

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### TEXT, CONTEXT, AND PRETEXT: REVIEW ESSAY OF YEHUDA LIEBES'S *ARS POETICA IN SEFER YETSIRA*\*

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The *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetsira* by Yehuda Liebes is a book marked by a somewhat unsettling confluence of exacting philological precision reflective of the most rigorous academic training and fanciful flights of historical reconstruction based on rather primitive assumptions about the nature of textuality. Thus, it is appropriate to begin my review with some observations regarding the textual contours and composition of *Sefer Yetsirah*, a relatively small treatise that began to have an inordinate influence on the development of speculative Jewish thought from the tenth century onwards — precisely at the time that commentaries on the work are written do we begin to see evidence on the part of some figures to establish the text itself. What, then, do we mean when we speak of *Sefer Yetsirah*, the ‘Book of Formation?’ What kind of book is intended? The historicist impulse to pinpoint the provenance of this work, at full force in the work of Liebes, both in terms of time and place rests on a prior hermeneutical issue that must be settled: How is *Sefer Yetsirah* a text?

Properly speaking, the work should not be described as a single composition, but rather as a composite of distinct literary strands that have been woven together through a complicated redactional process whose stages are not clearly discernible and, in all probability, will not be ascertainable by the critical methods of historical investigation. In 1971, Ithamar Gruenwald published a ‘preliminary critical edition’ of *Sefer Yetsirah*. The editor embarked on a very risky path, as he readily admitted the difficulty, if not impossibility, of establishing the precise textual parameters of this work. As a result of examining the three main recensions that have survived from the Late Middle Ages, the long, short, and Se’adian, which is intermediate between long and short, Gruenwald concluded that the ‘three recensions differ from each other mainly in the length of the text and in the inner

organization of the material. The differences of reading between the three recensions are not so many as is generally assumed.’<sup>1</sup> What Gruenwald was getting at is that from a technical point of view he did not think it necessary to print all three recensions since the variants were not that significant. The differences he enunciates, however, are not so inconsequential. The methodological assumption, in the editor’s own words, was that an investigation of all the manuscripts would enable one ‘to trace more accurately the development of the manuscript-stems and of the text itself,’ and, indeed, the consultation of all available manuscripts and printed editions could lead to the establishing of a ‘standard and authoritative text.’<sup>2</sup> I have no doubt that the first part of this sentence is true, but I have reservations about the second. Given the dating of the manuscripts, there is little reason to suppose that the nature of the ‘text’ itself in distinction from the ‘manuscript-stems’ can be determined in this way. And, if we are limited to manuscript-stems, then discussion of a ‘text’ is problematic unless one is prepared to understand this term as an aggregate of affiliated textual units that have been variously assembled by scribes in different historical and geographical localities.

In a study published in 1973, Gruenwald criticized the attempt of Israel Weinstock to determine the ‘original text’ of the first chapter of *Sefer Yetsirah* extracted from later redactional accretions:

Weinstock takes the liberty of tampering with the text and its inner organization, very often basing his arguments for doing so on rather remote and corrupt readings in some of the manuscripts. His reconstruction of the text is therefore absolutely arbitrary, and cannot be accepted by a serious student of the text. ... Our present knowledge of the text does not allow anything in the nature of Weinstock’s undertaking, and it is quite doubtful whether future investigations of the text will justify many of his conclusions.<sup>3</sup>

I concur with this assessment of Weinstock, but I would level the same criticism at Gruenwald’s own attempt to distinguish manuscript-stems and text. Alas, all we have are stems that have been braided together into a text at some phase of the redactional process. Accordingly, there seems to be no justification to continue to speak of the *text* of *Sefer Yetsirah*, let alone to pinpoint the provenance of the so-called work without dealing with the fragmentary and multifaceted nature of its constitution.

<sup>1</sup> I. Gruenwald, ‘A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezira*,’ *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971) 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 135.

<sup>3</sup> I. Gruenwald, ‘Some Critical Notes on the First Part of *Sefer Yezira*,’ *Revue des Études juives* 132 (1973) 475 n. 1.

\* Yehuda Liebes, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetsira* [Hebrew]. Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2000. 380 pages. ISBN: 9-651-90511-5.

In fairness to Gruenwald, it must be said that he was aware of the difficulty of speaking monolithically about *Sefer Yetsirah*. In his words: 'To suggest one comprehensive theory that would explain all the doctrines contained in *Sefer Yezira*, their origin and how they came to live under the same roof, would be difficult in the extreme.'<sup>4</sup> The most important observation made by Gruenwald relates to what he describes as the 'methodological principle' that he adopted:

It has been assumed that the two parts of the book, that is the *Sefirot*-part (§§ 3–16) and the letters-part (§§ 17–64), are two distinct sections, possibly stemming from two different sources composed at different times. ... The two parts of the book are held strictly apart. This concerns matters of terminology and of contents alike. Whatever it was that the writer or editor of the book had in mind when bringing the two parts of the book together, and however this is being achieved, we still insist on a *methodological* separation of the text into the two parts.<sup>5</sup>

This was surely a hopeful development in the study of *Sefer Yetsirah* — an unambiguous recognition that the work is composed of two discrete parts, one that deals with the ten *sefirot* and the other with the twenty-two Hebrew letters. The two parts are brought together in the opening section according to all extant recensions in the umbrella concept of the thirty-two paths of mysterious wisdom by means of which God is said to have created the world. In the received text, there is one other passage where the two are brought together: 'Ten *sefirot belimah* and the twenty-two foundational letters — three mothers, seven doubles, and twelve simples, and there is one spirit in them.'<sup>6</sup> This comment immediately precedes the depiction of the *sefirot* wherein the second of them is identified as 'spirit from spirit,' *ruah me-ruah*, the substrate in which (following one manuscript recension) God engraves and hews the three divisions of the twenty-two letters. I shall return to this account of the *sefirot* below, but suffice it here to say that this appears to be a later interpolation and it is likely that the alternative reading, which describes God engraving and hewing the four cardinal points in the spirit that comes from spirit, is more original.

In this connection, it is of interest to mention the fragment of *Sefer Yetsirah* from a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Byzantine manuscript in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg published and discussed by Y. Tzvi Langermann.<sup>7</sup> The editor presents the text as a possible 'new

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 478.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 479.

<sup>6</sup> Gruenwald, 'Preliminary Critical Edition' § 9, 143.

<sup>7</sup> Y. T. Langermann, 'A New Redaction of *Sefer Yesira?*,' *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 2 (1997) 49–63.

redaction' of *Sefer Yetsirah*, but in my opinion it is a relatively late version that includes interpolated material, often with the aim of making firmer connections between the *sefirot* and the letters. Thus, for example, in this version we find the statement 'Ten *sefirot belimah*, twenty-two letters he engraved, hewed, combined, weighed, transposed and created through them all that exists and all that will exist.'<sup>8</sup> In the standard versions, there is no reference in this passage to the ten *sefirot* but only to the twenty-two letters.<sup>9</sup> The most plausible way to explain the reading of the text preserved in the St. Petersburg manuscript is to suggest the scribe made an attempt to unite the two agents of divine creativity. In the same manuscript, we find the cosmological delineation of the ten *sefirot* placed in the middle of the section depicting the combination of the letter *alef* with all the other letters.<sup>10</sup> The text as it stands makes little sense, but a plausible explanation may lie in a strategy to forge a more obvious link between the *sefirot* and letters as instruments of God's creative potency.

In any event, it is feasible to conclude that at some point in the redactional history an individual came up with the idea of the thirty-two paths to bridge the two discrete parts of the text. This recognition alone represented a great step forward when compared, for instance, to the description of *Sefer Yetsirah* offered by Scholem:

We do not know the exact date of this enigmatic text, which sets forth the meaning or function of the 'thirty-two ways of wisdom,' that is, of the ten *sephiroth* or original numbers, and of the twenty-two consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. We can only be sure that it was written by a Jewish Neo-Pythagorean some time between the third and the sixth century.<sup>11</sup>

The view espoused by Scholem, which can be corroborated by his description of *Sefer Yetsirah* elsewhere in his writings, presumes the text is an integral unit and, consequently, that there is a single author.<sup>12</sup> In the history of scholarship on *Sefer Yetsirah*, to the best of my knowledge, Gruenwald was the first to propose that the notion of the thirty-two paths of wisdom was based on combining two independent traditions. This, in turn, should cast doubt on the belief that there is a sole author of the entire work. Going beyond Gruenwald, I would claim that the two parts themselves, and

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Gruenwald 'Preliminary Critical Edition' § 19, 148.

<sup>10</sup> Langermann, 'A New Redaction', 59.

<sup>11</sup> G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, translated by R. Manheim (New York 1969) 167.

<sup>12</sup> G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York 1954) 75–78; idem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, edited by R. J. Z. Werblowsky, translated by A. Arkush (Princeton 1987) 24–35; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem 1974) 23–28.

especially the first, must be viewed as redactionally complex composites. In light of this probability, I am not sure what it means to speak of *the* text of *Sefer Yetsirah* without significant qualification. In the final analysis, I concur with the observation of Peter Hayman that the notion of an 'original text' of *Sefer Yetsirah* is nothing more or less than a 'scholarly illusion.'<sup>13</sup>

Lamentably, some of the more recent scholarship on *Sefer Yetsirah* has been marred by a decided lack of attention to the redactional complexities raised by Gruenwald and especially as they pertain to his insight regarding the two seemingly independent parts of the text. The overriding assumption — even if more often left unspoken — has been that the two parts cohere and we can thus continue to speak of 'one' text and 'one' author. I mention here two relatively recent attempts by Israeli scholars that epitomize this approach. In a study published in 1993, Joseph Dan distinguished three periods in the history of *Sefer Yetsirah*: the first consists of the period from the time of its composition (which Dan acknowledges is uncertain in contrast to his own conjecture in an earlier study that *Sefer Yetsirah* was written by an 'anonymous author of the talmudic period'<sup>14</sup>) to the beginning of its influence in the tenth century; the second consists of the influence of this work on philosophical thinkers from the tenth to the twelfth centuries; and the third consists of the adoption of this text by various mystics from the twelfth century.<sup>15</sup> This neat historical schematization takes no account of the fact that the redactional shaping of the text continued for a long period probably until the ninth or tenth century, a point to which I shall return in a moment.

The second example is the monograph by Yehuda Liebes that I am here reviewing. Given the scope and ramifications of the hypothesis proffered by Liebes, I will dedicate more time to discussing his project in an admittedly critical but decidedly non-polemical way. In his customary manner, Liebes offers a passionate and provocative depiction of *Sefer Yetsirah* as an illustration of *ars poetica* (or, in the Hebrew he employs, *torat ha-yetsirah*),

<sup>13</sup> P. A. Hayman, 'The 'Original Text': A Scholarly Illusion?,' in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer*, edited by J. Davies, G. Harvey and W. G. E. Watson (Sheffield 1995) 434–449.

<sup>14</sup> J. Dan, 'Three Types of Ancient Jewish Mysticism,' *The Seventh Annual Rabbi Louis Feinberg Memorial Lecture in Judaic Studies*, Judaic Studies Program, University of Cincinnati, April 26, 1984, 20, reprinted in J. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism: Late Antiquity* (Northvale 1998) 59.

<sup>15</sup> J. Dan, 'The Religious Meaning of *Sefer Yezira*,' *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 11 (1993) 1–35 [Hebrew]. See idem, 'Three Phases of the History of the *Sefer Yezira*,' *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 21 (1994) 7–29, reprinted in Dan, *Jewish Mysticism: Late Antiquity*, 155–187.

that is, a work that chronicles the 'spiritual activity' (*ha-pe'ilut ha-ruhanit*) of God and its reflection in human creativity below (p. 7), the activity of poiesis (*yetsirah*), which Liebes tellingly describes as the 'perpetual destruction of the cosmological orientation' (p. 11). In the author's opinion, being attuned to this spiritual activity holds the key to understanding *Sefer Yetsirah* and it stands as a corrective to the prevalent view that the book is about imparting scientific information. Listen to his exact words:

Thus, an attentive reading like this will teach us that with the destruction of the cosmological orientation (*be-harisat ha-shitativyut ha-qosmologit*) we have not only harmed the dignity of the book, but we have grasped its intention (*kiwwanu le-da'ato*). For, according to my understanding, *Sefer Yetsirah* itself does not overflow most of its springs to sustain the cosmological orientation but to destroy it! In the essence of the deconstructive activity (*be-etsem pe'ulat ha-harisah*) will be found, as will be seen, the religious, ethical, and mystical ideal, which is the heart of the book and the core of its intention (p. 31).

We note the curious consequence of Liebes's thinking, and what he assumes to be a strain evident in the text of *Sefer Yetsirah*: reading in accord with the 'spiritual' sense entails destroying an alternative reading. Hermeneutics is here understood primarily as waging battle, combat, polemic. Let me be quick to point out that the notion of destruction offered by Liebes, *harisah*, is to be contrasted sharply with the deconstructionist mode that marks an interpretative trajectory that stretches from Nietzsche to Derrida. This textual strategy, as is well known, contests the privileging of any one reading and thus welcomes polysemy. The deconstructive element fosters multiple perspectives. By contrast, for Liebes, the destructive element is constrictive as it centers on the defeat of the other, in the case of *Sefer Yetsirah*, the scientific-cosmological reading that is rejected by the spiritual-poetic. Precisely in the act of tearing down, according to this Jerusalem scholar, can one find the religious, ethical and mystical ideal that is the heart of *Sefer Yetsirah* and the essence of its intent.

Liebes has argued for an early dating of *Sefer Yetsirah*, suggesting as the latest possible date the middle of the first century, basing himself primarily on internal evidence (p. 229), though on occasion he does appeal to external parallels as in the case of Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of the author of *Sefer Yetsirah*, according to Liebes (pp. 76–77, 91–92, 105–110, 226–227, 230–231). It is of interest to compare the position adopted by Liebes to the 'orthodox' view espoused by Aryeh Kaplan:

The *Sefer Yetzirah* is without question the oldest and most mysterious of all Kabbalistic texts. The first commentaries on this book were written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and the text itself is quoted as early as the sixth. References to the work appear in the first century, while traditions regarding its use attest to its existence even in Biblical

times. So ancient is this book that its origins are no longer accessible to historians. We are totally dependent on traditions with regard to its authorship.<sup>16</sup>

Liebes would not concur methodologically with the notion that we are completely dependent on traditions, since he is laboring under the presumption that his argument is textually and philologically sound, but his conclusion about the provenance of *Sefer Yetsirah* is not substantively far from Kaplan's a-historical reading. The historical basis for Liebes is, in my opinion, not verifiable by scholarly means and it is thus, in some sense, beyond criticism. Nonetheless, insofar as the author presents his argument as an academic one, it cannot be left without criticism. The claim, for instance, that references to Temple imagery in *Sefer Yetsirah*, and especially the central cosmic role it is accorded, coupled with the absence of any reference to longing for the Temple, demonstrate that the text had to be written before the Jerusalem structure was destroyed (pp. 229–230) is logically flawed. Indeed, one could cogently argue that additional symbolic significance is accorded Temple imagery as a way to depict the topography of the divine realm precisely in the absence of an earthly Temple; the imaginal space may be enhanced when the territorial demands of occupying a particular physical place are eliminated as a consequence of the events of history.

I would like to raise some of the larger hermeneutical issues that go unexamined in the reconstruction of Liebes. One wonders, to begin with, how it is possible to determine a date for the work as a whole without considering the fragmentary and disparate nature of the literary units threaded together into a composite text. On what grounds can Liebes refer to the 'true spiritual world' of *Sefer Yetsirah* (*olamo ha-ruhani ha-amiti*)? How can Liebes plausibly continue to speak in the singular of the author of the 'Book of Formation' (*ba'al sefer yetsirah*)? How can Liebes continue to speak of an 'essence' (*iqqar*) or 'substance' (*mahut*) of the book when there is little reason to believe there is a book at all in such a manner that one could isolate a theme that demarcates its essence? Even more troubling is his use of the term *sefer yetsirah* itself as a way of denoting authorial intent, as we find, for instance, in the rhetorical query *ha-im be-khakh sover sefer yetsirah leha'aniq yeda amiti al tiv'o shel ha-olam* (p. 10)? I trust we would all agree that it is problematic to ascribe intentionality of this sort to a book, if it is indeed credible to speak of a 'book' at all in the case of *Sefer Yetsirah*. I know it is customary in medieval rabbinic sources to refer to an author by the name of his major composition — kabbalists even have a numerology to anchor this idea *shemo = sefer* — but there is no venerable tradition to

<sup>16</sup> A. Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation* (York Beach 1990) ix.

personify a book in the absence of an author, which is precisely what Liebes has done with *Sefer Yetsirah*.

Liebes's claim is even bolder for he asserts that the destruction of the cosmological orientation will prove to be a spiritual boon, for 'we will destroy an old and bad book of science (*naharos sefer mada ra u-meyushan*), and we will build in its place the Jewish spiritual *Sefer Yetsirah*, which expresses in a deep and potent Hebrew its views related to issues that are still found today in the center of the cultural agenda' (p. 11). Or, as he puts it in another passage:

One should not impose an external classification (*hagdarah hitsonit*) on the book. The classification of the book must flow from within it, to be attentive to the essential tradition (*meser ha-iqqari*) that it attempts to transmit and to emphasize in our ears, to distinguish between the information that is transmitted incidentally and the essence of the claim (*iqqar ha-ti'un*). (p. 31)

The imaginative force of the assertions notwithstanding, they rest on no textual or philological foundation and hence defy any scholarly assessment. What is the text to which Liebes refers when he makes an appeal to the 'essential claim' in contrast to periphery issues? On what grounds can he speak so assertively of an 'essential tradition' that is inside the text as opposed to what is thought of as being outside? In the conclusion of an essay on the hellenistic and hebraic influence in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, which was published in 1999, I referred to 'inside' and 'outside' as relative judgments, for what is outside at one historical stage becomes appropriated and assimilated into the inside at another.<sup>17</sup> Surely we are accustomed to distinguishing inside from outside and outside from inside — without these distinctions one would be hard pressed to be oriented in the world — but from a perspective that is not shaped by pragmatic concern it would be more accurate to presume that the two are dialectically interrelated at any moment of historical construction. That is, the process of appropriation and internalization of what is perceived to be an external influence occurs by means of a creative leap through which boundaries are traversed, resulting in the destabilization of the inside/outside dichotomy. To the extent that this destabilization is mollified and the outside becomes inside, the cultural balance is regained temporarily so that for the moment one knows one's bearings. But the spatial orientation is always subject to disruption by the creative mind that challenges the dichotomy by looking outside in (as in the case of the heretic) or inside out (as in the case of the radical believer). Even if one were not willing to go the distance with me in obfuscating the

<sup>17</sup> E. R. Wolfson, 'Hebraic and Hellenistic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*,' *Poetics Today* 19 (1998) 172–173.

line dividing what is inside and what is outside the text, one would surely assent that the antimony presented by Liebes between meaning that is imposed from the outside — that is, the cosmological or scientific — and an internally true, Jewish sense — the poetic and creative — is based on a far too rigid notion of textual boundary.

Thematic descriptions of *Sefer Yetsirah* as well as attempts to date it chronologically and to place it geographically have suffered to the degree that they are predicated on the supposition that the book is of one piece. This is not only true of Liebes, as I have noted, but also of Scholem, Pines, and Idel, just to mention a few of the more prominent scholars who have assumed this to be the case. It is not accurate, in my opinion, to speak of a date of composition of this work nor is it particularly helpful to speak of an author. It is better to think of the textual issues in terms of critical periods of redaction when isolated and autonomous tradition-complexes were welded together to take the shape of a literary source. A close reading of the first part of the text indicates, in my judgment, that there were three distinct ways to interpret the *sefirot*, three autonomous positions that were harnessed together at some point in the redactional process.<sup>18</sup> If we cannot say with certainty that the approach to the *sefirot* is uniform, we surely are in no position to accept the claims of Liebes, which rest on the presumption that there is a *text* with a 'heart' or a 'core' that is discernible to an attentive reader.

A more sophisticated redactional analysis (which apparently will not benefit greatly from manuscript readings) may support the contention that some of the material contained in *Sefer Yetsirah* reflects a relatively early date, but it seems likely that the view proffered by Steven Wasserstrom, which resurrects and elaborates the perspective cultivated by a number of Islamicists, to wit, Paul Krauss, Louis Massignon, Henri Corbin, and, to a lesser extent the Judaic scholars, Georges Vajda and Nehemiah Allony, is the most viable.<sup>19</sup> That is, the best we can hope for is to identify a period and region that accounts for the redaction of the material into the literary form that has been transmitted though I readily acknowledge that even this is an over-simplification. The choice of a ninth-century Islamic environment is eminently sensible on textual and sociological grounds. Situating the redaction of the text in the early ninth century — in what Wasserstrom has called the period of 'gnostic encyclopedism' marked by the 'creative

<sup>18</sup> For a preliminary discussion, see E. R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton 1994) 70–72.

<sup>19</sup> S. M. Wasserstrom, 'Sefer Yesira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal,' *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993) 1–30; idem, 'Further Thoughts on the Origins of Sefer Yesirah,' *Aleph* 2 (2002) 201–221.

symbiosis of Jewish and early Islamic occult sciences' — does not preclude the possibility that older elements are discernible in the margins of *Sefer Yetsirah*. On the contrary, the preservation of archaic textual fragments and linguistic gesticulations is precisely what this enterprise entailed and thus we can still attempt to discover in the words of *Sefer Yetsirah* traces and allusions to much older sources of a diverse nature including sectarian, gnostic, neopythagorean, neoplatonic, Samaritan, Jewish-Christian, rabbinic, or even Indian provenance. The critical point is recognizing the eclectic nature of the work so that the binding of the text will be loosened and one thereby comes to appreciate that reflected therein is not one social-intellectual milieu, but a plethora of possibilities. The claim to deciphering the 'true spiritual world' or the 'essential tradition' of *Sefer Yetsirah* cannot be upheld.

The relatively unstable nature of the text is evident from the words of Saadia Gaon (882–942) near the end of the introduction to his commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*: 'I will begin with the version of the book. I wanted to establish each and every tradition in its completeness, and afterward I will translate it, because the book is not found a lot and not many people preserved it so that there would be no change or deviation in it.'<sup>20</sup> Saadia's remark is very significant for it attests to the fluid nature of the text as late as 931, the year that he composed his commentary. Saadia saw as one of his major tasks the need to stabilize the text for it was not a work widely disseminated and people did not take care to preserve it rigorously. According to Saadia, *Sefer Yetsirah* is a tannaitic work inasmuch as it was committed to writing in the time of the Mishnah by Judah the Prince based on an archaic text that was transmitted orally. Bracketing this interesting idea regarding the transition from an oral to a written text, what is important for us is the evidence offered by Saadia that the text had not been determined in a precise way even as late as the tenth century.

In conclusion, let me state that at this stage of research we have advanced to the point that we can be certain that any hypothesis that proposes to speak of the 'original' or 'essential' view of the work cannot be entertained seriously. Finding parallels to particular themes will not suffice to prove the provenance nor will it settle the question of the appropriateness of thinking about the work as a singular text. What we have are layers of traditions woven together to form a collage of speculation on the process of divine creativity and the nature of what has been created. It is no wonder that in the late Middle Ages (from the tenth century onward) *Sefer Yetsirah* — in one form or another — served as the springboard for the

<sup>20</sup> *Sefer Yesirah im Perush R. Se'adyah bar Yosef Fayyumi*, edited by J. Kafih (Jerusalem 1970) 34.

speculative imagination of the rationally minded, mystically inclined, and magically oriented. All three currents are attested in *Sefer Yetsirah*. Finally, let me say that, contra Liebes, I do not think the poetic/spiritual is to be sharply set off from the cosmological/scientific; on the contrary, what emerges most impressively from the redactional forms in which *Sefer Yetsirah* has been preserved is the blurring of boundaries, a blurring that has had an instrumental role in expanding the imaginative horizons of readers inspired by the multiple and conflicting voices echoing in the landscape of *Sefer Yetsirah*. Opposition on this account does not mean destroying the other, but rather providing a space for the other to exist in difference.

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## INSTRUMENTA

### *Quaestiones in Exodum* 2.62–68 Supplement to *The Philo Index*

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As all Philonists know, a truncated part of Philo's original *Questions and Answers on Exodus* was translated into Armenian in the sixth century. The text of this translation was first published by Aucher in 1826 and its contents have gradually been integrated into our knowledge of Philo's writings and thought. What is less well known is that a brief extract from this work, namely *QE* 2.62–68 on the Cherubim and the contents of the Ark of the Covenant, is found at the end of a manuscript containing twenty two Philonic treatises, Vaticanus Graecus 379. This is the only part of the *Quaestiones* which has come down to us complete through manuscript transmission.

Strictly speaking, therefore, Françoise Petit was correct in not including this extract in her *Quaestiones: Fragmenta Graeca*. The different form of transmission of this text means that it is not comparable to the fragments of the *Quaestiones* which have come down to us through their inclusion in the *Florilegia* and *Catenaes*. But her decision had two unfortunate consequences. It meant that this text was not included in the TLG CD-ROM, and so cannot be electronically searched. Moreover it was also not included in *The Philo Index* produced by Peder Borgen and his Norwegian team (on this work see the review article in *SPhA* 10 (1998) 131–134). These consequences are regrettable because, even though it is quite short (consisting of a little over 1,000 words), its subject matter is of great interest and has often been referred to in Philonic studies. Another sign of neglect is that the extract in its original Greek form has never been integrally translated into a modern language.

The present article seeks to ameliorate this situation by presenting a word index to the passage using the same methodology as *The Philo Index*. This means it will have the following features.

- (1) It contains all words except the definite article, δέ and καί.
- (2) It is organized on the basis of the primary grammatical form of the word. Participles are thus included under the verb, adverbs under the corresponding adjective.
- (3) It indicates in parentheses how many times the word occurs in the Greek Philonic corpus (based on the combined results of the present index added to what is already present in *The Philo Index*).