PSEUDO-PHOCYLIDES
(First Century B.C.-First Century A.D.)

A NEW TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION
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Introduction

Phocylides was an Ionic poet living in Miletus in the middle of the sixth century B.C.\(^1\) Though his name is almost unknown today, he was famous in antiquity as a writer of maxims with useful advice for daily life.\(^2\) Only a few of these sentences have been preserved.\(^3\) The poem of 230 lines which is under discussion here is undoubtedly not authentic but written pseudonymously under the name of Phocylides. Quite apart from content, features of language and meter make it impossible to attribute the poem to an author of the sixth century B.C. Moreover, since it is evident that the writer knows the Septuagint and Stoic ethics, the sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides must be given a date after the second century B.C.\(^4\)

Though a close study of the text reveals its undeniably Jewish character, the most striking characteristic of the poem is the author's effort to hide this by consistently avoiding any allusion to customs, rules or laws that might be recognized as typically Jewish and also by concealing Old Testament ethics in the disguise of Greek (Ionic) hexametric poetry.\(^5\) He succeeded so well that his poem was held as authentic till the end of the sixteenth century. This characteristic, of course, raises the problem of the author's intentions. What did he wish to accomplish with such a poem? Why did he select only those commandments from the Old Testament with which civilized Greeks would be inclined to agree? Though the solution to this problem may never be found, three possible solutions have been suggested: (1) The author did not mean anything with his poem. He wrote it just for fun, as a kind of exercise in versification. (2) The author wanted to say to his fellow Jews: Look, the best of Greek ethics agrees with the Law, so do not be ashamed of your own tradition over against the Greeks and do not be afraid that you have missed anything by remaining Jewish. (3) The author directed himself to the heathen, not in order to make converts to Judaism (which would be impossible by means of such a poem), but in order to make "sympathizers,"\(^6\)

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\(^2\) Phocylides’ fame is demonstrated by the references to his poetry in ancient authors, collected by W. Pape and G. Benseler, Wörterbuch der griechischen Eigennamen (Braunschweig, 1911); repr. Graz: 1959) s.v. Phocylides.
\(^4\) The most recent defender of the authenticity of the poem is F. Dorneis, Echtheitsfragen antik-griechischer Literatur: Rettungen des Theognis, Phokylides, Hekataios, Choirilos, pp. 37–51. Dorneis’ thesis that Phocylides may have known the OT by contact with the Jewish Diaspora in Miletus and by pre-LXX translations of the Pentateuch has met with serious criticism. See the reviews by E. Howald, Deutsche Literaturzeitung 61 (1940) 663–68, and by A. von Blumenthal, Gnomon 19 (1943) 289–93.
\(^5\) The first to point this out was J. Bernays, Über das phokylideische Gedicht (Berlin, 1856), repr. in his Gesammelte Abhandlungen (Berlin, 1885) Bd. 1, pp. 192–261.
that is, to win over people to a standpoint more sympathetic to Judaism so as to break through the isolation of the Jews in the hellenistic world.⁷

None of these three possibilities can be ruled out entirely, but many scholars seem to favor the third solution.⁸ The arguments are: There was a current in early Judaism that thought it useful, perhaps in a way reminiscent of the so-called Noachian laws, to propagate some universal principles of religion and ethics without the intention of making proselytes.⁹ And, secondly, in a number of verses Pseudo-Phocylides runs parallel to passages in Philo’s Hypothetica and Josephus’ Against Apion which clearly figure in an apologetic and propagandistic context.¹⁰ It has been suggested that all three of them had a common source which had its origin in a “wide-spread Jewish missionary activity which promoted ethical monotheism.”¹¹ “The original impulse and intention of the Jewish mission lay . . . not in an extension of ‘Judaism’ as a national and religious cult but in the proclamation of the one God and his universal, ethical standards.”¹²

There are problems, however, with this solution: These parallel texts in Philo and Josephus figure in recognizably Jewish writings, and, unlike these writings, our poem can hardly be called a missionary document. Moreover, the relation to the Noachian laws is a very uncertain matter (see below). These points seem to lend support for the second alternative, that Pseudo-Phocylides wrote for his own co-religionists, either to demonstrate that there is no marked difference between Jewish and Greek ethics or to show them that the rules of the Law could be given in a hexametric poem that could match contemporaneous Greek poetry quite well. One might also suggest that it was written as a schoolbook for Jewish children, since we know that collections of sentences were often used as material for writing and reading exercises in hellenistic schools.¹³ These sentences would have had educational value at the same time. Another alternative has been suggested by the Jewish scholar G. Alon, who assumes that the author made Phocylides, the acclaimed ancient Greek writer, present the principles of Jewish life in order to demonstrate to Jews who were engrossed in hellenistic culture, and who imitated its manners and deeds, that even an honored poet like Phocylides recognized Jewish moral requisites. He did not have to mention abandonment of idolatry, which was taken for granted even by these thoroughly hellenized Jews.¹⁴ This is a most attractive theory, explaining both the use of a pseudonym and the absence of the prohibition of idolatry, but it cannot be proved or disproved. It does, however, merit serious consideration. Ultimately we will have to await new data before the intention of this author will become wholly clear to us.

Original language and texts

There is no doubt that the original language of the poem was Greek. There are no versions in other ancient languages, and all extant manuscripts are in Greek. Of these many manuscripts only a limited number are valuable, namely the five which Douglas Young has used for his recent edition:¹⁵

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⁷ A fourth possibility suggests that the poem was written by a “sympathizer” or “God-fearer,” not by a Jew (which is the position of M. Rossbroich, De Pseudo-Phocylideis, diss. Münster, 1910). If this is true Ps-Phoc should not be included in this volume.

⁸ Most modern scholars see in Ps-Phoc a kind of (clumsy) propagandistic poet.

⁹ See G. Klein, Der älteste christliche Katechismus und die jüdische Propaganda-Literatur, pp. 8–65, and M. Gutmann, Das Judentum und seine Umwelt (Berlin, 1927).

¹⁰ This was pointed out by P. Wendland, "Die Therapeuten und die philonische Schrift vom beschaulichen Leben," Jahrbücher für classische Philologie Supplementband 22 (1896) 709–12.


¹² Crouch, Origin, p. 94.


M: tenth century, in Paris;  
B: tenth century, in Oxford;  
P: twelfth century, in Paris;  
L: thirteenth century, in Florence;  
V: thirteenth-fourteenth century, in Vienna.

Still debated is the value of the so-called Psi group of manuscripts of the Sibylline Oracles. This group has inserted Pseudo-Phocylides 5–79 between Sibylline Oracles 2.55 and 149. Seventy-five lines of Pseudo-Phocylides occupy ninety-five lines in the Sibylline Oracles because this Psi group has again inserted twenty lines of its own into the quotation from Pseudo-Phocylides; the result is an “interpolated interpolation.” Nevertheless, according to some scholars, these twenty interpolated lines are an original part of the text of Pseudo-Phocylides, and Psi, therefore, represents a better text tradition of lines 5–79 than the manuscripts listed above. This theory, however, has not won acceptance because the secondary character of the extra lines is too obvious to consider them seriously as authentic.

Date and provenance

Though the dates proposed for Pseudo-Phocylides vary from the sixth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D., there is a growing consensus to ascribe the poem to the period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. We must consider if it is possible to fix the time of origin more precisely. This is difficult, however, because nowhere in the poem are there references to political events or circumstances that might help. Nevertheless, there are some features of language and thought that make it possible to narrow down the above-mentioned period.

Pseudo-Phocylides uses about thirty words (or word forms) which are not attested in Greek literature before the third century B.C.; about fifteen of these do not occur in texts before the first century B.C. This suggests 100 B.C. as the earliest possible date. The same date is suggested by the unmistakable acquaintance of the author of Pseudo-Phocylides with the Septuagint, including the Prophets and Wisdom literature as well as the Pentateuch (which is evident in more than half of the poem). Also undeniable is the influence of Stoicism on the author. In itself this Stoic influence indicates only that the poem was written after 300 B.C., but its affinity with the thought of first-century A.D. Stoics like Musonius Rufus, Hierocles, and Seneca points strongly to the Imperial period. The first century A.D. is also suggested by Pseudo-Phocylides’ many agreements with Philo and by the similarities it shares with the “diatribes” of the popular philosophical-ethical preachers, who were most active in the early Roman period.

This cumulative evidence seems to favor a date between about 50 B.C. and A.D. 100. Moreover, if we recognize the probable Alexandrian provenance (see below), then the most probable date of origin lies in the period when the relations between Jews and Greeks in Alexandria were not too tense, namely during the reigns of the emperors Augustus (30 B.C.–A.D. 14) and Tiberius (A.D. 14–37). It is unlikely that after the anti-Jewish pogroms in Alexandria during the reign of Caligula (A.D. 37–41) an Alexandrian Jew could have...
maintained so great an openness toward pagan culture. Therefore, the most probable date would be somewhere between 30 B.C. and A.D. 40. Needless to say, this does not mean that another dating would be impossible, but the characteristics of the poem are explained best by a date within this period.

That Alexandria is to be preferred to other places as the city of origin is a conclusion based on one single line in the poem (102), where it is said that it is not good to dissect the human body. As far as we know, it was only in Alexandria that human anatomy was studied by applying dissection, which is of course no definite proof that Pseudo-Phocylides was written there. Since a prohibition of the dissection of humans would make more sense if Pseudo-Phocylides originated in Alexandria, and since in other respects the poem excellently fits in with the Jewish-hellenistic culture in Alexandria as we know it from other sources, that city is most likely the place of origin.

Historical importance

If Pseudo-Phocylides really belongs to a current of nonproselyting religious propaganda of ancient Judaism, are there more writings from the hellenistic-Roman period which reflect that same interest? Rabbi Klein has pointed in this connection to the so-called Derek Erez literature, which he saw as the continuation of the universalistic Wisdom literature of Israel’s hakhamim. But, as has been pointed out, Klein is inclined to project late sources back into an earlier period. Nevertheless, he is right in stressing that even in the Old Testament period there was always a nonparticularistic, universalistic current in Israel, embodied in the Wisdom literature, which never disappeared, not even after Ezra. It is well known that this Wisdom literature often incorporated non-Israelite wisdom, just as the author of Pseudo-Phocylides took over many maxims from Greek authors before him. So we must bear in mind that this tendency was not new among the Jews of the hellenistic age. Closer parallels, however, than the Derek Erez tractates are the “forgedquotations” from classical Greek poets like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Menander, Diphilus, and others, and even more the (Syr.) sentences of Menander the Wise. By means of this Jewish pseudepigraphic activity no reasonable Jew would have expected to convert pagans to Judaism. The forgers may have had no other intention than inculcating in heathen minds some universally valid ethical and religious principles, perhaps with the hope of humanizing pagan society. These Jews may have felt obliged to inform their non-Jewish fellow men about some fundamental and universal principles of religion and ethics without feeling any necessity to make converts to Judaism.

Is there any relation between this literature and the seven so-called Noahian laws? As is well known, unlike the Sinaitic laws these laws were considered by the Jews to be valid


27 Let us adopt this (debatable) thesis at this point for the sake of convenience.

28 Klein, Der älteste christliche Katechismus, pp. 66–142.


30 Now conveniently collected by A. M. Denis, Fragmenta Pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt Graeco (PVTG 3; Leiden, 1970) pp. 161–74, and discussed by Denis in his Introduction aux pseudopigraphes grecs d’Ancien Testament (SVTP 1; Leiden, 1970) pp. 223–38. Most of these quotations have been preserved by Ps-Justin (De Monorchia, Cohortatio), Clement of Alexandria (Stromateis), and Eusebius (Praeparatio Evangelica).


32 Cf. Gutmann, Judentum, pp. 110ff.
for the whole of humanity. These seven commandments were: (1) the command to establish courts of justice; (2) the prohibition of idolatry; (3) the injunction against blaspheming the name of God; (4) the prohibition of murder; (5) the ban against adultery and incest; (6) the forbiddance of robbery and theft; (7) the proscription against eating meat with the blood of life in it.33 The gentiles, it was believed, had undertaken to keep these laws, but did not do so. It has been asserted that Pseudo-Phocylides, in a more or less veiled way, incorporated these seven commandments in his poem34 and added a number of rules with the same "unwritten law" character, partly from Greek, partly from Jewish sources.35 This might be true. With the first Noachian commandment one can compare several lines in Pseudo-Phocylides dealing with the incorruptible administration of justice (9–12, 86); with the second and third, 8 and 54, which stipulate that the one God has to be honored;36 with the fourth, 4, 32, and 58; with the fifth, 3 and 177–83; with the sixth, 6, 18, 135f. and 154, and with the seventh, 147f. Therefore, at least twenty-five lines reflect ideas which are found in the Noachian laws. But it apparently was not Pseudo-Phocylides' only intention, if it was his intention at all, to propagate these laws,37 for he added a great number of other rules. It is significant, however, that all these rules of behavior are cast in the same mold; that is to say, not one presupposes Jewish national particularities but all can claim a universal validity equal to the Noachian laws. Some of them even prove to be so-called "unwritten laws" of the Greeks,38 and several have their parallels in Stoic lists of duties, which often incorporated earlier "unwritten laws."

Nevertheless, in spite of this universalistic tendency of his poem, Pseudo-Phocylides has succeeded in stating clearly two principal Jewish tenets of his age: that there is one God (I. 54) and that there will be a resurrection of the dead (II. 103f.).39 Also the thought of a retribution in the hereafter, closely related to the tenet of the resurrection,40 is possibly present in the poem (I. 11). The reference to the resurrection clearly shows that the author of Pseudo-Phocylides is Jewish,41 and perhaps it is for this reason that he immediately continues with remarks about the deification and incorruptibility of the soul, which make a very Greek impression.42

If all the above is true, we may conclude very tentatively that in the poem of Pseudo-Phocylides we have a representative of that universalistic current in ancient Judaism. While holding to the principal tenets of "orthodox" Judaism, it tried to give to the gentiles some ethical principles that might humanize life in family and society, using therefore all sources that could contribute to this aim, both Jewish and Greek.43

However, this thesis, which cannot be proved, could be wrong. Another possible solution

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34 Gutmann, Juden und Christen, p. 112, and Siegert, JJS 4 (1973) 125.
35 On the striking analogy between Noachian laws and unwritten laws in Philo see the remarks by H. A. Wolfson, Philo (Cambridge, Mass., 1948) vol. 2, pp. 183–87. Cf. Crouch, Origin, p. 96: "Both (Noachian laws and unwritten laws) were regarded as expressions of a primitive code of ethics which was valid for the entire human race."
36 Of course Ps-Phoc could not prohibit idolatry and blasphemy openly without making known his Jewishness. Hence only this positive formulation appears in II. 8 and 54. Cf. the same positive formulation in a Noachian context in Jub 7:20.
38 E. g. the injunctions to leave no corpse unburied (vs. 99) and always to return a benefit (vs. 80). See R. Hirzel, Agraphos Nomos (Abhandl. der k nigl. sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Philol.-hist. Classe 20, 1; Leipzig, 1900).
40 Bousset and Gressmann, Religion, pp. 192f.
41 How strange this theory was to non-Jewish ears may be seen from Acts 17:32.
42 The whole passage II. 103–15 is not very consistent in matters of the hereafter, "but to press this point would be to ignore the widespread tendency of language about the afterlife to admit inconsistencies" (A. D. Nock, Essays on Religion and the Ancient World [Oxford, 1972] vol. 1, p. 507, n. 19). See further below.
43 Another point of importance is that we have in Ps-Phoc an example of Jewish-hellenistic ethics as it found its way into so many parts of the NT. The parallels to the parabolic passages of the NT are numerous and have been adduced especially by Martin Dibelius in his commentaries. Cf. his remarks in Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums (Tübingen, 1971) p. 239. The NT parallels will be referred to in the nn. to the translation. See also P. W. van der Horst, "Pseudo-Phocylides and the New Testament," ZNW 69 (1978) 187–202.
is that of Alon (see above), who suggests that Pseudo-Phocylides is a very interesting example of inner-Jewish "propaganda" meant to keep Jews that were in danger of sliding down too far into an un-Jewish way of life within the limits of Judaism and to encourage them by the suggestion that even a renowned pagan author propagated the principles of Jewish life. Further and closer study of hellenistic Judaism will, we hope, shed more light on this still obscure field.

Theological importance

To speak about the theology of Pseudo-Phocylides would be rash, for his poem consists mainly of ethical rules and many of his ideas are very general. By what principles the author was guided in his eclectic procedure we have already seen above. To systematize his thoughts, which are uttered so unsystematically, is difficult; there is no unifying conception behind the poem and no coherence exists in it since he has drawn from so many sources. Sometimes there are even contradictory statements. In general, one may say, Pseudo-Phocylides is guilty of a certain superficiality.

The "doctrine" of God in Pseudo-Phocylides is, of course, monotheistic. The only wise and mighty God, who is rich in blessings (l. 54), must be honored before anything else (l. 8). His image is man's spirit, a loan of God to the mortals (l. 106). As the source of our prosperity, God demands that men share their wealth with those in need (l. 29). God hates perjury (l. 17). He blesses each creature with a means of self-defense; in addition man receives the ability to think and speak (ll. 125–28). This statement and the one in line 106 (see above) no doubt imply that God is the creator of the universe, though this is nowhere actually expressed. This universe is harmonious and coherent (ll. 71–74). God will judge us after death (l. 11) and is the ruler of all souls, whether high or low (l. 111). The emphasis on the instability of life (ll. 27, 116, 118–20) may derive from the underlying thought that the ways of God is inscrutable.

The problem of the so-called polytheistic references has been exaggerated. Twice (ll. 75, 163) reference is made to "the Blessed Ones" (Gk. makoares), by which the heavenly bodies are designated. Although in Greek literature this term generally means "the gods," it does not mean here that sun, moon, and stars are gods any more than does the use of a current Platonic term by Philo when he calls them "visible gods" (De opificio mundi 27). It does mean ascription of personality to the heavenly bodies, but that is not inconsistent with Jewish monotheism.

In two other lines (98, 104) there is the plural form "gods." In the former case this reading makes no sense at all and the text should be emended. The second reference, where it is declared that the departed become gods (l. 104), looks rather pagan and has no exact Jewish parallels, though often the deceased were regarded as angels, and angels were often called gods. Here we can say that Pseudo-Phocylides goes rather far in an effort to neutralize the effect of his statement on the bodily resurrection in lines 103f. Real "polytheistic" references are not found in Pseudo-Phocylides.

Pseudo-Phocylides' teaching on man contains several Old Testament ideas. Man's body is of the dust of the earth and at death returns to it; his spirit, which is God's image, is released into the air at death (ll. 106–8). From the numerous warnings against evil and wrongdoing one may conclude that the poet assumes that human nature is inclined toward evil. Except by implication, the writer almost nowhere delineates the character of the good life, so intent is he upon warning his readers against the evil life. He condemns a great number of evils and clearly is more concerned with the consideration of specific evils than the pursuit of general ethical principles.

44 Though he sees all this clearly, J. J. Lewis nevertheless goes too far in systematizing Ps-Phoc's "doctrines" in his "The Teaching of Pseudo-Phocylidea," The London Quarterly and Holborn Review (Oct. 1953) 295–98. Yet his attempt is of some use.
45 This is actually the only line in the poem that shows a religious foundation of ethics.
46 Because of them several scholars have denied the Jewish origin of the poem.
47 See Nock, Essays, vol. 2, p. 912. Often the stars were regarded as angels; cf. Bousset and Gressmann, Religion, pp. 322f.
48 We read goosi with Bernays instead of theosi.
50 On afterlife see further below.
with any abstract conception of evil or its origin. Behind all his precepts is the assumption that, if man so desires, his will is strong enough for him to reject evil and cleave to good. There is no mention of the need for forgiveness or for divine aid in conquering evil.

Lines 153–74 form the longest coherent passage of the poem and also constitute its best part in expressiveness and style.\(^{51}\) Here, in accordance with the positive appraisal of labor in the Old Testament and Judaism,\(^{52}\) Pseudo-Phocylides sings a song in praise of labor and against idleness. Work is useful and important for man; it is the only route to an honorable existence.

To enumerate all the evils that are condemned by our author would be tedious and useless. One topic, however, must be mentioned because Pseudo-Phocylides devotes so much attention to it, namely sexual sins. He warns against nearly every sexual aberration that one can imagine (viz. ll. 177–94). Nevertheless, he heartily encourages marital relations (175f.). That, too, is in accordance with Judaism, in which a positive evaluation of marriage is often accompanied by strong puritanism.\(^{53}\) The reason Pseudo-Phocylides chose to elaborate upon this subject is probably that injunctions concerning “forbidden relations” formed a set part of Jewish propaganda.\(^{54}\)

The poet lays stress on moderation and self-restraint. Due measure is best in all things. The word “measure,” or “moderation” (Gr. metron), occurs several times in the poem (see ll. 36, 69, 98). This Greek ideal was, of course, fully compatible with his Jewish ideas. More Jewish than Greek is the accent he lays on practicing justice and mercy, especially in lines 9–41, where a real concern for the poor and the weak is evident. Also great emphasis is laid on good relationships in the family, between wife and husband (ll. 195–97), between children and parents (ll. 207–9), and between slaves and masters (ll. 223–27).\(^{55}\) Friendship is highly appraised (ll. 142, 218). Even to one’s personal enemy kind help is to be given when there is an opportunity (ll. 140–42).\(^{56}\) The writer reveals a keen sense of the value of good relations.

It is clear that Pseudo-Phocylides’ remarks on the afterlife are inconsistent.\(^{57}\) Admittedly, inconsistencies in theories of the afterlife are very common with philosophically untrained people. But in this matter our author seems to go to the extreme. On the one hand he clearly expresses his hope of the resurrection of the dead (ll. 103f.). It is for that reason that the remains of the dead are to be treated with respect (l. 102). He even says that the souls remain in the deceased (l. 105). On the other hand he declares that the immortal souls go to the everlasting home of Hades, where God rules over them (ll. 111f.). Moreover, he says that the body is turned to dust and the spirit is released into the air (ll. 107f.). This third statement is not necessarily a contradiction of the second, for in the hellenistic period Hades was often transposed into the air,\(^{58}\) and in Judaism the distinction between soul and spirit was often neglected.\(^{59}\) The first and second statements, however, are hardly reconcilable. Again it is clear that Pseudo-Phocylides has no logically thought-out system. Yet he does not give the impression of being an uneducated man. Had he been uneducated he could not have written as well as he did in hexameters and in an artificial Greek dialect that was used only in poetry. He must have been one of the upper class who could afford a thorough literary training but who did not go beyond that.

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\(^{51}\) This is the judgment of several scholars, e.g. Bernays, Gesammelte Abhandlungen, vol. 1, p. 209, and Bousset and Greßmann, Religion, p. 431. The only other coherent passage is ll. 177–94 (on sexual sins).


\(^{54}\) See Josephus, Apion 2.199–203.

\(^{55}\) One is reminded here of the so-called Haustafeln in the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians. Crouch (Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel) discusses the relation between these passages and Ps-Phoc and points to their common background in hellenistic-Jewish propaganda.

\(^{56}\) This line has allured some scholars (e.g. J. Scaliger) to the view that the poet must have been a Christian (“love your enemy!”), but Bernays, Gesammelte Abhandlungen, Bd. 1, p. 197, rightly referred to Ex. 23:5 as the source of this line. Yet Harnack (TLZ 10 [1885] 159f.) still believed that the author was a Christian.

\(^{57}\) See n. 42; see also H. C. C. Cavallin, Life after Death. Paul’s Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Cor. 15. Part I: An Enquiry into the Jewish Background (Lund, 1974) pp. 151–55 (on Ps-Phoc) and pp. 199–202 (on this phenomenon in Judaism in general).


\(^{59}\) See Bousset and Greßmann, Religion, pp. 400f.
Relation to canonical books

As indicated above, Pseudo-Phocylides probably knew the whole Septuagint. But not all parts of the Septuagint influenced him equally. There is no doubt that he knew the Prophets, but the reminiscences are not many. The Wisdom books (especially Prov and Sir) obviously influenced him much more strongly, and there are many reminiscences or allusions to these books. Most manifest is the influence of the Pentateuch, of which some chapters have affected him strongly; foremost among them is Leviticus 19. Many verses of this chapter have their echo in the poem, probably because the principal tenets of Old Testament ethics are summarized there. Leviticus 18 and Exodus 22 and 23 (from the so-called Book of the Covenant) also have many parallels in Pseudo-Phocylides. These chapters seem to have been followed rather closely. Some scholars correctly see in lines 3–8 a summary of the Decalogue. It is clear therefore that a number of central passages in the Pentateuch have done much in shaping the poem of Pseudo-Phocylides. That Genesis and the other historical narratives of the Pentateuch do not play a part can be explained by the nature of the poem.

It is very unlikely that Pseudo-Phocylides has influenced any of the New Testament authors. That there are many parallels between Pseudo-Phocylides and the New Testament is explained by their common background, namely the Old Testament and hellenistic Jewish culture. These parallels, and also those from the Old Testament, will be noted in the margin of the translation.

Relation to apocryphal books

Of the apocryphal books the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach has the closest affinity to Pseudo-Phocylides, but at the same time there are marked differences; Sirach is certainly not as universalistic as Pseudo-Phocylides. A similar situation exists in the case of Tobit; its emphasis on the duty of burying the dead is paralleled in Pseudo-Phocylides 99. For the relationship of Pseudo-Phocylides to pseudepigraphic literature see Historical Importance.

Cultural importance

In antiquity the poem apparently influenced few writers. The first to quote from it was Stobaeus, who wrote in the fifth century A.D. No author in the Middle Ages quoted from it, yet the text was being copied (see the dates of the MSS, above). The first printed edition appeared in 1495 from Venice. Subsequently the poet received great popularity. In the sixteenth century there were numerous editions, translations, and commentaries. The poem became a favorite lecture source for young schoolboys. Pseudo-Phocylides embodied the ideal combination of biblical ethics and classical forms. And because the poem was deemed authentic, one was delighted that a real heathen had presented a testimony to truths that in essentials were identical with biblical doctrines. Natural reason proved to consent to biblical ideas.

In 1591 the first doubts concerning the authenticity of the poem were raised, and fifteen years later the great Joseph Scaliger demonstrated persuasively that it was not from the real Phocylides. The result was a rapid decline of interest in the poem, which was neglected.

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60 Cf. A. Beltrami, “Ea quae apud Pseudo-Phocylidem Veteris et Novi Testamenti vestigia deprehenduntur,” Rivista di Filologia e Istruzione Classica 36 (1908) 411–23, who gathers a large collection of parallels (several of which, however, must be rejected).
61 E.g. 1. 53 is evidently inspired by Jer 9:22 (or 1Kgs 2:10 LXX).
62 Most clear is the influence of LXX Prov 6:6–8c in Ps-Phoc 164–74.
63 Bernays, in his pioneering study Über das phokylideische Gedicht, which appeared in 1856, was the first to point this out.
64 E.g. the fact that the prohibition of adultery is mentioned first is paralleled in several other free renderings of the Decalogue; see Bousset and Greßmann, Religion, p. 425 with n. 3.
65 For the history of Ps-Phoc in the sixteenth century see Bernays, Gesammelte Abhandlungen. Bd. 1, pp. 192f.
66 By F. Sylburg, Epicae elegiacaeque minorum poetarum gnomae (Frankfurt, 1591).
67 In Animadversiones in Chronologica Eusebii, printed in his Thesaurus Temporum (Leiden, 1606), pp. 88f.
until Jacob Bernays wrote his famous study on our author in 1856. The popularity and influence of Pseudo-Phocylides lasted only a century, from 1500 until 1600, but no doubt before and after that period many read his lines and perhaps were edified.

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Crouch, J. E. *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel*. FRLANT 109; Göttingen, 1972. (Crouch discusses Ps-Phoc along the lines indicated by Klein [1909], but follows more refined methods.)


Klein, G. *Der alteste christliche Katechismus und die jüdische Propaganda-Literatur*. Berlin, 1909; see especially pp. 143–53. (The first to place Ps-Phoc in the context of universalistic, non-proselytizing Jewish propaganda.)

Kroll, W. “Phocylides” (2), Pauly-Wissowa. Stuttgart, 1941; vol. 20.1, pp. 505–10. (Very learned discussion, stresses the hellenistic elements in the poem, underrates its Jewishness.)


Rossbroich, M. *De Pseudo-Phocylideis* (diss. Münster, 1910). (The latest commentary on the Gk. text; sees in Ps-Phoc a God-fearing gentile.)

THE SENTENCES OF PSEUDO-PHOCYLIDES

Prologue
1 Phocylides, the wisest of men, sets forth these counsels of God by his holy judgments, gifts of blessing.*

Summary of the Decalogue
3 Neither commit adultery nor rouse homosexual passion.
4 Neither devise treachery nor stain your hands with blood.
5 Do not become rich unjustly, but live from honorable means.*
6 Be content with what you have and abstain from what is another’s.*
7 Do not tell lies, but always speak the truth.
8 Honor God foremost, and afterward your parents.*

Exhortation to justice
9 Always dispense justice and let not your judgment be influenced by favor.*
10 Do not cast down the poor unjustly, do not judge partially.*
11 If you judge evilly, subsequently God will judge you.*
12 Flee false witness; award what is just.
13 Watch over a deposit, and in everything keep faith.
14 Give a just measure, and an extra full measure of all things is good.
15 Do not make a balance unequal, but weigh honestly.
16 And do not commit perjury, neither ignorantly nor willingly.
17 The immortal God hates a perjurer, whosoever it is who has sworn.*
18 Do not steal seeds. Cursed is whosoever takes (them).
19 Give the laborer his pay, do not afflict the poor.
20 Take heed of your tongue, keep your word hidden in (your) heart.
21 Neither wish to do injustice, nor therefore allow another to do injustice.

Admonition to mercy
22 Give to the poor man at once, and do not tell him to come tomorrow.

Exhortation to Justice

b. See the references in the previous n. For the concern for the poor cf. Ex 23:6; Prov 22:22; Sir 4:1–6.

c. It is uncertain whether the divine judgment takes place in this life or in the hereafter.

d. This may be a rendering of Ex 20:7b: "Yahweh will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it."

* Prologue
a. These opening lines correspond with the closing lines (229f.); hence there is little reason to regard them as spurious as has often been done since they are missing in some MSS.

Summary of the Decalogue
a. There is a very strong emphasis on justice in Ps-Phoc; especially cf. II. 9, 12, 14f., 21, 22f., 29.
b. For II. 3–6 cf. Mk 7:21f., and for the traditional combination of licentiousness and covetousness cf. also Eph 4:19; 5:3–5.
c. For the combination of these two commandments (not in this form in the OT, but traditional in Gk. ethics) cf. especially SibOr 3.593f.; Juba 7:20; Josephus, Apion 2.206; Philo, Spec. Leg. 2.235.

Exhortation to Justice
b. See the references in the previous n. For the concern for the poor cf. Ex 23:6; Prov 22:22; Sir 4:1–6.
c. It is uncertain whether the divine judgment takes place in this life or in the hereafter.
d. This may be a rendering of Ex 20:7b: "Yahweh will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it."
You must fill your hand. Give alms to the needy. Receive the homeless in (your) house, and lead the blind man. Pity the shipwrecked, for navigation is unsure. Extend your hand to him who falls, and save the helpless one. Suffering is common to all; life is a wheel; prosperity is unstable. When you have wealth, stretch out your hand to the poor. Of that which God has given you, give of it to the needy. 

Pity the shipwrecked, for navigation is unsure. Extend your hand to him who falls, and save the helpless one. Suffering is common to all; life is a wheel; prosperity is unstable.

When you have wealth, stretch out your hand to the poor. Of that which God has given you, give of it to the needy. 

Love of money and its consequences

The love of money is the mother of all evil.

Gold and silver are always a lure for men. Gold, originator of evil, destroyer of life, crushing all things, would that you were not a desirable calamity to mortals!

For your sake there are battles and plunderings and murders, and children become the enemies of their parents, and brothers (the enemies) of their kinsmen.

Honesty, modesty, and self-control

Do not hide a different thought in your heart while uttering another. Be sincere to all, speak what is from your soul.

Admonition to mercy

a. The Gk. text is very uncertain here. Alternative renderings are: "if your hand is full, give . . ." or "you must fill his hand; give . . ." or "he will fill your hand; give . . ."

b. This line expresses a very Gk. sentiment.

c. The exact meaning of this line is obscure.

d. This line is missing in all the important MSS. It is probably a Christian interpolation on the basis of Acts 15:29.

e. These two lines have an undeniably pacifistic ring about them.

f. This line is an interruption (as is the spurious l. 37) between l. 35 and l. 38. It is identical with l. 69b and strikes a note of keeping measure in all things, which often recurs in this poem, e.g. ll. 59–69, 98, etc.

g. The historical basis of the injunction to treat aliens fairly (l. 39), namely, the Israelites having been themselves aliens in Egypt (Lev 19:34; Ex 23:9), is generalized here into a common truth.

h. The text is somewhat in disorder here.

Love of money and its consequences

a. This maxim occurs in many forms in many ancient writings. The best-known instance is 1Tim 6:10: "The love of money is the root of all evils."

b. This kind of an address to money itself is not found in the Bible but has many parallels in Gk. literature.

c. For this (traditional) list of calamities cf. SibOr 8:24–6 and also Mk 13:12. On the motif of these lines cf. Sir 8:2; 10:8; 31:6.

Honesty, modesty, and self-control

a. Here Ps-Phoc polemicizes against a famous Gk. poet (Theognis) who exhorts man to be as adaptable as a polyp. [An inferior translation would be "octopus"; a polyp, not an octopus, changes its colors according to the environment. See P. van der Horst’s commentary for further discussion. — J.H.C.]

b. Lit. "simple" (Gk. haplous); for this theme see, besides Prov 11:25 and Wis 1:1, especially TLevi 13:1 and the whole of Tlss; cf. EBar 19:2.
51 Whoever wrongs willfully is a bad man; but if he does so under compulsion,
52 I shall not pass sentence, for it is each man's intention that is examined.
53 Do not pride yourself on wisdom nor on strength nor on riches.c
54 The only God is wise and mighty and at the same time rich in blessings.
55 Do not afflict your heart4 with bygone evils;
56 for what has been done can no more be undone.
57 Do not be rash with (your) hands, but bridle your wild anger.*
58 For often someone who has dealt a blow has unintentionally committed a murder.f

Moderation in all things
59 Let (your) emotions be moderate, neither great nor overwhelming.
60 Excess, even of good, is never a boon to mortals;
61 and a great luxuriousness draws one to immoderate desires.
62 Great wealth is conceited and grows to insolence.
63 Anger that steals over one causes destructive madness.
64 Rage is a desire, but wrath surpasses (it).a
65 Zeal for good things is noble, but (zeal for) bad things (is) excessive.b
66 Daring in bad deeds is ruinous, but greatly helps a man who works at good deeds.c
67 Love of virtue is worthy, but love of passion increases shame.d
68 A man who is too naive is called foolish among the citizens.
69 Eat in moderation, and drink and tell stories in moderation.
70 Moderation is the best of all, excesses are grievous.e

Danger of envy and other vices
71 Do not envy (your) friends their goods, do not fix reproach (upon them).a
72 The heavenly ones5 also are without envy toward each other.
73 The moon does not envy the much stronger beams of the sun,
74 nor the earth the heavenly heights though it is below,
75 nor the rivers the seas. They are always in concord.
76 For if there were strife among the blessed ones,c heaven would not stand firm.

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c. Jer 9:23: "Let the sage boast no more of his wisdom, nor the valiant of his valor, nor the rich man of his riches."

d. Lit. "liver." For this use of "liver" as the center of emotions cf. TSim 2:4, 7; 4:1; TZab 2:4; TGad 2:1.

e. Cf. Mishnah, Aboth 2:10: "Be not easily provoked."


Moderation in all things
a. Or: "but if it [rage] is excessive, it is wrath." Behind these lines is a piece of Stoic casuistry that distinguishes three kinds of anger. For warnings against anger see Prov 15:1; 27:4; 29:11; Sir 1:22; 10:18; 23:16; 27:30; Eph 4:31; also TDan 2-4.

b. Again a Stoic distinction.

c. Here two kinds of daring are distinguished (not demonstrably Stoic).

d. Again a Stoic distinction.

e. This line is similar to 1. 36 and possibly an interpolation.

Danger of envy and other vices
a. That is: "Do not defame your neighbor because you envy him his goods."

b. Here and in 1. 75 the heavenly bodies are given Gk. names that often denote gods. Since a Jew would never call these creatures gods these lines have led some scholars to conclude that our author was not a Jew (see Intro.). But Ps-Phoc does no more than borrow traditional pagan terminology to express that the heavenly bodies are personalities, a common Jewish view. No deification of the heavenly bodies is implied here. Also Philo, who explicitly denies that stars are gods (Spec. Leg. 1.13ff.), only adopts traditional philosophical terminology when in Opif. Mundi 27 he says that the stars are visible gods. (This argument is strengthened by the observation that during the period in which Ps-Phoc was composed Jews were influenced by astrological symbols and ideas; cf. TrShem.)

c. See previous n.
Practice self-restraint, and abstain from shameful deeds. Do not imitate evil, but leave vengeance to justice. For persuasiveness is a blessing, but strife begets only strife. Trust not too quickly, before you can see exactly the end. It is proper to surpass (your) benefactors with still more (benefactions). It is better to entertain guests with a simple meal quickly than extensive festivity drawn out beyond the right time. Never be a relentless creditor to a poor man. One should not take from a nest all the birds together, but leave the mother bird behind, in order to get young from her again. Never allow ignorant men to sit in judgment. [Do not pass a judgment before you have heard the word of both parties.]

A wise man examines wisdom, and a fellow craftsman (examines) crafts. An untrained ear cannot grasp important teaching; for those who have never learned good things do not understand. Do not make parasitic flatterers your friends. For many are friends of drinking and eating, flattering at a time whenever they can satiate themselves, but all being discontented with little and unsatiated with much. Trust not the people; the mob is fickle; for the people and water and fire are all equally uncontrollable.

Death and afterlife
Sit not in vain at the fire, weakening your heart. Be moderate in your grief; for moderation is the best. Let the unburied dead receive their share of the earth. Do not dig up the grave of the deceased, nor expose to the sun what may not be seen, lest you stir up the divine anger. It is not good to dissolve the human frame; for we hope that the remains of the departed will soon come to the light (again)

The concept of self-restraint (Gk. sôphrosyne), which is very important in Gk. ethics, seldom occurs in the LXX (e.g. 4Mac 1:31) but more frequently in later Jewish literature, e.g. TJos 4:2; 9:2; 10:2–3; Josephus, Apion 2.195. This utilitarian principle of reciprocity is very hellenistic; see the note on 1.152.

Many Jews in the Diaspora were bankers and, in spite of the OT prohibition to ask interest from an Israelite (Ex 22:24; Lev 25:36; Deut 23:20), they lent money to one another at the regular interest of 24 percent.

These two lines belong to the most typically Jewish ones of this poem. The source is evidently Deut 22:6f., though Ps-Phoc probably derived it from a document also used by Philo (Hypothetica in Eusebius' Praeparatio Evangelica 8.7.9) and Josephus (Apion 2.213). Though regarded as the least weighty of all commandments in rabbinic literature, it was viewed as important; see e.g. Mishnah, Hullin 12.1.

This line, a well-known ancient maxim, is lacking in most of the important MSS.

The sense of this line is hard to determine.

Criticisms of the uneducated are found frequently in Sir.

How to discern a flatterer from a real friend was a theme frequently discussed in Gk. and Roman literature.

The aristocratic mentality reflected in these lines, though more Gk. than biblical, may also be seen in Philo's remarks on the Alexandrian mob (Leg. ad Gaium 67.120).

Death and afterlife
a. Though the sense of this line is not very clear, it may be a warning against excessive mourning; see the following lines.

b. Reading gooi, "grief" (with Bernays) instead of theoisi of the MSS. The text, however, is very uncertain; hence the translation is an educated guess.

c. This was one of the unwritten laws of Gk. ethics.

d. Probably these lines must be interpreted in the light of 1.102: graves were opened in order to dissect the corpses of the deceased.

e. A reference to anatomical practice in Alexandria (see Intro.).
out of the earth; and afterward they will become gods.

For the souls remain unharmed among the deceased.

For the spirit is a loan of God to mortals, and (his) image.

For we have a body out of earth, and when afterward we are resolved again into earth

we are but dust; and then the air has received our spirit.

When you are rich, do not be sparing; remember that you are mortal.

It is impossible to take riches and money (with you) into Hades.

All alike are corpses, but God rules over the souls.

Hades is (our) common eternal home and fatherland, a common place for all, poor and kings.

We humans live not a long time but for a season.

But (our) soul is immortal and lives ageless forever.

The instability of life

Nobody knows what will be after tomorrow or after an hour.

Death is heedless of mortals, and the future is uncertain.

Do not let evils dismay you nor therefore exult in success.

Many times in life incredible calamity has come suddenly to the confident and release from evil to the vexed.

Accommodate yourself to the circumstances, do not blow against the winds.

Speech and wisdom, man’s distinction

Do not become mad in your mind by reveling in boastfulness.

Practice speaking the right word, which will greatly benefit all.

Speech is to man a weapon sharper than iron.

God allotted a weapon to every creature; the capacity to fly to birds, speed to horses, and strength to the lions;

he clothed the bulls with their self-growing horns, he gave stings to the bees as their natural means of defense, but speech to man as his protection.
129 [But speech of the divinely inspired wisdom is best.]
130 Better is a wise man than a strong one.
131 Wisdom directs the course of lands and cities and ships.

Avoidance of wickedness and the life of self-restraint and virtue
132 It is unholy to hide a wicked man so as to prevent his being brought to trial;
133 but one must return an evildoer forcibly.
134 Those who are with the wicked often die with them.
135 Do not accept from thieves a stolen, unlawful deposit.
136 Both are thieves, the one who receives as well as the one who steals.
137 Render to all their due, and impartiality is best in every way.
138 In the beginning be sparing with all things, lest in the end you fall short.
139 Take not for yourself a mortal beast’s ration of food.
140 But if a beast of (your) enemy falls on the way, help it to rise.
141 Never expose a wandering man and a sinner.
142 It is better to make a gracious friend instead of an enemy.
143 Nip the evil in the bud, and heal the wound.
144 [By a tiny spark a vast forest is set on fire.]
145 [Keep your heart restrained and abstain from disgraceful things.]
146 [Flee an evil report; flee lawless men.]
147 Eat no meat that is torn by wild animals, but leave the remains to the swift dogs.
148 Make no potions, keep away from magical books.
149 Do not apply your hand violently to tender children.
150 Flee dissension and strife when war is drawing near.
151 Do no good to a bad man; it is like sowing into the sea.

The usefulness of labor
152 Work hard so that you can live from your own means;
153 for every idle man lives from what his hands can steal.
154 [A craft maintains a man, but an idle man is oppressed by hunger.]
155 Eat not the leavings of another man’s meal,
156 but eat without shame what you have earned yourself.
157 And if someone has not learned a craft, he must dig with a hoe.

b. This line, in clumsy Gk., is probably unauthentic. It is lacking in some important textual witnesses.
c. On Wisdom as helmsman see Wis 10:4.

Avoidance of wickedness . . .
a. Probably a proverb.
b. The Gk. text of this line is rather obscure. Many interpreters have asserted that the line forbids the eating of meat that is torn by animals, but that is the theme of II. 147f.
c. No doubt deriving from Ex 23:5.
d. Again the text is obscure. A little change in the text (reading not broton, “man,” but boston, “beast”) might make it refer to Ex 23:4 (on your enemy’s ox going astray), which is attractive in view of I. 140.
e. On the worth of friendship see Sir 6:16; 7:18.
f. This line is in only one MS. On the theme cf. Jas 3:5 (“Think how small a flame can set fire to a huge forest”); Philo, Migr. Abr. 123.
g. This clumsy interpolation occurs in only one MS.

h. This is one of the very few typically Jewish prescriptions in the poem, no doubt deriving from Ex 22:31. It was also one of the Noachian laws; see Sanhedrin 56a.
i. The principle of reciprocity, i.e. that one has always to return a benefaction (see I. 80), had as a consequence that one wanted to benefit only those people from whom one expected some return. Of hellenistic origin, this principle had penetrated into Judaism, as may be concluded from Sir 12:1–7. Jesus’ polemics against this principle are reflected in Lk 6:32–5.

The usefulness of labor
a. This passage (II. 153–74) and the following one (II. 175–205) are the only really coherent parts of this poem.
b. Cf. Qiddushin 29a: “He who does not teach his son a craft teaches him brigandage.”
c. This spurious line is in only one MS.
d. The text of this line is uncertain.
e. Digging was regarded as the hardest kind of work, mostly reserved for slaves or uneducated.
Life has every kind of work if you are willing to toil. If you want to sail and be a mariner, the sea is wide. And if you want to cultivate land, the fields are large. There is no easy work without toil, neither for men, nor for the blessed themselves. But labor gives great increase to virtue.

The ants having left their homes, deeply hidden under the earth, come in their need of food when the fields fill the threshing floors with fruits after the crops have been reaped. They themselves have a load of freshly threshed wheat or barley—and always bearer follows bearer—and from the summer harvest they supply their food for the winter, without tiring. This tiny folk is much-laboring.

The bee toils, traversing the air, working excellently, whether in the crevice of a hollow rock or in the reeds, or in the hollow of an ancient oak, within their nests, in swarms at their thousand-celled combs, building with wax.

Marriage and chastity

Do not remain unmarried, lest you die nameless. Give nature her due, you also, beget in your turn as you were begotten.

Do not prostitute your wife, defiling your children. For the adulterous bed brings not sons in (your) likeness.

Do not touch your stepmother, your father’s second wife, but honor her as a mother, because she follows the footsteps of your mother.

Do not have intercourse with the concubines of (your) father.

Do not approach the bed of (your) sister, (a bed) to turn away from.

Nor go to bed with the wives of your brothers.

Do not let a woman destroy the unborn babe in her belly, nor after its birth throw it before the dogs and the vultures as a prey.

Marriage and chastity

A. This section and the following (II. 175–227) show several resemblances to the so-called Haus­tafeln in Col 3:18–4:1 and Eph 5:22–6:9. These passages also deal with marriage, education of children, and treatment of slaves. One is reminded of the rabbinic triad, “women, slaves, and minors.”

B. Recommendations of marriage and procreation, though also found in Stoic authors, are more frequent in Jewish writings (usually based on Gen 1:28 and 2:24). See the long instructive passage Jebamoth 61a–64a.

C. This has no OT source, though Lev 19:29 forbids the prostitution of one’s daughter.

D. Perhaps this line reflects the ancient belief that the likeness of children to their parents was determined solely by the man’s sperm.


F. Having no exact OT counterpart, this line may also render Lev 18:8 (as does l. 179). The combination stepmother-concubine was a traditional one.

G. Cf. Philo, Spec. Leg. 3.22. Possibly Ps-Phoc had in view here the marriages between brothers and sisters in Egypt (not only in the royal family).

H. See for l. 179–83 also Mishnah, Keritot 1.1. Abortion and exposure of children were the current methods of family planning in pagan antiquity. Though the OT forbids neither practice (but see the LXX translation of Ex 21:22f.), they are frequently condemned (in this combination) in Jewish and Christian writings, e.g. Philo, Spec. Leg. 3.108–19, Josephus, Apion 2.202, SibOr 2:281f.; Did 2:2; EBar 19:5, etc.

f. Agriculture is strongly recommended by both Gk. moralists and by Jewish authors.

g. This line is probably a literal quotation from an oracle of the Milesian Branchidae. The author possibly drew upon a collection of oracles as they were current in antiquity.

h. This addition to the oracle text looks like a polemic against the ancient idea of the great ease of divine action. But by “the blessed” Ps-Phoc means (as in l. 75) the heavenly bodies. The labors of sun and moon are the eclipses, as may be gathered from several Gk. and Lat. texts.

i. This whole passage (II. 164–70) is inspired by Prov 6:6–8, though there are many classical texts where the ants are regarded as examples of industry.

j. For this somewhat top-heavy sentence the author drew upon Prov 6:8a–c, which is not in the Heb. text but only in the LXX. Though there are classical parallels here too, the sequence of II. 164–74, which is exactly the same as Prov 6:6–8c, makes it more than probable that Ps-Phoc tried to render this LXX text.
Do not lay your hand upon your wife when she is pregnant.\(^j\)

Do not cut a youth’s masculine procreative faculty.\(^k\)

Do not seek sexual union with irrational animals.\(^l\)

Do not outrage (your) wife by shameful ways of intercourse.\(^m\)

Do not transgress with unlawful sex the limits set by nature.\(^n\)

For even animals are not pleased by intercourse of male with male.\(^o\)

And let women not imitate the sexual role of men.\(^p\)

For eros is not a god,\(^q\) but a passion destructive of all.

Love your own wife, for what is sweeter and better
than whenever a wife is kindly disposed toward (her) husband and a
husband toward (his) wife

till old age, without strife divisively interfering?\(^r\)

Let no one violently have intercourse with a girl not yet betrothed. Ex 22:16

Do not bring as a wife into your home a bad and wealthy woman,
for you will be a slave of (your) wife because of the ruinous dowry.\(^s\)

We seek noble horses and strong-necked bulls,
plowers of the earth, and the very best of dogs;
yet we fools do not strive to marry a good (wife),
nor does a woman reject a bad man when he is rich.\(^t\)

Do not add marriage to marriage, calamity to calamity/
Nor permit yourself strife with your kinsfolk about possessions.

Family life

Do not be harsh with your children, but be gentle.

And if a child offends against you, let the mother cut her son down to
size,
or else the elders of the family or the chiefs of the people.\(^a\)

If a child is a boy do not let locks grow on (his) head.

Do not braid (his) crown nor the cross knots at the top of his head.

Long hair is not fit for boys, but for voluptuous women.\(^b\)

Guard the youthful prime of life of a comely boy,
because many rage for intercourse with a man.

Guard a virgin in firmly locked rooms,\(^c\)
and do not let her be seen before the house until her wedding day.

Family life

a. These lines probably are a rather free and

b. A man’s wearing long hair was often considered
as a sign of effemination; e.g. Philo, Spec. Leg. 3.37.

c. Cf. Philo, In Flaccum 89.

j. The sense of this line is not wholly clear, but
probably it is about sexual intercourse with a

k. In the OT castration is not explicitly forbid­
den, but cf. Philo, Hypothetica in Eusebius’ Prae­
paratio Evangelica 8.7.7, and Josephus, Apion
2.270f.; also Sanhedrin 56b; Shabbath 110b, etc.


m. Though several explanations of this line are
possible (intercourse during menstruation, Lev 18:19;
“variations”; violating; adultery), probably it for­
bids intercourse that is not for the sake of procrea­
tion, strongly condemned by both Jewish and
(some) Gk. writers.

n. In view of the following line this line probably
forbids homosexual activities (as does l. 3) by
referring to the law of nature, as do Philo (Abr.
135; Spec. Leg. 2.50) and Paul (Rom 1:27) and
other Jewish and Gk. authors.

o. This zoological error was a current opinion
in antiquity.

p. Lesbian love is not explicitly forbidden in
the OT, but see Shabbath 65a, Jebamoth 76a, and
in the NT Rom 1:26.

q. Or “a woman.”

r. Eros, “love; desire,” was regarded as a god
by the Greeks.

s. These lines are a paraphrase of some vss.
from Homer (Odyssey 6.182–84) that had become
almost proverbial in antiquity.

t. This was a topic in ancient literature; cf.
Josephus Apion 2.200.

u. In ll. 201–4 the author paraphrases some
well-known lines of Theognis, a Greek poet from
the 6th cent. a.c.

v. It is hard to decide whether this line is directed
against remarrying or against bigamy (polygamy).
The same difficulty is found in CD 4:21 (“to take
two wives during their lifetime”).
The beauty of children is hard for their parents to guard.

[Love your friends till death, for faithfulness is a good thing.]

Show love to your kinsmen and holy unanimity.

Revere those with gray hair on the temples and yield your seat and all privileges to aged persons. An old man of equal descent and of the same age as your father give the same honors.

Provide your slave with the tribute he owes his stomach.

Apportion to a slave what is appointed so that he will be as you wish.

Do not brand (your) slave, thus insulting him.

Do not hurt a slave by slandering (him) to (his) master.

Accept advice also from a judicious slave.

Epilogue

Purifications are for the purity of the soul, not of the body.

These are the mysteries of righteousness; living thus may you live out (your) life well to the threshold of old age.

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d. This line is an interpolation occurring in only one MS.

e. The sentiment expressed in these three lines is universal in the ancient world; cf. Philo, Spec. Leg. 2.237; Josephus, Apion 2.206.

f. Typical of the great humanity of Ps-Phoc, in II. 223–27 he mentions only duties of masters toward slaves, not the reverse.

g. Philo, Spec. Leg. 2.90f.

h. Slaves usually were branded when they had run away or had done something wrong; but rabbis admitted branding as a preventive measure. It was felt very much as a disgrace.

i. Prov 30:10 (note, however, that Prov 30:10 is rendered in the LXX in quite another way; it looks as if Ps-Phoc knew the Heb. text, but that is extremely improbable).

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Epilogue

a. The text and meaning of this line is uncertain. It is clear, however, that in our author's view the purity of the soul is of greater importance than that of the body.

b. By this term the whole content of the poem is summarized.

c. For structurally similar closing passages cf. SibOr 2:149–51; EBar 21:1; ShepHerm Similitudes 10.4.1. (I am indebted to the editor for some useful suggestions.)