1. An error that is to be avoided when we talk about the rebirth of Platonism in the early Imperial age is thinking that it was a unified and systematic process, as if all the philosophers were working together in agreement on the codification of a single body of doctrines. Rather, to use an expression by Heinrich Dörrie, we do better to think of it as a battlefield, in which various images of Plato faced each other, not necessarily compatible one with another. A second complication is that this attempt to construct a systematic Platonism is not only an affaire de famille, the result of the exegetical work of Platonists engaged in reading Plato’s dialogues. No less important is the comparison with other schools of thought in the attempt to conquer a major role on the philosophical scene. And, as always, comparison also means contamination: the various images of Plato were enriched with elements taken from other schools or traditions, whether Pythagoreanism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism or Scepticism. It would therefore be more correct to speak of various Platonisms that start from similar problems and try to elaborate a coherent body of doctrines in order to conquer a central place on the philosophical scene of the period.

We need to bear these problems in mind when we consider the position of Philo of Alexandria, who was not a philosopher in the traditional sense, but a “philosophically oriented exegete” (Runia), who was very well acquainted with the philosophical language of the age (Nikiprowetzky)—not only its terminology, but also its concepts—and was able to use it for his own exegetical ends.¹ An ancient bon mot read ἦ Πλάτων φιλόσοφος ἦ Φίλων πλατωνίζεται:² effectively, even a superficial


reading of his writings reveals that Philo was extremely deeply-read in Plato. And not only Plato: his Platonic readings often reflect the influence of Platonist interpretations that were circulating in the early Imperial age. This was the philosophical tradition to which Philo was closest.3 But, more precisely, is it possible to clarify what type of Platonism he was most interested in? In this paper I want to analyse Philo’s testimony in relation to the new Pythagoreanizing Platonism, which had been circulating in Alexandria from the end of the 1st century BC.4 As we know, it is a particularly delicate problem on which it is difficult to reach incontrovertible conclusions. But at least on some points this type of analysis will allow us to clarify some underlying problems and the type of solutions that have been devised: in this sense Philo is an important testimony of Platonism in one of the most lively periods of its history. And at the same time this comparison will also allow us to show Philo’s competence and autonomy: he was not just slavishly assimilating other people’s doctrines, but proved capable of exploiting them brilliantly for his own objectives.

2. One of the most interesting texts for evaluating the spread of Platonic themes in the 1st century AD is certainly the *De opificio mundi*, particularly the opening section with its discussion of the ultimate principles of reality. After criticising those who impiously prefer the world, or the product, to its creator,5 Philo exalts Moses’ superiority, claiming:

[Moses] recognized that it is absolutely necessary that among existing things there is an activating cause on the one hand and a passive object on the other, and that the activating cause is the absolutely pure and unadulterated intellect of the universe, superior to excellence and super-

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3 As has now been shown by the researches of D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden 1986), and J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London 1996), 139–183 among others.

4 It is interesting to observe that this link was also recognised by Clement and other Christian writers, who refer to Philo as Pythagorean, the term being a sort of equivalent in this period for ‘Platonist’, cf. D.T. Runia, “Why does Clement of Alexandria call Philo ‘the Pythagorean’?”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 49 (1995), 1–22 and, more generally, M. Bonazzi, *Academici e Platonici. Il dibattito antico sullo scetticismo di Platone* (Milan 2003), 208–211.

5 The identity of these impious adorers of the cosmos is controversial. A.P. Bos, “Philo of Alexandria: a Platonist in the Image and Likeness of Aristotle”, *The Studia Philonica Annual* 10 (1998), 66–86, thinks of the Chaldeans, but perhaps F. Trabattoni “Philo *De opificio mundi* 7–12”, in M. Bonazzi–J. Opsomer (eds.), *The Origins of Platonism* (Leuven, forthcoming) is right to suggest that the target of the polemic is rather the Aristotelian tradition.