Mit ihrer detailreichen und gründlichen Arbeit über die rhetorische Nutzung von Mythen, die gleichzeitig ihre politische Inanspruchnahme bedeutete, hat G. eine wichtige Facette der antiken 'Arbeit am Mythos' näher beleuchtet und damit einen bedeutenden Beitrag zur Mythenforschung geleistet.

Sabine Föllinger


The new commentary of Philo’s In Flaccum by P. van der Horst has been long awaited by Philo specialists and others, and this volume does not in any way disappoint. Van der Horst brings his extraordinary erudition to bear on one of Philo’s two ‘historical’ works (the other being Legatio ad Gaium), a treatise that is often considered the most engaging of all of Philo’s surviving writings. Here Philo departs from his usual intense allegorical exegesis of scripture to focus on the severe crisis in which he was embroiled in the year 38, when the ‘Greeks’ (Greek-acculturated Alexandrian citizens) used the weakness of a Roman governor as a means to launch a horrific series of attacks on Jewish property and Jews themselves.

Philo, while reporting the attacks, has as his primary focus this governor, Aulus Avilius Flaccus (c. 15–39 CE), who had been appointed as Praefectus Alexandriae et Aegypti in 32 CE and ranked as an amicus Caesaris. We find in this treatise not only an account of the ‘pogrom’, as vdH. defines it, but also a kind of psychological study of this unfortunate man; hence the title of the work, In Flaccum, ‘On Flaccus’. Philo’s purpose seems to be to show that even though Flaccus had mental problems he could not be deemed ‘insane’ in a way that would abrogate him of responsibility. He therefore had to suffer the consequences of justitia retributiva: God’s divine justice. Flaccus’ miserable death on the island of Andros in 39 CE, where he was exiled by Gaius Caligula, was God’s punishment, which rendered ‘indubitable proof that the Jewish people had not been deprived of the help of God’ (§191). Justitia retributiva demanded that god-insulters would die terrible deaths, as we see in Herodotus’ Cambyses (3. 64) and Lactantius’ De mortibus persecutorum. One wonders, however, whether the process could work inversely: if someone had a horrible death would people seek to find a reason for it?

The rhetorical aspect of Flacc. is recognised by vdH. throughout. He defines the work as a kind of ‘consolation literature’, with a two-fold audience: the Jews who had suffered and also the Romans who were the new administration of Egypt. Consolation to the former was a warning to the latter. History is placed at the service of rhetoric, and to this end Philo is not afraid of pure invention. The entire second part of the treatise, which concerns Flaccus on Andros (§97–191) presents inner monologues of the fallen governor which may, as vdH. suggests, be inspired by Greek novels (p. 11). Indeed, the whole treatise is in many ways a novelisation of history, with our interest drawn not only to the chronicle of atrocities but also to the essential character of the protagonist, Flaccus himself.
A holistic analysis of Flacc. is impeded slightly by the fact that we do not possess a companion piece which dealt with the subject of Sejanus, who was also apparently justly punished by God. As vdH. notes, both the first and last sentences of Flacc. refer to this previous story. In addition, there is the problem that John of Damascus quotes a passage from Flacc. not found in any existing manuscripts. Nevertheless, vdH. is confident that we have a «relatively reliable text of Philo» (51).

This seems undoubtedly right. However, I am less confident of placing Flacc. in a series of five treatises (vgl. Eusebius, Hist. Eccles. 2,5,1) which would have Legat. as a sequel to Flacc. VdH. notes that the themes of Flacc. concern providence and justice, the loyalty of Rome and the baseness of the Egyptians. A key theme of Legat. concerns virtue, absent in Flacc., and the manuscript tradition firmly places Legat. as the first in a work appropriately titled ‘On Virtues’, with De Vita Contemplativa forming the fourth part. In the course of his commentary, vdH. does note contradictions between Flacc. and Legat., which would not be surprising if they inhabit two different rhetorical fields, but would surely jar in the same one. For example, regarding §44, vdH. notes that in Legat. 346 Philo presents the emperor Gaius himself as responsible for the troubles in Alexandria (pp. 138, 176), while in Flacc. it is Flaccus’ responsibility. «This difference in accent is perceptible throughout the treatises» (138).

Reviewing the historical events Philo describes, vdH. asks the question: «Why did the non-Jews ... hate the Jews so much?» It is something never addressed in Flacc. The reason given in Legat., that the Jews did not accept Gaius Caligula as a god, seems tangential. VdH. answers by pointing to the historical association between the Jews and the Roman authorities (20–21), so that «attacking the Jews became an indirect, and therefore relatively safe, way to attack the authority of Rome» (21), an astute suggestion, and one borne out by the ‘Greek’ vitriol found in the Acta Alexandrinorum (and vgl. Josephus, War 2. 487–93). Flaccus would then be the exception. Bizarrely, on account of his mental state and desperation to save himself by pleasing the emperor, who had taken a dislike to Judaism, he colludes with those whose ultimate goal is not just the humiliation of the Jews but the humiliation of Rome itself.

Even before the Romans, Judaean refugees had secured their position in Egypt by military services offered to the Persians, with a temple and base at Elephantine. Here Jews were linked with the occupying power, and the destruction of the temple by the Egyptians in 410 surely shows us older roots to the animosity that erupted in Alexandria (19–20). VdH. also surveys anti-Jewish literature in Greek and Roman authors (25–32) which may have their source in Egyptian stories.

The issue of the Alexandrian citizenship of the Jews is discussed coherently, and vdH. adopts the position which would have Jews aspiring to this citizenship, with only a small minority ever attaining it (21–4).

Clearly, this complex fare is fine fodder for novelisation, and vdH.’s modern, accurate and accessible translation brings out the drama very well.

Philo has something of a novelist’s strategem in mind when he begins by extolling Flaccus for his brilliance during his early years as governor (1–7). This is meant to show that Flaccus knew what it was to do right, and therefore he could not be excused as ignorant. Even Flaccus’ banning of clubs and associations is a good thing. Implicitly here, Flaccus must have exempted synagogues, as did
Julius Caesar and Augustus, for Philo to be so pleased, and therefore behind Philo’s praise of Flaccus one can sense the indignation of the ‘Greeks’.

Then we have the extraordinary presentation of Flaccus’ ‘degeneration’, as vdH. describes it, which appears really to be a kind of nervous breakdown. On Tiberius’ death and Gaius Caligula’s accession to the imperial throne, Flaccus is thrown into despair. He had backed Tiberius’ grandson Tiberius Gemellus to be emperor and conspired against Gaius’ mother, Vipsania Agrippina, which meant the chances were that Gaius would take his revenge upon him. Flaccus ‘was struck by an indescribable sense of misfortune and threw himself on the ground and lay there speechless’ (§10). When, additionally, Flaccus discovers that his influential friend Macro has been killed he ‘completely lost the hope that had still been left, and he was no longer able to take to hand public affairs as he used to do, for he was totally exhausted and lost control of his mind’ (§16) so that ‘the ruler became a subject and the subjects became leaders’ (§19). In a brilliant metaphor, in vdH.’s excellent translation, Philo states that Flaccus was no more than a ‘masked dummy with the title government inscribed upon it’ (§20), the real authorities being demagogues such as Dionysius, Lampo and Isodorus. While another writer might have excused Flaccus on the grounds of his mental state, however, Philo is determined to argue against this suggestion. He blames Flaccus continually, as if presenting a case against him in a court of law, when, as vdH. notes, «the evidence is much less clear than Philo would have us believe» (127).

Flaccus main crime is inaction (128).

Philo alleges that Flaccus believed Isodorus and Lampo that he could win favour with Gaius by anti-Jewish measures (§22–3), which may be right, but we do not know whether there were directives received by Flaccus from the emperor. When King Agrippa I of Judaea arrives in Alexandria and there is an anti-Jewish demonstration in which a madman, Carabas, is paraded as a mock Jewish king (§21–40), Flaccus does nothing. The anti-Jewish mob call for statues (of the emperor) to be placed in synagogues and duly erect them, damaging synagogues in the process, though in Legat. 346 this is the result of an order by Gaius himself. I disagree with vdH. at this point when he finds the description in Legat. «less probable» (135), because such an order does fit with Gaius’ interests (in the light of his later determination to erect a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple War 2. 184–203; Ant. 18. 261–309) much more than it fits with those of the Alexandrian mob (as expressed in the Acta Alexandrinorum), though the anti-Jewish Alexandrians must have relished the opportunity to cause suffering to the Jews by means of outraging Jewish religious sensibilities in this way.

When Flaccus does eventually act, to issue a decree classifying Jews as ‘aliens and foreigners’ (§54), vdH. notes: «since there can be little doubt that Jews were indeed not formal citizens of the polis of Alexandria, why then is Philo indignant?» (155). He answers in the introductory pages that Jews had enjoyed a privileged position, and Flaccus lowered that to the status of foreigners and temporary residents (22–3). VdH. suggests that there may have been a formal claim to full citizenship and that the decree was an edict presenting a formal refusal of the request, as with Claudius’ letter of 41 CE, which tends to put Gaius again implicitly in the picture. But Philo has no interest in exonerating Flaccus by pointing to Gaius as the culprit.
In addition, Philo blurs things by implying that the decree could be read as permission to those who wanted to plunder the Jews, when it should be distinguished, as vdH. points out (157). What exactly Flaccus did in giving permission, given his mental state, is also vague. Philo himself insists in fact on the ‘mob rule’ that Flaccus did not control. In an ‘ethnic cleansing’ operation, the ‘Greeks’ drove out Jews from their homes into one part of the city, so that refugees had to camp on the beaches, rubbish tips (vdH. has «dunghills», which is an accurate translation but not quite right for the sense) and tombs (§56). Their homes and workshops were plundered, and graves desecrated. Jews were left without a means to survive and died of hunger. They were beaten up or killed in horrific ways. Flaccus, finally, then acts not – apparently – to punish the perpetrators of violence but against the members of the Jewish gerousia, who are whipped on the emperor’s birthday, 31 August. No charge against them is given by Philo, which creates a curious lacuna. Certain Jews are crucified as part of games in honour of the birthday and (later?) Jewish houses are searched for weapons. The association of this attack on the Jews and the emperor’s birthday is interesting and vdH. notes Slingerland’s suggestion that the prefect seemed to think this would make an acceptable present for Gaius (176).

In the second part of the treatise Philo indicates why Gaius himself may have been wanting to punish the Jews of Alexandria, when he notes that Flaccus did not send to Rome the declaration of loyalty from them on Gaius’ accession, an omission that was rectified only by the intervention of Agrippa I. Again Flaccus’ crime here is non-action, but it would have created the impression for the emperor that, as Philo states explicitly, ‘we alone of all people under the sun would be considered enemies (of the emperor)’ (§101). This was not the negligence of ‘a sudden attack of insanity, on an unseasonable fit of mental derangement’, argues Philo, but ‘the actions of a man who had been brooding for many nights over the preparations for his attack against us’ (§101). Here we see Philo dismissing those who would claim Flaccus irresponsible by reason of insanity.

Once this omission was brought to the attention of the emperor, Flaccus was doomed. As vdH. notes, «Caligula did not care about persecution of the Jews, but certainly did care about suppressing letters of congratulations and declarations of loyalty addressed to him» (187).

Flaccus is arrested, put on trial and exiled to Andros. At this point, Philo fully accepts Flaccus’ terrible mental state, since it was ‘impossible to see any difference with a lunatic’ (§162). Philo writes that he ‘ran around, frequently jumping up and down, clapping his hands, smiting his thighs, flinging himself on the ground’. VdH. comments: «This description of a desperate or psychotic state of mind and its physical expressions is rather unique in ancient literature» (232).

Oddly, the last part of the treatise, in which Flaccus is described as exhibiting the «utter panic» (so vdH., 243) that is the antithesis of Stoic detachment, leaves one with a strange sense of a Roman prefect who may have acted, even before his arrival on Andros, without full mens rea. Gaius – despite Philo’s silence and rhetoric of justitia retributiva – looms large behind events: the ghoul that terrified Flaccus into both mental collapse and the victimisation of people he should have protected.
This book will undoubtedly bring an interesting and valuable treatise to the attention of a wider scholarly community. VdH. treats the material carefully, without delving too deeply into historicity. When he does so he opts for a middle way, neither accepting the totality of Philo’s portrayal nor dismissing it as too polemical to be trustworthy as a historical source. His translation is careful and very readable. His notes are clear, pertinent and perceptive, avoiding the pitfall of prolix density that is often tempting for commentators. VdH. is to be congratulated for providing such a worthy addition to the study of Philo.

Joan E. Taylor


The diversity of the different usage types of the middle and passive voice in Greek has been the subject of debate ever since the times of the ancient grammarians. The main question is whether the middle verbal endings express only one meaning (and in this case how it is to be defined) or a polysemous structure of semantic uses related to one another. Modern grammars identify a number of usages of the middle voice suffixes: direct reflexive (λούμαι ‘bathe oneself’), indirect reflexive (δεινεῖζομαι ‘borrow’), intransitive corresponding to active transitive (τέρπομαι ‘enjoy’ vs. τέρπω ‘please’), intransitive corresponding to active causative (φοβοῦμαι ‘flee in panic, fear’ vs. φοβῶ ‘make flee in panic, alarm’), passive (ὑϐοῖζομαι ‘be assaulted’), media tantum (δύναμαι ‘be able to’), and so on. On the other hand, a number of publications give different unitarian definitions of the meaning of the grammatical category as a whole. These definitions tend to be unspecific to such an extent that also the meaning of oppositional active forms are covered by them. Furthermore, it is often hard to derive from the abstract definition the sense attributed to a middle form in a given passage.

This book, which is a slightly revised version of a doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of the professors C. J. Ruijgh and A. Rijksbaron, faces this puzzling problem and some other questions related to the morphology and the semantics of the middle voice. Be it only for this reason it should be welcome by linguists and classicists. Apart from that, the conclusions drawn by A. provide us with what in my view is a coherent description of what the usages of the middle voice in Ancient Greek, a well founded unitarian definition of the meaning of the middle verbal suffixes and a thorough account of how the abstract meaning relates to the various middle uses and how these uses are semantically related to one another. However, the treatment does not exhaust the subject, because A. deals very briefly with the vexed question of the preference of the future stem for the middle voice (e.g. the future of the active λαμβάνω ‘take’ is λήψαμαι in the middle voice).

Chapter 1 (p. 1–36) deals with the following questions: 1) Is there a semantic element common to the different usages types of the middle voice? 2) Assuming that the various middle uses constitute a polysemous structure, in what way are the middle uses related to one another?