

Philosophy, the Handmaiden of Theology

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THE MAXIM that philosophy should serve as the handmaiden of theology was frequently proclaimed by scholastic theologians in the Middle Ages. They expressed it in these terms: *Philosophia theologiae ancilla*.¹ Whether or not the subordination of philosophy to theology, which is implied in this formula, can be supported by reasonable argument will not be touched upon in this essay. It is the origin rather than the doctrinal aspect of this idea which I shall discuss.²

One more limitation is necessary. The interpretation of the relationship between philosophy and theology in terms of servant and mistress originated in the Alexandrian school of theology and can be appreciated adequately only when considered in connection with the character, methods and intentions of that institution. Our analysis, therefore, will be confined to the way in which this idea was represented and transmitted in the writings of the four leading teachers of this school, namely Philo the Jew and the Christians Clement, Origen and Didymus the Blind. They constitute a uniform and continuous tradition of biblical exegesis and, to a lesser degree, of theological thinking, which persisted from the first to the fourth century of our era. After that time, the doctrines of Origen and Didymus, which were nearly identical in substance, fell victim to the rigorous censorship of church councils, and their works, with few exceptions, were no longer copied.

One of the ideas that escaped this *damnatio memoriae*, because it corresponded to a common belief of the Greek Fathers in general, was

¹ Still useful is F. J. Clemens, *De scholasticorum sententia philosophiam esse theologiae ancillam commentatio* (Münster 1856). Clemens was one of the first scholars to trace the maxim back to Philo. Since then this origin has become well-known: cf. e.g. E. Norden, *Antike Kunstprosa II* (Leipzig/Berlin 1918, repr. Darmstadt 1958) 670–79; H. Fuchs, *Reallexikon für Ant. u. Chr.* 5 (1962) 382 s.v. ENKYKLIOS PAIDEIA; F. Kühnert, *Allgemeinbildung und Fachbildung in der Antike* (Berlin 1961) 94f and 133f.

² A version of this paper was presented at a colloquium of the Department of Classical Studies of the University of Michigan on 25 July 1968.

the subordination of philosophy to theology. It meant simply that the secular knowledge of the time and, more specifically, Greek philosophy, especially the Platonic concept of the human soul and the ethical system of the Stoics, could serve as a useful instrument in the interpretation of the scriptures.

One of the most characteristic features of the Alexandrian school is the allegorical interpretation of the Bible. This method of biblical exegesis is based upon the principle that not all passages of the Bible can be taken at their face value, but that a deeper meaning can be derived from most of them. Frequently the same passage could be interpreted both literally and allegorically. To a modern mind this procedure is arbitrary, because it reads a meaning into a text that was not given to it by its authors. But the doctrine of divine inspiration provided ample justification for the Alexandrians. The books of the *Old Testament* had been written by divinely inspired prophets and sages, and they had been intentionally composed in a way that allowed for different interpretations. Thus the explanation of a biblical passage could be adapted to the degree of enlightenment which the reader had attained.

Allegorical interpretation was not at all restricted to the Bible. The Homeric poems were the first Greek texts to be subjected to this kind of treatment. The earliest evidence for allegorical interpretation of the *Iliad* dates from the sixth century B.C., whereas the works of Philo provide the first extensive example of similar methods applied to the *Septuagint*. (The few fragments of Aristobulus are negligible.³) There can be no doubt that Philo had Jewish predecessors. But even so the application of the allegorical method to Homer antedates the Jewish allegorists by at least three centuries. It is well known that the Stoic philosophers were also fond of allegorical interpretation, which enabled them to find traces of the Stoic doctrine in texts that were considerably older than Stoic philosophy itself. Chrysippus was notorious for this pursuit. According to Cicero, who follows Philodemus' treatise *On Piety*, Chrysippus tried in the second book of his work *On the Nature of the Gods* to reconcile the poetry of Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer with his own teachings about the gods, which he had expounded in the first book of the same work.⁴

³ For a detailed discussion of the evidence see N. Walter, *Der Thoraausleger Aristobulos* (*Texte und Untersuchungen* 86, Berlin 1964), esp. 141–48 on the predecessors of Philo.

⁴ Cic. *Nat.D.* 1.15.41 = Philodemus, *Piet.* p.80,16ff. Gomperz; H. Diels, *Dox.Graec.* (Berlin

There are certain conditions under which allegorical interpretation is possible and even inevitable. The first requirement is that there be a text to which this interpretation can be applied. Most naturally this text will be a book or collection of writings which has been sanctioned by tradition and the content of which is so important for the inner life of a given society that it is recognized as an authoritative source of knowledge by each successive generation. The other condition is a fairly developed cultural status of this society. As a result, the message contained in this text will not be accepted without criticism but will be challenged by contemporary intellectual achievements. Such criticism will discover that the inherited text is full of objectionable passages which no longer make sense. The traditional commitment of the society to this text, however, is so deep-rooted that a total rejection of it is impossible. Instead, the defenders of the tradition declare that the wisdom of the present lies hidden in the old texts and can be easily brought to light if only proper interpretation is given to them. It was precisely under these circumstances that allegorical interpretation as a compromise between the contending forces of tradition and progress was invented.

The reader of Homer and of the *Old Testament* comes constantly across passages which were morally objectionable or otherwise found unsatisfactory in antiquity. The only possible solution for ancient interpreters was to explain such difficulties away by giving a new meaning to them.

One of these offensive passages in the *Old Testament* is *Genesis* 16.1–2. The text reads: “Sarah, Abraham’s wife, did not bring forth any children for him. But she had an Egyptian handmaiden whose name was Hagar. So Sarah said to Abraham: Behold, the Lord closed my womb so that I cannot bring forth children. Therefore go to this handmaiden of mine in order to beget children by her.”

To Jews and Christians alike, monogamy was the only acceptable relationship between man and woman. To accept this passage in its literal sense was beyond their capacity. How could Abraham, the model of virtue, have intercourse with a maid-servant of his household, and how could his wife Sarah not only tolerate this license but

1879) 547. The Stoics used fanciful etymologies in order to support their interpretations. In this respect, they surpassed even the Alexandrian exegetes of the Bible. A pre-Stoic allegorical commentary on Orphic poetry is extant on papyrus; cf. S. Kapsomenos, *Deltion* 19 (1964) 17–25, R. Merkelbach, *ZPapEpigr* 1 (1967) 21–32, and W. Burkert, *AntuAb* 14 (1968) 93–114.

even make the suggestion herself? The obvious conclusion, that among nomadic tribes the chief of a clan had to produce male offspring by any means and that a patriarchal society did not necessarily practise monogamy, was not drawn. Instead, allegorical interpretation was substituted for historical record.

We are now in a position to understand Philo's comment on this passage: "The idea that the quotation we deal with has anything to do with physical intercourse, which aims at pleasure, must be abandoned completely. For it is Mind (Abraham) who is approaching Virtue (Sarah) and who desires to beget children by her. Since Mind is not yet advanced enough to do so, he is advised by Virtue to have the handmaiden, that is intermediate education (*μέση παιδεία*), betrothed to him."⁵

The very nature of Philo's interpretation is significant. Sarah and Hagar are no longer regarded as living human beings, but as symbolic representations of mental activities. The intermediate education (we explain the term later) that is equated with Hagar is an important element in the faithful's endeavor to reach his final goal, which consists in moral perfection or virtue and is identified with Sarah. The Greek philosophical term which the Alexandrian theologians used to describe this way towards perfection is *προκοπή*, 'spiritual progress'. What the Hellenized Jews and Christians of Alexandria regarded as the essence of their religion was not so much obedience to the Jewish Law or the display of Christian charity, but rather the unceasing attempt to understand the Divine. Thus their religious attitude was deeply influenced by Greek, and this means in our context pagan, tradition. They practised the Socratic gospel that virtue and knowledge cannot be separated and that the greatest accomplishment of man is moral blamelessness combined with intellectual excellence.

The allegorical interpretation of *Genesis* 16 by Philo and his Christian successors is a perfect self-characterization of their own attitude, by which they tried to link the creed of Judaism and Christianity with the achievements of the Greek mind. In fact we are entitled to conclude that Sarah and Hagar symbolize the two souls that kept Alexandrian theology alive for more than four centuries. It is not surprising that the decline of the Alexandrian school coincided with the final stage of pagan philosophy, when Neoplatonism ended in theurgy and magic. In 553, only a quarter of a century after the pagan university of Athens

⁵ Philo, *De Congr. Erud. Grat.* 12 (vol. III.74,16ff Wendland).

had been closed by Justinian, the Council of Constantinople declared that the teachings of the Platonizing Alexandrians Origen and Didymus were heretic.⁶ Thus the Christian Church purged itself of an element that, though foreign to the majority of ancient Christians, had for the first time propagated the Christian belief in philosophical language and had created the first systematic outline of theological doctrine.

The term 'theology' was rarely used by the Alexandrians. Instead, they preferred the terms *ἀρετή* and *σοφία* with reference to the course which they were pursuing. In their usage, the word *ἀρετή* does not have primarily a moral connotation. Didymus, for instance, followed Aristotle in distinguishing between practical or ethical virtues on the one hand and dianoetic virtues on the other.⁷ If we transfer this distinction into a Christian context, we may say that the former group includes the moral code of the Ten Commandments, for instance, whereas the latter group comprises virtues such as insight (*σύνεσις*), prudence (*φρόνησις*) and wisdom (*σοφία*), which were associated with the doctrinal aspect of the Christian belief. We have already mentioned that the Alexandrians stressed intellectual qualities much more than the 'practical' virtues of moral behavior. For them the virtue of virtues was *σοφία*, which is defined by Philo as "the knowledge of things divine and human and of their causes," a definition which stems from Chrysippus.⁸ In this sense, *ἀρετή* and *σοφία* can be regarded as identical.

Another passage from Philo may serve as an illustration for this use of *σοφία* and will at the same time enable us to determine the correct meaning of the 'intermediate education' with which Hagar was identified. The passage runs: "We are not able to receive the seed of virtue, unless we have previously met with the handmaiden. The handmaiden of wisdom is encyclopedic education, which consists in the various branches of preliminary instruction (*ἡ διὰ τῶν προπαιδευμάτων ἐγκύκλιος μουσική*)."⁹

The accumulation of technical vocabulary in the last part of this passage can be dealt with briefly, because the terms are well-known.

⁶ *Didymos der Blinde, Kommentar zu Hiob, Teil I (Pap. Texte u. Abh. I, Bonn 1968) 311ff;* L. Koenen, *ZPapEpigr* 2 (1968) 50f.

⁷ Didymus, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 41.

⁸ Philo, *De Congr.Erud.Gr.* 79 (III.87,19ff W.). For Chrysippus' definition, see *SVF* II.35 and 1017; W. Bousset, *Jüdisch-christlicher Schulbetrieb in Alexandria und Rom* (Göttingen 1915) 106f; Walter, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 84f.

⁹ Philo, *De Congr.Erud.Gr.* 9 (III.74,2ff W.).

Hagar is interpreted as the body of secular knowledge, which in Hellenistic and Roman times provided a preliminary education for the student before he devoted himself to a special field, for instance rhetoric, philosophy or law.¹⁰ This preliminary education is comparable to the modern academic ideal of a *studium generale* which should precede professional studies.

The regular Greek terms for this body of knowledge are ἡ ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία or τὰ προπαιδύματα. In spite of various modern theories about the significance of the term ἐγκύκλιος, the clearest explanation can be found in ancient authorities, who interpret it as a circle of disciplines through which the student had to pass.¹¹ The idea of the circle was supposed to stress the uniform character and the interrelationship of these disciplines. This ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία is identical with the *artes liberales* (Cicero was the first to use this term¹²), which were a constitutive factor in mediaeval universities. In the passage quoted from Philo, μουσική is synonymous with παιδεία. Already in Attic Greek the word μούσα was used to designate the arts.¹³

There is another important element in the allegorical exegesis of the Bible that deserves mention. Hebrew names which occur in the *Septuagint* were incorporated into allegorical interpretation by giving a Greek translation of them. Such a translation, of course, had to correspond exactly to the tenor of the interpretation given to a specific passage. Therefore the criterion for translation was not etymological correctness but mere expedience.¹⁴ Thus in many instances we are unable to verify these Greek translations and to connect them with any of the Hebrew roots known to us. It is doubtful whether Philo knew Hebrew at all. It would by no means be surprising if he did not. The Greek translation of the *Old Testament*, which is traditionally called *Septuagint*, was made in response to a general need: the Hellenized Jews of the Diaspora had by that time forgotten their native

¹⁰ For an extensive treatment, see Kühnert, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1).

¹¹ Quint. *Inst.* 1.10.1; August. *Contra Acad.* 3.7. The idea of a uniform and coherent body of knowledge was stressed by Cic. *De Or.* 3.21 and *Arch.* 2; also by Vitruvius. *De Arch.* 1.1.12.

¹² Cic. *De Inv.* 1.35; cf. Cic. *De Or.* 1.17, 1.72 and 3.127; Sen. *Ep.* 88.2.

¹³ E.g. Eur. *Med.* 1085 and 1089. Philosophy itself was also called μουσική; cf. Pl. *Phd.* 61A and Strab. 10.3.10, p.468. For a later example, see Dion.Hal. *De Orat.Antiq.* prooem. 1, ἡ Ἀττικὴ μούσα, who refers to Attic rhetoric in contrast to the Asianic perversion. This passage in Dionysius is even more pertinent to our subject, since Attic oratory is compared to a married woman (ἡ ἐλευθέρα γαμετή), who loses her influence to a mistress (ἑταίρα).

¹⁴ Even if the translations can be justified by modern linguistic standards (as seems to be the case for Sarah, the 'princess'), it remains true that etymological correctness was not the main concern of the allegorists.

tongue. Christian theologians faced a similar language problem. Didymus, for instance, confesses several times that he does not know Hebrew.¹⁵ Origen, on the other hand, was one of the few Christian scholars of that time who were well versed in that language. The most conspicuous proof is his bilingual edition of the *Old Testament*, the *Hexapla*, in which the Hebrew version and the Greek translations of it were arranged in parallel columns. Those allegorists who were unfamiliar with Hebrew could consult special dictionaries, the so-called *Onomastica*, which listed the Greek equivalents of Hebrew names in alphabetical order.

The traditional translation for Sarah is ‘the leading one’ (ἡ ἄρχουσα or ἀρχή μου).¹⁶ Clearly the translation was made to express the superiority of the mistress over the handmaiden or, in the terms of the interpretation, that of virtue and wisdom over secular knowledge. We find also combinations such as ‘leading virtue’ (ἄρχουσα ἀρετή)¹⁷ or ‘the leading wisdom’ (ἡ ἄρχουσα σοφία).¹⁸ Hagar’s name was supposed to mean ‘sojourn’ (παροίκησης). The underlying idea is that the student of divine wisdom has to sojourn with the handmaiden first, until he is able to settle permanently in the embrace of the mistress. The Greek term for such a permanent settlement is κατοίκησης, which Philo uses in his explanation of Hagar’s name: “Before anyone who is eager to get settled in the perfect wisdom is enrolled in its city, he sojourns with the encyclopedic disciplines in order to advance through them with devotion to the perfect wisdom.”¹⁹

It is in this context that we must look for Philo’s explanation of his term ‘intermediate education’ (μέση παιδεία). The student of wisdom who tries to get acquainted with secular knowledge first is somewhere between an alien and a citizen. “For a sojourner can be compared to a citizen because he lives in the community, and to an alien because he is not permanently settled there.”²⁰ This intermediate position of the student of wisdom was transferred by Philo to the activity in which

¹⁵ Didymus, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 51.

¹⁶ E.g. Philo, *De Cherub.* 7 (I.171,21f Cohn); *De Mut.Nom.* 77 (III.170,16ff W.).

¹⁷ Philo, *Leg.Alleg.* 3.244 (I.167,5 C.); *De Cherub.* 3 (I.170,14 C.).

¹⁸ Philo, *Leg.Alleg.* 2.82 (I.106,24 C.).

¹⁹ Philo, *Leg.Alleg.* 3.244 (I.167,10ff C.).

²⁰ Philo, *De Congr.Erud.Gr.* 23 (III.76,23ff W.). The same metaphorical language is used in the *Letter to Diognetus*, where it expresses the transitory existence of the Christians on earth: “They live in their own countries, but as aliens; they share all duties like citizens and suffer all disabilities like foreigners; every foreign land is their country, and every country is foreign to them” (*Ep. ad Diogn.* 5.5, transl. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* [Cambridge 1965] 20).

the student is engaged. Thus the term 'intermediate education', which is peculiar to Philo, was coined. The internal logic of Philo's explanation should not be examined too closely. Allegorical interpretations are surprisingly systematic, but nevertheless they do not follow strict logic.

We have seen that Philo's allegorical interpretation of Abraham's relations with Sarah and Hagar is the source from which the maxim which we are discussing was derived. Before we can proceed to consider the use which the Christian successors of Philo made of this maxim, we must deal with the model that inspired Philo. The fact that Philo's explanation of *Genesis* 16 has a pagan precedent is highly characteristic of the Hellenized spirit in which Alexandrian allegorical interpretation developed. Stobaeus and the *Gnomologium Vaticanum* preserve a fragment which is ascribed by Stobaeus to the Stoic philosopher Ariston of Chios (*ca.* 250 B.C.).²¹ There is some doubt as to the authenticity of his ascription, because the *Gnomologium* ascribes the same fragment to Gorgias. But obviously Ariston is the better guess. The text runs: "From the 'Comparisons' of Ariston. Ariston of Chios maintains that those who waste their effort with the propaedeutic disciplines but neglect philosophy, resemble the suitors of Penelope, who when they failed to win over the mistress mingled with the handmaidens."²²

The close resemblance to Philo's explanation of *Genesis* 16 is obvious. We can safely assume that this comparison between the suitors of Penelope and the pursuers of the propaedeutic disciplines was known to Philo. It is unlikely that Ariston intended to interpret this episode from the *Odyssey* allegorically. He simply referred to it by way of comparison. But the fact that he did shows how easy it was to explain passages from Homer in a figurative sense. That Ariston was a Stoic is also significant, if we recall the use of allegorical interpretation by the Stoics. For Ariston it was philosophy that ranked above the encyclopedic disciplines, whereas for Philo it is wisdom, which is for him the equivalent of theology. This difference accounts for one passage in

²¹ Stob. 3.109 (vol. III.246,1 Hense)=SVF I.350; L. Sternbach, "De Gnomologio Vaticano inedito, II," *WS* 10 (1888) 36 no.166=*Texte und Kommentare* 2 (Berlin 1963) 68. Slightly different versions of the same apophthegm are ascribed to Aristotle (Cramer, *Anecd.Par.* IV.411,15ff), Aristippus (Diog.Laert. 2.79) and Bion ([Plut.] *De Lib.Ed.* 10 p.7c).

²² The translation is based on the version preserved in Stobaeus.

Philo, where he subordinates pagan philosophy to wisdom or theology: "And indeed, in the same way in which the encyclopedic disciplines contribute to the acquisition of philosophy, philosophy itself contributes to the acquisition of wisdom."²³ Here we have the triple sequence of encyclopedic disciplines, philosophy, wisdom instead of the usual pair, encyclopedic disciplines *versus* wisdom. The reason for this inconsistency is that in this passage Philo had Ariston's comparison in mind, which he reinterpreted by subordinating pagan philosophy to his Graeco-Judaic theology.²⁴

We may deal with Clement briefly. In a chapter of his *Stromata* he explains the meaning of Sarah and Hagar with long quotations from Philo. But he adds one new element, which we shall meet again later when we treat Didymus. Clement connects the allegorical interpretation of *Genesis* 16 with a similar explanation of a passage from *Proverbs* (5.18–20), which reads: "Let your fountain of water be your own, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. Let her accompany you like your most beloved deer and your most graceful foal. Let your own wife attract you and let her be with you every moment. Because you have been embraced in her love, your offspring will be numerous. Let your dealings with another's wife not become frequent." These lines have a poetic beauty of their own. But Clement's explanation of the last part of this passage proves that he disliked the literal meaning. "The words 'Let your dealings with another's wife not become frequent' recommend that a person make use of secular education (*κοσμικὴ παιδεία*), but not stay with it indefinitely."²⁵ Here the allegorical interpretation of Hagar is applied to another passage of the *Old Testament*.

What we have of Origen has come down to us in a mutilated and fragmentary condition. Parts of these texts are extant only in Latin translations, which were made towards the end of the fourth century. We must be content if we find some traces of our maxim.

A short Greek fragment from Origen's commentary on *Genesis* 16 has been preserved. We can gather from it that he, too, interpreted Sarah as virtue (*ἀρετή*) and Hagar as the propaedeutic disciplines (*τὰ προπαιδευμάτα*).²⁶ In a Latin version of his *Homilies on Genesis* the fact that some of the Patriarchs were married to several wives either at the

²³ Philo, *De Congr. Erud. Gr.* 79 (III.87, 19ff W.).

²⁴ This passage has puzzled some scholars: cf. Bousset, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.8) 102f, and Kühnert, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 94 n.4.

²⁵ Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.5.29 (GCS II.19, 5ff).

²⁶ Orig. *In Gen.* 16.4 (Migne, PG 12 [1862] 116A).

same time or successively is explained in terms of the allegory. The wives are the virtues, which one acquires at the same time or one after the other. In the same passage, logic and rhetoric, both of which form part of the propaedeutics, are described as concubines.²⁷

The most interesting passage, however, can be found in a letter that Origen wrote to his former pupil Gregory the Wonder-Worker. There we read: "I should like you to select even from Greek philosophy those encyclopedic disciplines or preliminary studies that can be applied to the Christian teaching, and also those parts of geometry and astronomy that are useful for the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. The reason for this advice is that we have to regard pagan philosophy as an assistant of Christian doctrine, just as the adherents of pagan philosophy themselves regard geometry, music, grammar, rhetoric and astronomy as assistants of their philosophy."²⁸ It seems clear to me that Origen here expressly refers to Ariston's subordination of the propaedeutic disciplines to philosophy.

The writings of Didymus have suffered even more severe damage than those of Origen. Until recently, all that was known were several hundred fragments of some of Didymus' commentaries on books of the *Old* and *New Testaments*. These fragments had been collected by scholars from the so-called *Catena*e, Byzantine commentaries of the Bible which consist of excerpts from the Greek Fathers that are written continuously around the text of the Scriptures. Thus no coherent commentary of Didymus and, with one very doubtful exception, none of his dogmatic works were extant. This situation has been completely changed by the discovery in Egypt in 1941 of eight papyrus codices, five of which contain Didymus' commentaries on *Genesis*, *Psalms*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Job* and *Zachariah*. This find has provided nearly 1,000 papyrus sheets or 2,000 pages of new information. The publication of these texts is in progress.²⁹ We shall see presently how useful this increase in material will prove for our purpose.

Some fragments bearing the name of Didymus have been incorporated in the vast collection of excerpts from the Bible, Philo and the Greek Fathers that is known as the *Sacra Parallela* of John of Damascus. These excerpts are arranged according to subject matter and must have been a widely-used book of reference. Under the heading 'Secular

²⁷ Orig. *In Gen.Hom.* 11.2 (GCS VI.103).

²⁸ Orig. *Ep. ad Greg.Thaum.* 1 (*Philocalia* p.64,21ff Robinson).

²⁹ L. Doutreleau and L. Koenen, *RecSciRel* 55 (1967) 547ff; Koenen, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 41–53.

Education' we find the following passage attributed to Didymus: "There are times when you come into brief touch with a discipline other than your own because of its usefulness, only to return to your own immediately. Grammar, for instance, is 'another man's wife' (*Prov.* 5.20). Yet it is appropriate to approach her briefly, because reading requires a skilful and sharp mind. The same is true for rhetoric, because it brings about vigor of speech and a correct sequence of ideas. And again for philosophy, in order to prove easily what at first seems to be incompatible. This is the way you beget children by the Egyptian Hagar, the handmaiden of the free Sarah, who is the 'leading one' and Wisdom personified. After this we should return to the Wisdom 'of our youth' (*Prov.* 5.18), which is a gift of God, so that we beget by her children who are no longer the secular knowledge born of the handmaiden (=Hagar), but the prudence that is born of the free and perfect Wisdom (=Sarah)."³⁰

This passage contains all the elements that we have hitherto discussed. The texts from the Bible on which it is based are *Genesis* 16 and the lines from *Proverbs* which we quoted earlier. These references find their clearest expression in the mention of Sarah and Hagar, of "the other man's wife" and of the "wife of your youth." The interpretation given to these two passages is the traditional one. The "other man's wife" or Hagar is equated with the secular disciplines such as grammar, rhetoric and philosophy. The term philosophy is here identical with logic or dialectic. It is noteworthy that the three disciplines mentioned by Didymus correspond exactly to what the Middle Ages called *trivium*, the triple way, which together with the *quadrivium* formed the body of the arts. Sarah is interpreted as the perfect wisdom which brings forth prudence. The connection of wisdom with prudence is also known from Philo.³¹ The translations of the biblical names are still the same. Didymus' advice to remain with the secular disciplines only for a short time reflects the translation 'to sojourn'

³⁰ *Sacra Parallela*, Migne, PG 96 (1891) 344AB: ἔνεστί ποτε πρὸς ὀλίγον θιγόντα διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον ἀλλοτρίας διδασκαλίας πάλιν τῆς ἰδίας εὐθέως ἔχεσθαι. οἷον γραμματικὴ ἀλλοτρία γυνὴ τυγχάνει ταύτη πάλιν καλὸν πρὸς ὀλίγον ἐγγίσει διὰ τὸ τεχνικὸν καὶ ὀξὺ τῆς ἀναγνώσεως. ὁμοίως ῥητορικῇ διὰ τὸ ἰσχυρὸν τοῦ λόγου καὶ τὴν ἀκολουθίαν. ἀλλὰ καὶ φιλοσοφία διὰ τὸ εὐαπόδεικτον τῶν φαινομένων ἐναντίων. μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ὡς ἀπὸ τῆς Αἰγυπτίας Ἄγαρ τεκνώσαντες παιδείκης οὐσης τῆς ἐλευθέρης Σάρας τῆς ἀρχούσης καὶ αὐτοσοφίας οὐσης πάλιν εἰς τὴν ἐκ νεότητος τραπῶμεν σοφίαν, ἣτις καὶ θεόδοτός ἐστιν, ὅπως καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς τεκνώσωμεν οὐκέτι ὡς ἀπὸ δούλης αἰσθητὰ μαθήματα, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐξ ἐλευθέρης καὶ τελείας σοφίας φρόνησιν.

³¹ Philo interprets Sarah as φρόνησις, *De Migr. Abr.* 126 (II.292,26f W.).

that was given to Hagar's name. Sarah is called 'the leading one', as was the case in Philo and Clement.

Without the new papyri it would be impossible to prove that this passage actually goes back to Didymus. The ascriptions in collections of this kind are often wrong.

In a very mutilated passage of his commentary on *Ecclesiastes*, which is still unpublished, Didymus gives a literal as well as an allegorical explanation of the first line of the quotation from *Proverbs*.³² The literal interpretation goes: "You 'rejoice with the wife of your youth' (*Prov.* 5.18) in a literal sense, if you approach her in the way prescribed by the Law, so that 'your marriage is honorable and your bed undefiled' (*Hebr.* 13.4). The passage supports monogamy. For he whose only wife is his first one has her 'from his youth', but not the man who has many wives."³³ Later on, Didymus quotes the lines from *Proverbs* again, and this time he is opposed to the literal explanation: "If we understand these lines literally, they do not seem to be true. For a man's offspring will be made numerous by many wives rather than by a single one. It may happen that the only wife he has is either not productive or totally sterile."³⁴ Then Didymus goes on to the allegorical interpretation: "I will give you a better explanation of the words 'of your youth' (*Prov.* 5.18). I do not say something new that cannot be found in some written treatise or other, nor do I say something that has not been observed by many others. The 'wife of your youth' is the true wisdom (*ἡ ἀληθινὴ σοφία*) or the true ethical virtue (*ἡ ἀληθινὴ ἠθικὴ ἀρετή*)."³⁵ This time Didymus stresses the practical aspect of virtue rather than the intellectual. What follows in the papyrus is a long and very fragmentary section, in which Didymus maintains that true wisdom and true virtue naturally precede their spurious counterparts. This is an application of the Neoplatonic doctrine that only good actually exists, whereas evil is merely a priva-

³² I am indebted to L. Koenen and L. Liesenborghs for their generosity in placing their transcripts and photographs at my disposal. Most of the restorations are theirs.

³³ Didymus, *Comm. in Eccl.* 275.2–6 (on *Eccl.* 9.9a): καὶ ὡς π[ρ]ὸς τὸ ρητόν οὖν συν[ε]φραίνεται γυναικ[ί] τις τῆ ἐκ νεότητ[ος] αὐτοῦ, ἐὰν οὕτω[ς αὐτῆ] προσέλθῃ [ὡσπερ] βούλεται νόμος, ὥστε τίμιον γάμον [ἔχ]ειν καὶ κοίτη[ν ἀμ]ίαντον. δηλοῖ καὶ μονογαμίαν ἢ λέξις· οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ [π]ολλὰς ἔχων ἐκ νεότη[τ]ος [ἔχει], ἀλλὰ μόνην τὴν πρώτην.

³⁴ Didymus, *Comm. in Eccl.* 275.17–19: ἐὰν ἐπὶ [ῥητο]ῦ λάβωμεν [το]ῦτ[ο], οὐ φαίνεται οὕτως ἔχον· μᾶλλον γὰρ ἐκ πλείονων γυν[αι]κῶν πολλοσ[τ]ός τις ἔσται ἢ ἐκ μιᾶς. συμβαίνει τὴν μίαν ἢ ὀλιγοτόκο[ν] εἶναι ἢ στε[ί]ραν.

³⁵ Didymus, *Comm. in Eccl.* 275.23–26: καὶ θέλω κ[αλῶς εἰ]πεῖν τὸ ἐκ νεότητος. οὐ καινοτέ[ρ]ως λέγω τὸ μὴ κείμενον ἐν γραφ[ῆ]τινι, τὸ μὴ πολλοῖς θηρώμενον. ἐκ νεότητος γυνή ἐστὶν ἡ ἀληθινὴ σο[φία] ἢ ἡ ἀληθινὴ ἠθικὴ ἀρετή.

tion of good.³⁶ Hereafter Didymus resumes his main interpretation. True virtue produces many spiritual children. “But it is also necessary that we stay for a short time with ‘another’s wife’ (*Prov.* 5.20), that is with the foreign wisdom (*πρὸς τὴν ἕξωθεν σοφίαν*).”³⁷ The Greek term *ἕξωθεν σοφία* is synonymous with the *κοσμικὴ παιδεία* of Clement. Thus Didymus’ interpretation follows the traditional pattern. Since Didymus has already pointed out that he is offering a well-known interpretation for the passage from *Proverbs*, we are not surprised when he refers to Philo explicitly at the end of this interpretation. “In a similar way Philo showed that the housekeeper (?)³⁸ (=Hagar) produces offspring before perfect virtue does. For if one does not beget children by these (women) of inferior status, one cannot become father of undefiled achievements and of the teachings of wisdom.”³⁹ Didymus clearly refers here to Philo’s interpretation of *Genesis* 16.

We have again reached the point from which we departed. Didymus, the last representative of the Alexandrian school, repeats the allegorical interpretations that Philo had developed about 350 years before.

The interpretation of *Genesis* 16 that we read in St Paul’s *Epistle to the Galatians* (4.22–26) is completely different. St Paul is also convinced that an allegorical interpretation is the best approach to this passage. But for him, Sarah and Hagar symbolize the two Covenants and thus the development from servitude towards freedom. This explanation, from which pagan influence is totally absent, illustrates the more traditional spirit of Palestinian Jewry compared to the Hellenism of the Alexandrian Jews.⁴⁰ The profound difference did not escape Didymus. His reference to Philo is followed directly by a reference to St Paul: “The same relationship is called ‘letter’ and ‘spirit’ by the

³⁶ Cf. Didymus, *Comm. in Ps.* 129 (A. Kehl, *Der Psalmenkommentar von Tura. Quaternio* 9 [Papyrol.Colon. I, Köln-Opladen 1964] 1) 6: *καὶ καθόλου γε τοῦτο λέγομεν· ἡγεῖται τὰ καλὰ τῶν κακῶν.*

³⁷ Didymus, *Comm. in Eccl.* 276.15–16: *δεῖ δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἀλλοτρίαν ὀλίγως [εἶναι ἡμᾶς, τουτ]έστι πρὸς τὴν ἕξωθεν σοφίαν.*

³⁸ My supplement is doubtful, because the word *ἡ ταμία* was not widely used. One would also expect the article, for which there is no space at all.

³⁹ Didymus, *Comm. in Eccl.* 276.19–22: *καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο ὁ Φίλων ἐξέλαβεν τ[αμ]ίαν προτίκει[ν] τῆς ἀρετῆς τῆς τελείας· εἰ μὴ γὰρ τις τέκη ἐκ τούτων τῶ[ν μ]ικρῶν, οὐ δ[ύ]ν[ατ]ε π(ατ)ήρ {ἐκ τῆς} τῶν ἔργων τῶν ἀμείνων καὶ τῶν θεωρημάτων τῆς σοφίας γενέσθαι. (lege [μ]ικρῶν, δ[ύ]ν[ατ]αι; ἐκ τῆς manus posterior).*

⁴⁰ This is the view of Norden, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 674 n.1.

Apostle.”⁴¹ Didymus makes frequent use of the Pauline terms ‘letter’ and ‘spirit’ when he refers to the Old and New Covenant or to the two Testaments.⁴² But he also gives a new turn to St Paul’s explanation by adding: “It is indeed impossible to think in terms of allegorical interpretation without having practised the literal interpretation first.”⁴³ The different explanations of the Alexandrians and of St Paul have one thing in common: Hagar and Sarah represent successive stages on the arduous way towards the realization of Christianity.

We have reason to expect more information on Didymus’ interpretation of *Genesis* 16 and on his dependence on Philo from his commentary on *Genesis*, which hopefully will soon be published by P. Nautin.

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⁴¹ Didymus, *Comm. in Eccl.* 276.22–24: τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ὁ ἀπόστολος γράμμα καὶ πνεῦμα λέγ[ει· κ]αὶ ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν τὰ τῆς ἀναγωγῆς νοῆσαι μὴ ἀκριβώσαντα τὰ τῆς ἱστ[ορίας].

⁴² E.g. II Cor. 3.6. Didymus, *Comm. in Zach.* 266.14ff, esp. 266.21ff; *idem*, 163.2f and 221.3ff; *Comm. in Ps.* 134 (*op.cit.* [*supra* n.36] 6) 6ff, with Kehl’s note.

⁴³ See n.41 *supra*.