

The Women Therapeutae and the Divided Space of the “Synagogue”

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In July this year I completed work on the SBL commentary on Philo of Alexandria’s treatise *De Vita Contemplativa*, after taking on the project after the passing of David Hay, who is my co-author for the work as a whole. This is scheduled to appear next year, after the editorial process is completed, but in this paper I wish to present a couple of discussions from this volume that I hope are of interest to Philonists and others working in the field of Second Temple Judaism, developing topics I have already discussed in my book *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo’s Therapeutae Reconsidered* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

The first subject I wish to address in this paper is taken from the Introduction, and concerns the question of the actuality of the group in question. This is important simply because it matters for historians of ancient Judaism and Christianity whether we are discussing a group of men and women that can be considered as existing. For literary specialists it may well be of interest to explore gender in a text without a concern about actuality, but a historian will always wish to probe how useful it is as evidence for the past. The second subject is a reflection on what may be defined as a “synagogue”, used by the Therapeutae for Sabbath assemblies, and the issue of gendered space within it.

1. The Actuality of the Therapeutae

In *De Vita Contemplativa* and its foregoing (lost) companion piece Philo of Alexandria extolled those who were exemplary within Judaism, pointing first (in the lost work) to the Essenes of Syria Palaestina, who represented the Stoic ideal of an active life (*Contempl.* 1), and then to his local contemporaries in the context of Alexandria, a group usually known as the Therapeutae: ascetic philosophers, engaged in allegorical exegesis, living in a small community outside the city on the shores of Lake Mareotis. He did this as Apion (Josephus, *Ant.* 18: 257-59) and his associates who directly opposed him in the embassy to the emperor Gaius in 39-40 CE (such as Isidorus: *Flacc.* 20; *Legat.* 355), could write that Jews worshipped a golden ass’s head in their Temple in Jerusalem (Josephus, *Apion* 2: 80, 114), that their word “Sabbath” derived from the Egyptian word for venereal disease (*Apion* 2: 21), that annually they kidnapped a Hellene, fed him up, killed and ate him, while vowing enmity towards all Hellenes (*Apion* 2: 89-96), that they fomented sedition against the emperor and Rome (*Apion* 2: 68) and that they “have

not produced any admirable men (θαυμαστοὺς ἄνδρας), such as inventors of certain technical advances or transmitting wisdom ... in the likes of Socrates, Zeno and Cleanthes” (*Apion* 2: 135, cf. 148).

The latter accusation is particularly pertinent to what Philo is doing in the two treatises, both lost and extant: the one providing an example for the active, or practical, life of philosophical excellence and the other for the contemplative. *De Vita Contemplativa* describes people who truly are “admirable men”: self-controlled, philosophical, intellectual, inspired. The treatise begins with the recognition that these people are so stunning they could strike one dumb (*Contempl.* 1). As Philo states outright, the examples of such figures as Anaxagoras and Democritus that “Greece has admired” (Ἑλλάς ἐθαύμασεν) are inferior to the people he describes, people who are more admirable (θαυμασιώτεροι) than they are (*Contempl.* 16).

According to Philo these admirable Jews live a fairly solitary life, mostly spending their days reclusively in small huts studying and interpreting scripture in accordance with an ancient allegorical method, composing music, praying. On the Sabbaths they meet together for a discourse, and a meal - listening, eating and drinking with the utmost dignity and moderation -- and every 49th eve (Sabbath of Sabbaths) they also engage in entranced sacred singing and dancing during all night celebrations. They then greet the dawn of the 50th new day with prayers facing the sun and go back to their private huts. Their regimen is strict yet balanced. Their lives are a perfect illustration of philosophical excellence.

In the struggle for such philosophical excellence within the world of Alexandria’s intelligentsia, Philo’s idealising portrayal in *De Vita Contemplativa* describes the life of pre-eminent Jews, true disciples of Moses, in order to show how in Judaism overall there was not only an example of “admirable men”, but of people who would put even Socrates to shame. This is not simply a eulogy to people Philo happens to admire; it is a highly polemical piece, mindful of the struggle of Jews in Alexandria at a time of enormous social tension, full of sniping at those who suppose they are living lives of piety when they are plainly not.

The historical context of the treatise is not explicitly described within it, but the general circumstances surrounding the second deputation to Claudius in 41 CE, in the wake of Gaius’ assassination (*Ant.* 19: 278; *CPJ* 153: ll. 90-2), would provide a likely context (Taylor 2003, 39-44). Apion’s horrific misrepresentations are implicitly dismissed. A Roman milieu may be indicated by internal features of the treatise in which Roman concepts of the “Greek Other” are used freely to construct the opposing party (Niehoff 2010). The absurd “Egyptian Other”, at least in regard to its

animal worship (*Contempl.* 8-9), was a standard motif among Romans (Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984) to which Philo could appeal.

The audience is clearly not composed of Alexandrians, either Jewish or Graeco-Egyptian, since the administrative districts of Egypt, the “nomes”, are described as something to be introduced to people unfamiliar with them (*Contempl.* 21; Taylor 2003, 43), as Porphyry would do (*Abstin.* 4: 9), writing in Rome in the 3rd century. The primary audience cannot have been Jewish, since the concept of the Sabbath is explained (*Contempl.* 30, 32, 35-6, 65) and we are told the story of the crossing of the Red Sea and the singing of choirs as not part of a common, shared tradition, but as something new (*Contempl.* 86-88). The Therapeutae are “those of our people who have embraced the contemplative life” (*Contempl.* 58), over against a different, implied “you”.

By the time the Jewish deputation gave their case to Claudius, the Graeco-Egyptian delegation had been joined by a philosopher named Chaeremon, who “spoke at length about the city” (CPJ 2: 153, ll. 14-21; van der Horst 1987, 3). He was not only a philosopher, apparently Stoic, but also a priest in an Egyptian temple, ascetic and – like Philo -- an allegoriser (see the testimonies in van der Horst 1987, 2-7). Like Apion, he wrote negatively about Jews, and Josephus wrote to refute him (*Apion* 2: 1). Like Philo, he would describe the philosophical excellence of the contemplative life found in a group with whom he was particularly acquainted: Egyptian priests (Porphyry, *Abstin.* 4: 6-8; Jerome, *Adv. Iovinianum* 2: 13, see van der Horst 1987, 17-23; Taylor 2003, 44-5).

Philo then wrote with clear opponents in view, in a fraught political context where his work would be scrutinised. It is in tone polemical and designed to hit his opposition hard.

i. An Imaginary Ideal?

In 1935 Charles Guignebert (1935, 320) suggested that Philo’s description of the Therapeutae was so idealised and stylised that if such people did exist, they were not exactly as Philo described them, but in many ways this is an appropriate acknowledgement of the rhetoricity of ancient texts. More recently, however, there has been the extreme suggestion that Philo means to present a kind of fantasy rather than show actual Jews living their lives in a particular way (see Engberg-Pedersen 1999; Kraemer 2011, 66-114, revising Kraemer 1989). Engberg-Pedersen (1999, 48) does not wholly dismiss the notion that there was a real group, but – as presented -- they are more of a philosopher’s dream than reality; they are more fiction than fact. There are, however, several reasons why the notion that we are dealing with a fictional presentation is unconvincing.

In the first place, a depiction of ideal Jews that was a fantasy bearing no relationship to what Jews were actually doing would have been greeted by Philo's audience, and eventual readers (both Jewish and non-Jewish), as laughable; the opponents could simply point to the non-existence of actual admirable Jews to dismiss Philo's entire presentation. Those who suggest that Philo made up an ideal community have not grasped the issues of Philo's political context and the vitriolic attacks Jews faced in Alexandria.

Secondly, about a third of Philo's treatise is taken up attacking the opposition, the "Greek Other" (Niehoff 2010), whether they are current -- in the form of cultic devotions -- or historical -- in the form of Plato's *Symposium*, which informs the current practice of symposia, characterised as opportunities for binge drinking and violence (*Contempl.* 3-11; 40-63). This is not only a foil for a perfect philosophical life, but also a counter-assault against opponents, proclaiming that a life of perfect virtue can actually exist within Judaism, in such a way to make it far superior to all those models of excellence presented from the spectrum of well-known religious and philosophical groups within the Graeco-Roman world, and particularly within Alexandrian society. It is not just that Judaism provides a supreme example of "admirable men", but the examples put forward by the Graeco-Egyptians are at best inadequate, at worst depraved, abusive and murderous.

Thirdly, Philo locates the group not in a remote place at the ends of the world, unverifiable to observers, but exactly on a low-lying hill near Alexandria, between Lake Mareotis and the Mediterranean Sea (*Contempl.* 23). Thus, David Winston (1981, 41), an expert on the genre of ancient utopias, states: "Having placed the Therapeutae not far from Alexandria, where he himself lived, it is clear that he could not have invented them. Utopias are usually located at remote distances, safe from any effort at verification" (see also Beavis 2004, 32; 2006, 60). Given that Philo's stated aim is to show a contemplative life, as actually represented by a group of Jews who live in a real place that is in striking distance of the city of Alexandria, his purpose would be totally nullified by any suggestion that his group were not real, and the precise details of the location of the Therapeutae close to the huge metropolis of Alexandria almost invite someone to find them.

Fourthly, since Chaeremon used an example of a real group apparently to show the philosophical excellence of admirable men among the Egyptians (Porphyry, *Abstin.* 4: 6-8), Philo would not have been so idiotic to think that a group of imaginary Jews would have proven his case, which is to describe "the extraordinary virtue of these men" (*Contempl.* 1).

Fifthly, Philo makes clear that he has already used an actual example in exploring the “active” philosophical lifestyle: the Essenes. The Essenes are widely attested in ancient literature, and are described in at least two of Philo’s own treatises: *Quod Omnis Probus liber sit* (“Every Good Man is Free”) 75-91, and part of the so-called *Apologia pro Iudaeis* “Apology for the Jews” (as in Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica* 8: 11: 1-18), a work usually considered part of the *Hypothetica* (Taylor 2007; 2012, 22-48). It would follow then that if Philo is using an actual group for his presentation of the topic of the active life, he would use an actual group for the presentation of the contemplative life (see Beavis 2004, 31; 2006, 59). To use an actual group for one treatise and an invented one for another would be strangely inconsistent.

ii. *Genre*

We may then consider the fundamental question of genre. Defining the specific genre of the treatise might help us in terms of viewing its rhetorical components and relationship with actuality more accurately. Engberg-Pedersen (1999, 41) has suggested that it conforms to one defined on the basis of Aristotle’s usage (*NE* 2: 2) as a *πραγματεία*, a scientific treatise (though one apparently transformed into fiction), by the internal use of this term in the treatise in *Contempl.* 1. In Philo’s usage elsewhere, however, *πραγματεία* has no relationship to a literary genre in any place it is found. The term *πραγματεία* has been shown to be a very general one implying no precise literary form (see discussion in Manetti 1986, 25). It means “subject of a treatise” (LSJ 1457) elsewhere in Philo’s works: “the subject’s hidden meaning”. With the fundamental meaning deriving from *πρᾶγμα*, which can mean “matter” (LSJ 1437), in *Sacr.* 120 *πραγματεία* is found with the same meaning. In *Gig.* 29, *Deus* 97 and *Abr.* 30 it appears in plural as “occupations” or “labours”, but it can also mean a subject or topic under study, such as physics or logic: *Ebr.* 97: *Congr.* 147, 149; *Mut.* 53, 75; *Somn.* 1: 102, 120. In *Spec.* 2: 65 it refers to the “matter/substance of life”, as also in *Spec.* 2: 102, and 3: 105. In *Hypoth.* 11: 6, in plural, it refers to the activities, labours, or occupations Essenes work in, cf. 11: 5. In *Flacc.* 3. Flaccus became familiar with “Egyptian affairs/matters”. In *Praem.* 142, in plural, it means “occupations/industries”, as also *Fug.* 33. The usage of the word in *Contempl.* 1 is then completely consistent with Philo’s usage elsewhere, and can be read as “subject” or “topic”, in this case a reference to the topic of “the contemplative life”, a presentation of a philosophical ideal by a description of the lived life of real people.

Furthermore, it is clear from his rhetoric that Philo intends to contain both the Essenes and the Therapeutae in the paradigm of virtue readers would expect from the living of a philosophical life, even if they do not exactly fit with the common practice of Jews in Alexandria or his own notions. Philo constructs them by downplaying such features as the junior members of their community by Lake Mareotis whose “active” service of the seniors would muddy his rhetoric in terms of the “contemplative” ideal, since they are actually quite busy and serve the seniors during a meal (*Contempl.* 72, 81). In addition, the group appears to follow a solar calendar in which the day begins at dawn: their Sabbath of Sabbath celebration, on every 49th day, concludes when the sun rises (*Contempl.* 89, cf. 65), when they go back to “work”. Most importantly, the inclusion of women is not required or necessarily positive as an element in the ideal contemplative life (for example, in Chaeremon’s presentation of the Egyptian priests), and Philo works hard to ensure that they do not become a negative feature, given the various problematic ways philosophical women could be presented in antiquity (see Taylor 2003, 171-226). Philo’s “spin” is found not only in terms of how he manages such issues of the actual, but also in what he chooses to leave out (see Hay 1992). A rhetorically-heavy text is still not a “fiction” as such, in terms of genre.

Engberg-Pedersen is right that philosophical writing in antiquity was highly influenced by the principles established in Aristotle’s *Rhetorica*, but ancient authors knew their fables from their fact. Quintilian distinguished three genre distinctions: a *fabula* (fable, or myth), an *argumentum* (a narrative story) and a *historia*, “an exposition of actual fact” (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 2.4.2). But Engberg-Pedersen’s assessment (1999, 43) that Philo’s claims to writing truth was a ruse to conceal the fiction, is, as Mary-Ann Beavis has noted, ultimately “contrived” (2004, 32), or “overly ingenious” (2006, 60). In my view the genre of *Contempl.* is best considered by reference to what Aristotle defines how an inductive argument may be built up on the basis of “examples”, παραδείγματα (1.2.10; 1357b-1358a, see Kennedy 1999, 82-84). In accord with this, the treatise uses the good example of the Therapeutae to contrast with the bad examples used in Graeco-Egyptian culture, thus incorporating a rhetorical mode of censure or accusation (cf. Bréhier 1907, 285).

It is critical for philosophers utilising such examples to be seen to be representing the actual, in terms of their presentations that assert that they are truthful (so *Contempl.* 1-2), and in terms of representing philosophical ideals by reference to actual lives. We can consider the importance of the actual by reference to Epictetus. In his *Discourses*, Book 4, Epictetus grapples with the issue of freedom, and how easily one falls into various forms of slavery; the solution being to embrace the Stoic ideal of

detachment. However, in order to show that it is not an impossible ideal, Epictetus has to provide an example of someone who has lived such a life. Thus, he writes of Socrates (4: 1):

And that you may not think that I show you the example of a man who is a solitary person, who has neither wife nor children, nor country, nor friends, nor kinsmen, by whom he could be bent and drawn in various directions, take Socrates and observe that he had a wife and children, but he did not consider them as his own; that he had a country, so long as it was fit to have one, and in such a manner as was fit; friends and kinsmen also, but he held all in subjection to law and to the obedience due to it.”¹

For Epictetus it is necessary to show that the Stoic lifestyle can be adopted in the here and now by anyone with the appropriate commitment, and he looks to Xenophon’s *Symposium* for an example from history.² The Stoic lifestyle relies on historical examples for it to be shown as liveable, and to explain how it is lived, and so “an example (παράδειγμα) of this as also the other things [referred to] is proposed to us in the life of Socrates” (4: 5). In Dio Chrysostom’s *Euboean Discourse* (*Or.* 7), likewise, there is the example of a simple Euboean hunter and his family in terms of an argument for simplicity as a basis for a happy life. This type of philosophical rhetoric that functions on the basis of describing an example or series of examples may be seen in Cicero’s *De Divinatione* 1, where he reviews all known examples of divinatory practices, demonstrating its widespread usage (and for further see Breytenbach 2014). This type of literature is to be distinguished from Plato’s *Republic*, for here it is not necessary for Plato to argue that in his utopian society the “Guardians” conform to any existing precedent, since it is clear that this is a created ideal for a future society that has never existed.

What we have then in work such as *Contempl.* is an extended παράδειγμα or δείγμα: an example presented rhetorically in order to prove a philosophical life of virtue, and it is clear that Philo has it in mind that this is what he is presenting by what he states against the examples provided by his opposition, which become his “foils” (Hay 2003), of the “Greek Other” (Niehoff 2010) to demonstrate their inadequacy. In *Contempl.* 57, Philo defines the examples (παράδειγματα) from Xenophon’s *Symposium* as the opposite of what he is exhibiting in his treatise, demonstrating therefore that he is

¹ Epictetus, transl. George Long (1904), 311.

² I am very grateful to Prof. Wayne Martin for furnishing me with this important illustration from Epictetus.

engaged precisely in the work of furnishing παραδείγματα that would render Socrates inferior. This could not be done by means of a fantasy. One would not strongly contrast an actual example with an imaginary one. The rhetoric relies on the actuality of the example to point out the inadequacy of one that is used as a real basis for emulation.

The treatise is, then, a “life story”, or βίος, in that it illuminates the working of a philosophical life by means of a descriptive presentation of how people fulfil certain criteria the audience would expect. The usual title of the work, Περὶ βίου θεωρητικοῦ ἢ ἰκετῶν, suggests as much. Such philosophical “lives” – depicting “lifestyles” of virtue – could be organised on the basis of ways of behaving virtuously as defined by Aristotle (*Nicomachian Ethics* 1:5; 10:7-8), who listed four lives of virtue that would lead to happiness, the foremost two being the active (public, work-oriented) life and the contemplative (reclusive, scholarly) life; he then discusses whether happiness consists in the life of contemplation or in action (10: 7-8; see Engberg-Pedersen 1999, 41). Such lifestyles of virtue became standard models in Graeco-Roman philosophy (see Porphyry, *Abstin.* 1: 53; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7: 130). Philosophers could be defined in terms of the lives they exemplified, such as Dicaearchus (active) and Theophrastus (contemplative) (so Cicero, *De Finibus* 5: 57; Dicaearchus, *Frag.* 29 and 31; cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7: 92, 130). In due course examples of practitioners were created, with Antiphon’s *On the Life of Those who Excelled in Virtue* (quoted in Porphyry, *Vita Pyth.* 9-12), dating to the 3rd century BCE and containing an example of Pythagoras (training with Egyptian priests), being the earliest attested.

One thing to note, however, is that while the standard philosophical βίος concerns an example of an individual philosopher or hero (as in Philo’s own *Life of Moses*), in *Contempl.* we have a collective subject. This is also the case in terms of the lost treatise on the Essenes, which is paralleled in what Philo says elsewhere about them (*Prob.* 75-91; *Hypoth.* 11: 1-18), and in *Prob.* 91 Philo specifically defines his goal as showing them as an example (δειγμα). The immediate parallel is – as mentioned -- Chaeremon’s work on the Egyptian priests. Such collective examples are shown also in the extended discussion on the Essenes by Josephus (*War* 2: 119-61), or Porphyry’s examples of the Essenes and others as exponents of vegetarianism in *De Abstinencia* 4, a work which includes Chaeremon’s work on the Egyptian priests. The collective example is found also in Iamblichus’ presentation of the Pythagoreans (*Vita Pythag.*). This sub-genre, which presents the lifestyle of a collective subject as an example of philosophical excellence in the same way as in the usual βίος of a single individual, parallels another developed sub-genre of the collected biography of multiple individuals (see Adams 2013).

While much more could be said on this topic, the point here is simply that such examples had to be drawn from what was actual: real people. They are worked over rhetorically, but it simply cannot be the case that the Therapeutae are imaginary in this type of literature. Philo aims to show his hearers the truth (*Contempl.* 1), even if this is shaped to his own ends (Taylor 2003, 6-15).

2. The Gendered Space of the “Synagogue”

Overall then, we may assume that the men and women described in *Contempl.* existed historically, and Philo included details that are beyond mere convention or imagination in his description. As noted, there was nothing necessary about the inclusion of women in the description of an example of the Jewish contemplative life. Ross Kraemer (2011, 84-107) has suggested Exodus 15 – especially the dancing and singing of Hebrew women led by Miriam -- as a possible inspiration for Philo, which is construed then as supporting a notion that the women’s inclusion in the fantasy group was necessary, though, as van der Horst has noted, “if Philo could have patterned his description ... on his own interpretation of the text of Exod 15, then a contemporary coreligionist of his ... could pattern their celebrations on the same interpretation as well, with the result that the actual (historical) reality was more or less as Philo described it” (van der Horst 2012, 100). Additionally, the women do not just appear in the context of the inspired Sabbath of Sabbath celebration where Exod. 15 is referenced. Philo flatly states women’s inclusion within his example at the start (*Contempl.* 2), and he then mentions them specifically when they appear with men on the Sabbath days, in a common gathering place for the purposes of teaching, where all participants are portrayed as exhibiting model virtues: thus the women are additionally provided with the womanly virtue of modesty (*Contempl.* 30-33):

§30 So for six days each of them philosophises solitarily apart by themselves in the aforesaid ‘solitaria’ (μοναστηρίοι), not going beyond the doorway; moreover they do not look from afar. But on the seventh days they come together as into a common congregation (σύλλογος) and sit sequentially according to age with the proper posture, having the hands inside, the right hand between chest and chin, the left one drawn back along the thighs.

§31 After coming forward, the one most senior and most experienced in the doctrines gives a talk – with gaze steady, with voice steady, with reason and consideration, not showing off a display of words like the rhetors or the contemporary sophists, but rather he has examined the accuracy in the thoughts and so interprets – which does not stay on the tips of the ears, but comes through

hearing to soul and there remains securely. All the others listen in silence; they indicate agreement by a look or by a nodding of the head, this alone.

§32 This common sanctuary (σεμνεῖον) into which they come together on seventh days is a divided enclosure (περίβολος), the one part set aside for the male-area (εἰς ἀνδρῶνα), and the one into the female-area (εἰς γυναικωνῆτιν). For indeed also women customarily listen together, having the same purpose and the same practice.

§33 The wall between the spaces from the floor to the top is about three or four cubits, constructed in the form of a parapet, with the higher part rising up to the roof left open, for reason of two things: that the proper modesty in the womanly nature be protected and that, in order to have easy reception by their sitting in ear-shot, nothing impedes the voice of the one talking.

This passage is interesting as it provides a detailed description of a communal Sabbath assembly. We are justified then in exploring whether the location for this assembly should be defined as a synagogue, and in asking what the gendered spatial division might have meant in terms of gender relations.

i. Synagogues in the Work of Philo

It was Conybeare (1895, 310) who first suggested that the place of the Sabbath assembly in *Contempl.* should be considered as a synagogue. However, it is not absolutely clear that this is the case. To begin with, the term Philo uses for the “congregation” in *Contempl.* 30 is quite general: σύλλογος is used elsewhere in Philo’s extant works to mean the sacred “congregation” of Israel (*Leg.* 3: 81, *Post.* 177; *Deus* 111; *Somn.* 2: 184; *Spec.* 1: 325, 344), when paired with a θεῖος or ἱερός, though otherwise it is used to refer to any gathering of people in a city. Philo writes of law courts, theatres, council chambers, markets and other assemblies and “congregations” of people (*Mut.* 198; *Abr.* 20; *Spec.* 1: 321; 2: 44), which he also defines as particularly male spaces in *Spec.* 3: 169.

The building is described as a σεμνεῖον, a rare word that is first introduced in the treatise in §25 for the inner part of the individual huts, which is called a “sacred room”. While “sanctuary” appears then an appropriate translation, the designation would suggest it is appropriate in terms of a private dwelling.

The total space is also referred to as an “enclosure”, περίβολος, a term that would indicate a walled space. In Philo’s writings this word can refer to the walled enclosures of the tabernacle or Temple complex (*Mut.* 43; *Abr.* 128; *Mos.* 2: 92, 231; *Spec.* 1.74, 261; *Legat.* 212), but it does not have a

necessary correlation with a sacred enclosure; rather it indicates a walled enclosure of many kinds (*Opif.* 143, *Mos.* 2: 241; *Aet.* 73; *Flacc.* 123; *Legat.* 214, 347) including a field enclosure (*Agr.* 14), and it can refer to the surrounding wall itself (*Mut.* 74; *Mos.* 1: 229; *Spec.* 1: 71). This word then seems to be used for an architectural component that forms an enclosure within a larger structure. It also has a roof, mentioned in §33. Nevertheless, in *Flacc.* 48 Jews are described as no longer having their sacred enclosures: οὐκ ἔχοντες ἱεροὺς περιβόλους, defined as their synagogues, προσευχαί.

In *Mos.* 2: 216 synagogue buildings are called προσευκτήρια: a *hapax legomenon* in extant Greek works, but in both *Flacc.* and *Legat.* an actual synagogue building is called by the term προσευχή (*Flacc.* 41, 45, 47-49, 53, 122; *Legat.* 132, 134, 137-138, 148, 152, 157, 165, 191, 346, 371, cf. Acts 16: 13; Josephus, *Vita* 54), which is found on numerous Jewish inscriptions to indicate the building itself (see Horbury and Noy 1992, 9, 13, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 117, 125, 126; CPJ I: 129, 134, 138 II, 432; see also Levine 2005, 83-84). This would suggest that Philo uses the term προσευχή for “synagogue” as a building in the way that was normative in the inscriptions, but it is not the only way he refers to a synagogue.

Philo in *Contempl.* does present the Therapeutae as assembling just as other Jews assemble together on Sabbath days in a synagogue. While Philo may seem vague here, this is partly because he is vague elsewhere also. Philo’s normal term for a synagogue assembly is difficult to determine, but it is not usually called a συναγωγή (see for texts Runesson, Binder and Olsson 2008, 255-63). In *Somn.* 2: 123 Philo writes of a Roman governor, probably either Iberius or Vitrasius Pollio (see Colson and Whitaker, LCL Philo 5, Appendix. p. 609), who proposed to abrogate the law of the Seventh Day by compelling Jews to serve him on it; when he saw that some people did not submit to this, and others were very upset, the governor then makes a snide speech to the Jews that, very usefully, describes Sabbath assemblies as συναγωγία (sing. συναγωγή). If, says the governor, there was a sudden enemy attack, flood, fire, famine, plague or earthquake on the Sabbath would you “stay at home completely silent?” (2: 125). Would you “sit in your assemblies (καθεδεῖσθε ἐν τοῖς συναγωγαῖς), collecting the usual sacred company (θίασον), and securely read the sacred books, clearly unfolding whatever there may be, and in comfort pass your time slowly expounding the ancestral philosophy” (*Somn.* 2: 127-8)? This actually shows that the public gathering in the synagogue in part involved collective (and seated) discussion about the points of scripture that is actually *not* what takes place in the meetings of the Therapeutae, where discussion is not found. This word συναγωγή is also found also in *Legat.* 311, where Philo mentions a letter of Augustus permitting Jews of Asia to assemble “into assemblies”, which

are also συνόδοι, “meetings”, and διδασκαλεῖα, “schools”, of temperance and righteousness which also send envoys to Jerusalem with the annual first-fruits taxes to pay for sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple (*Legat.* 312-313). That they are such “schools of good sense, courage, temperance and righteousness” is a notion found in *Mos.* 2: 16 (so also *Praem.* 66). In *Spec.* 2: 62 Philo writes: “On seventh days, in fact in every city, thousands of schools of good sense, temperance, courage, righteousness and the other virtues are open, schools in which the (people) sit in [right] fashion (οἱ ... ἐν κόσμῳ καθέζονται) in silence, with ears pricked up (σὺν ἡσυχίᾳ τὰ ὄτα ἀνωρθιακότες) with complete attention because of the quenching draughts of words, when a certain person of the most experienced (τις τῶν ἐμπειροτάτων) gets up and sets out what is best and profitable with which will give over the whole of life to the better”.

For Philo a συναγωγή is, like σύλλογος, the congregation of Israel (*Post.* 67; *Agr.* 44; *QG* 2: 66; *QE* 1: 19), from *Num.* 27: 2-3 LXX. Thus the term συναγωγή refers to an “assembly” (a subsection of the συναγωγή of Israel as a whole) within this. However, in *Prob.* 81 the Essenes go “to sacred places they call ‘synagogues’”: εἰς ἱεροὺς ἀφικνούμενοι τόπους, οἱ καλοῦνται συναγωγαί, indicating buildings.

Prob. 81 is particularly important in its employment of several words that replicate what Philo would write of the teaching assembly of the Therapeutae and the teaching at the symposium. Those in the synagogue also “sit in [right] fashion”, with their “ears pricked up” (cf. ἀνωρθιακότες in §77) taught by someone “most experienced” (cf. ἐμπειρότατος §31). In *Contempl.* 30 they sit “with the proper posture, having the hands inside, the right hand between chest and chin, the left one drawn back along the thighs”. This posture was considered modest, exhibiting decency. In Colson’s translation (LCL, 131), this phrase is given as “with their hands inside the robe”, which perhaps suggests the way priests of Isis covered their hands when carrying vases of the sacred Nile waters. According to Chaeremon (Porphyry, *Abstin.* 4: 6), writing of Egyptian priests: “Always the hands [were] *inside of the figure*”. Philo uses similar language in *Somn.* 2: 126 when he describes the governor saying to the Jews: “Will you go out and assemble according to the customary figure, with the right hand inside (τὴν ... δεξιὰν εἴσω χεῖρα), and the other one under the outerwear (ὕπο τῆς ἀμπεχόνης) held along the thighs (παρὰ ταῖς λαγῶσι πῆξαντες)?” This way of draping the ἀμπεχόνη or ἱμάτιον (outer garment) is not uncommon: statuary can show figures with their right arm tucked close to the chest in the fold of the ἱμάτιον (hand uncovered), with the left hand by the body (see Taylor 2003, 292-3), as is famously depicted in the marble statue of the emperor Hadrian from Cyrene, now in the British Museum (GR 1861,1127.23). Interestingly, Philo is depicted draped in this way, with his left hand covered and his right exposed, in two portraits of the 9th-century Paris manuscript of the *Sacra Parallela* (Paris Gr. 923: 305 v and 310

v). Since the left hand was associated with negative things, it was presumably covered to be particularly decent. Nevertheless, in adopting this posture, it may be that Jews were stating something distinctive about a refusal to use the hands in work on the Sabbath: the hands are tucked away (see Daumas and Miquel 1963, 100).

To what extent is this depiction of correct posture gendered? Tanagra figurines of women, made in terracotta from the 4th century BCE to the 1st century CE, show the *himation* worn in various ways by women outdoors, often with both arms and hands within the veil, but the same form of tucked-away right arm is found in statuary of women, for example in the statue of Vibia Sabina in the Villa Adriana, Tivoli. Thus, Philo is probably describing the decent, attentive comportment of both men and women here as they sat and listened, as well as indicating an actual practice of tucking away the hands to show inactivity on the Sabbath.

Philo then states: “After coming forward, the one most senior and the one who has the fullest knowledge of the doctrines gives a talk.” The word *παρελθών*, literally “passing by”, indicates a movement in space, with this person passing by the others to come up to speak (see for this LSJ 1337 VI), once they are settled in the synagogue area. Translating *ἐμπειρότατος*, Colson (LCL IX, 131) has: “one who has the fullest knowledge”; Conybeare (1894, 759): “most skilled”, Daumas and Miquel (1963, 101), “le plus versé”; the sense is of one who is full with the doctrines. These doctrines (*δογμάτα*) are philosophical: those that the group adheres to, as in §§26, 35, and 68.

Philo writes that they “sit sequentially according to age”. The word *καθέζονται*, “sit” here, would usually imply that there are benches or banks. The adverb *ἐξῆς* indicates a sequence of places in terms of rank (cf. *Prob.* 12). While Philo refers to an order based on age here, in §67 he will indicate that the concept of eldership is not in fact dependent on actual physical age. The emphasis on the sequential seating arrangements in terms of a specific hierarchy is found also in §§66-67 and §75; everyone is conscious of where they are in relation to others. This same hierarchical arrangement is noted by Chaeremon in regard to the Egyptian priests, who had a symbol indicative of the rank they had obtained (Porphyry, *Abstin.* 4: 6). As Rachel Hachlili states: “The most important and distinctive element of these Second Temple period communal synagogue structures are the benches lining the walls, which must have been specifically added for the congregants to sit upon when congregating and worshipping, the focus being the center of the hall” (Hachlili 2013, 46).

ii. *Synagogue Space and Gender*

The origins of the synagogue as an institution remain debated (see e.g. Binder 2003; Olsson 2003a, 2003b). Though some have suggested that the synagogue began in Egypt (Griffiths 1987; Kasher 1995), with prior Jewish sanctuaries being temples: at Leontopolis in the nome of Heliopolis (Hayward 1982; Schiffman 1998 and Taylor 1998) and at Elephantine on the Nile River north of Aswan (Porten et al. 1996). While numerous inscriptions have been found from Graeco-Roman Egypt indicating the presence of προσευχαί as early as the 3rd century BCE (see Horbury and Noy 1992, 215), no actual synagogue has thus far been excavated. The question of what was meant by terms such as προσευχή continues to be debated (see Hachlili 2013, 8-10), but a place for communal prayer and scripture reading on the Sabbath appears to be the perhaps the most basic feature. The internal arrangement of such places in Egypt would likely have been similar to that of wider Judaea in being a hall with tiered benches around it, with a focus on the middle of the space, since Philo's descriptions of activity in synagogues (as cited above) would cohere with this. In *Somn.* 2: 139 all the people of the synagogue are praying "standing right opposite (each other) arranged in order by rank with hands lifted up (στάντες ἀντικρὺς οὕτω κατὰ στοῖχον ἐν κόσμῳ τὰς χεῖρας ἐξάραντες)". This provides a vivid image of synagogue worship in which people are indeed placed in banks facing each other, as in an auditorium and in the earliest synagogues excavated in Palestine.

In Alexandria, the closest parallels to a benched room enclosure are the auditoria that have come to light in Kom el-Dikka (Majcherek 2010), excavated by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (University of Warsaw). As Majcherek (2010, 473) states, "Stone benches were the most important interior furnishing, present in all the units". However, the auditoria date most likely from the 5th-6th centuries CE, and cannot therefore be used as a definitive parallel for the kinds of auditoria known at the time of Philo, though some have earlier structures under their floors. Nevertheless, that Philo refers to synagogues as διδασκαλεῖα is interesting given that this is the kind of structure that is found in Kom el-Dikka: school rooms.

Questions regarding the separation of men and women among the Therapeutae have been used in discussions about gendered space in synagogues in antiquity. Recently, Chad Spigel has explored the question of separate seating in ancient synagogues, in which Philo's evidence is employed as a model (Spigel 2012: 68-69). Spigel notes that *Contempl.* can be rejected as providing evidence for normative synagogues since it describes a "sectarian" community, but actually this "does not mean that everything in the description of their worship practices was unique to them", for example meeting on the Seventh

Day. The separation into gendered space “allows the women to participate equally without sacrificing modesty” (2012, 69).

One question is whether there was an upper women’s gallery in synagogues and whether this concept was anticipated here (e.g. Winston 1981, 317-18). In the Palestinian Talmud there is a reference to the slaughter of Jews in the Alexandrian synagogue, described as a דיפליסטון, *diplistoon*, a term similar to that found regarding secular basilicas (Vitruvius, *De architectura*, 5: 1: 6), implying a higher and lower level, which is borne out in the words of the women who say, after the men have been killed, “Do to those above as you have done to those below” (j.Sukk. 5: 1 [55b], but see Spigel 2012, 71 n.40 on the textual and translation problems). According to Spigel this type of synagogue construction seems to be evidenced in Khirbet Susiya (4th-8th centuries; see Mattila 1996, 274; Hachlili 2013, 118), or Khirbet Shema` (Spigel 2012, 75; Hachlili 2013, 73) dating from the 3rd century. In Gush Halav (Hachlili 2013, 63-4), a simple single-storey synagogue structure dating to the mid-3rd century was modified in the 4th century to have a mezzanine level, which Spigel (2012, 76-8) suggests would be a women’s gallery. Spigel (2012, 69-71) notes that the separation of men and women -- with women above on a balcony and men below -- is defined in m.Mid. 2: 5 (cf. m.Sukk. 5: 1-4) and in t.Sukk. 4: 1 this is defined in terms of when there was festive dancing in the water drawing ceremony of Sukkoth. On the basis of this the Babylonian Talmud (b.Sukk. 51b-52a) affirms the *mechitza* as a dividing wall between men and women. While Josephus does not specify any separation within the Court of the Women (in *Ant.* 15: 419; *War* 5: 198-200; *Apion* 2: 102-4), his comments could be consistent with rabbinic material since he indicates it is simply a court in which both men and women were allowed, while only men were only allowed in the Court of the Israelites; he does not indicate internal arrangements of this court.

However, even if there was an upper gallery in the Court of the Women, the great synagogue of Alexandria, or other synagogues, this is not how space is configured in the “sanctuary” of the Therapeutae, since Philo states that the wall rises up from the floor. In fact, one-level divisions of space are also evidenced in rabbinic literature, as well as a concern for a decent separation of men and women at times: a partition of canes is mentioned by Rabbi Raba and one of rugs by Rabbi Abaye is noted in b.Kidd. 81a (Mattila 1996, 274; Winston 1981, 317-18; Spigel 2012, 72). Thus Spigel (2012, 78) suggests that in Gush Halav the Jewish “community may have made a move from separate seating using a non-permanent room divider in the main hall to separate seating using a mezzanine.”

Whatever we may define as the practice and arrangements in synagogues, however, Philo tends to indicate that (ideally) women did not actually attend synagogue (Taylor 2003, 276-7): on Sabbath

days, properly, a man returns home to the household in the evening and explains what he has heard of the laws to his wife, children and servants (*Hypoth.* 7: 14). In *Spec.* 3: 171 Philo states that women should not be concerned with matters outside the household: a woman should cultivate solitude, and not be seen in front of men, going to the “temple” (not synagogue) only in the least busy time of the day. The presentation of women in a synagogue context in *Contempl.* would then appear to run counter to his ideal arrangement.

iii. *Private and Public Synagogues*

The concept of women being not appropriately out in public may be laid aside if the enclosure in which the Therapeutae meet is conceptualised as fundamentally private. Not only is the term σεμνεῖον defined first in the private context of a hut, in *Contempl.* 25, but the words used for the male and female areas of the divided enclosure (διπλοῦς ... περίβολος) are known from domestic architecture, since in Hellenistic Egypt the front part of the house, also used for male dinner parties, was designated as the male space, ἀνδρῶν, while the back part of the house was the female space, γυναικωνίτις; the women’s apartments, a division reflected in Philo’s works (see Taylor 2003, 266-74). The word γυναικωνίτις was the term used by Josephus (*War* 5: 199) of the women’s court in the Temple precincts, but for Philo the word is only used in a domestic context (cf. *Leg.* 3: 98; *Sacr.* 103; *Agr.* 79; *Migr.* 96; *Somn.* 2: 9, 55, 184; *Legat.* 358). Philo therefore fuses concepts of domestic architecture with a meeting space that would normally be understood to be a synagogue: a place of assembly on the Sabbath. This is striking in that Philo elsewhere does not see synagogues as places that women come to. It creates a dissonance in terms of what he might define as ideal in terms of what he has stated elsewhere, but women can apparently be accommodated as a (just) positive feature in this treatise as long as women’s modesty is assured and the space itself is private. However, the Therapeutae may themselves have construed the space as private. Their occupation area was not in a city, or even in a village; it appears to be a rural landholding in which there was a central villa surrounded by individual huts (*Contempl.* 24, Taylor 2003, 90-97).

That synagogues could be private, is shown by the fact that they have been found within or adjacent to private palatial complexes at Jericho (Hachlili 2013, 28-30; Runesson, Binder and Olsson 2008, 40-42), in the First Revolt occupation of Masada (Hachlili 2013, 30-33; Runesson, Binder and Olsson 2008, 55-57) and in the Bar Kokhba period occupation of the palace-fortress of Herodion (Hachlili 2013, 28-29; Runesson, Binder and Olsson 2008, 35-36). Critics of the identification of the

Jericho structure as a synagogue can assume it *had* to have a public use to be so designated (Levine 2003b, 187-8), but, as Hachlili (2013, 30) states: the Jericho synagogue “is more reminiscent of Hellenistic-Roman villas and may have been part of one”. From this evidence, it would be appropriate to conclude that people could construct an enclosure they utilised for Sabbath assemblies within their personal precincts. The 1st-century BCE benched structure adjacent to *miqva’ot*, identified in Shuafat (Khirbet a-Ras) within an agricultural complex, may then also be a synagogue (Onn and Rafyunu 1993; Runesson, Binder and Olsson 2008, 75-6) though it is poorly published and there is some scepticism about its nature (Levine 2005, 72; Hachlili 2013, 39). If it is a synagogue, then it is particularly relevant to the present discussion in that it was divided by a low stone wall. At any rate, the Sabbath meeting place of the Therapeutae as described in *Contempl.*, provides us with a type of private synagogue that we already know from archaeology.

In *Contempl.* Philo affirms that women listen “having the same purpose (ζηλος) and the same practice (προαίρεσις)” as the men. The word ζηλος is a “seeking”, or “craving”, expressing a desire to emulate an ideal; προαίρεσις for Philo indicates the chosen lifestyle of this group (*Contempl.* 2, 17, 29, 67, 79). But Philo accommodates women in the treatise in a way that does not sit comfortably with what he states elsewhere about women’s place, role or capabilities. For example, Philo states in *Sacr.* 100 that neither men nor women should attempt to gain the functions which are appropriate to the other sex. Sameness between men and women was not Philo’s ideal. He affirms in *Contempl.* what he does not really condone.

How then can we configure the divided space of the “synagogue” of the Therapeutae? As Philo describes them, in the synagogues of the Essenes, the juniors sit below the elders/seniors (ὕπο πρεσβυτέροις νέοι καθέζονται), and one takes the reading and another the expounding. This provides an order in which the best seats are those at the top of the benches, rather than at the bottom; the lower you are in status, the more you sit at the feet of the ones who are superior to you (*Prob.* 81-3).

But among the Therapeutae the meeting space is divided. Philo identifies there is a clear partition: “The wall between the spaces from the floor to the top is about three or four cubits, constructed in the form of a parapet”. Here there are, literally, “the rooms” (τῶν οἰκῶν) yet one roofed hall in which there are two areas. The common translation of “breastwork”, for θωρακίου (so Colson, LCL IX, 133), applies a military term to this construction and does not make very good architectural sense. Rather, the sense here seems similar to the usage of Josephus, *War* 5: 317, where it means something protective. There is only one other place where Philo uses the word θωρακίον: in *Spec.* 3:

149, interpreting Deut. 22: 8. In this case it refers to the “unguarded roof”: the need to ring flat roofs with “parapets” to prevent anyone from falling over the edge, and it is accordingly translated as “parapet” by Colson (LCL VII, 569, 638-9). It is therefore in *Contempl.* also a wall of protection.

A cubit in Hellenistic Egypt was about 45 cm or 18 inches (Stone 2014), meaning the height of the wall was between 1.35-1.8 m. high, about 4’5”to 5’9”, thus approximately 1.6 m. or 5’2”. However, it is stated that “the higher part rising up to roof [is] left open”. The airy openness of the upper part of the space where the low wall is located is emphasised by assonance using a succession of ‘a’ sounds: ἄχρι, ἀνάγειον, ἀχανές, ἀνεῖται, all lost in translation. Note that here Philo indicates that they are in a roofed space, not in an open courtyard, and thus we need to imagine it as a large room or hall.

The open area is “for reason of two things”. The first one is that “the proper modesty in the womanly nature be protected”. The dividing wall is configured in terms of preserving women’s modesty, a key concern for Philo in order to ensure that the women of the group are not considered in any way loose and sexualised, according to common criticisms of philosophical women (see Taylor 2003, 173-226). This is all about women’s virtue. There is no indication that the wall preserves the *men* from being distracted by the women. The height of the wall is designed to protect women’s modesty while sitting, but the focus here is entirely on the relationship between the women and the speaker, not the men who also listen. The speaker is presented by Philo here as a man, despite the fact that the group itself may have applied the criteria of excellence that warranted someone becoming a speaker in gender-neutral terms (*Contempl.* 31) and the masculine terms can function as inclusive in Greek, even in the singular (see Taylor 2003, 103). However, in terms of how Philo presents the speaker in action, in relation to the women of the group, he clearly indicates a male; the same person who will be defined as the πρόεδρος, “president”, in §§75 and 79.

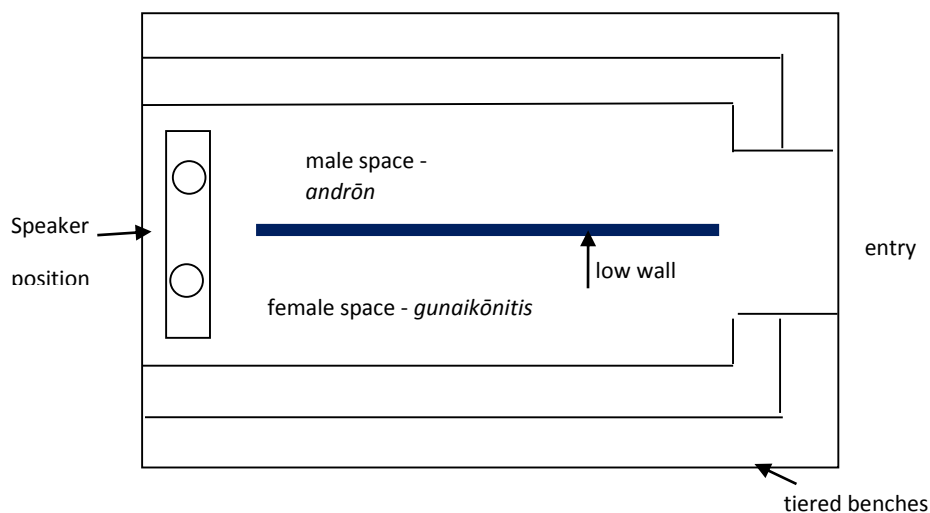
This is confirmed by the second point Philo makes, since the wall is configured in relation to the male speaker and the women. The wall does not go up to the top so that, “in order to have easy reception by their sitting in ear-shot, nothing impedes the voice of the one talking.” Philo presents the women as listeners here, eager to hear because they have the same purpose and practice as the men (see Taylor 2003, 274-82). Nothing obstructs the voice of the male speaker as it comes towards the women; it travels over the wall, but their modesty is preserved because he cannot see them. But the gendered division of space in no way assumes women’s inferiority to men.

In terms of the (male) speaker’s positioning, we are told – as noted -- that he “comes beside/forward”, παρελθὼν: given this is a male speaker he would then remain in male space. He would

also sit, as was common for teachers in antiquity. The wall appears to assume that everyone sits, and the height of the wall is taken as slightly higher than the maximum eye level of seated women in relation to the male speaker.

This partition seems to reflect some concept of a *mechitza*, dividing wall (cf. b.Sukk. 51b, 52b), but it is difficult to imagine how this wall could actually work practically in the ancient synagogues with tiered banks that have been found in Israel-Palestine and elsewhere, where some of the higher banks would mean that people sat at a level considerable higher than the eye-height of 1.6 m (5' 2"). The auditoria of Kom el-Dikka have banks that are quite low, about 30 cm high, and therefore one could have people sitting down on the lower ones and reaching an eye level of about 1 – 1.2 m., with a higher bank at 1.3-1.6 m., so only two banks could then be envisaged in this space. In Kom el-Dikka there are indeed auditoria with only two banks (D, G, O, T) and even just with one (C, R) so this would not be anomalous if the pattern of Kom el-Dikka did continue more ancient forms. Philo also does not indicate that the female space was any smaller than the male space, in a gallery, or in any way at the back.

If the space is configured as having a central dividing wall running longways, then the male speaker would sit on the male side, perhaps on a low dais, but this divided space would allow for there at times to be a female speaker sitting on the female side, also blocked from view from the men (and vice versa) by the low wall:



Conclusions

This paper has concentrated on two matters: the actuality of the group described in Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa*, and the presentation of the gendered space of the synagogue of this group, with a synagogue defined as being the place for assembly on Sabbaths. Philo seems to indicate tiered banks for people seated in order, as in the teaching spaces of auditoria found in Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria, and also ancient synagogues in Judaea. This is a divided enclosure. Here both men and women assemble with the women in one part and the men in the other. How we should imagine the division given ancient architectural models remains unclear, but nothing indicates that the women are in an upper gallery, or located in an inferior position.

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