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Chapter 5

ABRAHAM IN PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

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Abraham is a major figure in Philo's writings with numerous treatises dedicated to his narrative in Genesis. An article-length treatment, therefore, will naturally not be able to cover all or even most of what could be discussed. Indeed, Samuel Sandmel expresses his difficulty in covering the breadth and depth of Philo's discussion of Abraham, and he had a full book with which to work.¹ Not wishing to duplicate previous scholarship unnecessarily, this chapter, in addition to providing an overview of how Abraham features in Philo's corpus, will highlight a less-discussed feature, namely how Philo constructs Abraham through his relationships to others.

Before commencing with the chapter, a brief reflection on methodology is in order. Although Philo dedicates specific treatises to Abraham, such as *De Abrahamo*, and those that have Abraham as the focus of the lemma in his allegorical commentaries,² Philo does not provide a singular reading of Abraham's narrative, nor does he treat the Genesis account in strict biblical order. Rather, as per his usual method, Philo forges links between characters, ideas, and terms that allow

1. S. Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1971).

2. Five allegorical treatises interpret part of the story of Abraham: *De migratione Abrahami* (Gen. 12:1-6), *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* (Gen. 15:2-18), *De congressu eruditionis gratia* (Gen. 16:1-6), *De fuga et inventione* (Gen. 16:6-12), and *De mutatione nominum* (Gen. 17:1-5, 15-22). Although *Quaestiones in Genesin* and *Quaestiones in Exodum* are fragmentary, surviving mainly in an Armenian translation, a majority of Abraham's narrative (Gen. 15:7-25:8) is preserved in Philo's *Quaest. in Gen.* 3.1-4.153. On the state of *Quaestiones in Genesin*, see J.R. Royse, "The Works of Philo", in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. A. Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 32-64 (34-8). The poorly named *De Deo* also provides a commentary on the Abraham narrative, citing Gen. 18:2 as a primary lemma. See, A. Terian, "Philonis *De vision trium angelorum ad Abraham*: A New Translation of the Mistitled *De Deo*", *SPhA* 28 (2016): 77-107.

him to reference Abraham when desired. As a result, it is often necessary to cull statements from different places in order to provide a fuller picture of how Abraham is employed and interpreted by Philo. This approach is not without problems as Philo's exegesis of a passage or character is contextually dependent, resulting in some distinct interpretations.³ Nevertheless, the nature of Philo's writings and the limitations of this chapter require such actions to be taken.

Abraham in Philo

Scriptural characters are important for Philo, not only in how he structures his works, but also in how he discusses and explains his theological perspective. Characters, in addition to being historical persons, also symbolize ideas, and can be read allegorically as representatives of specific virtues, vices, inclinations, etc. Although Abraham is the focus of this chapter, he is by no means unique in his treatment by Philo, who provides allegorical interpretations for most biblical characters. Abraham is read in two ways by Philo: literally and allegorically.⁴ The literal Abraham is taken from the text of Genesis and represents an historic figure who lived, married, travelled to and from specific geographical locations, encountered God, produced offspring, died, and was buried. The allegorical Abraham, as the metaphor of the soul, abandoned polytheism, saw God, learned wisdom, and advanced in virtue.⁵ Both are integral to Philo's understanding of Abraham, and any attempt to tease these two Abrahams apart too discretely will result in a flawed reading of Philo.⁶

Philo begins his presentation of Abraham, both in his allegorical commentaries and *De Abrahamo*, by closely interpreting Gen. 12:1-3, in which God calls Abram to leave his land, family, and father's house, and to go to a land that will be shown to him, promising that in doing so he will be blessed. This passage forms the

3. For example, in *De migratione Abrahami*, Joseph is presented positively as one who "lives" in Egypt (*Migr. Abr.* 21), but elsewhere in Philo's corpus Philo treats Joseph's governing of Egypt negatively. Cf. M. Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature* (AGJU 16; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 54–83.

4. The language of two Abrahams occasionally used by Sandmel gives the wrong impression of separation between the literal and allegorical readings of Abraham, something that neither Philo nor Sandmel would endorse. Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 96.

5. Cf. T. Tobin, "The Beginning of Philo's *Legum allegoriae* I", *SPhA* 12 (2000): 29–43.

6. For a study of characters (including Abraham, Sarah, Lot, etc.) and how they are presented in the different corpora of Philo (i.e., *Exposition, Allegorical Commentary, Questions*), see M. Bohm, *Rezeption und Funktion der Vatererzählungen bei Philo von Alexandria: Zum Zusammenhang von Kontext, Hermeneutik und Exegese im frühen Judentum* (BZNW 128; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005). Bohm rightly argues that the differences between these groups are not because of inconsistencies, but are due to Philo's intended purpose.

primary lemma for the *De migratione Abrahami* and provides a framework for Philo of how to progress in virtue. This schema is outworked through his reading of Genesis and his interpretation of specific locations as stops along his spiritual journey.⁷ The events at each location, especially Abraham's interaction with others and his willingness to relocate, are allegorically understood as revealing Abraham's spiritual character, showing him to be a person who loves God and one who outworks his piety through beneficial actions to his fellow humans (e.g., *Abr.* 208).

One of the prominent representations of this journey is the change in Abraham's name. For Philo, following Plato,⁸ the name of a person or place provides insight into the character of the individual, item, or location (*Cher.* 56).⁹ Name changes, therefore, signal to Philo that a change has occurred within the individual and that s/he has a new nature or has reached a new stage in their development.¹⁰ The change of name from Abram ("uplifted father") to Abraham ("the chosen father of sound") signifies a transition from his preoccupation with lower elements to his contemplation of higher issues (*Gig.* 62–4; *Mut. Nom.* 69–76), specifically his move from the study of nature to ethical philosophy (ἀπὸ φυσιολογίας πρὸς τὴν ἠθικὴν φιλοσοφίαν, *Mut. Nom.* 76) and from specific to generic virtue (*Cher.* 5–7). The acquisition of virtue allows Abraham to become a philosopher king, one who is appointed, not by humans, but by Nature, a reality acknowledged by those around him (*Mut. Nom.* 151–2, citing Gen. 23:6). Abram is an astronomer, but Abraham is the Sage.¹¹

That the Genesis narrative is the foundation and starting point of Philo's interpretation of Abraham is clear. However, this is not to say that the Genesis narrative is complete or without need of interpretation. Unlike some of his predecessors, who attempt to fill gaps in the biblical story with additional narrative

7. On Philo's use of place and movement in *De migratione Abrahami*, see S.A. Adams, "Movement and Travel in Philo's *Migration of Abraham*: The Adaptation of Genesis and the Introduction of Metaphor", *SPhA* 30 (2018): 47–70.

8. Plato develops this idea in *Cratylus*, especially 397c1–2 for the giving of divine names.

9. Cf. L.L. Grabbe, *Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation: The Hebrew Names in Philo* (Brown Judaic Studies 115; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

10. In *Cher.* 5, 7; *Mut. Nom.* 77 and *Quaest. in Gen.* 3.53, Philo makes it clear that the change in Sarah's name from Σάρρα to Σάρρα indicates a fundamental change in her nature; no longer is she specific and perishable, but she has become generic and imperishable (cf. *Congr.* 2).

11. The rejection of Abraham's association with astrology stands in sharp contrast to how Abraham was perceived by Greek and Latin authors. Cf. Berossos, *FGrH* 680 Fr. 6 (=Josephus, *Ant.* 1.158, although not mentioned by name); Vettius Valens, *Anth.* 2.28; Firmicus Maternus, *Math.* 4. *prooemium*.5; Julian, *Con. Gal.* 356C; cf. J.S. Siker, "Abraham in Graeco-Roman Paganism", *JSJ* 18 (1987): 188–208 (195–7). See now the chapter by Margaret Williams in this volume.

material,¹² Philo predominately resists this practice, but does extrapolate meaning by adding certain elements, most prominently, speeches attributed to Abraham (and others).¹³ This practice allows Philo to have Abraham say exactly what he thinks he should say and to articulate a previously cloaked idea more explicitly.¹⁴ In particular, created speech allows Philo to present his vision of the character's inner thought world, something that is said to be lacking in the biblical accounts.¹⁵

Philo's primary method of interpretation is to allow the richness of Scripture to illuminate obscure and opaque passages.¹⁶ Accordingly, Philo draws broadly from Scripture as a means to provide internal interpretation, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.¹⁷ Abraham's narrative, therefore, is not read in isolation, and many elements of Abraham's story are read in conjunction with other accounts from the Pentateuch, especially Genesis and Exodus.¹⁸ For example, Philo's biography of Abraham does not open with standard biographical topoi (e.g., *Vit. Mos.* 1.1–4), but with a triad of lives (Enos, Enoch, and Noah), each representing a

12. Some rewritings of the Genesis narrative have slightly different accounts of the travels of Abraham. For example, 1Q20, also known as the *Genesis Apocryphon*, has Abraham dwelling in Hebron for two years prior to his travels to Egypt because of the famine (1Q20 XIX, 9). After a much-expanded Egyptian narrative, Abraham travelled to Bethel (1Q20 XXI, 1). Following his separation from Lot, Abraham toured his promised land, surveying the different areas, before settling in the oaks of Mamre (1Q20 XXI, 15–19; cf. *Jub.* 13:21). The text of 1Q20 breaks off after the rescue of Lot. *Jubilees* also expands on the Abrahamic narrative, particularly with regard to the theme of circumcision (15:25–34), the near-sacrifice of Isaac (17:15–18:19), and his farewell discourses (20:1–22:30). So too does Josephus (e.g., *Ant.* 1.166–8). Conversely, Pseudo-Philo, in *LAB* 8.1–3, omits substantial portions of Abraham's narrative (e.g., Egypt, the sacrifice of Isaac, death, etc.), only retaining the most elementary details.

13. E.g., *Rer. Div. Her.* 27, 29; *Congr.* 151–2, 156; *Abr.* 71. *Abr.* 248–52 provides a speech in character by Sarah regarding giving Hagar to Abraham. This practice is not limited to Philo (e.g., *Jub.* 19:26–22:30).

14. On the ancient practice of creating speech for characters, see Thucydides, *Hist.* 1.22.1–4; Theon, *Prog.* 115–18.

15. Cf. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 114.

16. Cf. J. Cazeaux, *La Trame et la Chaîne: Ou les Structures littéraires et l'Exégèse dans cinq des Traités de Philon d'Alexandrie* (ALGHJ 15; Leiden: Brill, 1983), 5–7, who argues that the biblical narrative moves slowly between events in order to leave “spaces” and “distances” for the interpreter to explore the deeper meanings of the text.

17. Cf. Porphyry, *Hom. Quaes.* 2.297.16–17, “Considering it right to explain Homer with Homer, I have shown that Homer interprets himself sometimes in passages which are nearby, sometimes in other passages.” Cf. Galen, *Dig. Puls.* iv 8.958.6 (Kühn); Plutarch, *Adol. poet. aud.* 4 [= *Mor.* 20d–e].

18. For Philo's use of Exodus, see G.E. Sterling, “The People of the Covenant or the People of God: Exodus in Philo of Alexandria”, in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, eds. T.B. Dozeman et al. (VTSup 164; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 404–39.

different aspect of virtue (hope, repentance, and perfection, respectively; *Abr.* 7–47; *Praem. Poen.* 13–23).¹⁹ To the life of Abraham, Philo appends the (now lost) lives of Isaac and Jacob as symbols of virtue (*Abr.* 52–54), which encourages the reader to view this trio of works as a collected biography in three volumes.²⁰ In localized discussions, Philo creates links through shared characters, names, places, terms, concepts, etc., creating unified interpretations from multiple passages.²¹

Although the text of Genesis is foundational for Philo's understanding and interpretation of Abraham, he is not slavishly beholden to it. This is not to say that Philo changes the text, but that his unified view of the Pentateuch, including the Abraham narrative, allows him to present elements of the text as they are appropriate. For example, in *Abr.* 72–76, Philo recounts how Abraham turned away from polytheism and abandoned the study of the material universe to examine himself as a microcosm. These events are said to take place at Haran (i.e., “sense perception”) with the result that God is said to have been seen immediately by Abraham (εὐθὺς... ὥφθη δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῷ Ἀβραάμ, *Abr.* 77, citing Gen. 12:7).²² However, in the *De migratione Abrahami*, Philo shows that Abraham is only able to truly see God after a lengthy process of toil. This is why the lover of learning (i.e., Abraham) needed to take possession of Shechem, which is metaphorically understood as “shouldering” (ὠμίας, *Migr. Abr.* 221; cf. *Leg. All.* 3.25), because much labor is required to achieve perfection in virtue. Such differences in Philo's depiction of Abraham result from tailoring his reading to fit the context of his treatise.

19. For a detailed outline of *De Abrahamo*, its structure and use of Scripture, see D.T. Runia, “The Place of *De Abrahamo* in Philo's Œuvre”, *SPhilo* 20 (2008): 133–50 (138–9).

20. Borgen suggests that *De Abrahamo*, the works on Isaac and Jacob, and *De Josepho* could be considered a “rewritten Bible”, or a “history of the lives of virtuous persons and of evil persons”: P. Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete For His Time* (NovTSup 86; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 71.

21. For example, in *De migratione Abrahamo*, Abraham's time in Haran is dependent on Jacob's narrative and the inclusion of “beastly” (θρεμμάτων, *Migr. Abr.* 212; cf. *Cher.* 70; *Somn.* 1.42–60). Similarly, Abraham's experience in Egypt is read through Joseph and Moses' narrative (*Migr. Abr.* 17–25). On the importance of this structure for interpreting Philo, see D.T. Runia, “The Structure of Philo's Allegorical Treatises: A Review of Two Recent Studies and Some Additional Comments”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 209–56 (236–41).

22. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, *Philo, with an English Translation*, 12 volumes (Loeb; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929–53), 6.42. Colson rightly notes that, according to Gen. 12:7, God's revelation to Abraham took place in Canaan (Gen. 12:5–6). However, I am not convinced that this was a “mistake” by Philo, but a compression of the journey. At a later point in *De Abrahamo*, Philo omits a number of details from the binding of Isaac, which he includes in other treatises (e.g., *Deus Imm.* 4; *Fug.* 132; *Leg. All.* 3.203). Although they could have fit within his schema, they were likely thought not to be necessary for his current point.

Philo's high view of Abraham leads him to minimize passages that the uninitiated might wrongly interpret.²³ For instance, in Abraham's interaction with Pharaoh (Gen. 12:10-20), Philo assures his reader that Abraham acted innocently; although he concedes that the story is liable to misinterpretation by those who have not tasted virtue (*Abr.* 89).²⁴ Here, Philo recasts the narrative to place Abraham in a better light, omitting his request for Sarah to be called his sister (Gen. 12:13), and framing the incident as the Egyptians' violation of hospitality norms (*Abr.* 94). This retold narrative is then allegorically interpreted, pitting Abraham (the good mind) against Pharaoh (the body-loving mind) for access to Sarah (generic virtue, *Abr.* 99-106).²⁵ This positive depiction of Abraham fits with Philo's understanding of him as a "man of God" (*Gig.* 64) and a prophet through whom God speaks (*Rer. Div. Her.* 258-66, citing Gen. 20:7). Even more than this, Abraham is one who fully followed the natural law and so became a model for the written law penned by Moses (*Abr.* 3-4).

Abraham's Relationships

For the remainder of this chapter I will evaluate Philo's depiction of Abraham through the lens of character relationships, highlighting the interconnectedness of Abraham with other individuals. In what follows, I argue that Philo presents Abraham as part of a network of characters and that, far from being on the periphery, Abraham is a primary node by which other characters are connected and defined, and is in turn also understood in light of these points of contact. This understanding of characterization is modern and is not explicitly adopted or discussed in antiquity.²⁶ Nevertheless, this interconnected view of individuals, I

23. E.g., Philo felt the need to defend Abraham against envious and bitter detractors who critique his plan to sacrifice his son (*Abr.* 184-99). Cf. D.M. Hay "Philo's References to Other Allegorists", *SPhilo* 6 (1979-80): 41-75.

24. Philo omits the parallel story of Abraham and Sarah in Gerar (Gen. 20:1-18) when discussing Pharaoh, only quoting Abraham's explanation (20:12) in *Ebr.* 61, which is allegorized in *Rer. Div. Her.* 62.

25. In the Sodom narrative, Philo omits any mention of Lot and his family in *De Abrahamo*. Lot might be implied by the preservation of one city (*Abr.* 141), presumably the one that he fled to (Gen. 19:20-23), but the five cities of the area are allegorized as the five senses, the best of which is sight (*Abr.* 151-4).

26. For example, Aristotle's discussion of "character" (ἦθος) is not that of a fictional person, but that which reveals moral choice (*Poet.* 1450a5; 1450b7). For types of characters based on a characteristic range of behaviors, see Theophrastus, *Characters* and the fragments of Ariston of Keos. For character *topoi*, see Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.7.10-22; 5.10.23-31; Theon, *Prog.* 109-110. For other ancient discussions of characterization, especially with regard to rhetoric and *progymnasmata*, see A.C. Myers, *Characterizing Jesus: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Fourth Gospel's Use of Scripture in its Presentation of Jesus* (LNTS 458; London: T&T

think, provides interpretive insight into the way that Philo contrasts Abraham with other biblical characters, and so needs to be taken into account when reading Philo's treatises.

The study of character has been important for literary theorists in the last century, and has become prominent in classical and biblical studies.²⁷ Scholars who have adopted a literary or narrative-critical approach have explored the ways that authors, both modern and ancient, have presented characters by means of a variety of models, evaluating character depth, symbology, narrative purpose, etc.²⁸ Although these approaches have made varying contributions to the study of character, they are not ideal for this study as we are not interpreting a narrative, but a work of scholarship. Accordingly, an additional layer of complexity is introduced in our discussion of Philo because he is not the author of the biblical narrative, but its interpreter. Philo does not have complete say over character relationships, but is constrained (to some degree) by the associations established in the Pentateuch. On the other hand, Philo has almost complete freedom to assign specific meaning(s) to individuals and to craft original interpretations and interpersonal connections. It is this freedom that Philo exploits frequently throughout his works, affording him the space to make unique readings and creative explanations regarding character relationships.

This chapter's specific focus on character relationships obviates the adoption of a singular literary model. Rather, certain elements of character discussion seem

Clark, 2012), 42–61. For a good introduction to characterization in antiquity, see K. De Temmerman and E. van Emde Boas, eds., *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative, Volume Four* (MnSup 411; Leiden: Brill, 2018), esp. 6–11; R. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 238–56.

27. E.g., V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (2nd edn.; trans. Laurence Scott; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968); J. Frow, *Character and Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch. 3; C.B.R. Pelling, ed., *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); C. Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

28. For example, scholars have used Forster's flat/round categories, Harvey's character categories (protagonists, cards, ficelles), Chatman's open theory of character, Wolfgang Müller's "interfigural" view of character (i.e., interrelations that exist between characters of different texts), etc. Cf. E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1927), 69–81; B. Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); W.J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 52–73; S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 108–27; W.G. Müller, "Interfigurality: A Study of the Interdependence of Literary Figures", in *Intertextuality*, ed. H.F. Plett (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 101–21.

pertinent.²⁹ For example, the recognition that character that is revealed by actions is vague—requiring the reader to infer the meaning of the action in order to understand the character—is important for our study of Philo, who imputes meaning to specific actions taken by characters. Even direct speech (either by the individual or those around them) and narrator declarations require interpretation, and Philo attempts to eliminate ambiguity by providing a specific understanding(s) to the biblical text. Abraham and other characters, when presented by Philo, are not neutral, but have been integrated within a larger interpretive framework.

Second, characters are not isolated, but integrated within a larger work in which other characters exist. As a result, a character is defined by and is a function of his or her relationships to the other characters introduced over the course of a story.³⁰ One of the consistent elements of Philo's depiction of Abraham is that he is not a solitary figure, but interacts with others on his journeys and in the locations where his travels take him.³¹ Abraham's interactions with other individuals provide concrete examples of his piety and journey towards perfection, and his actions are often contrasted with the negative actions of others.³² This understanding of intersecting space and contrasting definition will be of central importance for this chapter as the other characters, through their interactions with Abraham, shape Philo's allegorical interpretation and his reading of the text.³³

Third, interfigural theory—the idea that authors and readers create a network of relationships, especially, but not exclusively, between characters in different texts—helps us understand Philo as a reader of texts and how he made connections

29. Many of these points were identified by J.A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reading and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (LCBI; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 38–49.

30. For example, in Greek literature, a disciple is almost always defined by his/her relationship with his/her master. Cf. S.A. Adams, "The Characterization of Disciples in Acts: Genre, Method, and Quality", in *Characters and Characterization in Luke-Acts*, eds. F. Dicken et al. (LNTS 548; Bloomsbury, 2016), 155–68.

31. In some instances, Philo downplays the role of Abraham's travelling companions, wishing to focus on the spiritual meaning of the biblical text. For example, in *De Abrahamo*, when Abraham leaves Haran (Gen. 12:1), Philo interprets his journey as that of the soul (τῆ ψυχῆ), not of the body; and, as this journey is by nature solitary, Philo needs to minimize his companions' presence, stating that he departed with "few, or even alone" (μετ' ὀλίγων δὲ οὗτος ἢ καὶ μόνος, *Abr.* 66). Cf. *Virt.* 218.

32. E.g., Abraham's piety and Pharaoh's *hybris* (*Abr.* 98). Cf. A-C. Geljon, "Abraham in Egypt: Philo's Interpretation of Gen 12:10-20", *SPhA* 28 (2016): 297–319 (306–9).

33. On "intersecting space" as a means by which to evaluate character, specifically the protagonist and minor characters, see A. Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

between Abraham and other characters.³⁴ Philo views the Pentateuch as a unified work, composed of five treatises, and penned by a single author (i.e., Moses). The Pentateuch is primary for Philo's reading and analysis of Abraham and other Genesis characters, but it is clear that Philo also draws from other texts as part of his explicit reading strategy.³⁵ These links evidence a complex web of connections identified by Philo, and show the wider structure of Philo's mental map.³⁶

Fourth, proponents of social-cognitive theory argue that individuals understand and define themselves in contrast to others, and that an individual's identity is embedded in a larger group or community.³⁷ Philo's reading of Scripture is within a specific geographic, temporal, and cultural setting, and this profoundly influences his interpretation. In particular, his theological perspective of the narrative, that it is divinely inspired, not only shapes how the text is read, but also how it is to be used. In the case of Abraham and others, the biblical text provides both models to emulate and actions to avoid as one attempts to walk the path of virtue. The view of text as authoritative leads Philo to read the text in a very different way, forging specific links between the characters presented in the text and himself and his community.

Abraham and His Relationships

In the biblical narrative, Abraham is introduced through family relationships, specifically his father, Terah.³⁸ However, there is no discussion of his early life prior

34. E.g., I.R. Kitzberger, "Synoptic Women in John: Interfigural Readings", in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-viewed*, ed. I.R. Kitzberger (BIS 43; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 77–111 (108–9).

35. This is evidenced by the sizable number of references to other, non-Pentateuchal biblical books, as well as to Greek literature more broadly (esp. Plato and Homer). Cf. D. Lincicum, "A Preliminary Index to Philo's Non-Biblical Citations and Allusions", *SPhA* 25 (2013): 139–67; D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (PhilASup 44; Leiden: Brill, 1986). Cf. G.E. Sterling, "When the Beginning Is the End: The Place of Genesis in the Commentaries of Philo", in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, eds. C.A. Evans et al. (VTSup 152; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 427–46.

36. One of the benefits and challenges of interfigural reading is that connections are not static or fixed, but change over time as the reader's knowledge of literature expands and as different ideas grow or fade in importance/relevance. As a result, a systematic reconstruction of Philo's (or anyone's) connections is not possible, nor should difference in connections with a single character be seen as a detriment.

37. E.g., S.M. Andersen and S. Chen, "The Relational Self: An Interpersonal Social-Cognitive Theory", *Psychological Review* 109 (2002), 619–45; B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3rd edn.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 60–7.

38. For Abraham's genealogical relationships, both in Philo and in other second temple authors, see F. Siegert, "Und er hob seine Augen auf, und siehe': Abrahams Gottesvision

to his call in Genesis 12, implying that Abraham was in alignment with his father, sharing the same theological outlook and astronomical knowledge (*Mut. Nom.* 71).³⁹ This view is adopted by Philo and is part of his argument that good individuals can come from poor parental stock (*Virt.* 211–12).⁴⁰ However, although Terah did not establish Abraham in good theological principles, he was not completely devoid of insight, having taken up residence in Haran.⁴¹ This is best seen in Philo's attribution of the saying "know yourself" (γνῶθι σαυτόν) to Terah, who is contrasted, but not equated with Socrates; Socrates is a human, but Terah was the principle itself (Θάρρα δ' αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος).⁴² Ultimately, the seed of self-knowledge comes to maturity in Abraham and bears good fruit. Terah, therefore, represents an intermediate position on the soul's progression to virtue. By leaving Chaldea, Terah embraces the secondary virtue of sense perception, and so provides an individual through whom Philo could contrast Abraham.

Nahor, although also fathered by Terah (Gen. 11:26), is not defined by his relationship with his father; rather, his kinship with Abraham is most important for Philo. Interpreted as "rest of light" through a Hebrew etymology (*Congr.* 45;

(Gen:18) im hellenistischen Judentum", in *"Abraham, unser Vater": die gemeinsamen Wurzeln von Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, eds. R.G. Kratz et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003), 67–85.

39. Terah recognizes the fundamental unity of the world, but wrongly attributes causality to non-material entities by assimilating God with the world, believing that God is contained in it (as the soul of the universe, so *Migr. Abr.* 179; cf. *Abr.* 78. On this stoic perspective, see *SVF* 1.157, 532; Diogenes Laertius, 7.148). On the contrary, God created the universe and so is not limited by it (*Migr. Abr.* 192–3). This was not the only reading of the silence. For example, *Jub.* 11:1–12:21 presents Abraham in conflict with the local inhabitants over idol worship from an early age, and is the reason that Terah and his family needed to move. This begs the question as to when Abraham had his revelation about God and the true nature of the universe, which, for Philo, was when Abraham was in Haran (*Virt.* 214; *Abr.* 70).

40. Here, Philo compares Abraham with Cain, who is an example of evil being born from good (*Virt.* 198–200, 211). Cain's ignobility, evident in his evil action, is contrasted with Abraham's nobility evident in his epistemology and his knowledge of the Existent (γνῶναι τὸν ὄν). This is another example of Philo creating connections between characters for which none is found in the original.

41. Cf. *Somn.* 1.45. According to *Congr.* 49, Abraham is called to leave Chaldea, but not to abandon the study of astrology, because he rightly knows the heavens are not God, but created by him. In contrast, the science of ἀστρονομία is praised as one of the intellectual disciplines worthy of study (e.g., *Congr.* 11). For a recent study on Philo and astronomy/astrology in Alexandria, see J.E. Taylor and D. Hay, "Astrology in Philo of Alexandria's *De Vita Contemplativa*", *ARAM Periodical* 24 (2012): 56–74.

42. Cf. *Somn.* 1.42–58, esp. 1.58. This interfigural reading of Terah goes beyond the Genesis narrative and shows Philo's reading of the Genesis narrative in conversation with the character of Socrates.

Quaest. in Gen. 4.93), Nahor is granted this name because he is Abraham's brother and so has access to wisdom's light because of him (although exactly how this is the case is not explained). However, his settlement in Chaldea and his refusal to travel with Abraham, result in the arresting of his understanding (*Congr.* 48–49).⁴³ Accordingly, Nahor provides a counter example to Abraham's pursuit of virtue and his willingness to move beyond astrological science and the study of the physical world.

Lot, the son of Abraham's brother Haran (*Gen.* 11:26, who is said to have died in Ur, *Gen.* 11:28),⁴⁴ has an important role in the Genesis narrative. Although he is discussed apart from Abraham,⁴⁵ it is primarily by this relationship that he is defined. In the Genesis narrative, Lot travels with Abraham from Chaldea, through Haran, Egypt, and the Negev, until they reach Bethel (*Gen.* 13:3), where they separate due to conflict amongst their servants.⁴⁶ Lot moves to Sodom where he is captured by foreign kings, liberated by Abraham, and subsequently preserved from destruction by an angel.⁴⁷

Foundational for Lot's narrative is his travel with Abraham, which is allegorically interpreted through the metaphor of the path (*Migr. Abr.* 13). Here the migration styles of Abraham and Lot are contrasted. The former, as a lover of the incorporeal, is not like the latter, a lover of sense perceptions, who is defined as one who "turns away" (ἀπόκλις) and is not able to stay the course (*Migr. Abr.* 148). According to Philo's interpretation of the Genesis narrative, Lot is one who turns away, not only from bad, but also from good, wavering back and forth. What might originally appear as positive actions, namely Lot's willingness to follow Abraham out of Chaldea or his departure from Sodom (*Gen.* 19:1–23; *Somn.* 1.85–6), are actually

43. Pseudo-Eupolemus (Fr. 1.3–4, 8; Fr. 2) and Artapanus (Fr. 1) present a positive view of "Chaldean science", but more often it is portrayed negatively. E.g., *Abr.* 68–72; *Jub.* 12:16–18; *1 En.* 8; *Sib. Or.* 3.218–30; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.168; *Gen. Rab.* 44:12.

44. The character of Haran is not mentioned by Philo.

45. Lot and his wife, who is defined as "custom", and is also afflicted with ἀπόκλις (*Somn.* 1.246–8), were unable to produce any male offspring, but only two daughters ("council" and "consent", *Ebr.* 162–6). With the detrimental influence of alcohol, the mind assents to pleasurable suggestions and attempts to "raise up" offspring for itself. This is a poor idea and the outcome is that Lot's children by his daughters, Moab and Ammon, are excluded from the congregation of the Lord (*Poster. C.* 175–7, citing *Deut.* 23:3).

46. According to Philo, it was good that Lot and Abraham separated, as Lot's servants, which took after their master, were in regular conflict with Abraham and so, not wishing to war and ultimately defeat Lot, Abraham withdrew, offering Lot his choice of dwelling place (*Abr.* 212–16).

47. For the pleading of Abraham for Sodom (not bargaining), see L.H. Feldman, "The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah according to Philo, Pseudo-Philo and Josephus", *Henoch* 23 (2001): 185–98.

not creditable, as they, along with his turning towards vice, are not deliberate actions.⁴⁸

More problematic for Philo is the fact that Lot becomes a hindrance to Abraham. Lot's inability to unlearn (ἀπομαθεῖν) his natural tendencies leads him into trouble, forcing Abraham to leave temporarily the safety of the middle path and to risk battle with the senses and passions in order to come to his nephew's rescue (Gen. 14:1-22). The issue is that, at this time, Abraham is still a novice in divine matters and so these detours retard Abraham's progress in virtue (*Migr. Abr.* 150) and put him in a position to become entrapped by the senses.⁴⁹ Philo's retelling of the Genesis narrative highlights the unequal relationship between Abraham and Lot. This imbalance is not unintentional, but is symbolic of the disparity between the one pursuing virtue and the one who lacks that goal. Lot, therefore, provides a dark foil by which Abraham shines brightly.

By far the most important relationship for Abraham is that of his wife and half-sister, Sarah. Philo's discussion of Abraham's relationship with Sarah is unequally distributed across his treatises. For example, discussion of Sarah as a travelling companion is absent in the *De migratione Abrahami* despite her being part of the primary lemma (Gen. 12:1-6). One possible explanation is that Sarah and Abraham's relationship led to actions in which Abraham appears to behave deceitfully (e.g., Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18).⁵⁰ Although positing a rationale for this omission is speculative, I would suggest that Philo did not want to complicate his positive portrayal and metaphor of Abraham, and to include actions that might be thought by others to be morally ambiguous (e.g., *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.60).⁵¹ In contrast, the eulogy for Sarah in *Abr.* 245-54 speaks of her steadfastness and how she accompanied her husband in all aspects of his travels: his departure from his homeland, his unceasing wanderings, his privation in famine, and on his military campaigns (*Abr.* 245).⁵² Sarah's outstanding qualities become an opportunity for Philo to praise Abraham, who, after her death, did not give way to unrestrained

48. A similar understanding is ascribed to Adam, who is not by nature good or bad, but adopts either virtue or vice based on the people around him (*Leg. All.* 3.246).

49. On the importance of choosing correct traveling companions, see Epictetus, *Dis.* 4.5.17-18. For dangers of people who are migrating, see P. Van Nuffelen, "De migratione Abrahami und die antike Exilliteratur", in *Abrahams Aufbruch: Philon von Alexandria: De migratione Abraham*, eds. M. Niehoff et al. (SAPER 30; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 203-18 (216-17).

50. As far as we know, neither passage was used as a lemma in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*, although he does mention Sarah as sister in *Ebr.* 61 and *Rer. Div. Her.* 62 (cf. *Rer. Div. Her.* 258; *Abr.* 89-98).

51. For Rabbinic interpretation, see Meg. 14a; Sanh. 58b.

52. The final element is not found explicitly in Genesis, and may be an allusion to Gen. 14:13-16. This positive emphasis is not found in the corresponding verses in *Quaestiones in Genesin*.

grief, but mourned in moderation (*Abr.* 256–7), earning the admiration of those around him (*Abr.* 260–1).⁵³

Abraham's statement that Sarah and he shared a father (*Gen.* 20:12), but not a mother, is important for Philo, and he uses this declaration to define Sarah's allegorical nature.⁵⁴ In particular, Sarah, or generic virtue, does not have maternal parentage, but, being born of the father and cause of all things (ἐκ τοῦ πάντων αἰτίου καὶ πατρός), she has no relation to material substance (*Ebr.* 61; *Rer. Div. Her.* 62; *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.68). This interpretation fits with Philo's larger argument that Sarah is generic virtue, but is grounded in a specific statement from Abraham.

In addition to being Abraham's sister, Sarah is also his wife, therefore drawing two major identity markers from her relationship with Abraham. Their marriage is a partnership, not of bodies, but between thoughts (*Abr.* 100) and here Sarah acts as the generative male, sowing good counsel and noble words to the receptive and fertile Abraham (*Abr.* 101). Abraham's childlessness is not only on the physical level, but also relates to his need to produce heirs of virtue (*Rer. Div. Her.* 35–38). Philo's attribution of childlessness to Abraham, and not to Sarah or to them as a couple, is distinct. Here it is Abraham and his lack of education that is the problem, and Sarah is fully exonerated (*Congr.* 3–4, 9).⁵⁵

Abraham's relationship with Sarah is also influenced by their relationship with Hagar, and the triad of Abram, Sarah, and Hagar forms the basis of Philo's discussion

53. Abraham's superiority in virtue led those among whom he settled to regard him as a king (*Virt.* 216, *Gen.* 23:6) and to treat him with awe and respect. This respect was not won by force or by weapons, but because of his election by God who rewards those who love piety with imperial powers (αὐτοκρατέσιν ἐξουσίαις, *Virt.* 218). As a result, those within the vicinity of Abraham acknowledge the philosophical doctrine that the Sage alone is king (*Migr. Abr.* 197; *Mut. Nom.* 152; *Somn.* 2.244; cf. *SVF* 3.169). Philo highlights the contrast between Abraham and his neighbors, emphasizing the superiority of the virtuous life and the respect that should be given to those who pursue it. This support of Abraham is emphasized in his interaction with Melchizedek (*Gen.* 14:18–20). Although he has a small role in the Genesis narrative, the importance of Melchizedek in subsequent Jewish thought is substantial (11QMelch [11Q13]; *Heb.* 7:1–28; 2 *En.* 71.1–72.11). For Philo, Abraham's interaction with Melchizedek is also significant as both are examples of God's graciousness in giving original endowments (*Leg. All.* 3.79–103). Melchizedek provides an example of a character who accurately recognizes Abraham for who/what he is and blesses him (*Abr.* 235). In turn, Abraham gives him a tenth of all he had in recognition of his divinely given priesthood (*Congr.* 99, citing *Gen.* 14:20).

54. For Philo's explanation and exoneration of Abraham's actions in Gerar, see *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.60–70.

55. Cf. D. Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women* (BJS 209; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 147–54. For a negative discussion of Philo's depiction of women that places too much emphasis on the Greek-Jewish divide, see J.R. Wegner, "Philo's Portrayal of Women: Hebraic or Hellenic?", in *"Women Like This": New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. A.-J. Levine (SEJL 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 41–66.

in *De congressu eruditionis gratia* (*Mating with Preliminary Studies*).⁵⁶ The relationship between Sarah and Hagar is foundational, not only in the Genesis text, in which Hagar is Sarah's handmaid (Gen. 16:1-16),⁵⁷ but also in their allegorical symbolism, in which Hagar represents lower knowledge and Sarah higher (*Leg. All.* 3.244; *Congr.* 11).⁵⁸ The dichotomies of slave/mistress, encyclopedic study/wisdom, concubine/lawful wife permeate all aspects of the Hagar-Sarah relationship, including how their children are interpreted. In this relationship, Abram is represented as an outsider and a partaker of aspects embodied by each woman. The biblical hierarchy of Abraham as the head of the house is absent, being replaced by Sarah's prominence and wisdom's authority. Abraham's growth from lower to higher reasoning and attainment of virtue is allegorized through his interactions with Sarah and Hagar; however, once his educational training is complete and he receives his new name, Abraham no longer has need of Hagar and she is cast away (*Cher.* 7-8).

The most important outcome of Abraham's relationship with Sarah is the birth of Isaac, Abraham's joy (*Abr.* 201-4; Gen. 21:6). Isaac is the lawful offspring, coming from Sarah, his citizen wife, and represents the fulfilment of God's promise and the one with whom the covenant will continue (Gen. 17:19).⁵⁹ As a result, it was

56. In contrast, Keturah, Abraham's third wife (Gen. 25:1-6), is only mentioned in *Sacr.* 43-44 and *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.147. According to Philo, her name is interpreted as "incense burning"; and she represents the sense of smell, the third most virtuous and middling of the senses, and one that is clearly inferior to that of sight (Sarah) and hearing (Hagar). She is a very minor character in Philo's corpus, and her children are only alluded to in reference to Isaac. In Keturah's case, her relationship to Abraham is minimized by Philo, who instead contrasts her with Abraham's other wives, a comparison that is not prominent in Genesis.

57. The Sarah-Hagar relationship can fruitfully be read through the Platonic allegories of Penelope and her handmaidens in Homer's *Odyssey* (cf. Ps.-Plutarch, *Lib. ed.* 10 = *Mor.* 7d), recently argued for by M. Cover, "Philo's *De mutatione nominum*: Sample Commentary, Exegetical Structure, and its Place in the 'Abrahamic Cycle' of the Allegorical Commentary", paper presented at SBL Annual Meeting, San Antonio, November 2016 (http://torreys.org/philo_seminar_papers/).

58. In *Congr.* 23 Abraham is presented as the mind, with Sarah as virtue, and Hagar as education. However, at the end of the treatise, Philo claims that Sarah and Hagar are not women in this discussion, but minds (*Congr.* 180). For a recent study, see A.P. Bos, "Abraham and the *Enkyklios Paideia* in Philo of Alexandria", in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, eds. M. Goodman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 163-75.

59. Abraham is also said to have borne a number of children (Gen. 25:2), but all were faulty and needed to be sent away, save Isaac, to whom he gave all he had (*Sacr.* 43; *Praem. Poen.* 58; *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.148). Of his other children, only one is named: Ishmael. Ishmael is the progeny of Hagar ("preliminary education"), and so is by nature a sophist (*Cher.* 8-10). Primarily contrasted with self-taught Isaac (*Congr.* 129; *Mut. Nom.* 255; *Quaest. in Gen.* 3.33), Philo does not pair Ishmael and Abraham often. The notable exception is *Mut. Nom.* 201-2, where Abraham prays that Ishmael might "live".

right for Abraham to offer back to God Isaac as a sacrifice, not as a person, but as one who represents the fruit of a rich and fertile soil (*Leg. All.* 3.209; *Migr. Abr.* 139–42; cf. *Abr.* 167–207). Drawing on the statement in Gen. 22:8–9 that “both journeyed and came together to the place which God had told him,” Philo claims that by travelling together the διδακτική ἀρετή and the αὐτομαθῆς ἀρετή reached their full potential (*Migr. Abr.* 166–7).⁶⁰ These allegorical significations are not mutually exclusive or competing, but specific aspects are expressed according to the literary context and Philo’s argument, even within the same treatise. This malleability of characterization is not part of literary theory, but represents Philo’s appropriation of a narrative and his reading of it through his interpretive framework.

The literal patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob come from one house and represent three generations: father, son, and grandson. However, for Philo, paternal relations are not always linearly fixed. For example, Abraham is thought to be Jacob’s father because he is the practitioner (commenting on Gen. 28:13), but if he fully attains the name of Israel, Isaac would become his father (*Somn.* 1.166–71).⁶¹ Based on their shared view of God, they are grouped together as partners in God’s eternal name: the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (*Abr.* 49–51, citing Exod. 3:15, cf. *Mut. Nom.* 12). According to Philo, the trio is also a metaphor, representing the threefold division of time: past, present, and future (*Migr. Abr.* 125).⁶²

These three patriarchs allegorically represent the natural endowments attributed to the soul or mind that empower it to achieve perfection in virtue; Abraham embodies the ability to be taught, Isaac the natural virtue, and Jacob the perfection attained through practice.⁶³ Each of the (literal) patriarchs, according to Philo, possesses all three qualities, as they are interconnected and interdependent (*Abr.* 53). These abilities, rightly paired with the Graces, are either gifts from God

60. This is reinforced by additional lemmata taken from Exodus, recounting Moses’ supportive companions: Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu (*Migr. Abr.* 168–70; cf. Exod. 24:1).

61. Jacob’s new name, given by an angel unlike Abraham, and the fact that Jacob is still called by his original name, signifies that the transformation was not complete (*Mut. Nom.* 83–7).

62. This is a distinctive interpretation in Philo’s corpus and is not explicitly employed by him in other sections. Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 5.563 suggest that this interpretation might be more fully understood from the contents of *Migr. Abr.* 154 and Exod. 3:15. The latter suggestion is not particularly helpful for this interpretation; although *Migr. Abr.* 154 does have more potential.

63. E.g., *Congr.* 34–38; *Mut. Nom.* 12, 88; *Abr.* 52–55; *Praem. Poen.* 24–7. This trio is also read in contrast with another trio, Enos, Enoch, and Noah: *Abr.* 7–47. See E. Birnbaum, “Exegetical Building Blocks in Philo’s Interpretation of the Patriarchs”, in *From Judaism to Christianity: Tradition and Transition: A Festschrift for Tomas H. Tobin, S.J., on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. P. Walters (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 69–92 (74–88); E. Birnbaum, “What in the Name of God Led Philo to Interpret Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as Leaning, Nature, and Practice?”, *SPhA* 28 (2016): 273–96.

or a gift to the reasonable soul from itself (*Abr.* 54), but either way all are necessary for virtuous living. Nevertheless, they are not equal. Rather, natural virtue is superior to that acquired by learning or practice, because the self-taught one receives his virtue directly from God.⁶⁴ Accordingly, Isaac, as a γένος, is superior to Abraham and Jacob, who are classified among the λαοί.⁶⁵ Thus, Philo creates a specific hierarchy among them, identifying Isaac as a genus and the generic, and Abraham and Jacob as the species and specific.⁶⁶ This understanding places the son above his father, inverting the expected hierarchy between Abraham and Isaac. The reason for Isaac's priority is his origin, being given as a promise from God and born from Sarah (generic virtue).⁶⁷ This example shows not only how Philo interprets Abraham as an integral member of a group, but also how specific relationships are created through the logical implementation of his allegorical reading.

In addition to earthly relationships, Philo also depicts Abraham's relationship with God (esp. *Abr.* 62–207).⁶⁸ Unlike the majority of humanity, who attempt to hide themselves from God (*Leg. All.* 3.6), Abraham is said to have desired intimacy with God, allowing God to come close to him (*Cher.* 18–19; *Somn.* 2.226, citing Gen. 18:22–3). Ultimately, God reveals himself to Abraham, allowing Abraham to see him as much as he is able to bear (*Abr.* 77–80).⁶⁹ These visions allow Philo to identify Abraham as a “friend of God”⁷⁰ and, as God's companion (*Gig.* 64), Abraham travels the “king's road” to attain the summit of virtue (*Migr. Abr.* 170–1; cf. Num. 20:17) with the assistance of angels who escort him on his way (*Migr. Abr.* 173–5; *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.20; cf. Gen. 18:16; Exod. 33:15). Abraham's trust in God (*Abr.* 262, citing Gen. 15:6; cf. *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.17) freed him from deep-seated doubt, but still permitted him to ask questions as to how God will achieve his

64. E.g., *Sacr.* 6–7; *Somn.* 1.160–2. God taught Abraham but begat Isaac (*Leg. All.* 3.219; *Somn.* 1.173).

65. This explains why Isaac only has one wife, but Abraham and Jacob have many wives and concubines (*Congr.* 34–38) and why Isaac did not have need of a name change, but Abraham and Jacob did (*Mut. Nom.* 83–8).

66. Cf. E. Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes* (BJS 290; SPM 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 56–8, who discusses how Philo differentiates between λαός and γένος in his reading of Gen. 25:8; 35:29; 49:33.

67. Isaac is given priority in other books/passages (e.g., in Tobit; Jdt. 8:26). Cf. T. Novick, “Biblicized Narrative: On Tobit and Genesis 22”, *JBL* 126 (2007): 755–64.

68. For Philo's piety, see G.E. Sterling, “‘The Queen of the Virtues’: Piety in Philo of Alexandria”, *SPhA* 18 (2006): 103–23.

69. For Philo's discussion of a human's ability to see God, either in one or in three parts, see *Abr.* 119–32; *Deo* 12. Cf. J. Ryu, *Knowledge of God in Philo of Alexandria* (WUNT 2.405; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 112–17.

70. Cf. φιλόθεος, *Abr.* 89; *Deo* 3; *Somn.* 1.193–5; *Sobr.* 55–57; *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.21. A similar epithet is found in *Jub.* 19:9. This is not part of Gen. 18:17. In *Sobr.* 56, Philo adds “friend of God” and in *Leg. All.* 3.27 it is “servant of God”. Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 177 n.347 argues that “friend of God” is equivalent to “prophet”.

promise. The fact that doubt passed through Abraham's mind momentarily, distinguishes his faith from divine faith (*Mut. Nom.* 177–8, referencing Gen. 15:8; cf. *Quaest. in Gen.* 3.2). This difference is important for Philo as it differentiates the human from divine, creating a clear hierarchy between the two.

Abraham's relationship with God is one of the defining elements of who Abraham is. Not only does God bless Abraham and give him gifts,⁷¹ but his call in Genesis 12 is the catalyst for Abraham's physical and spiritual migration. This relationship also differentiates Abraham from all of the other individuals whom he meets in his travels; Abraham is defined by this relationship and it becomes the determinative feature of Philo's evaluation of him. At the same time, God defines himself in light of his relationship with Abraham; disclosing to Moses that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:6; cf. 2:24; Lev. 26:42; 2 Macc 1:2). This mutually-defining relationship is central for Philo's interpretation of Abraham and his place within Scripture (*Abr.* 49–51; *Mut. Nom.* 12).

Finally, Abraham not only is interpreted in relationship to other, biblical characters, but, as part of Scripture, Abraham also has an important role in shaping the life of Philo and his reading community. Scripture, for Philo, records the historical actions of Abraham, his experiences, life events, and relationships. However, such an historical reading would not adequately represent how Abraham was understood by Philo and his readers.⁷² Philo sees in Scripture the varied experiences of humanity, and holds the position that the text is therefore relevant for him. Accordingly, Abraham is not only an historical figure, but one that speaks to aspects of contemporary life. For example, Philo moves beyond the narrative world by applying the allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar to his own person. Here, in *Congr.* 6–7, Philo assigns himself the role of Abraham, one who has produced too many offspring from Hagar and now needs to focus on true virtue in order to produce legal offspring. This passage, along with others (cf. *Congr.* 88; *Somn.* 1.164–165; *Abr.* 3–5), provides a good example of how Philo read the life of Abraham and applied it to his personal experience.⁷³

71. The five gifts are: 1) land (*Migr. Abr.* 36–52), 2) great nation (*Migr. Abr.* 53–69), 3) God's blessing (*Migr. Abr.* 70–85), 4) magnification of Abraham's name (*Migr. Abr.* 86–105), and 5) Abraham will be blessed, being in actuality what is reported of him (*Migr. Abr.* 106–8). Cf. *Abr.* 98.

72. Philo does recognize the inherent difficulty of leaving one's family and living as a stranger in a foreign land, thus reading Abraham through personal or shared experiences (*Abr.* 63–7).

73. On the topic of exemplars and models, particularly with regard to Abraham, see the insightful article by A.Y. Reed, "The Construction of Subversion of Patriarchal Perfection: Abraham and Exemplarity in Philo, Josephus, and the Testament of Abraham", *JSJ* 40 (2009): 185–212. Cf. A. Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1982), 62–5.

Conclusions

Although character theory is typically limited to narrative texts, we have seen how certain aspects can be fruitfully applied to interpretive works. Here, theoretical frameworks provide insight into Philo's analysis of Genesis, and how one ancient reader interpreted standard literary features and the inherent ambiguity of character construction. Philo's interpretation of Genesis takes advantage of the interpretive space within the Genesis narrative, allowing him to define characters and relationships in unique ways. Regarding Abraham's narrative, Philo regularly interprets specific actions as meaningful and/or symbolic. The high ambiguity of actions for understanding character affords Philo the space to portray Abraham and others in ways that align with his philosophical perspective. The same practice is also applied to dialogue and narration, with Philo interpreting speech in specific ways and/or attributing new statements to biblical characters in order for them to fully articulate ideas that Philo wishes to make clear. As a result, even though Philo is commenting on the text, he is not constrained by it nor does it limit what he can say.

The most important aspect for understanding Abraham is how Philo refuses to view him in isolation, choosing instead to define him through his relationships with other characters. How Abraham is characterized is not static. Rather, Philo adapts his interpretation of him based on the immediate interpretive context. In certain situations, Abraham is presented as being part of a specific group, intricately tied to other characters (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Abram, Sarah, and Hagar). At other times, Philo's interpretation is based on contrast, often with the other character acting as a foil in order for Abraham to shine more brightly (e.g., Lot, Pharaoh, Nahor). Abraham is not always presented as the dominant member in a relationship; Philo subordinates him to his son Isaac, whose natural endowment is superior to Abraham's learning. Similarly, both Sarah, his wife, and Hagar, his concubine, are presented as Abraham's teachers and he in the position of pupil.⁷⁴

74. Thank you to Michael Cover who gave some helpful comments on a draft of this chapter.