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HEBREWS AND PHILO ON ΥΠΟΣΤΑΣΙΣ :
INTERSECTING TRAJECTORIES ?

I have extensively argued elsewhere that the roots of Origen's innovative Trinitarian notion of ὑπόστασις as individual substance within a general οὐσία common to other individual substances of the same nature, which exerted so great an influence on subsequent Christian theology – and perhaps even on « pagan » Neoplatonism –, lie both in philosophical and medical literature of the early imperial age and in Origen's own exegesis of Scripture, especially of Hebrews 1,3, as well as in Philo of Alexandria and his philosophical allegoresis of the Bible (the Septuagint, the same that constituted the main scriptural text of Origen)¹. Indeed, another main scriptural passage that inspired Origen in this respect, namely Wisdom 7,25-26, was virtually certainly read by him in the light – again – of Philo's exegesis. And Origen's repeated association of Hebrews 1,3 with Philo's reading of Wisdom 7,25-26 also draws a connection between Hebrews and Philo with respect to the theological concept of hypostasis. Now, as is well known, the relationship between Philo's writings and Hebrews is a highly problematic issue. Yet, I suspect that a thorough examination of the notion of « hypostasis » in both Philo and Hebrews, also in light of Origen's interpretation, can contribute to the advancement of research in this direction.

The question whether Philo regarded the Wisdom of God and the Logos of God as a hypostasis of its own, that is, an individual substance and not simply an aspect or manifestation of the divinity, is a *vexata quaestio*. Unlike most scholars, Roberto Radice surmised that Philo is actually the first who considered the Logos to be a hypostasis, just as the

1. I. RAMELLI, « Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis », *Harvard Theological Review* 105, 2012, pp. 302-350.

author of the prologue to the Gospel of John did. This concept – Radice argues – simply did not exist outside the Mosaic tradition and, more specifically with respect to Philo's principal philosophical pedigree, had no parallel in Middle Platonism². As will result from the present investigation, on the other hand, this notion does have a parallel in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which, as I shall point out, might even have been influenced by Philo, and which, at any rate, was paramount to the formation of the technical use of ὑπόστασις in Origen, as well as Philo's exegesis of Wisdom was. Martin Neher has taken a more nuanced position than Radice in assessing the presence of a hypostatic Logos and Wisdom in Philo's thought. He has devoted a whole monograph to asking whether the personification of Wisdom in the Septuagint book of Wisdom amounts to a real hypostasis or to a mere poetic personification³. The key texts in this respect, which he has all analysed, are Proverbs 1-9, Job 28, Ecclesiasticus 1,1-10 and 24, and especially Wisdom 1,1-10 ; 7,1-8,1 ; 9,1-18 and 10,1-11,1. In this connection, Neher notes that Philo uses the hypostasis language, and thinks that on Philo's reading the Wisdom of the *Sapientia Salomonis* is at an intermediate degree (*Zwischenstufe*) toward an understanding of Wisdom as a full hypostasis⁴.

Let us consider Philo's very use of the term ὑπόστασις and how it approaches the sense of individual substance that in Origen will become semi-technical in the theological sphere (in Origen's case, in the Trinitarian meaning). In Philo, we cannot speak of a properly technical sense for ὑπόστασις ; however, his use is certainly very relevant to the development of the technical meaning, and is extremely likely to have influenced it, both terminologically and conceptually, also because Origen was an attentive reader of Philo. In *Aetern. mundi* 88 and 92 Philo emphasises the notion of « a substance of its own » in a passage in which he repeatedly uses the term ὑπόστασις. He is explaining that the emitted light or αὐγή, in this case the bright light of fire, « has no substance per se (καθ' ἐαυτήν ὑπόστασιν οὐκ ἔχει), but it derives from what precedes it, the coal and the flame (...) it has no substance of its own (ὑπόστασιν ἰδίαν οὐκ ἔχει) ». According to Philo's reasoning here, the light of the flame has no substance per se, therefore it has no individual substance. The notion that Philo has in mind for ὑπόστασις, which here is denied in reference to the αὐγή, is that of an individual substance that originates from another

2. See R. RADICE, « Philo's Theology and Theory of Creation », *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (ed. A. Kamesar), Cambridge, 2009, pp. 125-145, in particular p. 137.

3. M. NEHER, *Wesen und Wirken der Weisheit in der Sapientia Salomonis*, Berlin, 2004.

4. M. NEHER, *Wesen und Wirken*, pp. 155-163.