Hellenistic Visuality and Jewish Textuality in Ezekiel's *Exagoge*

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"In Hellenistic literary culture," Simon Goldhill argues, "there is … a distinctive way of looking at things,"[1] and the way in which Hellenistic poets looked at and described objects has recently been the subject of detailed study.[2] Central to the distinctiveness of such Hellenistic visuality is its appetite for the new and unexpected,[3] its staging of the subjective process of viewing itself, and its concern for the ways in which viewing is related to interpretation.[4] Hellenistic authors repeatedly depict such scenes of viewing in their works. Moreover, their own awareness of the scene of viewing as a Hellenistic *topos* is demonstrated by their construction of epigram sequences which self-consciously revolve around this scene,[5] and their use of such

[1] Simon Goldhill, "The Naive and Knowing Eye: Ecphrasis and the Culture of Viewing in the Hellenistic World," in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture* (Cambridge 1994) 197–223, at 198.

[2] Irmgard Männlein-Robert, *Stimme, Schrift und Bild: Zum Verhältnis der Künste in der hellenistischen Dichtung* (Heidelberg 2007); Évelyne Prioux, *Regards alexandrins: Histoire et théorie des arts dans l'épigramme hellénistique* (Leuven 2007). For earlier bibliography see Graham Zanker, *Modes of Viewing in Hellenistic Poetry and Art* (Madison 2004) 201 ff.; Michael Squire, "Making Myron's Cow Moo? Ecphrastic Epigram and the Poetics of Simulation," *AJP* 131 (2010) 589–634, at 591 n.10.

[3] Zanker, *Modes of Viewing* 124 ff.

[4] Zanker, *Modes of Viewing* 72 ff., describes this as "Reader or Viewer Supplementation."

[5] See for instance *Anth.Pal.* 7.421 ff. and the lengthy series on Myron's cow (9.713–744, 793–798).

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scenes as the basis for humour and irony.[6] Yet few Hellenistic poets were as daring as Ezekiel the tragedian in his *Exagoge*, who not only stages a scene of Hellenistic viewing, but deliberately overturns the convention inherent in such scenes that successful viewing can be a means of acquiring significant understanding.

The *Exagoge*'s relationship with Hellenistic poetic treatments of visuality has already been noted by Jane Heath. She argues convincingly that Ezekiel's description of the Phoenix in fr.17 is influenced by the Hellenistic poetic portrayal of such scenes of viewing. For Heath, Ezekiel simply subconsciously assimilates Hellenistic cultural and poetic approaches to the visual "seamlessly in the course of social interaction" with Greek culture. The result is that the *Exagoge* displays a distinctively "Hellenistic" attitude to visuality.[7] However, a close investigation of the *Exagoge*'s presentation of Moses' encounter with the burning bush demonstrates that, on the contrary, Ezekiel was highly self-aware in his use and manipulation of this poetic tradition. Indeed, rather than adopting a Hellenistic approach to visuality, he deliberately challenges some of its underlying epistemological assumptions.

To make this case, I first show how Ezekiel remodels the opening of the Biblical burning bush scene to give it the appearance of a typical Hellenistic ekphrastic scene. Yet, rather than following through on this Hellenistic opening, he deliberately interrupts it. God himself denies the possibility of gaining divine knowledge through the virtuosic interpretation of an image, by pointedly rejecting Moses' vocabulary of sight and signification. In its place, God presents a theological epistemology that is grounded solely in the oral/aural transmission of λόγοι ("words").

In presenting this opposition, Ezekiel recasts the rivalry

[6] Theoc. *Id.* 15 (see Goldhill, in *Art and Text* 217–218) and Herod. 4 with Thomas Gelzer, "Mimus und kunsttheorie bei Herondas, Mimiambus 4," in C. Schäublin (ed.), *Catalepton: Festschrift für Bernhard Wyss* (Basel 1985) 96–116.

[7] Jane Heath, "Ezekiel Tragicus and Hellenistic Visuality: The Phoenix at Elim," *JThS* 57 (2006) 23–41, at 41.

between the visual and the (verbal) poetic arts inherent in ekphrastic poetry to suggest a broader cultural contrast between Hellenistic and Jewish approaches to knowledge of the divine. While Hellenistic religion and philosophy were saturated with visual language and practices, contemporary Jewish literature and religious practice also often focused on texts, read and heard, as *loci* of divine revelation. In his presentation of the burning bush, therefore, Ezekiel uses the Greek poetic tradition against itself. He remodels the Hellenistic ekphrasis to construct and articulate a distinction between Greek and Jewish religion based on differing sensory hierarchies. This sophisticated and oppositional interaction with Greek culture and poetics has profound implications for how we understand Ezekiel's literary project, and his own self-understanding as an author who was Jewish but/and chose to write in a Greek form.

1. *Background*

Ezekiel's *Exagoge* recasts the narrative of Exodus 1–14 in the metrical and stylistic forms of a Greek tragedy.[8] The 269 lines of the play that remain, quoted in Alexander Polyhistor's *On the Jews,* and then preserved in excerpts from that work transmitted in Eusebius *PE* 9, provide the only reliable information we have about the author. The fact that the *Exagoge* draws heavily on the Septuagint translation of Exodus indicates that the earliest date for the text is the latter part of the third century BCE. The latest possible date is given by Polyhistor's work in the mid-first century CE.[9]

Ezekiel's home is even harder to identify. Nevertheless, his familiarity with the Septuagint, his advanced level of knowledge

[8] The two major recent commentaries on Ezekiel are Howard Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge 1983), and Pierluigi Lanfranchi, *L'Exagōgē d'Ezéchiel le Tragique* (Leiden 2006). For a short overview of Ezekiel's work and its context and interpretation see, most recently, Pierluigi Lanfranchi, "The *Exagōgē* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," in Vayos Liapis et al. (eds), *Greek Tragedy after the Fifth Century* (Cambridge 2018) 125–146.

[9] See Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 5–13, and Lanfranchi, *L'Exagōgē* 10, for further discussion.

of Greek literature, and his ability to produce sophisticated Greek poetry make Egypt a likely candidate.[10]

If he was writing in Egypt, Ezekiel was also writing in a location that would have provided him with an educated and sophisticated audience for his work. The text's Jewish story, its celebration of the power of the Jewish God, its detailed account of the Passover rituals, and its frequent engagement with matters of Biblical exegesis suggest that Jews were Ezekiel's key audience.[11] As Jacobson has pointed out, however, some details in the text may have been designed to appeal to a non-Jewish Greek audience as well.[12] Whatever the broader audience, it is clear that those who would have been able to appreciate the text the best would have been individuals with a similar background to the author. These Jews, educated both in Jewish and in Hellenistic culture, would have been able to appreciate fully the skill with which Ezekiel handles the metrical and stylistic demands of tragedy, the creative way in which he engages with the Biblical text, and his frequent and sophisticated interactions with the Bible, Jewish exegetical traditions, and many works of non-Jewish Greek literature.[13]

For such members of Ezekiel's audience, the *Exagoge*'s burning bush scene represented a *tour de force* of the author's ability to present and recast Greek poetic form and the Biblical text in creative ways that not only engage with, but also challenge, Greek cultural conventions.

2. *Moses as a Hellenistic viewer*

A comparison of the first lines of the burning bush scene in Ezekiel and in his Septuagintal source demonstrates the ways in which the tragedian has reshaped the opening of the scene to resemble a Hellenistic scene of viewing.

[10] See Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 13–17, and Lanfranchi, *L'Exagōgē* 11–13.

[11] See Lanfranchi, *L'Exagōgē* 3–7.

[12] Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 17–20.

[13] See M. J. Kramer, "Ezekiel's *Exagoge* and the Drama of Intertextuality," *JSP* 32 (2022) 147–166, at 166.

Exagoge 90–95:

ΜΩΣ. ἔα· τί μοι σημεῖον ἐκ βάτου τόδε,
τεράστιόν τε καὶ βροτοῖς ἀπιστία;
ἄφνω βάτος μὲν καίεται πολλῷ πυρί,
αὐτοῦ δὲ χλωρὸν πᾶν μένει τὸ βλαστάνον.
τί δή; προελθὼν ὄψομαι τεράστιον
μέγιστον· οὐ γὰρ πίστιν ἀνθρώποις φέρει.

MOSES: Look! What is this sign from the bush? It is wonderous and unbelievable for mortals! Suddenly the bush burns with much fire, but all its foliage remains green. What then? I will go up to it and see this very great wonder; for this is something that it's hard for humans to believe.

LXX Exod 3:2–3:

ὤφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐν φλογὶ πυρὸς ἐκ τοῦ βάτου, καὶ ὁρᾷ ὅτι ὁ βάτος καίεται πυρί, ὁ δὲ βάτος οὐ κατεκαίετο. εἶπεν δὲ Μωυσῆς Παρελθὼν ὄψομαι τὸ ὅραμα τὸ μέγα τοῦτο, τί ὅτι οὐ κατακαίεται ὁ βάτος.

The angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flame of fire from the bush, and [Moses] saw that the bush burned in the fire, but the bush was not consumed by the fire. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not consumed."

2.1. *Viewing stimulated by paradox*

The linguistic similarities between the two passages reflect the fact that throughout the *Exagoge* Ezekiel makes heavy use of the language of the Septuagint.[14] In both, the apparition emerges ἐκ (τοῦ) βάτου, the burning of the bush is described in similar vocabulary (ἄφνω βάτος μὲν καίεται πολλῷ πυρί ~ ὁ βάτος καίεται πυρί), and Moses' approach is described in very similar terms (προελθὼν ὄψομαι τεράστιον μέγιστον ~ Παρελθὼν ὄψομαι τὸ ὅραμα τὸ μέγα). However, this comparison also reveals the distinctiveness of Ezekiel's account. Firstly, while Exodus does describe the bush as a "great sight" (ὅραμα … μέγα), Ezekiel develops considerably the emphasis placed on the surprising and enigmatic nature of what Moses sees. Before even describing what is in front of him, Moses calls his vision "wondrous" (τεράστιον) and "beyond belief" (βροτοῖς ἀπιστία). His description of the sight

[14] Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 40.

then adds a further element of visual paradox to the Septuagint's account by noting that the burning bush not only is "not destroyed," but remains a verdant green amongst the flames, counter to the usual effect of fire on a plant. Finally, after his description of the sight, Moses returns once again to remarking on its spectacular nature with the language of wonder (τεράστιον μέγιστον, note the superlative) and the incredible (οὐ γὰρ πίστιν ἀνθρώποις φέρει). Unlike the relative restraint of the Biblical account, Ezekiel makes explicit and emphatic the wondrous and paradoxical nature of what Moses sees.[15]

Ezekiel's emphasis on the paradoxical in this scene is in line with his interest in the unusual in his description of the Phoenix, noted by Heath.[16] As she points out concerning that later scene, this emphasis on the paradoxical represents a link between Ezekiel's work and that of his Hellenistic poetic and scholarly contemporaries whose "eye for the new is well known."[17]

Testimony to the interest of Hellenistic readers and writers in the paradoxical is found in the emergence of paradoxographical collections in this period. The first of which we are aware is the *Collection of Marvels from Every Land arranged according to Places* by Callimachus. Production of such works continues to flourish into the Roman era.[18] Their interest in the strange and the decontextualized nature of their descriptions of individual "wonders" is also mirrored in the epigram collections that became popular in this period.[19] In particular, as George Walsh pointed out,[20] in Hellenistic poetic representations of viewing it is often the strange or paradoxical nature of what is viewed that represents the stimulus for the act of investigation and description. One of

[15] Cf. Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 98.

[16] Heath, *JThS* 57 (2006) 35.

[17] *JThS* 57 (2006) 39. For a recent study in this area see Jessica Lightfoot, *Wonder and the Marvellous from Homer to the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge 2021).

[18] Lightfoot, *Wonder and the Marvellous* 46–52.

[19] Lightfoot, *Wonder and the Marvellous* 78–79, cf. 52–57.

[20] George B. Walsh, "Callimachean Passages: The Rhetoric of Epitaph in Epigram," *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 77–105, at 92–97.

Meleager's epigrams begins with the speaker puzzling over the fact that a statue of Eros seems to be dressed in the wrong clothes (*Anth.Pal.* 7.421):

> Πτανέ, τί σοι σιβύνας, τί δὲ καὶ συὸς εὔαδε δέρμα;
> Winged one, why does the spear, why does the boar skin please you?

This wonder leads him to further description and decryption. Likewise, the speaker of an epigram of Antipater (*Anth.Pal.* 7.424) is led to ponder the meaning of the carvings on Lysidice's funeral stele because the objects depicted (reins, a muzzle, and a bird associated with war) seem inappropriate on the tomb of a woman (οὐχ ἅδεν οὐδ' ἐπέοικεν ὑπωροφίαισι γυναιξίν, "these do not please or befit women who live indoors"). In a more scientific mode, the speaker in one of Posidippus' epigrams is drawn to describe a double-magnet because of its qualities that are "amazing" (θαυμάσιον) and "wondrous" (τέρας).[21] Finally, Antipater's instruction to the viewer, "do not be amazed" (μὴ θάμβει) at seeing a whip, an owl, a bow, a goose, and a dog depicted on Myro's tomb, suggests that amazement is the natural initial reaction (7.424).

As these examples demonstrate, the affinities between Moses and the viewers presented in Hellenistic poetry are not limited to a shared interest in the paradoxical, but also extend to the linguistic ways in which the aura of the paradoxical and mysterious is expressed in such poetic scenes. Most obviously, Ezekiel and Posidippus share the vocabulary of wonder (τεράστιον/τέρας) to describe what they have seen. In more dramatic terms, the startled direct question with which Moses' speech opens reflects a Hellenistic poetic way of marking the intriguing and puzzling quality of what follows, as in Meleager's epigram above, or in Leonidas' epigram on Peisistratus' tomb (*Anth.Pal.* 7.422):

[21] C. Austin and G. Bastianini, *Posidippi Pellaei quae supersunt omnia* (Milan 2002), no. 17. See Peter Bing, *The Scroll and the Marble: Studies in Reading and Reception in Hellenistic Poetry* (Ann Arbor 2009) 264–266.

τί στοχασώμεθά σου, Πεισίστρατε, χῖον ὁρῶντες
γλυπτὸν ὑπὲρ τύμβου κείμενον ἀστράγαλον;
What are we to guess about you Peisistratus, seeing a Chian die carved on your tomb?

By starting with this conventional stylistic evocation of a paradoxical vision scene, Ezekiel begins his description of Moses' encounter with the bush in a way which encourages his audience to see his treatment of this incident as an example of a familiar *topos*: a Hellenistic scene of viewing.

2.2. *Focalisation through the viewer*

A second aspect of the scene strengthens this connection. The language of the scene is carefully chosen to draw the audience into Moses' own act of viewing.[22] The brief Biblical description does focalize part of the scene through Moses. The fact that the bush is burning but is not consumed is not described directly by the narrator, but is presented through Moses' observation ("he saw that … the bush was not consumed"). Ezekiel, however, heightens the dramatization of Moses' process of viewing. The interjection (ἔα) and the dative of interest (μοι),[23] combined with the explicit expression of the desire to view the object (προελθὼν ὄψομαι), together with the use of the direct question and the demonstrative τόδε,[24] all draw attention to Moses' role as viewer of the bush.

Once again, both this presentation of a poetic description

[22] Graham Zanker, *Herodas: Mimiambs* (Oxford 2009) 125: "A heightened form of audience-inclusion … is a pronounced feature of Hellenistic poetry." For the importance of the presentation of the act of viewing in Hellenistic poetry see Doris Meyer, "The Act of Reading and the Act of Writing in Hellenistic Epigram," in P. Bing et al. (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram* (Leiden 2007) 185–210. Cf. Zanker, *Modes of Viewing* 109–123.

[23] Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (New York 1920) 1486: "the personal pronouns of the first and second person are often used to denote the interest of the speaker … in an action or statement."

[24] I. Männlein-Robert notes that the frequent use of demonstrative pronouns in such poems to "create the fiction of direct sense perception" is "stereotypical": "Epigrams on Art: Voice and Voicelessness in Hellenistic Epigram," in *Brill's Companion* 251–271, at 253.

through the lens of a viewing persona and the linguistic formulae in which this is evoked find close parallels in ekphrastic verse. As Walsh memorably puts it, in Hellenistic ekphrases we are often viewing objects or reading inscriptions by "looking over [the viewer's] shoulder, or peering through a window at the back of his skull."[25] This evocation of the viewing subject is often effected by questions which the viewer poses to him/herself to suggest an internalised dialogue (called a *dialogue transposé* by Prioux),[26] as a substitute for the actual dialogue between viewer and object found in other poems. To take just one example, the opening of an epigram of Antipater of Sidon uses the same combination of interjection, explicit expression of viewing purpose, and question as found in Ezekiel to highlight the role of the speaker as a viewer of the tomb (*Anth.Pal.* 7.427):

ἁ στάλα, φέρ' ἴδω, τίν' ἔχει νέκυν.
Come let me see what body this stone holds.

2.3. *Viewing as interpretation*

This visual interest, sparked by the paradoxical nature of what is seen, and leading to a highlighting of the role of an 'internal viewer' within the text, leads us to the most significant similarity between the opening of Ezekiel's burning bush scene and the viewing scenes of his Hellenistic contemporaries: the importance that is placed on interpreting what is seen. As Simon Goldhill puts it, in analysing a number of Hellenistic viewing epigrams, "in each poem what is dramatized is the moment of looking *as* interpreting."[27] Elsewhere Goldhill identifies the insistence on a moment of interpretation as the key distinction between Hellenistic and epic ekphrasis.[28] This interest in interpretation is also present in the opening lines of Ezekiel's account of the burning

[25] Walsh, *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 103. Cf. Prioux, *Regards alexandrins* 283.

[26] Prioux, *Regards alexandrins* 140 n.17.

[27] Goldhill, in *Art and Text* 204. Cf. Männlein-Robert, in *Brill's Companion* 253.

[28] Simon Goldhill, *Preposterous Poetics: The Politics and Aesthetics of Form in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2020) 24.

bush. In the LXX the bush is described as a ὅραμα (simply, "*that which is seen*," LSJ) but in Ezekiel it is called a σημεῖον. The adjective τεράστιον in the next line suggests that the use of σημεῖον is partly motivated by the repeated Septuagintal phrase σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα, found elsewhere in Exodus.[29] Nevertheless, the choice of σημεῖον also suggests that Ezekiel's Moses views the bush as a signifier,[30] as an object that he must not only see but *interpret* to uncover its significance. As the viewers in Hellenistic poetry sought to apply their intellect to uncover the meaning of what they saw, so Moses regards the burning bush as an object that requires just such Hellenistic decryption. Unlike the Septuagint, where Moses' interest in the bush is limited to the question of "why it is not being consumed by the flames," in the *Exagoge* Moses is concerned to uncover in more general terms what the burning bush *means*: "what is this sign from the bush … what is it?" (τί μοι σημεῖον ἐκ βάτου τόδε … τί δή;).

This interpretative concern is also suggested by a further deviation from the Biblical text. The word used for Moses' approach to the bush in the *Exagoge* suggests a rather stronger desire to get close to the bush than that used in Exodus itself. The significance of the prefix in Exodus' παρελθών seems to be that Moses went "aside" from his path, that he *changed direction* from his original course. Ezekiel's προελθών places much more emphasis on the *approach* to the bush itself. Given that Ezekiel often follows the wording of the LXX and that the two words are metrically equivalent, it seems that Ezekiel's choice of prefix is deliberate. From a theatrical perspective, Lanfranchi suggests that the reason for such a change is to provide an implicit stage direction for the actor.[31] If so, however, such a physical movement would only underscore the significance of this changed prefix. It stresses the purposeful nature of Moses' approach. The

[29] E.g. Exod 7:3. See Lanfranchi, *L'Exagōgē* 260.

[30] The term is used in this sense only a few verses later in the LXX itself: τοῦτό σοι τὸ σημεῖον ὅτι ἐγώ σε ἐξαποστέλλω ("this is the sign for you that I am sending you," Exod 3:12).

[31] Lanfranchi, *L'Exagōgē* 206.

emphasis is not on the fact that he deviates from his path, but that he deliberately goes up close to this "wonder" to inspect and interpret it further.

By his remodeling of the Biblical incident, therefore, Ezekiel presents Moses as preparing to interpret the bush in the manner of one of the viewers presented in Hellenistic poetry, whose artful methods of observation "reveal and articulate the concealed significance of the object of [their] gaze."[32] Indeed, the possibility of the visual encounter developing in this interpretative way in a Jewish-Hellenistic text like the *Exagoge* is shown by the fact that this is indeed how Philo later presents this scene in his *Life of Moses*.

2.4. *Comparison with Philo's burning bush scene*

Philo's description imaginatively surveys the different aspects of the bush's appearance, interpreting each of them symbolically in turn, in a manner strikingly similar to Hellenistic poetry's interpretative descriptions, such as that found in Posidippus' much-studied epigram on the statue of Kairos.[33]

Philo *Vit.Mos.* 1.67–69:

> For the burning bramble was a symbol of the oppressed, and the burning fire of the oppressors. The fact that that which was burning was not burnt up was a sign that the oppressed would not be destroyed by their aggressors … The angel represents the providence of God, which silently brings relief in the greatest dangers, exceeding the hopes of all. The details of the comparison must be considered. The bramble, as I have said, is a very weak plant, but it is also prickly and will wound if one touches it. Again, though fire is naturally destructive, the bramble was not devoured thereby, but on the contrary was guarded by it, and remained just as it was before it took fire, lost nothing at all but gained an additional brightness. All this is a description of the nation's condition as it then stood, and we may think

[32] Goldhill, in *Art and Text* 206.

[33] Philo seems to have been aware of at least one such non-Jewish poetic interpretative ekphrasis. For, as Prioux notes (*Regards alexandrins* 190 n.4), Philo's allegorical interpretation of the image of Apollo of Delos in *Leg.* 95 seems to draw on Callimachus' ekphrasis of the wooden image of Apollo in *Aet.* 3 fr.114b Pf.

of it as a voice proclaiming to the sufferers: "Do not lose heart; your weakness is your strength, which can prick, and thousands will suffer from its wounds."[34]

Posidippus no. 19:

Who and from where is the sculptor? – From Sicyon. – And his name? – Lysippus. – And who are you? – Kairos the all-subduer. – Why do you stand on tip-toe? – I am always running. – Why do you have a pair of wings on your feet? – I fly with the wind. – Why do you hold a razor in your right hand? – As a sign to men that I am sharper than any edge. – And why is there hair over your face? – For the one who meets me to grasp at, by Zeus. – And why is the back of your head bald? – Because none whom I have once raced by on my winged feet will now, though he wishes it, take hold of me from behind. – Why did the artist fashion you? – For your sake, stranger, and he set me up in the portico as a lesson.[35]

The similarity between Philo and Posidippus consists not only in the similar method of interpretation, in which attributes are singled out and then interpreted, but also in the fact that both the silent statue and the silent bush are imagined in some sense to speak out their own interpretation. Indeed, Männlein-Robert's comment on Posidippus' poem could apply equally to Philo's interpretative description of the burning bush: "through its striking attributes, the statue makes an oblique reference to something beyond its mere appearance; it is an allegory to be interpreted."[36] For a Jewish-Hellenistic writer like Philo, such visual decryption, popular with the Hellenistic poets, was one way to elaborate and understand this critical Biblical encounter. Were Ezekiel simply to have been influenced by Hellenistic approaches to visuality, as Heath suggests,[37] we might have ex-

[34] Transl. following F. H. Colson, *Philo* VI (Cambridge [Mass.] 1935) 311–313.

[35] Transl. Austin and Bastianini, *Posidippi Pellaei*. For discussions see Prioux, *Regards alexandrins* 187–243; Männlein-Robert, in *Brill's Companion* 260–263; and Goldhill, *Preposterous Poetics* 27–29, which also includes a brief summary of other views.

[36] Männlein-Robert, in *Brill's Companion* 261.

[37] Heath, in *JThS* 57 (2006) 41.

pected him to develop the burning bush scene in a similar way himself.

The opening of Ezekiel's burning bush scene, therefore, shares several thematic and stylistic affinities with poetic scenes of interpretative viewing found in the work of his non-Jewish contemporaries. Such similarities, if noticed by a literate audience, would naturally have generated the expectation that in the later part of the scene Ezekiel would present a visual interpretation of the bush, as we find in Philo. The opening lines prepare the audience for a scene in which, by looking closely and intelligently, Moses will indeed be able to discover for himself what it is that is signified by this paradoxical "sign."

3. *Hellenistic viewing disrupted*

The expectation Ezekiel raises that Moses will perform as a Hellenistic viewer, however, only makes what happens next more striking. For rather than allowing itself to be viewed and interpreted, the bush 'speaks' to cut Moses off, before he even has time to begin interpreting its symbolism (*Exagoge* 96–97):

> ἐπίσχες, ὦ φέριστε, μὴ προσεγγίσῃς,
> Μωσῆ, πρὶν ἢ τῶν σῶν ποδῶν λῦσαι δέσιν·
>
> Stay back, noble Moses, do not draw near, before you have removed your footwear.

Compare LXX Exod 3:4–5:

> ὡς δὲ εἶδεν κύριος ὅτι προσάγει ἰδεῖν, ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὸν κύριος ἐκ τοῦ βάτου λέγων Μωυσῆ, Μωυσῆ. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν Τί ἐστιν; καὶ εἶπεν Μὴ ἐγγίσῃς ὧδε· λῦσαι τὸ ὑπόδημα ἐκ τῶν ποδῶν σου· ὁ γὰρ τόπος, ἐν ᾧ σὺ ἕστηκας, γῆ ἁγία ἐστίν.
>
> But when the Lord saw that he came near to see, the Lord called to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses." He replied, "What is it?" And the Lord said, "do not come closer; take your shoes off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

Once again, the ways in which Ezekiel has developed the Biblical narrative are noteworthy. The command to "come no closer" in Exod 3:4 is far less abrupt than that in Ezekiel, as it comes as part of a conversation which begins with God calling out Moses' name, perhaps encouraging him to draw a little

nearer. In the *Exagoge*, on the other hand, it is Moses' own interest in the bush that leads him to make the approach, and God's first word in the whole scene is a blunt imperative, ἐπίσχες, "stay back," which gives his whole utterance an oppositional tone. Rather than being part of the same process, Moses' approach to the bush and God's instructions that follow are presented as being in conflict. Unlike the objects in Hellenistic poetry which imaginatively cooperate in their own visual interpretation like the Kairos statue of Posidippus,[38] Ezekiel's bush seems hostile to Moses' visual approach.

3.1. *Words, not vision, bring understanding*

The nature of the divine objection to the use of vision to discern the meaning of what is taking place is made explicit in what follows (*Exagoge* 100–103):

> θάρσησον, ὦ παῖ, καὶ λόγων ἄκου' ἐμῶν·
> ἰδεῖν γὰρ ὄψιν[39] τὴν ἐμὴν ἀμήχανον
> θνητὸν γεγῶτα, τῶν λόγων δ' ἔξεστί σοι
> ἐμῶν ἀκούειν, τῶν ἕκατ' ἐλήλυθα.

> Take courage, my child, and hear my words; for it is impossible to see my appearance, as you are a mortal, but you are able to hear my words; this is why I have come.

Again, Ezekiel's account represents a significant departure from the Septuagint. As Jacobson notes, in Ezekiel "God declares that Moses may not behold him, whereas God says no such thing in the Biblical bush scene."[40] Indeed, several verses later, God commands Moses to say to the elders of Israel, Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν

[38] Cf. Prioux's comment on the response of a statue of Hermes to an interpretation of his erection by a viewer in Callim. *Iamb.* 9: "Devenu son propre exégète, l'Hermès rend compte de son iconographie au moyen d'une étiologie religieuse" (*Regards alexandrins* 149).

[39] Ezekiel's choice of vocabulary here seems to be deliberate, playing on the double meaning of ὄψις (both "face" and "sight"). ὄψις-face suggests an allusion to Exod 33:20, while ὄψις-sight fits into the immediate context which contrasts visual and auditory means of perception, suggested by the balanced infinitives ἰδεῖν "see" and ἀκούειν "hear."

[40] Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 98.

πατέρων ὑμῶν ὦπταί μοι, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, *has been seen by me*."[41] The categorical opposition between sight and speech is Ezekiel's development of the Biblical scene,[42] and he deliberately emphasises this contrast by the chiastic word order ἰδεῖν … ἀμήχανον and ἔξεστί … ἀκούειν. Likewise, the negative imperative (ἐπίσχες), which puts an end to Moses' visual approach, is balanced with a positive imperative to "listen" (ἄκου'). God halts the search for an understanding through vision, which appealed so much to Ezekiel's Hellenistic poetic contemporaries (and to Jews like Philo), replacing it with an assertion that understanding comes solely through his "words" (λόγοι).[43] The priority of the latter is sealed with the totalising comment of line 103: τῶν ἕκατ' ἐλήλυθα, "this is why I have come." In the Biblical account, the motivation of God's revelation to Moses remains implicit.[44] In Ezekiel it is simply this: to create an opportunity for Moses to hear God's authoritative words.

As the speech progresses, God's rejection of the visual approach in favour of the auditory continues. While Moses seemed to think that the σημεῖον of the bush could be interpreted through closer vision (ὄψομαι), God's response indicates that the knowledge he has received and can pass on cannot be obtained through vision (ἰδεῖν … ὄψιν τὴν ἐμὴν ἀμήχανον), but is purely verbal (*Exagoge* 109–111):

[41] Exod 3:16; the point is repeated at 4:1, 3.

[42] While the assertion of the *universal* impossibility of seeing the divine may be Ezekiel's innovation (see Howard Jacobson, "Mysticism and Apocalyptic in Ezekiel's Exagoge," *ICS* 6 [1981] 272–293, at 287), it is likely that he articulates this by developing auditory epiphanies in Greek tragedy where *a stage character* is unable to see a god (see especially Eur. *Hipp.* 84–86 and 1391–1445), and the general, if not universal, practice of Zeus not figuring as a dramatic character in Greek tragedy (Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 99).

[43] Cf. Jacobson, *ICS* 6 (1981) 282: "Moses is permitted audition, but not sight."

[44] Exodus 3 suggests that it might include expressing sympathy (3:7–9), commissioning Moses for his task (10–12), revealing his sacred name (14–15), and prophesying the future (19–22), as well as delivering words to be passed on (16–18).

ἀλλ’ ἕρπε καὶ σήμαινε τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις
πρῶτον μὲν αὐτοῖς πᾶσιν Ἑβραίοις ὁμοῦ,
ἔπειτα βασιλεῖ τὰ ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ τεταγμένα.
But go and *explain* in my words that which I command, first to all the Hebrews together and then to Pharaoh.

God picks up on Moses’ vocabulary of sight (ὄψομαι/ὄψιν) and signification (σημεῖον/σημαίνειν) only to reverse it. The assumption inherent in Hellenistic ekphrastic verse, that visual signs can signify important meaning,[45] is rejected by God, who insists that here meaning will be imparted through the transmission of words, not interpretative vision. This insistence on the primacy of verbal communication is reinforced by the accumulation of verbs of speech in the following lines, emphasised by the sound repetitions in λα/λε (116–119):

Ἀάρωνα πέμψω σὸν κασίγνητον ταχύ,
ᾧ πάντα λέξεις τἀξ ἐμοῦ λελεγμένα,
καὶ αὐτὸς λαλήσει βασιλέως ἐναντίον,
σὺ μὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὁ δὲ λαβὼν σέθεν πάρα.
I will quickly send your brother Aaron, to whom you will say that which has been said by me, and he will speak it in the presence of Pharaoh. You will take it from me, and he will take it from you.

3.2. *Sight as a mere metaphor*

The primacy of speech over sight as a medium for divine communication is asserted in a more sophisticated way in the line of God’s speech which has attracted the most scholarly comment. In addressing Moses, God declares (*Exagoge* 99–100):

ὁ δ’ ἐκ βάτου σοι θεῖος ἐκλάμπει λόγος.
θάρσησον, ὦ παῖ, καὶ λόγων ἄκου’ ἐμῶν·
The divine speech shines out to you from the bush. Take courage, child, and hear my words.

The paradox of a word visibly “shining out” from the bush, together with the adjective “divine” has led some commentators to interpret the words θεῖος λόγος (“divine speech/word”) as

[45] For the same vocabulary see *Anth.Pal.* 7.421.11–12: ναὶ μὲν δὴ Μελέαγρον ὁμώνυμον Οἰνέος υἱῷ / σύμβολα σημαίνει ταῦτα συοκτασίας, “Yes, these symbols of boar-killing refer to his name-sake, Meleager the son of Oeneus.”

being a "specialized and significant term that is familiar from Philo, namely the notion of a personification or hypostatization of God, an intermediary between God and the world."[46] However, as Jacobson points out (282), "this scene is filled with λόγος/λέγειν words referring [simply] to speech," and the use of the term in other Jewish writers, including Philo himself, supports the view that θεῖος λόγος refers to nothing more spectacular than the speech of God (280–282). If this is the case, then the clash of senses expressed by the divine speech "shining out" from the bush is particularly striking—more so, in fact, than if the line refers to some kind of appearance of a hypostasis.

It is certainly true that part of the reason for this particular choice of vocabulary is that the notion of words being seen connects the passage with the delivery of the ten commandments in Exod 20:18, where the people "*see* the voice" of God (ἑώρα τὴν φωνήν).[47] However, this striking image has a further function when read in the context of the conventions of Hellenistic poetic ekphrasis to which this scene alludes.

Like God's promotion of words over sight in the chiasmus of lines 101–103, the phrase θεῖος ἐκλάμπει λόγος demotes the significance of vision for gaining knowledge to the status of a mere *image* for the verbal exchange, which is actually the medium in which divine knowledge is transmitted. What *really* shines out of the bush, according to God, is not flames, the striking sight that first caught Moses' attention, but speech. The metaphor subordinates the visual to the auditory sense. What can be seen, however impressive, is merely an image to describe the brilliance and the centrality of the delivery of the λόγος that is God's central concern.

The significance of this claim can only be fully understood when we realise that the relationship between the language of sight and speech in this line is a reversal of that found in ekphrastic poetry. In such poems the hierarchy of the metaphor is

[46] Jacobson, *ICS* 6 (1981) 279.

[47] Jacobson, *ICS* 6 (1981) 283.

the opposite to that found in Ezekiel. As Prioux notes, in the epigrams *Anth.Pal.* 7.421–429[48] the language of oral communication is frequently used metaphorically to describe visual signification.[49] Thus the image of a jay "will tell" (φάσει, 423.2) that the deceased loved to talk; the carving of reins "will cry out" (αὐδάσει, 424.8) that "I directed my house"; a palm branch does not "declare" (ἐνέπει, 428.13) a victory; a carving of a muzzle "will sing" (ἀείσεται, 424.9) that "I was not fond of many words"; and a viewer wonders what a carving of dice "announces" (ἀγγέλλοντι, 427.7).

As is implicit in some of these examples, the use of the vocabulary of speech for visual signification was sufficiently recognised as a typical feature of this *topos* as to be material for poetic playfulness. For several of these visual 'speaking' signs signify something to do with the deceased's attitude to speech itself. At its most elaborate, λόγος ("speech") itself is frozen as a silent visual icon: ἀλλ' ἄρα, ναί, δοκέω γάρ, ὁ γᾶς ὑπένερθε σοφιστὰς / ἐστί, σὺ δ' ὁ πτερόεις τοὔνομα τοῦδε, λόγος ("Ah yes, now I get it, the man beneath the earth was a sophist, and you are the winged word which made his name," *Anth.Pal.* 7.421.7–8), and the power of silent visual signification is presented as the most effective form of communication: ὡς εὖ τὸν φθίμενον νέον ἄκριτα καὶ τὸ κυβευθὲν / πνεῦμα δι' ἀφθέγκτων εἶπέ τις ἀστραγάλων ("how well someone told of the young man dead by ill fortune and the life gambled away through unspeaking dice," 7.427.13–14).[50]

These Hellenistic ekphrastic poems thus not only use the metaphor of speech to express the communicative power of sight, but also make explicit claims about the ability of the visual to communicate without words. Once again, a Jewish analogue to this Hellenistic approach is in Philo, who declares explicitly that in the burning bush, "with a silence clearer than speech,

[48] Goldhill, *Art and Text* 204, identifies this important *Anth.Pal.* sequence as "exemplary" for the Hellenistic treatment of the visual.

[49] Prioux, *Regards alexandrins* 254–256.

[50] For the ironies inherent in the use of such metaphors, see §4.1 below.

[the angel] employed the miracle of vision to announce future events," τὰ μέλλοντα γενήσεσθαι διήγγελλε τρανοτέρᾳ φωνῆς ἡσυχίᾳ διὰ τῆς μεγαλουργηθείσης ὄψεως (*Vit.Mos.* 1.66).

Both Ezekiel's explicit statements about divine communication and his use of auditory metaphor, therefore, are the *reverse* of those found in the Hellenistic viewing scenes he initially evokes. In Ezekiel, we find a visual metaphor for words, rather than the conventional auditory metaphor for sights, and an assertion of the significance of speech without sight, in the place of the celebration of the power of sight without speech found in the ekphrastic poems and Philo.

3.3. *Summary*

Philo's treatment of the story of the burning bush indicates that it would have been possible for Ezekiel, had he wished, to present the Biblical scene in a manner which followed more closely the conventions of other Hellenistic scenes of viewing. Indeed, had he taken such an approach, this would have counted as further evidence for Jane Heath's assertion that Ezekiel simply adopts the Hellenistic attitude to the visual. However, a close reading of this scene in the *Exagoge* suggests that Ezekiel re-writes the Biblical narrative in a way which actually interrupts, challenges, and even inverts the conventions of the Hellenistic viewing scenes that he initially evokes.

As Moses approaches the bush, the emphasis on paradox, the interest in the focalisation of the act of viewing, and the initial interpretative intent of Moses, prepare us to read this scene as a typical scene from Hellenistic poetry—a description of the skillful interpretation of a visual image. Yet, the character of God, no less, puts a stop to this approach. In his speech, God strongly contrasts vision and hearing, and claims that speech, not sight, is the only medium through which he communicates. In a reversal of a pervasive ekphrastic metaphor, sight is only an image for the transmission of speech, and God's explicit statement that he communicates through words not visions inverts ekphrastic statements that celebrate the power of visual objects to communicate without words.

Moses may, therefore, initially appear to be a model Hellenistic viewer. However, by the end of the passage, with its sharp opposition between speech and sight as vehicles of knowledge, Ezekiel seems to be distancing God's own epistemology from that of the Hellenistic form to which he initially alludes. In order to understand the reason for Ezekiel's departure from these conventions we must explore more closely both the poetics of Hellenistic ekphrasis and the religious context in which Ezekiel is writing.

4. *Ezekiel and the poetics of Hellenistic ekphrasis*

4.1. *The verbal and the visual in Hellenistic ekphrasis*

While the categorical nature of Ezekiel's promotion of verbal over visual methods of communication represents a departure from ekphrastic tradition, the tension between verbal and visual means of signification was already a feature of Hellenistic ekphrasis. For, as Männlein-Robert has argued,[51] Hellenistic ekphrastic poetry often contained a competitive dimension. While poems that interpret objects on the surface seem to celebrate the power of visual art to convey meaning through acts of virtuosic interpretation, they also often reflect on the limitations of the visual medium. This tension can be seen even in early examples of such poems and is so pervasive that it seems essential to the ongoing vitality of the genre. In what Männlein-Robert has called "putatively the first 'ecphrastic' epigram,"[52] Erinna describes an image of a young woman (*Anth.Pal.* 6.352):

Ἐξ ἁπαλᾶν χειρῶν τάδε γράμματα· λῷστε Προμαθεῦ,
  ἔντι καὶ ἄνθρωποι τὶν ὁμαλοὶ σοφίαν.
ταύταν γοῦν ἐτύμως τὰν παρθένον ὅστις ἔγραψεν,
  αἰ καὐδὰν ποτέθηκ', ἦς κ' Ἀγαθαρχὶς ὅλα.

This picture is the work of delicate hands. Good Prometheus, there are men whose skill is equal to yours. At least if whoever drew this girl so truly had added also her voice, you would be the complete Agatharchis. (transl. Männlein-Robert, after Paton)

[51] Männlein-Robert, *Stimme, Schrift und Bild* 261–307.

[52] Männlein-Robert, in *Brill's Companion* 255.

While the human artist is praised, one significant omission is highlighted. The artwork has no voice, and without a voice the image cannot present "the whole Agatharchis."[53] This inability of the visual arts to endow their products with voice is a repeated theme of such works. Thus, Posidippus' apparent aside in an epigram that a bronze of the poet Philitas "seems to speak" (Posidippus 63) only draws attention to the inadequacy of visual art to capture the talents of a poet.[54] Likewise, in Theocritus *Idyll* 1.27–56 the ekphrasis of the shepherd's cup evokes not only its beauty but also its static and fragile qualities, in sharp contrast to the work of a poet which cannot only capture action but also flourishes, rather than fades, with reuse.[55] Finally, while Theocritus *Idyll* 15 celebrates the beauty of an embroidered tapestry, the poem's attention to the tapestry is relatively short in comparison to the hymn to Adonis that follows. As Männlein-Robert concludes, "die Ekphrasis des Wandteppichs lediglich als fragmentarische Hinführung, Präludium oder als Rahmen für das eigentliche Adonisbild dient, das im Medium des Liedes bildhaft beschreiben wird." Thus, while evoking the beauty of visual art, ekphrastic poetry is also keen to assert the superiority of the written form, presenting its readership with an "*agon* of the arts" (*Agon der Künste*).[56]

This agonistic quality of ekphrastic verse is also implicitly present in many of the epigrams explored in this paper. For instance, while the pervasive metaphorical use of oral language to describe visual signification in *Anth.Pal.* 7.421–429 on one level celebrates the communicative power of visual signs, it also serves as an implicit and ironic reminder of the actual silence of the visible object, which is only conjured into communication by the words of the poet.

In presenting a contrast between verbal and visual communi-

[53] *Brill's Companion* 256.

[54] *Brill's Companion* 259

[55] Männlein-Robert, *Stimme, Schrift und Bild* 306.

[56] *Stimme, Schrift und Bild* 293, 291.

cation, therefore, Ezekiel is drawing on a theme that is already inherent in the Hellenistic ekphrastic form. What is original about his ekphrastically-inspired scene is not the conflict between verbal and visual ways of communication itself, but rather the way in which he remodels and redirects this tension for religious ends.

4.2. *Ezekiel's adaptation of the Hellenistic "agon of the arts"*

In the burning bush scene, Ezekiel refashions the ekphrastic "*agon* of the arts" in three significant and related ways.

Firstly, the supremacy of words over visions as the means of the transmission and propagation of divine knowledge is made absolute. While many Hellenistic poems explicitly or implicitly do express the superiority of the verbal over the visual, the vitality of these works turns on such a an artistic *agon* being a close-run thing. Erinna, for example, may assert that without a voice a statue cannot be "the complete Agatharchis" (*Anth.Pal.* 6.352), but equally the lack of a voice is presented as the *only* deficiency in the visual artwork. In the Hellenistic poems we have been exploring, art and poetry constantly jostle for preeminence, and function as close competitors for supremacy, even if poetry is ultimately vindicated as victorious. Indeed, one of the most impressive features of such poetry is its ability to evoke the impact of a visual object on a viewer, even if ultimately, one way or another, the poem itself is seen as the greater work of art.

In Ezekiel, by contrast, there is no ongoing interplay between visual and verbal communication. Unlike Posidippus' Kairos or Hermes in Callimachus' *Iamb.* 9, God does not refine, assist, or correct Moses' visual interpretation of the bush. Rather, he puts a stop to his visual approach altogether. The ongoing tension between visual and verbal signification that ekphrastic poetry plays out is forestalled by God's command to Moses to "come no closer." Moses' initial visual approach is simply *replaced* by God's insistence on verbal communication. Indeed, this insistence means that the ekphrastic character of the scene cannot continue any further. In place of the expected moment of

virtuosic interpretation, Moses is reduced to taking dictation in a series of lines that emphasise the importance of listening to and faithfully reproducing words.

Secondly, the categorical nature of the promotion of verbal over visual communication is reinforced by the unequal power dynamics of this scene. The relationship between viewer and viewed in the Hellenistic poems is presented as one of relative equality, even when one of the interlocutors is divine. Where conversations are imagined, the two parties engage in discursive questions and answers. Here, by contrast, God not only interrupts Moses' initial approach, but engages with him principally through imperatives: "stay back, do not approach, be bold, listen, go, tell." This power dynamic strengthens the categorical supremacy of verbal over visual communication, as the visual approach is associated with the weaker character of Moses, while the verbal approach is associated with the supremely authoritative character of God.

That this categorical assertion of the superiority of verbal communication is placed in the mouth of God also has the effect of grounding the conflict between the verbal and the visual in the religious, rather than the artistic sphere. The ironies and asides of Hellenistic ekphrastic poems suggest that different forms of representation are to be valued based on their intrinsic communicative power. Here, however, God's command overrides such artistic judgments. His power to communicate through words alone is based not on any inherent artistic power of the verbal, but on the very particular nature of the God of Israel, whose invisibility is accompanied by a purely verbal form of communication. The preference for verbal over visual signification in this scene is a religious, not an aesthetic, judgment.

Finally, unlike the Hellenistic "*agon* of the arts," Ezekiel's assertion of the superiority of verbal rather than visual communication is limited in its scope. Unlike the poems which assert the supremacy of the verbal over the visual as a matter of general principle, in Ezekiel this supremacy is associated solely with the way in which God communicates with mortals. This is made

apparent by the way in which the assertion of the categorical superiority of verbal communication coexists with a heavy emphasis on visual spectacle elsewhere in the play.

4.3. *A verbal deity and the spectacular in the Exagoge*

Ezekiel's interest in the spectacular has long been recognised.[57] Indeed, the elaborate nature of some of his stage effects has led some scholars to doubt whether the play could ever have been conceived for performance at all, an argument which is rejected by Jacobson and Lanfranchi.[58] In addition to the impressive sight of the burning bush itself, the same scene goes on to show the audience Moses' leprous hand and, perhaps most impressively of all, his staff in some sense turning into a snake. The astonishing appearance of the latter is marked by God's use of the language of wonder and amazement (δράκων γὰρ ἔσται φοβερός, ὥστε θαυμάσαι, the staff "will become a terrifying snake, so that you will be amazed," *Exagoge* 123), a familiar aspect of Hellenistic visual description (as discussed above), and the exclamations and highly emotional reaction of Moses (124–126):

> ἰδοὺ βέβληται· δέσποθ', ἵλεως γενοῦ·
> ὡς φοβερός, ὡς πέλωρος· οἴκτειρον σύ με·
> πέφρικ' ἰδών, μέλη δὲ σώματος τρέμει.
>
> Look, I've thrown it down. Lord, have mercy! How terrifying, how monstrous! Have pity on me! I tremble to look at it! My body's limbs are shaking!

This interest in the spectacular is also evident in the evocative descriptions of sights off-stage that are reported by the charac-

[57] Lanfranchi, in *Greek Tragedy after the Fifth Century* 130–131, makes the significant point that Alexander Polyhistor's own interest in the paradoxical makes it likely that he deliberately excerpted the most strange and unusual parts of the play. This important qualification means that we should not assume that the focus on wonders found in our fragments would also have been found throughout the lost parts of the work. Nevertheless, the extant material alone contains enough emphasis on the wonderous to identify visual spectacle as a significant feature of the play overall.

[58] Howard Jacobson, "Two Studies on Ezekiel the Tragedian," *GRBS* 22 (1981) 167–178, at 167–175; Lanfranchi, in *Greek Tragedy after the Fifth Century* 142–143.

ters. These include the description of the Phoenix (254–269), a "marvelous display of descriptive prowess,"[59] the idyllic description of the oasis at Elim (243–253), and the vivid one of the opposing Egyptian and Israelite forces at the Red Sea (193–219), which substantially develops the visual aspects of the Biblical narrative.

These impressive visual effects, both staged and reported, indicate that Ezekiel is able and willing to produce a dramatic spectacle which satisfies the visual expectations both of classical tragedy[60] and indeed of later tragedy, which may well have placed greater emphasis on dramatic visual effects.[61]

The heavy interest in the spectacular in Ezekiel's play indicates that his promotion of the verbal over the visual in this scene was not a matter of general artistic principle or preference. Rather this promotion is unusual within Ezekiel's own work. Indeed, the sharp contrast between the priority attached to the verbal here and the celebration of visual spectacle elsewhere in the play serves to emphasise the distinctively religious motivation of Ezekiel's departure from ekphrastic precedent at this key moment, when the character of God himself 'appears' for the first time. While Hellenistic attitudes to visual spectacle may be acceptable for much of his drama, the representation of the God of Israel demands a break with Hellenistic poetic and cultural convention.

One scene that may seem initially to challenge this reading is the throne vision and its interpretation (lines 68–89). Here

[59] Tim Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic: Adventures in Greek Postclassicism* (Berkeley 2013) 226.

[60] For a brief overview of the importance of spectacle to Attic tragedy see Froma Zeitlin, "The Artful Eye: Vision, Ecphrasis and Spectacle in Euripidean Theatre," in *Art and Text* 138–196. Indeed, coincidentally or otherwise, the word that Ezekiel uses to refer to what God cannot provide on stage, ὄψις ("vision"), is the same word that Aristotle uses to assert the *necessary,* if not the most poetically valuable, visual aspect of a Greek tragedy (*Poet.* 6.5).

[61] See Simon Hornblower, "Hellenistic Tragedy and Satyr-Drama; Lycophron's *Alexandra*," in *Greek Tragedy after the Fifth Century* 90–124, at 93–94.

Moses does indeed speak of the appearance of a "noble mortal" (φῶτα γενναῖον, 70) enthroned on the top of Sinai, and describes a vision that includes the cosmos and the procession of the stars. This vision is then interpreted by Raguel in language reminiscent of the opening of the burning bush scene. The vision "signifies" (ἐσήμηνε⟨ν⟩, 83) good for Moses. The enthronement signifies his future kingship and his superior knowledge, which is described in the language of sight, "you will *see* (ὄψει) that which is, that which was before, and that which shall come after" (89). However, while the lack of context around this scene makes it difficult to interpret, what is noteworthy are the several ways in which the scene distances itself from a full endorsement of the use of the visual to make contact with and learn about God.

Most obviously, the entire vision of Moses is presented as a frightening dream, rather than as existing within the world of the play.[62] Secondly, despite the heavenly location on the top of Sinai, not only is no clear mention made of a divine appearance, but the character on the throne in Ezekiel is explicitly described as a "mortal," despite his enormous stature and despite the scene's parallels with other Jewish texts that do suggest a divine encounter.[63] Finally, and most significantly, the visual interpretation of the dream is given by a non-Jewish character. Indeed, as Jo-Ann Brant has argued, Ezekiel presents Raguel as a character who wrongly draws on Hellenistic, rather than Jewish, interpretative traditions, which leads him to an erroneous understanding of Moses' future.[64]

4.4. *Summary*

God's response to Moses in the burning bush scene represents both a dramatic departure from the usual form of a Hellenistic viewing scene and also an original development of one of the pervasive themes of ekphrastic poetry. God's command to

[62] Jacobson, *ICS* 6 (1981) 277–279.

[63] Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 91–92.

[64] Jo-Ann A. Brant, "Mimesis and Dramatic Art in Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagoge*," in *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative* (Leiden 2005) 129–147, at 139–141, 145.

"stop" prevents Moses' early observations developing into the kind of virtuosic interpretation a learned audience might have expected in this poetic context. In its place, God's assertion of the supremacy of verbal communication alone draws on a tension between visual and verbal art forms that is repeatedly explored in Hellenistic verse. However, Ezekiel has developed this "*agon* of the arts" in a number of distinctive ways. Unlike the closely-matched contests of ekphrastic poetry, where poetry outstrips art, but only just, and in which the expressive power of the visual is also celebrated, here the victory of the verbal is absolute. Furthermore, the superiority of verbal over visual expression is associated not with the relative merits of different forms of representation *per se,* but with specific religious convictions about the particular and distinctive nature of the God of Israel. This is borne out by the fact that other parts of the play show an interest in visual spectacle as strong as that found in non-Jewish Hellenistic literature.

Moses' approach to the bush leads the audience to expect a moment of visual interpretation. God's explicit rejection of this approach replaces the ekphrastic interplay of visual and verbal communication with the assertion of a strong disjunction between these forms of knowing, and with the assertion that knowledge of the Jewish God is to be obtained through the oral/aural sense alone. This literary move, which draws on ekphrastic form and themes only to disrupt and, ultimately, undermine them, represents a sophisticated poetic means of articulating the distinctive religious position of a Jewish author writing a religious play in a Hellenistic context. For in promoting the verbal over the visual, Ezekiel here is constructing from Hellenistic poetic forms a distinctive hierarchy of the senses which challenges that found in non-Jewish writings about the divine.

5. *The visual and the verbal in Hellenistic and Jewish culture*

5.1. *The visual sense in Hellenistic religion*

Ezekiel's reshaping of the ekphrastic form to emphasise his downgrading of the importance of the sense of sight in this scene of divine encounter has profound religious connotations in his

Hellenistic context. In Greek religion, 'seeing' was central to contact with the divine in a very wide range of contexts. At its most intense, direct divine contact with human beings was often cast in visual terms. For, as Verity Platt has noted, while in a few cases "epiphanies can be sonic (and even olfactory) as well as visual … the visual sense tends to predominate in Greek epiphanic discourse."[65] The importance of the visual is also found in the "epiphanic and emotional heights"[66] of the ἐποπτεία[67] (itself a word with visual connotations) of the mysteries. Vision was also key to the more everyday practice of visiting a temple, in which "the most insistent, direct, and powerful means of experiencing divine encounter, was by viewing a physical image that served as the object of cult, usually a statue displayed in a prominent position."[68] In the words of Lucian, it is in this moment of seeing that the god seems to come alive, and a living connection is established (*Syr.D.* 32):

> καὶ ἄλλο θωυμαστόν ἐστιν ἐν τῷ ξοάνῳ. ἢν ἑστεὼς ἀντίος ἐσορέῃς, ἐς σὲ ὁρῇ καὶ μεταβαίνοντι τὸ βλέμμα ἀκολουθέει·
> There is another wondrous feature in the statue. If you stand opposite and look directly at it, it looks back at you and as you move its glance follows.[69]

This visual aspect of worship was portrayed in tragedy as early as the fifth century BCE. In Euripides' *Andromache*, for example, a group of pilgrims spend three days in viewing the sanctuary before making offerings (1086–1088). Likewise, in *Ion*, the chorus' approach to the temple is marked by their enthusiastic viewing of the temple sculptures, which seem to come alive in

[65] Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge 2011) 10–11.

[66] J. Elsner, "Image and Ritual: Reflections on the Religious Appreciation of Classical Art," *CQ* 46 (1996) 515–531, at 518.

[67] See Ian Rutherford, "*Theoria* and *Darśan*: Pilgrimage and Vision in Greece and India," *CQ* 50 (2000) 133–146, at 139.

[68] Platt, *Facing the Gods* 77; cf. J. Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton 2007) 22–24.

[69] Cf. Elsner, *Roman Eyes* 19.

their vivid descriptions (184–218).[70] Furthermore, as Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis points out, the viewing of religious artefacts in shrines often involved just the same kind of interpretative processes that we have seen at play in poetic depictions of vision: "the display of exegetical inscriptions next to thank-offerings in the sanctuaries invited viewers to read narratives into images with the guidance of the texts. Priests and guides may also have helped pilgrims to interpret the thank-offerings."[71]

It is unsurprising, therefore, that sight also provides the dominant language for the philosophical contemplation of the divine. For Aristotle, "sight of God" is the *summum bonum* which is the criterion which governs the worth of all decisions: ἥτις οὖν αἵρεσις … ποιήσει μάλιστα τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ θεωρίαν … αὕτη ἀρίστη ("therefore, whichever method of choosing leads to the greatest vision of God, that is the best," *Eth.Eud.* 8.3.16, 1249B.16–20). Likewise, in Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima's description of the ascent of the soul repeatedly makes use of the language of sight (210C–E):[72]

> ἵνα ἀναγκασθῇ αὖ θεάσασθαι τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλὸν καὶ τοῦτ᾽ ἰδεῖν ὅτι πᾶν αὐτὸ αὑτῷ συγγενές ἐστιν … ἵνα ἴδῃ αὖ ἐπιστημῶν κάλλος … βλέπων πρὸς πολὺ … ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ πέλαγος τετραμμένος τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ θεωρῶν … ἕως ἂν … κατίδῃ τινὰ ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην, ἥ ἐστι καλοῦ τοιοῦδε.
>
> So that he may be made to *observe* the beauty in practices and laws, and *see* that this beauty is all akin … so that he may indeed *see* the beauty of areas of study … *gazing* at beauty in many forms …

[70] Cf. Rutherford, *CQ* 50 (2000) 138; Zeitlin, in *Art and Text* 147–152. For connections between this scene and later Hellenistic viewing scenes see Männlein-Robert, *Stimme, Schrift und Bild* 261–264.

[71] Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, "The Body in Space: Visual Dynamics in Graeco-Roman Healing Pilgrimage," in J. Elsner et al. (eds.), *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford 2007) 183–218, at 207.

[72] For the argument that *theoria* provides a justification for the entire philosophical project see Andrea Wilson Nightingale, "The Philosopher at the Festival: Plato's Transformation of Traditional *Theōria*," in *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity* 151–182.

> turning to and *looking at* the whole sea of beauty … until he *catch sight of* one such study, which is the study of such a beauty [as I shall go on to describe].

The central importance of this connection between vision and the divine in Greek thought and practice is summed up in the "false (but telling) etymology by which *theoria* and *theates* (spectator) were related to *theos* (god)."[73]

In the Hellenistic age the notion that one could engage with a god through the visual sense provided the stimulus for much poetic creativity. As Verity Platt has explored in an extended study of this theme in Callimachus' *Hymn to Athena* and in Hellenistic epigrams related to images of Aphrodite,[74] a range of poems explored the link between the viewing of a cult image and a vision of the goddess herself (175, 190–192, 201), the dangers and taboos inherent in these visual encounters (11), the link between viewing and eroticism (183–186), and the limitations of and frustrations caused by such forms of viewing (193–199, 203–211). The very volume of this material, and the repeated thematization of the possibilities and problematics involved in the viewing of a divine image, demonstrates not only the central importance of the visual sense in Hellenistic religion, but also its significance as a popular topic for exploration by Ezekiel's non-Jewish poetic contemporaries.

In this Greek context, in which the visual approach to the divine was a key component of religious practice and philosophical writing, and the subject of considerable poetic fascination,[75] the complete subordination of the visual to the verbal in Ezekiel's scene, which goes far beyond his Biblical source, is a striking poetic contribution to this discourse.

In place of the centrality of the visual in Hellenistic religious practice, philosophical speculation, and ekphrastic poetry,

[73] Platt, *Facing the Gods* 11.

[74] *Facing the Gods* 170–211.

[75] For the "careful ambiguity between cult statue and living deity" that features in a number of Greek stories of contact with the divine, see Platt, *Facing the Gods* 11–12 with nn.43–44.

Ezekiel proposes a distinctively verbal theological epistemology. Knowing God, Ezekiel claims in this scene, relies not on a form of visual apprehension, or even interpretative ability, but on the faithful transmission of *words* from God to Moses to Aaron to Pharaoh and the Israelites, and, as the expression θεῖος λόγος perhaps implicitly suggests, to the Scriptures and Ezekiel's Jewish contemporaries.[76] It is an alternative epistemology that has its roots in aspects of early Jewish literature and religious practice.

5.2. *The significance of the verbal in ancient Judaism*

Philo's visual interpretation of the burning bush is related to his confidence in the spiritual and epistemological value of the visual sense that is very similar to that found in the non-Jewish Greek texts we have just explored. In *De Abrahamo* Philo states that sight is "the most beautiful" (57) and the "the truest" (60) of the senses.[77] In particular, it is superior to "untrustworthy and unsound hearing" (60). Furthermore, as in Plato and Aristotle, *sight* of God is to be identified as the highest form of blessedness (58):

> ὅτῳ δὲ μὴ μόνον ἐξεγένετο τἄλλα ὅσα ἐν τῇ φύσει δι᾽ ἐπιστήμης καταλαμβάνειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν πατέρα καὶ ποιητὴν τῶν συμπάντων ὁρᾶν, ἐπ᾽ ἄκρον εὐδαιμονίας ἴστω προεληλυθώς· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀνωτέρω θεοῦ, πρὸς ὃν εἴ τις τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα τείνας ἔφθακε, μονὴν εὐχέσθω καὶ στάσιν.
>
> But whoever is not only able to apprehend by knowledge all that is in nature, but also able to *see* the father and creator of all, may he know that he has come to the peak of blessedness. For nothing is higher than God. If anyone has already managed to extend the *eye* of his soul to him, let him pray simply to remain and abide in that state.

Philo's emphasis here on the supremacy of sight over speech, however, was not necessarily a view shared by all Hellenistic Jews. The reverence for the "word," the λόγος, in spoken and written texts, as a medium for the reception and communication

[76] For the use of θεῖος λόγος to refer to the Scriptures see Philo *Somn.* 1.190.

[77] For a similar formulation see Arist. *Metaph.* 980a.

of divine knowledge is expressed in a range of Second Temple Jewish writings. Time and again in the book of Jubilees, for instance, "revelation happens through an ideal figure's encounter with a written text, a text that must be written again (with divine aid) and passed down."[78] Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, Levi, and Moses, in Jubilees (if not in the Pentateuch) *all* write texts to communicate knowledge of the divine. In Jubilees this written knowledge is fully compatible with visions of the divine. However, as Mroczek points out (99), this scribal presentation of ancient figures serves to legitimise the contemporary practice of textual transmission, a practice which could replace direct vision as a source of revelatory insight:

> The enthronement of the scribe as an ideal, divinely inspired figure, and the elevation of scribal activity to Sinai, shows that a text-centred tradition does not imply that revelation has ceased. Rather, transcribing, collecting, and presenting revelation is itself revelatory.

The importance of spoken words and written texts to the Jewish understanding of divine revelation was not limited to a highly literate scribal elite, but was also deeply embedded in the religious experience of ordinary diaspora Jews through the institution of the synagogue in Ezekiel's own religious context.

If the consensus that locates Ezekiel in Egypt is correct, the author inhabited a land which gives us the earliest reliable evidence for synagogue worship. As Gruen points out, an inscription in Arsinoe-Crocodilopolis attests a synagogue (*proseuche*) as early as the reign of Ptolemy III (246–221 BCE),[79] and a papyrus attests the existence of another in Alexandrou Nesos by 218 BCE.[80] By the early first century CE Philo could present the

[78] Eva Mroczek, "Moses, David and Scribal Revelation: Preservation and Renewal in Second Temple Jewish Textual Traditions," in George J. Brooke et al. (eds.), *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden 2008) 91–115, at 99.

[79] *I.Jud.Egypt* 117.

[80] *CPJ* I 129. See Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greek and Romans*

proseuche as an essential component of life in Jewish communities throughout Egypt.[81]

The range of activity taking place in a synagogue seems to have been rather diverse. However, there seems little reason to doubt Philo's assertion that the reading of sacred texts and their interpretation was at the centre of their sacral function,[82] along with a multitude of spoken prayers. For any practicing Jew in Egypt, therefore, the worship of the synagogue itself (whatever its exact form) may have reinforced the sense we find in literary works like Jubilees that Jewish contact with the divine had a strong verbal dimension.

In the *Letter of Aristeas*, a work of a similar date and geographical and cultural provenance to Ezekiel, the Septuagint text itself is explicitly presented in ways that in the Hellenistic world are more commonly associated with visual divine images and rites. Following the translation, for instance, the reading of the text takes centre-stage in a public gathering of the Jewish community (308–310),[83] and provokes awe in King Ptolemy when he hears it (λίαν ἐξεθαύμασε, 312),[84] leading him to make a prostration.[85] The books themselves are to be protected and treated with holy care (317–318, cf. 177),[86] and any who profane the text can

(London 2002) 106–107, and Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven 2005) 75–82.

[81] Philo *In Flacc.* 48–49; cf. Gruen, *Diaspora* 68 with n.109.

[82] Philo *Vit.Mos.* 2.216; cf. Gruen, *Diaspora* 116.

[83] Cf. the centrality of statues to public festivals in the Greek world, and the increased interest in the carrying of divine statues in processions in the Ptolemaic context: Angelos Chaniotis, "The Life of Statues of Gods in the Greek World," *Kernos* 30 (2017) 91–112, at 94–95.

[84] Cf. the ability of cult statues to provoke *thauma*: Platt, *Facing the Gods* 106–108, cf. 90.

[85] On the gesture see Chaniotis, *Kernos* 30 (2017) 100–101, 106–107. Cf. Ps-Luc. *Amores* 16.

[86] Statues so treated, Chaniotis, *Kernos* 30 (2017) 94–95, 100–101, 106–107.

expect divine punishment (314–316).[87]

5.3. *Summary*

Ezekiel's use of a categorical opposition between the visual and the verbal to construct a distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish attitudes to the divine, therefore, has a background in the differing religious cultures of Ezekiel's Greek and Jewish contemporaries.

Philo's commitment to the superiority of sight, and Greek interest in non-visual forms of epiphany, prevent an over-simplistic schematic association of Hellenism with visuality and Judaism with textuality. Nevertheless, the importance given to words as a *locus* of revelation alongside, or, in some cases, in place of visual objects, in at least some aspects of Jewish life, and the importance given to seeing in Greek religion, provide Ezekiel with the cultural raw materials out of which he constructs the sensory opposition of this scene.

Moses initially appears in the guise of a conventional Hellenistic viewer. He approaches the bush expecting to be able to interpret what he sees to decode the message the bush brings. This visual approach is rebuffed by the character of God himself, who insists on the use of verbal communication alone, a sensory hierarchy which has a background in Jewish, rather than Greek, attitudes to the relationship between the senses and the divine.

The dichotomy this scene creates between visual and verbal ways of knowing is explicitly linked to the distinctive nature of this particular God, and is the reason why the ekphrasis suggested in the opening lines of the scene cannot proceed to its

[87] For the parallels with the profanation of the Greek mysteries see Benjamin G. Wright III, *The Letter of Aristeas* (Berlin 2015) 447. Compare the well-known story of a young man who committed suicide after attempting intercourse with the Aphrodite of Knidos (Ps-Luc. *Amores* 15–17). A parallel with the Theodektes who was punished for using material from the scriptural text in his play (*Letter* 316) is Aeschylus, who was accused of profaning the Eleusinian mysteries in his tragedies. For the story of Aeschylus and its sources see Renaud Gagné, "Mystery Inquisitors: Performance, Authority, and Sacrilege at Eleusis, *ClAnt* 28 (2009) 211–247, at 220.

conventional interpretative conclusion. If the vitality of ekphrasis turns on the ongoing rivalry between visual and verbal modes of signification, the categorical supremacy of the verbal in this passage marks an end to the Hellenistic possibility of a divine ekphrasis. The interplay of the visual and the verbal, essential to ekphrastic verse, is replaced by a heavy emphasis on the importance of the transmission of words alone.

5.4. *Comparison with Palladas*

Ezekiel's manipulation of the poetics of ekphrasis to explore his religious distinctiveness as an author can be better understood by a comparison with a much later poet, for whom ekphrastic encounters with the divine are used to articulate his own sense of religious difference from his surroundings.

A series of poems by the fourth-century CE Palladas, written in the voice of a "non-Christian … schoolteacher," reflect on the significance of the statues of his gods which have been defaced or dishonourably relocated by "Christian zealots."[88] One poem presents the transformation of a statue of Eros into a frying pan as appropriate, "since that also burns you" (*Anth.Pal.* 9.773); a statue of Tyche now installed in a pub represents only too powerfully the fickleness of fortune for which the goddess stands (9.180–183; Bing 331–333); and a statue of Heracles pulled to the ground is interpreted by the god himself in a dream as representing his ability "though a God [to] serve the times" (9.441; Bing 330).

Bing focusses on the "witty" and "rueful" (330) nature of these poems. It is also possible, however, to see a significant degree of religious defiance and assertiveness in these verses. The very fact that the statues in their humiliated state can still convey significant meaning visually, and can still be virtuosically interpreted in a coherent way in the style of Hellenistic ekphrasis, suggests they have an ongoing power. The fact that Eros has been turned

[88] Peter Bing, "Ecphrasis and Iconoclasm: Palladas' Epigrams on Statues," in M. Kanellou et al. (eds), *Greek Epigram from the Hellenistic to the Early Byzantine Era* (Oxford 2019) 324–338, at 324 and 328.

into the form of a frying pan—when well interpreted—serves as a reminder that Eros is still powerful: he still burns! For Palladas, the very act of ekphrasis, the act of making sense from these disfigured statues, is a sophisticated way of acknowledging the power of the Greek gods who continue to communicate through their traditional visual means of signification, even as they come under attack.

The poems of Palladas, therefore, share Ezekiel's move of reframing the artistic *agon* of Hellenistic ekphrasis to explore religious difference, but to the opposite effect. In Palladas the ongoing signifying power of the visual, celebrated in ekphrastic verse, vindicates the ongoing power of the visually-oriented Greek deities and their statues. In Ezekiel, by contrast, the emphatic *impossibility* of interpretative ekphrasis in the burning bush scene, the denial of signifying power to the visual sense, articulates the distinctive sensory hierarchy which marks the distinctiveness of the God of Israel from the Greek deities. An ironic appropriation of the language of Greek theophany emphasises Ezekiel's point. While in epiphanies in the Homeric Hymns, a visible light or beauty may flash forth (ἀπολάμπω) from the deity,[89] in Ezekiel the related verb ἐκλάμπω is used not of something visual but of the divine speech itself, a verbal form of revelation which is accessible not only to Moses, but, as the divine imperative to pass the words on suggests, to Aaron, the Israelites, and the readers of the Scriptures themselves.

6. *Conclusion*

Jane Heath's argument that Ezekiel was aware of Hellenistic modes of visuality is strengthened when his presentation of the burning bush, as well as the Phoenix, is taken into account. However, Heath's conclusion, that Ezekiel's indebtedness to Hellenistic visuality "[arose] seamlessly in the course of social interaction, when one pattern [came] to animate another,"[90] is

[89] See Platt, *Facing the Gods* 65, who quotes *Hymn.Hom.Dem.* 278–279, *Aph.* 174–175.

[90] Heath, *JThS* 57 (2006) 41.

incorrect. While such a conclusion might be justifiable in respect of the passages from Philo this paper has explored, the episode of the burning bush suggests that Ezekiel interacted with this aspect of Hellenistic culture in a much more deliberate and self-conscious way.

Rather than simply being inspired by Hellenistic poetry's attitude to the visual, Ezekiel deliberately adapts the agonistic character of ekphrastic verse to stage the conflict not between two art forms but between two different approaches to divine revelation. The contest between the visual arts and poetry presented in Hellenistic ekphrasis is remodeled into a contest between visual and verbal ways of encountering and knowing the divine, a contest in which, in this scene at least, God himself asserts the supremacy of words over visions.

This reshaping of the ekphrastic form draws on aspects of ancient Jewish belief and practice, and demonstrates the degree to which Ezekiel is not simply influenced by his Hellenistic surroundings, but able to manipulate and challenge their poetic and ideological conventions in order to present a culturally distinctive and original work. He is every bit as capable of staging viewing as Posidippus, Leonidas, or Theocritus. Yet, even as he asserts his *ability* to write as a Hellene, Ezekiel indicates his lack of *desire* to do so in the words of no less an authority than God himself: ἐπίσχες, ὦ φέριστε. To write Jewish literature, for Ezekiel, means not only being able to match the Hellenistic writers but also to be able carefully to differentiate one's work from theirs.

7. *Implications for Ezekiel's relationship with Greek culture*

On a superficial level, Ezekiel's decision to re-present the story of the Exodus in the Greek form of a tragedy would appear to be an act of assimilation. Whether scholars understand the work to be directed towards a Greek audience to increase their sympathy for their Jewish neighbours,[91] or towards the Jews them-

[91] Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 18.

selves,[92] Ezekiel's use of Greek poetic form appears at first to be designed to suggest and encourage a closeness between Jewish and Greek culture. However, when we explore the burning bush scene in detail, a different, and more subversive, picture emerges. For while we do find a shared poetic *topos* in the scene of viewing, this *topos* is carefully manipulated and redirected to construct and articulate a distinction between Jewish and Hellenistic approaches to the divine.

Ezekiel's use of one of the conventions of Greek literature serves to highlight what he suggests is a difference—rather than a similarity—between Greek culture and Judaism. A Hellenistic viewing scene is introduced, but then broken off to conclude with a discourse on the importance of verbal revelation alone. In this instance we see Ezekiel not so much moulding his Jewish story into Hellenistic forms, but deliberately breaking open and re-fashioning prestigious Hellenistic poetic forms to accommodate the distinctiveness of a Jewish God. Perhaps, for this ancient Jewish author at least, and for the highly literate Hellenistic Jewish audience that might have understood his poetic subtlety, the master's house can indeed be dismantled by the master's own tools.[93]

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[92] Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley 1998) 135.

[93] I would like to express my thanks to the editors and the anonymous reviewer of this piece for their helpful insights, advice, and assistance.