

## PHILON OF ALEXANDRIA AND HIS ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

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Onița Burdeț, *Legum Allegoriae – Un posibil  
pattern al discursului exegetic iudeo-alexandrin*  
[*Legum Allegoriae – A possible pattern of  
Judeo-Alexandrian exegetical discourse*]  
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The work constitutes the doctoral dissertation of Onița Burdeț in the field of Old Testament Studies, composed under the guidance of Reverend Professor Ioan Chirilă, who also authored the foreword. This academic endeavor reflects a scholarly pursuit, guided by an esteemed mentor in the field. The book represents a thorough academic exploration of allegorical interpretation in Judeo-Alexandrian exegetical discourse, especially focusing on Philo of Alexandria. The book is structured into five main sections, each delving into different aspects of allegorical methods and their historical and thematic contexts. It examines the integration of Greek and Judaic teachings in Philo's work, the adoption and transformation of these patterns in various religious and philosophical traditions, and concludes with a synthesis of these insights, offering a unique perspective on the evolution of exegetical methods.

The book commences with a foreword, followed by acknowledgments and an introductory chapter that lays the groundwork for the subsequent study. In the first part, the focus is on fundamental concepts and methodologies, providing an in-depth examination of biblical allegory and its interpretation within Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian traditions. This section is predominantly centered on the notion of allegory in the Judeo-Alexandrian exegetical tradition. It probes into the use of allegory in holy scriptures, specifically examining its historical application in both Judeo-Christian and Greek philosophical contexts. A significant portion of this work is dedicated to highlighting the contributions of Philo of Alexandria, particularly his influential role in synthesizing Jewish teachings with Hellenistic philosophy, thus establishing a new paradigm in the field of exegetical discourse. This section of

the book also discusses the impact of Philo's allegorical interpretations and their significance in shaping later exegetical approaches in both Jewish and Christian contexts. In this chapter, the author presents an insightful analysis of Philo of Alexandria's position within ancient culture, emphasizing his pivotal role in the synthesis of Jewish religious tradition and Greek philosophy. The chapter underscores Philo's unique contribution to creating a fusion between Judaism and Hellenism, a topic that remains a point of scholarly debate. The author emphasizes for instance, that Peder Borgen's inquiry about Philo's categorical identity – whether he is a mystic, philosopher, or exegete – highlights the complexity of Philo's intellectual persona. The author adopts a balanced viewpoint, considering Philo as embodying elements of mysticism, philosophy, and exegesis. This perspective aligns with Erwin Goodenough's interpretation of Philo's thought as part of a broader Jewish mystical trend, albeit with an anti-rabbinic stance that often employs symbolism. However, the author also addresses the critiques of Goodenough's arguments, particularly the claim that his extensive work on Jewish symbols does not conclusively prove the existence of a uniform mystical trend in Judaism. This critique does not diminish Philo's mystical inclinations or his symbolic expressions, as the author clarifies. Furthermore, the chapter discusses M. Idel's counterarguments to Goodenough. Idel contends that Philo's use of symbolism and his mystical tendencies in allegorical discourse do not substantiate the existence of an ancient, mystical, anti-Jewish current developed by Philo. Thus, the author navigates through various scholarly opinions, presenting a nuanced understanding of Philo's intellectual legacy within the context of ancient culture, balancing his role as a mystic, philosopher, and exegete. The final part of this section discusses how Philo creates a unique pattern in his portrayal of Moses, connecting the prophet's experiences with those of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, such as Abraham and Noah. It delves into the three stages of Moses' prophetic experience, starting from his emotional responses to various situations, leading to a state of divine possession, and culminating in the utterance of prophetic oracles. The chapter also explores the idea that Moses' emotional states transformed into motives for entering a state of inspiration, highlighting the connection between emotional responses and the state of prophetic inspiration. This pattern of prophetic inspiration reveals the link between emotional states, the experience of inspiration, and Moses' declarations to his people. The divine possession experienced by Moses had a significant psychological impact, transforming him into a biblical character akin to a 'priestly

oracle,' comparable to figures in Greco-Roman sources like Sophocles, Virgil, Strabo, or Lucian. Furthermore, the book examines other biblical narratives used by Philo to exemplify the phenomenon of prophecy among the Jewish people, such as the crossing of the Red Sea, the prophecy about manna, the punishment of those who worshipped the golden calf, the rebellion and punishment of Korah, and Moses' final prophecy before completing his mission. In addition to Philo's portrayal of Moses, the book discusses the allegorical method and its reception in various contexts, such as Judaism and Hellenism, and its roots in the interpretation of Homeric poems and religious teachings. It also touches upon the influence of Stoicism and other philosophical traditions on allegorical interpretations

The second part focuses on Philo of Alexandria, a key figure in allegorical interpretation, examining his approach and influence. The author articulates a comparative analysis of the use of allegory in the Old Testament and parable in the New Testament, highlighting a significant shift in the stylistic and interpretative approaches within these scriptural texts. In the Old Testament, allegory is identified as the predominant stylistic device. This preference for allegory is linked to the Jewish tradition of Torah study and the specialized training of rabbis, which was essential for deciphering the allegorical meanings embedded in the scriptures. These allegorical interpretations were accessible primarily to those who underwent rigorous intellectual initiation in the study of Torah within schools and synagogues. In contrast, the New Testament marks a transition from the allegorical method to a parabolic approach, aligning with the Savior's hermeneutics. This shift reflects a more pedagogical character in the interpretation of sacred texts, moving away from the allegorical complexity of the Old Testament. The author acknowledges the enduring significance of allegory as a paradigm for scriptural exegesis, noting its widespread presence in Holy Scripture and its capacity to elevate the narrative style through concrete comparisons and metaphors. However, the author also points out that in the Old Testament, allegory can sometimes be perceived as vulgar or indecent, and not always suitable for conveying moral ideas. These so-called „imperfections” (page 43 and 64) in allegorical usage are seen as contributing to the narratives' plasticity and realistic character, hidden beneath the allegorical veil. Crucially, the author cautions against solely adhering to the allegorical interpretations of these texts, as this could transform the narratives into mythologies and significantly diminish their importance. The analysis thus suggests a balanced approach to understanding these scriptural texts, recognizing the value of both allegory

and parable in their respective contexts within the Old and New Testaments.

The third and fourth parts analyze the application of allegorical methods in Philo's treatises and broader Judeo-Christian discourse. In the analysis of Philo's works, the author explores the Judeo-Christian interpretations of New Testament writings, emphasizing the Jewish origins of most New Testament authors. These authors are culturally situated within the Hellenistic stream of thought, reflective of the broader context in which early Christian communities emerged. Notably, many of these communities were located within the territories of the Greco-Roman Empire. This geographical and cultural placement led to religious dissensions within these early Christian communities, particularly around practices like circumcision and Sabbath observance. These issues became points of contention, not only between Christians and Jews but also within Philo's own interpretations in relation to Judaism. Philo, in his works such as "De Specialibus Legibus" and "De Migratione Abrahami," argues in favor of circumcision and Sabbath observance. However, he also imbues these practices with symbolic meaning, thereby offering a nuanced perspective that blends traditional observance with allegorical interpretation. This scholarly examination sheds light on the complex interplay between cultural, religious, and geographical factors in the formation of early Christian doctrine and practice. It particularly highlights the role of Philo as a key figure in bridging Jewish traditions with the evolving Christian thought within the Hellenistic context.

The author makes a significant contribution to the field of biblical hermeneutics by identifying and exploring the concept of "pattern" in the context of Philo of Alexandria's allegorical exegesis. This innovative approach draws on Thomas Kuhn's idea of patterns in scientific communities, as outlined in his book "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions." The author applies this concept to the study of Philo's work, suggesting that Philo's writings represent a paradigmatic shift in the interpretation of biblical texts. By analyzing Philo's treatise "Legum Allegoriae," the author demonstrates how Philo merged elements from both Greek culture and religious Judaism, creating a new pattern that had a profound influence on Christian hermeneutics. This merging is evident in the way Philo incorporates Greek allegory with key symbols of religious Judaism, structuring them in Midrash-like patterns of questions and answers and adopting verses from the Septuagint as the basis for exegesis. Furthermore, the author argues that Philo's work transcends the conservative approach of the rabbinic community and the allegorical exegesis of the Hellenistic community, thereby

creating a new, influential pattern. This pattern combines oral elements, such as Greek rhetoric, with written traditions, establishing a comprehensive and universal exegetical discourse. The author's approach is particularly noteworthy for its interdisciplinary nature, applying concepts from the natural sciences to biblical hermeneutics. This cross-disciplinary method allows for a deeper understanding of Philo's impact as a paradigmatic figure who not only interpreted existing scientific knowledge but also laid down major interpretative lines for future works.

The final section discusses the reception and transformation of these methods in various intellectual traditions. The book concludes with a comprehensive bibliography, reflecting extensive research. This structure suggests a detailed and scholarly examination of allegorical interpretation, its historical development, and its impact on religious and philosophical thought.

The contribution of Onița Burdeț lies in identifying Philo of Alexandria as a paradigmatic figure in biblical hermeneutics, whose work represents a synthesis of Greek and Jewish elements, thereby creating a new pattern that profoundly influenced Christian interpretation of the scriptures. This approach opens up new perspectives in the study of biblical texts and their interpretation, highlighting the dynamic and evolving nature of hermeneutical practices.