch make for its own words? The verse says ‘You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness (Leviticus 18.19) is it permitted to hug her, and to kiss her, and to have an intimate conversation with her? Infer it from that it says ‘do not approach’.” [איזהו סייג שעשתה תורה לדבריה הרי הוא אומר ואל אשה בנדת טומאתה לא תקרב יכול יחבקנה וינשקנה וידבר עמה דברים בטלים ת”ל לא תקרב].

between Philo's rather lengthy account on the practice of going to synagogues and learning Pentateuch and other texts like the Gospels, Qumran and also Rabbinic literature.⁴⁹ Both in Qumran and in rabbinic literature, the custom of gathering at the synagogue in order to engage in communal learning was so strong as to result in the prohibition against reading scripture in solitary.⁵⁰ However, there is one aspect in Philo's description of the Sabbath which perhaps deserves further attention. Along with the focus on philosophy and learning, Philo emphasizes time and time again that the Sabbath is a day of introspection and repentance, an aspect mentioned by Philo in virtually every reference he makes to the Sabbath. Hence, in his account of "the wood gatherer" in the desert (based on Num. 15.32-37), Philo underlines the purpose of intellectual activity on the Sabbath:

*[...] expounding and instructing the people what they should say and do, while they received edification and betterment in moral principles and conduct [...].*⁵¹

In the *Decalogue*, Philo is even more explicit:

⁴⁹ Gilat, *Studies*, pp. 350-351. It is noteworthy, however, that as scholars have pointed out, in most of Philo's descriptions of the Sabbath the contents of the communal learning is Philosophy whereas only in *Legatio ad Gaium* and *Hypothetica* Philo speaks of the study of "the laws". D. Boesenberg, *Philo's Descriptions of Jewish Sabbath Practice, SPA XXII* (2010), pp. 158-159, suggests that the difference might have been the result of a different intended audience. According to Boesenberg, a Roman audience might have been more susceptible to the idea of the study of law, than to the study of Philosophy. On *nomos* as Pentateuch see N.G. Cohen, "Context and Connotation, Greek Words for Jewish Concepts in Philo", in: J.L. Kugel (ed.) *Sehm in the Tents of Japhet, Essays on the encounter of Judaism and Hellenism*. Leiden-Boston-Köln: 2002, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁰ Noam & Qimron, *Collection*, pp. 530-537. As Noam and Qimron note, this understanding of Qumran and Rabbinic law is based on an interpretation of a very difficult *Mishnah* (Shabb.16.1), which generated many different interpretations as early as the Talmud. However, it is overwhelmingly understood that the basis of the *Mishnah* is the motivation to preserve the communal activity of learning in the synagogue. For our purposes it is less important whether the nature of this custom was to read from the Torah/Prophets or to engage in "Oral Torah".

⁵¹ De Vita Mosis ii, 215.

*[...] they should also consider whether any offence against purity has been committed in the preceding days, and exact for themselves in the council-chamber of the soul, with the laws as their fellow-assessors and fellow-examiners, a strict account of what they had said or done in order to correct what had been neglected and to take precaution against repetition of any sin.*⁵²

Philo's emphasis on the Sabbath as a day of repentance which appears in his "exposition of the laws" as well, comes with the notion that the six weekdays are dedicated to the body, whereas the seventh day is dedicated to the soul:

*So each seventh day there stand wide open in every city thousands of schools of good sense, temperance, courage, justice, and other virtues [...] But since we consist of body and soul, he assigned to the body its proper tasks and similarly to the soul [...] Thus while the body is working, the soul enjoys a respite, but when the body takes its rest, the soul resumes its work, and thus the best forms of life, the theoretical and the practical, take their turn in replacing each other [...].*⁵³

In his account of "the wood gatherer" as well, Philo juxtaposes the soul with the bodily senses:

*But this leisure should be occupied and devoting their leisure, not as by some in bursts of laughter or [...] through the dominant senses of sight and hearing reduce to slavery their natural queen, the soul, but by the pursuit of wisdom only.*⁵⁴

⁵² De Decalogo 98.

⁵³ De Specialibus Legibus ii, 62-64.

⁵⁴ Vita Mosis ii, 212.

6. The Sabbath as a day of fasting

Perhaps this aspect of Philo's Sabbath, i.e. the Sabbath as a day of repentance, which is based on the dualistic notion of the separation of body and soul, may shed light on an historical question, which has been the subject of several studies. While a number of non-Jewish sources describe the Jewish Sabbath as a day of fasting, the Jewish sources seem to overwhelmingly reject such a practice. This rejection is found in many Second-Temple sources, including the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁵⁵ Josephus testifies that this prohibition on fasting was strictly observed and so when the people of Tiberias were assembled in the synagogue on the Sabbath in order to decide how to react to the existing political turmoil, they dispersed at noon-- before reaching a decision-- in order to avoid the prohibition against fasting.⁵⁶

In rabbinic literature there is an explicit prohibition against fasting on the Sabbath until mid-day, which was probably based on an understanding of Isaiah 58.13: "if you call the Sabbath a delight". However, the strong rhetoric against such a practice suggests that it did, in fact, exist, and as Gilat points out, there is extensive evidence of the existence of such a practice among the Rabbis, which he assumes was based on two different alternatives for understanding the term, *o'neg* in Isaiah i.e. "delight" either as a corporal or as a spiritual pleasure.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ For a survey of both Jewish and non-Jewish sources see Gilat, *Studies*. Pp. 109-111

⁵⁶ Bios Josepou, 54. On the correlation between Josephus' account on the Rabbinic law see D.R Schwartz, *The Life Of Josephus*

⁵⁷ See M. Williams, "Being a Jew in Rome: Sabbath Fasting as an expression of Roman-Jewish identity". In J.M. Barclay (ed.) *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire*. London-New York (2004), pp. 8-18. Williams argues that this practice was distinctively Jewish-Roman. She suggests that the practice evolved out of the special circumstances which led to the existence of the community, namely the Jews' reluctance to fight against the Romans on the Sabbath. However, this suggestion seems very unlikely for various reasons. Among these, as noted above, is the evidence for such a

Interestingly, Gilat shows that in many cases, the spiritual approach which favors fasting is consistent with the notion that what is in stake is whether to spend time eating and indulging in other corporal pleasures, or in the intellectual learning of Torah, as this saying in the name of R. Eliezer explicitly states: “R. Elizer says: on holidays one can only either eat and drink or sit and learn”.⁵⁸ This aspect of learning as opposed to corporal pleasure is very much emphasized in Philo’s account as well.

Perhaps it is significant, in this context, to note that the Day of Atonement is described in the Pentateuch as *shabbat shabbaton* (Leviticus 16.31 And 23.32). This term might literally mean something like a “Sabbath of rest”, or a “Sabbatical”, but at the same time the use of this emphatic form of “Sabbath” also implies that the Day of Atonement is an “ultimate Sabbath”. Possibly, the practice of fasting on the Sabbath, as well as Philo’s notion that the Sabbath as a day of introspection and repentance, were also influenced by an understanding of this term as bearing practical implications. Although there is no reason to believe that this was perceived by anyone as a Biblical requirement, it might have been perceived as an ideal practice beyond the minimal requirements.

I would suggest that although Philo does not mention fasting explicitly, it seems that his portrayal of the Sabbath fits into the conceptual framework of the Sabbath as a potential “mini day of Atonement” very well. Indeed, Philo himself makes the connection between the Sabbath and the Day of Atonement. Expressing his resentment towards

practice amongst the Rabbis, the strong rhetoric against it, and, as I will argue below, the fact that this practice has a textual and theoretical basis.

⁵⁸ *Bavli P’sachim* 68b. This applies to the Sabbath as well; see Gilat pp. 111 n. 18. It is noteworthy that the same R. Eliezer is portrayed as having a negative attitude towards sex. On negative rabbinic approaches towards sex see D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israe, Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: 1993. pp. 47-52.

those who think that a festival should be celebrated through corporal pleasure and ask: “What sort of a feast is this where there is no eating and drinking”? (*Spec.* 2.193). Philo asserts that: “Moses saw with the most sharp-sighted eyes and so proclaimed the fast - a feast, and named it the greatest of feasts, which in our ancestral language is “a Sabbath of Sabbaths” [...]” (*Spec.* 2.194).

Perhaps Philo did not mention this practice explicitly since whereas going to the synagogue and engaging in Torah study was most likely a common practice, this was simply not the case with regard to extending a greater effort and fasting. Hence, while Philo lays down a theoretical framework which may lead to the notion that fasting on the Sabbath is an ideal, he does not advocate for a practice which he knew was not very common: Philo’s purpose is to lay out, explain, and theorize the common Jewish practice, and not to advocate a severe version of it. In this, I disagree with Weiss, who argues that this aspect of the Sabbath “seems to be a particular Philonic contribution to the benefits of Sabbath observance.”⁵⁹ Rather, I see this as another example of a practice which has a textual basis (Leviticus 16.31, 23.32 – “*shabbat shabbaton*”), and a specific Jewish historical context.

Understanding Philo’s Sabbath in this rather nuanced way is consistent with what Steven Fraade called “ascetic tension” in Philo’s writing. According to Fraade, although Philo’s dualistic ideal leads him to idealize virginity, and to claim that wise people have

⁵⁹ Weiss, *Philo on the Sabbath*, pp. 90.

no need for food and drink, the reality of life necessitates all these ideals to be moderated.⁶⁰

Conclusions

In the course of our discussion we have identified different elements in Philo's description of the Sabbath, which were unique in some of their aspects, while they shared other elements with other Second-Temple and rabbinic sources. We have identified Philo's use of exegetical methods that can be defined as *midrash*; a beginning of a hierarchical thinking of Jewish law which distinguishes between those parts of the law which are the essence of law, and other parts which play a more didactic role, or which reflect different levels of obligation. These methods and conceptions will be significantly developed in later, rabbinic, traditions. Finally, the incorporation of the Hellenistic conceptual world into the portrayal and even the details of the Jewish practice, is telling, especially in cases with other Late-Antiquity parallels. Thus, for instance, Philo's Sabbath slave-law, or his portrayal of the Sabbath as a "mini-Day-of-Atonement," and at the same time as a day dedicated to philosophy reflect both a *midrashic* reading of the Bible and his Hellenistic conceptual world. These observations suggest that attempting to determine the degree of awareness of the Jews of Alexandria

⁶⁰ S. Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism", in A. Green (ed.): *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, World Spirituality: an Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest 13 (New York 1986) pp. 265. That Philo did not see fasting as a requirement is evident from his account on the Therapeutae, according to which they would fast during the weekdays. However if the "feast" which Philo describes in great length, and which occurred every seven weeks, is an indication of the Sabbath meals, it reflects a very different view of the term *oneg* i.e. "delight" as is consists of (Da Vita contemplativa 73): "only the clearest water; cold water for the generality, and hot water for those old men who are accustomed to a luxurious life. And the table, too, bears nothing which has blood, but there is placed upon it bread for food and salt for seasoning".

of Palestinian Halakha, or the influence that Palestinian Halakha might have had on them might miss the mark. Perhaps in some cases, Palestinian-- and later on, rabbinic-- laws were the result of a process through which Hellenistic ideas trickled down to, and affected Jewish practices in primarily Greek-speaking Jewish areas, ultimately having an effect, on rabbinic Judaism.