

## ON GREEK ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE NEAR EAST THE CASE OF LUCIAN'S *DE DEA SYRIA*

*Jane L. Lightfoot*

Near the river Euphrates in northern Syria, about twenty miles from the present border, is the modern town Membij, the ancient Hierapolis. The modern town gives barely a hint of its former greatness, but as its ancient name, the Holy City, indicates, it was the centre of a prestigious and arguably very ancient cult - that of Atargatis, the Syrian Goddess<sup>1</sup>. Partnered by the old Aramaic storm god, Hadad, Atargatis was an all-powerful benefactress, patroness of human life and promoter of fertility, queenly and merciful, and especially associated with life-giving water whose visible symbol were her sacred fish<sup>2</sup>. The cult had other distinctive features. It had priests who wore white, conical head-gear which bears an interesting resemblance to divine headgear on Hittite rock-carvings and suggests that the cult had preserved at least some very archaic features<sup>3</sup>. And somewhere on the fringes, the goddess had a retinue of noisy, self-castrating eunuch devotees, reminiscent of those of the goddess Cybele<sup>4</sup>.

In (probably) the second century AD, this cult attracted the attention of a writer who was, I believe, Lucian of Samosata. He treated it to a minute and circumstantial eye-witness account written in imitation of the ethnographical style of the classical Greek historian Herodotus, purporting to give its myths, cultic aetiologies, a physical description of the temple, the highlights of its sacred calendar and some of its more picturesque rituals and cultic personnel. The result, the *De Dea Syria* (henceforth *DDS*) is an important, celebrated, and highly controversial text, disputed at almost every level, but also much-cited as a uniquely rich description of a native religious centre functioning under Roman rule. The purpose of this article is, not to seek to elucidate this or that factual detail, but to address some of the questions that scholarship is increasingly coming to realise are central to *DDS* as an ethnography<sup>5</sup>. For prior to attempting to use it as a documentary source one must ask: who is speaking? Through whose eyes are we looking? What sort of culture is the author describing - and how does he present it? To

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws on my own forthcoming *Lucian, 'On the Syrian Goddess': Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Oxford. For Atargatis, her antecedents, iconography, and Empire-wide diffusion, see Part One of this book.

<sup>2</sup> Sacred fish: Lucian, *DDS* §45; Pliny, *NH* 32.17; Aelian, *NA* 12.2.

<sup>3</sup> Priests: *DDS* §42; 'Abd Hadad, depicted on local coins of the early Hellenistic period: H. Seyrig, "Le monnayage de Hiéropolis de Syrie à l'époque d'Alexandre", *RN* 13, 1971, 11-21, nos. 1, 3; a local relief of the imperial period: R. Stucky, "Prêtres syriens 2. Hiéropolis", *Syria* 53, 1976, 127-140.

<sup>4</sup> See J.L. Lightfoot, "Galli in the Cult of the Dea Syria", in S. Tougher (ed.), *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, Cardiff 2002, 71-86.

<sup>5</sup> Most recently: J. Elsner, "Describing Self in the language of Other: Pseudo (?) Lucian at the temple of Hierapolis", in S. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*, Cambridge 2001, 123-153.

what extent are his stances influenced by the literary genre or genres within which he writes, and are there features of *DDS* for which earlier writing has not prepared us? What is the meaning of the ethnic terms and labels that the author uses, or that we ourselves might use, to characterise the speaking voice in *DDS* or the culture he describes?

First of all, we must face up to the problem of the text's ascription. Transmitted in the Lucianic corpus, *DDS* has nonetheless provoked doubts about its authenticity; these doubts were articulated within a century of the *editio princeps* and still dog the subject today<sup>6</sup>. Lucian was a native of the Commagenian city of Samosata and remained highly conscious of his origins<sup>7</sup>. Aramaic may or may not have been his first language<sup>8</sup>, but he was utterly at home in Greek literature, a skilled and clever mimic, and on that level a highly plausible author for *DDS*. On the other hand, his very adoption of Greek aesthetic values and his aggressively sceptical attitude towards religion have counted against his authorship: if genuine (the argument has gone), it must really be a satire of its subject. This article is not intended to contribute to the debate on authorship *per se* which (as I shall argue in my forthcoming commentary) I think highly likely to be resolvable in Lucian's favour<sup>9</sup>. Rather, I believe that the mistake lies in assuming that his literary mode is inevitably satirical - for what gives us the right to confine the brilliant Lucian to writing always in a single mode and with the same agenda? The difficulties here begin with those inherent in all ethnography. We are presented with a description of a native temple town, a so-called 'oriental religion' in its native setting. Is the treatise useful evidence for the cult of Atargatis itself, and can we draw any more general conclusions from it about the culture of this segment of Roman Syria at the date of the treatise's composition? What problems do attempts to answer this question bring to light in the representation of foreign peoples in classical ethnography? How are matters complicated by literary imitation, by pastiche, and how do we assess *DDS*'s tone? Above all: what to make of the fact that its narrator (who cannot simply be assumed to be identical with the author, whether Lucian or not) labels himself a local, in fact an erstwhile participant in one of the rituals he describes (§§1, 60)? What are the implications of bringing on a (potential) insider to speak?

<sup>6</sup> See most recently: L. Dirven, "The Author of 'De Dea Syria' and his Cultural Heritage", *Numen* 44, 1997, 153–179, and T. Polański, *Oriental Art in Greek Imperial Literature*, Trier 1998, 79–117 and 197–207 = "Is it or is it not Lucian's? An Art Historian's Supplement to the Controversy over the Authorship of the "Syrian Goddess" ", *Polska Akademia Umiejętności: Prace Komisji Filologii Klasycznej* 27, 1998, 161–84, both denying *DDS* to Lucian. *Contra*, Elsner, "Describing Self", 153 finds (despite his title) it "hard - with such a clever piece - not to believe it was written by Lucian".

<sup>7</sup> *Hist. Conscr.* 24, *Scyth.* 9, *Adv. Indoct.* 19, *Hal.* 19, *Bis Acc.* 14, 25–34.

<sup>8</sup> Various argued; for example, S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50–250*, Oxford, 1996, 299 n. 5, 307, believes Lucian's reference to a barbarian φωνή means a thick accent or provincial Greek, while H.-G. Nesselrath, in M. Ebner - H. Gzella - H.-G. Nesselrath - E. Ribbat (eds.), *Lukian: Die Lügenfreunde oder: Der Ungläubige*, Darmstadt 2001, 12 canvasses the possibility of Aramaic or Syriac. The rhetorical context of *Bis Accusatus* 27 makes it likely that Lucian means at least to *imply* the use of a language other than Greek.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. e.g. the topos of bearded Apollo (*DDS* §35, *Icaronem.* 28, *De Sacr.* 11, *Jup. Trag.* 26); the cult of Aphrodite and Adonis on Lebanon (*DDS* §§6–9, *Adv. Indoct.* 3, *Dial. Deor.* 19.1); the interest in Stratonice (*DDS* §§17–27; *Icarom.* 15; *Calumn.* 14; *Salt.* 58; *Hist. Conscr.* 35) and in Nireus (*DDS* §40, *Tim.* 23; *Necy.* 15; *Pro Imag.* 2; *Dial. Mort.* 5.1, 19.4, 30); the perfumes of Arabia (*DDS* §30; *VH* 2.5); above all, the remarkable dialectal and stylistic correspondences between *DDS*, the *Astrologia*, and the *Vitarum Auctio*.

Before we go any further, it is worth pausing to reflect on the fact that *DDS* exists at all. Our map of classical Syria and Phoenicia, as it emerges from literary sources, concentrates, on the one hand, on the Graeco-Macedonian foundations in the north of Syria, and on the other, on the great and ancient mercantile centres of coastal Phoenicia - Sidon, Tyre, Byblos<sup>10</sup>. These had long been accommodated within classical frameworks; they had been equipped with mythologies, concerning such figures as Cadmus, Europa, Agenor, Adonis; and literary traditions had come to attach to them: Homer referred to Sidon, Herodotus claimed to have visited Tyre<sup>11</sup>. As an inland, ancient Aramaic temple-town<sup>12</sup>, without a high-profile connection to classical mythology, with no Homer or Herodotus to ground its appeal to classical observers, Hierapolis' obviousness as a place for a classical author's gaze to fall on should not be taken for granted. It registered sporadically in scholarly and mythographical literature from the Hellenistic period onwards<sup>13</sup>, but nothing that prepares us for the full-blown travelogue that we encounter in *DDS*.

The approach is immediately reminiscent of Herodotus, especially his ethnographical *tour-de-force* in book 2, devoted to ancient Egypt. This is explicit in the fact that the treatise's language is a highly accomplished imitation of Herodotus' Ionic, and not only of its dialect, its peculiarities of style, and idioms, but also of the personality of the Herodotean narrator (fussy, naïve, garrulous) and the entire stance of Herodotean ethnographic narrative<sup>14</sup>. The sections of the treatise - mythological traditions (§§12–27), topography (§§28–41), and ritual peculiarities (§§42–60) - all correspond well to Herodotean categories of ethnographical analysis. And yet there are also important senses in which the treatise is unHerodotean. Whereas Herodotean ethnography was devoted to foreign, exotic peoples, a way of bringing them within the sight-lines of classical civilisation and rendering them interpretable by it, Hierapolis was in the middle of territory which, by the date this treatise was written, had been familiar to classical civilisations for centuries. So whatever else the treatise's aim might be, it is not to explicate something newly-discovered to a Greek readership. Secondly, the travelogue is not embedded into a wider work on geography and history, but is a self-standing, specialist monograph. In this respect it is more like the countless lost Hellenistic treatises devoted to particular localities - a branch of Peripatetic-inspired περὶ-literature, specialist

<sup>10</sup> For Phoenicia in the Greek novel, see F. Briquel-Chatonnet, "L'image des Phéniciens dans les romans grecs", in M.-F. Baslez - P. Hoffmann - M. Trédé (edd.), *Le Monde du roman grec*, Paris 1992, 189–197, recapitulated by F. Zeitlin, "Visions and revisions of Homer", in S. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*, Cambridge 2001, 264–266. For the literary map of Syro-Phoenicia, see the remarks of F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC–AD 337*, Cambridge MA 1993, 246; T. Polański, *Oriental Art*, 99 = "Is it or is it not Lucian's?", 181. Another author who notices Hierapolis is Macrobius' source for the speech of Praetextatus (*Sat.* 1.17–23), where the city's cult statues are described beside those of Heliopolis / Baalbek and Aphaca (inland of Byblos).

<sup>11</sup> *Hdt.* 2.44; *Hom. Il.* 6.290–1, 23.743; *Od.* 4.84, 4.618 = 15.118, 13.285.

<sup>12</sup> For Hierapolis' early history, see *RAC* 15 (1991), s.v. Hierapolis (Mabbog), 29 (H.J.W. Drijvers). Though it is first mentioned in Assyrian documents, the first analysable evidence is the series of coins struck under its priest-kings (Seyrig, "Monnayage") on the eve of the Hellenistic period.

<sup>13</sup> References assembled by P.-L. van Berg, *Corpus Cultus Deae Syriae*, 2 vols., Leiden 1972.

<sup>14</sup> To be discussed at length in Part Two of Lightfoot, *Lucian, 'On the Syrian Goddess'*.

monographs 'about' a place or thing, which in fact becomes explicit in the title *On* (περὶ) *the Syrian Goddess*. Of an antiquarian character and, in Jacoby's words, employing "die grösste Ausführlichkeit, Vollständigkeit und entsprechende Genauigkeit in der (weitgehend historischen) Kommentierung der Denkmäler"<sup>15</sup>, these Hellenistic treatises were often written by local patriots, of old Greece or of Asia Minor. So *DDS* has it both ways. The Herodotean voice implies foreign, even exotic, subject-matter. The specialist Hellenistic monograph is more likely to be the work of the patriot, antiquarian, or periegete, not necessarily so overtly exoticising a treatment. Furthermore, Jacoby's list of specialist monographs devoted to the cities of Syro-Phoenicia and their cults confirms *DDS*'s peculiarity<sup>16</sup>. Not only are specialist writings of this type rare in comparison to those on the traditions and cults of old Greece (and Syria tends to receive less attention than the cities of Phoenicia), but attention here is directed towards an unusual subject. Other writings on northern Syria concern the Seleucid foundations of the tetrapolis, and the only other περὶ- treatise known to have concerned itself with the cults of northern Syria is a work on the festivals of Antioch's suburb, Daphne<sup>17</sup> - that is, it dealt precisely with one of these Hellenistic foundations, not with an indigenous religious centre, an ancient temple-town.

The creative tension between the different vantage-points implied by the Herodotean and Hellenistic genres comes to a head in the person of the narrator, who writes as an external observer, but also identifies himself as a local. He introduces himself as an Ἀσσύριος (§1), the same label as he uses for his subjects (§§23, 33, 56, 59), and at the end reveals himself an (erstwhile) devotee and participant in the rituals of the Holy City (§60 τοῦτο καὶ ἐγὼ νέος ἔτι ὧν ἐπετέλεσα). Herodotus never went this far, and Lucian's contemporary, the Greek periegete Pausanias, only very sporadically presents himself as a participant in the cults he visits<sup>18</sup>. Yet it is impossible to pin down the author/narrator of *DDS*. He gestures at, but ultimately does not fall into line with, any of the classical conventions of self-reference at the beginning and / or end of a historical or geographical treatise<sup>19</sup>. He conspicuously does *not* give his name, and the ethnic adjective he chooses, Ἀσσύριος, is precisely that, 'ethnic': not (with Herodotus of Halicarnassus and subsequent Greek historiographical tradition) the name of his city. But what sort of ethnic? While it is redolent of the ancient empires of the Near East, it originates in a Greek literary conceit and equates with 'Syrian'<sup>20</sup>. What sort of racial self-consciousness does it imply?

<sup>15</sup> Jacoby on *FGrH* 369 (IIIb Komm. pp. 132–134). On the Hellenistic periegesis, see also W. Kroll, *Studien zum Verständnis der römischen Literatur*, Stuttgart 1924, 311–313.

<sup>16</sup> On Syria: *FGrH* IIIc p. 934 and nos. 848–55; on Phoenicia: *FGrH* 783–94; cf. also *FHG* iv. p. 688.

<sup>17</sup> *FGrH* 853 F 2 (F 1 names Περὶ Δαφνικῶν ἀγώνων). A work on the foundation of Antioch by the 4<sup>th</sup>-c. Pausanias of Antioch, *FGrH* 854.

<sup>18</sup> I. Rutherford, "Tourism and the Sacred: Pausanias and the Traditions of Greek Pilgrimage", in S.E. Alcock - J.F. Cherry - J. Elsner (edd.), *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece*, Oxford and New York 2001, 43.

<sup>19</sup> D. Earl, *ANRW* i/2, 842–856; Hornblower on Thuc. 1.1.1; J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography*, Cambridge 1997, 271–275; K.J. Clarke, "In Search of the Author of Strabo's Geography", *JRS* 87, 1997, 94–97.

<sup>20</sup> T. Nöldeke, 'Ἀσσύριος, Σύριος, Σύρος', *Hermes* 5, 1871, 443–468; Millar, *Roman Near East*, 454–455.

First, however, we should consider some of the ways in which he adopts a Herodotean voice, that of a Greek and an outsider registering foreign marvels. According to one of the classic manoeuvres of such writing, he presents his subject as alien, exotic, 'other'. True, the Hierapolitans themselves are not called βάρβαροι<sup>21</sup>, but they are, notwithstanding, characterised as not-Greek. The treatise's subjects are Ἀσούριοι, presented as an apparently distinctive national or ethnic unit (§59). Several times they are compared and contrasted with what 'the Greeks' do, thereby distinguishing them from Greeks as a group. They use items of (Greek) vocabulary in specialised local senses (§56, διδάσκαλοι); one ambiguous passage might - though need not - be taken to imply that a native, indigenous word might have been used (though was not) in place of a Greek one (§33, on the religious standard known as the σημήιον). One Herodotean mannerism is to call attention to a feature in which a foreign people supposedly correspond uniquely to a Greek one: just as Herodotus' Egyptians uniquely match the Spartans in rising from their chairs in the presence of an elder, so Lucian's Hierapolitans correspond uniquely with the people of Troezen in celebrating a certain hair-cutting ritual<sup>22</sup>. The temple is characterised as an exotic holy place, not only overtly by emphasis on barbarian wealth, the holy of holies dripping with gold and precious stones, but also more subtly, linguistically, in ways not necessarily evident until the Herodotean linguistic model is studied in detail. For example, the adjective ἅγιος is applied to the temple (§10 οὐδὲ νηὸς ἄλλος ἁγιώτερος, §13 νηὸν ... Ἡρῆς ἅγιον). But in Herodotus and other literary authors, ἅγιος is the epithet of non-Greek temples, Egyptian, Phoenician, or Anatolian<sup>23</sup>. If *DDS* follows Herodotean usage, then it characterises Hierapolis' religious culture as not-Greek.

Although the tendency in this work, as in Greek ethnography in general, is to concentrate on procedure rather than rationale or theory<sup>24</sup>, the narrator does on one occasion put into the mouths of the Hierapolitans a reflection about their own religion, and immediately afterwards a criticism of Greek practice. He explains that they make no divine images of the sun and moon because these, alone among the gods, are visible to all; what point, therefore, in making statues of them (§34)? He then goes on to comment that the Hierapolitans have a bearded Apollo, in contrast to the usual smooth-cheeked Greek god, and in this they praise themselves and blame the Hellenes (§35), claiming that it is 'unwisdom', ἀσοφίη, to depict a god as immature (ἄτελής). This is the only episode in the treatise where the Hierapolitans are presented as bearers of a culture actually opposed to that of the Greeks. It might at first sight be taken as evidence for something extremely important, for which there is precious little hard evidence in the Levant other

<sup>21</sup> βάρβαρος occurs in §11 (of one of the competing foundation-myths of the temple) and §16, of clothes dedicated in the temple; but is it focalised by the narrator or by the Hierapolitans themselves?

<sup>22</sup> *DDS* §60, and Hdt. 2.80.1, cf. also 1.195.1, 1.196.1, Arrian, *Ind.* 10.8-9.

<sup>23</sup> 2.41.5 (Hathor in the west Delta of the Nile), 2.44.1 (Milqart in Tyre), 5.119.2 (Zeus Labrayndeus in Caria). The only other pagan author I have found who applies ἅγιος to νεὸς is Aelian, *VH* 1.15, of the Phoenician temple of Astarte on Eryx; Jewish authors apply it to the Temple in Jerusalem, and Christian writers use the phrase νεὸς ἅγιος both literally and metaphorically.

<sup>24</sup> J. Gould, "Herodotus and Religion", in S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography*, Oxford 1994, 98-106; A. Henrichs, "Dromena und Legomena: Zum rituellen Selbstverständnis der Griechen", in F. Graf (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale*, Stuttgart 1998, 33-71.

than the Jews - the existence of a culture that consciously differentiated itself from that of its Graeco-Macedonian or Graeco-Roman overlords<sup>25</sup>. But on closer inspection, parallels in Herodotean ethnography complicate the picture. At 1.216.4, another foreign people, this time the Scythians, reason aprioristically about their worship of the Sun, in terms which can readily be paralleled from Greek theory (see Asheri ad loc.). And in 1.131, Herodotus discusses the Persians' refusal to make anthropomorphic images of the gods, their worship of the sun and moon, and their imputation of 'folly' (μωρίην) to those who do otherwise (i.e., the Greeks). Here we are on similar ground: not an identical claim, but precedent for a manoeuvre in which the subjects of ethnography criticise classical culture - and in doing so articulate a view which had already been put forward by Greek intellectuals. Critics had already been sceptical of whether Herodotus' Persians could really have thought like this; Walter Burkert commented that "Es handelt sich um eine Rekonstruktion, nicht um Feldnotizen", and that the Persians are made practitioners and exponents of a recent piece of *Greek* theoretical speculation<sup>26</sup>. Much the same applies to Lucian's Hierapolitans, whose views that manifest gods need no images, and that youth is a state of ἀτέλεια, are presented as distinctive elements of local culture, and yet can both be paralleled in Greek theory (Plat. *Leg.* 931 A; Arist. *Pol.* 1275<sup>a</sup>14–17). If this is right, it becomes, not simply a question of whether the Hierapolitans thought like this or not, whether or not they consciously differentiated themselves from Greeks, but also of the presentation and stylisation of their views using literary techniques which the author had inherited from Herodotean ethnography.

A paradox of the ethnographer's position is that, even as he presents his subject as an exotic 'other', he also imposes Greek interpretations and a classical explanatory framework on it. This complicates the presentation of the mythology and divinities of Hierapolis. Thus, the treatment of Hierapolis proper begins with a discussion of the temple's foundation myths. It adduces Deucalion (§§12–13), Semiramis and her mother Derceto (§14), Rhea (Cybele) and Attis (§15), and finally Dionysus and Hera (§16). One could argue about the extent to which each myth is likely to have been embedded in local tradition, and each is certainly of different status. Thus, the story about Semiramis looks to derive from the classical historiographer-cum-fabulist Ctesias, while 'Deucalion' bears an uncanny resemblance to the Biblical Noah<sup>27</sup>. But the most important point here is the arrangement of the whole discussion as a sort of large-scale priamel in which the first

<sup>25</sup> And is so taken by J. Elsner, "The Origins of the Icon: Pilgrimage, Religion and Visual Culture in the Roman East as "Resistance" to the Centre", in S. E. Alcock (ed.), *The Early Roman Empire in the East*, Oxford 1997, 195, speaking of "a self-assertive assault on the Graeco-Roman culture of the conqueror ... Despite centuries of conquest, hellenization and romanization, Lucian's sacred Syria ... affirms its superiority through the continuance of its most holy traditions of knowledge manifested in images". See also Dirven, "Author of 'De Dea Syria' ", 166, and Elsner, "Describing Self", 140, 150 n. 68. For the problem, Millar, *Roman Near East*, 503–510, 517.

<sup>26</sup> W. Burkert, "Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen", in G. Nenci (ed.), *Hérodote et les peuples non grecs: neuf exposés suivis de discussions*, Geneva 1990, 20–21.

<sup>27</sup> Dependence on Ctesias (*FGrH* 688 F 1b (4–20)) in *DDS* §14 is indicated by the mention of Semiramis' mother, Derceto, by the particulars of the myth (Derceto has partially the form of a fish; her daughter, Semiramis, is transformed into a dove), and by the veiled reference to Ascalon, Ctesias' own setting. Parallels between Deucalion and Noah (cf. Gen. 6–7) in §12 include the fact that the animals enter the ark *in pairs*; that Deucalion is accompanied by his extended family; the piety that preserves him; the waterworks that break from the earth itself as well as the heavens.

terms are mentioned only be discarded, eventually, in favour of the last. I suspect very strongly that what Lucian has done here is to arrange his foundation-myths in a pattern taken over from the beginning of Herodotus' fourth book, his ethnography of Scythia (Hdt. 4.5–12). Points of similarity are that both feature the standard Greek foundation-heroes (Heracles / Dionysus); both appeal to proofs for the various traditions in the form of local festivals, νόμοι, and monuments; and both eventually settle on the version on which Greeks and foreigners are supposed to agree, supporting their case by appeal to material remains<sup>28</sup>. Whether or not any of these myths had any local status in Hierapolis - and at least some of them look to have been drawn from a κοινή of literary traditions about the east - it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they have been carefully arranged in an inherited Greek literary scheme.

The presentation of Hierapolis' deities is complicated to an equally great extent by a classicising garb whose correspondence to local realities is almost impossible to gauge. Hierapolis' deities are referred to by their *interpretationes graecae* throughout. It is important that this approach is *hyper*-Herodotean. Herodotus is one of the first exponents of the technique of equating foreign gods with Greek apparently without any embarrassment or sense of anything other than a one-to-one correspondence; but not even he had insisted on this approach to all foreign deities, some of whom appear under their native names (as, for example, Al(i)lat, Atargatis' Arabian relative)<sup>29</sup>. Not so Hierapolis, where the names are uncompromisingly classical: the chief deities appear as Zeus and Hera, accompanied by a retinue of lesser deities including Apollo (§§35–7), Atlas, Hermes, Eileithuia (§38), and a gallery of well-known Greek mythological characters (§40). Fascinating though the implications of the latter are - did the Hierapolitans really portray the heroes of the Trojan cycle on their altars<sup>30</sup>? - it is the identifications of the chief deities that I am most concerned with. Here we are almost equally frustrated with respect to the historical realities underlying the text. And yet a few scattered clues indicate that the relationship of *DDS* to the extra-textual world is very complex.

In one case, at least, it is likely that the narrator's *interpretatio graeca* reflects local conditions. After describing the two chief deities, he mentions an oracular god whom he calls Apollo. But this deity figures in another work - a Syriac treatise dealing at some length with local cults in Roman Syria - under the name of Nebo<sup>31</sup>. Nebo, or Nabu, was the Babylonian god of scribes; there is evidence for the diffusion of his cult throughout Mesopotamia and Syria in the Roman period. But we know also that in Seleucid Babylon, in Dura Europos and elsewhere, Nebo was indeed equated with Apollo, and

<sup>28</sup> Compare §15 ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλος λόγος ἰρός ~ Hdt. 4.11.1 ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλος λόγος ἔχων ὠδε; §16 ἀνδάνει δὲ μοι ἃ λέγουσιν τοῦ ἱεροῦ περὶ τοῖσι Ἕλλησι τὰ πολλὰ ὁμολογεύοντες ~ Hdt. 4.11.1 ... τῶ μάλιστα λεγομένῳ αὐτὸς πρόσκειμαι ... 4.12.3 οὗτος δὲ ἄλλος ζυγὸς Ἑλλήνων τε καὶ βαρβάρων λεγόμενος λόγος εἴρηται. For the Herodotean scheme, see E. Norden, *Die germanische Urgeschichte in Tacitus Germania*<sup>4</sup>, Stuttgart 1959, 42–52.

<sup>29</sup> See I.M. Linforth, "Greek Gods and Foreign Gods in Herodotus", UCP 9/1, 1926, 1–25, and the table of Herodotean identifications on 6–7; for a recent discussion of Herodotean *interpretationes graecae*, T.E.H. Harrison, *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus*, Oxford 2000, 209–212.

<sup>30</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, cf. the Babylonian tapestries embroidered, according to Philostratus, VA 1.25, with images of Andromeda, Amymone, Orpheus; Zeitlin, "Visions and Revisions", 264.

<sup>31</sup> W. Cureton, *Spicilegium Syriacum*, London 1855, 44–45; for Nebo, F. Pomponio, *Nabû: Il culto e la figura di un dio del Pantheon babilonese ed assiro*, Rome 1978, and LIMC s.v. *Nabu* (A. Bounni).

onomastic evidence from near Hierapolis confirms the equivalence; a name Βαρνεβοῦν is rendered Ἀπολλινάριος in Greek<sup>32</sup>. In this case, therefore, Lucian's Apollo is quite likely to reflect a known, local identification. However, in the case of Hadad - Atargatis' male partner - the narrator tells us expressly that "although he is Zeus, they call him by another name" (§31). Although he does not mention that name explicitly, a little dedication to Hadad found near Hierapolis indicates that the thunder-god still retained his original, Aramaic, name as late as the third century AD<sup>33</sup>. Here, then, the narrator correctly signals that the Greek name is not the local one.

But what is most interesting, perhaps, is the identification of the Syrian Goddess herself as Hera. This is presented in Herodotean style as an established and self-evident fact. And yet in the epigraphic evidence, the only secure *interpretatio graeca* of Atargatis is Aphrodite, and by the centuries AD this is falling into disuse; moreover, there is no evidence that it had any currency in Syria itself, where the original, Aramaic name – Atargatis - survives longest. Coins of Hierapolis itself use various forms of the Aramaic name in the Hellenistic period, and by the Roman period have switched to 'Syrian Goddess of the Hierapolitans'<sup>34</sup>. In short: although the equation 'Hera' is presented as a self-evident given, it is, as far as we can see, a literary equation, and a minority one at that<sup>35</sup>. It may be based on the narrator's presumption that Hierapolis' queenly chief deity, female partner of Zeus, must equate with the Greek queen of the gods, although it does also occur in a myth set at the river Aborrhias in Mesopotamia, told by Aelian from an unknown source, about a goddess who, like Atargatis, is associated with sacred fish (*NA* 12.30).

However, when he comes to describe her cult-statue, the narrator admits that this one-to-one equation is challenged. "While the overall effect is certainly that of Hera, she also has something of Athena and Aphrodite and Selene and Rhea and Artemis and Nemesis and the Fates" (§32). Here, in fact, a deeply un-Herodotean attitude to *interpretatio Graeca* is implied: there is no apparently simple, unquestioned, one-for-one correspondence, as in Herodotus, but rather an acknowledgement that the correspondence can only be general, may be inexact, in need of qualification. It is not the case, as in Herodotus, that the foreign people has merely happened upon a different name for the same divine essence; rather, the overlap with each Greek deity is only partial, provisional, and a whole palette of Greek goddesses must be used to help the narrator render Atargatis' features. But what is the passage's effect? Does it illustrate some of the ways in which the goddess was, or had become, amenable to interpretation by Greek spectators? Does it illustrate some of the ways in which she could be interpreted in a Greek theological vocabulary? Or, on the contrary, does it succeed rather in showing her

<sup>32</sup> Babylon: Strab. 16.1.7, cf. L. Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos: A Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria*, Leiden 1999, 135–146. Onomastics: *IGLS* i. 166, from Ishahie, ancient Nicopolis, about 80 miles from Hierapolis, dated 3rd–4th c. AD. Theophoric names compounded with Apoll- are frequent in the inscriptions both of Hierapolis itself and of the Hierapolitan community on Hellenistic Delos (*IGLS* i. 237, 238A, 245, 247, 248; *IDel* 2226, 2259).

<sup>33</sup> H. Seyrig, "Antiquités syriennes 30. Inscriptions", *Syria* 20, 1939, 304 (AD 233/4).

<sup>34</sup> For the Hellenistic series, see Seyrig, "Monnayage", and H.J.W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs of Edessa*, Leiden 1980, 89–91; for the Roman coins, *BMC Syria*, 138–146.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Plut. *Crass.* 17.6. In Firm. Mat. *Err.* 4.1–2, 'Assyrian Juno' has been taken to refer to Astarte. The onomastic evidence is evaluated fully in my commentary.



radical *difference* from a Greek deity, by the failure of the Greek vocabulary to provide an exact analogue<sup>36</sup>? Or is it merely irrelevant if her name was now - as at least it is on the city's imperial coins - 'Syrian Goddess of the Hierapolitans'? Does the host of Greek interpretations stem from the author's determined adherence to a Greek explanatory framework, serving only to undermine it by illustrating its imprecision?

I have been arguing that the narrator of *DDS* exhibits two countervailing tendencies. He both exoticises his subject and interprets it through a Greek perspective; the result, where testable, seems to bear a very oblique relation to the reality that it purports to describe. But now we must face the additional tissue of complications presented by his own speaking voice. In the periegetic sections of the treatise he is ever-present as a fussy and interventionist guide; he is ever-ready with claims to autopsy (e.g. §§6, 9, 10, 13, 40 εἶδον, §3 ὄπωπα), some of which are carefully qualified so that we are under no illusion about what he has and has not seen (e.g. §§5, 48). What sort of an individual is it through whose eyes we are looking, and what is the literary function of these hammered repetitions of autopsy? On one obvious level, they are modelled on the claims of Herodotus himself; there is a particular echo of Herodotus' visit to Tyre, which evidently prompted the narrator's own excursion to the same city<sup>37</sup>. But there have been voices since antiquity doubting the true extent of Herodotus' travels (including the journey to Tyre)<sup>38</sup>. Those who accept the Lucianic authorship of the treatise, but consider that that entails a satirical, or cynical, attitude to its subject, might hold to a position of extreme scepticism: these are 'lie-signals'<sup>39</sup>, with the same function as such protestations have in (say) Lucian's genuine *True Stories*. The narrator protests too much: he never visited the place at all. I hope that we can transcend this ultra-sceptical, ultra-reductive position, which does not easily admit of refutation in the absence of evidence about the 'real' personality behind *DDS* and his movements. For what it is worth, I think the text contains sufficiently clear nuggets of genuine information as to make it highly probable that the treatise rests ultimately on first-hand information, wherever it came from. But more to the point is that the treatise does present some radical discontinuities with 'lying-literature' like the *True Stories*, which after all own up to being fiction. If there is uncertainty about the person of the narrator, it surrounds the *stance* of the individual who claims to have done the seeing. For (as we saw) the narrator initially declares himself to be a Syrian, and, at the end, to have taken part in the temple's rituals. Are his insistent claims to autopsy, therefore, simply the scientific, verifying 'I saw' of the

<sup>36</sup> Elsner, "Origins of the Icon", 194.

<sup>37</sup> §9 ἀνέβην ... πυθόμενος ~ 2.44 ἐπλευσα ... πυνθανόμενος.

<sup>38</sup> Ancient doubt: Arist. *Or.* 36.46–57 Keil; modern doubters include O. Kimball Armayor, "Sesostris and Herodotus' autopsy of Thrace, Colchis, Inland Asia Minor, and the Levant", *HSCP* 84, 1980, 51–74, and Herodotus' *Autopsy of the Fayoum*, Amsterdam 1985; D. Fehling, *Herodotus and his 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art*, transl. J.G. Howie, Leeds 1989; R. Rollinger, *Herodots babylonischer Logos: eine kritische Untersuchung der Glaubwürdigkeitsdiskussion an Hand ausgewählter Beispiele*, Innsbruck 1993. Herodotus has been spiritedly defended by W. Kendrick Pritchett, *The Liar School of Herodotus*, Amsterdam 1993; S. Dalley, *OLZ* 91, 1996, 525–532; and others.

<sup>39</sup> H. Weinrich, *Linguistik der Lüge*, Heidelberg 1966; Munich 2000; cf. especially 2000, 70–78. See, for example, attempts to treat certain *periplus* texts as fictive Greek explorations of *altérité*: Clarke, "In Search", 97

ethnographer<sup>40</sup>? Or is there also a sense in which his εἶδον and ὄπωπα reflect the 'seeing' which was an integral part of the experience of the pilgrim<sup>41</sup>?

There is a certain distancing effect here. What the narrator says is that there was a custom, in the temple, of dedicating locks of hair which had been allowed to grow from birth; they were cut, and deposited in gold and silver containers inscribed with the name of the devotee (§60). He had participated in this ritual in his youth, in the past tense - though the lock and his name are still there. However we interpret the tone here (confiding? whimsical? nostalgic?), it sounds like a statement on some level of continuing - or at least still-unsevered - religious affiliation, with all the complex connections to ethnic identity that that might entail; and here we reach one of the text's most fundamental cruces. Since this is a self-labelled Syrian speaking, is he using a Greek vocabulary and explanatory framework, a set of inherited ethnographic conventions, to represent something that resists description in Greek terms at all? Is his ethnography of an Aramaic temple only possible at the price of its misrepresentation<sup>42</sup>? Could we but know it, did the Syrians - as *DDS*'s own references to peculiarities of local terminology might imply - have a language that is fundamentally different and inaccessible to us, displaced in this text by the prestigious Greek idiom?

Here is a case in point. In the throes of hyperbole, he avers that among no other people is there a sanctuary as holy as that of the Hierapolitans; "the gods are extremely manifest to them" (§10 καὶ θεοὶ δὲ κάρτα αὐτοῖσιν ἐμφανέες). The word he uses for 'manifest', ἐμφανέες, is a less common alternative to ἐπιφανείς or ἐναργεῖς, though still attested in the inscriptional record (as in a famous inscription from second-century Didyma)<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, it is a favourite word of the author of this treatise; he uses it eight times in all. The question is: if the Syrian narrator were left to his own devices, untrammelled by Greek literary convention, would he have presented the Hierapolitans' experience of their gods in a different way? Again, immediately afterwards he discusses the ways in which this intense divine presence makes itself manifest: it is a question of the sweating and spontaneous movement of statues, booming voices emerging from the closed sanctuary. All these are common themes in Greek literature, in particular in the Alexander historians and afterwards, where they figure as sinister portents before the battle of Chaeronea and sack of Thebes<sup>44</sup>. The sinister connotations here are absent, but the *topoi* themselves remain the same. The same question arises. Is the Hierapolitan experience of the divine framed in these terms, which are essentially Greek, only because the narrator has adopted a set of Greek *topoi* and stylisations along with the Greek language and genre? Or is he rather reflecting the situation in real-life Hierapolis, which shared or had borrowed similar *topoi* about divine epiphany? Must he, insofar as he is a

<sup>40</sup> C. Dewald, "Narrative Surface and Authorial Voice in Herodotus' Histories", *Arethusa* 20, 1987, 147-170, especially 155-159.

<sup>41</sup> I. C. Rutherford, "Theoria and Darśan: Pilgrimage and Vision in Greece and India", *CQ* 50, 2000, 133-146, and id., "Tourism", 43; *Eur. Ion* 184-218, cf. 232-4; *Herod. Mim.* 4.20-78.

<sup>42</sup> Elsner, "Describing Self", 137, of Hierapolis: "Clearly, the categories available in Greek mythology and the Greek language are simply insufficient to accommodate the sacred identity of *an entirely different cultural world*" (my italics).

<sup>43</sup> *Inscr. Didyma* (Rehm), 496 A 3-6; cf. also Aesch. *Pers.* 518 ὄψις ἐμφανῆς ἐνυπνίων; Diog. Laert. *Proem.* 7 θεοὺς αὐτοῖς ἐμφανίζεσθαι λέγοντας (sc. the Persian magi); Matthew 27:53.

<sup>44</sup> *Ap. Rhod.* 4.1284-5, and scholia; *Diod. Sic.* 17.10.4; *Quint. Smyrn.* 12.507-9.

patriotic Syrian, use a foreign idiom in order to speak at all? Are the Hierapolitans Semites with strange practices and attitudes that encourage, but ultimately baffle, translation into a Graeco-Roman conceptual framework? Or is it in large part *DDS* itself and its generic stances that persuades us that they are?

I confess that the paper must end with a *non liquet*, but it is one that ought to make us stop and reflect on the pitfalls of ethnic essentialism. What does it mean to accept the narrator's own terms, Ἕλληνες and Ἀσσύριοι; to adhere to the underlying Herodotean framework, which sets two cultures over against each other; and to perpetuate the language of scholarship which implicitly follows this by labelling Hierapolis' culture 'Semitic'? Some of the archaeological data I have mentioned speaks for the influence of Greek culture; but how useful are blanket terms like 'Hellenisation' to describe a complex and no doubt many-tiered reality? Our questions must be far more differentiated, but to make real progress we would have to have far more plentiful material remains from Hierapolis than we do. The city's imperial inscriptions mention the standard accoutrements of a Graeco-Roman polis; a βουλή, a δῆμος, and Greek games<sup>45</sup>. There is a good proportion of Aramaic among the personal names mentioned in inscriptions. But that tells us little or nothing about the complexion of the city's religious culture. Did the temple's liturgy, for example, employ a different language? For what numismatic evidence is worth, a series of coins struck at the dawn of the Hellenistic period shows the city's two supreme deities with certain highly archaic or archaistic traits, including hair-styles with striking continuity with evidence from Ugarit<sup>46</sup>. By the Roman period, on the other hand, the goddess has doffed her Aramaic name and assumed certain characteristics familiar to the Greeks from the Graeco-Phrygian goddess Cybele<sup>47</sup>. In other words, it looks as if she has bought into an international repertoire that made her more readily comprehensible by classical onlookers, even if it was only in terms of an 'exotic' register already familiar to them elsewhere. So, if there is a clash between the idiom of *DDS* and the reality of the cult of Atargatis - as there surely is - it might be better to avoid assuming that the culture of the Syrians was radically 'other', that the Greek idiom is a wholly false and alien imposition. The artificial, literary idiom of the Herodotean travelogue should not necessarily persuade us that what it describes is intrinsically incommunicable in 'Greek' terms. Rather, it may have been piquantly defamiliarised in Herodotean ones.

Finally, the presentation of ethnic identity in this treatise is complicated even further by the question of the environment in which it was written and published. But of this next to nothing is known. If Lucian wrote it, it may - though need not - have been for performance on the Mediterranean-wide lecture-circuit which he travelled as a *rhetor*<sup>48</sup>. We know, on the one hand, that a piece entitled *Herodotus* (a suitable prologue for *DDS*?) was performed in one of the cities of Macedonia, and, on the other, that at a

<sup>45</sup> *IGLS* i. 233 and iv. 1265 = *JGR* iii. 1012, ll. 21–2 (AD 214 / 221).

<sup>46</sup> Seyrig, "Monnayage", no. 5, and p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Note in particular *LIMC* s.v. *Dea Syria*, nos. 8, 9, two coins from the reign of Caracalla, one of which shows the Syrian Goddess with tympanum enthroned between lions, and the other the Syrian Goddess with tympanum mounted on a lion's back-classic Cybele schemata.

<sup>48</sup> For a recent account of Lucian's career, see Nesselrath, *Lügenfreunde*, 12–15.

certain point in his career Lucian returned to visit his family in Syria<sup>49</sup>. But, as far as *DDS* itself is concerned, all is speculation. That leaves us ignorant whether the treatise might have been originally intended for a city of mainland Greece - perhaps one already permeated by Syrian or Anatolian cults? - or even for one in Syria itself. A Greek audience in Greece could enjoy the presentation of exotic wonders in the very literary style most suited to them. A Syrian audience, perhaps, could enjoy the presentation of what was perfectly familiar, only transmitted through a prestigious, highly idiosyncratic, occasionally comical, classical literary idiom. One can only imagine what the Hierapolitans themselves would have made of it all.

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<sup>49</sup> Lucian, *Herod.* 7, 8; the city may be Beroea (C.P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian*, Cambridge MA 1986, 11). J. Hall, *Lucian's Satire*, New York 1981, 380–381, suggests that *Herodotus* and *DDS* may have belonged together; interestingly, Beroea emerges from Lucian, *Asin.* 34, as a haunt of Atargatis' devotees, the galli. For Lucian's visit home, in the early 160's, see Nesselrath, *Lügenfreunde*, 13.