Much has been written on Philo’s allegorical interpretation of the Bible and numerous studies have shown the similarities as well as the differences between his exegesis and the Stoics’ allegorical method known in particular through Heraclitus’ *Homeric Problems*. Philo’s philosophical affinities with the Academy have been acknowledged to a growing extent and the connections between Philo’s allegorical interpretation and that of Middle or Neo-Platonic authors have therefore come under scrutiny as well. In his book *Homer the Theologian*, in particular, Robert Lamberton dedicates a few pages to Philo, and so does Luc Brisson in *Sauver les mythes*, albeit in a much briefer way; but more research needs to be done on that topic. In this article, I wish to analyse Philo’s affinities with the Neo-Platonic allegorical readings of Homer, and to show that even if several aspects of Philo’s allegorical reading of the Bible may be compared to the Stoic use of allegory, Philo can nevertheless be considered closer to the Neo-Platonic tradition of allegorical interpretation that will later be found under the pen of Porphyry, than to the Stoic one.

---

1 See Bréhier 1908: 37–39; Pépin 1958: 231–242; Amir 1984; Dawson 1992: 73–126; Dillon 1994; Long 1997 (in his view, Heraclitus was not a Stoic); Matusova 2010, who summarises the history of research and analyses in a very insightful way the problems raised by the theory of a Stoic influence on Philo’s allegorical exegesis. On the importance and the meaning of allegory in Stoicism, see in particular Lévy 2004, with a summary of recent debates. For a detailed analysis of Philo’s approach of Scriptures, including the way he combines allegorical interpretations with scholarly inquiries into textual problems, see Niehoff 2011.

2 Notably thanks to John Dillon, David Runia, and Carlos Lévy.

3 See in particular Dillon 1983. For a survey of these attempts among Philonic scholars, see Matusova 2010, 14–16. See also her illuminating analysis of the affinities between Aristobulus’ and Philo’s allegorical interpretation of the Bible and the tradition of the allegorical interpretation of the Orphic *hieroi logoi*, which is first found in the Derveni papyrus, as well as her comparison of Philo’s allegorical reading of the Bible with the allegorical interpretation of the Pythagorean symbols among Neo-Pythagorean or Neo-Platonic writers (on which see also below).

I shall first compare Philo’s and the Platonic school’s knowledge and use of Homer in the Roman period (I will use the term Platonist or Neo-Platonist in a broad sense to include both Pythagorising Platonists—such as Numenius—and Middle or Neo-Platonic writers such as the author of the *Anonymous Commentary to Plato’s Theaetetus*, Plutarch, Porphyry, Plotinus, etc.). Secondly, I shall compare a few characteristics of Philo’s allegorical exegesis of the Bible with the allegorical interpretation of the Homeric corpus in Neo-Platonic writings in general and in Porphyry’s *On the Cave of the Nymphs* in particular (even though the latter was of course written much later than Philo’s works).

I. Philo’s Knowledge and Use of Homer Compared to the Platonists’ Knowledge and Use of the Poet’s Works

Plato’s criticism of Homer and of poets in general is well known. The allegorical interpretation of Homer therefore did not develop first and foremost in the Academy, but it eventually did, maybe under the influence of Neo-Pythagoreanism. Plato himself engaged in the creation of myths, such as the myth of Er or the myth of the cave in the *Republic*, for instance. An allegorical interpretation of Platonic myths developed as well, and it was often combined with the allegorical interpretation of Homer. The use of Homer’s work for the purpose of interpreting Plato, of course, strongly differentiates the Neo-Platonic approach from that of the Stoics, as Heraclitus’ attacks against Plato in his *Homerics Problems* abundantly show.

The purpose of the Neo-Platonists’ exegesis of Homer was twofold: first, they defended Homer against a criticism that, with the passing of time, became increasingly Christian—a fact which led Neo-Platonists to defend Homer not only for the sake of the Homeric corpus but also in order to defend Greek pagan culture and religion in general. Second, Neo-Platonists used Homer in their attempt to explain Plato’s writings and to show the truth of his teaching.

Where does Philo stand in this regard?

---

6 See in particular the end of Book 2 in the *Republic*.
7 According to Diogenes Laertius (2.11), Metrodorus of Lampsacus (5th century B.C.E.) was the first to study Homer’s “physical doctrine.” Metrodorus apparently used physical allegory in connection with gods and heroes in the Homeric epic. See Long 1996: 61–62.