PHILEMON AND BAUCIS IN OVID’S METAMORPHOSES

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The number of religious motifs found in the Philemon-Baucis tale (Met. 8.611–724) is strikingly large. Brooks Otis is right to see the story primarily as a theodicy, designed to vindicate the power and influence of the gods. He draws attention to the contrast and balance of the Philemon-Baucis and Erysichthon episodes at the centre of the Metamorphoses: the Philemon-Baucis is a story of piety and its reward, the Erysichthon is a story of impiety and its punishment.1 At the mid-point of the poem Ovid tells two moralistic tales. The charm of the Philemon-Baucis can be attributed in large measure to the way in which Ovid tells the story: he is not closely involved with the characters of Philemon and Baucis and allows humour and touches of cynicism to colour his narrative about them.2 The tone is sympathetic and the edifying character of the tale makes it stand out among the generally tragic, erotic, and vengeful stories which fill the Metamorphoses.3

Commentators, such as A. S. Hollis and F. Bömer, have noted and listed the religious motifs and themes found in the Philemon-Baucis.4 There is the motif of a sacred tree in a walled enclosure (Met. 8.621–2; 719–24), the motif of superhuman beings wandering the earth to test human behaviour (Met. 8.626–9; 689–90), the motif of entertaining a god or hero in an ordinary everyday environment (Met. 8.637–78), the motif of miraculous replenishment as a sign of divine goodwill (Met. 8.679–80), the motif of a flood as the punishment for human wickedness and the saving of one pious couple (Met. 8.689–97), and the motif of divine rewards for piety and hospitality (Met. 8.703–20).

Where did Ovid find the Philemon-Baucis tale? It first appears in the Metamorphoses and no other classical author tells the story. A comment by E. J. Kenney can provide a starting point for a discussion of its background: ‘On to a folk-tale originating apparently in Asia Minor he (Ovid) has grafted a literary motif inherited through Callimachus from Homer: the reception of a great personage in a humble dwelling.’5 It is possible, though perhaps not very likely, that the grafting was the work, not of Ovid himself, but of an earlier writer who was Ovid’s source for the story. Kenney is certainly right to point to Asia Minor as the place where the Philemon-Baucis seems to have originated and also to Callimachus whose Hecale played a significant role in the development of the topos of entertaining an
important personage in a peasant home. W. S. Anderson argues that
the few fragments of the Hecale which survive do not permit us to
assert categorically that Ovid ‘borrowed directly from Callimachus’
account’. Hollis’s commentary, however, lists the verbal and thematic
borrowings from the Hecale and establishes that they are genuine,
though it is worth pointing out that the debts to Callimachus’ poem
are found in the section in which Ovid describes the preparation and
serving of the meal (Met. 8.637–78), that is to say in less than half of
the Philemon-Baucis as a whole (Met. 8.611–724). The extent of
Ovid’s debt to Callimachus is therefore exaggerated by Due who
describes the Philemon-Baucis as Ovid’s ‘imitation of Callimachus’
Hecale’. It is only that in part. Callimachus’ story about Hecale and
her hospitality to Theseus on his way to destroy the bull of Marathon
was not a theoxeny nor a theodicy as the Philemon-Baucis essentially
is. Nor was the Hecale related in any way to stories about the
punishment of human wickedness by flood and the saving of a pious
couple. The Philemon-Baucis belongs to the tradition of flood stories
whose prime Greek example is the tale of Deucalion and Pyrrha.10
The major religious aspects of the Philemon-Baucis – theodicy, flood
story, tree cult – owe nothing to Callimachus’ Hecale.

When Philemon and Baucis discover that their two guests are gods,
they attempt to sacrifice their only goose in their honour, but the
gods forbid the sacrifice (Met. 8.684–8). This short episode, appended
to the description of the meal with its echoes of the Hecale, shows
indebtedness to another Callimachean poem, the Aitia. The motif of
a simple peasant meal for a distinguished guest was also present in
the Aitia where Molorchus entertained Heracles in his cabin before
the hero set out to kill the Nemean lion.11 Heracles refused to allow
Molorchus to sacrifice his only ram in his honour.12 In the Molorchus
episode, as in the Philemon-Baucis, a simple peasant meal is followed
by an attempt at a sacrifice which the distinguished guest(s) forbid(s).-
Philemon’s and Baucis’ attempt to sacrifice their only goose had, it
seems, a Callimachean parallel and precedent.13

Anderson claims that there is no convincing evidence that Ovid
borrowed directly from Callimachus’ Hecale in the Philemon-Baucis.14
This is not so. Ovid draws attention to the Callimachean background
in a thoroughly allusive and Hellenistic fashion. At the end of the
Philemon-Baucis Ovid remarks that the tale impressed everyone,
‘especially Theseus’ (Met. 8.726: Thesea praeclipe). Anderson’s
comment ‘Theseus would obviously be more moved than his doubting
friend Pirithous’ misses the point of Thesea praeclipe. The story of
Philemon’s and Baucis’ hospitality to distinguished visitors impressed
Theseus because he too had received similar hospitality in a peasant’s
hut. The story of Philemon and Baucis makes Theseus remember Hecale with gratitude: Ovid’s Theseus recalls his Callimachus.\textsuperscript{15}

There is no doubt that the \textit{Philemon-Baucis} has ‘affinities’, as L. P. Wilkinson judiciously puts it,\textsuperscript{16} with the \textit{Hecale} and also, we can add, with the \textit{Aitia (Molorchus episode)}. Simple peasant meals seem to have developed into a standard poetic topos after Callimachus. The motif is found in Latin poetry not only in the \textit{Philemon-Baucis} but also in satire and in the \textit{Moretum}. Galinsky suggests that Ovid has added the themes of theophany, flood, and tree cult to a story ‘borrowed’ from Callimachus.\textsuperscript{17} It is really the other way round. Ovid has incorporated the Callimachean simple meal motif into a story of theodicy and flood. Remove the elaborate description of the meal which runs from \textit{Met.} 8.637 to 688 and the \textit{Philemon-Baucis} story is still complete. Theophany and flood are primary elements in the tale: the Callimachean borrowings are secondary.

When we approach the question of the source of the \textit{Philemon-Baucis} the situation is not quite so hopeless as Anderson’s comment ‘We do not know where Ovid discovered this tale’ suggests.\textsuperscript{18} Ovid’s story carries significant traces of its background and some hints on the basis of which we can form an opinion about which author Ovid is most likely indebted to for the tale. First of all we can note that the information given about the location of the \textit{Philemon-Baucis} is fairly precise. It is set in the Phrygian hills (\textit{Met.} 8.621: \textit{collibus . . . Phrygiis}). Ovid is not likely to have chosen this location off his own bat: it probably comes from his source. Mention of Phrygia comes out of the blue in a series of stories set in central Greece and focused on Theseus in the context of the Calydonian hunt and its aftermath. Secondly the area of Phrygia specified belonged to the province of Asia in Ovid’s day and is anachronistically called Phrygian. The story is set in the region of Phrygia which Pelops ruled and beside a marshy lake (\textit{Met.} 8.621–5). Strabo tells us that Pelops ruled the country round Mt. Sipylius, ‘which the ancients called Phrygia’ and that Pelops himself was called ‘Phrygian’.\textsuperscript{19}

More geographical information is contained in the description of the person who pointed out the site of Philemon’s and Baucis’ transformation into trees as \textit{Thyneius} (\textit{Met.} 8.719). The island of Thynia lies one mile off the southern Black Sea coast of Bithynia and belonged to the region of Bithynia often described as ‘Lesser Phrygia’.\textsuperscript{20} A \textit{Thyneius} living in the Phrygian hills near Mt. Sipylius is therefore accurately described as an \textit{incola (Met.} 8.720\textit{), that is a resident alien, a \pi\alpha\rho\omega\kappa\omega\varsigma. Thyneius is an unusual word, used only here in Ovid: it seems almost certain that Ovid found it in his Greek source. The geographical evidence contained in the \textit{Philemon-Baucis}
locates the story near Mt. Sipylus in Asia Minor and probably close to the coast as the presence of *mergi* (‘seagulls’) at *Met.* 8.625 suggests.

There is Ovidian humour in the fact that the meal served by Philemon and Baucis in the Phrygian hills consists of traditional Roman peasant fare, but one item on the menu comes specifically from Asia Minor. Only here in the *Metamorphoses* is there a reference to a type of fig produced in Caria and called *carica* (*Met.* 8.674). There is nice point in the old couple serving a local type of fig which to Ovid’s readers might seem an exotic import.21 Ovid is not likely to have taken the word from his Greek source: there is no evidence that the term was used in Greek.

Three suggestions have been made about Ovid’s source for the *Philemon-Baucis*. Haupt et alii suggest that Ovid may have found the story in the *Περὶ Φρυγίων* of Alexander Polyhistor of Miletus who received his freedom from Sulla after arriving in Rome as a prisoner of war.22 Alexander Polyhistor, however, wrote in prose and Ovid is much more likely to have used a poetic source. There are a number of Hellenistic poeticisms in the *Philemon-Baucis* which argue against a prose source. The second suggestion, made by W. M. Calder, is that the story was brought back from Asia Minor by an officer of P. Sulpicius Quirinius who campaigned in the region in c. 4–3 B.C.23 There is no corroborative evidence to support this theory, and Hollis makes the sensible point that ‘an officer of P. Sulpicius Quirinius is not a very likely informant for Ovid’. Quirinius’ campaigns were on the Sicilian borderland of the province of Galatia, a long way from Mt. Sipylus and the western part of Asia Minor where the *Philemon-Baucis* is set. The third suggestion is that Nicander of Colophon’s *Heteroioumena* was Ovid’s source for the *Philemon-Baucis*.24 This seems most likely. Nicander’s lost didactic poem was a major source of material for Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as the prose summaries of episodes from four of seemingly five original books of the *Heteroioumena* show.25 The prose summaries have survived in the handbook compiled by Antoninus Liberalis in the second century A.D. Of the twenty-six stories from Nicander’s poem which Antoninus Liberalis summarizes, twenty-one are used by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. Gow and Scholfield place Nicander’s *floruit* in the middle of the second century B.C. He was the hereditary priest of Apollo at the oracle of Claros near Colophon. The poet-priest was on friendly terms with Attalus III of Pergamum (c. 170–133 B.C.) to whom he addresses a short hymn praising the prince’s pedigree which he traces back to Heracles and Pelops.26

The location of the *Philemon-Baucis* fits in neatly with the
possibility that Nicander was Ovid’s source for the story. First Mt. Sipylus is only 30/40 miles distant from Colophon as the crow flies and the mountain featured prominently in Nicander’s version of the Pandareos legend.\textsuperscript{27} Secondly the story is discovered as a result of a journey undertaken on the orders of Pittheus, son of Pelops (\textit{Met.} 8.622–3). The references to Pittheus and Pelops gain significance when we remember that Nicander was subject to, and on good terms with, Attalus III in whose kingdom the story of Philemon and Baucis is set.\textsuperscript{28} There is no difficulty therefore in supposing that Nicander had first-hand knowledge of a local cult of a pious couple (perhaps called Philemon and Baucis) in the Mt. Sipylus area or alternatively the scholarly poet-priest may have come across the legend in the library at Pergamum, a library second only to that of Alexandria in the Hellenistic world.\textsuperscript{29} Finally the reference to Pelops’ kingdom as located in the ‘Phrygian hills’ (\textit{Met.} 8.621) fits in well with an Attalid perspective on the history and geography of the region. The reference makes much less sense in the context of the geography of Ovid’s day when Mt. Sipylus was in the province of Asia.

The \textit{Philemon-Baucis} story contains elements which enable us to label it as a local version of the flood story: Phrygia was an area in which such stories abounded.\textsuperscript{30} There is evidence that Nicander had a penchant for stories of the flood type in which human beings who failed to show respect to gods in their midst were punished by natural disaster and those who honoured the gods were saved.\textsuperscript{31} The homiletic tone of the \textit{Philemon-Baucis} is in keeping with the moralistic approach of Nicander as reflected in the prose summaries of episodes from the \textit{Heteroioumena}. So too is the actiological character of the story as the explanation of a local cult and cult site.\textsuperscript{32} Warm conjugal affection, such as that between Philemon and Baucis, was a congenial subject to Nicander who was Ovid’s source for the most moving account of married love in the \textit{Metamorphoses} in the story of Ceyx and Alcyone in book 11.\textsuperscript{33}

Ovid’s \textit{Philemon-Baucis} contains a number of typically Nicandrian touches. A learned concern for the authenticity of source material was a feature of Hellenistic poetry generally;\textsuperscript{34} in Nicander’s \textit{Heteroioumena} the authenticity of a miracle story was sometimes corroborated by the narrator’s description of the cult site, followed by an \textit{adtestatio rei visae}. For example, the story of the Lycian farmers who were turned into frogs, taken by Ovid from Nicander,\textsuperscript{35} begins with a description of the marsh and altar at the site of the transformations and the narrator vouches for the reliability of his account as an eyewitness (\textit{Met.} 6.320–1: \textit{vidi praesens stagnunque locumque / Prodigio notum}). So too in the \textit{Philemon-Baucis} the narrator describes the tree
enclosure and the marsh (stagnum) at the site of the couple’s transformation and comments ipse locum vidi (Met. 8.622). In both stories the narrator is a god-fearing man sent on an expedition to a place where a metamorphosis had occurred. A local resident (Met. 6.323–4) or residents (Met. 8.719–22) tell the cult story to the narrator. Lelex, the narrator of the Philemon-Baucis tale, is described as animo maturus et aevō (Met. 8.617): this description establishes his reliability as a witness and informant. The credibility of Lelex’ account is further enhanced by his attribution of it to reliable local elders (Met. 8.721–2: non vani . . . / . . . senes). The emphasis on the maturity and reliability of the narrator and the respect shown for old age as a guarantee of a storyteller’s credibility find parallels in Nicander’s Cragaleus, a narrator whom his neighbours regarded highly on account of his mature years and sound intellect (Ant. Lib. 4: ‘Ο δὲ Κραγαλέως οὖτος ἐγεγόνει γηραιός ἕδη καὶ τοῖς ἐγχώριοις ἐνομιζότεν δίκαιος εἶναι καὶ φρὸνιμος).

Hollis points out another typically Nicandrian touch at Met. 8.719–20. ‘To end a story by mentioning some local landmark or custom still observed by the ἐπιχώριοι (cf. 720: ‘incola’) seems to have been a regular practice in Nicander’s Heteroioumena.’36 In this context Ovid’s adhuc at Met. 8.719 is reminiscent of the ἀχριν νῦν / ἐτὶ νῦν often found at the end of Antoninus Liberalis’ paraphrases of Nicander’s stories.37 Lelex’ pious gesture and utterance (Met. 8.723–4) find a parallel in the prayer of the narrator at the cult site in the story of the Lycian farmers (Met. 6.328).

The Phrygian religious features of the Philemon-Baucis have long been acknowledged.38 Theophany, sacred trees, the joint worship of Zeus and Hermes, and the story of a local flood are elements of the Philemon-Baucis which find parallels in Phrygian folk-tales.39 One curious detail of Ovid’s Philemon-Baucis also fits into a Phrygian context and may come from Nicander. The marsh near which the transformation took place is described at Met. 8.625 as celebres mergis fulicisque palustribus undae: Nicander seems to have had a liking for cult sites in the vicinity of marshes (cf. Met. 6.320–1). The reference to fulicae at Met. 8.625 is unique in Ovid. Fulica (fulix) is a water-fowl (‘coot’) known in Greek as φαλαρίς. Elsewhere in Augustan poetry fulica is found only in Virgil who makes an ornithological error at G. 4.362–3 by referring to ‘marinae . . . / . . . fulicae’. Wilkinson points out that ‘a sea-coot is a non-bird’: the coot is a ‘bird of marsh and estuary, not sea’.40 Ovid’s description of the fulica as a marsh bird is ornithologically accurate. Coots collect, just as Ovid describes them, in flocks of hundreds or thousands.41 Pliny also tells us that coots were the most highly esteemed water-fowl in Asia
Minor (Nat. 10.132: *phalerides in Seleucia Parthorum et in Asia aquaticarum laudatissimae*). The ornithological precision and the geographical appropriateness of Ovid’s only reference to *fulicae* suggests that he found these coots in his source. Nicander had a specialist’s knowledge of zoology and is likely to have known his local birds.\(^{42}\) The reference to *fulicae* at *Met.* 8.625 seems to strike a genuinely Nicandrian note in a typically Nicandrian description of a cult site.

We have seen that the description of the meal at *Met.* 8.637–78 is indebted to Callimachus’ *Hecale*. But it is worth suggesting that there may also be echoes of Nicander in this section: everyday details about the preparation and serving of meals are very much in the style of Nicander’s *Georgica*. The *Georgica* dealt with such humdrum topics as sowing and preserving vegetables, cooking meat and fish. Some fragments of the *Georgica* consist of kitchen recipes and one fragment describes lopping off the outer leaves of a date-palm to get at its heart in the same way that Philemon lops off vegetables leaves at *Met.* 8.647.\(^{43}\) Nicander’s poem is supposed to have had an influence on Virgil’s *Georgics*, but the fragments of the *Georgica* describing everyday details of country life suggest that the poem had more in common with the *Moretum* and the *Philemon-Baucis* than with Virgil’s work. The down-to-earth nature of the description at *Met.* 8.637–78 is in Nicander’s manner, even if Nicander’s direct influence cannot be proved.

Recent scholars have paid scant attention to Old Testament parallels to the *Philemon-Baucis* story.\(^{44}\) Hollis’s otherwise very thorough review of the background to the *Philemon-Baucis* refers only in passing to the possibility of Jewish influences on the Phrygian tale.\(^{45}\) Galinsky comments vaguely and blandly that the affinity between the *Philemon-Baucis* and certain biblical themes and passages ‘is ultimately explained by the original, religious character of the myth’.\(^{46}\) Earlier scholars were more explicit and forthcoming. H. T. Riley observed that ‘the story of the wretched fate of the inhospitable neighbours of Philemon and Baucis is thought by some modern writers to be founded upon the Scriptural account of the destruction of the cities of the plain’ (i.e. the story of Sodom and Gomorrah at *Genesis* 19.1–29). Riley also mentions the theory that Philemon’s and Baucis’ entertainment of Jupiter and Mercury is ‘founded on the history of the reception of the Angels by Abraham’ (*Genesis* 18.1–15).\(^{47}\) Franz Bömer acknowledges the possibility of Jewish influences on the *Philemon-Baucis* but fails to mention an article by C. C. Bushnell in which the connections with *Genesis* 18–19 are set out.\(^{48}\) The parallels between the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen.* 19) and the *Philemon-Baucis* can be itemized as follows:
1 Two unrecognized superhuman beings arrive at evening in a carefully defined locality.
2 A single household offers food and shelter to the pair.
3 The foot-washing motif and the topos of the hospitable meal are found in both narratives.
4 The rest of the local community shows hostility towards the visitors.
5 The visitors reveal their superhuman status by performing a miracle (causing blindness in Genesis, replenishing the wine in Ovid).
6 The guests announce that they are gods in Ovid, that they are God’s messengers in Genesis.
7 The superhuman visitors decree the punishment of the local community for its ill-will towards them.
8 The hospitable household is granted immunity from impending disaster.
9 The visitors tell their hosts to leave their home and flee to the mountains.
10 The visitors escort their hosts to safety on higher ground. The hosts delay their departure in Genesis and move slowly and with difficulty to safety in Ovid.
11 Divine punishment is visited on the wicked (who are submerged in a lake in Ovid and submerged under a ‘rain’ of fire and brimstone in Genesis).
12 Survivors (Philemon and Baucis in Ovid, Lot’s wife and Abraham in Genesis) look back over the scene of the disaster.
13 The disaster is confined to the particular locality where the wickedness occurred.
14 A favour is granted by the superhuman visitors to the hospitable household (the saving of Zoar in Genesis, priesthood and simultaneous death in Ovid).
15 One or two members of the hospitable household undergo metamorphosis (Lot’s wife in Genesis, Philemon and Baucis in Ovid).

The common elements show that Genesis 19 and the Philemon-Baucis are both theodicies and that both are related to the near eastern tradition of flood stories. Evidence that the Sodom story has affinities at one level with the flood-tradition is provided (a) by the use of the Hebrew word for ‘rain’ (himṣīr) at Genesis 19.24 (‘Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire out of heaven’); (b) by the command to flee to the hills (Gen. 19.17) (this command makes sense in the context of a deluge); (c) by the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah as located in the basin of the Dead Sea (Gen. 14.1–3).49
The predominant flood myth described a universal deluge and is represented in *Genesis* by the story of Noah and in Greek literature by the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha. M. L. West points out that the flood story was not mentioned by Hesiod, either because he did not know it or because he excluded it. 'It came, of course, from the east, for it is nothing but the story of Ziusudra-Utnapishtim-Noah, transferred to the improbable setting of central Greece. On its arrival it was doubtless attached to Deukalion because he was the first man, at least in central Greek myth.' The *Sodom and Gomorrah* story and the *Philemon-Baucis* can be described as subtypes of the Babylonian-Sumerian flood story because they describe *local* deluges. The author of *Genesis* and Ovid both give much greater prominence to the flood theme in their versions of the *universal* flood in *Genesis* 6–8 (Noah) and in *Metamorphoses* Book 1 (Deucalion). Just as the Deucalion story is the story of Noah transferred to central Greece, so the Phrygian tale of Philemon and Baucis has assimilated elements from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Riley also drew attention to the connections between Philemon's and Baucis' entertainment of Jupiter and Mercury and Abraham's and Sarah's entertainment of three angels at *Gen.* 18.1–15. In *Genesis* 18–19, as in the *Philemon-Baucis*, the entertainment of superhuman visitors by a hospitable and pious couple (theoxeny) precedes an account of the destruction of the wicked and the saving of a single pious household (theodicy). The *Genesis* 18 theoxeny offers the following parallels to the *Philemon-Baucis*:

1. A married couple offers hospitality to unrecognized superhuman visitors.
2. Husband and wife are elderly and there are no children.
3. Husband and wife both help to prepare a substantial meal for their visitors.
4. Humour is a feature of both stories (the laughter motif in *Genesis*, the light-hearted tone of the narrative and the humorous goose chase in Ovid).
5. Sacred trees feature in both stories (the epiphany to the couple takes place by the terebinths of Mamre in *Genesis*, husband and wife are transformed into sacred trees in Ovid).

Some of the common elements in the *Genesis* 18 and the *Philemon-Baucis* theoxenies (e.g. the foot-washing motif, the meal topos, the granting of a boon) feature in most theoxenies, but the five parallels noted above are distinctive and seem to show that the *Philemon-Baucis* has at some stage assimilated material from *Gen.* 18.1–15.

Motifs from *Genesis* 18.1–15 have also found their way into the
Hyrieus episode (Fasti 5.493–544) which is another theoxeny and a doublet of the Philemon-Baucis. The major feature which Genesis 18.1–15 and the Hyrieus story have in common is that both tell of the miraculous conception of a son for an elderly father as his reward for entertaining three superhuman visitors. The Boeotian saga of the birth of Hyrieus' son Orion ἀπὸ τῶν οὐρων τοῦ Δίως καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ Ποσειδῶνος was, it seems, known to Nicander (Theriaca 15: see scholiast ad loc.) and can be traced back through Nicander's poetic predecessor Antimachus of Colophon (fl. c. 425 B.C.) to Pindar (Pindari Carmina [ed. A. Turyn, 1948], fragment 83 p. 290). Where and when material from the story of the miraculous conception of Isaac (Gen. 18) found its way into the story of the miraculous conception of Orion cannot now be ascertained.

Another Old Testament motif which finds a parallel in the Philemon-Baucis is the miraculous replenishment of the wine at Met. 8.679–80. In a similar situation at Silius Italicus, Punica 7.289–91 Bacchus proves his divinity to his host Falernus by transforming milk into wine. Silius Italicus may be indebted at this point to Eratosthenes' Erigone in which Bacchus visited the Athenian Icarius and gave him a present of the vine. Transformation must however be distinguished from replenishment. Replenishment as a sign of divine favour is found in two Old Testament stories and in the Philemon-Baucis. The prophet Elijah replenishes oil and meal for the hospitable woman of Zarephath (1 Kings 17.14–16) and Elisha replenishes the oil of a prophet's widow (2 Kings 4.2–6). It looks as if this Old Testament replenishment motif has been incorporated into the recognition scene (epiphany) of the Philemon-Baucis.

Is it reasonable to suggest that Old Testament stories were known in Hellenistic Phrygia and that Old Testament motifs were assimilated into Phrygian folk-tales? Josephus tells us that Antiochus III (c. 242–187 B.C.) sent two thousand Jewish families from Mesopotamia and Babylonia to Lydia and Phrygia. The Philemon-Baucis is located in the heartlands of Lydia. Doubt has been expressed about the historicity of the letter attributed to Antiochus by Josephus guaranteeing the Jewish settlers freedom to use their own laws and customs, but it is certain that Jewish colonists were sent to Lydia and Phrygia as part of the king's policy of expansion. Clearly they came under favourable conditions to set an example of loyalty to Antiochus. Two thousand Jewish families represents a very large number of settlers: plantations do not work unless the planters are sufficiently numerous to make a considerable impact on their new environment.

Two thousand Jewish families arrived in Lydia and Phrygia with their sacred stories about Abraham and Sarah and about Lot and
Sodom. Jewish accounts of theoxeny and flood would have been of particular interest in Phrygia where such stories abounded, and it is scarcely surprising that themes and motifs from an Old Testament story about a god-fearing household rewarded for entertaining superhuman visitors should be assimilated into a Phrygian tale about a devout couple rewarded for entertaining gods. The serious moralistic tone of the Philemon-Baucis, unusual in the Metamorphoses, may reflect the Old Testament background in which the stories of Abraham and Sarah and of Lot and Sodom show Yahweh confirming his covenant relationship with the righteous and destroying the ungodly. Old Testament material lies, at some distance or other, behind Ovid’s Philemon-Baucis, though Ovid, of course, is unlikely to have been aware of Jewish elements in the tale. The fact that Ovid chose to place this particular story at the mid-point of the Metamorphoses is sufficient proof that he responded to its moral and human qualities.

NOTES

2. G. Karl Galinsky, Ovid’s Metamorphoses (Oxford, 1975), pp. 197–204, points out that Ovid has shifted the emphasis of the Philemon-Baucis from its original religious themes to its narrative qualities and has adopted a detached and amused attitude towards the protagonists.
6. The topos can be traced back to Homer where human conduct comes under the scrutiny of gods visiting human homesteads in disguise (Od. 17.485–7). Eumaeus entertains Odysseus in his cottage at Od. 14.48ff. Demeter is entertained at the home of Celeus and Metaneira at Hom. H. 2.184ff.
8. ‘Ovid’s debt to this poem here is obvious even from the meagre fragments remaining’ (Hollis, op. cit., p. 104). See also Hollis’s notes on Met. 8.639; 640; 641ff.; 644–5; 647; 664ff.; 665. Manfred Beller acknowledges Ovid’s debts to Callimachus’ Hecale, but suggests that Ovid may also have taken some details of the meal directly from Homer’s account of Eumaeus’ entertainment of Odysseus in Odyssey 14 (Philemon und Baucis in der europäischen Literatur (Heidelberg, 1967), pp. 30–31). See note 13 below.
10. At Hom. Il. 16.384ff. a simile describes Zeus sending a flood as the punishment for human wickedness. For Deucalion’s flood see Pindar, Ol. 9.42–53 and Ovid Met. 1.313–415. Ovid summarizes another flood story (Ceramalus) at Met. 7.353–6.
13. Beller (op. cit., p. 31) suggests that the two meals prepared by Eumaeus for Odysseus (Od. 14.72ff.; 414ff.) provided the inspiration for the sequence of a meal followed by an attempted sacrifice in Callimachus (Molorchus episode) and Ovid. If so, then Ovid follows the Callimachean development of the Homeric material.
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20. Strabo, Geography 12.543; 571. See Hollis on Met. 8.719 and C. J. Fordyce on Catullus, 46.4. The island of Thynia was sacred to Apollo (Plin. Nat. 6.32; see ‘Thynias’ in RE VI A, 718–20) and there is likely to have been frequent contact with the nearest oracle of Apollo, at Claros near Colophon. On the close contacts between towns on the Black Sea coast and Claros, see H. W. Parke, Greek Oracles (London, 1967), p. 140. Catullus mentions Thynia and Bithynia together at 31.5. The choice of Thynia is significant: mention of another small island is appropriate in a poem praising Sirmio as insularumque ocelle (vv. 1–2). When Catullus returned from his Bithynian tour of duty he talked of leaving the ‘Phrygii . . . campi’ (46.4).
24. Hollis, loc. cit. The Heteroiooumena seems the most likely source, but the Colophoniaca in at least six books is another possibility.
28. Strabo, Geography 12.571.
31. See Anderson on Met. 7.354–6 and 365–7. Cerambus (Met. 7.354–6) was killed by a storm according to Nicander because he insulted the nymphs and Pan (see Antoninus Liberalis 22). The daughters of king Damon alone escaped the general destruction of the Telchines because they had entertained Jupiter hospitably (see Met. 7.365–7 and the scholion on Ov. Ibis 475).
32. The story of the Lycian peasants at Met. 6.313–81 has a similar aetiological character and was adapted by Ovid from Nicander (Antoninus Liberalis 35). The altar and the marsh at Met. 6.324ff. are very similar to the tree enclosure and marsh at Met. 8.620ff.
35. See Antoninus Liberalis 35 and Met. 6.317–81.
37. See Ant. Lib. 1 (ἀχρι βὺν); 2 (ἀχρι βὺν); 4 (ἀχρι βὺν); 8 (τι νῦν); 26 (ἀχρι βὺν); 30 (ἀχρι βὺν); 31 (τι νῦν); 35 (ἀχρι βὺν); 37 (τι νῦν).
38. L. Malten, ‘Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Sagenforschung’, Hermes 74 (1939), 176–206; Hermes 75 (1940), 168–76.
42. Gow and Scholfield, op. cit., pp. 18–22.
44. Haupt et al. made no reference to Old Testament parallels to the Philemon-Baucis in the note on Met. 8.611ff. Von Albrecht’s revision remedies the situation (Met. 8.616–724n.).
45. Hollis, loc. cit.
46. Galinsky, op. cit., p. 198.
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49. There is an excellent account of the Lot and Philemon stories as subtypes of the Babylonian flood myth by Joseph Fontenrose, 'Philemon, Lot and Lycaeon', University of California Publications in Classical Philology, Vol. 13 No. 4 (1945), 93–120.


51. A theoxeny is also followed by a flood story at Met. 1.209ff. (Lycaeon and the Flood).

52. Celeus and Metaneira (husband and wife) entertain Demeter in their home: this theoxeny goes back to the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.

53. See Kenney and Melville on Met. 8.618–728.

54. The following parallels can be noted between Abraham's theoxeny (Gen. 18.1–15) and the Hyrieus episode in the Fasti:

1. Three unrecognized superhuman visitors (angels in Genesis; Jupiter, Neptune, and Mercury in Ovid) arrive at an elderly man's home.
2. They receive a pressing invitation to accept hospitality and to rest.
3. The superhuman visitors are brusque.
4. A meal is prepared, respectfully served, and eaten.
5. The visitors promise the birth of a son (Isaac in Genesis; Orion in Ovid) to their elderly host.
6. The child's conception is miraculous.

55. According to Hesiod Orion was a son of Poseidon by Euryale (see West, op. cit., p. 84). The account of Orion's birth ἀπὸ ὀφρόν can be traced back no further than Pindar. The association of ὀφρόν with begetting is found also at Ant. Lib. 41 ('Ο γὰρ Μίνως ὀφρεῖκεν ὅφεις . . .) in a story which probably comes from Nicander (see Papathomopoulos, op. cit., p. 165 n.1).

56. The replenishment of the wine is a much more dramatic and effective epiphany than the parallel epiphanies at Fasti 5.511ff. (Hyrieus) and Fasti 4.555ff. (Demeter). For the impressive self-revelation of Demeter to Metaneira see N. J. Richardson, The Homeric Hymn to Demeter (Oxford, 1974), 256–74n.
