

Pázmány Péter Catholic University
Faculty of Humanities
Doctoral School of History
Doctoral Program for the History of Ideology

József Gátas

Throne Vision on Stage
The Political Interpretation of Ezekiel's *Exagoge*

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

Supervisors: Dr. Ida Fröhlich DSc and Dr. Lautner Péter

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1. The preliminaries of the research; raising a problem

The *Exagoge* is the only existing drama of the Hellenistic Jewish literature as well as the longest fragment of the contemporary drama. It is the work of Ezekiel the Tragedian, who might have lived in the second century BC in Alexandria as a Jewish poet, which tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt in the form of the drama; the analysed extract is the first fifteen chapters of the *Book of Exodus*. The text was used by Alexander Polyhistor in his lost work of *Upon the Jews*. Eusebius of Caesarea (*Praep. Ev.* 9.28.2-4 and 9.29.5-16) extracted the iambic trimeter of 269 lines from his work. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.23) also preserved an *Exagoge* fragment which relates to Ezekiel, however, the belief, according to which Epiphanius of Salamis also quoted from the *Exagoge* (*Panarion* 64.29.6-30.1), proved to be groundless.

As a consequence, the sole drama of the Hellenistic Jewish literature survived by the pen of a pagan and a Christian poet. Similarly to many Jewish texts from the Hellenistic Age, the *Exagoge* was also read as a Christian text. Some two thousand years had to pass until the German philologists of the nineteenth century started to handle it as a part of the Jewish literature. The view, according to which the readable fragments constituted about one quarter of the original work, held for long, yet, in the mirror of the latest research, which analyses the text in terms of dramaturgy and history of theatre, it seems that the majority of the drama was remained.

Besides being fragmentary, it is a severe problem that there is no other drama of the age with a due length, with which a parallel could be drawn. Not only does the work of art hold particular interest for the researchers of classical literature, but it also serves certain novelty value for the experts of Hellenistic Judaism.

I consider the introduction of Ezekiel's work important and very topical, since the age, in which the *Exagoge* was born raises similar questions in certain respect to the men of the late second century BC and the ones of the

early third millennium AD. By way of illustration, how could one keep their local identity as opposed to a quickly and cruelly spreading political, social and economical system; how could an imported world view influence the relation of the individual and the community; what tools does one have living in their own tradition yet in a multicultural society to represent their world view and legacy? Naturally, these questions cannot be answered by a fragmented drama; however, it can help the better understanding of the present and the examined period.

There are excellent translations of the drama in Hungarian and German, moreover it has got critical editions in English and French. It also occurs in the Hungarian secondary literature, at first in Miksa Szabolcsi's work of *A zsidók egyetemes története*. The two most important monographs are Howard Jacobson's *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Pierluigi Lanfranchi's (*L'Exagoge d'Ezechiel le Tragique: Introduction, texte, traduction et commentaire* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha 21) (Leiden: Brill, 2006). Jacobson primarily approaches the drama as a literary man; in his book, the Greek text and its translation is embraced by a detailed introduction and a commentary; though, the commentary does not explain the text line by line, but only after bigger fragments. Lanfranchi does likewise, yet, he put more emphasis on the Jewish background of the drama and its adaptation in the Jewish cultural heritage. The most accurate edition and commentary of the drama is Lanfranchi's monograph, which focuses on the role of the text in the Jewish literature; however, it also takes the classical literary models into consideration. He lays great stress on the history of research and the transmission of the fragments by significantly dealing with the relation of the Jews and the theatre.

Despite the drama's unique nature and importance, the text was dealt with by the researchers rather late. When the classical scholars and the researchers of Jewish studies came across the drama, they primarily examined the non-canonical elements of it. There are three sections of the drama classed among this category. The first is the *dialogue of Sepphora and Khos* (*Exag.* 66-67), the second, which is the most important in terms of the dissertation, is the

Dream of Moses (including the throne vision) (*Exag.* 68-82) and the *description of the bird* (*Exag.* 254-269), which closes the drama.

Clearly, the *Dream of Moses* is the most provoking section. Its peculiarity is that not only does Moses rise and experiences revelation while being asleep on the Mount Sinai, but he also obtains the regalia from the *noble man* sitting on the throne.

The dream of Moses was and is explained as a mystical element by numerous researchers by creating the *Exagoge* the forerunner of the early Jewish mysticism and the Merkavah literature. However, the main aim of the dissertation is to prove that the work of Ezekiel does not belong to the legacy of the early Jewish mysticism. Those often quoted works in the dissertation which regard the *Exagoge* as part of the early Merkavah literature do not take the other remained fragments and the context of the drama into consideration. The throne vision could have been influenced by the dream visions, heavenly ascents and throne visions of the apocryphal literature and the Old Testament; yet, the *Exagoge* itself is not part of the literature of the early mysticism. The other sections of the drama closely follow the Septuagint, besides the parabiblical interpolations do not include elements beyond tradition, either.

My aim is to demonstrate that Ezekiel worked rather in the Jewish tradition of the Diaspora and despite his form of expression, the Greek influence is limited to the externals. In my view, the audience of the *Exagoge* was not primarily the elite of Greek culture, but the Jewish Diaspora, who started to be Hellenized by searching their own tradition in the meantime.

To support my statement, I list inner as well as external arguments. The most important inner argument is that neither the dream of Moses, nor Moses himself is in the centre of the work, but the Exodus and the Pesach. According to the external argument, the throne vision also has got a political interpretation. The main idea of my dissertation is that the *Exagoge's* Moses is primarily a political leader, whose complex character is affected by numerous sources. Moses as a king cannot be considered as a new

phenomenon in the Second Temple period; consequently, I would like to place the *Exagoge* in this tradition. In my opinion, Ezekiel was a highly educated author of his age, who not only was well acquainted by the Jewish tradition but he was also closely linked to the philosophical tradition through his Hellenic education, furthermore, he thoroughly studied the antecedents of the classical Greek literature. My statement is fortified in Chapter 5, where I cite authors living after Ezekiel and extracting his text, mainly Philo of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea. Philo of Alexandria, in his work of *Life of Moses* undoubtedly used the text of Ezekiel and Eusebius of Caesarea deliberately compiled the drama into Chapter 9 of the *Praeparatio Evangelica*. To prove my thoughts, I also use another work of the father of the Church, his biography of Constantine the Great. As far as I am concerned, certain sections of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* can be read as *speculum regis*, where the Jewish kings, especially Moses, have a great role.

2. The applied methodology

The dissertation divides up into five chapters. In the first chapter I deal with the picture of Moses and the Exodus occurring in the works of Hecataeus of Abdera, Manetho, Artapanus and Eupolemus, through which I depict the mental environment in which the work of Ezekiel was born and survived. The chapter is not solely important due to its description of the mental climate, since these authors are known also from Eusebius of Caesarea's *Praeparatio Evangelica*.

Except for Manetho, the authors describe Moses as a remarkably versatile character, inventor, culture-hero, legislator and philosopher. Moses was competent in almost all the important sciences of his age (astrology, maths and philosophy), and he also handed down his knowledge to the pagan people's edification. As a consequence, the Jewish texts, which deal with the history of the Exodus from Egypt, are not necessarily answers to the Greek historiographers' works of hostile tone, but works born following the difficulties occurring during the Diaspora for the sake of satisfying the communities' inner demands. I do not differentiate pro- and anti-Judaist

authors on purpose on the basis how they write about the Jews and the Exodus. The history of the liberation from the Egyptian captivity is a centre topic only in Jewish literature, yet, at the non-Jewish authors obviously not. For them, Moses and the Exodus is nothing else but the origin of a colourful ethnographic portrayal.

In Chapter 2, I detail the *Exagoge* by touching upon the drama's research history, the role of the text within the dramatic literature as well as its presumed audience, the receptive party. I put great emphasis on the shorter sections which differ from the Book of Exodus, such as the judgement of the Egyptian "loan". While examining the receptive party, I dwell on one of the most important and central elements of the drama, the analysis of the Pesach's description. Although, the *Exagoge* does not refer to an archetypal Pesach, one might find the Pesach's roots of the age of Haggadah. There are no sources whether the *Exagoge* had been performed; therefore, one cannot know whether the drama had been put on the stage in a synagogue or on Jewish festivals, which is supposed by Lanfranchi. The fact that a Midrash-like, but literary work could be written presumes the existence of a strong Jewish community in Alexandria, which was on the border of assimilation. Apart from forming identity, the aim of the *Exagoge* is also fostering the memory of the Pesach.

In Chapter 3, I deal with the text's earlier mentioned complements, which differ the most from the book of Exodus. The three sections are surplus comparing to the Septuagint, in the first one, we meet the figure of Khos, who is unknown by other sources and strongly opposes the marriage of Moses and Sepphora; in the second one can read the throne vision of Moses and the third covers the description of the bird, which has been wrongly identified with the phoenix in the secondary literature for long. The third chapter includes the examination of the dialogue and the description of the bird in detail. The dialogue of Sepphora and Khos is too short to analyse the text thoroughly enough, however, it can be stated that the character who opposes the marriage is also of Ethiopian origin. The statement, according to which Khos is the

earlier rejected suitor of Sepphora or her brother, cannot be proved by the text.

In the modern secondary literature, the identification of the description of the bird with the phoenix was present from the beginning. In this sub-chapter I search for the possible sources of Ezekiel, then I probe that the description written in the text cannot be directly connected with any real or fictional bird. In my view, the bird also symbolises the ruling role, it is the king of the other birds (*Exag.* 265.: βασιλεὺς δὲ πάντων ὀρνέων / king of all birds) which follow it (*Exag.* 266-269). This motif has something to do with Moses' kingdom, as well.

In Chapter 4, I survey the scientific evaluations and interpretations of the throne vision. The Jewish literature knows numerous heavenly travels and throne visions; however, there is no example for the surrender of the throne. The origin of the dream-reader also should be noted, Raguel, the father-in-law of Moses is of Midianite origin or according to the *Exagoge*, he is from Libya. It is interesting, since usually, the Jews are the ones who unravel the dreams of the non-Jewish dreamers, and not in the other way round.

In this chapter of my dissertation, I would like to place the dream of Moses in the Jewish as well as in the Greek tradition. Apart from introducing the archetypes related to the dream-reading and the throne visions of the Jewish literature, I present the effects of the dreams occurring in the Greek literature on the *Exagoge*. I attach importance not only to the *Exagoge*'s placement into the tradition, but also its context; therefore, I particularly deal with the dreams occurring in the Hellenistic Jewish literature. I separated the earlier given modern answers to the categorization of the dreams into three groups. In my opinion, there are two great categories of interpretation: the mystical and the sociological approach. I list those interpretations to the third "mixed" category, which can be associated with only one author and has not received much support from other researchers.

By searching the possible roots while historically sequencing the throne visions preceding the *Exagoge*, we avoid the fact that however much the author belonged to the intellectual and literary elite of his age, one cannot prove exactly, what sources he used.

The connection of the *Exagoge* with the Merkavah tradition is arbitrary, on the one hand, since it reflects elements from an earlier period, on the other hand the mysticism and the world of the stage cannot be harmonized. The mystical experiences are not collective, neither do they speak to an audience, but they are individual experiences. The appearance of the throne and the other elements did not necessarily mean the text's classification to the mystical literature in the time of the *Exagoge*'s birth. Those, who approach this section from the Merkavah mysticism do not take the whole drama neither its cultural context into consideration.

The problem of the sociological approach is that it seeks non-provable social conflicts. The Enoch-Moses conflict seems logical; however, there are differences between the Enoch literature and the *Exagoge*. The work of Ezekiel is far less spectacular and colourful than the literature bequeathed under the name of Enoch. During his travel, Enoch met such things that are unrivalled on earth. Ezekiel hid his message in a sound dream-scene and described the throne visible in the dream in rather short; besides the stars are also present as only celestial bodies not as angels.

In his vision, Moses receives the symbols of the worldly power, he does not experience a mystical union but a change of place, moreover, the manifestation of deification is really far from the period's Jewish way of thinking as well as from the mainstream of the Jewish way of thinking in general. As I have already indicated in the ending of the previous chapter, those who write a play of the stage – no matter if it was performed or not – should face such requirements of the genre which exclude the complex, mystical interpretations. The images of the *Exagoge* are much less visual and theological than that of the literature survived under the name of Henoah. In my opinion, the *Exagoge* is a “simple” work, whose aim, apart from

remembrance and reminding, is the elucidation, identity formation and preservation, as well as entertainment.

One cannot be sure why Alexander Polyhistor selected the *Exagoge* in his work, yet in the case of Eusebius of Caesarea we can state that he dealt with the work for the sake of education and propaganda, not for apologetics. Constantine the Great, as the first Christian monarch, was not set a good example of ruling, therefore, a *speculum regis* had to be compiled for him, in which he could meet the deeds of great predecessors. As far as I am concerned, Eusebius of Caesarea selected such works in the ninth chapter of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* that he considered their utility with a view to a Christian king-ideology.

In the last chapter of my dissertation, I introduce the picture of Moses, as a king, drawn by the Hebrew Bible and the *Exagoge*. In the second sub-chapter I present Moses as a king on the basis of Philo's biographical work of *De Vita Mosis*. For writing the *De Vita Mosis*, Philo of Alexandria must have used the *Exagoge*, which has got phraseological and exegetical proofs. In my view, the Moses of the *Exagoge* and the *De Vita Mosis* is a figure of the same tradition about the Hellenistic ideal king. I finish the chapter with the image of Moses formed by Eusebius of Caesarea by supporting the link between the texts and the justness of the *Exagoge*'s interpretation from a political point of view.

Similarly to Philo of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea also exploits the parallel of Moses and Plato. As one can come across the image of the ideal king by Plato in the *De Vita Mosis*, in the *Praeparatio Evangelica* it also often occur that the knowledge of the Greeks is from Moses (*Praep. Ev.* 9.6.23, 11.18), moreover Eusebius of Caesarea had the courage in the formation of the "Christian Moses" that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is derived from Moses himself (*Praep. Ev.* 11.20).

Moses life is in the centre of the *Praeparatio Evangelica*'s ninth book, though, this Moses is not the Moses of the Old Testament, but the Moses of the Hellenistic authors that were selected by Eusebius of Caesarea. The father

of the Church deliberately chose those sections into his work that fit his purpose. The *Exagoge* fell into the same category of such authors, like Eupolemus, according to whom all knowledge – including the skill of writing – derived from Moses; Artapanus, whose Moses goes even further, to the domestication of the Egyptian animal cults. In this context, the drama of Ezekiel is one of the most moderate ones; however, its task is important, since the coronation of Moses and his introduction as a king happens here.

3. New results

Ezekiel's *Exagoge* is the only existing drama of the Hellenistic Jewish literature, which still can be read, even if in fragments. It went from hand to hand presumably from Alexandria to the Jewish intellectuals of Berlin and from there to the present scientific discourse. Not only does such an enigmatic text generate its own interpretation, but it also has the diverse scientific ideas and approaches searched their own conceptions. This drama is not solely special for the modern research, since in the collection of Eusebius of Caesarea it has no peer concerning neither its genre, nor its content. As it was mentioned above, it proves to be a serious problem that there is no other drama of the age with a due length, with which a parallel could be drawn.

The purpose of my dissertation was to introduce such an interpretation of this particularly colourful and rich text, which does not necessarily reflect back from later periods (like the Merkavah mysticism), or search for social polemics (Enoch and Moses; besides Henoch and Adam), but it originates in the drama's *Sitz im Leben*.

To be able to examine the *Exagoge*, I had to start from scratch, therefore in the first chapter I outlined the intellectual and cultural circumstances, in which the drama had been politically born (Hellenism) and survived (among the other authors in the work of Eusebius of Caesarea). I devoted the second chapter to the gradual introduction of the drama by highlighting those elements that are related to the fundamental question of the dissertation, to the kingdom of Moses and the Hellenistic king ideal. In the third chapter, I

surveyed the interpretations of the throne vision, which was most often analysed by the secondary literature, as well. The fourth and fifth chapter is the *novum* of the dissertation, the completion and connection of the existing interpretations, which focused on the political aspect.

In conclusion, I believe that Ezekiel created such a work in the genre of drama, which primarily served the identity formation and strengthening of the communities of the Jewish Diaspora. The throne vision refers to the worldly kingdom of Moses, in which dream Moses is the perfect ruler.

4. Publications

Articles

„*The Role of a Myterious Bird in a Fragmented Jewish Drama*” (In Preparation for the Published Version of the Third Enoch Graduate Seminar, 2010)

„*Herodotean influence on the book of Judith?*” (In preparation for the Published Version of the Sixth International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, 2009)

„*Hérodotosz és az aranyásó hangyák*” [Herodot and the Gold-digging Ants], *Vallástudományi Szemle [Journal for Religious Studies]* 2008/3, 87–96.

„*Az örök visszatérés madara*”[The bird of Eternal Returning], *Vallástudományi Szemle [Journal for Religious Studies]* 2007/2, 63-77.

Book Chapters

„*Trónvízió a színpadon*” [Throne Vision on Stafe] (In: „*Vidimus enim stellam eius...*” Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, L’ Harmattan kiadó Budapest, 2011. Szerk.: Szávay László)

„*A bukott angyalok tanítása*”[Teaching of the Fallen Angels], „*Angyalok az ókortól Szent Tamásig* [The Angels from the Antiquity to Thomas Aquinas] eds., Dr. Géza Xeravits)
2011

Papers and lectures

2013 „*Cosmos in the Moses basket*” International Conference in Theology, Károli Gáspár Reformed University, 15. November 2013. Budapest

2011 „*Throne Vision on Stage*” International Conference in Theology, Károli Gáspár Reformed University, 15. October, 2011, Budapest

„*The Political Background of a Mystical Ascent*” International Conference on Political Power and Ideology in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Tradition, Sapientia - College of Theology of Religious Orders, 19. May, 2011, Budapest

2010 „*The Role of a Myterious Bird in a Fragmented Jewish Drama*” Third Enoch Graduate Seminar, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 19-23. July, 2010, Piliscsaba, Hungary

„*Állati bűnök – bűnös állatok*” – *Miért ne fogyasszunk hiénát?* [Animals and Sins – Why do not consume Hyenas?] – Fifth Conference of the Religion, Tradition and Modernity Workgroup at the Eötvös Lóránd University, 26. June, 2010, Budapest.

2009 „*Rókánál nagyobb, de kutyánál kisebb*” - *egy fura szerzet Hérodotosz állatkertjéből.* [„Bigger than a Fox, but Smaller than a Dog – A Wondrous Creature from the Zoo of Herodot] Fourth Conference of the Religion, Tradition and Modernity Workgroup, Eötvös Lóránd University, 25. June, 2009, Budapest.

„*Herodotean influence on the book of Judith?*” – Conference on Deuterocanonical Books, Sapientia - College of Theology of Religious Orders, 14-15. May, 2009, Budapest

„*Mózes a Mennyekben – adalékok egy trónvízióhoz*” [Moses in Heaven – Footnotes to a Throne Vision] Annual Conference of the Religion, Tradition and Modernity Workgroup, Eötvös Lóránd University, 27. March, 2009, Budapest

2008 „*Ezékielosz Exagógé című drámája*” [The Exagoge of Ezekiel]
International Conference on „Bible as a Resource”, Károli Gáspár
Reformed University, 05. December, 2008, Budapest