PSEUDO-PHOCYLIDES ON THE AFTERLIFE: A REJOINDER TO JOHN J. COLLINS

BY

PIETER W. VAN DER HORST

Universiteit Utrecht

In a recent publication in one of the Supplements to this journal John Collins takes me to task for several statements I made in my Commentary on Pseudo-Phocylides of 25 years ago, especially as far as this Jewish author’s view of the afterlife is concerned. After having carefully studied Collins’ points of criticism, I had to come to the conclusion that most of them have little or no basis, as I will now demonstrate.

To begin with, I should state that the passage under discussion (vv. 103-115), in which this Jewish author sets out his view on the fate of the individual after death, is notoriously difficult and has given rise to very contradictory interpretations over the past 150 years. It is no wonder that one scholar speaks of “the unharmonized juxtaposition of contradictory ideas about afterlife” in this passage. Most scholars find it very difficult, if not impossible, to interpret these 13 lines as a systematic exposition of a consistent view on life after death, especially so since, inter alia, the author seems to defend the immortality of the soul as much as the resurrection of the body and, moreover, does not clarify the relations between body, soul, and spirit. Collins is less pessimistic, however. He concedes that Pseudo-Phocylides relied on traditional forms that “stand in some tension with each other” (85), but affirms at the

same time that he “strung them together in a way that achieved a measure of coherence” (85). It may well be the case that there is more unity and coherence to this passage than I and others have been able to see, but Collins’ arguments are sometimes far from convincing.

I will first deal with his objections to my translation of the first line of the passage. Vv. 103-104a καὶ τάχα δ’ ἐκ γαϊῆς ἐλπίζομεν ἐς φῶς ἐλθεῖν / λείψαν’ ἀποχωμένον was translated by me as follows: “For in fact we hope that the remains of the departed will soon come to the light again out of the earth.” His own translation is rather different: “And we hope that the remains of the dead will perhaps come to the light again out of the earth” (75). Collins firstly objects (twice, 75 and 79) that ‘in fact’ in my translation is without any basis in the Greek. That is not true. My translation is based upon the following considerations.

One has to make sense of καὶ . . . δὲ in the text. Usually this combination implies that the former particle denotes that something is added, and the latter that what is added is distinct from what precedes. But that does not make sense here. In the preceding line (102), the author has warned against disintegrating the human frame (most probably for anatomical purposes). What follows must give the reason for this prohibition. Just as in the immediately preceding lines (100-101), the reason given for his prohibition against disturbing graves is that it may stir up divine anger, so one would expect something similar here. There can be no doubt that the prohibition against disintegrating the human frame stands in a close relationship to the immediately following remark about the hope of the resurrection of the body. Because this bodily resurrection is hoped for, one should not dissect the human frame. So one expects a word like γὰρ here, not particles denoting that something is added and that what is added is different from what precedes. Now it is well-known that in Greek “δὲ is not infrequently used where the context admits, or even appears to demand, γὰρ.” Denniston lists dozens of examples, especially from poetry, and adds the observation that ancient scholia often observe: ὁ δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ γὰρ (δὲ is used instead of γὰρ). In other words, δὲ is the word indicating the causal connection that we need here. So much for δὲ, which is left untranslated by Collins. He does translate καὶ by ‘and’ whereas I render it by ‘in fact’ (which Collins says has no basis in the Greek text). Why this unusual translation?

---

5 Denniston, Particles, 169.
6 That Ps-Phoc. does not use γὰρ here may be metri causa.