CHAPTER ELEVEN

PHILO, PSEUDO-PHILO, JOSEPHUS, AND THEODOTUS ON THE RAPE OF DINAH

1. Introduction

James Kugel\(^1\) has noted the danger in assuming that when one finds in the retelling of a biblical story in ancient literature details that are not present in the Bible one is justified in concluding that these details have been added by the author for merely ideological reasons or as a reflection of then-current events, since the author may simply be trying to solve a problem in the biblical text. However, we may suggest that there is often a pattern to such changes in the work of a given writer, particularly if we can surmise for what purpose and for what audience he is writing; and, if so, it is, indeed, more likely that the author has made these modifications in order to present a given point of view and to preach a lesson or to defend his people against attacks.

It is proposed here to examine several ancient accounts of the rape of Dinah and its consequences and to consider why those changes were made and whether the changes made by the authors follow a pattern found in their treatment of other biblical passages or whether they merely answer questions arising from the problems in a particular text.

2. The Biblical Account

One instance that seems to portray seeming Jewish brutality toward non-Jews is the revenge meted out by Simeon and Levi for the rape of their sister Dinah (Gen. 34). According to the biblical narrative, Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivvite, the prince of the region, saw Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and had relations with her (Gen.

\(^1\) Kugel 1992, 2.
He then became deeply attached to her and asked his father to arrange to have him marry her. Hamor spoke to Jacob and to Jacob’s sons asking them to give Dinah to Shechem and, in general, to have the Israelites intermarry with his people, offering to have them dwell among his people, to acquire property there, and to carry on business there (Gen. 34:8-10). Shechem then expressed a willingness to give whatever gifts they desired if only they would permit Dinah to marry him. Jacob’s sons answered him deceitfully because he (they [i.e., the Hivvites], according to the LXX) had defiled their sister. They (Simeon and Levi, specifically identified as the brothers of Dinah, according to the LXX) said that they could acquiesce only if all their males would be circumcised (Gen. 34:13-17), in which case the Israelites would intermarry with them. Hamor and Shechem, who was the most respected in his father’s household, agreed without delay and convinced their people to be circumcised, noting that thus all the possessions of the Israelites would be theirs.

On the third day after the circumcision, however, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi killed all the males of the Hivvites, including Hamor and Shechem and took Dinah home with them (Gen. 34:25-26). These sons of Jacob then proceeded to plunder the Hivvite city, seized all their wealth, and took captive their wives and children (the LXX omits the children, perhaps because of embarrassment at such behavior by Israelites) (Gen. 34:27-29). The fact that the biblical text speaks (Gen. 34:27) of the sons of Jacob as plundering the city “who had defiled their sister” indicates that the crime had been committed not merely by one person, Shechem, but by others as well, and this would presumably justify the mass execution of the inhabitants. Jacob then told Simeon and Levi that they had brought trouble upon him by making him odious to (the LXX adds the word “all,” perhaps to indicate that Jacob was so deeply upset by the fact that all the Hivvites had to pay for the act of what he apparently understood to have been by a single individual) the inhabitants of the land and expressed the fear that they would attack him. But they replied, “Should he treat our sister as a harlot?” At this point in the Bible we hear nothing further as to what action, if any, the neighboring tribes took.

2 “They” in the LXX, perhaps to indicate that the Hivvites generally countenanced the act of Shechem and thus shared in the responsibility for it.