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## **MOSES AS ΘΕΡΑΠΙΩΝ IN HEB 3:5-6: PORTRAIT OF A CULTIC PROPHET-PRIEST IN EGYPT?**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The unknown author of Hebrews uses the hapax legomenon θεράπων in his reference to Moses as a “servant” when he contrasts Moses with Jesus in Heb 3:1-6. He states that Moses was faithful as a servant (θεράπων) in God’s house, whereas Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. Why did the author of Hebrews choose this particular term? Through a study of the use of θεράπων in the literature from antiquity – specifically the cultic and prophetic elements associated with the term – it might be concluded that the author of Hebrews deliberately employs this term for Moses in order to depict him as a religious or temple servant, as a priest in the service of Christ, the “Son”.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The unknown author of Hebrews uses the *hapax legomenon* θεράπων in his reference to Moses as a “servant” when he contrasts Moses with Jesus in Heb 3:1-6. He states that Moses was faithful as a servant (θεράπων) in all God’s house, whereas Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. Why did the author of Hebrews choose this particular term? How did it differ from similar terms in the same semantic domain? With other synonymous terms available for somebody who renders service – such as ὑπηρέτης, διάκονος, λάτρευμα, λειτουργός, οἰκέτης, παῖς and δοῦλος – why did the author of Hebrews particularly choose the term θεράπων in his reference to Moses?

### **2. ΘΕΡΑΠΙΩΝ AND RELATED TERMS IN ANCIENT GREEK LITERATURE**

Ancient Greek literature differentiated semantically between different terms for a servant. Whilst a ὑπηρέτης was originally drawn from military matters and generally understood to be an attendant or assistant, the function of a διάκονος was not far removed from and understood as being a servant waiting to serve, or as a messenger – that is, a servant who represents someone in his activity *for the work* (Heimgartner 2014). They were, for instance, the attendants at a festival. Whereas a λειτουργός generally performed public duties to serve the people or state, a λάτρευμα

was assumed to be somebody who is hired. Four terms were generally used for a slave: *παῖς*, although less generally, and *οἰκέτης* particularly for a household slave or domestic servant: “He is one of the household, of the ‘family,’ in the older sense of this word; not indeed necessarily one born in the house” (Wright 2008:221).<sup>1</sup> *Οἰκέτης* was often used as an equivalent for *δοῦλος*. A *δοῦλος*, in turn, stood in a servile relation to a *person* and was forced by its master to serve. It was the more general term for a slave (Wright 2008:221) and was someone who was “in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will altogether swallowed up in the will of the other” and a ‘*bond-man*’” (Gehrke 2014). A *θεράπων*, on the other hand, was a personal attendant (Wright 2008:221) who stood in a voluntary relation to a person and implied free service (Liddell 1996:363) which he rendered irrespective of being a freeman or slave, but “bound by duty, or impelled by love” (Gehrke 2014). He had rights and could “avail himself of an opportunity without servility” (Gehrke 2014). There “habitually (goes) with the word the sense of one whose services are tenderer, nobler, freer than those of the *δοῦλος*” (Gehrke 2014). Ancient Greek literature, furthermore, applied the terms *θεράπων* and *θεραπεύειν* in the following senses:

- a. *An attendant, inferior in rank*: Homer’s *Iliad* refers to “the titles of *κῆρυξ* and *θεράπων*”, and it uses the term *θεράπων* in the sense of “an attendant, ‘a companion in arms, though inferior in rank’” (Liddell 1996:363) – as is clear in the example of Patroclus, who “is a *hetairos* (companion) to Achilles, but subordinate to Achilles” (*Iliad* I.345) (Şorodoc 2010:110). According to the *Iliad*, it seems as if each hero generally had one *θεράπων*, “an immediate personal attendant or ‘squire,’ who in the case of Idomeneus is Meriones” (Leaf 1900).<sup>2</sup> In Herodotus (born 484 BCE) and Thucydides (460-395 BCE), *θεράπωντες* simply became a general term for servants and slaves (Liddell 1996:363).
- b. *Healing of body and soul*: Plato (428-348 BCE) applies the verb in the sense of doctors who render service, “and therefore *θεραπεύειν* acquires the sense ‘to care for the sick,’ ‘to treat

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1 Cf., for instance, Athenæus, vi. 93; Herodotus, viii. 106; Sophocles, *Trach.* 894. See also Gehrke (2014).

2 A similar situation appears later in Josephus when Elijah has a *θεράπων* (*Ant.* 8, 344, cf. 348).

medically,' 'to cure'" (Plato *Euthyphro* 13d; *Leges* 4.720d). The same applies to Aristotle (*Ethica Nicomachea* 1.13). In a metaphorical sense, Plato also used it of the healing of body and soul (*Gorgias* 513d).<sup>3</sup>

- c. *Religious connotations*: Especially in his *Euthyphro*, Plato clearly sets out the different senses of *θεραπεύω*, stating that all *θεραπεύειν* "has in view something good and the advancement of the subject to which it applies". He compares the ministry of slaves to their masters (*δοῦλοι τοὺς δεσπότας θεραπεύουσιν*) with ministering worship of the gods. Furthermore, just as there is a *ἵππους θεραπεύειν* and a *κύνας θεραπεύειν*,<sup>4</sup> "so *ὀσιότης* and *εὐσέβεια* are a *θεραπεία τῶν θεῶν* (*Euth.* 13aff.) – which mainly consists in cultic action (Beyer 1965:128-129). Strabo (8.8.15), in turn, also later understood healing as manifestation of the divine intervention of Asclepius. Beyer (1965:128-132) pointed out that "the religious significance of the word is more common in the inscriptions and papyri" dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE. But it is especially the references in Dittenberger (1915-1924)<sup>5</sup> that are of special significance here, where the *οἱ θεράποντες* refer to the priests of the temple of Asclepius (Arndt & Danker 1979:359).

### 3. ΘΕΡΑΠΙΩΝ IN JEWISH HELLENISTIC LITERATURE

#### 3.1 In the LXX

The term *θεράπων* is known in the LXX, where it occurs 64 times: 38 times in the Torah,<sup>6</sup> four times in the Early Prophets (including 1 and 2 Chr), eleven times in the Writings, and eleven times in the Deuterocanonical books (Lust, Eynikel & Hauspie 2003). It occurs especially frequently in the book Exodus.<sup>7</sup> Its usage ranges in the LXX mainly

3 See also Beyer (1965:128-129).

4 Classical literature also states that "*the charioteer* is *ἡνίοχος θεράπων*; kings were *Διὸς θεράποντες*; warriors *θεράποντες Ἄρηος*" (Liddell 1996:363).

5 *Τῶν ἱεροδούλων καὶ τὸν θεὸν θεραπευόντων* (3.996.28); *καὶ εὐείλατος γένοιτο ὁ θεὸς τοῖς θεραπεύουσιν ἀπλῆ τῆ ψυχῆ* (3.1042.11). Cf. also 219, 12; 1168, 114f.

6 Cf., for instance, LXX Gen 24:44; 45:16; 50:17; Num 12:7; Deut 29:1; 34:11.

7 Cf. LXX Exod 4:10; 5:21; 7:9; 9:8; 10:1; 12:30; 14:5; 33:11. "The predominance of *θεράπων* in Exodus can be attributed to that translator's use of

between the following different meanings (Lust, Eynikel & Hauspie 2003; Beyer 1965:128-31):

- a. An ordinary “*servant*”, for example, Gen 24:44. The same applies to the use of the verb in cases such as Esth 1:1b; 2:19; 6:10, where somebody serves in an ordinary secular sense.
- b. As a “*member of staff*”, for example, Exod 5:21.
- c. As a “*servant*” or “*healer*”, for example, Prov 18:14. The verb is used similarly in the sense of “to heal” in Tob 2:10; 12:3; Wis 16:12 and Sir 18:19; 38:7.
- d. Particularly interesting, however, is its use in the sense of a “*religious servant*” – as in the case of LXX Exod 33:11: *καὶ ἀπελύετο εἰς τὴν παρεμβολήν, ὁ δὲ θεράπων Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Ναυη νέος οὐκ ἐξεπορεύετο ἐκ τῆς σκηνῆς*. The same applies to the use of the verb in cases such as Jdt 11:17 (to serve God), Isa 54:17 (to serve the “Lord”, *κύριον*) and the Ep Jer 25:38 (to serve idols). Furthermore, the term is used particularly of Moses in this regard at places such as Exod 4:10, 14:31, Num 11:11, 12:7-8, Deut 3:24 and Josh 1:2, where reference is made to the Lord’s “servant Moses” (*Μωυσῆς ὁ θεράπων*) – the LXX translation for *מֹשֶׁה*. However, *θεράπων* is not a consistent LXX translation for *מֹשֶׁה*, but has elsewhere been translated as *δοῦλος*.<sup>8</sup> The author of Revelation most probably follows this tradition when he refers to Moses with the phrase *Μωϋσῆς ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ Θεοῦ* (Rev 15:3). Furthermore, the title *θεράπων κυρίου* is given to Moses in Wis 10:16, but to no other of the prominent characters of the old Covenant mentioned in Wis 10. In Wis 18:21 it is also used, however, for Aaron (Gehrke 2014).

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the term to represent the servants/attendants of Pharaoh, a phrase that occurs frequently in the book” (Wright 2008:224).

- 8 Elsewhere, however, the LXX employs the terms *παῖς*, *δοῦλος* and *οἰκέτης*. Cf. Deut 34:5 (*Μωυσῆς οἰκέτης κυρίου*); Bar 1:20 (*τῷ Μωυσῆ παιδί αὐτοῦ*); 2:28 (*παιδός σου Μωυσῆ*); Josh 1:7 (*Μωυσῆς ὁ παῖς μου*); 1:13 (*Μωυσῆς ὁ παῖς κυρίου*); 9:24 (*Μωυσῆ τῷ παιδί αὐτοῦ*); 11:12 (*Μωυσῆς ὁ παῖς κυρίου*); 11:15 (*Μωυσῆ τῷ παιδί αὐτοῦ*); 14:7 (*Μωυσῆς ὁ παῖς τοῦ θεοῦ*); 3 Kgdms 8:56 (*Μωυσῆ δούλου αὐτοῦ*); 4 Kgdms 21:8 (*ὁ δοῦλός μου Μωυσῆς*); Neh 1:7 (*Μωυσῆ παιδί σου*), 1:8 (*Μωυσῆ παιδί σου*); 9:14 (*Μωυσῆ δούλου σου*); LXX Ps 104:26 (*Μωυσῆν τὸν δοῦλον αὐτοῦ*); Mal 4:4 (3:24 LXX) (*Μωυσῆ τοῦ δούλου μου*).

### 3.2 *In Philo of Alexandria*

Philo uses the verb *θεραπεύω* in the sense of medical healing (for example, *Contempl.* 2), but more especially and prominently in the sense of the healing of the soul (for example, *Leg.* 3.118; *Spec.* 2.239) (Beyer 1965:128-31). The noun *θεράπων* itself occurs 281 times in the works of Philo of Alexandria and is primarily (although not exclusively) used in a religious sense for a cultic servant, for instance, in *Her.* 7, when he explicitly refers to Moses as “the servant of God” (ἐπὶ τῷ θεράπων θεοῦ), or *Sacr.* 120, which refers to the “ministry of the Levite” (θεραπείας δὲ ὁ Λευί), or *Somn.* 1.78, which speaks of the “priest and minister of the mind” (τὸν δὲ ἱερέα καὶ θεραπευτὴν τοῦ νοῦ).<sup>9</sup>

Wright has pointed out that, according to Philo in *Her.* 6, where Philo is interested in speaking to God, a slave “properly speaks to his master when his words and actions are all for the master’s benefit”. Thus “when else should the slave (δοῦλός) of God open his mouth freely to Him who is the ruler and master both of himself and of the All..., when he feels more joy at being the servant (θεράπων) of God than if he had been king of the human race” (Wright 2008:240). Wright, nonetheless, came to the conclusion that it is evident from many places that *θεράπων* “is a normal word for slave in Philo’s vocabulary” (Wright 2008:240).

Turning to Philo’s depiction of Moses, he refers to him with many attributes. I have argued elsewhere that Philo intended to show that Moses was the “greatest and most perfect man that ever lived” (Steyn forthcoming). Josephus also shared these sentiments later during the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Lane argued similarly, stating that in the Hellenistic-Jewish tradition Moses is presented as “the supreme exemplar of perfection in the sense of immediacy and access to God” (Lane 2002:lv). Philo combines in Moses’ character the ideal king, legislator, high priest and prophet (*Mos.* 2.1-7) and portrays Moses as probably in the category of “divine man” (Falk 2010:969). He describes him, for instance, as a “theologian” (ὁ θεολόγος εἶναι) and as a “god<sup>10</sup> and king” (θεὸς καὶ βασιλεύς) (*Mos.* 2.115).

9 Cf. *Det.* 62; *Fug.* 67; *Spec.* 1.242 for priests as *θεράπων θεοῦ*.

10 It is assumed that “(t)he biblical text that impels Philo to call Moses *θεός* here is *Exod.* 7:1, where God says to Moses, ‘Behold I send you as god to Pharaoh’”. Cf. Runia (1988:53).

He, furthermore, introduces Moses as a *high priest*<sup>11</sup> (*Mos.* 2.66-2.186).<sup>12</sup> Moses' connection with the priesthood was clear from Philo's LXX Exodus text: Moses' father and mother belonged to the tribe of Levi (Exod 2:1)<sup>13</sup> and he also married the daughter of a priest (Exod 2:16, 20; 3:1; cf. *Mos.* 1.52). Moses actually enjoyed the first priesthood (τῆς πρώτης ἱερωσύνης) "in order that he might, with perfectly conducted sacrifices, and with a perfect knowledge of the proper way to serve God, entreat for a deliverance from evil and for a participation in good, both for himself and for the people whom he was governing, from the merciful God who listens favourably to prayers" (*Mos.* 2.5). By his *priesthood* he may arrange not only all human but likewise all divine things (*Mos.* 2.187). It was during his stay on the mountain that Moses was "initiated in the sacred will of God, being instructed in all the most important matters which relate to his priesthood" and receiving God's commands with regard to the building of a temple and its furniture (*Mos.* 2.71). Such a task was suitable and consistent "to be entrusted to the real high priest" (ἀληθῶς ἀρχιερεῖ, *Mos.* 2.75). Furthermore, according to Philo,

the priesthood has for its duty the service of God. Of this honour, then, Moses was thought worthy, of which there is no greater honour in the whole world, than to be instructed by the sacred oracles of God in everything that related to the sacred offices and ministrations (*Mos.* 2.67) (Yonge 1995:497).

Moses was also "of necessity invested with the gift of *prophecy* (προφητείας), in order that he might, through the providence of God, learn all those things which he was unable to comprehend by his own reason; for what the mind is unable to attain to, that prophecy masters" (*Mos.* 2.6).

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11 Moses conversed face to face with YHWH in Exod 33:7-11 – a personal privilege (Num 12:6-8) which the priests did not share (Num 27:21) (De Vaux 1980:349).

12 See also *Her.* 182; *Praem.* 53, 56. Cook (2004:6) points to other authors who also identify Moses as priest: "Pompeius Trogus (STERN I § 137 = Justinus, *Hist. Philip.* 36, *Epit.* 2.16); Strabo (16.2.35 (STERN I, §115); Chaeremon apud Jos., *C. Ap.* 1.290 (STERN I, §178). He is closely associated with Egyptian priests in the Hellenistic Jewish author Artapanus, *F.* 3 = Eus, *P. E.* 9.27.4, 6".

13 Particularly 1 Chr emphasizes Moses' relation to the tribe of Levi. Cf. 1 Chr 6:3; 23:13; 26:24.

By his *prophetic* office he may predict those things which cannot be comprehended by reason (*Mos.* 2.187).

Elsewhere Philo even stated that Moses shared God's nature, came from him and returned to him (*Sacr.* 8-10) (Steyn forthcoming). He refers to Moses as "their leader and general, the chief priest, and prophet, and friend of God" (ἡγεμόνα προστησάμενοι καὶ στρατηγὸν τὸν ἀρχιερέα καὶ προφήτην καὶ φίλον τοῦ θεοῦ Μωυσῆν, *Sacr.* 130) (Yonge 1995: 110) – a formulation that strongly reminds of that used for Jesus in Hebrews (cf., for instance, Heb 12:2: ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν).

#### 4. MOSES AS AN EGYPTIAN PRIEST AT HELIOPOLIS

Scholars have argued that the reference in Acts 7:22 to Moses, who became "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians", probably refers to Heliopolis as such a centre of learning – which was one of two chief seats of learning where his education was completed. "His education would doubtless be carefully attended to, and he would enjoy all the advantages of training both as to his body and his mind" (Easton 1996). More explicit, are the remarks of Strabo (ca. 24 BCE) about Heliopolis and Moses being an Egyptian priest. Strabo most probably had little knowledge of Jewish history prior to the exodus and no knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. He writes of Heliopolis:

##### Strabo, *Geogr.* 17.1.29

ἐν δὲ τῇ Ἡλίου πόλει καὶ οἴκους εἶδομεν μεγάλους ἐν οἷς διέτριβον οἱ ἱερεῖς· μάλιστα γὰρ δὴ ταύτην κατοικίαν ἱερέων γεγονέναι φασὶ τὸ παλαιὸν φιλοσόφων ἀνδρῶν καὶ ἀστρονομικῶν· ἐκλέλοιπε δὲ καὶ τοῦτο νυνὶ τὸ σύστημα καὶ ἡ ἀσκησις. ἐκεῖ μὲν οὖν οὐδεὶς ἡμῶν ἐδείκνυτο τῆς τοιαύτης ἀσκήσεως προεστώς, ἀλλ' οἱ ἱεροποιοὶ μόνον καὶ ἐξηγηταὶ τοῖς ξένοις τῶν περὶ τὰ ἱερά (Meineke 1877:1124-1125).

At Heliopolis we saw large buildings in which the priests lived. For it is said that anciently this was the principal residence of the priests, who studied philosophy and astronomy. But there are no longer either such a body of persons or such pursuits. No one was pointed out to us on the spot, as presiding over these studies, but only persons who performed sacred rites, and who explained to strangers [the peculiarities of] the temples (Hamilton 1903:246).

Strabo also wrote about Moses:

**Strabo, Geogr. 16.2.35**

μωσῆς γάρ τις τῶν Αἰγυπτίων  
 ἱερέων ἔχων τι μέρος τῆς [κάτω]  
 καλουμένης χώρας, ἀπῆρεν ἐκεῖσε  
 ἐνθὲνδε δυσχεράνας τὰ καθεστῶτα,  
 καὶ συνεξῆραν αὐτῷ πολλοὶ  
 τιμῶντες τὸ θεῖον (Meineke 1877:  
 1061).

An Egyptian priest named  
 Moses, who possessed a  
 portion of the country called  
 [Lower Egypt] ..., being  
 dissatisfied with the established  
 institutions there, left it and  
 came to Judaea with a large  
 body of people who worship-  
 ped the Divinity (Hamilton  
 1903:177).

Hebrews' summary of Moses shows interesting similarities with that of Strabo:

**Heb 11:24-28**

Πίστει Μωϋσῆς μέγας γενόμενος  
 ἠρνήσατο λέγεσθαι υἱὸς θυγατρὸς  
 Φαραώ, μᾶλλον ἐλόμενος  
 συγκακουχεῖσθαι τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ  
 πρόσκαιρον ἔχειν ἁμαρτίας  
 ἀπόλαυσιν, μείζονα πλοῦτον  
 ἠγησάμενος τῶν Αἰγύπτου θησαυρῶν  
 τὸν ὀνειδισμόν τοῦ Χριστοῦ·  
 ἀπέβλεπεν γὰρ εἰς τὴν  
 μισθαποδοσίαν. Πίστει κατέλιπεν  
 Αἴγυπτον μὴ φοβηθεὶς τὸν θυμὸν τοῦ  
 βασιλέως· τὸν γὰρ ἀόρατον ὡς ὄρων  
 ἐκαρτέρησεν. Πίστει πεποίηκεν τὸ  
 πάσχα καὶ τὴν πρόσχυσιν τοῦ  
 αἵματος, ἵνα μὴ ὁ ὀλοθρεύων τὰ  
 πρωτότοκα θίγη αὐτῶν.

By faith Moses, when he was grown  
 up, refused to be called a son of  
 Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather  
 to share ill-treatment with the  
 people of God than to enjoy the  
 fleeting pleasures of sin. He  
 considered abuse suffered for the  
 Christ to be greater wealth than the  
 treasures of Egypt, for he was  
 looking ahead to the reward. By  
 faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the  
 king's anger; for he persevered as  
 though he saw him who is invisible.  
 By faith he kept the Passover and  
 the sprinkling of blood, so that the  
 destroyer of the firstborn would not  
 touch the firstborn of Israel.  
 (NRSV)

It is clear, nonetheless, that the author of Hebrews presents Moses in a heroic manner, sympathetically tainted, and that he furthermore reinterprets the Moses narrative in the light of the Christ event.

Josephus too, in his work *Against Apion*, wrote of Moses:



**Josephus, Ag. Ap. 1.31**

Λοιπὸν μοι πρὸς αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν περὶ Μωυσέως. τοῦτον δὲ τὸν ἄνδρα θαυμαστὸν μὲν Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ θεῖον νομίζουσι, βούλονται δὲ προσποιεῖν αὐτοῖς μετὰ βλασφημίας ἀπιθάνου, λέγοντες Ἡλιοπολίτην εἶναι τῶν ἐκεῖθεν ἱερέων ἓνα διὰ τὴν λέπραν συνεξεληλαμένον. δείκνυται δ' ἐν ταῖς ἀναγραφαῖς ὀκτώ καὶ δεκά σὺν τοῖς πεντακοσίοις πρότερον ἔτεσι γεγονῶς καὶ τοὺς ἡμετέρους ἐξαγαγῶν ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου πατέρας εἰς τὴν χώραν τὴν νῦν οἰκουμένην ὑφ' ἡμῶν

It now remains that I debate with Manetho about Moses. *Now the Egyptians acknowledge him to have been a wonderful and a divine person; nay, they would willingly lay claim to him themselves, though after a most abusive and incredible manner, and pretend that he was of Heliopolis, and one of the priests of that place, and was ejected out of it among the rest, on account of his leprosy; although it had been demonstrated out of their records that he lived five hundred and eighteen years earlier, and then brought our forefathers out of Egypt into the country that is now inhabited by us.*

And furthermore:

**Josephus, Ag. Ap. 2.2**

Ὅτι μὲν οὖν οὔτε Αἰγύπτιοι τό γένος ἦσαν ἡμῶν οἱ πατέρες οὔτε διὰ λύμην σωματῶν ἢ τοιαύτας ἄλλας συμφοράς τινὰς ἐκεῖθεν ἐξηλάθησαν, οὐ μετρίως μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πέρα τοῦ συμμέτρου προαποδεδείχθαι νομίζω. περὶ ὧν δὲ προστίθησιν ὁ Ἀπίων ἐπιμνησθήσομαι συντόμως. φησὶ γὰρ ἐν τῇ τρίτῃ τῶν Αἰγυπτιακῶν τάδε: Μωσῆς, ὡς ἤκουσα παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τῶν Αἰγυπτίων, ἦν Ἡλιοπολίτης, ὃς πατρίοις ἔθεσι κατηγγυημένος αἰθρίους προσευχὰς ἀνῆγεν εἰς οἶους εἶχεν ἥλιος περιβόλους, πρὸς ἀφηλιώτην δὲ πάσας ἀπέστρεφεν: ὧδε γὰρ καὶ Ἡλίου κεῖται πόλις. ἀντὶ δὲ ὀβελῶν ἔστησε κίονα, ὑφ' οἷς ἦν ἐκτύπωμα σκάφη, σκιά δ' ἀνδρὸς ἐπ' αὐτὴν διακειμένη,

Now although I cannot but think that I have already demonstrated, and that abundantly more than was necessary, that our fathers were not originally Egyptians, nor were they expelled, either on account of bodily diseases, or any other calamities of that sort; yet will I briefly take notice of what Apion adds upon that subject; for in his third book, which relates to the affairs of Egypt, he speaks thus: "I have heard of the ancient men of Egypt, that Moses was of Heliopolis, and that he thought himself obliged to follow the customs of his forefathers, and offered his prayers in the open air, towards the city walls; but that he reduced them all to be

ὡς ὅτι ἐν αἰθέρι τοῦτον ἀεὶ τὸν δρόμον  
ἡλίῳ συμπεριπολεῖ.

directed towards sun-rising, which was agreeable to the situation of Heliopolis; that he also set up pillars instead of gnomons, under which was represented a cavity like that of a boat, and the shadow that fell from their tops fell down upon that cavity, that it might go round about the like course as the sun itself goes round in the other”.

##### 5. HEBREWS’ MOSES AS A CULTIC PROPHET-PRIEST IN EGYPT?

According to Ben Sira (ca. 180 BCE), Moses was considered to be “a godly man who was equal in glory to the angels, a miracle worker and law-giver, chosen by God out of all humans for his faithfulness and humility. He was a holy man and prophet” (44:23-45:6; 46:1). Two centuries later, the unknown author of Hebrews presents Jesus as “worthy of more glory than Moses” (πλείονος γὰρ οὗτος δόξης παρὰ Μωϋσῆν ἡξίωται, Heb 3:3; cf. 1:3). His audience is probably reminded of the Old Testament concept of Israel as the household of God when he uses the metaphor of the “house of God”. He argues that the builder of a house deserves greater honour than the house itself. Whereas Moses, on the one hand, serves faithfully *in* (ἐν) the house as a *servant*, (ὡς θεράπων – a *hapax legomenon*), Christ, on the other hand, is *over* (ἐπὶ) the house as the *Son* of God. Moses’ honour is thus inferior to that of God, who built the house, and particularly to that of Jesus as God’s Son. I argued elsewhere that “The ‘house’ is explained in Heb 3:6 in terms of the community of believers: ‘we are his house’” (Steyn 2011:156).

Are there any implied connotations with cultic service in the sanctuary by using the term θεράπων? Is there any evidence through the author’s choice of this term of closer alignment with an Egyptian setting? Hebrews’ reference to Moses as θεράπων most probably alludes to LXX Num 12:7 and conveys the author’s familiarity with the LXX: οὐχ οὕτως ὁ θεράπων μου Μωϋσῆς, ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ μου πιστός ἐστιν. The allusion and the contrast between Heb 3:2 (Μωϋσῆς ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ) and 3:6 (Χριστὸς δὲ ὡς υἱὸς ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ) is clear. The latter is again alluded to in Heb 10:21, when the author referred to Christ as ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ. Furthermore, when the author of Hebrews refers to Moses

as *θεράπων* on the basis of the exceptional dignity ascribed to him in Num 12:7 within the confines of the wilderness tabernacle, he clearly elevated him above other *δοῦλοι* of God, implying that Moses “occupied a more confidential position, (and) that a freer service, a higher dignity was his, than that merely of a *δοῦλος*, approaching more closely to that of an *οἰκονόμος* in God’s house” (Gehrke 2014).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the cultic and prophetic elements associated with the term *θεράπων*, its associations with the priests of Asclepius and the servants of the Pharaoh, its use in the context of a cultic servant by Philo of Alexandria, and especially its allusion to LXX Num 12:7, it might be concluded that *the author of Hebrews deliberately employs this term for Moses in order to depict him as a religious or temple servant, as a priest in the service of Christ, the “Son”* – the latter being a title which reminds of the title of the Pharaoh as the son of the sun god, Ra. Ellingworth (2000:207) is thus correct, in my opinion, that the term is used particularly for a free man offering personal service to a superior and (in some non-biblical writings) for a temple servant, or that it implies a cultic office – and so is Asumang (2005:99) when he states that “Moses in Heb 3:1-6 may be seen as a servant who serves in God’s tabernacle”. It was probably not only Hebrews’ familiarity with the LXX Pentateuch, where Moses employs this term (*θεράπων*) with regard to himself (for example, Exod 4:10, 14:31, Num 11:11, Deut 3:24; see also Asumang 2005:99), but also the religious connections to *θεράπων* as a cultic servant that led the unknown author to prefer this particular term above *οἰκέτης*, *παῖς* and *δοῦλος*, which were also connected to Moses as a servant of God. I disagree with Ellingworth (2000:207), however, that it is Moses’ “prophetic rather than a cultic role” that is being referred to in Heb 3 and agree on this point rather with Asumang (2005:99) that “the prophetic role is nevertheless fused with cultic priestly functions” and that “consequently the cultic connotations of the description of Moses as servant in the house cannot be discounted”. According to Asumang (2005:99), the presence of the cultic imagery “supports the suggestion that the space which occupies our author’s attention in Heb 3:1-6 is the priestly courtyard and the Holy Place”. This can only make sense in the context of Hebrews if one assumes that the author associates the earthly desert tabernacle where Moses served God with the heavenly sanctuary where the Son is being served by the angels. Jesus’ appointment as Son became clear from Heb

1:5 and he remains the Son in Heb 3:6. Moses, however, is subordinate to the Son and was a mere (cultic) servant (high priest?) in the earthly sanctuary of God. But the relation between Moses and Jesus as servants in God's sanctuary is not too distant. The one is just a sketch and a shadow of the other (Heb 8:5). Similar to Moses' role as *θεράπων*, Jesus has also been appointed as God's Son in the heavenly sanctuary as a high priest (*ἀρχιερέα*, Heb 5:5-6; 8:1) and as a minister (*λειτουργός*, Heb 8:2).

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