CHAPTER FIVE

THE TEMPLE IN PHILO AND QUMRAN

5.1 PHILO AND QUMRAN AS COMPARATIVE SOURCES

The texts of Philo and those from Qumran have the advantage of being relatively more secure historical sources than the Gospel of John in several ways. One major methodological problem with a comparison between the Gospel of John and these other writings, apart from the differences of genre, is the fact that they did not originate at exactly the same period of time and do not describe the same historical events. Nevertheless, they all intersect in one way as they describe fairly similar events and institutions and they all have a kind of Jewish origin. While John and Philo certainly describe events of the first decades in the first century ce, the Qumran community probably refers to incidents more than 100 years before Philo.¹ Now, the Qumran community was probably not dissolved until the Jewish war against the Romans (66–71 ce), and since their texts were apparently in use until then, the writings found at Qumran are of essential interest for the historical study of Philo and the Gospel of John too.² Most probably, the final version of the Gospel of John was written at a time after the Jewish war and when the temple was destroyed, but it reflects both contemporary and former incidents. It is essential for a discussion of the redactional or community level that all of the three groups of writings most probably were in use in the second half of the first century. Negatively or positively then, these text-corpora may be looked upon as reflecting

¹ ‘Describe’ i.e. indirectly, since there are no real history writings among the extant Qumran manuscripts. If we accept the Qumran-Essene connection and the traditional explanation on the origin and history of the scrolls, there were Essenes at Qumran until the Roman war against the Jews. This scholarly consensus that emerged during the years after the discoveries of the scrolls, is largely today still accepted, see e.g. Brooke (1999b:69).
² According to a well-accepted thesis on the Qumran findings. Vermes (1995:xxxiii) argues that the Qumran discoveries are beneficiary particularly for the student of the history of Palestinian Judaism in the period 150 BCE–70 CE. See also the analysis of the Qumran writings below.
practices and beliefs of Judaism(s) in the first century, a fact that further strengthens the historical and sociological value of a comparison.

As stated by several scholars, the significance of Philo for the study of John is not so much the possibility of a direct influence on the early church or the New Testament writers themselves, as in his bearing witness to a particular trend in Jewish milieu as well as Jewish exegesis and life at approximately the same time as the historical Jesus, the object of John’s story. The attitude of Philo towards the temple is naturally closely linked to his views on other practices and beliefs of Judaism of his time and place, the Mosaic Law in general or in connection with special issues such as Sabbath and circumcision. There is also a connection between the stated attitudes towards the temple and towards the city of Jerusalem, including temple related subjects such as worship, priests, feasts or festivals, and pilgrimage. The statements concerning the temple therefore represent a suggestive part of Philo’s attitude to his ancestral traditions generally (see Borgen 1992a). The Philonic corpus covers a broad range of ideas related to the temple that reveal temple attitudes. It also contains several statements concerning social relations like named ‘others’, and as in the Gospel of John, these statements are often linked to a discussion of places of worship, as will be shown.

It has been broadly discussed whether Philo was a loyal Jew in spite of the influence of Greek language, philosophy and culture in Alexandria (see e.g. Dodd 1953:54). A common opinion today is that he identified not only with ‘Athens’, but with ‘Jerusalem’ as well (Borgen 1997:25). A distinction between Jewish and Greek traditions in his writings is very difficult to draw and can only be seen from an analytical point of view. As soon as one starts to discuss particular issues, one seems to find both Jewish and Greek heritage. Only in an analytical perspective may Philo be looked upon as someone

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3 Several scholars have identified common features and concepts between the two collections of writings. Dodd (1953:54ff) stresses that there is a real affinity between the two writers, John and Philo, in their use of symbolism. In his analysis of the use of Philo in the New Testament studies, Runia (1993a:83) points to the fact that the consensus of Johannine scholarship adopts a very cautious approach to the subject of the relation between Philo and John. Borgen (1996a:99) suggests that Philo may ‘exemplify Jewish traditions and thought-categories that are interpreted along different lines by him and by John’ and this is the method employed in this analysis as well. See also similar discussions in Scott (1995:58); Seland (1995a).