The hermeneutics of Philo and the Rabbis differ on various fundamental issues, most notably Philo’s dualistic assumptions about the hidden, spiritual meaning of the biblical text, which are not shared by the Rabbis. However, there are also significant similarities. These are not limited to shared themes and legal traditions, but encompass interpretive methods and tools, such as the citation of multiple interpretations and lumping together disconnected verses to reach the desired exegesis, as well as several specific techniques, etymologies, analogies and syllogisms.

Above all, Philo and the Rabbis seemed to have a very similar notion of the religious meaning of interpreting divine scripture. “It does not simply explain individual passages, but reconstructs the entire picture of God’s word. This is why, on the one hand there is breaking into pieces, and many are the ‘digressions’, the explanations, the references to other passages; on the other, there is a broadened reconstruction of the word that ‘manifests’ itself in the Bible, but which also has to be reconstructed in its hidden meanings, in its apparent repetitions and contradictions, via the many interpretative systems which are all valid in that they are all partial”. This recent scholarly description of Philo’s theory of interpretation could have been taken almost verbatim from an introduction to rabbinic midrash.

Assessments of interpretive techniques in any two corpora tend to embellish trivial similarities that are easily seen; the more important task is to search for fundamental hermeneutic assumptions. For example: both

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1 Research for this paper was generously funded by the Israel Science Foundation (41/09). The project, titled: “the Terminology of the tannaitic midrashim: Toward a Hermeneutic Lexicon”, is conducted with the assistance of two brilliant young scholars: Yael Fisch, from Tel Aviv University, and Amit Gvaryahu, from the Hebrew University.
Philo and the Rabbis have an interest in explaining scriptural repetitions and redundancies. In her study of biblical exegesis in Alexandria, Maren Niehoff states that: “Philo, like Aristarchus and other Biblical scholars, was sensitive to stylistic redundancies. While Aristarchus had noted especially redundant lines, unaware that they reflect the oral origin of the epic, Philo discusses mostly redundant words, which reflect—unknown to him—the underlying Hebrew”. As an example Niehoff cites Philo’s usage of the biblical idiom: *mot yumat* (Ex 21:21; translated literally in the LXX—*thanato thanatousto*—which does not make much sense in Greek) to demonstrate that there are two kinds of death: “some are dead while living, while some are alive while dead” (*Fuga* 54). Interestingly, Rabbi Akiva has a very similar homily regarding a parallel biblical redundancy: “That person shall utterly be cut off (*hikaret tikaret*, Num 15:31): *hikaret*—in this world; *tikaret*—in the world to come, so R. Akiva. R. Ishmael said to him: Because it also says: “That person shall be cut off” (*venichreta*; ibid., 15:30): am I to understand that there are three cuttings off in three worlds!? [Rather] what does scripture teach by *hikaret tikaret*? That Torah spoke in human language” (Sifre Numbers 112, 121).

Philo is interested in redundancies as an opportunity to demonstrate the necessity of allegory. As Niehoff convincingly shows, Philo took advantage of the textual sensitivities developed by Alexandrian homeric scholarship “to anchor allegory in the literal sense, thus hoping to convince his literalist readers of its plausibility”. In contrast, the tannaitic debate is about the problem of redundancy itself, regardless of its local, thematic implications. R. Ishmael certainly does not dispute the idea of “the world to come”, celebrated by R. Akiva, but only the ability to deduce it from the (alleged) repetition; according to him “Torah spoke in human language”. Biblical redundancies are a major issue in midrash, even in places where no ideological or thematic problems are apparent. In their independent

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7 Cf. Y. Ber. 2:2 (4:4); b. Ber. 18a; Ecc Rab. 9:5; “For the living know that they would die (Ecc 9:5)—these are the righteous that even when they are dead are called living; and the dead know nothing (ibid.)—these are the wicked that even when alive are called dead”.