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**Reading in the Twilight Zone: Homer and the Jews in Antiquity**

This paper suggests that, in the context of Greco-Roman Jewish antiquity, Homer often represents a unique cultural paradox: Homeric poetry was the foundation of education in the ancient world. Many Jews were exposed to such education, and thus to Homeric poetry. Nevertheless Homeric values and ideals were largely incompatible the fundamentals of Judaic thought. Thus, among educated, Hellenized Jews in the ancient world, Homer presented a special cultural predicament: he was a fundamental, but incompatible component of their cultural identity.

The paper illustrates this state of affairs through a discussion of some relatively little known, non-canonical texts that are of Jewish provenance, but written in Homeric Greek Hexameter. The assumption is that under such "forced proximity," discrepancies between Homeric and Judaic values may appear with particular poignancy. The authors/texts discussed are: a) Philo the Elder (3rd-2nd c. BCE), who wrote a hexameter poem entitled *On Jerusalem*. Only twenty four fragmentary verses of this poem survive (in Eusebius), dealing, apparently, with the *Akeda* (the sacrifice of Isaac) and the covenant between God and Abraham. This foundational narrative is described by Philo using important components of Homeric discourse which, as the discussion shows, become highly problematic in a Jewish context. b) Theodotus (2nd-3rd c. AD), who wrote a poem *On the Jews*, of which we have a few surviving fragments dealing with the biblical story of the rape of Dina (Gen. 34). The basic plot-line of this narrative (the abduction of an attractive woman by a young prince, her retrieval by her kin, and the ensuing destruction brought upon the abductor's city) is, of course, analogous to that of the *Iliad*. Theodotus uses highly evocative elements of Homeric discourse, but in the process, brings the incompatible values of Homeric and Judaic culture into sharp relief. The paper also comments briefly on c) a Jewish funerary inscription from Beth Shearim (northern Palestine), written in Homeric hexameter. The deceased, an educated Jew by the name of Iustos (=Zadok, a priestly name) manifests his learning and familiarity with Homeric poetry, but in the process manages to enhance the irreconcilably transgressive tension between the Judaic and Homeric worlds.

The paper concludes by suggesting a framework for the understanding of Homer's paradoxical role. Drawing upon psychoanalytical readings of the study of culture (Freud, Lacan, Jameson, Žižek, Rose, etc.), the paper suggests that Homer may be conceptualized as part of the "cultural unconscious" of Greco-Roman Judaism, i.e. as a highly transgressive but inextinguishable component of cultural identity which, in an attempt to harmonize and rationalize that identity, is somehow relegated to cultural "twilight zones."