

THE APOLOGY OF PS.-MELITON

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Ps.-Meliton's *Apology* is a short work, extant only in Syriac, in a sixth- or seventh-century manuscript. It is not at all well known. The work itself, which purports to be an example of early Christian apologetic, is a curiosity, as will emerge below. But the real curiosity is a chapter which is packed with information about pagan cults – cults to which the author applies a version of Euhemerism, although again a rather unusual one. Several of his cults are set in the Roman Near East, and it is scholars of this area who have paid the work the little attention that it has received. The author seems to have access to interesting and far-flung information, although it is mediated through a highly individual interpretative bias. The following study is an attempt to make the text more widely-known, and as a protreptic to further study, for there are certainly more things to be discovered about it, and it would benefit from the attention of scholars in more than one area. The first part of the paper considers the text as a whole and raises some general questions about the Euhemerist chapter. The second part, which is prefaced with an adapted version of William Cureton's translation for ease of reference, provides a provisional commentary on the Euhemerist chapter. Since the author's approach is anecdotal, I have used the term 'historiola' for each entry.

PART ONE

I. WHAT IS IT?

The main body of the text consists of a harangue purportedly delivered to an emperor called Antoninus. The heading in the manuscript calls it '*Melitonis philosophi oratio ad Antoninum Caesarem*'. How well informed is it?

To begin with, the attribution to Meliton, bishop of Sardis in Asia Minor (d. c.190), cannot be right¹. Eusebius quotes some fragments from the genuine Meliton's *Apology*, which was addressed to Marcus Aurelius some time between 169 and 176, and they do

¹ As first divined by J.L. Jacobi, the year after the *editio princeps* (Jacobi 1856, 107-8; cf. also e.g. Harnack 1882, 262; Nöldeke 1887; Zuntz 1952, 195-6). Many other works are falsely ascribed to Meliton, but the ascriptions follow a different pattern. They are Latin works ascribed to Meliton in the mediaeval west; in the case of the *De Transitu Mariae*, which has a Greek underlay, the ascription first occurs in Bede. There are also five Syriac fragments, translated in Cureton 1855, 52-6. Four, ascribed to Meliton in BM no. 12156 (written by an Edessene scribe, c.AD 562; cf. Cureton 1849, 352-3), are elsewhere to Alexander of Alexandria and to Irenaeus. But if Krüger's attempt to reconcile the ascriptions by supposing that Alexander reworked an earlier work of Meliton's was correct, then we are not dealing with pseudepigraphy. For the pseudepigrapha of Meliton, see Pitra 1855, xxxi-xxxii; Harnack 1882, 264-76 and 1893, 251-4; Bardenhewer 1913, 462-5.

not overlap with this text². The genuine Meliton is polite and deferential towards the emperor; this one is outspoken to a degree. Syriac scholars have noted how well and fluently it reads; it is not translationese³. But if Syriac, not Greek, is its original language, then Meliton is ruled out as its author straight away. So whence the attribution? Possibly the pretence originated with the writer himself. But if so, he seems not to have tried very hard to create a 'Melitonian' persona. If he had wanted to do that, then instead of the Syrian and Mesopotamian religions listed in 5 (unless that chapter is a later insert), he would much more naturally have listed deities of Asia Minor. The attribution to Meliton could just as well be an inference made by a scribe who identified the work with the address to the emperor (Πρὸς Ἀυτωνῖνον βιβλίδιον) mentioned by Eusebius in the *Ecclesiastical History*⁴. If this is so, as Otto saw, then Eusebius' words (λόγους προσεφώνησαν) may have fostered in the annotator the impression that the work was a speech.

The description of Meliton as a 'philosopher' ranks it immediately among other apologetic works whose *tituli* describe the author in these terms (Aristides, Justin, and Athenagoras), and more generally among apologists who call Christianity a 'philosophy'⁵. They do so inasmuch as it is a body of teaching, indeed a way of life; adopting the pose or even title of a philosopher helped the apologist to set his faith on the same footing as the great and prestigious systems of thought among the pagans. More than this, pagan philosophies themselves often had a 'centrally religious orientation', being preoccupied with the quest for God⁶. Justin, in fact, purports to have run the gamut of pagan philosophical sects in an attempt to find true knowledge of God (*Tryph.* 2), before finding the true philosophy, which is Christianity (*ibid.* 7). In the event that the *titulus* originates with the composer, the writer sheltering behind Meliton's name wanted his work to appear to emanate from one of the apologists who spoke of Christianity in such terms, perhaps because their audience also had philosophic pretensions⁷.

² Euseb. *HE* 4.26.4-11. The Chronicle, not necessarily accurately, places it in the year 170 (ed. Helm, p. 206); for the date and occasion, see Grant 1955, 27-8, id. 1988a, 93, and 1988b, 5-7 (summer 176); Gabba 1962 (late 175/early 176); Keresztes 1968, 333, 335-40. It can be made Meliton's by (i) supposing that Meliton wrote two *Apologies* (cf. Chronicon Paschale for AD 165 and 169; Dindorf 1832, i. 482, 484) (so Cureton), or (ii) identifying it with his *De Veritate* (Euseb. *HE* 4.26.2, Jerome, *Vir. Illustr.* 24) (Ewald 1856, 658-9; Land 1862, 55; Renan 1882, 184 n.1; Vermader 1972, 33-6). But against (i), see Jacobi loc. cit.; and against both (i) and (ii), see Otto 1872, 382-3; Bardenhewer 1913, 461-2.

³ Nöldeke 1887; Bardenhewer 1913, 462; Baumstark 1922, 27.

⁴ *HE* 4.26.1 λόγους ... προσεφώνησαν; cf. 4.26.2 Πρὸς Ἀυτωνῖνον βιβλίδιον, 4.26.4 ἐν δὲ τῷ πρὸς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα βιβλίῳ; Otto 1872, 380. Cureton prints the relevant chapters from the Syriac version of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* on pp. 56-60.

⁵ For Christianity as a philosophy, see Bardy 1949, Malingrey 1961, 107-28, Rutherford 1989, 257 n.6; and for a few apparent references to pagans themselves calling it by this name, Gelficken 1907, 32 n.2 (Tertullian vigorously protested). Aristides' *Apology* in Syriac carries a double heading: the first, dedicating the work to Hadrian, calls the author 'Aristides the philosopher', and the second, to Antoninus Pius, 'Marcianus Aristides, philosopher of the Athenians'. See also Euseb. *HE* 4.26.7 (Meliton), 5.17.5 (Miltiades); Justin, *Ad Tryphonem* (*titulus* and *passim*); *titulus* of Athenagoras' *Legatio*; Tatian, *Or. ad Graec.* 42.

⁶ Rutherford 1989, 179-80, 258.

⁷ Indeed, the genuine Meliton expressed himself thus in one of the excerpts quoted by Eusebius, *HE* 4.26.7. Kaizer 2006, 33, writes that «the fact that Melito is explicitly called 'the philosopher' in

Alternatively, it is the contribution of a later annotator who was persuaded that the work belonged among writings of this kind.

The text addresses itself to «Antoninus Caesar, and your sons with you» in the last paragraph (13). No other information about the identity of the emperor seems to have been available. The treatise lacks the elaborate formal titulature at the head of those apologies that give themselves out to be letters⁸. The name would fit Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Caracalla, or Elagabalus⁹. The reference to children in 12 and 13 must, if we are to understand a reference to real children, mean Antoninus Pius and his adoptive sons Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, or Marcus Aurelius and his sons Commodus and Annius Verus (d. 169)¹⁰. It was also in the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Antoninus Pius that we hear most of apologists delivering / addressing works to emperors¹¹, and if one feels that either the speech is genuine, or was meant by a fabricator to have some degree of verisimilitude, these would be the reigns in which one would first try to place it¹². Others, cutting loose from the attribution to Meliton, have suggested reasons why 'Antoninus' might refer to Caracalla or Elagabalus¹³. This later dating is the one most often put forward in literary surveys. There are indeed scattered reports of letters or other works being addressed to later emperors¹⁴, but as they are no

the Syriac text may indeed lead us to suggest that the latter was composed shortly after its model, the apology of Melito of Sardis as presented by Eusebius, became known in the Near East». This is possible, although the language of 'philosophy' is not so distinctive of Meliton that we need suppose the author of this treatise is alluding to that.

⁸ Such as Justin's first *Apology*.

⁹ An analogous problem with Bardesanes' *διάλογος περὶ εἰμαρμένης*, reported as having been addressed *πρὸς Ἀντωνίνον* (Euseb. *HE* 4.30.2). Conflicting indications of Bardesanes' chronology have made it possible to identify him both with Marcus Aurelius and with Elagabalus or Caracalla (see Bardy's note *ad loc.*). Another problem, as with ps.-M., is the supposed dedication of an original Syriac composition to a Roman emperor. Drijvers 1966, 69, suggests that Antoninus was a private individual.

¹⁰ Otto 1872, 385.

¹¹ Our main source is Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, which records a series of *λόγοι ἀπολογητικοί* addressed to emperors. Under Hadrian: Quadratus (*HE* 4.3.1, Jer. *Epist.* 70.4.1), Aristides (*HE* 4.3.3, Jer. loc. cit.). Under Antoninus Pius: Justin (*HE* 4.8.3, 4.11.11; Jerome, *Epist.* 70.1). Under Marcus Aurelius: Miltiades (*HE* 5.17.5), Meliton of Sardis (*HE* 4.13.8, 4.26.1; 4.26.2; 4.26.4-11; Eusebius / Jerome, for the year 170; Chronicon Paschale, 164/6 and 169), and Apolinarius (*HE* 4.26.1, Chronicon Paschale, 169). Athenagoras' *Legatio* was addressed to Marcus Aurelius and Commodus in 176/7.

¹² Those who believe the attribution must ascribe it to Marcus Aurelius (Renan; Cureton; Vermander) or Antoninus Pius (Seeberg 1893, 238 and n.1). Even if the text is pseudepigraphic, the author may have meant it to be understood as addressed to Marcus Aurelius (Kaizer 2006, 33).

¹³ So Jacobi 1856, 107; Harnack 1893, 251; Baumstark 1922, 27; Gabba 1962, 469. The reference to women's clothes in 6 would suit Elagabalus (e.g. Otto 1872, 385; Zuntz 1952, 196), while the emphasis in 5 on eastern religions might suit Caracalla during his campaigns in 216-217 (Harnack 1882, 263-4; Tixeront 1888, 9 n. 5; Baumstark loc. cit.; Drijvers 1966, 209; Millar 1993, 478).

¹⁴ Moses of Chorene, *History of Armenia*, 2.66, reports that Bardesanes addressed a letter to 'Antoninus', having indicated that he flourished under the last Antonine; in the early third century, Hippolytus addresses an *ἐπιστολή* 'to a certain queen' (*GCS* I.2, 253); Julius Africanus dedicates his *Kestoi* to Severus Alexander; his mother, Julia Mamaea, sent for Origen in order for him to expound his teaching to her (Euseb. *HE* 6.21.3-4).

longer extant we cannot tell what they were like. By this period, apologies directed to emperors as testaments of faith seem to have dried up. At least, Eusebius no longer registers the presence of any.

Did early Christian apologists really hope to reach the ears of the emperor? Or did they use the address to the emperor in order to add weight to their message and to advertise their works? Or are our surviving apologies revisions of the original plea (whatever form that took), dressed up for literary circulation? A century ago, J. Geffcken was fundamentally sceptical: «Ich kann mir nicht denken, daß diese Reden des Apologeten so wie sie uns jetzt vorliegen, wirklich dem Kaiser zugegangen sind, geschweige gehalten worden sind ... Diese Schriften sind reine Buchliteratur ohne unmittelbar praktische Zwecke»¹⁵. Some do at least seem to have had a definite situation in view, whether or not they really aspired to reach the emperor himself. Justin's second *Apology* was written in the wake of the execution of several Christians by the urban prefect Q. Lollius Urbicus. Meliton (the real Meliton) pleaded with Marcus Aurelius on behalf of Christians of Asia Minor whom he describes as 'harrassed by new decrees', whatever those decrees were¹⁶. A sense of grievance, of suffering from undeserved prejudice, drives Justin's first *Apology* and Athenagoras' *Embassy*, whether or not one takes their dedication to the emperor at face value¹⁷.

This is not the case with ps.-M. *Apologia* is a modern label born of taking seriously the attribution to Meliton (where it is Eusebius' word). But it is not a speech of defence, and it has no judicial setting. There is hardly any hint of a real situation. The work is not trying to ameliorate a situation in which Christians are suffering from prejudice or persecution. It maintains complete silence on that subject. On the contrary, the speaker is actually trying to convert the emperor away from idolatry and to the worship of the true God – an extraordinary stance¹⁸. The content of the treatise is partly polemical (a classical ἔλεγχος or *refutatio*) and partly exhortatory. It is an example of what Eduard Norden called *Missionspredigt*, or *Busspredigt*, or *Umkehrungspredigt*.

No other Christian apologist in the second century tried to convert an emperor. From the sheer improbability of any attempt to do so, Jacobi preferred to identify the addressee with one of the later Antonines¹⁹. But does it get any less improbable as time passes? Alternatively, one could infer that the setting and addressee are fictive, that the author was more concerned with the message than with the circumstances in which it was delivered. This might also explain why, in contrast with other works which may at least be *trying* to reach the emperor and begin with elaborate titulature, this one identifies the ruler so inadequately. The author does not even seem interested in making clear what sort of an

¹⁵ Geffcken 1907, 99 and n.1, writing of Justin.

¹⁶ For interpretations, see Keresztes 1968, 335-40. He himself suggests that Meliton's *Apology* may be responding to persecutions that were indirect results of a *senatus consultum de pretiis gladiatorum minuendis* in early 177.

¹⁷ For doubts about the *Legatio*, see Geffcken 1907, 99 and n.1, 237; Schoedel 1972, xiii.

¹⁸ Equally extraordinary is how little notice scholars have taken of it. But see Jacobi 1856, 107: «Eine kühne, bei den Apologeten des 2. Jahrhunderts nicht mehr vorkommende Vorstellung, daß der Kaiser und sein Reich sich zum Christenthum bekehren solle. Noch Tertullian setzt voraus, daß das Reich und die Masse darin heidnisch bleiben und in dem Kaiser ein heidnisches Haupt haben müsse».

¹⁹ 1856, 107.

address this is, whether speech or letter²⁰.

I myself prefer this second option. This seems to me to be a work of polemic and exhortation, with a situation at best ill-defined, at worst implausible. To begin with, there is the question of the text's original language. The fluency of the Syriac has implications for the addressee as well as for the author: if Syriac *is* the original language, then all pretence at addressing a Roman emperor in a language he could understand must fall away (unless perhaps it was directed at the Syrian emperor Elagabalus?). Second, there is the style of address. One might just about maintain that the emphasis on truth, the use of tropes whose origin was in *pagan* philosophical critique of pagan religion, the lack of reference to specifically Christian doctrines and the concentration on the one supreme god, was all intended to be addressed to the philosophic instincts of a philosophic emperor²¹. But when the speaker harangues and abuses the speaker with an extraordinary lack of humility, implying that he is deceiving himself and sinning, calling him 'fool', casting imputations on his ancestors – all this takes to an extreme even the convention of philosophical *παρρησία*²².

Noting it, E. Renan refused to believe that the text could have been addressed to an emperor at all. In his view, Meliton's treatise 'on truth' had been equipped with a false title and an apocryphal conclusion which, in order to heighten its status, made it seem to be addressed to an emperor, perhaps in order to pass it off as the lost *Apology*. But the problem is not solved so easily. Although the author employs many stock arguments against idolatry, he also expands them with new material which, in one case, can only have a worldly ruler in mind: when he specifically heads off the objection that a ruler must follow the wishes of his subjects, this is a new departure in anti-pagan polemic which must have in mind an addressee who is a king (10). Likelier, I suggest, is that this is a piece of propaganda which advertises Christianity through its prestigious addressee but is barely interested in sketching even the outlines of a situation in which it could have been plausibly addressed to him.

A treatise that stands comparison with ps.-M. is the *Apology* of Aristides²³. This is extant in full in a Syriac translation; another version is embedded in the Greek romance of Barlaam and Joasaph; there are also fragments of the original Greek, and of an Armenian

20 The heading calls it an 'oratio', and the harangue would suit a *viva voce* address (cf. *Missionspredigt* in the Sibylline Oracles and Areopagus address); but there is no vocative at, or near, the beginning, to identify addressee and occasion (contrast e.g. Athenagoras' *Legatio*; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*; ps.-Justin, *Oratio ad gentiles*). The description of the work as an 'oratio' also conflicts with the three references to writing in 5: yet 5 stands out as an oddity, and has been regarded by many as a later addition. The rest of the treatise is extremely unforthcoming about what it is supposed to be, though the new (or renewed) address towards the end can be paralleled in other speeches (Athenagoras, *Leg.* 37; Tatian, *Or.* 42; ps.-Just. *Or.* 40 B).

21 The possibility that the treatise could be appealing to Marcus Aurelius' Stoicism is raised, but not looked on favourably, by Jacobi 1856, 106.

22 Noted by Otto 1872, 385-6; Renan 1882, 184 n.1; Harnack 1882, 264; Haase 1910, 71-2; Bardenhewer 1913, 462 (contrasting it with the tone of the Eusebian fragments of Meliton). An anecdote in Philostratus, *VS* 2.5, tells of the *παρρησία* of the Greek rhetor Alexander towards the emperor (Rutherford 1989, 82), but ps.-M. makes this look positively tame.

23 For the connection of the two treatises, see Seeberg 1893, 237-8; Quasten 1950, 247.

translation²⁴. The problem is in reconstructing the original, for the Syriac differs substantially from the Greek. In the romance of Barlaam, the story has been transferred to a romantic setting – a staged debate in front of an eastern king and his son which, even against the speaker's will, turns into a missionary discourse on behalf of Christianity. In its original form, however, it seems to have been addressed to a Roman emperor. Eusebius, who mentions it, reports that it was addressed to Hadrian²⁵. The Syriac version, no less than the Greek, addresses itself to a 'king' throughout²⁶, but a double *titulus* puts the identity of this ruler in question. According to the first half, it is «the apology which Aristides the philosopher made before Hadrian the king concerning the worship of God», while the second dedicates it «[to the Emperor] Caesar Titus Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius, from Marcianus Aristides, a philosopher of Athens». Scholars debate which of these titles is the original²⁷. But if we believe either, then we have another treatise addressed to an emperor, with minimal indication of any point of departure in a real situation²⁸. In a study published twenty years ago, K.-G. Essig refused to believe that Aristides' original apology could possibly have been addressed to the emperor: two of his reasons were the lack of a detectable point of departure for the speech, and inappropriately pedagogical tone²⁹. In other words, the text seems to have been situated at the 'fictive' end of the apologetic spectrum, along with ps.-M³⁰.

There is more. Not only are the *Apologies* of Aristides and ps.-M. both addressed overtly to a 'king'; not only are they not tracts of self-defence; and not only do they lack a sense of embattlement or specific grievance. Both of them are in fact appealing for converts to Christianity.

It is useful to compare their styles of approach, although with Aristides the issue is complicated by the fact that one of our two prime witnesses, the romance of Barlaam, is recast as a discourse precisely in a setting of winning converts to the faith. Fortunately,

24 For the Syriac and Greek, see Rendel Harris and Armitage Robinson 1891: Greek fragments: P. Lond. 2486, P. Oxy. 1778. For the various versions, including the Armenian, and the history of their discovery, see Geffcken 1907, xxxiii–xxxiv; Oesterle 1980, 15–7.

25 Euseb. *HE* 4.3.3; so too Jer. *Epist.* 70.4.1.

26 A few plural forms are found in the Syriac, which according to O'Ceallaigh 1958, 252–3, are the work of a Christian interpolator; the original document had 'O king' throughout.

27 In favour of Hadrian: O'Ceallaigh 1958, 229–32. In favour of Antoninus Pius: Rendel Harris 1891, 7–10; Geffcken 1907, 28–31; Oesterle 1980, 18.

28 The final chapter of the Syriac (§17) holds that the Greeks have accused the Christians of the 'foulness' of homosexuality of which they themselves are culpable; but that is all. Not even this is present in the Greek (where the debate is taking place in front of an Indian king, and where there is no further need to describe the speech's context).

29 Essig 1986, 186.

30 Might this be connected with the fact that both treatises are ambiguous as to whether each is a speech or a letter? The *titulus* of ps.-M. and the first part of that of Aristides both understand the work as a speech; both contain vocative addresses to the king throughout; and in both cases the lively harangue sorts better with a speech than a letter. In ps.-M., however, there are three references to writing in 5 (n.20): as for Aristides, the second part of the *titulus* is an *incipit* more appropriate to a letter, and when classical authors refer to this apology, they do so as a letter (Euseb. *HE* 4.3.3 ἀπολογία ἐπιφωνήσας Ἀδριανῶ, cf. Jer. *Vir. Ill.* 20). Similarly, Justin's *Apologies* are written treatises (1 *Apol.* 2.3 τῶνδε τῶν γραμμάτων; 2 *Apol.* 14.1 βιβλίδιον, cf. Euseb. *HE* 4.16.1 βίβλιον), but have a rhetorical character (implied for the first *Apology* by Euseb. *HE* 4.11.11, 4.18.2 λόγος ... προσφωνητικός).

comparison with the Syriac can act as a control on the extent to which the supposed live setting of the Greek has, or has not, altered its stance or its style. In practice, it seems, there has been little change – with the exception of one important detail, noted below. In both versions, Aristides begins his review of the three (in Greek) or four (in Syriac) religions of human kind as it were as an impartial review³¹; he gradually leads his audience or reader through to the ineluctable conclusion that Christianity is superior to the others, the only acceptable system, and only at the end does he press his explicit demand for conversion. It is here that the Greek version has a small difference from the Syriac, which could, of course, be an adjustment to the setting: it concludes with an outright, second-person plural, appeal to those present to convert.

§17 συμφέρει γὰρ ὑμῖν θεὸν κτίστην σέβεσθαι καὶ τὰ ἄφθαρτα αὐτοῦ ἐνωτίζεσθαι ῥήματα, ἵνα, κρίσιν ἐκφυγόντες καὶ τιμωρίας, ζωῆς ἀνωλήθρου δειχθῆιητε κληρονόμοι.

No longer addressing himself exclusively to the king, here the speaker turns to all the assembled audience – the king, his son, the court orators, and a crowd of interested persons. The Syriac concludes with an appeal for converts, but in the third person and not directed to the addressee:

§17: «Let all those then approach thereunto who do not know God, and let them receive incorruptible words, those which are so always and from eternity: let them, therefore, anticipate the dread judgement which is to come by Jesus the Messiah upon the whole race of men».

It is worth making the comparison with ps.-M., who, in contrast to this, delivers a full-frontal assault. Aristides never went as far as ps.-M. in his outrageous attempt to convert a king, or emperor. As we have seen, not even the Greek does this. Ps.-M., on the other hand, roundly denounces the error of his addressee in the first paragraph. At, or close to, the beginning of both treatises there is a section describing the nature of the true God³². Aristides presents this as the conclusion of natural reason, based on contemplation of the universe, rather than as the dogma of one specific theological system. His review of world religions, exposing the weaknesses of each one until the truth finally bursts forth at the end, then follows. Right from the beginning, however, ps.-M. sets up an antagonism between the true God and the false, wicked, idolatrous system to the overthrow of which his treatise is devoted. There is no question of refutation *preceding* the exposition of the truth. The missionary drive of ps.-M. is so much the more *ad hominem* – and extraordinary, given the identity of his addressee.

³¹ There is dispute over which system is older. Three ‘races’ have the support of the Κήρυγμα Πέτρου, ap. Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6.5.41.6–7 (Hellenes, Jews, and Christians). Essig, however, has argued that the four races in the Syriac are the older system (1986, 175-8).

³² Noted as a distinctive feature of Aristides by van Unnik 1961, 171.

There are other features that ps.-M. shares with Aristides. In both cases, the author brings a 'philosophic' mode to bear on his imperial addressee³³. Indeed, ps.-M.'s work is comprehensible as a piece of classical rhetoric: it is arranged round a series of arguments that could be made in favour of idolatry and their refutations, in a way that readily parallels the objections and rebuttals of imaginary opponents in discourses and harangues by pagan philosophers. Both he and Aristides use a diatribal style whose tropes can be paralleled from, say, the ethical discourses of Epictetus. They are dominated by the antithesis between truth and error, ἀλήθεια and πλάνη³⁴. Error and ignorance are blindness, lameness, drunkenness, or sleep; the truth is waking, vision, sunlight. All this can be paralleled in Epictetus; the harangues in the Sibylline oracles are also riddled with the same clichés³⁵.

It is presumably related to the 'philosophic' style of approach that the preaching of monotheism is more important than specifically Christian dogma. Ever since ps.-M.'s treatise was discovered, scholars have commented on the outright absence of specifically Christian elements³⁶. Indeed, the Jewish antecedents of Christian apologetic are particularly clear in this text; the basic argument, 'worship the Creator rather than things created by men', can already be paralleled in Philo. Aristides' case is more complicated: both the Greek and Syriac versions have, albeit in different positions, a Christian 'Confession of faith', whose date of origin is still obscure³⁷. Yet, in an article which has been criticised but never decisively refuted, G.C. O'Ceallaigh maintained not only that this confession is a much later interpolation, but that Aristides' *Apology* originally was not a Christian writing at all. It began as a Jewish author's advocacy of his own religion and way of life and attack on three idolatrous pagan nations (the Chaldaeans, Egyptians, and Greeks), and only later did a Christian interpolator bring the scheme to a climax in the perfection of Christianity. In the process he transferred to the Christians most of the commendatory material which he found applied in his source to the Jews³⁸. If this is right, it is possible that what ps.-M. knew was not the pro-Christian encomium which we have today, but the putative Jewish original – and that its emphasis lay on its broadside

³³ Altaner 1950, 653: «Im übrigen ist das von A. verwendete philosophische Sprachgut nichts anderes als die auf seine heidnischen Leser berechnete Einkleidung christl. Gedanken: er will den geoffenbarten Glauben in philosophischer Sprache verteidigen».

³⁴ Seeberg 1893, 237. For ps.-M., see 1 (error, sleep, cloud *versus* truth, sunlight, vision); 3: «just as you cannot blame the blind for stumbling, so you cannot blame those who have never heard the truth»; 9: «thou art not able to know until thou shalt have lifted up thy head from this sleep in which thou art sunken, and have opened thine eyes». These clichés are developed in a Judaeo-Christian sense, so that the light of the truth becomes specifically the light of revelation.

³⁵ For imagery of blindness and erring in Epictetus, see e.g. 1.18 ὅτι οὐ δεῖ χαλεπαίνειν τοῖς ἀμαρτανόμενοις *passim*; 1.20.10-2; 1.28.9; etc.

³⁶ Beginning with Jacobi 1856, 107. Jacobi, and many scholars after him, have supposed the author of the treatise to be a Jewish Christian (1856, 108).

³⁷ Rendel Harris 1891, 13-5, 23-5, argued that «he was crucified by the Jews» points to an early date, and regards it as part of the original second-century composition; O'Ceallaigh 1958, 239-42, dated it to 360-400, «in some backward community of the East, probably in Syria or Asia Minor»; Essig 1986, 182-5, who is inconclusive.

³⁸ O'Ceallaigh 1958; criticised by Essig 1986, cf. 185: «Daher kann auch nicht mit letztgültiger Sicherheit bestritten werden, daß die Apologie ursprünglich ein jüdisches Dokument darstelle, noch kann diese Hypothese zwingend falsifiziert werden».

against idolatry, much in keeping with his own interests. Still, even on O’Ceallaigh’s view, the attack on idolatry would have been counterbalanced by praise of the Jews and advocacy of their virtues and way of life. Any such commendation of social virtues is absent from ps.-M., who is wholly focussed on the knowledge of God.

For his teaching about God, ps.-M. uses a repertoire of divine predications which are standard fare in the apologists. The very enumeration of God’s qualities was traced by Geffcken back to Stoicism, while many of the details can be shown to have Platonic and/or Stoic antecedents; they were transmitted thence to Hellenistic Jewish writers, so that Philo, in particular, is an excellent source of parallels for many of the ideas in question³⁹. Given how commonplace most of this material is, it is hardly surprising that ps.-M. uses many of the same *topoi* as Aristides⁴⁰. Both authors present them in a particularly bland form: Essig’s description of the colourlessness of Aristides’ divine predicates applies equally well to both writers: «Die Trennung verschiedener Traditionsebenen scheint bei Aristides’ Gotteslehre aufgehoben. Spezifisch Christliches ist in seiner Darstellung (Aristid., Apol. 1,3 ff.) nicht greifbar, ein Exklusivitätsanspruch nicht erkennbar: die verschiedensten Strömungen können sich mit dieser Darstellung identifizieren»⁴¹.

Yet despite the stock character of most of these predicates, here too it seems possible that ps.-M. could have known a version of Aristides’ treatise. In the following list, ps.-M.’s words come first, followed by Aristides’, and then any other relevant parallels, whether to indicate a Greek philosophical background, or how common the word is in other apologists.

2: ‘By his power everything subsists’: Aristides, §1.5 δι’ αὐτοῦ δὲ τὰ πάντα συνέστηκεν; Geffcken 1907, 40, citing ps.-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 397b.

2: ‘Not made, nor yet brought into being, but exists from eternity, and will exist for ever’: Aristides, §1.4 ἀναρχον καὶ αἰδίου. But the idea is very common, with a Stoic background (Geffcken 1907, 37, citing Diog. Laert. 7.137 ὅς (sc. ὁ θεός) δὴ ἀφθαρτός ἐστι καὶ ἀγέννητος); for other apologists see Athenag. *Leg.* 4.1 τὸ ... θεῖον ἀγέννητον ... καὶ αἰδίου, 6.2 al.; Theophil. *Autol.* 1.4.

2: ‘Undergoes no change, while all things are changed’⁴²: Aristides, §4.1 ὅς ἐστιν ...

³⁹ ‘Negative theology’ – statements of what God is *not* – are already found in Stoic writers (Geffcken 1907, 37, with instances of ἀφθαρτος and ἀγέννητος); for Philo, see e.g. *Leg. All.* 1.51: *De Cher.* 86; *De confus. ling.* 138; *De mut. nom.* 15; van Unnik 1961, esp. 173.

⁴⁰ On whose divine predications see Essig 1986, 178-82.

⁴¹ Essig 1986, 181. He also remarks on «das eigentümliche Nebeneinander von mittelplatonisch / stoischen und hellenistisch-jüdischen Gottesprädikationen» in Aristides (180–1), in which respect he contrasts him with Tatian or Justin, yet fails to give a single specific example of how they differ.

⁴² Similar to the well-known formulation in which a negated verbal adjective with a passive meaning is paired an active finite verb, e.g. Κήρυγμα Πέτρου, ap. Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6.5.39.3 ὁ ἀόρατος, ὅς τὰ πάντα ὄρα, ἀχώρητος, ὅς τὰ πάντα χωρεῖ, ἀνεπίδεής, οὐ τὰ πάντα ἐπιδέεται ... ἀποίητος, ὅς τὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν λόγῳ δυνάμεως αὐτου; cf. also *Or. Sib.* 3.12, fr. 1.8: Aristides, §4.1 ἀόρατος· αὐτὸς δὲ πάντα ὄρα, sim. §13 Syriac. Similar, but not identical, for ps.-M. does not pair ‘unchanged’ with ‘changes all things’ (unless something has gone wrong with either an ancient translation into Syriac, or modern translations from it). The pattern again has Stoic antecedents (Geffcken 1907, 38, citing Sallust. *Bell. Jug.* 2.3 *animus incorruptus ... agit atque*

ἀναλλοίωτος καὶ ἀόρατος· αὐτὸς δὲ πάντα ὄρᾳ καὶ καθὼς βούλεται ἀλλοιοῖ καὶ μεταβάλλει. See also *ibid.* 1 ἀνώτερον πάντων τῶν παθῶν καὶ ἐλαττωμάτων. ἀναλλοίωτος also occurs in Theophil. *Autol.* 1.4, Athenag. *Suppl.* 22.

2: 'No sight is able to behold him': commonplace, cf. e.g. *Or. Sib.* 3.17, fr. 1.9.

2: 'Nor understanding able to comprehend him': Aristides, §1.2 (Syr.) 'incomprehensible', with the commentary of Geffcken 1907, 35-6. ἀκατάληπτος occurs in Philo, *De Confus.* 138, *De mut. nom.* 10, 15; Athenag. *Leg.* 10.1; Theophil. *Autol.* 1.3.

2: Nor words to describe him': Aristides, §1.5 (Armenian) 'unaussprechlich', with the commentary of Geffcken 1907, 39-40. Compare Theophilus, *Autol.* 1.3 ἄρρητον καὶ ἀνεκφραστον; Justin, 1 *Apol.* 61.11, 2 *Apol.* 10.8, al. ἄρρητος.

6: 'immoveable': Aristides, §1.5 (Armenian) 'unbeweglich', with the commentary of Geffcken 1907, 40, citing Philo, *De Confus. Ling.* 136, but the idea is found already in Xenophanes, fr. 26 D.-K. It recurs in Athenag. *Leg.* 22 ἀκίνητον.

6: 'lacks nothing': Aristides, §1 (Syriac), with the commentary of Geffcken 1907, 38, adding to his list of apologists *Ep. ad Diognet.* 3; Theophil. *Autol.* 1.3-4; Justin, 1 *Apol.* 14. Commonplace.

In both authors, the major section of divine predication occurs at the beginning, and they have in common a few less-frequent items. Note especially 'unchanged / all-changing'; 'immoveable'; and perhaps 'by his power everything subsists'. If there is a connection, note that 'immoveable' and 'indescribable' are present *only* in the Armenian version of Aristides, while 'by his power everything subsists' is only in the Greek. This would show, if the parallels were not illusory, that it was not the Syriac translation of Aristides (at least, not the extant one) that ps.-M. was using.

Finally, there are other correspondences between the two treatises, to which Seeberg has already drawn attention. While most are conventional in content, the overall argument for a relationship between the two treatises depends, as before, on their accumulated frequency in treatises which are, after all, fairly short.

◆ Ps.-M. 2 and Aristides, §4.1 both advance the standard argument that no created thing can be a god. Both also employ a traditional argument, Jewish in origin, against worshippers of the elements and/or of the heavenly bodies (*Wisd.* 13:2; Phil. *Vit. Contempl.* 2-5, *Decal.* 52-7). In Aristides, this argument is directed against 'barbarians' (Syriac) or 'Chaldaeans' (Greek), whereas ps.-M. does not distinguish nature-worship from any other sort of false belief. Aristides, §4.3-6.3 names all the elements; ps.M. 2 all save air. But neither was the source of the other. Among other improper objects of worship, Aristides names men of the past, while ps.-M. adduces gold and silver, wood and stones. Both are traditional targets, and are found combined in Phil., *Vit. Contempl.* 6-7.

habet cuncta neque ipse habetur: Philo, *Somm.* 1.63 τῶ περιέχειν μὲν τὰ ὅλα, περιέχεσθαι δὲ πρὸς μηδενὸς ἀπλῶς, *Confus. Ling.* 136 περιέχοντος, οὐ περιεχομένου). For another adaptation, see Aristides, §1: the heavens do not contain him, but he contains the heavens and everything else; he has no adversary, because none is more powerful; he is without anger, because none can withstand him; he is without error or forgetfulness, for he is wisdom and understanding.

◆ Ps.-M. 8 and Aristides §1 both use the traditional Stoic argument from the goodness of creation to the beneficence of its creator⁴³. The context in both authors is different: ps.-M. argues that his addressee has free will which ought to lead his addressee in the right direction by the contemplation of nature, whereas Aristides himself does the contemplating and concludes from it that that which moves is more powerful than that which is moved. ps.-M., however, alludes to this argument too: «He who moveth these is greater than they all».

◆ One of ps.-M.'s dummy pro-idolatri arguments has a parallel in Aristides. Compare 11, «But there are men who say that it is for God's own honour we make the idol» and Aristides, §13.3 «But even the writers and philosophers among them have wrongly alleged that the gods are such as are made in honour of God Almighty».

◆ Three times ps.-M. uses the image of grovelling or rolling round on the ground for idolatry (3 «For there are some men who are not able to raise themselves up from their mother earth»; 9 «On this account thou rollest thyself upon the ground before demons and shadows»; 11 «Why rollest thou thyself upon the earth?»). The same is found in Aristides, §16.6 (Syriac): «But the rest of the nations err and cause error in wallowing before the elements of the world»⁴⁴.

In sum, it seems to me entirely possible that ps.-M. knew the *Apology* of Aristides in some form. This would not be surprising, since Syria seems to have been the area where the treatise exerted what little influence it did⁴⁵. It does not seem to have been the extant Syriac version that he knew, if the evidence presented above is accepted; he may even have known O'Ceallaigh's putative Jewish original. Perhaps Aristides' treatise was the source of his idea of a fictive *Apology*, using the imperial addressee to advertise his message. Ps.-M. adopted the same 'philosophic' stance, and the same neutral, non-sectarian way of describing the deity. He may have derived a few details from Aristides too, both divine predicates and argumentative tropes and manoeuvres. His demands, however, were more strident; he sharpened the critique of idolatry; and he cared little for the implausibility of tackling an emperor head-on.

II. THE GODS OF THE NATIONS

The Euhemeristic section is by far the most interesting and difficult section of the treatise. Ps.-M. has been arguing that worshippers of false gods are in fact worshipping images of kings, who are dead; he supports this familiar argument by pointing to the modern practice of emperor-worship, to which many people are even more devoted than they are to the images of the former gods. But he then backtracks to the former gods, and launches upon his exposition by promising to «write and shew how and for what causes images were made for kings and tyrants, and they became as gods». What follows is a sudden concentration of specialist material, while the rest of the treatise ignores classical mythology and avoids detailed comment on pagan cults. It is the only section in the

⁴³ Geffcken 1907, 34, citing various apologists who use it; Pease 1941, 163-200 (a survey of the teleological argument in pagan and Christian writing); Rutherford 1989, 158, 210, 228, 243. A good instance in Wisd. 13:3-5.

⁴⁴ Furthermore: both Aristides and ps.-M. quote from the Sibyl (ps.-M. 4, quoting 3.722-3; Aristides, §1, quoting 8.390).

⁴⁵ *RGG*¹, s.v. *Aristides*, i, 728 (R. van den Broek); Essig 1986, 188.

treatise to refer to writing, which it does three times. Some have seen it an interpolation, in whole or in part⁴⁶. Can this view be sustained?

The very concentration of detail in this chapter contrasts with the rather diffuse argumentation of the rest of the treatise, but again there is an approximate analogy in Aristides' *Apology*, which also contains a detailed attack on pagan cults. As we have seen, the Syriac and Greek differ in their taxonomies: whereas the Greek distinguishes Chaldaeans, Greeks, and Egyptians within the general category of 'worshippers of false gods', the Syriac labels the first group 'barbarians', and deals with the Egyptians (§12) only in a digression in which they are contrasted with the Greeks. The people that the Greek calls Chaldaeans and the Syriac barbarians are not, in fact, characterised by the worship of ethnically distinctive gods, but both versions of the treatise deal at length with the traditional Greek gods and the scurrilous stories that are told about them, and both arraign the Egyptians for animal-worship and the worship of Osiris, Isis, Horus, and Typhon⁴⁷.

The very fact that Aristides contains a series of potted stories might suggest some sort of connection with ps.-M., but, as will emerge more clearly below, there are also differences. While Aristides neatly subdivides his pagan religions, ps.-M. lists them all higgledy-piggledy, without any theoretical distinctions between them (had the order of §3 and §4 been reversed, there would at least have been separate groupings of Greek, Egyptian, and Near Eastern gods). While Aristides does not assign his gods definite locations, ps.-M. does in every case; and while Aristides does not, even by implication, mention any myth set further east than Phoenicia, the east is ps.-M.'s speciality. Their common ground are the myths of Dionysus, Heracles, and – more strikingly – Aphrodite and Adonis/Tammuz, but in each case the details are different⁴⁸. But one of the most important differences is that ps.-M. conspicuously lacks Aristides' sustained scorn. I will return to this.

Another difference is that ps.-M. makes more overt use of Euhemerism. Of course, nothing is more familiar in early Christian polemical writing than the Euhemerist attack on pagan gods. Both ps.-M.'s basic argument, that pagan gods arose from the worship of mortal kings, and his subject-matter – at least the subjects of the first five *historiolae* – are readily paralleled in other Christian apologists⁴⁹. But there are distinct oddities in the way ps.-M. deploys this supposedly traditional argument.

⁴⁶ Seeberg 1893, 238-9 n.1, considers that the Syriac translator might have inserted the Syriac material, and added (a) the *interpretatio persica* of Heracles' friend in §1, and (b) (perhaps) the *interpretatio aegyptiaca* of Joseph in §3. (b) is certainly wrong, and I think (a) is to be rejected as well: the *historiolae* show many of the same peculiarities and are to be ascribed to the same author.

⁴⁷ The material contained in Aristides §§10-1 is not paralleled in Epiphanius, *Anc.* 106.1-6, despite their ultimate use of a common source. It seems that Aristides has preserved the original state of affairs, but that the roster of divine myths was pruned back at some point by the time of Epiphanius so as to foreground the parallels between the erotic adventures of Zeus and of Heracles (Dummer 1994, 282-7, especially 285).

⁴⁸ À propos of Heracles, the Syriac version of Aristides seems to combine both positive and negative traditions in a way that recalls ps.-M.; the Greek is more consistently hostile (§10.9). Aristides, §11.3-4, interestingly records that Aphrodite went to Hades in quest of Adonis: the tradition of her *Höllenfahrt* is also noted by Cyril, *PG* 70.441 (cf. Lightfoot 2003, 310).

⁴⁹ For the argument, see e.g. Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 20.6; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 1.15.2-4; Cyprian, *Quod idola dii non sint*. Of the *historiolae*, Zeus (§1) and Aphrodite (§5) are particular staples of

First, and simply with reference to his own argument, the sequence of *historiolae* does not perform the job it is called on to do. It is introduced in order to show how the gods arose from images of dead kings⁵⁰. Yet images are only mentioned in only three *historiolae* (§§1,6,9), and of these only the first two explain the reason why the image was made.

Second, given the relentless hostility of the rest of the treatise to paganism, this section is remarkably mildly disposed towards its subject-matter. This becomes all the more obvious when ps.-M. is compared to other apologists. They love to arraign paganism by accumulating detail, and often this detail is presented, as in ps.-M., in the form of a list – specifically, a geographical list, or list of ‘gods of the nations’. But contrast ps.-M. with the hard-headed application of geographical data in other apologists: Athenagoras, to demonstrate that the pagans disagree amongst themselves, since they all worship different gods; ps.-Clement and Arnobius, that graves of the gods of paganism lie scattered across the entirety of the known world; Tertullian, that the pagan world is dotted with local gods and cults, knowledge of which is confined to a very tiny orbit – or again, to plead that each province and city has its own gods, and all but the Christians enjoy freedom of worship⁵¹. At first sight, the geographical passage in Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 1.15.8-9, is more neutral in tone: it occurs in an explanatory account of the origin of pagan cults⁵². But of course it is part of a larger argument, that the worship of gods originated in excessive reverence for human kings; Lactantius leaves us in no doubt whatsoever that this is ‘error’, ‘evil’, ‘vanity’, and ‘mists of falsehoods’ (1.15.11, 14-5).

Of course, lists need not be geographical. We find them in both pagan and Christian writers, in the former case both to show how humans were divinised for their good services and, in writing directed against traditional conceptions of the deities, to catalogue the wicked deeds of the so-called deity in question. In either case, they serve argumentative ends and do not present deadpan little summaries, as ps.-M. does here. Not only is this section of ps.-M. less argumentative and less hostile than its obvious comparanda. It is also more digressive, narrative, and mythographical⁵³.

Third, and leading on from the last point, the *historiolae* rest principally on favourable traditions about the culture hero in question. Heracles is a slayer of monsters; Dionysus introducer of the vine; Joseph supplier of corn to the Egyptians in time of dearth; Athena

Euhemerist story-telling and can be traced back to the master himself (for Aphrodite, see T. 74-75B. Winiarczyk).

50 The reference to *statues* points to the tradition of Judaeo-Christian polemic against idolatry, rather than classical Euhemerism, which as far as I am aware did not refer to statues: the line of attack goes back to Wisdom 14:15-21, which suggests that idolatry originated with statues of (i) deceased children and (ii) absent monarchs; cf. *Or. Sib.* 3.279, 554, 723, al.

51 Athenagoras, *Leg.* 14.1; ps.-Clem. *Hom.* 5.23.1-3, *Recogn.* 10.23-4, Ps.-Caesarius Nazianzenus, *Dial. II*, resp. ad interrog. 112 (*PG* 38.993); Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 6.6; Tertullian, *Nat.* 2.8.5, *Apol.* 24.8.

52 Followed by Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 8.11.1-2.

53 Should one again compare Aristides? Some of his cameos of Greek gods are rather narrative in style: especially Kronos (§9), Aphrodite (§11), Isis (§12). But even here, narrative is subservient to polemical ends. A few other passages that exceed the form of the bare list: Athenag. *Leg.* 29-30 assembles a few pagan testimonia for the gods he discusses; Justin, *Tryph.* 69, goes into a little more detail than usual about Dionysus, Heracles, and Asclepius – but does so in order to make the point that each myth is a travesty of Christian myth.

foundress of Athens (not discoverer of the olive, as usual); Belti protectress, if not foundress, of Gebal; Athi a source of healing; Cuthbi a deliverer; Nebo and Hadaran victorious over an evil spirit. Ps.-M. does a little to dent these favourable traditions, but is half-hearted at best. This is not what we find in other apologists.

Among the Euhemerist arguments Christian writers use against paganism, there are two approaches which I shall label respectively A, 'Prodican' (men who benefited mankind were deified *post mortem*) and B, 'Xenophanean' (what sort of gods can they be, if they behaved so badly?)⁵⁴. Argument A is developed by the apologists in various ways. They may deny that these beings were anything but humans; they may assert that they were demons; they may belittle or deny their achievements⁵⁵. Argument B is of obvious and immediate application, and is maliciously padded out by the apologists with all manner of damaging mythological material⁵⁶.

It is by comparing ps.-M. with other apologists that his true peculiarity emerges. He uses both Arguments A and B, but fails to develop A in any of the damaging directions that the other apologists (not to mention pagan authors themselves) take. It is true that there are swipes of typical B argumentation: Heracles and his friend were lustful; Athena, Zeus, and Aphrodite are all said to have committed adultery. But these swipes are, as it were, grafted onto the basically positive traditions about the gods in question – and it is remarkable that they cease altogether for the purely Syrian *historiolae* §§6-9. The story of Orpheus (§9) is a missed opportunity for polemic, which emerges clearly from a comparison with the Euhemerist treatment of Orpheus-as-magus in Strabo 7, fr.18. Ps.-M., on the other hand, gives us a version of the ritual in Hierapolis – distorted no doubt in all sorts of ways – but not so as to be maximally or even minimally discreditable to anybody.

In other words, his polemic is remarkably flaccid – sometimes barely polemical at all.

The fourth peculiarity of this section is that the writer, or his source, gives signs of having massaged his material, slightly or more substantially, in order to get a list of gods of particular nations. Heracles and Dionysus are among the gods who figure most often in lists of 'homines pro diis culti'⁵⁷, but it is ps.-M. who has affixed them to a particular location, Heracles to Argos and Dionysus to Attica. Athena is sometimes mentioned by Euhemerist writers, but it is in connection with her 'discovery' of the olive, rather than as

⁵⁴ From the famous sentiments at, respectively, Prodicus, 84 B. 5 D.-K.; Xenophanes, 21 B. 11-2 D.-K.

⁵⁵ Nothing but humans: ps.-Clem. *Hom.* 6.20.2-22; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.26.7-8, 2.29-30; Cyprian, *Quod idola dii non sint*; Origen. *Cels.* 3.22; Athanas. *Or. contr. Gent.* 11; Theodoret. *Graec. affect. cur.* 3.26-8; Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.15; Firm. Matern. *Err.* 7.6, 12.8; Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 1.41; Aug. *Civ. Dei* 18.14. Demons: Euseb. *PE* 5.3.2. Achievements belittled: Tertullian. *Ad Nat.* 2.14-5.1, Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.18.1-6. Achievements denied: Lact. *ibid.*; Origen. *Cels.* 3.42; Socr. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.23. Other arguments: if you have deified men for such benefactions, how much more right have we to regard Christ as divine: Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 1.38. Since they came so late in time, we can the same thing about Christ: Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 2.74; Theodoret. *Graec. affect. cur.* 3.29-30. People disagree so much that there cannot be a single truth: Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 3.39. Dionysus, Heracles, the Dioscuri, Hermes, Perseus, Artemis were deified by Zeus in order to cover up his adulteries: Athanas. *Contra gent.* 12.

⁵⁶ E.g. Aristides, §§9-11; Tatian, *Or. ad Graec.* 8-9; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 21; Theophilus, *Contra Autol.* 1.9-10, 3.3, 3.8; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 22-3; Tertullian, *Apol.* 11.11-4.

⁵⁷ Winiarczyk 2002, 188-91.

chief deity of the Athenians⁵⁸. With Belti goddess of Byblos it is the other way round. Unlike Heracles and Dionysus, her very identity is local. Yet Venus / Aphrodite, the Olympian goddess with whom she is identified, if she appears in lists of 'homines pro diis culti' at all, is associated with Cyprus⁵⁹. The author appears to have created a niche for a local figure of Byblos who had not figured there before. She is a distinct departure from the repetitive lists of deified benefactors in other Christian authors.

Still more is this true of the exotic deities of Syria and Mesopotamia. The geographical emphasis deserves particular note. To make their point, Christian authors usually hit hard at what was well known: it was not in their interests to refer to cults that would look exotic or marginal to mainstream pagans. So why do it here? It is true that the ps.-Clementine *Homilies* contain a wide-ranging geographical list of places where the graves of gods are shown, a list which includes allusions to the 'graves' of Helios and Selene at Hatra and Carrhae respectively⁶⁰. The passage occurs in an account of a show-down between Clement and Appion the sorcerer, in which Clement responds to an attempt to persuade him to yield to Eros with a blistering denunciation of pagan gods and pagan ways. But the author, who may have been a Syrian⁶¹, has chosen prominent cult-places of the deities concerned in order to make a point about the deity (*viz.*, that they died), not the place; this is quite different from ps.-M.'s procedure.

His list starts to remind us more of the lists of pagan cults in other Syriac sources more than the familiar style of Graeco-Latin anti-pagan polemic. One thinks especially of the polemic against idolatry in Jacob of Sarug's *Discourse on the Fall of the Idols*, which – although it is a considerably later text – parallels ps.-M. as a self-standing tract entirely given over to the attack on idolatry⁶². Jacob's mixture of international and local, Syrian, information runs interestingly parallel to ps.-M.'s. He, too, has detailed knowledge of Syrian cults (especially Edessa, Harran, and Hierapolis), whereas his knowledge of more distant places is more generic (sun-worship in India and Ethiopia, the elements in Assyria, astrology in Babylon, magic in Media)⁶³.

In short: ps.-M. could have attacked myths, or cults, or both, but in fact did neither. What we have instead are deadpan little summaries which do little to discredit the object of the attack.

⁵⁸ Though note Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.15.9.

⁵⁹ E.g. Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.15.9; Firm. *Matern. Err.* 10.1.

⁶⁰ Ps.-Clem. *Hom.* 5.23.2-3 and *Hom.* 6.21.3.

⁶¹ For the pseudo-Clementines and their place of origin, see Bidez - Cumont 1938, i. 43; Drijvers 1966, 215; *ABD* i. 1061-2 (F. Stanley Jones); *LTK* i. 128 (J. Wehnert).

⁶² Martin 1875 (text 108-29; translation 130-44); see Drijvers 1980, 37, 43-5; Kaizer 2006, 35 n. 45.

⁶³ If we bring Jacob of Sarug into the discussion, we should be aware what we are comparing ps.-M. with. In the words of Sebastian Brock, he was a man who was «a product of the chora, rather than of a polis; for such people, in particular, the Greek cultural world, despite the superficial presence of its outward trappings in day-to-day provincial life, remained an essentially alien entity» (Brock 1994, 157). Jacob was born in a village on the Euphrates, «and represents someone who lived all his life without being outwardly affected by the Greek cultural world: for him the Syriac cultural heritage was entirely self-sufficient (though his education at the Persian School [*sc.* in Edessa] had brought him into contact with a number of Greek Christian writers in Syriac translation)».

What was the source, or sources?

Here are some prior considerations.

First, the material is very eclectic. Some *historiolae* just repeat well-known testimonia with which the author seems to have done very little, other than simply repeat them. Others are more idiosyncratic. As I have argued, Christian sources that use Euhemerism tend not to stray too far away from standard, stock *exempla*. Yet not only do several of ps.-M.'s *historiolae* present wholly new material (§§6-9), but, even when he is dealing with well-known gods, his treatments are often unconventional. This is not necessarily because what he reports is itself unusual. On the contrary, the mythographical details themselves in his classical stories are usually commonplace. Yet closer comparison of the *historiolae* with other Euhemerist Christian authors reveals details that are absent from other apologists, or traditional data that is combined in unexpected ways. Consider the combinations in §1 of Heracles and (I suggest) Theseus; in §4, of Athena, Zeus, and Heracles; in §5, of Aphrodite in Cyprus and Tammuz in Byblos (discussed further below). A couple of noteworthy details provide further clues: in §2, the archaic/poetic form 'Akte' (Attica), implying an antiquarian source; and in §4, the interesting mistake that Alcmena is wife rather than the daughter of Electryon. Might this suggest misunderstanding of a mythological handbook? Or the abbreviation of a longer narrative account by someone who was not *au fait* with his pagan mythology⁶⁴?

Second, indications of the stories' perspective are mixed. Do they reflect the point of view of a Christian or a pagan, a Greek or a Syrian – and what might those categories mean in this context? The two longest *historiolae*, the fifth and the ninth, deal with two eastern locations that would be familiar to any pagan who had been educated in polite letters: Lebanon and the Phoenician city of Byblos, associated with the graeco-orientalising myth of Adonis; and Hierapolis/Mabbug, with its cult of the Syrian goddess, a centre of exotic practices yet deep in the heart of a well-established Roman province. These are places that mark the classical, literary map of the region⁶⁵. Yet with the Nanai-worshipping Elamites of Susa and the Edessenes we step outside areas with such associations. If the Edessene items, in particular, derive from a pagan, Greek source, then the writer's attention was drawn to things that usually escape the attention of those writing within mainstream *belles lettres*⁶⁶. As for the writer's religion, a demolition of the

⁶⁴ Consider also the interesting mistake in both Syriac and Greek versions of Aristides, §9.4. where, in contrast to the parallel account in Epiphanius, *Anc.* 105.2-4, Zeus castrates his father Cronos (rather than Cronos castrating Uranus) and Aphrodite is born from the foam. See Dummer 1994, 286: «Beim ungenauen Ekzerpieren könnte der Name des Uranos ausgelassen worden sein – ein Vorgang, der bei einem in der hesiodischen Mythologie unbewanderten Autor schon denkbar ist».

⁶⁵ Lightfoot 2003, 294, and references. For this concentration on Phoenician cities in other Christian writers, compare ps.-Clem. *Recogn.* 10.24.2 / ps.-Caesarius Nazianzenus, *Dialog. II, resp. ad interrog.* 112 (PG 38.993), a wide-ranging geographical catalogue in which the 'Syrians' are mentioned for Adonis and the cult of Heracles / Melqart at Tyre; Aug. *Civ. Dei* 18.12 also mentions Tyrian Heracles. Athenagoras, *Leg.* 30.1 mentions Derceto and Semiramis among the Σύροι; although he does not name a city, he cites Ctesias, who had set the story in Ascalon (*FGrH* 688 F 1m).

⁶⁶ Edessa is transmitted in the manuscripts at Julian, *Or.* 4, 150 c-d (p. 195 Hertlein): οἱ τὴν Ἐδεσσαν οἰκοῦντες, ἱερὸν ἐξ αἰῶνος Ἡλίου χωρίου, which he says he has taken from Iamblichus. Spanheim corrected to Ἐμεσσα, here and at 154 b, surely correctly (*pace* Drijvers 1980, 159, and Ross 2001, 88): Julian cites the city's religion as an example of Phoenician beliefs, and

pretensions of pagan cult-places is quite conceivable from the pen of a pagan religious sceptic, say a Cynic philosopher. But the history of §3 (Joseph and Serapis) lies in Christian apologetic, with a possibly Jewish background; and as for §7, it seems possible, as my commentary suggests, that the story of Atti of Adiabene may be somehow connected with the Christian myth of Abgar, Thaddeus, and Edessa. Yet it ought to be clear by now that this would be a very unusual specimen of Christian writing, if that is what it is⁶⁷.

In a few cases where ps.-M.'s material overlaps with the Syriac writers Theodore Bar Konai and Išo'dad of Merv, we do seem to have some insight into a source. Bar Konai (end of the eighth century) was a Nestorian monk, author of the *Liber Scholiorum*, a collection of annotations on the Syriac bible. Išo'dad (ninth century) was author of an exegetical biblical commentary. The approach of both writers is deeply fact-driven, and in the course of their researches they have preserved a good deal of valuable material from earlier Greek and Syriac sources, much of it now lost.

Bar Konai appears to know and draw on ps.-M. In *Mimrā* XI:4 he presents a digest of stories §§3 + 5–8, following the same order as ps.-M, except that §7 and §8 are reversed; there are also a few differences in detail, especially in stories §§7–8 (on which see commentaries). In *Mimrā* XI:13 he summarises §9, and in *Mimrā* XI:93, he gives an account of the story of Nānai which runs parallel to §6, but adds a detail that is missing from ps.-M. But the best evidence comes from *Mimrā* IV:38, a long account of the myth of Tammuz and Astarte. It overlaps substantially with ps.-M. §5, though both Bar Konai and Išo'dad transmit details not found in ps.-M., while ps.-M.'s version has idiosyncrasies of its own which Bar Konai and Išo'dad do not share (see commentary). From which it follows that, whether or not Bar Konai and Išo'dad have used ps.-M. directly for this story, on which there is disagreement, they must also share a common source⁶⁸.

Can we establish from §5, where the overlap between ps.-M. and Bar Konai/Išo'dad is most substantial, whether the other *historiolae* are likely to have had the same origin? Not surprisingly, the answer seems to be no: the probability is against a single source.

It is true that, like the other Near Eastern stories, this one uses non-Greek names (Tammuz, Belti; possibly Kotar⁶⁹). It could also be described as both eclectic and syncretic, in that it combines Aphrodite of Cyprus, the literary goddess of *Odyssey* 8, and the goddess of Lebanon associated in myth with Tammuz/Adonis⁷⁰. This is particularly notable: the story of Adonis is set in both Cyprus and Lebanon in classical sources, but I

whereas Emesa is sometimes said to be in Phoenicia (Lightfoot 2003, 305), the same could hardly be said of Edessa.

67 Clermont-Ganneau overdoes it when he writes of «le caractère profondément chrétien du document dit de Méliton» (1900, 219).

68 The relation of ps.-M.'s fifth *historiola* to Bar Konai is discussed by Baudissin 1911, 75-6, and Vandenhoff 1915, 260-1. Baudissin thought they derived independently from a common source. Vandenhoff thought they derived from a common source but Bar Konai did know ps.-M.

69 If this was in the source, rather than ps.-M.'s addition: see commentary.

70 Bar Konai and Išo'dad go still further, since they name Astarte as well. Philo of Byblos equates Baaltis of Byblos with Dione, but distinguishes her from Astarte and Aphrodite (*FGrH* 790 F 2 (10.22)).

find only ps.-M., Bar Konai, and Išoʿdad actually combining them in the one narrative. This eclecticism could perhaps be compared with §4, which appends to the story of the birth of Erichthonius a notice about Heracles. But it is really a different kind of combination: the one, of testimonia on a notorious goddess⁷¹; the other, of otherwise independent stories linked by the figure of Athena (and drawn from a mythological handbook?). Similarly, the 'syncretism' in this story is different from anything offered by any of the other *historiolae*. Here, we find an accumulation of myths pertaining to Astarte /Aphrodite (a divine equivalence with a long history); it differs from the learned equation, in all likelihood deriving from Hellenistic Jews, between their own culture-hero Joseph and the Ptolemaic deity Sarapis, backed up by the etymology Σαρά-παῖς; and quite different again from the completely idiosyncratic Persian syncretisms in §§1 and 9. These are so unusual that they deserve a closer look.

§1. The association of Heracles with 'Zurdi' is indeed strange, but perhaps the familiar identification (which is here suppressed) of Heracles and Verethragna might have suggested that anyone associated with Heracles in myth ought to have a Persian identification as well, so that (?) Theseus (Heracles' companion in lust) becomes 'Zurdi'. If so, this syncretism is an exercise in ingenuity. It need not require more than a superficial knowledge of Zoroastrianism.

§9. The identifications of Nebo and Hadaran in Hierapolis, and their combination one with another, also look very odd. The equation of Nebo and Orpheus is based on visual similarity and implies familiarity with the iconography of the god of Hierapolis, where the 'official' Greek identity of the god was Apollo. As for the equation of Hadaran and Zoroaster, this stands far removed from the many ingenious equations of Zoroaster found in Christian writers who, possibly with Jewish precedent, proposed to identify him with various biblical figures in order to foreground different aspects of his character. Hadaran stands outside this tradition. One might infer that the identification originated with local priests. Alternatively one might infer that the author was using techniques he had learned from the Christians, but that he put them to maverick use. Either way, the combination is unparalleled.

In short: the *historiolae* have patently different characters and complexions. Some draw on mainstream mythology, which is sometimes reproduced eccentrically; others are highly idiosyncratic. Different kinds of syncretism are also in evidence. I would suggest that the section should be seen as a compilation of notices from different sources, some from handbooks of pagan mythology (§§1,4), some from the stock of Christian apologetics (§§3,5), some perhaps even from personal testimony (§9?).

What was the original language?

The original language of the treatise as a whole is controversial. Had it been Meliton's, it would have had to be Greek; had there been even a plausible pretence of its being Meliton's, the same would apply. Had the treatise been addressed to an emperor, or intended to seem so, then again the fiction would depend on there being a Greek original – although it comes close to exploding its own fiction by the sheer implausibility of its style of address. Yet, according to Syriac scholars, the language of the treatise is fluent

⁷¹ For compilations of 'wicked things done by Aphrodite', compare e.g. Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.33.9, or Firmicus Maternus, *De Err.* 9-10, who mentions the Venus / Mars / Adonis débâcle AND Vulcan AND Cinyras in Cyprus.

and unlike translationese, so that one reaches an impasse: if it was meant as a pseudepigraph, then the original was Greek, but its fluency points to Syriac⁷².

Although the theory of a Syriac original is widely entertained⁷³, there is also something of a consensus that §5 has a Greek original. It was R. Oden who, in 1977, put forward the most sustained argument for this view⁷⁴. My purpose here is not to show that this cannot be right under any circumstances, but to suggest that the positive arguments in favour of it are weak. It would have a bearing on the 'problem' of the fluency of the Syriac only if it could be shown that this chapter is less fluent, and no-one has tried to do that. Of the three more detailed arguments that Oden put forward, none is strong (see the commentaries on §§7 and 8). Furthermore, the theory of a Greek original must also take into account that the writer often prefers Semitic equivalents in names⁷⁵. One would have to suppose that the translator had tacitly Aramaised the Greek names he had found in his putative original. It is true that several of the names are the ones Syriac writers would be familiar with from the Bible (Susa, Tammuz, Gebal; Beth Nahrin is an updated version of the biblical form). But it would differ from the practice of Aristides' translator, who leaves most names from Greek mythology unchanged and, where he offers equivalents, does so explicitly (*viz.*, *Kwn* for Cronos, Astarte for Aphrodite, and Tammuz for Adonis). Furthermore, Kothar's name cannot be an equivalent for anything else: even if the original was Greek, it must have been taken from a Semitic source.

The main text may or may not have a Greek original; I leave to Syriac experts to pursue this question further. But if scholarly literature is to continue to express the probability of a Greek original for the Euhemerist passage, then stronger arguments will have to be found for it. If no such arguments are forthcoming, then one might entertain the possibility of a Syriac original, which either belonged with the work as an original composition, or – in the event that the treatise as a whole is a translation – was added when it was rendered into Syriac. I myself am quite hospitable to the idea of a Syriac original for the entire treatise. But we also have to be clear why the question does, or does not, matter. It bears on the question of the verisimilitude, of what could, with any degree of probability, be presented as having been delivered to an emperor. But its cultural significance may be much less, especially if the text (as I suggest below) emanated from Edessa, where there was in any case a strong tradition of translation from one language to another, sometimes almost simultaneously with a work's composition. As Drijvers writes, «Syriac does not represent a culture different from Greek; both languages are expressions and vehicles of the same Hellenistic civilization in Syria, the traditions of which go back to the former Seleucid empire»⁷⁶.

72 Nöldeke 1887; cf. Millar 1993, 477-8.

73 Harnack 1893, 251; Baumstark 1922, 27; Quasten 1950, 247; Altaner and Stuiber 1978, 63; Drijvers 1980, 35. Not all these scholars accept as a consequence that the dedication to an emperor is a literary device.

74 Attridge - Oden 1976, 1; Oden 1977, 127-32, following Lidzbarski; Drijvers 1980, 93.

75 Personal: §5 Belti, Tammuz, Kothar. Place: §5 Gebal (Byblos); §6 *šwšn* (Susa); §8 Orhai (Edessa), *byt nhrn* (Mesopotamia); §9 Mabog (Hierapolis).

76 Drijvers 1992, 126.

III. CONCLUSIONS

«The fact of having been written in Syriac did not necessarily prevent Christian analyses of pagan cults in Syria from representing the same concatenation of confused and incompatible data as Lucian himself reveals» (Millar 1993, 247).

Language is not the only issue where verisimilitude is concerned. Another is the wealth of local detail. The sheer implausibility of addressing the emperor with such local *minutiae* seems not to have perturbed the author of the Euhemerist section.

Yet the focus on the peoples of the Roman Near East is not without parallel in several other Syriac writings. Native Syrian cults drew down the disdain of the anti-idolaters, just as mainstream pagan cults drew forth the ire of Christian writers in Greek and Latin. This is amply clear from the *Discourse on the Fall of the Idols* by Jacob of Sarug, who mentions Edessa, Harran, Manbog, as well as other better known Syrian (Antioch, Sidon) and international religions (Ephesus, Rome); or from the *Doctrina Addai*, where, in a discourse before the population of Edessa, the apostle Addai denounces the pagan deities of Edessa, Harran, Manbog⁷⁷. The author seems to have drawn on a wide variety of sources. One wonders whether this might have included pagan material, whether in Greek or Syriac, for once upon a time there existed Manichaean and pagan literature in that language⁷⁸.

It is a seductive notion that this treatise, with its unknown, possibly exotic, origins, might be preserving all sorts of details that our wretched literary sources for Roman Syria have otherwise forgotten. It does indeed preserve much fascinating detail; but if we were to hope for a glimpse of a Syrian, insider's, perspective – of 'little' cultures untrammelled by 'great' ones – we would almost certainly be disappointed. The use of Syriac does not *ipso facto* allow or imply a privileged insight into local realities. Classical paganism exerts its influence in the story-pattern of §6, and even in the image of Orpheus-as-magus in §9. The 'great' cultures of Judaism and/or Christianity are also in evidence, obviously in the story of Serapis/Joseph (§3), *perhaps* in the use of the name Tammuz in Byblos in §5, and perhaps in §7, if it is connected with the Abgar story.

That said, several details do deserve remark. First, names. In §9, independent testimony confirms the presence of both Nebo and Hadaran in Hierapolis. Nebo is not, therefore, derived from the polemic in Isaiah 46:1; on the contrary, his equation with Orpheus implies eye-witness knowledge of the cult (above, and commentary). Hadaran is a much more obscure figure: here ps.-M. shows himself particularly well informed, although, since it is the city's Hellenistic coins rather than an imperial source that mentions him, ps.-M. could be using antiquarian sources rather than contemporary knowledge. In §8, there is a very good chance that *kwtby* is the name of a local, Arabian deity, who appears as al-Kutba³ or Kutba³ in four Nabataean inscriptions, two of them in, or in the vicinity of, Petra. In §5, the testimony of Bar Konai and Išo'dad of Merv shows that the names of Belti and Tammuz were already present in the source, which (as I argue in the commentary) seems not to have been specifically about Byblos. But the most interesting name here is that of *Kwtr*, which does not appear in Išo'dad and Bar Konai – whether it was in the source but they omitted it, or the detail is new with ps.-M. This must

⁷⁷ *Doctrina Addai*, 48–9; see Drijvers 1980, 33–5, 37–8.

⁷⁸ Drijvers 1992, 125; Brock 1994, 153.

be the divine name Kothar, smith of the gods in north Syrian mythology. It is well informed, a substitute for Adonis' father Cinyras in classical sources, and depends on the association of both with music and metallurgy. This must reflect 'local' knowledge of some sort, whether contemporary or antiquarian. It has somehow been preserved from the sound-change of *ḫ* to *ḫ* in Phoenician.

One notes that there is no *interpretatio graeca* in the Edessene stories §7 and §8, but that there is in §9 (Hierapolis). Could this be connected with the fact that «there is no element of *interpretatio graeca* in Edessan religion»⁷⁹, whereas there was in Hierapolis? If so, this might reflect the author's sensitivity to different local traditions of northern Syria and Mesopotamia.

What of the stories themselves? The very fact that we have mythographical narratives *at all* is most striking in the case of the Near Eastern deities of §§6-9, for whom the sources are almost completely uninformative about mythology⁸⁰. But for this very reason it is usually only possible to show when a story parallels or copies something else that is better-known: a Euhemerist story-pattern superimposed *ad hoc* on a cult of Elam (§6); a possible copy of Christian myth in Edessa (§7). If §5 contains any genuine Byblian myth at all (as opposed to the names), it is almost buried under commonplaces about Aphrodite. Consider how different it looks, save for some of the names, from Philo of Byblos' Byblian material⁸¹. All the comparison really reveals is the possibility that the motif of death by hunting – shared by ps.-M. with the standard Greek version of the story of Adonis – may have a correspondence in local, Byblian, mythology⁸².

§9 is the exception here. It overlaps with several passages in Lucian's *De Dea Syria*, but, far from literary copying or accidentally-similar story-motifs, what we find is detailed convergence from a wholly different and unexpected direction. Both texts describe a ritual in which sea-water is fetched and poured out in the temple in Hierapolis. Although they offer completely different aetiological narratives, they agree that a cultic standard ('Simi' in ps.-M., σημήϊον in *DDS*) is specially concerned with fetching the water from the sea, that it is poured down a declivity (a crevice in the temple in *DDS*, a well in a wood in ps.-M.), and that Nebo ('Apollo'/'Orpheus') is a key player in despatching the standard to fetch the water. According to one story, this commemorates a catastrophe in the past; the other explains it as the banishing of a harmful spirit. Both stories contain the same vague idea that something noxious is confined within the declivity, but the exact narrative mechanism is less important than the ritual sequence that underlies it. The close correspondence between authors independent of each other strongly implies local knowledge of some sort.

That knowledge is not necessarily contemporary knowledge, however. Drijvers remarks on the fact that the semeion is more closely connected with Hadad than with Atargatis and that this may reflect an earlier state of affairs. When Lucian is writing, Atargatis has surpassed her partner in importance. This is an interesting suggestion because it points to the possibility that the author is using antiquarian sources – perhaps the sort of sources that might also have supplied the name Kothar in §5.

79 Ross 2001, 96.

80 Drijvers 1982, 35.

81 *FGrH* 790 F 2 (10) 15, 19, 35.

82 Philo, *FGrH* 790 F 2 (15), reports that Ἐλιοῦν Ὑψιστος died ἐν συμβολῇ θηρίων.

Where could such a document have originated? This has started to enter the terrain of guesswork, but we are looking for someone who possessed some literary learning about several cultures, yet seems also to have been sensitive to local detail. Some have conjectured a place of origin in Hierapolis⁸³. The author is well informed about the Syrian goddess, who was at home there; the ninth *historiola*, concerning Hierapolis, is the longest, and he speaks about its priests' beliefs with confidence. Edessa is equally possible. It is true that the *historiola* about Edessa itself is brief (§8), but, as I have suggested, the story about Athi (§7) may be connected with the legend of Addai and King Akbar of Edessa; Athi's epithet 'Hadibite' might also be explained if the story originated in Edessa, whose relations with the ruling family of Adiabene were close. Edessa would be a suitable context for a special interest in Hierapolis: Atargatis the Syrian goddess was worshipped in Edessa, and Hierapolis lay on the silk-route between Antioch and Edessa⁸⁴. It is perhaps worth noting that an implicit distinction is made between 'Athi' (Atargatis, or the Syrian Goddess) and Belti (identified with Aphrodite/ Venus): «exactly the same distinction as found at Edessa and in the area of Osrhoene»⁸⁵.

The author's philosophical pretensions also square with a city that possessed a school where Greek philosophy was taught in Syriac. Among the texts which were either written or known there, and can therefore serve as testimony to its intellectual climate, Drijvers discerns a common philosophical tradition, distinctly Middle Platonist in character⁸⁶. This does not quite fit ps.-M.; if anything, he and the Letter of Mara bar Serapion are coloured by Stoicism; and yet the philosophical hue of their writings could well find its context in a city well acquainted with the mainstream Greek philosophical schools. In the extent to which philosophy has ousted specifically Christian dogma, ps.-M. could be compared with the 'Assyrian' Tatian, in whose *Oratio ad Graecos* «the name of Jesus, his life, crucifixion and resurrection do not occur ... The Christian faith is a timeless philosophy of the correct conduct by which salvation and redemption are brought about»⁸⁷.

Finally, it is a possible setting for ps.-M.'s extraordinary mix of classical pagan (§§1, 2,4,5), Phoenician (§5), Aramaic (§§7,9), Babylonian (§5), Arabian (§8), Iranian (§9), as well as Judaeo-Christian motifs and traditions. Two *historiolae* (§§3 and 7) contain Old Testament characters; a third (§8) refers to a 'Hebrew' woman in Edessa⁸⁸, though

83 E.g. Harnack 1882, 262 n. 393; Tixeront 1888, 9 n. 5; Bardenhewer 1913, 462; Baumstark 1922, 27; repeated by Haase 1925, 134; Casamassa 1944, 258; Boyce and Grenet 1991, 356 n. 224.

84 Drijvers 1970, 8-9.

85 Drijvers 1980, 185.

86 Drijvers 1985, 13-29, 1992, 129-37, and 1996, 171-3: such works include the Gospel of Thomas and Acts of Thomas, Odes of Solomon, Bardaisan, and Tatian. For the philosophical culture of Edessa, see also Drijvers 1982, 38; 1992, 126.

87 Drijvers 1996, 172.

88 Jews are often supposed to have played an important role in the beginnings of Edessene Christianity; the *Doctrina Addai* reports how Addai lodged in Edessa with Tobias son of Tobias, a Palestinian Jew, who introduced him to king Abgar (e.g. Kirsten 1959, 567-8, 569; Drijvers 1966, 215; Neusner 1965, 166-9 and 1968, 356; Teixidor 1992, 37-9). For the alleged importance of Jewish communities in the Christianisation of Mesopotamia in general, see Fiey 1970, 46-8. Drijvers has argued (a) that both Judaism and early Christianity in Edessa took on the syncretistic colours of their surroundings, so that 'Jewish Christianity' is not a helpful term (1970, especially 30-2); (b) that the *Doctrina Addai* has its own axe to grind with regard to the Jews (1985; 1992, 137; cf. 1996, 164); and (c) that Edessene Christianity was of mainly gentile origin (1992, 138-43).

probably by graphic error. Edessene culture, as Drijvers' writings have demonstrated in a lifetime's scholarship on early Christian Syria, was the creation of the manifold cultures which had left their impress upon the area. Yet there is also a contrast with the tone we should have expected a Christian writer to adopt towards such subject-matter. For «another characteristic – wrote Drijvers – of all early Syriac writings and their polemical and propagandistic trends is that they merely deal with internal Christian questions. Jews and pagans are mentioned, but as outsiders, objects of hate and conversion»⁸⁹. The contrast is clear if we turn from ps.-M. to the polemic in the *Doctrina Addai* or Jacob of Sarug. Of course, whatever the origins of ps.-M.'s material, in its final incarnation it is pressed into an anti-pagan framework. But it is turned against its notional target with remarkable half-heartedness, and this is especially true of the *historiolae* about Near Eastern religions. Should we find the contrast with other works puzzling and problematic, or seek to explain it in terms of the thinking of one individual who expressed himself, in writing, with unusual restraint?

It would have been straightforward and easy to conclude that the section on the 'gods of the nations' uses Euhemerism as we should have expected it to, that ps.-M.'s exposé of pagan cult complements his strong advocacy of monotheism; but I cannot see that this is so⁹⁰. Nor is there an obvious argumentative purpose or rationale to be discerned *within* the section on the 'gods of the nations'. What we are offered seems simply to be a series of snapshots, with no central perspective to direct them.

It is instructive to compare and contrast Philo of Byblos, author of a 'Phoenician History' in the late first or early second century AD⁹¹. The two writers demand to be set beside one another: both are interested in Phoenicia; both use Euhemerism; Philo probably had access to antiquarian material, even if not as ancient as he claimed, and it is entirely possible that ps.-M. did too; both also have a passing interest in Zoroaster, although Philo's religious teacher (F 4 (52)) is a much more conventional image of the magus than ps.-M.'s local wizard. Of course, there are obvious external differences. The one author offers a series of more or less unsystematic anecdotes about places throughout Greece, the Greek East, and beyond. The other offers methodical, systematic genealogy in a restricted locale (although it is interesting that he is prepared to look further afield, to Attica – where Athena, much as in ps.-M., enjoys τῆς Ἀττικῆς τὴν βασιλείαν – and to Egypt⁹²). More telling is that the approach to Euhemerism itself is quite different, and it is here that we should broaden the discussion to include what can be inferred of ps.-M.'s sources, for the contrast also reaches back to them. In his introduction, Philo posits two main routes by which gods have arisen: first, the deification of heavenly bodies and elements, and second, the deification of human benefactors⁹³. These principles are explicit, coherent, and put into practice in his narrative. Ps.-M. uses the first not at all, and

But there is no doubt that Jews and Christians in Edessa were closely connected, and that Judaism exercised a powerful attraction on Christians (Drijvers 1992, 141-2).

89 Drijvers 1996, 174. For Christian hostility to sorcery of various kinds – contrasting with ps.-M.'s neutral report about 'magi' in §9 – see Drijvers 1982, 40.

90 Contrast Lévy 1899, who finds in ps.-M. the sort of polemic we should expect to find.

91 *FGrH* 790, of which frr. 1-2 derive from Eusebius, *PE* 1.9-10; for bibliography, see *BNP* s.v. Herennius Philo (S. Fornaro).

92 1.10.32; 1.10.38.

93 1.9.29.

the second, as we have seen, in a very unconventional way. Philo works methodically through the stages of cosmogony, 'technogony', and theogony⁹⁴; ps.-M. ignores the first, makes negligible use of the second (§2), and for the third substitutes a series of figures who conferred benefit on an extremely local scale.

Why did Philo use Euhemerism at all? In a patriotic treatise that represented (supposedly) ancient Phoenician tradition, did it not diminish the majesty of its gods to trace them back to human beings, or to mere names given to natural phenomena? The answer seems to be that it is a Hellenistic element in his work, by which Philo fashioned himself in the tradition of writers such as Hecataeus of Abdera and Euhemerus⁹⁵. It is a literary project, and it is not supposed to detract from the majesty of the beings he writes about. On the contrary, Philo is trying to argue the patriotic case that the divinised humans of Phoenicia brought universal cultural benefits into the world. He was writing both for and against Greeks, to criticise and correct their misapprehensions of an ancient and much-misunderstood nation⁹⁶. The question readily follows whether ps.-M – whose attempts to pour scorn on polytheism are so half-hearted – has used a source which originally had a similar purpose. Could (say) §§6-8 have come from a source which tried to explain deities of the Roman Near East in Euhemerist terms, and which ps.-M., or a redactor, has failed to adjust to the argumentative needs of his treatise? This might help to explain the gap between the neutrally-informative tone that ps.-M. unexpectedly adopts, and the polemic that bewilders by its absence. It might also be a stronger argument for a Greek source than those that have been advanced hitherto. But the parallel raises more problems than it solves. To what person, or group, would it have occurred to band together Elamites, Syrians, and Mesopotamians in order to represent themselves to the Greeks? Whose ethnic consciousness might this be supposed to reflect? And what would their motive have been for doing so? Ps.-M. does not allow a glimpse of anything other than localism; there is no attempt to argue that these gods and heroes conferred anything other than parochial benefits. There is no sign of any universal dimension, and this is especially true of the Near Eastern deities. The contrast with the way, say, the Hellenistic Jews turned their national heroes into universal culture-bringers is evident⁹⁷.

In the end, I find the argumentative purpose of the chapter on the 'gods of the nations' enigmatic. It remains for Semiticists, especially for Syriac experts, to seek out further parallels, contexts, and meanings for the snapshots of local traditions we find in ps.-M., where Hellenic, Judaeo-Christian, and 'local', are all so inextricably mixed up.

⁹⁴ The divisions, and the term 'technogony', are those of Barr 1974.

⁹⁵ On the Euhemerism of Philo, see Barr 1974, 33-6; Oden 1978, 118-9; Edwards 1991, 214-5. His arguments about the origins of gods in 1.9.29 can both be paralleled exactly in Diod. Sic. 1.11-2 (elements and heavenly bodies), 1.13 (kings and benefactors). The parallel remains whether Diodorus is taken to represent the original work of Hecataeus (*FGI* 264 Anhang, F 25), or later Hellenistic commonplaces, perhaps by Diodorus himself. The point is that Philo is drawing on what were by now familiar themes and stances.

⁹⁶ 1.9.27: 1.10.8.

⁹⁷ Cf. Eupolemus and Artapanus, cited in the commentary on §3.

PART TWO: COMMENTARIES ON THE *HISTORIO LAE*

The Apology of Ps.-Meliton

Titulus

«An Oration of Meliton the Philosopher; who was in the presence of Antoninus Caesar, and bade the same Caesar know God, and shewed him the way of Truth; and he began speaking after this manner. »

[5] But I, according as I know, will write and shew how and for what causes images were made for kings and tyrants, and they became as gods.

§1 The people of Argos made images for Hercules, because he was one of their own citizens and was brave, and slew by his valour noisome beasts, and more especially because they were afraid of him, for he was violent, and carried away the wives of many, for his lust was great, like that of Zuradi the Persian, his friend.

§2 Again, the people of Acte worshipped Dionysus, a king, because he originally introduced the vine into their country.

§3 The Egyptians worshipped Joseph, a Hebrew, who was called Serapis, because he supplied them with sustenance in the years of famine.

§4 The Athenians worshipped Athene, the daughter of Zeus, king of the island of Crete, because she built the citadel Athens, and made Erichthippus her son the king there, whom she had by adultery with Hephaestus, a smith, the son of a wife of her father; and she always was making companionship with Hercules, because he was her brother on her father's side. For Zeus the king fell in love with Alceme, the wife of Electryon, who was from Argos, and committed adultery with her, and she gave birth to Hercules.

§5 The people of Phoenicia worshipped Belti, queen of Cyprus, because she fell in love with Tammuz, son of Cuthar, king of the Phoenicians, and left her own kingdom, and came and dwelt in Gebal, a fortress of the Phoenicians, and at the same time she made all the Cyprians subject to the king Cuthar: for before Tammuz she had been in love with Ares, and committed adultery with him, and Hephaestus her husband caught her, and was jealous over her, and came and slew Tammuz in Mount Lebanon, while he was hunting wild boars; and from that time Belti remained in Gebal, and she died in the city Aphaca, where Tammuz was buried.

§6 The Elamites worshipped Nanai, daughter of the king of Elam. When the enemy had taken her captive, her father made for her an image and a temple in Shushan, a palace which is in Elam.

§7 The Syrians worshipped Athi, a Hadibite, who sent the daughter of Belat, who was skilled in medicine, and she cured Simi, daughter of Hadad, king of Syria; and after a

time, when the leprosy attacked Hadad himself, Athi entreated Elishah, the Hebrew, and he came and cured him of his leprosy.

§8 The people of Mesopotamia also worshipped Cuthbi, a Hebrew woman, because she delivered Bakru, the patrician of Edessa, from his enemies.

§9 But touching Nebo, which is in Mabug, why should I write to you; for, lo! all the priests which are in Mabug know that it is the image of Orpheus, a Thracian Magus. And Hadran is the image of Zaradusht [Zoroaster], a Persian Magus, because both of these Magi practised Magism to a well which is in a wood in Mabug, in which was an unclean spirit, and it committed violence and attacked the passage of every one who was passing by in all that place in which now the fortress of Mabug is located; and these same Magi charged Simi, the daughter of Hadad, that she should draw water from the sea, and cast it into the well, in order that the spirit should not come up and commit injury, according to that which was a mystery in their Magism.

(Transl. W. Cureton)

I. HERACLES IN ARGOS

Heracles has been converted into a local deity of Argos. He was of course associated with Argos in classical mythography, and sometimes it (rather than Thebes) was given as his birthplace; yet it contrasts with other Euhemerist treatments which regard him as a *universal* hero and benefactor (a point made specifically by *TGrF Adesp.* F. 392)⁹⁸.

Few Euhemerist sources give as much detail as ps.-M. here; the biography has been cobbled together out of mythographical traditions favourable and unfavourable to Heracles⁹⁹. Sometimes other Christian sources mention Heracles' lust, though they are at least as interested in pederasty (Hylas) as in his lust for women¹⁰⁰. One wonders whether the reference to a friend and companion in lust means Theseus, who abducted Helen, raped Antiope (when he and Heracles made a joint expedition against the Amazons), tried to abduct Persephone from Hades but was rescued by Heracles, and whose companionship with Heracles is known to Christian authors¹⁰¹. Whoever he is, he is identified with the Persian 'Zurdi', a form of the name Zoroaster¹⁰². The identification

⁹⁸ Argive Heracles: Plut. *Mor.* 857F; Varro, *Ling. Lat.* 5.45; Mela, *Chron.* 1.103; born in Argos: Diod. Sic. 4.9-4.10.1; king of Argos: Clem. *Strom.* 1.25.105.3 (ps.-Apollodorus, *FGrH* 244 F 87). Universal figure: see e.g. Cic. *Tusc.* 1.28 *apud Graecos indeque perlapsus ad nos et usque ad Oceanum* ...; ps.-Plut. *Mor.* 880C.

⁹⁹ Similarly Aristides, §10: «Herakles, too, they introduce, and they say of him that he is a god, a hater of things hateful, a tyrant and a warrior, and a slayer of the wicked; and of him they say that at the last he went mad and slew his children and cast himself into the fire and died».

¹⁰⁰ Heterosexual: Epiphanius, *Anc.* 106.7 (the defloration of the fifty daughters of Thestius; despite the ultimate use of a common source, this myth does not feature in either the Greek or the Syriac version of Aristides). Homosexual: Firm. Matern. *Err.* 12.2; ps.-Clem. *Hom.* 5.15.3. Bisexual: Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.33.4-5; Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 4.26; Tert. *Ad Nat.* 2.14.7.

¹⁰¹ Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.21.104.3 Θησεύς δὲ [ὁ] Ἡρακλέους ζηλωτής.

¹⁰² The Syriac *zwrđy* seems to come closest to the later Greek form Ζαράδης, itself Aramaic in origin, but combined with the *ō* of Ζωροάστρης. It differs from the usual Syriac form Zaradust (used by ps.-M. himself in §9). For the forms of the name, see Bidez - Cumont 1938, i. 36-7; Jacoby, commentary on *FGrH* 273 F 94 (III. A. 2, pp. 296-8); de Jong 1997, 317-9.

is strange and unexpected, though the Syriac tradition about Zoroaster sometimes refers to his lustfulness¹⁰³. But why should a Persian equivalent have been proposed at all? This is extremely hypothetical: perhaps the well-known identification of Heracles with the Persian Verethragna¹⁰⁴ prompted the feeling that Heracles' companion should have a Persian equivalent as well; but the result is that Heracles is mentioned without his Persian *alter ego* and Zurdi without his Greek one.

2. DIONYSUS IN ATTICA

Like Heracles, Dionysus is often mentioned by Christian polemicists pursuing a Euhemerist line, but again ps.-M. has converted him into a local deity instead of universal benefactor. His choice of Attica¹⁰⁵ rests, of course, on the story of Dionysus' introduction of the vine to Icarius and Erigone, but the only other Christian euhemerist source I know of to use this tradition is Aug. *Civ. Dei* 18.12. 'qt', if it is not corrupt, seems to be representing Ἄκτῆ, which is a poetic and/or archaic form, used in many narratives of Attica's earliest antiquities¹⁰⁶. Perhaps, then, ps.-M.'s ultimate source (whether poetry or prose) used it in a story of an antiquarian character, and ps.-M. has derived it thence, either directly, or across summarisers who left the archaism intact.

3. JOSEPH AND SERAPIS

This is the earliest testimonium to the equation of Sarapis and Joseph¹⁰⁷, but it certainly does not originate here. It was presumably originally proposed by a Greek-speaking Hellenistic Jewish writer – Jewish, because a pagan Greek would not have heard of the son of Sarah¹⁰⁸. It recalls the style and manner of Hellenistic writers such as Artapanus, who equates Moses with Musaios, or Eupolemus, who equates Enoch with Atlas¹⁰⁹. Did it originate in a Hellenistic Jewish account of the development of human culture in which Joseph was a bringer of agriculture and dispenser of order (as indeed he is in Artapanus, *FGrH* 726 F 2 [2])? Some of the other writers who propose this equation are much more hostile to the Sarapis cult (especially Firmicus and Paulinus of Nola). It could be that the polemics gathered momentum as time went on (so Mussies), but it could also be that this is yet another specimen of ps.-M.'s preference for neutral, non-confrontational reportage.

¹⁰³ Testimonia S 3, 6 Bidez - Cumont. If this legend arose from his being credited with the origins of Persian incest (as in S 3 Bidez - Cumont), it is notable that in ps.-M. the motif has a secondary application.

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. Boyce - Grenet 1991, 62-5.

¹⁰⁵ Thebes was an obvious alternative (e.g. Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.26.2).

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Hollis on Callimachus, *Hecale* fr. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Other sources: Tertullian, *Ad Nat.* 2.8.9-18; Firm. Matern. *Err.* 13.1-2; Rufinus, *Hist. Eccl.* 11 (2). 23 (for text, see *GCS* n.s., Band 6.2 = Eusebius, II.2); Paul. Nol. *C.* 19.100-10; *Suda* s.v. Σάρραπης. For an evaluation of these sources, see Mussies 1979. Bar Konai, *Liber Scholiorum*, *Mimra* XI:4 (ii. 214 Hespel - Draguet) is taken from ps.-M.

¹⁰⁸ Noted by Mussies 1979, 200. Lévy 1899, 372, and 1909, 297 n. 1 derived it from a Hebrew etymology (cf. Babylonian Talmud, Abodah Zarah, 43; Tosefta' Abda Zara, V. 1), but this less obviously suggests Joseph's character.

¹⁰⁹ *FGrH* 726 F 3 (3-4); *FGrH* 724 F 1 (9).

4. ATHENA AND HERACLES

Most of the details in this rambling notice are commonplace mythography: Athena daughter of Zeus; Zeus associated with Crete; Athena patroness of Athens; the (aborted) sexual connection with Hephaestus resulting in the birth of Erichthonius; Hephaestus son of Hera; Athena's association with Heracles; Heracles son of Zeus by Alcmena of Argos. But making Alcmena wife of Electryon is quite a revealing error. As any averagely-educated pagan ought to have known, she was the wife of Amphitryon and daughter of Electryon (cf. e.g. the Shield of Heracles; ps.-Apollodorus). This smacks of the misreading or careless copying of a handbook. Another handbook-like feature is the sheer wealth of detail. While Zeus' adulteries¹¹⁰ and Athena's 'affair' with Hephaestus¹¹¹ are among the discreditable tales from pagan mythology that Christian authors relish, they do not work through the story with as much circumstantiality as ps.-M. – whose tone is also a good deal less vicious.

Athena's benefaction is normally her gift of the olive¹¹², not founding the citadel of Athens. Apparently ps.-M. preferred something place-specific. Her family motivation for helping Heracles also seems to be his embellishment.

5. BELTI AND TAMMUZ

The Euhemeristic treatment of Aphrodite goes back at least to Euhemerus (T. 75B Win.) and, being *louche* and incriminating, was a favourite with Christian apologists. They often refer to the stories of (a) Aphrodite and Cinyras; (b) Aphrodite and Adonis; (c) Aphrodite, Hephaestus, and Ares (from *Od.* 8). Firmicus Maternus, *De Err.* 9-10, mentions all three. Of all the Graeco-Latin sources for the Adonis story, he is the only one who, like ps.-M., involves Hephaestus in Adonis' tragedy and who alludes in some measure to the narrative content of *Od.* 8¹¹³. It is not unreasonable to infer that a collection of Christian *testimonia* on the goddess Aphrodite in which these two stories were connected ultimately underlies both Firmicus Maternus and ps.-M.

We get further by studying a group of Syriac biblical commentators whose interest is in the exegesis of biblical passages mentioning the Semitic goddess Astarte. Their approach to commentary is encyclopaedic and mythographical¹¹⁴, and in the course of this they draw on myths of the classical Aphrodite. The main ones are Theodore Bar Konai and Iso'dad of Merv, and their stories have an obvious relationship to ps.-M.'s¹¹⁵.

i. Bar Konai, *Liber Scholiorum*, *Mimrā* IV:38 (ad Ezekiel 8:14) [ed. A. Scher, i. 312.1 – 313.20 / transl. Hespel - Draguet, i. 263-4]. c. AD 800.

¹¹⁰ The Euhemerised Zeus goes back, of course, to Euhemerus himself. For Christian denunciations of him, see sources in *RE Suppl.* XV, 1317-9 (H. Schwabl); add Bar Konai, *Liber Scholiorum*, *Mimrā* XI:4 (ii. 214 Hespel - Draguet). A few refer to him more or less neutrally as king of Crete: Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 23.13; Athanasius, *Contra gentes* 9; Firm. Matern. *Err.* 7.6.

¹¹¹ Tatian, *Or. ad Graec.* 8.3; Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.17.11, cf. Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 18.12.

¹¹² Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 1.38; Aug. *Civ. Dei* 18.12; Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.18.1; Tert. *Apol.* 11.6.

¹¹³ 9. 2 *inter duos maritos adulter positus ab uno capitur, alterum vincit*. For other sources for the death of Adonis, see Lightfoot 2003, 320.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Leonhard 2001, as reviewed by D.J. Lane, *JSS* 50, 2005, 222.

¹¹⁵ It is not necessarily the case that Iso'dad himself was using Bar Konai: they may rather share a common source, as they do elsewhere (see Leonhard 2001, 54, 72-3, 82, 221).

«Ce Tammouz, dit-on, était un pasteur et il aima une femme qui était très célèbre par sa beauté. Elle était de l'île de Chypre; son nom était Balti, le nom de son père Héraclès, le nom de sa mère Ariane, et son mari (était) Héphaïstos. Or celle-ci s'enfuit avec Tammouz, son amant, dans la montagne du Liban; c'est en fait celle qui est aussi appelée Astarté [*Esterā*], nom que lui donna son père à cause de sa [corruption]. Son père se lamenta sur elle sept jours au mois de [Ṭabit], qui es *kanoun* second (janvier); ils cuisirent du pain sur le sol et le mangèrent, lequel est jusqu'à maintenant appelé chez les païens gâteau de Bet Ṭabit. Or, Héphaïstos la suivit dans la montagne du Liban, et Tammouz le rencontra et le tua, mais un sanglier déchira Tammouz lui-même, et il mourut. Cette amante, par amour pour Tammouz, mourut de tristesse sur son cadavre. Son père, apprenant sa mort, se lamenta au mois de *tammouz* (juillet); ses parents aussi pleurèrent Tammouz; ce sont les pleurs dont pleurent les impies pour Tammouz, et le peuple des Hébreux les imitèrent.

Ajoutons aussi ceci. Héraclès, père de l'adultère, lui fit une statue d'or, et comme il était le chef de l'endroit, il obligea tout le monde à adorer la statue. Et pour que le nom de sa fille se répandît davantage en tout lieu, il acheta Ḥamour, roi de 'Arab, et il fabriqua et lui envoya la statue d'Astarté pour que lui aussi l'adorât. Ḥamour la reçut et la donna à un homme qui s'appelait Manou'a pour y veiller. Peu après, elle lui fut volée, et par crainte, il dit au maître de la statue qu'elle s'était offusquée et était montée résider dans cette étoile. A l'aube il se leva et dressa une tente, et il établit un pontifie à son nom et il fit un grand festin; c'est la fête que font les 'Arabayé d'année en année. Telle fut son œuvre. Comme il avait craint que l'on sût que la statue n'était pas montée dans l'étoile, il s'enfuit et vint au Tigre; il pris du bois de chêne, il fit une statue et, du nom du bois, il la nomma [Bel]; et il fit une autre statue et il l'appela Astarté de Bar Ḥalyā, et il en trompa beaucoup par son impiété. Mais il fut frappé en tous ses membres, il tomba en pourriture et il mourut».

ii. Isoʿdad of Merv, commentary on Judges 2:13 [ed. van den Eynde 1962, 18; transl. id. 1963, 23-4]. 9th century.

«Astarté [*ʿstrʾ*?], au singulier ou au pluriel, est une et même (personne). Cette Astarté était une femme de bel aspect, (originaire) de l'île de Chypre; elle s'appelait Belti [*blty*]. Son père était Héraclès, le prince de Chypre, sa mère Arayanos, et son mari Héphaïstos. Mais elle aimait Tamouz [*tmwz*?], un berger, et comme elle s'était corrompue avec Tamouz, elle s'enfuit et gagna avec lui le mont Liban. Mais son mari la suivit; Tamouz alla au-devant de lui et le tua. A son tour, Tamouz fut déchiré par un sanglier et mourut. Quant à la femme adultère, à cause de son amour pour Tamouz, elle mourut de chagrin sur son cadavre. Son père, ayant appris sa mort, outre (qu'il lui dédia) une grande lamentation, lui fit encore une statue d'or massif; et pour que la renommée de sa fille se répandît davantage, il gagna Ḥamor, roi de 'Araba, fonda une statuette et la lui envoya, pour que lui aussi l'adorât. Ḥamor, l'ayant reçue, la donna à un serviteur, nommé Manouka, pour la garder, mais peu après elle lui fut volée. Par crainte il dit à son maître que la statue s'était offensée, était montée et s'était fixée dans cette étoile-là, – il parlait de l'étoile qui se lève en orient pendant la saison d'automne. (Ḥamor) se leva de grand matin, dressa une tente et institua des prêtres en l'honneur de (la déesse). Quant au serviteur, il s'enfuit, se rendit au born du Tigre, fabriqua une statue de (la déesse) et égara par elle

beaucoup de gens. Plus tard, à cause de son activité impie, il fut frappé dans tous ses membres, tomba en pourriture et mourut.

La (déesse) porte de nombreux noms. Les Tāiens la nomment ‘Ouzi, les Grecs Aphrodite, les Qadšites Tšamqyat, les Chaldéens Belti, les Araméens Estra, les Radnéens la Reine du ciel, les Arabes Nani. On la met toujours auprès de Baal comme épouse. D’autres (la nomment) Bidoukt; c’est (l’étoile) qui se lève au point du jour à partir du quinze Tamouz. Quant à Aphrodite, elle se lève pendant six mois à l’occident, le soir, et pendant six mois à l’orient, le matin.»

The similarities with ps.-M. are clear. They all call the goddess Balti or Belti, queen of Cyprus. They all bring the goddess from Cyprus to Lebanon; name her lover as Tammuz (rather than Adonis); bring her husband Hephaestus to Lebanon in pursuit of her; and narrate the deaths of both Tammuz (somehow involving a boar¹¹⁶) and the goddess herself. The main difference between their versions and ps.-M.’s is that Bar Konai and Iso‘dad present their story as the aetiology of the cult of Astarte/the Venus star over the whole of the Near East (the places mentioned in their story are Cyprus, Lebanon, ‘Araba’, and the Tigris), while ps.-M.’s story is localised in Phoenicia, and specifically in Byblos and Aphaea, which Bar Konai and Iso‘dad do not mention.

Did Bar Konai and Iso‘dad use ps.-M. (which would be chronologically quite possible), or have they a common source, and if so which is closer to it? Both have reasons for their respective presentations: ps.-M. treats the Near East, not as a whole, but in terms of its constituent parts (Phoenicia, Elam, ‘Syria’, Mesopotamia, and Hierapolis), and so does not treat Belti as a pan-Levantine goddess; while Bar Konai and Iso‘dad are both commenting on biblical verses that mention Astarte, of biblical notoriety, who was not located in a specific cult-centre, and whose cognates were disseminated all over the Near East. Both preserve details of the traditional myth over against the other source: Bar Konai and Iso‘dad know that Tammuz was a shepherd, and they have Tammuz killed by a boar (ps.-M. has him killed by Hephaestus during a boar-hunt), while ps.-M. specifically mentions Ares, while Bar Konai and Iso‘dad do not. However, it seems to me likelier that Bar Konai and Iso‘dad have the original version, and derived their story from a collection of Christian testimonia against Astarte, where it was not located in one specific place (cf. Firm. Matern. *Err. 9.1 in plurimis Orientis civitatibus ... Adonis quasi maritus plangitur Veneris*). Ps.-M. would be following his normal procedure in tying it down to a specific locality.

If that is right, it is quite an important conclusion as far as ps.-M. is concerned, because it allows us to see how he has fashioned his material to suit his own purposes.

First, he has dropped the material irrelevant to a Byblian Astarte. This includes the story of how she came to be honoured as a goddess when her father had a statue made for her, and how the statue’s theft was covered up by the story that she had been translated to the heavens. This is omitted despite the fact that it would have tied in nicely with the *incipit* of the Euhemerist section («I, according as I know, will write and shew how and for what causes images were made for kings and tyrants, and they became as gods»).

¹¹⁶ In ps.-M., Hephaestus kills Tammuz during a boar-hunt, while in Bar Konai and Iso‘dad, Tammuz kills Hephaestus before being killed by the boar. Both versions are non-standard. Firmicus mentions Hephaestus, but does not bring him to Lebanon, and Adonis is killed by Mars in the form of a boar, the usual form of the story.

Second, although he has edited the story, he has left in the goddess' Cypriote origins¹¹⁷, which the Byblian narrative does not strictly need, and it results in the unusual connection of the goddess of Cyprus with the goddess of Byblos (classical sources for the stories of Cinyras and Adonis otherwise locate the story in the one place or the other but not both). Unique to him is the detail that Belti brought Cyprus under the control of Kothar, king of the Phoenicians.

Third, he has dropped the name Astarte, which was present in the source, and concentrated on 'Belti'. All three writers connect this name with Cyprus, and I am grateful to W. Burkert for explaining it. It is a rendering of Aphrodite's Cyprian title ἄνασσα back into Semitic (from whence it presumably arose)¹¹⁸, using a Babylonian title which designates Venus as the Evening Star. The stories of Bar Konai and Iso'dad turn on her transformation, or alleged transformation, into a star, and at the end of his narrative, Iso'dad lists various names for Venus/the Evening star among peoples of the East, including Belti as the Chaldaean form¹¹⁹. Why did ps.-M. retain the name and even prefer it to Astarte? Perhaps because of its phonetic similarity to the Baalat Gebal¹²⁰. But, if so, this was opportunistic. It was not a link that the source intended.

How much of this story, then, does reflect local knowledge of Byblos and its environs? The Adonis story was indeed set there since the Hellenistic period¹²¹, but I fear we cannot safely use ps.-M. as evidence that the Byblians themselves used Tammuz and Belti as divine names (with the provision that there may be an *accidental* similarity with the name of the Baalat Gebal)¹²².

One very interesting detail is present in ps.-M.'s version and neither of the others: he makes Tammuz son of 'Kot(h)ar' (*kwtr*), 'king of the Phoenicians'. When Belti makes

¹¹⁷ Albeit without the genealogy which Bar Konai and Iso'dad both give. Her mother is Ariane, which could refer to the extremely obscure cult of Ariadne Aphrodite on Cyprus (Paion of Amathous, *FGrH* 757 F 2 from Plut. *Thes.* 20; *RE* II.1 (1875) s.v. *Ariadne*, 807.62–808.54; Nilsson 1906, 369; Marini 1932, 72-3), though would disregard the cult myth reported by Paion according to which Ariadne died in childbirth. Her father is Heracles. For the little known about Heracles in Cyprus, see *RE* Suppl. III (1918), 981 (Gruppe); alternatively, Baudissin connects him with Heracles–Melqart in Tyre (pp. 74-5, n.6). Astarte's parents would thus combine the Cypriote and Phoenician aspects of the legend. But there is still no sign of a specifically Byblian connection.

¹¹⁸ For Aphrodite as ἄνασσα of Cyprus, see Masson 1983, nos. 4, 6.1, 7.4, 7.4, 10, 16.2, 17.4, 90.2, 91.3 (a corpus of syllabic inscriptions from fourth-century Paphos, whose kings are called "priest of the (F)ἄνασσα"): Lycophron, *Al.* 588–9 θεᾶς ἢ Γόλγωων ἀνάσσης; Moschus, *Eur.* 69-71; Musaeus, *Hero and Leander*, 33. Connected with Adonis: HOrph. 55.24; John of Gaza, *Anacr.* 6.6 (cf. 6.9 Παφίη). See Poldrugo 1999, esp. 32-5, 38, 45-51. ἄνασσα is a title of goddesses (HHom. 5.29, 32.17), with the exception of *Od.* 6.149 (Hainsworth ad loc.) and Moschus, *Eur.* 69-71, where it is used honorifically of humans with an implied comparison to deities.

¹¹⁹ For the use of similar forms in mediaeval Harran and in Aquincum, see Lightfoot 2003, pp. 81 n. 225, 503.

¹²⁰ Lightfoot 2003, 319; cf. especially Βααλιτίς in Philo of Byblos, *FGrH* 790 F 2 (10) 35. Βααλιτίς seems to imply *b'lyt*, so is not quite identical to ps.-M.'s form.

¹²¹ Lightfoot 2003, 307 and n. 12.

¹²² Seyrig 1950, 235-6, supposes that the names Belti and Tammuz, in use in the interior of Syria, were familiar to the Syriac writers, and were substituted for the Phoenician names Baalat and Adonis. For Tammuz on Palmyrene tesserae, in two cases together with Belti, see *RTP* 218-9 (*BLTY/TMWZ?*): 342 (*TMWZ?*), accompanied by the image of a mourning female figure).

the people of Cyprus subject to him, it reads rather like a statement of the precedence of the Phoenician cult over the Cyprian one¹²³. Kothar's name is, first and foremost, a loud reminiscence of the North Syrian divine name Kothar, present already in Ugaritic sources which depict him as the divine smith¹²⁴. It thus appears that a Semitic theonym has survived and been substituted for the name of Adonis' father, Cinyras, in the Greek story. Cinyras' name itself is Semitic in origin: it reflects *kinnōr*, 'lyre', although Greek sources are still dimly aware that he has connections with metal-working as well as music¹²⁵. Conversely, with the figure of the divine smith, it is not a difficult transition from metal-working to music (among the sons of Cain in Gen. 4:21-2, one is the ancestor of all who play on the harp and flute, while another forges all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron). The author is not offering an *interpretatio graeca* – otherwise Hephaestus might well have been substituted for Kinyras, *qua* smith¹²⁶. Rather, if the connection with Kothar is right, he is offering an intelligent and learned Semitic equivalent evidently derived from a north Syrian source.

But the name also recalls Aphrodite's title Κυθήρεια. The true etymology of this name has long been a problem; the one proposed by Hesiod, 'goddess of Κύθηρα', does not work because the *e*-vowels are different quantities, and the name may rather mean 'goddess of desire'¹²⁷. Another approach has been to connect it to Kothar himself, though that, too, has been doubted on phonological grounds¹²⁸. My concern here is not with its origin, but with its presence in ps.-M., whose statement that Belti «made all the Cyprians subject to the king Kothar» reads, in this light, as a slight displacement of the idea that the Cyprians all became subject to a mighty figure called Kythereia, i.e. Aphrodite herself¹²⁹.

Two points need to be made.

First, the name in ps.-M. appears as *kwtr* rather than **kwsr* or **kwsr*, the latter reflecting the development in Phoenician (and Hebrew) from inherited *ṭ* to Canaanite *ṣ*. So for example the Phoenician writers Philo of Byblos and Mochus both use the form Χουσωρ, as we should expect¹³⁰. If ps.-M. is writing about Byblos from Byblian sources, why should he use an un-Phoenician form of the name? The spelling is, on the other hand, a more appropriate one if there is an allusion to Aphrodite's Greek title Κυθήρεια.

¹²³ Hdt. 1.105.3 reports that it was Phoenicians who founded Aphrodite's temple in Cyprus.

¹²⁴ Brown 1965; Albright 1940, 296-7; 1968, 118-20; Xella 1976; Ribichini 1981, 51-2; Lipinski 1995, 108-12. The same name also appears in Greek sources (n. 130) as Χουσωρ: their relevance to ps.-M. was already seen by Hoffmann 1896, 256-7. It is still accepted by Lipinski 1995, 74.

¹²⁵ Lyre: see Lightfoot 2003, 331, and references; for his musical associations see Pindar, *P.* 2.15-7; Eustathius on *Il.* 11.20. Metal-working: most famously in *Il.* 11.24-5, cf. also Pliny, *NH* 7.195.

¹²⁶ As Philo identifies Chousor with Hephaestus, *FGrH* 790 F 2 (11).

¹²⁷ See Hesiod's etymology at *Th.* 198 and West ad loc.; Hainsworth on Homer, *Od.* 8.288; Boedeker 1974, 19-20; Morgan 1978.

¹²⁸ Prehn, *RE* XII.1 (1924), s.v. *Kythereia*, 217-8; Brown 1965, 216-8; Kádár 1966, 102; Albright 1968, 118 n. 65 («we should have to go back to the third millennium to make such a derivation possible»); Morgan 1978, 118.

¹²⁹ All the more so, in that Kythereia usually occurs as a title, with optional epithets of its own, but not combined with the name of Aphrodite: see Bruchmann 1893, 59-60.

¹³⁰ Mochus, *FGrH* 784 F 4, Philo of Byblos, *FGrH* 790 F 2 (11); for the sound-change see Friedrich and Röllig 1999, 10 (§8.1).

But if this is so – the second point – it might have implications for whether or not the name was present in the original source. Even though the name is not in Bar Konai and Išoʿdad, it is more in the style of their narratives to amass different titles and identifications for Aphrodite than it is for ps.-M., who is mainly interested in the Byblian/Libanese form of the goddess. It is true that he leaves in the reference to Cyprus; but should we expect him to introduce one to Kythera on his own account?

All this makes it difficult to decide whether the name was introduced by ps.-M., or was in the common source of all three authors, but subsequently omitted by Bar Konai and Išoʿdad. Ps.-M. presumably would have wanted to import a local, Byblian (or at least Phoenician) detail¹³¹, though the rationale for a ‘surplus’ allusion to Aphrodite as Kythereia would be less clear. The putative author of the original version is perhaps likelier to have intended both allusions, but why would Bar Konai and Išoʿdad have dropped something that was precisely germane to the subject they were writing about? At least for the time being, I leave this as a *non liquet*. But the most important point is the presence of Kothar’s name *per se*. He had no connection in traditional mythology with Tammuz, let alone Adonis; the substitution of his name for Cinyras, whoever was responsible for it, must depend on a well-informedness about the nature of the god, even though it remains below the surface in the story. Whether it was ps.-M. or a predecessor, the writer who introduced the name was well informed about Phoenician/North Syrian divine mythology. Could the un-Phoenician spelling derive from an Aramaic source, unaffected by the sound-change of *l* to *š*¹³²?

Finally, the punch-line of ps.-M.’s local version is that the goddess died in Aphaca, which was also the location of Tammuz’ grave. Both the other authors say that Astarte died of sorrow over Tammuz’ body, but ps.-M. implies that her death did not immediately follow her lover’s. There is a tradition about Aphrodite’s grave on Cyprus¹³³; ps.-M. may be adapting it, but equally possible is that he has in mind some local tradition of Aphaca, of which we are otherwise ignorant.

6. NANAI AND ELAM

This chapter is about the Elamite and Babylonian goddess Nanai, originally goddess of Uruk¹³⁴. Ps.-M. seems to have used the standard Aramaic form of her name (*my*), which has been subjected to a simple misreading as *nh*¹³⁵. (The translator ‘B.H.C.’,

¹³¹ Neither Mochus nor Philo indicates a special connection between Χουσόρ and Byblos (although Byblos is sporadically important throughout Philo, and Lipinski 1995 treats him among the «dieux de Byblos»). But Cinyras himself is sometimes connected with the Byblos area: Lucian, *DDS* §9 and Lightfoot 2003, 331, adding Hyginus, *Fab.* 242.

¹³² Brown 1965, 199, 201 (*IJLS* iv. 1728 Χαυθαρ, from Mešerfé, in the territory of Apamea on the Orontes, 3rd c. AD).

¹³³ Winiarczyk 2002, 197 (for the Martyrium Ignatii, see e.g. J.B. Lightfoot 1889, 504 (Roman Acts, III)); Bar Konai, *Liber Scholiorum*, Mimrā V:19 (i. 298 Hespel - Dragnet).

¹³⁴ For bibliography see *LIMC* Suppl., p. 865, s.v. *Nanai* (M. Gawlikowski); de Jong 1997, 274; *DDD*², 612-4 (M. Stol).

¹³⁵ Cureton and Renan (Cureton 1855, 90) suggested a mistake for *my* or *?my* (Anais or Anaitis), but *my* is the standard Syriac form of the name (Payne Smith, ii. 2387); it is the form used by Bar Konai, *Liber Scholiorum*, Mimrā XI:4 (ii. 214 Hespel - Dragnet); and the graphic error in this case would be just as easy.

whom Cureton takes to task throughout his commentary, misread it differently, as 'Hai': this is also how the name is rendered in P. Martin's edition of Jacob of Sarug's *Homily on the Fall of the Idols*, 74, but the correct name, and goddess, were recognised by Landersdorfer 1913, 411 (163), and 1914, 70.)

Ps.-M. is alluding to the goddess' temple and cult at Susa¹³⁶. The best known temple of Nanaia is the one in the famous story in 2 Maccabees 1, which Maccabees sets in ἡ Περόςῖς and Polybius and Josephus in Elymais: it tells how Antiochus IV and his Friends were cut to pieces by the priests in this temple when the king had gone there on the pretext of 'marrying' the goddess¹³⁷. But although the two temples have often been thought to be one and the same, more recent opinion is against the identification¹³⁸. The two areas are distinct: the Greek term Elymais denotes the mountainous area to the north east of the lowlands in which Susa is situated¹³⁹. If that distinction is correct, it follows that ps.-M – unlike Bar Konai, for whom see below – has *not* derived his knowledge of the cult from the Bible, which does not mention the Susa temple. He does, however, refer to Susa itself in biblical terms, for when he sets the city in Elam (ʿylm), he means Elam in the biblical or pre-Hellenistic sense, an area in whose heartlands Susa lay. Darius I chose it as his capital and built a palace there. Biblical writers refer to it as 'the fortress' or 'the fortress-city' (רָבֵּיבָרָה), the same word as the one used in ps.-M.'s Syriac (*byrt* = 'palace', 'castle', 'court')¹⁴⁰.

Maccabees calls the Elymaean goddess Ναναῖα ¹⁴¹, while classical sources that refer to the same story (n.137) prefer the *interpretatio graeca* Artemis (Appian alone has 'Elymaian Aphrodite'¹⁴²). Le Rider argues that in Susa itself it was during the Parthian

¹³⁶ For this temple, see Pliny, *NH* 6.135 *Dianae templum augustissimum illis gentibus*; *SEG* vii. 22.11. Ps.-M. uses the normal Aramaic form of the city's name, šwšn (Payne Smith, ii. 4345; šwš is an alternative: ii. 4108); Hebrew שׁוֹשַׁן . Syriac writers knew it from Daniel 8: 2, Nehemiah 1: 1, and the book of Esther.

¹³⁷ 2 Macc. 1: 13–5; Polybius, 31.9; Jos. *AJ* 12.9.1; Porphyry, *FGH* 260 F 53, 56; Appian, *Syr.* 66. (The story may or may not be historical: see *pro* Holleaux 1916, 77–102; *contra*, Tarn 1951, 463–6. In the present context this is not important.) This may also be the temple referred to by Aelian, *NA* 12.23 as that of Anaitis. Strab. 16.1.18 refers to temples of Athena and Artemis in the same region.

¹³⁸ Identification: Tarn 1951, 464, approved by Walbank, on Polybius 31.9.1; Wikander 1946, 71, 74 (supposing that it was a temple of Anāhitā in Susa that Antiochus tried to plunder); see *contra* Le Rider 1965, 295; Boyce - Grenet 1991, 45 n. 63; de Jong 1997, 274. The site of neither temple has been found; but for that of the temple in Elymais, see Ghirshman 1976, 236–8 n. 1, suggesting Shami (25 km from Izeh-Malamir).

¹³⁹ e.g. Boyce - Grenet 1991, 40; *New Pauly* s.v. Elymais, 931 (J. Wiesehöfer).

¹⁴⁰ Hebrew: e.g. Nehemiah 1: 1; Esther 1: 2, al.; Daniel 8: 2. The explanation of J.E. Goldingay on Daniel 8: 2 (*WBC* 30, 196) (« רָבֵּיבָרָה is in apposition to שׁוֹשַׁן and thus does not refer to a fortress within Susa, but denotes Susa as a fortress-city») is better than that in Gesenius' Hebrew Lexikon s.v. רָבֵּיבָרָה , 2 («in these passages it apparently means a fortress in the city bearing the same name»). The LXX rendering πόλις is uninformative. For the Syriac, see Payne Smith, i. 522; comparable is Bar Konai, *Liber Scholiorum*, *Mimrā* V:4 (i. 292 Hespel - Draguet); Daniel «mourut en 'Élam et fut enterré dans le palais de Suze».

¹⁴¹ As do Hellenistic inscriptions from Susa itself: *SEG* vii. 15, 18, 22, 24.

¹⁴² Nanaia was sometimes linked with Ishtar in Akkadian sources (*DDD*², 612–13) and identified with Astarte (*SEG* viii. 5–48, l. 18; Bar Konai, *Liber Scholiorum*, *Mimrā* III:74 (i. 191 Hespel-Draguet)).

period that Nanaia was first assimilated to Artemis¹⁴³. But even if the *interpretatio graeca* was available to him, ps.-M. has preferred the standard Aramaic form of the name, whether because he was familiar with it from the Peshitta of 2 Maccabees (and knew the same goddess to be involved), or for some other reason.

Yet despite the non-classical geography, the biblical designation of Susa, and the failure to use an *interpretatio graeca* (if one was available), ps.-M.'s story reads as a classic piece of Euhemerism, following a standard story-pattern to explain a cult with reference to a disappearance and the substitution of a statue for a disappeared person. For example, in Lucian, *DDS* §4, Europa's disappearance is dressed up by the Phoenicians with a *hieros logos* and temple¹⁴⁴. Other classical myths of a similar structure, in which a myth containing a metamorphosis or marvel is rationalised by some sort of explicable disappearance, are collected by Howie 1984, 294-5. As an explanation of her disappearance, Nanaia's captivity is functionally equivalent to the other rationalisations Howie cites (burning, being eaten by animals, drowning, sudden flight). Only the vain search by friends or family, a frequent element in these stories, is missing; but it may in any case have been ruled out by the girl's captivity (her whereabouts were known, but she was unreachable). As in the story of Astarte transmitted by Bar Konai and Išo'dad of Merv, discussed in the last chapter, it is the father of the missing girl who institutes her cult.

In sum, this story sees the application of a *Greek* story-telling method to Near Eastern, and only partly biblical, raw material.

For his note on the cult of Nanai, Bar Konai prefers to euhemerise the Maccabees story, which lends itself particularly well to rationalisation (the girl's father, Darius, arranges a wedding between Antiochus and his daughter)¹⁴⁵. The girl's father plays a role in both stories, albeit a different one. However, Bar Konai adds at the end of his story, apparently gratuitously, and after the Euhemerist punch-line, that 'Nani' was taken captive by Chaldaeans, who killed her son. He could have taken the captivity, which does not have a biblical origin, from ps.-M., although he does not give it the same function. But the killing of the child is not in ps.-M. Is this another indication of a common source? If so, a source which spoke of Nani's slain (and therefore human) child was presumably itself euhemerist.

7. ATHI, SIMI, AND HADAD

Athi of Adiabene sends the 'daughter of Belat' (Cureton), *or* 'her daughter, Belat' (see below) to heal Simi, the daughter of Hadad, king of Syria. She then asks Elishah the Hebrew to go and cure Hadad himself of leprosy.

The personal names cannot but remind us of the gods of Hierapolis. 'Athi' is an unusual, but recognisable, form of the name of Atargatis; and Hadad and Simi are the goddess' consort and the cultic standard which Lucian calls the *σημίσιον*. As in the ninth *historiola*, 'Simi' is the daughter of Hadad. This seems to bring her into closer connection

¹⁴³ Le Rider 1965, 293, 295-6. A hymn to Apollo from Parthian Susa (*SEG* vii. 14, 1st c. AD) names *Ναναί[α]* (l. 6), and, even though the non-Greek name is used, its place in an Apollo hymn implies the assimilation to Artemis.

¹⁴⁴ Lightfoot 2003, 299.

¹⁴⁵ *Mimrā* XI:93 (ii. 261 Hespel - Draguet).

with the male deity of Hierapolis than with its divine patroness, and, in his commentary on §9, Drijvers suggested that this could reflect an earlier state of affairs in Hierapolis than the one Lucian describes in *DDS*, with its dominant chief goddess. Here, however, it may be less a sign that the story is an old one, than that the names were taken over from that (or another source) and assigned to the actors in a narrative of a different origin.

The story recurs in Bar Konai, *Liber Scholiorum*, Mimrā XI:4 (ii. 214 Hespel - Draguet):

«En Mésopotamie, ils adorèrent Kouzbi, une arabe, et Gathi, une adiabénite, laquelle envoya sa fille Palaṭ, médecin, qui guérit la fille du roi des Damascènes».

This whole section consists of notices drawn from ps.-M., though Bar Konai has a few changes with respect to the original: trivial phonetic differences in the case of Gathi, Kouzbi, and Palaṭ (does this last rest on a confusion of Syriac *b* and *p*?); Hadad becomes the king of Damascus (bar Konai having apparently missed the link with Hierapolis); and, as a result of linking the story of Gathi with that of Kouzbi by a copula, the worshippers of Gathi are now the Mesopotamians instead of the Syrians.

There are two main issues here: (A) the form of the names, and (B) the form of the story.

(A) Names.

(i) Atargatis' name and its morphology were analysed by Albright 1924-5, 88-91. He explains Atargatis as a compound of 'Aṭtar ('goddess') and 'Anat, with loss of *-n* and addition of another feminine ending. Athi / 'ty must be analysed as the second element (*-gatis* brings out the guttural more strongly in Greek, as Bar Konai does in Syriac), but it remains without parallel in the goddess' nomenclature; similar, but not identical, is the form used in Hellenistic Hierapolis, 'th (Lightfoot 2003, 13-4 and n.19). R. Oden cited A. Dupont-Sommer for the view that it was a transcription of a Greek form Ἄθη, and derived from this an argument that the ethnographical section in ps.-M. must have a Greek original¹⁴⁶.

(ii) Athi is said to be a 'Hadibite' (*hdyby*?), usually understood as meaning 'from Adiabene' (the area adjoining northern Mesopotamia, on the east bank of the Tigris, whose chief city was Arbela)¹⁴⁷. Oden objected to this as well. There is no reason to derive the Syrian goddess from Adiabene. Rather, the word originates in a Greek palaeographical error, which is further proof of the original language of this section. It derives from the corruption of ΧΑΛΕΠ, centre of a famous cult of Hadad – where, one must assume, he was accompanied by a form of the Syrian goddess – to ΧΑΔΕΠ, yielding *hdyby*?, which was then 'corrected' to a form that was understood as referring to Adiabene¹⁴⁸.

Neither of these arguments is strong.

¹⁴⁶ Oden 1977, 130, citing Dupont-Sommer 1939, 151 n. 1. who as evidence for the Greek form cites the theophoric names Ἀβδαάθης and Βαργάτης from Dura and Palmyra.

¹⁴⁷ This area is commonly referred to by Syriac authors as *hdyb*, the masculine ethnicon *hdyby*' (Payne Smith, i. 1202).

¹⁴⁸ Oden 1977, 130-1.

(i) Greek ἸΑθῆ should itself be a representation of a Semitic form of the name, of which Ἰϑῆ could be another rendering, independent of the Greek (Albright 1924-5, 90)¹⁴⁹. If Ἰϑῆ were a transcription of a Greek form ἸΑΤῆ, it is not clear to me why the transcriber would have chosen an initial Ἰαῖν (rather than Ἰαλεφ); as it is, it is correct in Aramaic. Besides, if the translator were simply transcribing a Greek form, it would be at odds with his practice elsewhere, which is to use the Semitic forms of personal- and place-names.

(ii) It is not likely that a Greek source would have called the city Χαλεπ at this date at all, rather than by its Hellenistic name, Beroia¹⁵⁰. On the other hand, there are reasons why Adiabene is not a particularly surprising place of origin for Athi, as will emerge from the commentary below.

In short: no positive evidence can be derived from this chapter that the original language of the treatise was Greek.

(B) The story.

When he first commented on this story, Cureton pointed to 2 Kings 5, where Naaman is healed of leprosy by Elishah the prophet. Elishah's presence here, and the fact that he cures the king of Syria, obviously points to that story. Cureton was also impressed by the presence of a girl in both stories: it is a little Israelite captive who first brings the prophet to the Naaman's notice. And yet there are also major differences. Naaman, hoping for a healer, first mistakes the identity of the man who is to heal him. *He* goes to Elishah, rather than Elishah coming to him. The little girl herself is not a doctor. In these respects there may be a better comparison for ps.-M.'s story, although one whose Syriac version Cureton did not yet know.

This is the story of the apostle Addai and king Abgar of Edessa¹⁵¹. The earliest version of this story appears in Greek, in Eusebius, who claims to have it from the Edessene archives; the later Syriac version, the *Doctrina Addai*, was first published by George Phillips in 1876¹⁵². According to the legend, when Abgar wrote to Jesus asking for a cure, Jesus promised him that he would send him one of his disciples, and after his ascension into heaven, the apostle Thomas did indeed send out Addai (Thaddaeus). Addai healed, not only Abgar, but another member of the court as well («Abdu, the son of Abdu, the second person of his kingdom»), from gout. Again, the main theme of the story is healing¹⁵³, but here, rather than the sufferer going to the healer, the healer is sent to the sufferer (a king) by a revered figure from a foreign region. There are different

¹⁴⁹ Precisely this form does in fact occur as a personal name in Palmyra (Stark 1971, 46). Albright, who treats it as feminine, understands it as a hypokoristikon of the divine name ἸΑτῆ (1924-5, 89). Stark, who records masculine as well as feminine instances, similarly suggests, among other possibilities, that it could be a variant spelling of the divine name Ἰϑῆ (1971, 108).

¹⁵⁰ The TLG lists no example of Χαλεπ in a Greek source earlier than the tenth century (Constantinus VII Porphyrogenitus), with most examples being in the eleventh or twelfth.

¹⁵¹ The Abgar in question is Abgar V, who ruled Edessa from 4 BC to AD 7 and again from AD 13-50.

¹⁵² *Doctrina Addai*: see Howard 1981, a reprint of the Syriac edition of G. Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle*. London 1876, with an English translation and notes; Greek version in Eusebius, *HE* 1.13.1-10; Moses of Chorene, *Hist. Arm.* 2.30-3. Discussion and literature in H.J. W. Drijvers, in *NTA* i. 492-9; Mirkovic 2004.

¹⁵³ Segal 1970, 71-3.

traditions about Abgar's illness, one of which was that it was leprosy – although that detail enters the tradition late¹⁵⁴, and might itself come from the Naaman story. In ps.-M., Cureton renders the identity of the person whom Athi sends out as the 'daughter of Belat'. This seems an unnecessarily convoluted identifier, and I am inclined to prefer Hespel and Draguet's rendering of Bar Konai (who renders the original word-for-word at this point), 'laquelle envoya sa fille Palaṭ'. If Balat/ Palaṭ is (G)athi's own daughter, there is a closer analogue to Christ sending out his apostle.

There are also a few differences: in ps.-M. there are two doctors, in the Abgar legend only one; in ps.-M., the king is healed second, in the Abgar legend first. The second healing, that of Hadad, is the one that bears the imprint of the Naaman story; but what of the dispatch of the healer by a divine figure from foreign parts, so much more obviously similar to Abgar than to Naaman?

I cautiously suggest that the author of this narrative, whether it was ps.-M. or his unknown source, was influenced by *some* form of the Abgar legend. The popularity of the Abgar legend increases with time. It seems to have originated, as we should expect, as a local story, and only to have become influential outside northern Mesopotamia in the fourth century¹⁵⁵. But it need not have been the fully developed form of the story, familiar from the *Doctrina Addai*, that was known to the author of this story. It seems that in the earliest days there were different traditions in Edessa, one of which made, not Addai, but Thomas the evangelist¹⁵⁶. All we need, after all, is a version in which Jesus sent out a healer to Abgar. The author of this story might have been an Edessene himself. He was most likely a Christian, although in an environment like Edessa where pagans, Jews, and Christians all lived closely together, I would not want to rule out the possibility that a pagan could have known and used the story. Even if the author *was* a Christian, the story is hardly hostile towards the pagan Syrians; he has hardly gone out of his way to create a scabrous myth.

Again, if it were an Edessene story, it would help to explain both the presence of Hierapolitan deities and the reference to Adiabene. The Syrian goddess, Atargatis, was one of pagan Edessa's best-known deities¹⁵⁷, while close links existed between Edessa and Adiabene, the neighbouring region on the eastern bank of the Tigris, which provide a context in which a 'Hadibite' could send an emissary to the royal family in Edessa¹⁵⁸. Yet it is not presented as an Edessene legend. Its protagonists are derived from the cult of the Syrian goddess, and the worshippers are Syrians, not Mesopotamians, as they would

¹⁵⁴ Segal 1970, 72. It is present in the *Chronicon Anonymum ad annum Domini 819 pertinens* (Chabot 1937, 96.1-2).

¹⁵⁵ For the early popularity of the Abgar story, see Mirkovic 2004, 19, 24-8 (pre-313), 29-57 (the fourth century).

¹⁵⁶ *Itinerarium Egeriae* 17.1; see Maraval 1982, 198-9.

¹⁵⁷ *RAC* Edessa, 564-5 (E. Kirsten); Drijvers 1980, 76-85. See e.g. the well-known description of Edessa's pagan cults in *Doctrina Addai* 24: «Behold, there are among you those who worship ... Tar'atha like the men of Mabbog»; Bardaisan, *Book of the Laws of Countries*, p. 59 (ed. Drijvers): «In Syria and Edessa there was the custom of self-emasculation in honour of Tar'atha.»

¹⁵⁸ 1892, 27-8; Clermont-Ganneau 1900, 220 and n. 1; Drijvers 1959, 566, 569; Segal 1970, 24.30, 68-9. Abgar VII (109-16) was a grandson of Queen Helena of Adiabene. The chronicle of pseudo-Dionysus refers to him as son of Izates (Chabot 1949, 89.20-1), and to Ma'nu son of Izates (Chabot 1949, 91.20, 94.13). This also suggests a connection with Adiabene. The two cities were allies in the siege of Nisibis in AD 194 (Dio, 75.1.2-3).

be if the setting were Edessa (and as they are in Bar Konai). Ps.-M. seems to want to treat Syria and Mesopotamia separately. He has given the Syrians their great goddess, but in order to euhemerise her as a human benefactress it is curious that he has turned to Judaeo-Christian legend – the Syrian commander of the Old Testament, possibly also the latter-day king who famously conversed with Christ. Were there no pagan stories about her that were suitable? Or are there more links with the pagan religion than appear at first sight? Atargatis is not known to us principally as a healing deity, though there are possible signs that she cared for young children (Lightfoot 2003, 471-2).

Finally, if this notice *is* connected with the Abgar legend, we should have a very approximate *terminus post quem* for the story. Our first testimony to the Abgar legend is Eusebius, who gives a Greek version (*HE* 1.13.1–10) for which he insists there is evidence in the archives of the city. The version in the *Doctrina Adlai* is later: it is padded out with material which derives from the legend of St. Helena and the discovery of the true cross¹⁵⁹. Nonetheless, it seems that a version of the legend was in circulation by approximately the end of the third century AD¹⁶⁰. But even if we suppose that ps.-M. was influenced by a particularly early form of the legend, it is unlikely that it could be early enough for the treatise to be what it purports to be, an address to one of the emperors called ‘Antoninus’.

8. KUTBAI, BAKRU, AND EDESSA

«Bakru the patrician of Edessa» is apparently a reference to one of Edessa’s early kings. The Syriac chronicle of pseudo-Dionysius names two, Bakru son of Fardašt and his son; their dates are conventionally given as 115-12 BC and 112-94 BC¹⁶¹. If that is right, this is a story about Edessa’s legendary past. Could it be a re-write of a story about the divinity in question helping Bakru in time of war? The Syriac chooses not to call him ‘king’, but ʿbyʿ, derived from ʿbʿ, *abâ*, ‘father’, as a calque on Greek πατρίκιος¹⁶². Oden thought that was another indication of a Greek original¹⁶³; but that would not follow if ʿbʿ was not the coinage of the translator of this text, and Payne Smith (i. 6) notes the possibility that the word belongs to Edessene dialect.

Who is Kutbai? All are agreed that the name comes from the root *ktb*, ‘write’, and means ‘the scribe’. Ps.-M. makes her a Hebrew [ʿbrʿytʿ], but Bar Konai, who repeats ps.-M. in the scholium partly quoted above, offers an important variant: «The Mesopotamians worshipped KWZBY, an Arab (goddess / woman) [ʿrbʿytʿ]»¹⁶⁴. Both variants, Hebrew and Arab, have their advocates, but the majority view, with which I agree, is that Bar Konai has preserved the correct reading. The Judaisers explain that Kutbai reflects an association between the Jews and writing, as evidenced by their practice of fixing a biblical text to the doors of a house or the gates of a city; Segal also points to the Hebrew

¹⁵⁹ Drijvers 1985, 91; id., *NTA* i. 492-3.

¹⁶⁰ The material Eusebius shares with the later, Syriac, version of the legend is traced to a common source which «cannot be pushed back much before the second half of the third century» (Mirkovic 2004, 8 cf. 19, 22).

¹⁶¹ Ed. and transl. Chabot 1927, 1949. On this work of c. AD 775, see Millar 1993, 558.

¹⁶² The explanation is already found in Duval 1900, 169; Clermont-Ganneau 1900, 216.

¹⁶³ Oden 1977, 130.

¹⁶⁴ *Mimrā* XI:4 (ii. 214 Hespel - Draguet).

influence in the previous story (Elishah)¹⁶⁵. The Arabists, however, point to the attestation of a deity al-Kutbâ (whose gender seems to vary) in several Nabataean inscriptions, albeit at some remove from Edessa¹⁶⁶. ‘Hebrew’ could be an error induced by the previous paragraph (and/or by the known influence of Jews in Edessa¹⁶⁷), and the Arabic name sorts better with the Arabic name of the king. This story would be testimony to the importance of the Nabataean/Arabic strand in Edessene culture, although the deity is obscure, and it is curious that ps.-M. has chosen not to represent the city through one of her better-known pagan gods. In his original Babylonian form, Nebo, one of Edessa’s chief deities, was divine scribe, but there is simply no way of knowing whether there is any connection with Kutbay here. Ps.-M. is holding Nebo in reserve until the next story.

9. NEBO AND HADARAN

This is the most interesting and unusual *historiola*. It stands out, even among an unusual collection, because it is not really Euhemerising at all: instead of replacing divine myth with watered-down rationalisation, it substitutes a story about wicked spirits and wizardry. A more conventional approach, which ps.-M. does not take, is found in Bar Konai in his commentary on Isaiah 46:1¹⁶⁸. It is striking that Bar Konai chooses to explicate this verse, which after all refers to the *Babylonian* idols of Bel and Nebo, with anecdote about Hierapolis; but the story that he tells is an unremarkable rationalisation (Nebo, god of writing, was really a local schoolmaster whose pupil tried to appease his bad temper by setting up a statue). Ps.-M.’s story, with its curious identifications and supernatural content, seems to have a different pedigree. Moreover, it contains information that overlaps with Lucian’s report of the gods and rituals of Hierapolis in the *De Dea Syria*, suggesting some sort of local basis.

A full commentary on that story can be found in my edition¹⁶⁹. Ps.-M. describes how the Hierapolitan gods Nebo and Hadaran commissioned Simi daughter of Hadad to fetch sea-water and pour it down a well. This is explained as a means of keeping an evil spirit banished there. *De Dea Syria* tells a different story, in which ‘Deucalion’ presides over a story which is really very close to Genesis’ flood myth, with the added twist that the flood-waters disappear down a chasm over which Deucalion subsequently founds the Hierapolitan temple. Lucian then tells how, twice a year, in commemoration of the flood, priests and pilgrims from all over Syria, Arabia, and Mesopotamia pour water from the sea down a crevice in the temple (§13). The conveyance of the water from the sea is in the charge of the cultic standard, or στήμιον; this, or a word like it, seems to be the name given to the object by the Syrians themselves (§33). The date of its departure is decreed by the oracle of Apollo (§36). More details of the processions that go to the sea are given in §48 (the containers of water are unsealed by a ‘sacred cock’ at the lake): this might be part of the same festival, but is not explicit.

¹⁶⁵ Clermont-Ganneau 1900, 216-23; Kirsten 1959, 567-8 (while also accepting the presence of the Arabic goddess ‘Kutbi’ in Edessa); Segal 1970, 43.

¹⁶⁶ Vandenhoff 1915, 250; Milik and Teixidor 1961; Drijvers 1980, 153-5; Ross 2001, 85.

¹⁶⁷ Drijvers 1970, 11.

¹⁶⁸ *Liber Scholiorum*, *Mimrā* V:26 (i. 304 Hespel - Draguet). On the biblical reference to Nebo, see *DDD*², 607–10 (A.R. Millard).

¹⁶⁹ Lightfoot 2003, 335 ff.

Alternative aetiological stories are thus offered for a remarkably similar programme of actions: 'Simi' goes to fetch the water, which is poured down a declivity (a crevice or well) and Nebo is a key player in determining when she goes. The coincidence in texts which clearly owe nothing to one another is impressive, and H.J.W. Drijvers, from whom ps.-M.'s notice has so far received most attention, tries to reconcile the two stories and to provide both with a local context. He suggests that ps.-M.'s evil spirit personifies Lucian's flood; he sets the water-pouring ritual in the context of the importance to the city of springs and water, and assigns it a double meaning, that of «allaying the dangerous flood and preserving the life-giving springs»¹⁷⁰.

This is all quite plausible, though it is difficult to go further and pick out genuine 'local details' from either narrative. In the *De Dea Syria* I analysed the literary character of Lucian's story and showed its dependence on Genesis' flood myth – a dependence marked enough to make one wonder whether local pagans really knew the story in this form. Ps.-M.'s story has a pagan cast, and two rare names (beside Nebo and Hadad) which, with a high degree of probability, are those of local deities: 'Simi', which obviously ties in closely with Lucian's σιμήϊον, and 'Hadaran', which occurs on one of Manbog's Hellenistic coins¹⁷¹. But need that imply that anything else in the story is local?

Both gods receive untraditional identifications. Let us consider each in turn. The first thing that we learn is that «all the priest which are in Mabug know that it [Nebo] is the image of Orpheus, a Thracian Magus». Ps.-M. sounds confident enough about local beliefs, but this identification departs from the usual *interpretatio graeca* of Nebo in the Roman Near East, in Dura Europos, Palmyra, and probably in Hierapolis itself, as Apollo¹⁷². It also departs from the literary mainstream in displaying a complete lack of interest in Nebo's association with writing, which interests other Syriac authors¹⁷³. On the other hand, the discovery of representations of Nebo in the form of Apollo Citharoedus has borne out Clermont-Ganneau's conjecture that the god's identification as Orpheus is most probably visual, and rests on the image of a god wielding a lyre¹⁷⁴. Does that leave Orpheus as anything more than the author's personal conjecture, though based on knowledge of local iconography? Hard to say: Orpheus imagery can be traced elsewhere in the Roman Near East, but there is no sign of a connection to Nebo¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷⁰ Drijvers 1980, 94.

¹⁷¹ Lightfoot 2003, 5, 40, cf. 336.

¹⁷² Lightfoot 2003, 456-7.

¹⁷³ Bar Konai (n. 168); cf. also Išo'dad of Merv who, in his commentary on Genesis, says that Nebo was the inventor of the Pahlavi script, after he had already mastered Hebrew and Syriac (text: van den Eynde 1950, 6; translation: id. 1955, 7).

¹⁷⁴ Clermont-Ganneau 1900, 212-6 (despite Lévy 1899, 373); Lightfoot 2003, 457.

¹⁷⁵ Orpheus imagery: a mosaic pavement from Edessa in a funerary context (*LIMC* Orpheus, no. 102; Ross 2001, 96); a fresco of David-as-psalmist using the iconography of Orpheus in the Synagogue at Dura (Kraeling 1979, 223-5, fig. 59 and pl. xxxiv, lxxiv). Drijvers 1970, 8-9, gives the equation full significance: the lyre is a sign of the god's cosmic function, and the choice of Zoroaster for Hadaran can also be connected with it, for Zoroaster's pupil Ostanes is described in an oracle quoted by Porphyry (fr. 330F Smith) as «lord of the seven-voiced» (τῆς ἑπταφθόγγου βασιλεύς), probably the strings of the lyre (see Bidez - Cumont, ii. 284-6). The identifications would thus have been chosen in order to bring out the connections of the gods with cosmic order

The *interpretatio persica* of Hadaran is harder to explain (as also in §1, though this time the form of the name, *zaradušṭ*, is the standard one in Syriac). Although one might expect the two identifications to work in a similar way, this one is not obviously based on iconography¹⁷⁶. Looked at from the other side it is strange, as well, for while Zoroaster is identified with numerous other figures, it is almost invariably a case of Christian writers (it is not certain whether these identifications go back to Hellenistic Jews or not) equating him with biblical characters¹⁷⁷. These equations all rest on familiar interpretations of Zoroaster's character: as a prophet (Ezekiel, Balaam, Baruch), sorcerer, or astrologer (Seth, Nimrod). Chronologically, they range from the haziest antiquity to the period of the Exile; the choice of one rather than another depends on the author's view of the controversial question of Zoroaster's date. Among them all there is nothing that really compares with ps.-M.'s equation with a local, pagan, deity. Indeed, it stands so far out of the mainstream that it is possible to infer that it originated locally—perhaps, once again, with the Hierapolitan priests¹⁷⁸. But one could also infer that the author of the identification learned the technique from Christian writers, even though he has employed it in an unorthodox way.

The identifications of Nebo and Hadaran with Orpheus and Zoroaster are unconventional, yet do seem to belong together as the contrivance of a story-teller (or priest?) who wanted a pair of magi or wizards. In Orpheus' case, this notion begins to be attested approximately in the late Hellenistic period/early empire¹⁷⁹. It is the common Graeco-Roman interpretation of Zoroaster, too, and the common view of magism. Yet sources who call him a magus or describe the activities of mages do not portray him, or them, as engaging in such acts of conjuration as this¹⁸⁰. Ps.-M., in fact, reflects barely any of the standard traditions about Zoroaster in either Graeco-Roman or Syriac sources¹⁸¹. He is not a prophet; there are no religious revelations delivered to him or by

and harmony. But it is not clear whether this Pythagorean, or neo-Pythagorean, idea has anything to do with Hierapolis itself (literary witnesses in Cumont 1942, 18 n. 4 and 499 (Additions)).

- 176 Lévy 1899, 373, proposed to explain both by onomastic play. Zoroaster was regarded as the priest, *athravan*, *par excellence*, and this Avestan word, which came to be pronounced *athravan*, recalled the name Hadaran. Orpheus, meanwhile, arose from the similarity between Nebo and Hebrew *nabi'*: Orpheus was the Greek prophet, or *μάντις*, *par excellence*. Though the second suggestion is hardly plausible, the first does gain in plausibility if the parallels between this story and Avestan tradition, which I suggest below, are accepted.
- 177 Bidez - Cumont, i, 41-50; Ginzburg 1925, 150-1, n.54, and 200-1, n.8; Neusner 1964. One dubious Jewish instance is Ezekiel, mentioned by Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.15.69.6; Bidez - Cumont, B. 26a, attribute this to Alexander Polyhistor, but Jacoby (*FGrH* 273 F 94, cf. III. A. 2, p. 296.6-8) does not. Bidez - Cumont also suggest that the equation with Nimrod (ps.-Clem. *Hom.* 9.4.1-5.1) goes back to a Hellenistic Jew.
- 178 Boyce - Grenet 1991, 356-7.
- 179 Pliny, *NH* 30.2.7; Egyptian ap. Paus. 6.20.18 (μαγεῦσαι δεινόν); Strabo 7, fr.18; Philo of Byblos, *FGrH* 790 F 4 (52) Ζωροάστρης ὁ μάγος (though the passage presents him as an exponent of religious doctrine rather than a wizard); Lucian, *Astrol.* 10; Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, Testimonia nos. 82-6. On the basis of his reputation as a magician, works were attributed to him such as herbals, medical lore, lapidary manuals, and astrological works.
- 180 Zoroaster called a *magus*: Plut. *Is.* 46 (see Gwyn Griffith ad loc.); Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.15.69.6. Zoroaster a magician: Pliny, *NH* 30.3; Justin, 1.1.7-10; ps.-Clem. *Homil.* 9.4 (B 45. B. - C.).
- 181 Greek sources: see Boyce - Grenet 1991, 521-5 (525-39 on the pseudepigrapha); de Jong 1997, 317-23.

him; there is no connection with heavenly fire (on the contrary, sea-water!); no scriptures, no astrology, no eschatology. Nor does he engage in any of the magic practices that classical sources associated with Zoroastrian magi – binding and commanding nature (raising or calming tempests, kindling fire), astrology, or sometimes black magic and necromancy¹⁸². The one possible connection with the Graeco-Roman Zoroaster legend is that the Hierapolitan well is situated in a wood. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.6.33, Zoroaster retreats into the solitude of an Indian forest, where he is instructed by Brahmans, and reclusiveness (if not forests) features in other versions of the legend¹⁸³. Bidez and Cumont, followed by Boyce and Grenet, interpret this detail as an indication that Zoroaster had gone to a lonely place in the forest in order to seek solitude¹⁸⁴, but, it must be said, the story does not make this explicit.

Once again, one could infer that this depiction of Zoroaster is so far out of the ordinary that it must have some idiosyncratic, possibly local, provenance. I should like to suggest that, wherever it comes from, it does preserve certain recognisable lines of continuity with Zoroastrianism – not with mainstream Graeco-Roman and Syriac literary tradition, however, but with Zoroastrianism as known chiefly from Avestan and Pahlavi sources.

First, it is part of the image of Zoroaster since the earliest sources that he is a ritual specialist¹⁸⁵.

Second, some sources assign him the special power of vanquishing evil spirits. This does not seem to be the way he is imagined in Graeco-Roman authors, but in younger Avestan texts Zoroaster is presented as ‘Vernichter der Dämonen’ – and this supremacy sometimes takes the form of consigning evil spirits to the depths, «in die Tiefe des finsternen Seins, in den tobenden Ort des schlechten Seins» (Stausberg, 141). Consider:

– Vidēvdāt 19,46-7: «Down are the Daēva-worshippers, the Nasu made by the Daēva the false-speaking Lie! | They run away, they rush away, the wicked, evil-doing Daēvas, into the depths of the dark, horrid, world of hell»¹⁸⁶.

– Yašt 19.80-1 (Hymn to the goddess Aši): «Before that time, the daēvvas used to rush about openly ... yet one Ahuna Vairia | which truthful Zaruštra recited ... drove down (all the daēvvas), causing them to hide under the earth (Stausberg: «so daß die sich in der Erde verkrochen»), | all the daēvvas unworthy of being worshipped (and) unworthy of being praised».¹⁸⁷

– Yasna 9, 15 (Hōm Yašt): «You, O Zaruštra, caused all the daēvvas used to hide under the earth, who previously used to rush over the earth in the shape of men».¹⁸⁸

It is true that in these Avestan sources Zoroaster banishes spirits by chanting incantations, in ps.-M. by masterminding a water-pouring ritual. But that is the very local detail from which the story takes its departure. Furthermore – my third point – there is

¹⁸² Bidez - Cumont, i. 143-50; Boyce - Grenet 1991, 511-21.

¹⁸³ Pliny, *NH* 11.242; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 36.40-1; de Jong 1997, 321.

¹⁸⁴ Bidez - Cumont, i. 39; Boyce - Grenet 1991, 525.

¹⁸⁵ Stausberg 2002, 24-6.

¹⁸⁶ Transl. Darmesteter 1880, 218.

¹⁸⁷ Transl. Humbach and Ichaporia 1998, 157.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted and translated by Humbach and Ichaporia *ibid.*

even a certain rationale for putting Zoroaster in charge of a ceremony of water-pouring, for libations did play an important role in Zoroastrian ritual, and Zoroaster was often seen as its high priest and religious expert. Libations (Zaotra) were used both in its daily liturgy and in specific rituals, especially the *āb-zōhr*, in which milk plus some other vegetable components were poured into a running stream in order to purify the waters¹⁸⁹. Classical authors know of some of these rituals, although many of their accounts of Persian libations are compromised by their similarities to Greek practice¹⁹⁰. It seems that water by itself could be used in libation: for example, water is poured on the ground before animal sacrifice¹⁹¹.

Fourth, Zoroaster is identified with a god rather than with a character of biblical mythology or Hebrew prophet. This is unusual, but in keeping with his heightened status in younger Avestan literature, where he is elevated from the exemplary worshipper of the gods to someone who receives worship himself¹⁹².

These parallels are with Persian sources; but there is also a text written in Greek in which similar ideas and ritual actions are attributed to a group of people called μάγοι. That text is the Derveni papyrus, and it provides a series of parallels to ps.-M. from a wholly unexpected direction.

The column in question could be read in the pirate publication of the Derveni papyrus in *ZPE* 1982, but it was only in 1997 when Tsantsanoglou published his new text of the first seven columns that the reference to μάγοι came to light. Below I give the column in question as it appears in the edition and commentary by Kouremenos, Parassoglou, and Tsantsanoglou (2006), accompanied by their translation:

col. vi

εὐ]χαὶ καὶ θυσ[ί]αι μ[ε]ιλ[ί]σσοσι τὰ[ς] ψυχάς,
 ἐπ[ω]ιδῆ δ]ὲ μάγων δύν[α]ται δαίμονας ἐμπο[δ]ῶν]
 γι[νο]μένο]υς μεθιστάνα· δαίμονες ἐμπο[δ]ῶν δ' εἰσὶ
 ψ[υχ]αῖς ἐχθροί. τὴν θυσ[ί]αν τούτου ἔνεκε[ν] π[ο]ιοῦσ]ι[ν]
 5 οἱ μά[γο]ι, ὡσπερὶ ποινὴν ἀποδιδόντες. τοῖ<ς> δὲ
 ἱεροῖ[ς] ἐπισπένδουσιν ὕ[δ]ωρ καὶ γάλα, ἐξ ὧν περ καὶ τὰς
 χοάς ποιοῦσι. ἀνάριθμα [κα]ὶ πολυόμφαλα τὰ πόπανα
 θύουσιν, ὅτι καὶ αἱ ψυχὰ[ι] ἀν]άριθμοὶ εἰσι. μύσται
 Εὐμενίσαι προθύουσι κ[α]τὰ τὰ] αὐτὰ μάγοις· Εὐμενίδες γὰρ
 10 ψυχὰί εἰσιν. ὧν ἔνεκε[ν] τὸν μέλλοντ]α θεοῖς θύειν
 ὁ[ρ]ν[ί]θ[ε]ιον πρότερον ...

«... prayers and sacrifices appease the [souls], while the [incantation] of the magi is able to drive away [*or*, change] the daimons who are hindering; hindering daimons are

¹⁸⁹ The *yasna*, the main priestly act of worship, contained a libation to the waters, or *āb-zōhr*, which could also be performed separately: see Boyce 1966, especially 110-8; *ead.* 1975, 155-6, 160; *ead.* 1984, 3-4; Boyce - Grenet 1991, 295-6.

¹⁹⁰ Aesch. *Pers.* 609-18; Hdt. 7.43.2; Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.1, 3.3.2; Appian, *Mithr.* 66; Strab. 15.3.14; see de Jong 1997, 353-7. Strabo, in particular, gives an account of the *āb-zōhr*, though contaminated with classical details (de Jong 1997, 140-2).

¹⁹¹ Boyce 1966, 110.

¹⁹² Stausberg 2002, 36-9.

vengeful souls (or: hostile to souls). This is why the magi perform the sacrifice, just as if they are paying a retribution. And on the offerings they pour water and milk, from which (plural) they also make offerings to the dead. Innumerable and many-knobbed are the cakes they sacrifice, because the souls too are innumerable. Initiates make a preliminary sacrifice to the Eumenides in the same way the magi do; for the Eumenides are souls. On their account anyone who is going to sacrifice to the gods must first [sacrifice] a bird ...»

Almost every detail of the text is controversial, and unfortunately this includes the reference to the μάγοι. While some scholars believe that it refers to Persian religious practitioners (or those who imported and practised their ways), others have taken it in its non-ethnic, non-ethnographical sense of 'diviner', 'sorcerer' – the sense in which it is often combined with other Greek words for wandering priests or diviners such as ἀγύρτης, μάντις, γόης¹⁹³. But the parallels between the actions attributed to the magi by the Derveni author and by ps.-M. provide remarkable support for the interpretation of Tsantsanoglou and Burkert, that the papyrus means either Persian magi, or Greek practitioners who follow, or are believed to follow, Persian practice. The Derveni author appears to be drawing an analogy between the initiates (μύσται) and the magi (Il. 8-9), the latter a recognisable and presumably respected group, but one to which he himself does not belong.

Whatever the sources of his information about the magi, the Derveni author has escaped the classical stereotypes about eastern conjurers and black magic, whether on the grounds of date (he was writing in the fifth, at the latest in the early fourth) century, or simply because his purpose was so far from the literary mainstream. Both he and ps.-M. have their own, strongly-characterised, perspectives; but the extent to which they agree on the typical ritual activities of the magi is striking.

First, magi are ritual experts (see also Diog. Laert. 1.6).

Second, the Derveni papyrus agrees with ps.-M. in associating the magi with libations. According to the Derveni author, they perform σπονδαί and χοαί of water and milk (6-7)¹⁹⁴, while in ps.-M.'s Hierapolis we find a ritual of water-pouring. Construed according to Greek practice, libations of water-pouring would almost certainly have suggested the cult of the dead¹⁹⁵, so that an author who wanted to explain the ritual at Hierapolis in Greek terms might have invoked some association with the dead or chthonic cult. Lucian's flood-myth in *DDS* §§12-3 plays on another, related, Greek association of water-pouring rituals: it recalls a *hydrophoria* in Athens, which was supposedly instituted

¹⁹³ Persian religious practitioners: Tsantsanoglou 1997, 110-2; Burkert 2004, 117-23. "Diviner" etc.: Betegh 2004, 78-83. In this latter sense, classical authors use the word disparagingly, so that either (i) the author's attitude to those μάγοι is favourable, in which case those negative connotations must be absent (so Betegh), or (ii) those connotations are present, and the Derveni author is indeed disparaging the magi and perhaps goes on to contrast their claims with those of another group which he considers legitimate (so Jourdain 2003, 38-9).

¹⁹⁴ The Derveni author uses standard Greek terminology which distinguished between different kinds of libation: see Henrichs 1984, 259-60.

¹⁹⁵ E.g. L. Ziehen, *RE* XVI.2 (1935), s.v. Νηφάλια, 2482-3; Burkert 1985, 72-3; Aesch. *Choe.* 129 τὰσδε χέρνιβας, with Garvie's commentary ad loc.

to commemorate the victims of Deucalion's flood¹⁹⁶. Ps.-M., in contrast, has departed from the normal Greek associations of libation and offers an aetiology about two magi. We now have the testimony of the Derveni papyrus that magi made libations of water and milk, and there is independent testimony for the use of both these substances in Persian ritual (see above).

It is unfortunate that the Derveni author is unclear about the circumstances in which the libations are poured. He reports that σπονδαί of water and milk are poured over τὰ ἱερά (5–6), but what are these ἱερά? Could they be the θυσίαι with which the magi have been propitiating the (?)souls in line 1? Or (with ἔντομα restored in line 2) sacrifices by which the magi have been banishing the 'obstructing daimones'? Or are they, as Kouremenos suggests, the preliminary sacrifices mentioned in what follows – the sacrificial cakes (πίπνα) in line 7 and the poultry (probably) in line 11? At all events, these libations are made to souls, perhaps with a view to placating and propitiating them, perhaps with a view to circumventing or removing those of a malign character¹⁹⁷.

Scholarly discussion concentrates on the identity of the supernatural beings in this passage. But my concern here is not the details of the Derveni author's eschatology. It is simply that both he and ps.-M. share the idea of hindering spirits and their removal, in the one case probably, in the other certainly, by means of libations. The fact that the μάγοι in ps.-M.'s story have power to compel an evil spirit *could* be explained simply with reference to Greek beliefs about magi in the word's non-ethnic sense: magicians do have power to constrain the supernatural world¹⁹⁸. But the fact that there is Persian colouring in the story tessellates remarkably with the Derveni author – whether we are dealing with 'true' Persian religious practice, or Greek imitation of Persian practice, or Greek beliefs about Persian practice. That the Persian magi were thought to be in contact with spirits of one sort or another is reinforced by Diogenes Laertius, 1.7, who reports the magi are in contact with εἰδωλα. These are apparently phantoms, ghosts, or souls of the dead, though dressed up in sophisticated modern vocabulary¹⁹⁹. With his libations, magi, and banishable evil spirits, ps.-M. could thus be added to the dossier of texts whose authors «see persuasive insights in the teachings of the magi, even if they were remodelling those teachings according to their own understandings and categories».²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Suda, Photius s.v. ὑδροφορία; *FGrH* 365 F 4. This may or may not be connected with an annual ritual in which barley-cakes mixed with honey are thrown into a crevice in the temenos of Ge Olympia, where the waters of Deucalion's flood are said to have drained away (Paus. 1.18.7); another similarity with Lucian's story.

¹⁹⁷ μεθιστάναι could mean "change"/"transform", or "remove out of the way" (Tsantsanoglou 1997, 98: 111-2). The second meaning seems to me likelier (though Tsantsanoglou seems to favour the first), but there would be an analogy with ps.-M. in either case.

¹⁹⁸ μάγοι are mentioned in the same category as ἀγύρται and μάντιες (Soph. *OT* 387 ff., cf. Hipp. *De morb. sacr.*, pp. 354-5 Littré), who have the power to compel the supernatural (Plat. *Rep.* 364b). The μάγος is combined with the γόης by e.g. Gorgias, *Helen*, 82 B 11, 10 D.-K., and for the magical powers of the latter see Plato, *Leg.* 909b τούς δὲ τεθνεώτας φάσκοντες ψυχαγωγεῖν καὶ θεοὺς ὑπισχνούμενοι πείθειν. For the Greek view of μάγοι, see Graf 1994, 31-7.

¹⁹⁹ Betegh 2004, 79.

²⁰⁰ Burkert 2004, 123 (see his discussion on 121-2).

IN SUM: A ritual which stands a good chance of being genuine, and two divergent narratives. Ps.-M.'s overtly Zoroastrian story complements Lucian's implicitly Jewish one. The Hierapolitans themselves might have known both, or neither: it is interesting that Lucian's LXX-based story supports an understanding of libations which, through its analogy to the Athenian *hydrophoria*, can be characterised as Greek, while ps.-M.'s finds better analogies in Persian practice. Lucian's story has a literary model; the source of this one seems quite oblivious to the usual features of either Graeco-Roman or Syriac traditions about its subject. Yet, as a magus, a master of ritual who banishes demons into an underworld, *this* version of Zoroaster is unexpectedly similar to the Persian one, and the ritual seems to have an unexpected plausibility in terms of Persian religious practice – both as it is known from Persian sources, and as the Derveni author reports it. Whoever it is, the source of the identification seems to have been uninterested in or unaware of the biographical legends about Zoroaster, but aware of and interested in his religious functions. It is highly unusual, but not idle and arbitrary.

This analysis leaves open the originator and date of the legend. The depiction of Orpheus as a *magus* is late Hellenistic or imperial, yet the presentation of Zoroaster as a ritual specialist and banisher of demons *could* go back a long way, perhaps even to the Achaemenid priests suggested by Boyce and Grenet, if the parallels with Avestan tradition hold good. It is not necessarily a current story²⁰¹. The analysis of this story points in quite a different direction from, say, that of §5 or §7, and indicates the wealth of material that ps.-M. had at his disposal.

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²⁰¹ Drijvers 1980, 95-6.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ABD* *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D.N. Freedman, New York *et al.* 1992.
- BNP* *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, ed. H. Cancik and H. Schneider, Leiden 2000-.
- CSCO* *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*.
- GCS* *Die griechische Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*.
- DDD*² K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P.W. van der Horst (edd.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Leiden²1999.
- LIMC* *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, ed. L. Kahil *et al.*, Zürich 1981–99.
- LTK* *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, ed. W. Kasper, Freiburg *et al.* 1993–2001.
- NTA* *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. E. Hennecke, rev. W. Schneemelcher, Eng. transl. ed. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols., Cambridge and Louisville 1991-92.
- RAC* *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. T. Klauser *et al.*, Stuttgart 1950-.
- RGG*⁴ *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. H.D. Betz *et al.*, Tübingen 1998–2005.
- RTP* *Recueil des tessères de Palmyre*, ed. H. Ingholt, H. Seyrig, J. Starcky, Paris 1955.
- WBC* *Word Biblical Commentary*.