

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations*

ACO 2.5	Liberatus Carthaginiensis. <i>Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum</i> . Edited by Eduard Schwartz. Acta Conciliorum Œcumenicorum 2.5. Berlin–Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1936.
ÄHG	Jan Assmann. <i>Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete</i> . Freiburg in der Schweiz–Göttingen: Universitätsverlag–Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999.
BD	The “Book of the Dead.”
CC	<i>Clavis Coptica</i> (or <i>Clavis Patrum Copticorum</i>): http://www.cmcl.it/~cmcl/chiam_clavis.html .
CCL	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i> . Turnhout: Brepols, 1953ff.
C.Gloss.Biling.	<i>Glossaria Bilingua in Papyris et Membranis Reperta</i> . Edited by Johannes Kramer. Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen 30. Bonn: R. Habelt, 1983.
CIJ	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum: Jewish Inscriptions from the Third Century BC to the Seventh Century AD</i> . Edited by Jean Baptiste Frey. Vols. 1–2. Rome–Paris: Pontificio Istituto d’archeologia cristiana, 1936–1952; 2nd Edition. New York: Ktav, 1975.
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . Berlin: G. Raimer–W. de Gruyter, 1863ff.
CMCL	<i>Corpus dei manoscritti letterari copti</i> : http://www.cmcl.it .
CPJ	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i> . Edited by Victor Tcherikover, Avigdor Tcherikover, Alexander Fuks. Vols. 1–3. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957–1964.
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> . Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866ff.
CT	<i>The Egyptian Coffin Texts</i> . Vols. 1–8. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1935–2006.
Edfou	Maxence de Chalvet marquis de Rochemonteix, Émile Chassinat. <i>Le temple d’Edfou</i> . Vols. 1–10. Cairo: IFAO, 1897–1934.
Esna	Serge Sauneron. <i>Le temple d’Esna</i> . Vols. 1–6. Cairo: IFAO, 1959–1969.
FGH	<i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Edited by Felix Jacoby. Berlin; Leiden: Weidmann; E.J. Brill, 1923ff.
G ¹	The <i>Vita prima</i> of Pachomius (see Armand Veilleux. <i>Pachomian koinonia: The Lives, Rules, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples</i> . Vol. 1. Cistercian Studies 45. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980).
LSJ	Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott. <i>A Greek–English Lexicon</i> . Rev. and Augmented by Henry S. Jones with the Assistance of Roderick McKenzie. With a Revised Supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.

* Ancient works are abbreviated according to the *SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999). For those not listed here, the reader will find the first mention in extenso. The abbreviations listed here are a selection of the main collections and series cited in this volume. For other abbreviations, especially Greek, Latin, Demotic, Coptic editions, and papyri, ostraca and tablets, please refer to http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/clist_papyri.html and <http://papyri.info/docs/checklist>.

NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible</i> : http://www.biblestudytools.com/nas/ .
NETS	<i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . 2nd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i> : http://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/ .
OF	<i>Poetae Epici Graeci Testimonia et Fragmenta. II. Orphicorum et Orphicis similium testimonia et fragmenta</i> . Edited by Alberto Bernabé. Vols. 1–2. München–Leipzig: Saur. Vol. 3. Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004–2007.
P.Adler	<i>The Adler Papyri: The Greek Texts</i> . London: Milford, 1939.
P.Amh.	<i>The Amherst Papyri being an Account of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of the Right Hon. Lord Amherst of Hackney, at Didlington Hall, Norfolk</i> . Vols. 1–2. London–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900–1901.
P.Ant.	<i>The Antinoopolis Papyri</i> . Vols. 1–3. Egypt Exploration Society, Graeco-Roman Memoirs 28, 37, 47. London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1950–1967.
Pap.Flor.	<i>Papiri greco-egizi pubblicati dalla R. Accademia dei Lincei</i> . Vols. 1–3. Supplementi filologico-storici ai monumenti antichi. Milan–Rome: U. Hoepli–Reale Accademia dei Lincei, 1906–1915.
PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca</i> . Edited by Jacques–Paul Migne. Vols. 1–161. Paris: Bibliothecae Cleri Universae, 1856–1866.
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i> . Edited by Karl Preisendanz. Vols. 1–2. Berlin–Leipzig: Teubner, 1928–1931.
P.Hamb.	<i>Griechische Papyrusurkunden der Hamburger Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek</i> . Vols. 1–4. Berlin–Leipzig: Teubner; Hamburg–Bonn–Stuttgart–Leipzig: R. Habelt, 1911–1998.
P.Lond.	<i>Greek Papyri in the British Museum</i> . Vols. 1–7. London: British Museum, 1893–1974.
P.Lond.Lit.	<i>Catalogue of the Literary Papyri in the British Museum</i> . Edited by Herbert J.M. Milne. London: Trustees, 1927.
P.Mon.Epiph.	<i>The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, Part II</i> . Edited by Walter E. Crum, Hugh G. Evelyn-White. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, 1926.
P.Oxy.	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> . Vols. 1–80. London: The Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898–2014.
P.PalauRib.	<i>Papiri documentari greci del fondo Palau-Ribes</i> . Edited by Sergio Daris. Estudios de papirologia i filologia bíblica 4. Barcelona: Institut de teologia, 1995.
P.Ryl.	<i>Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library</i> . Vols. 1–4. Manchester–London–New York: The University Press–Longmans, 1911–1952.
PLRE	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> . Edited by Arnold H. Martin Jones, John R. Martindale, John Morris. Vols. 1–3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971–1992.
Pn	Ranke, Hermann. <i>Die ägyptischen Personennamen</i> . Vols. 1–3. Glückstadt: J.J. Augustin, 1935–1977.
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i> . Vols. 1–53. Paris: Firmin–Didot; Leuven: Brepols, 1904–2015.
PSI	<i>Papiri greci e latini</i> . Vols. 1–16. Florence: Pubblicazioni della Società italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto, 1917–2013.
PT	<i>Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte. Pyramidentexte nach den Papierabdrucken und Photographien des Berliner Museums</i> . Vols. 1–2. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1908–1910.

RIC	<i>Roman Imperial Coinage</i> . Vols. 1–10. London: Spink, 1923–1994.
RICIS	Bricault, Laurent. <i>Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques</i> . Mémoires de l'académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres 31. Paris: De Boccard, 2005.
SB	<i>Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten</i> . Vols. 1–28. Berlin–Leipzig: W. de Gruyter; Heidelberg: Im Selbstverlag des Verfassers; Straßburg: K.J. Trübner; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1913–2013.
SBo	Recension of the <i>Life of Pachomius</i> represented by the Bo, Av, S ⁴ , S ⁵ , S ⁶ , S ⁷ , etc. (Compiled and Translated by Armand Veilleux. <i>Pachomian Koinoinia. The Lives, Rules, and Other Writings of St. Pachomius and His Disciples</i> . Vol. 1. Cistercian Studies 45. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980).
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i> . Amsterdam: Lugduni Batavorum; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1923ff.
SHA	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae (Historia Augusta)</i> . Edited by David Magie. Vols. 1–3. Loeb Classical Library 139, 140, 263. London–New York: W. Heinemann–G.P. Putnam Sons: 1922–1932.
SIG	Dittenberger, Wilhelm. <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> . 3rd Edition. Vols. 1–4. Leipzig: Hirzelium, 1915–1924.
TB	Talmud of Babylon.
TJ	Talmud of Jerusalem.
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i> : http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu .
TM	Trismegistos Database: http://www.trismegistos.org/index2.php .
Urk. 4	Sethe, Kurt. <i>Urkunden der 18. Dynastie. Historisch-biographische Urkunden</i> . Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1906–1909.
Urk. 8	Sethe, Kurt. <i>Thebanische Tempelinschriften aus griechisch-römischer Zeit</i> . Edited by Otto Firchow. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957.
XS	Shenoute's <i>Canon 5</i> (see <i>Sinuthii Archimandritae: Vita et opera omnia</i> . Edited by Johannes Leipoldt. Vol. 3. <i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> 73, <i>Scriptores Coptici</i> 5. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1913).
Wb	<i>Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache</i> . Vols. 1–6. Edited by Adolf Erman, Hermann Grapow. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957.

Introduction: Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1st and the 6th Cent. CE

Luca Arcari

1. Methodological issues

As the title of the project mentioned *supra* shows, this research focuses on the construction of space and time in the transmission of religious identities between the 1st and the 6th cent. CE, through the analysis of literary, archaeological and epigraphic data. As a result, this book aims to foster the cultural impact of a new heuristic model, whereby socio-religious identities in the ancient world are no longer analysed through the commonly utilised system of polarisation. The main aim of the book stems from the need to overcome the theological model of cultural polarisations. Such a model often fuelled misperceptions regarding collective identities in the ancient world. It imposed on the ancient world ideas and ideologies alien to antiquity and rather belonging to the contexts of European nationalisms.

One of the inputs for this research project, as well as for the book, has been the four-year project coordinated by N. Belayche and J.-D. Dubois between 2006 and 2009 (EPHE).¹ Reacting against the more traditional approach towards crisis and conflict, they analysed some specific cases of cohabitation between different cultural systems and religions within the Greek and the Roman worlds. This book, the first of a series, expands Belayche-Dubois' perspective, by applying it to broader case-studies and sources, through the well-known category of "Middle-Ground."² In so doing, this volume organically and

¹ See Belayche, Dubois 2011. See also Massa 2014.

² On this category, see White 2010. Studying the region around the Great Lakes (especially the area between Lake Erie and the Ohio river) between 1650 and 1815 (defined by French as *pays d'en haut*), White underlines that the concept of middle-ground emerges as both a place and a style of cultural interaction. For the application of the concept of "middle-ground" to a specific ancient cultural context, see Bonnet 2015. Framing "Greek" and "Phoenician" as monolithic categories that obscure the cultural pluralism of Phoenicia's urban areas and rural hinterlands, "Bonnet captures such intricacies by communicating the nature of Phoenicia's 'paysages religieux,' the landscapes or spaces in which Phoenicians created lived religious realities through their social and cultural practices, and her primary analytical frames are the negotiations of 'the Middle Ground,' the entanglements of *métissage*, and anthropological

extensively examines the specific middle-land of Alexandria and Egypt. Such a geo-cultural breadth inevitably calls for cooperation with experts in various fields, relating to different historical periods as well as various linguistic contexts. By doing so, we intend to overcome both chronological and academic barriers, allowing all sources to interact productively.

The pivotal idea of the book is the relevance of the spatial and chronological dimensions in the construction and transmission of collective identities. More generally, we aim to investigate the heterogeneous and contextual nature of social groups who coagulate themselves around the very commonly discussed, yet still useful notion of the “sacred.”³ Opposing the idea that advocates the existence of a “prototypical” identity, the book focuses on assimilation processes and/or osmoses, as well as on competition dynamics and/or phenomena, in a specific regional area and in a diachronic perspective.

1.1. Constructing collective “identities”

In a very well-documented essay, based entirely on the *fundamenta* of the recent sociological research concerning collective identities and/or groups, James C. Miller observes:

Forged within the multifaceted forces of social interaction, collectivities come in a bewildering variety of configurations. They may form for any number of reasons, they may be made up of people whose adherence to the group varies depending on a further host of factors, and they are shaped by the particulars of time and place. This many-layered, contextual nature of social groupings makes collective identity a difficult matter to study and define.⁴

Starting from similar methodological assumptions, this book portrays group-identity and processes of construction/formation of collective identities on the basis of three key components:

- a) collective identity as perception of similarities and differences;
- b) collective identity as it is perceived through time and space;
- c) collective identity as a social process.

views on culture articulated foremost by Marshall Sahlins and fellow travelers” (Andrade 2015). In the study of very complex phenomena of cultural and religious interaction, it is important to invoke, as Bonnet clearly does, other terms that have gained traction in classical studies, anthropology, various fields of history, and even the natural sciences, including, *bricolage*, “hybridity,” “modernity,” “new deal,” “subversive submission,” *simplexité*, and “more is different.” On the category of *métissage*, see the inputs developed, among the others, by Kandé 1999, Sahlins 1981 and Stoler 2002.

³ When I use terms like “religion” and/or “sacred,” here I allude to discourses as common-place rhetorics, authenticity narratives, social and/or individual practices or legitimating tales/myths which function in the creation, maintenance, and contestation of specific social formations. For the scholarly debate, see Anttonen 1996; for a cognitive approach to the “sacred,” see Anttonen 2000.

⁴ James Miller 2010a: 12. See also Miller 2010b.

Concerning a), the essays included in the volume seem to emphasise that collective identities are connected with perceptions of similarity and difference between groups of people. In Miller's words, collective identities entail

a sense of "we are us, they are not us, and we are not them." Without a sense of commonality, collective identity could not exist. At the same time, similarity cannot occur apart from difference; to say "we are alike" necessarily entails the idea that others are unlike us. This sense of similarity and differences arises as a result of social interaction. Through the give and take inherent in social engagement, similarities and differences become the stuff defining the "boundaries" between groups, those factors that enable those involved on both sides of the divide to distinguish who "we" are as opposed to "them."⁵

Concerning b), all the essays seem to underline that

describing communal identity as emerging out of social interaction does not mean that identity is spontaneous, as if it arises or exists only in the moment. A critical component of collective identity is the perception that it persists through time.⁶

Two factors contribute to this perception of continuity: communal narratives and the "routinisation" or institutionalisation of identity. Within the perceived history of a group, or within a history reinvented and perceived by the living group as an ongoing past, collective identity is grounded on a physical or imagined space. Therefore, identity emerges as the effect of what people have introduced and/or invented in the past. Specific identity markers – from particular language usages, ways of conceiving and seeing the world, to rituals or everyday practices – become routine.⁷

As Miller brilliantly states:

Such patterns of behaviour turn into "the way things are done." Once recognized as such, we can say they are "routinized" or "institutionalized" within a group.⁸

Concerning c), the essays in the book emphasise how difficult it is to conceive of collective identities as reified or substantial. Identities are thus cultural constructions, subject to constant negotiation or re-negotiation.

As people bring perceptions of group identity with them into social interaction, this "identity" must be produced and reproduced in each new situation. In the process, identity becomes redefined, if only slightly, for every fresh set of circumstances. Identities, therefore, are enacted or embodied perceptions of similarities and differences within a given social situation. In effect, group members must ask themselves at every turn, "What does it look like to be one of 'us' within this situation?". Answering that question is a complex task. It depends on which aspects of identity come into question in the specific situation, how negotiable these facets or identities are, the social positions of the various parties involved, the number and

⁵ James Miller 2010a: 12–13.

⁶ James Miller 2010a: 13–14.

⁷ On similar questions, see Esler 2003: 20.

⁸ James Miller 2010a: 14.

degree of differences between groups, and so on. What features of identity are called upon in a particular situation can determine how vigorously and in what manner that aspect of identity becomes enacted.⁹

1.2. *Identifying religious groups in antiquity*

As a starting point, contributors were asked to follow preliminary criteria aimed to identify specific communal contexts:

- expressions by which a specific membership is defined (ethnic paradigms of self-definition, “brothers,” “sons of ...,” followers and/or disciples of..., etc.);
- ideological structurings by which a particular membership is defined (a shared system of behavior[s], shared variations in a behavior system as a source for the formation of particular in-group identities, worldviews, etc.);
- practices and behavioral norms by which a particular collective membership is defined (shared practices, ways of life by which a specific group distinguishes itself as regards a cultural macro-system, etc.).

Concepts such as “group,” “groupality,” “groupness,” are not taken for granted, but critically assessed. Sociologist Roger Brubaker, in his work on ethnicity, nationalism and race, usefully reconsiders the concept of “group,” starting from a critique to “groupism.” He questions the

tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed.¹⁰

Brubaker’s insights can be applied to the study of ancient religious groups, often characterised by a sort of automatism, as if, to quote Brubaker,

they were internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes.¹¹

While similar insights appear as a convenient *vade mecum* in the analysis of ancient texts and conflicts, their indiscriminate usage seems to generate more problems than they intend to solve. Among the issues raised by Brubaker, the tendency to treat groups as abstract entities and individual actors is the most prominent.¹² As for the collectivities discussed in the book, when people involved in cohabitations or conflicts stigmatise a particular group, they turn it into an “abstract entity,” in order to strengthen the impact of their ideological and rhetorical agenda.¹³ Following Brubaker, it is important to focus on the “relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated” elements concerning the people discussed in the book, without analysing groups on the basis

⁹ James Miller 2010a: 15.

¹⁰ Brubaker 2002: 164. See also Lundhaug’s essay in this volume.

¹¹ Brubaker 2002: 164.

¹² Brubaker 2002: 165.

¹³ See Brubaker 2002: 166; see also Bourdieu 1991b: 220–221.

of our classifying categories, but rather on their being “contextually fluctuating conceptual variables.”¹⁴

Another methodological *caveat* concerns the more general concept of “identity,” a *basso continuo* for all the discussions concerning groups, groupality and/or groupness in the ancient world. As Emiliano R. Urciuoli has recently pointed out,¹⁵ it seems more fruitful to analyse the concept of “identity” by combining at least five different perspectives: identity as history (in the sense of story-telling), as asceticism (in the etymological sense of the word “askesis,” as a performance involving the dialectical process of reduction and amplification of the represented self), as camouflage (or mimetic negation of some stereotypes generally acknowledged as part of a specific perceived identity), as norm (as a process of re-negotiation of “dominant traits” assumed as norms in and for specific hegemonic contexts), and as success (in Bourdieu’s terms, the preservation of the “political capital” involved in every identity representation and/or self-definition).¹⁶ All these perspectives contribute to a more accurate definition of the “quantitative” dimension of identity, meant as a dialectic relationship between collectivities and individual¹⁷ actors who live, share and define themselves in a specific historical and cultural context. As Richard Jenkins has brilliantly summarised,

With respect to identification, the individually unique and the collectively shared can be understood as similar in important respects; the individual and the collective are routinely entangled with each other; individual and collective identifications only come into being within interaction; the processes by which each is produced and reproduced are analogous; the theorization of identification must therefore accommodate the individual and the collective in equal measure. The most significant contrast between individual and collective identification in this model may be that the former emphasizes difference and the latter similarity. This is only a matter of their respective *emphases*.¹⁸

2. Religious and cultural cohabitations in Egypt and Alexandria (1st–6th cent. CE)

Since the publication of Fraser’s masterpiece dedicated entirely to Ptolemaic Alexandria,¹⁹ and often following his methodological assumptions, scholarly debates on Alexandria and Egypt in antiquity have agreed on the coexistence,

¹⁴ Brubaker 2002: 167–168.

¹⁵ Urciuoli 2015.

¹⁶ See Bourdieu 1991a.

¹⁷ For a refreshing new approach to ancient religious individualities, see Rüpke 2013; Rüpke, Spickermann 2012.

¹⁸ Jenkins 1996: 38.

¹⁹ See Fraser 1972.

in this area, of different social and religious groups.²⁰ For many decades, a portion of scholars was more interested in conflicts. Such an approach found its justification in a series of historical events regarded as emblematic, first of all the *pogrom* under Caligolas (38 CE), by which the broader modern perception of the cultural interactions in the area was often influenced. The presence of the “library” of Nag Hammadi, considered as an expression of a group that privileged its own communal life and apparently rejected any contact with the cultural and political centre of the region, has also confirmed the image of Egypt as a theatre of conflicts and tensions, culminating in the definitive, officially regulated, establishment of the “Great Church.”

In line with this, Guy G. Stroumsa has underlined the existence of the “scholarly myth” of the “multiculturalism” of Alexandria “the Great.” According to Stroumsa, this myth entails the double claim of both pacific coexistence of different religious and cultural groups, and significant exchanges and mutual relationships or influences. Stroumsa obviously acknowledges that Alexandria, since its (more or less artificial) creation *ex nihilo*, has been a melting-pot of various cultures and religions.²¹ In ancient Alexandria coexistence was far from peaceful, and some groups lived in constant tension, but one cannot fail to consider that culture²² was often viewed as a pole of attraction for people interested in reaching high social positions. Also, culture acted as a *passe-partout* in spreading particular claims of authority or specific (re-)inventions of tradition.²³ Stroumsa stresses an element that is crucial:

Now that we speak of the global village rather than of multicultural cities, we know that cohabitation of cultural or religious communities, even when mutually fruitful, never entailed true *convivencia*. Throughout history, men and women belonging to different cultural and religious groups have shown a great ability to hate one another intensely, while at the same time learning to communicate and exchange cultural patterns. This discrepancy, in a sense, seems to be at once a riddle and a motor of history. Multiculturalism, if it entails both smooth cultural exchanges and irenic social relations, may well be a myth. But it is one of those powerful myths by which intense, generous, and gifted individuals, throughout the centuries, have been able to dream of a higher reality.²⁴

This statement seems to imply that cohabitation represents a sort of living historical process determined by contextual political, social and cultural dynam-

²⁰ In the scholarly debate on the topic such a coexistence is a sort of “must:” e.g., see Bonnet, Payen 2014; Bowersock 1996; Bowman 1996: 203–233; Frankfurter 1998; 2000; Haas 1996; Watts 2006: 143–256.

²¹ See Stroumsa 2003.

²² Following Cultural Studies, I use “culture” here in its very broad sense, including patterns of consumption goods and leisure activities as determined by relations of production, which led them to focus on class relations and the organisation of production. See Bennett 2010.

²³ For the concept of “(re-)invention of tradition,” see Hobsbawm, Ranger 2012.

²⁴ Stroumsa 2003: 29.

ics, always “fabricated” under a specific hegemony.²⁵ It is no exaggeration to state that Ptolemaic rulers have created, in the leading centre of the reign and, *per riflesso*, in other parts of Egypt, a cultural whole existing among other systems of consolidation and administration, under which people who “produced” culture were “forced” to operate.²⁶ Such a system was mostly preserved under the Roman domination and, to a lesser extent, even in the very complex phase of “Episcopal” governments.²⁷ To summarise, in the case of ancient Alexandria

²⁵ According to Antonio Gramsci’s statements. See Gramsci 1971: 7–8; 9–10 and the recent assesment by Grelle 2017. For a recent application of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to the Hellenistic period, see Portier-Young 2011: 3–45. It is important to underline that Egyptian papyri written in both Greek and demotic testify that the supposedly widespread “Hellenisation” of the Eastern Mediterranean – firstly prompted by Gustav Droysen to designate “Hellenistic period” – has undoubtedly been overestimated: on this topic, see Rotroff 1997 and Hall 2002 (especially 221–222). When we refer to Greek (more precisely to “Atheno-concentric”) *paideia*, we deals with both elites and groups of individuals who adopts (also countering) Greek hegemonic culture in order to define themselves in the same elitarian context or in cultural contexts more or less connected to the hegemonic social “platform.” In this regard, it is important also to recall that postcolonial studies and related fields of research pay great attention to the problem of hegemony as well as to its intrinsic ambivalence. The concept of cultural hybridity as introduced by Homi Bhabha (1994) is only understandable in the context of the ambivalence of hegemony and power. Whereas in the past ethnicity was a central category in the study of ancient and modern colonisations, post-colonial criticism emphasises the role of ethnicity as one category among others to define power relations. Inspired by the work of Antonio Gramsci, postcolonial authors started to shift the perspective towards cultural hegemony and subalternity.

²⁶ The affirmation of Coptic language in the history of late antique Egyptian Christianity emerges in the same context of Greek cultural hegemony. On this question, see the *status quaestionis* by Camplani 2015a.

²⁷ The reign of Septimius Severus (146–211 CE) seems to mark an important turning point in the history of late antique Egypt. The most relevant change consists in what modern scholars define “municipalisation” (see Capponi 2010: 191; Bagnall 2003: 56 and 78), i.e. the introduction of *boulai*, “the Greek equivalent of Roman municipal senates, both in Alexandria and in the capitals of the Egyptian districts. The process affected the administration of the cities, which were now governed by an assembly of liturgical councillors (that is, selected on the basis of their wealth), who were responsible for the collection of taxes” (Capponi 2010: 191). Diocletian (244–311 CE) completes this process of “municipalisation,” subdividing Egypt initially in two, later three, four or even more provinces, which partly reflect regional identities. After 381 CE, an Augustal Prefect is placed in overall charge of the Egyptian provinces. This more or less late and quite slow affirmation of municipality seems to explain the specificity of Ecclesiastical structures of government in late antique Egypt, as observed by Alberto Camplani: “In primo luogo merita almeno una breve considerazione la storia sociale e politica. Solo piuttosto tardi (III sec.) i centri urbani egiziani hanno acquisito lo statuto municipale, ciò che ha prodotto *élites* locali dotate di uno scarso senso dei principi dell’auto-nomia cittadina, a differenza di quanto avveniva, ad esempio, in Siria. Tale stato di cose si è riflesso anche nella struttura ecclesiastica lungo la Valle del Nilo, che ha lasciato agire, senza frapporre gravi ostacoli, la forza centripeta della megalopoli, portando alla formazione di un

and Egypt, domination and hegemony provide conditions and materials for the emergence of cultural and/or religious cohabitations.

2.1. *A regional approach in light of the integration between different sources*

That there were various ways of interaction between different groups in the Graeco-Roman Egypt cannot be doubted, as a number of regional studies have further reinforced.²⁸ Yet, the scale and nature of the interaction requires further research, in which an effective integration between various sources should play a central role. Exploring interactively the variety of documentary material is the main aim of this book. As Peter Parsons, among others, has recently re-affirmed, Egypt emerges as a great exception in the study of ancient history, for it provides scholars with the possibility of relying on a great number and variety of documents.²⁹ In socio-cultural terms, such a possibility corroborates the image of Egypt as a pervasive hegemonic system under which people, even when different languages and textual practices surface, produce culture in a more or less autonomous way.

2.1.1. *“Pervasive” cultural centres*

In spite of the great gap in sources and traditions, Alexandrian cultural institutions (the Bibliotheca/Museum, the Serapeum, as well as the gymnasium) are often represented as the most famous scholarly centres in antiquity. Beyond the celebrative intentions of the sources available to us, it is important to keep in mind the following elements:

- the strong influence of Aristotelian tradition (for example, the succeeding integration of both Aristotelian and Platonic assumptions) for the definition of *paideia* and its hegemonic programs in the history of both Alexandrian and Egyptian cultures of Hellenistic-Roman periods;³⁰

corpo episcopale apparentemente debole e omologabile alle direttrici della sede alessandrina. E tuttavia le élites cristiane locali, sebbene in ritardo, si sono formate e si sono evolute, lasciando tracce inequivocabili della loro presenza” (Camplani 2006: 400–401).

²⁸ Recent bibliography on such a regional approach emerges as a *mare magnum*. E.g., see Bagnall 2006; Frankfurter 1998, 2000; Riggs 2012: 317–489; other references and critical discussion in Gwynn 2010: esp. 32; 46–47. For the Jewish presence in Hellenistic-Roman Egypt, see the seminal works by John J. Collins 2000; Gruen 1998; 2002: 54–83; Momigliano 1990: 74–96. For the different forms of Egyptian Christianity, see Blaudeau 2006; Camplani 2013 and 2015b; Griggs 2000; Parsons 2007: 181–200; Pearson 2004; Simonetti 1997; Wipszycka 2015. For the Christian documents from Oxyrhynchus, see the recent work by Blumell, Wayment 2015.

²⁹ See the recent presentation by Parsons 2007.

³⁰ Concerning the Museum, Niehoff 2011: 18 underlines how it assumed the role of “the leading centre of Homeric scholarship in the Hellenistic world: developing Aristotelian models, it boasted of the largest library at the time as well as the famous Museum, which has rightly been identified as a type of university.” For the history of Alexandrian library, see the

- the development of a “typical” Alexandrian exegesis concerning ancient texts variously modelled on the principles of the leading cultural centres of Alexandria and the formation of textual communities influenced by such an exegetical activity;
- different levels of adhesion/opposition to such a cultural hegemony, and divergences between Alexandria and the *chora*, as well as between the leading centre of the reign and other cities in Egypt.

The hegemonic *paideia* highlighted the superiority of the Greek-speaking groups of the cities over the Egyptian-speaking peasants of the villages; it connected cultural products to elites outside Egypt, i.e. the educated groups of the Greek East and of the Latin West – whose cultural products were founded on Greek models. Hegemonic *paideia* assumed a pivotal role also in the counter-discourses and in the different forms of resistance to hegemonic culture. Articulating and promulgating counter-discourses implied competing re-uses and relocations of discursive elements ascribable to the same hegemonic *paideia*.

2.1.2. Local reinventions of tradition

Summarising Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, Timothy Mitchell underlines its dimension of

Non-violent form(s) of control exercised through the whole range of dominant cultural institutions and social practices, from schooling, museums, and political parties to religious practice, architectural forms, and the mass media.³¹

In the ancient world, hegemony was often a violent form of physical coercion exercised through enslavement, policing actions, murders, torture, etc.; but it also assumed the aspect of more subtle forms of control conveyed through cultural institutions, systems of patronage and social network as well as the structured practices of everyday life. This is the case with the Ptolemaic power in Egypt. The same control system was assumed, re-oriented but mostly preserved by the Romans. While Mitchell has highlighted mechanisms of hegemony, Daniel Miller has emphasised its “cosmological” dimension:³² hegemony often emerges as a normative and universal pattern entirely based on assumptions constructed (or invented) as traditional and, as a consequence, monolithic. Hegemony deliberately obliterates what is particular and contingent, assuming a specific “tradition” as the unique way in both perceiving the world and mapping the universe (and the place of men in it). “Tradition” separates inside from out-

seminal work by Canfora 1990. For more recent critical discussions on the topic see, among the others, MacLeod 2000 and Berti, Costa 2010. On the relationships between the Greek version(s) of the Bible and the Alexandrian Library, see Nina L. Collins 2000.

³¹ Mitchell 1990: 553.

³² Daniel Miller 1989: 64.66.

side, normal from aberrant; its logic legitimises claims about truth and authority. Pierre Bourdieu has named such an invisible logic *doxa*, “the sum total of the theses tacitly posited on the hither side of all inquiry.”³³

The many reinventions of “tradition” relocated and re-negotiated in the cultural context of Hellenistic-Roman Egypt are all perceived as non-arbitrary, as products of a self-evident and natural order, which goes unquestioned. The aspirations of agents live in the system of orientation created by hegemony under which they cohabit all together.³⁴ Experiences of forced or intensive cultural contact open up possibilities for mutual re-negotiations of different traditions, not only in naming and thinking what was previously unnamed and unthinkable, but also in re-thinking and re-defining what was rejected by the *élite* in order to react to hegemony with counter-discourses that articulate new parameters under the hegemonic forms of cultural activity. In a hegemonic context, marginal (or constructed as marginal) social actors are forced to dress counter-discourses often condemned by dominant elites with acceptable robes. In turn, this re-negotiation may be perceived as a “shift” from the “true tradition” by the other marginal (or constructed as marginal) actors, who share the same cultural space with the “new” deviants.

2.2. The limits of the “traditional” taxonomies

With the term “groups,” here meaning those collective entities traditionally defined according to ethnic paradigms (for example, Egyptians and Greeks) and cultural models (“pagans,” “Jews,” “Christians,” “Gnostics”). Upon a close examination of available sources, a use of such categories is not always justified, especially in the context of Alexandria and Egypt, where interactions cut across areas of actual social, cultural and religious cohabitations. As many recent scholars have observed, in a variety of cases sources show that our usual categories in classifying ancient “religious” groups, deriving from ancient Christian apologists (i.e. labels as “Jewish,” “Christian” and “Greek-Hellenistic,” or “pagan” if we still want to use this term), cannot fully and realistically represent the ancient world.³⁵ Following a very authoritative tradition of studies, a tendency towards a “taxonomic” analysis of Alexandrian sources is still well-attested in many publications and academic debates. Such a choice seems in part to find its justification in the *mare magnum* of the documentation coming out from the region.

All of the book’s essays, despite a certain terminological “fluctuation,” connected to the authors’ different “schools of thought,” aim at analysing cultural elements testifying to interactions between neighboring groups that share ac-

³³ Bourdieu 1977: 168.

³⁴ Further arguments in Bourdieu 1977: 166.

³⁵ For a critical discussion on this topic, see Nicklas 2012.

tual and symbolic spaces. Thanks to a methodological approach that considers religious groups as *loci* of cohabitation, rather than emphasising ideological and/or theological polarisations, cultural products, ideologies, and worldviews shared in public or private religious spaces assume their actual dimension of counter-discourses, implicitly or explicitly connected to a contextual hegemonic system.

In this framework, structures of power take on the appearance of something ideal, transcendent, and metaphysical, and counter-discourses emerge as competitive creations that share, and often re-use, the same hegemonic constructions in order to create a space for action.

3. Structure and contents of the book

First and foremost, this book aims to focus on distinct aspects concerning the implicit value of the documents analysed (*Use, [Re-]Invention and [Re-]Definition of Discursive Practices*): for example, uses of specific literary forms and/or specific terminology, reformulations of traditional *topoi*, reinventions of appellatives and *formulae* that also characterise contexts represented and/or considered as “other” in order to construct a viable representation of the self. The essays included also pay close attention to cases of re-negotiated identities, in which the “other” appears to be re-constructed in terms of conflict, with the aim of defining specific in-group identities (*Ideological Debates as Images of Cultural and Religious Cohabitations*). The book intends to analyse the construction of conflicts as instrument of both internal and external self-definitions, rather than mirror of real and/or well-documented social contrasts. As many scholars have observed, the traditional historiographical paradigm that has been producing literary and ideological profiles especially of Jewish and Christian ancient authors and groups, has carved through its endeavor a perspective by which the history of religious dynamics in antiquity is represented by a process of evolving debates and ideological conflicts on “orthodoxy” matters. The third part (*Cults and Practices as Spaces for Encounters and Interactions*) aims to attempt instead to identify and describe the multifarious religious practices for Alexandrian groups documented in sources.

As we have observed in the first part of this introduction, collective identity involves a perception of similarity and difference between one group of people and another. This sense of similarity and difference arises as a result of social interaction. Similarities and differences become the stuff defining the “boundaries” between groups, those factors that enable those involved on both sides of the divide to distinguish who “we” are as opposed to “them.” According to such a perspective, in the fourth part of the book (*“Open” and “Closed” Groups*) an intriguing topic in the analysis of ancient religious groups according to a socio-historical perspective is discussed.

The book's analysis of group dialectics and/or interactions in ancient Alexandria and Egypt also intends to redefine questions connected to the construction of authority in philosophical-religious schools (fifth part: *The Construction of Authority in Philosophical and Religious Schools*). By starting the already mentioned recent studies,³⁶ it is possible to provide focused corrections of some antiquity scholarship that tends to over-emphasise the collective aspect of ancient cultic practice. For the most part, according to differing methodologies of analysis, papers included in this section shed light upon the individualities of exceptional people, either ancient authors or "fictional" persons of some renown.

The first part of the book is opened by Tobias Nicklas' essay, "Jewish, Christian, Pagan? The *Apocalypse of Peter* as a Witness of Early 2nd-Cent. Christianity in Alexandria." Nicklas concludes that the *Apocalypse of Peter* seems to add an important piece to a puzzle lacking in many aspects: it served as evidence for a group of Christ followers who on one hand appear to have been isolated from important strands of the earliest Christianity, while on the other were interested in the figure of the apostle Peter. They developed the idea of a heavenly Christ who will return triumphant with his cross at the end of the days. They believed in a powerful God who as the world's creator has dominion to resurrect the dead and whose justice will be used to punish every sinner, but mostly those who do not worship him, in places of eternal torture, while his elect are assured a place in Christ's everlasting kingdom. While the *Apocalypse of Peter* does not make clear whether it sees "Judaism" already as an entity separate of "Christianity" or a group in opposition to the community of Christ-followers and though indebted in many ways to Jewish ideas, the label "Jewish-Christianity" (with its many associations regarding Torah practice and lower Christology) according to Nicklas' analysis appears problematic, especially if we have to be aware that this "Judaism" differs greatly from what we find in writings of communities like the Nazoraeans or Ebionites; it is a Judaism that is able to integrate many elements of the diasporic world of which it is part of.

In Philippe Matthey's essay, entitled "The Once and Future King of Egypt: Egyptian Messianism and the Construction of the *Alexander Romance*," it emerges how "typical" Egyptian elements, together with the Egyptian pseudo-prophetic texts, have often been interpreted as the result of native, "nationalist" reactions against foreign invasions, a form of Egyptian "propaganda." In this article, however, its author proposes to go beyond the potentially anachronistic categories of "nationalism" and "propaganda," and to demonstrate that the legend connecting Alexander to Nectanebo might not be the result of an explicit political and propagandist agenda, but might instead have organically emerged from the cross-cultural interactions of narratives and counter-narratives within the frame of a Late Egyptian historical theology de-

³⁶ See Rüpke 2013; Rüpke, Spickermann 2012.

manding piety of pharaohs and adherence to the precepts of divine law (*Ma'at* or *Hp*), a category very near to the one expressed in Jewish “Deuteronomist” books.

In his paper entitled “Demonology between Celsus and Origen: A Theoretical Model of Religious Cohabitation?,” Antonio Sena starts from the Alexandrian formation of Origen according to Eusebius, characterised by teaching classical subjects, biblical formation, deep contacts with “Gnostics” and “pagans.” In Sena’s analysis, this is the cultural network in which polemics about demonology appear to be rooted in *Contra Celsum*. Sena’s article aims at identifying various levels of the polemics in the 5th and 8th books of *Contra Celsum* and at identifying the diversity of values that Celsus’ ideas could have had in the 2nd cent., when the platonic philosopher wrote his *Alethes logos*, and in the middle of the 3rd cent., when Origen wrote his confutation of Celsus’ work.

Daniele Tripaldi (“Basilides and the ‘Egyptian Wisdom.’ Some Remarks on a Peculiar Heresiological Notice [Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.20–27]”) aims at shedding new light on a very neglected text, tracing his possible sources and comparing it with other images we have of Basilides, of his literary production, as well as of his teachings. The analysis deploys through four subsequent stages: first of all, as it needs to be done for any quotation, whether it be long or short, Tripaldi makes the attempt to understand Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice on Basilides within the redactional context in which it is embedded. Next he re-locates it in the overall frame of Basilides’ and his followers’ teachings as we know them from Clement of Alexandria. In a third step, Tripaldi takes “Hippolytus” at his word as he charges his “Basilides” with a full-blown *paideia* in Egyptian lore, searching for Egyptian and Graeco-Egyptian sources for possible parallels to the ancient text. Special attention is paid to an “Orphic” cosmogony recorded in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homiliae* and to a few passages from the 1st book of Diodorus of Sicily’s *Bibliotheca historica*, a Greek compendium on Egypt and Egyptian gods and traditions of the second half of the 1st cent. BCE. The cross-comparison carried out by Tripaldi is at first conducted on a strictly formal, structural and lexical basis. This structured analysis then leads him to his fourth point, re-assessing the relationship between this heresiological report and the notices on Naassenes, Perates and Sethians in the 5th book of *Refutatio*. Finally, by way of conclusion, Tripaldi explores the possibility that such a wide-ranging exegetical activity intended as an integral part, a basis and a plea for a “Christian” worldview in a multi-religious culture may in fact stem from the *Exegetika* on Parchor the Prophet attributed to Basilides’ son, Isidore, or from a literary enterprise of the like. As such, the profile emerges of an Alexandrian Christian intellectual milieu striving to combine theogony, cosmogony and *Heilsgeschichte*, Greek philosophical teachings and “barbarian wisdom,” Hebrew scriptures and older traditions of earlier groups of Jesus’ followers, in a degree of complexity reflecting the socio-cultural diversity of a realistic historical complex urban environment.

Thomas J. Kraus’ essay (“Demosthenes and [Late] Ancient Miniature Books from Egypt: Reflections on a Category, Physical Features, Purpose and Use”)

starts from the analysis of a private letter from the second half of the 5th cent. CE (P.Berol. 21849 = SB 12.11084 = C.Pap.Hengstl 91), where a certain Victor writes to a certain Theognostus to return a book he borrowed in Hermopolis. Victor adds the title and the name of the author of this book (the commentary on the orator Demosthenes by Alexander Claudius) and three more titles (Menander's "Art," the "Methods," and the "Eulogies"). The first book is attributed as τὸ βιβλίον, i.e., with a diminutive form; and this may lead to miniature books from (late) antiquity, their physical features, usages, contents, and, above all, purposes. Both sender and addressee are Christians. Furthermore, the whole text and the terms used for the two people in the papyrus letter suggest that Victor was a lawyer and an orator as well. On the basis of the fragments discussed, Kraus analyses how books looked like in late antique Egypt, as well as the reception and the transmission of one of the principal protagonists in the reinvention of a "Classic" *paideia* in such a regional area, i.e. Demosthenes.

Within the wider theme of cultural and religious cohabitations in Alexandria and in Egypt in the first six centuries CE, Paola Buzi ("Remains of Gnostic Anthologies and Pagan Wisdom Literature in the Coptic Tradition") focuses on the aspect of appropriation and re-use of traditional literary forms in specific (micro-)cultural contexts, and in particular on the re-definition and the re-location of gnomic literature, aiming to demonstrate that this cultural phenomenon was not limited to the schools, but had a strong influence also on the production of the Coptic literature, proving therefore a wide and vivid linguistic and literary interaction among various ethnic and cultural groups. As is well known, the *Menandri monostichoi* or *Menandri sententiae* are collections of one-verse sayings and moral precepts, ordered according to the first letter, that started to circulate, in Greek, from at least the 3rd cent. CE, under the name of Menander, although only a few of them may be directly referred to the authorship of the comedy writer. Their contents, in fact, draw material in almost equal proportion from both Greek philosophy, tragedy and comedy as well as the Old Testament. The second example that Buzi takes into consideration is represented by the very *Sexti sententiae*, a collection of 451 maxims traditionally attributed to the Pythagorean philosopher Quintus Sextus, formed mainly in the 2nd cent. CE in Greek. Whatever the reason maybe that the copyist of NHC XII decided to include the *Sexti sententiae* in the manuscript, it is clear that they were perceived as appropriate for that context (the Nag Hammadi version of the *Sexti sententiae* is, for the moment, the only extant Coptic witness). The third example that Buzi considers is represented by a fragmentary miscellaneous codex from the White Monastery of Shenoute (MONB.BE), dated to the 10th–11th cent. and containing *excerpta*, preserving a text defined as *Dicta philosophorum*. Buzi includes it in this analysis, despite the fact that it apparently exceeds the chronological limits of the book, because it is clear that it makes use of older textual material. Despite the undeniable classical origin of these types of gnomic collections, very likely they were not perceived any longer as "pagan," but rather as another

expression of the appreciated genre of the *apophthegmata*: edifying sayings and precepts, whose function was essentially that of providing an ethic and behavioural model to monastic, as well as non-monastic, communities.

The second part of the book is opened by Bernard Pouderon's essay ("‘Jewish,’ ‘Christian’ and ‘Gnostic’ Groups in Alexandria during the 2nd Cent.: Between Approval and Expulsion"). Pouderon initially points out that "Jewish," "Christian," and "Gnostic" groups (according to a highly debated terminology) in 2nd-cent. Alexandria have been so often studied that there seems very little to be discovered on similar questions. However, his analysis turns on the mutual relationships between these various groups, in order to know both the way they perceived each other and how they saw and defined themselves. Pouderon analyses various "monotheistic" (or perhaps also "ditheistic") groups in Alexandria, as well as the relationships between these communities. What emerged from Pouderon's study is that Early Christianity in Alexandria was at first Jewish-Christian, before it rejected its Jewish roots – rejection of the worship and the observance of the Law, but not of the Scriptures, appropriated by means of exegesis, either typological or allegorical, nor of this history, the Hebrews being looked as forefathers according to God. Pouderon stresses also that Early Christianity in Alexandria was at first varied and tolerant, so that the Gnostic trend was not rejected at once, and finally that Judaism, once distinguished from Christianity, was more harshly rejected than the philosophical theism, because it was judged less dangerous.

Adele Monaci Castagno's essay ("Messengers from Heaven: Divine Men and God's Men in the Alexandrian Platonism [2nd–4th Cent.]") observes that between the 2nd and the 4th cent., the divine man was a subject of great interest in the debate among the learned Christ's followers and between the various philosophical schools. In Celsus' *Alethes logos*, the person of Jesus was understood and challenged on the basis of the Graeco-Roman traditions concerning the divine men. Celsus criticised the incoherence of Jesus's followers, who worshipped him as a God and, on the contrary, refused any such cult of men like Pythagoras, Orpheus, and Asclepius (whom Celsus considered much more deserving of such worshipping). Moreover, in Monaci Castagno's analysis this debate must be placed within the framework of the intensive use of the *bios* of the philosopher, which growingly assumed religious contours in the competition and propaganda of philosophical schools, and as conveyance of a heroic ideal of perfection capable of fostering and strengthening consensus. Monaci Castagno stresses that there are many studies on this interlacement of discursive interests and practices that go throughout the different groups of the learned late ancient society. She deals with an aspect that has been on a lesser level: the importance of the divine men in the confrontation among the different groups that drove the most learned persons to rethink their presence in the world as a philosophical issue, that is, how these exceptional men could be understood on the basis of an anthropological and cosmological model that

– directly or indirectly through the Bible’s interpretation – was anchored to Plato’s *Dialogi*. Methodologically, Monaci Castagno focuses the attention (as Ludwig Wittgenstein and the sociologists that learned his methodological lesson) on that “family resemblances,” that “kinship” or circularity of solutions, which have constituted the common conceptual framework of texts that are only apparently different from each other.

Mark J. Edwards (“Late Antique Alexandria and the ‘Orient’”) considers three hypotheses of “Eastern” influence on the culture of Roman Egypt. The first posits native Egyptian roots for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; the second traces the origins of Neoplatonic thought to India; the third sees Gnostic thought in Egypt as an offshoot of native theology. Edwards argues that of these three speculations, the third one is the only one that is tenable, because the others fail to meet the criterion of proximity (according to which some channel must be traceable between the putative source and the recipient of influence), the criterion of salience (according to which the supposed source of influence must resemble the recipient more closely than any rival candidate), and the criterion of indispensability (according to which we must be able to say that without the influence of this source the recipient would have undergone a different course of development).

Ewa Wipszycka (“How Insurmountable was the Chasm between Monophysites and Chalcedonians?”) starts underlying that, according to the *communis opinio* carried out by the scholarship on the history of Late-antique Christianity, there was an insurmountable chasm between Chalcedonians and Monophysites. In her analysis, however, literary sources seem to bear this opinion: the harsh polemics contained in them suggest that the two dogmatic camps were rigorously separated from each other. As for the documentary papyri found in Egypt, they cannot be used for discussing this issue, for they never refer to the existence of two camps. However, there are some literary texts that can shed light on the religious attitudes and behaviors of ordinary believers, not of polemicists. They seem to prove that the division between Chalcedonians and Monophysites was not so irreducible. They are mainly narratives concerning the larger sanctuaries, especially that of Abu Mena and that of the Saints Cyrus and John. According to Wipszycka, there are several pieces of information which prove that exponents of both dogmatic camps could collaborate with each other on some particular occasions: it is not by chance that we unexpectedly see them appear together during solemn ceremonies, in presence of the crowd.

Philippe Blaudeau (“*Vel si non tibi communicamus, tamen amamus te*. Remarques sur la description par Liberatus de Carthage des rapports entre Miaphysites et Chalcédoniens à Alexandrie [milieu V^e–milieu VI^e s.]”) deals with the Carthaginian Liberatus’ book, the *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum*. This is a composition of 24 chapters dealing with Christological controversies in the East, since the preaching of Nestorius until the

promulgation of the first edict of Justinian against Three Chapters. Probably written around 566, this narrative gives a condensed ecclesiastical knowledge of great importance. This work contains an unusual wealth of information that comes from Alexandria. Moreover the booklet seems to consist of an updated response to the ecclesiastical history of Zachariah Rhetor. Thus, beyond the conflict between Miaphysites and Chalcedonians, in Blaudeau's analysis the *Breviarium* is a unique and exceptional witness to the greater complexity and the often unexpected richness of their relationship in Alexandria between Chalcedon (451) and the middle of the reign of Justinian (approx. 530/35).

The third part of the book is opened by Sofia Torallas Tovar's essay ("Love and Hate? Again on Dionysos in the Eyes of the Alexandrian Jews"). She explores the representation of Dionysos as well as references to the cult of this God in Hellenistic-Jewish texts mainly from Alexandria, including Septuagint and Philo the Alexandrian. Notwithstanding such a topic has been interpreted in different ways, Torallas tries to revise arguments and texts themselves placing them in their specific Alexandrian socio-historical and hegemonic contexts.

Francesco Massa ("Devotees of Serapis and Christ? A Literary Representation of Religious Cohabitations in the 4th Cent."), starting from the edict against Egyptian paganism issued by Valentinian I, Theodosius, and Arcadius, reminds us that the temple of Serapis, *unum et solum spectaculum novum in omni mundo*, was destroyed by the Christians in 392 CE, as well as a *martyrium* and a number of churches were erected in its place. Such destruction, according to Massa's analysis, marked the ultimate transformation of Alexandria's religious topography to a Christian city. Massa underlines that the events of 392 emerged as the result of a growing conflict between the religious communities of Alexandria that intensified during the second half of the 4th cent. CE. Nevertheless, according to Massa, at least from the end of the 2nd cent., Christians and pagans had been living together in the big and multicultural city of Egypt. By analysing literary as well as topographical sources, Massa concludes by illustrating the competition between Christians and the followers of Serapis in the context of the cohabitation of different Alexandrian groups.

Mariangela Monaca's essay ("Between Cyril and Isis: Notes on the Iatromantic Cults in 5th-Cent. Alexandria") starts from Cyril's proclamation in one of his "sermons" delivered during the transfer of the relics of Saints Cyrus and John from the Church of Saint Mark in Alexandria to the Church of the Evangelists in Menuthis (near Canopus), where there was a temple of the *Kyra* Isis, a place of an iatromantic cult whose vitality is attested by sources still in the 5th cent. Monaca points out that there are various suggestions offered by the narrative, which has come with some variations through an Italo-Greek manuscript, the Vaticanus G. 1607, containing texts of hagiographic character (the works of Sophronius, consisting of a *Praefatio*, a *Laus*, and *Miracula* of the Saints Cyrus and John, as well as two *Byographies* of Saints and the *Orationes* attributed to Cyril). Monaca underlines that Cyril – according to the

late history of Sophronius of Jerusalem (634 CE) – undertakes a persecuting work against the temple of Isis in Menuthis, a place of pilgrimage for pagans as well as for “baptised” Christians, eager to get healing through the practice of *incubatio*. According to Monaca, Cyril’s narrative provides a vibrant picture of a century and of a society in which a Christian majority, albeit internally divided, was opposed to the remains of a “pagan” religiosity, marginalised but at the same time strong and faithful in preserving the traditional cults.

Part four is opened by Marie-Françoise Baslez’s essay (“Open-air Festivals and Cultural Cohabitation in Late Hellenistic Alexandria”). The starting point of Baslez’s paper is the paradoxical testimony of the Jewish-Alexandrian literature, especially 2 and 3 *Maccabees*, as well as the book of *Judith*, all written in Alexandria or in the Alexandrian diaspora. They are stories of persecution against Jewish people ending with a Salvation Day (*soteria*) celebration intended as a Reconciliation Day as well. Baslez observes how in the 1st cent. CE also Philo and Josephus draw attention to another Salvation Day and to the Celebration Day of the Septuagint translation, where Jews and Greeks are mixed. According to Baslez, it seems possible to study Alexandrian festivals and festivities as spaces and opportunities for cultural and religious interactions. In such a context, persecution emerges as a consequence resulting not from an interethnic antagonism inside the civic system but from the lobbying inside the royal court. Baslez also questions if open-air festivities become space for encounters between Alexandrians and Jews. Textual comparative studies testify that the author (or the translator) of the Greek book of *Judith* knew the Great Procession of Alexandria, as well as that this typology of festivities (which corresponds to the Greek *eranos*) was assumed by Alexandrian Jews in celebrating their Salvation Day and Septuagint commemoration. Common open-air celebrations, associating Jews and Alexandrians, are really likely considering both social and military networks which grew up in the Alexandrian social life during the Late Hellenistic period.

Livia Capponi’s essay (“The Common Roots of Egyptians and Jews: Life and Meaning of an Ancient Stereotype”) deals with the idea and the discursive practices concerning a common origin for Jews and Egyptians. Capponi recalls that Hellenistic sources of Egyptian origin such as those from Manetho, Chaeremon, Lysimachus and Apion who identified the founder of the Jewish state with Moses/Osarseph, a philosopher and priest of the city of Heliopolis and explained the Exodus as the expulsion from Egypt of a group of lepers. Capponi underlines also that Strabo and other non-Egyptian sources agreed on the origin of Jewish people and of the Egyptian as being from the same stock, highlighting similarities of their customs. As Tacitus informs us, Emperor Tiberius expelled both the Egyptian and the Jewish people from Rome in 19 CE, and conflated the two religions into one *superstitio*. The literature of the so-called *Acta Alexandrinorum*, whether it was committed or mostly entertainment, gives voice to hostile attitudes towards the Jewish people, who are regarded as unworthy of the

Alexandrian citizenship and similar to the Egyptians; this again confirms the old conviction that Jewish people and the Egyptians had a common origin. Capponi stresses that the main enemy of this ancient commonplace is the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who in his work on the antiquity of the Jewish culture, conventionally called *Contra Apionem*, struggles to draw a boundary between his fellow countrymen and the Egyptians, against the common idea that the two groups were related. Earlier, the philosopher Philo of Alexandria, in his works *Legatio ad Gaium* and *In Flaccum*, tries to build a common cause for the Jewish people, Greeks and Romans against the Egyptians, who are regarded as an ancient civilisation with barbarous religious customs. Capponi's essay aims to investigate the reasons why first Philo and then Josephus wanted to separate the Egyptians from the Jewish history and tried to establish clearer boundaries between the two. The blurring of the ethnic boundaries and the question of the definitions of ethnic identity in this historical context is worth looking at as it may be linked to the vexed question of the origins of the presumed "Alexandrian anti-Judaism."

According to Hugo Lundhaug's essay ("The Nag Hammadi Codices in the Complex World of 4th- and 5th-Cent. Egypt"), in scholarship on the Nag Hammadi Codices one often encounters the claim that these codices were manufactured and read by people who were in opposition to, or even outright conflict with, institutional, ecclesiastical Christianity, and that the Pachomian monks, who were active in the area where the codices were discovered, would not have been likely to read this kind of literature. By going beyond traditional stereotypes and dichotomies, however, and taking textual fluidity and the complexities of real people fully into consideration, Lundhaug applies a fresh perspective and outlines a more complex picture of the place of the Nag Hammadi Codices in the world of early Egyptian monasticism. Lundhaug stresses that there is need of much further research explaining exactly how and why Egyptian monks read, copied, and edited the texts of the Nag Hammadi Codices. Even then, the only way to understand these codices in their proper context is by acknowledging a much higher degree of complexity than it is generally assumed, by dropping the all-too-convenient categories that have shown themselves to be unhelpful, and by comparing individual tractates to other sources contemporary with the Nag Hammadi Codices themselves. While doing so Lundhaug, paraphrasing the First Greek *S. Pachomii vita*, points out that "in a group or a community there are all kinds of people." Lundhaug's conclusions emphasise that there is no reason to dismiss the possibility that there were monks in the Pachomian monasteries who were capable of thinking for themselves and reading the Nag Hammadi Codices with a critical mind, finding inspiration in some of their contents while rejecting others.

Part five is opened by Carmine Pisano's essay ("Moses 'Prophet' of God in the Works of Philo, or How to Use the *Otherness* to Construct the *Selfness*"). Pisano observes that at the beginning of his *De vita Mosis*, written around the first half of the 1st cent. CE, Philo says that "according to some Moses is the

lawgiver of the Jews, for others the interpreter of the sacred laws” (*Mos.* 1.1; see also *Praem.* 55). Philo opposes the biblical lawgiver (*nomothetes*), a title with which Moses is generally known by the Greek and Roman authors, for the *hermeneus nomon hieron*, a syntagm that, in the Jewish-Hellenistic tradition, defines Moses in his function of a “prophet:” that is the official who, as the “mouth” (*stoma*) of God (*Her.* 266; *Mos.* 1.84), reveals to men the words that God “suggests to him interiorly” (*endothen hypechountos*: *Praem.* 55) in the forms of “inspired possession (*entheo katakoche*) and *mania*” (*Her.* 250; *Migr.* 84). Following in the footsteps of other modern scholars, Pisano notes that the prophetic figure of Moses incorporates elements of the biblical tradition, in which Moses speaks with God “mouth to mouth” (*Num.* 12.8) and God himself defines the prophet as “my own mouth” (*Isa.* 30.2; *Jer.* 15.19), as well as elements derived from the Platonic definition of the *mania* outlined in *Phaedrus* (244b–d; 248d–e; 256b), and in this sense presents itself as a symbolic place of cultural cohabitation. Pisano’s essay focuses on this process of cohabitation as well as on the Philonian use of the Platonic model that for Philo represents an effective means of interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures.

Starting from Origen’s intellectual and existential experience, Giulia Sfameni Gasparro (“Alexandria in the Mirror of Origen’s *didaskaleion*: between the Great Church, Heretics and Philosophers”) aims at identifying several salient elements in intellectual, ideological, religious, social, and economic contexts as well as in the political atmosphere of a metropolis characterised by many vital streams as Alexandria, between the last decades of the 2nd and the middle of the 3rd cent. CE. In this atmosphere – *mutatis mutandis* – Caesarea Maritima also seems to be involved, another metropolis with several social and cultural cores, i.e. Christianity, Judaism and Hellenism, all elements which live together and appear to be reciprocally connected. Through the analysis of main sources, especially of *Contra Celsum*, the historical situation experienced by Origen emerges through cultural and religious encounter and confrontation, as well as an irreducible conflict. If we assume Origen’s existential and intellectual biography as the mirror of a specific historical and geographical context, that of Alexandria, which in turn appears like a sort of counterpart – in spite of its historical-cultural specificity – for other metropolises in the Roman Empire, at the same time we can argue that in such a period as well as in such a context forms of cultural and religious contacts, confrontations and cohabitations were admissible as well as practicable. Nevertheless, there were strong motivations and occasions for disputations.

The book is completed by Marco Rizzi’s essay (“Cultural and Religious Exchanges in Alexandria: The Transformation of Philosophy and Exegesis in the 3rd Cent. in the Mirror of Origen”). Eusebius and Porphyry unanimously affirm that Origen had some contacts with Ammonius Sakkas, the shadowy teacher of Plotinus. They both testify that Sakkas was born Christian, even though they disagree in evaluating his attitude towards Christianity in his mature years when

his philosophical teaching shone brightly in Alexandria, attracting not only Origen and Plotinus, but also the future bishop Heraklas, and many others. In Rizzi's analysis, the treatment of these sources by modern scholars (roughly from the 18th cent. onwards) is indicative of the historiographical approach (and its changes) to the more general issue of cohabitation, conflict, and mutual influence between philosophical and religious cultures and practices in Alexandria during the 3rd cent. Rizzi observes that Origen's attitude stands on the watershed between tradition and innovation in the story of Alexandrian philosophy, stressing at the same time that we have no evidence of philosophers who pursued this program with the same radical approach as Origen did. In his case, eclecticism and disciplinary conflation find their specific space of application in the literary genre of allegorical commentary on the Bible, which so disturbed Porphyry, but seems to have been Origen's decisive gain at Ammonius' school in Alexandria.

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Part One
Use, (Re-)Invention And (Re-)Definition
of Discursive Practices

Jewish, Christian, Greek?

The *Apocalypse of Peter* as a Witness of Early 2nd-Cent. Christianity in Alexandria

Tobias Nicklas

For Jan N. Bremmer

When we search for the roots of Christianity in Alexandria we are in the dark,¹ and when we investigate the origins of the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Peter* we skate on thin ice. Nevertheless, in this paper I will not only ask both questions but will also try to show their relation. I will first take a look at some details in the text of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Based on this text I will then seek to demonstrate the inadequacies of typical categories of ancient “religious” movements, such as “Jewish,” “Christian,” and “Greek-hellenistic” (or “pagan” if we still want to use this term). These categories are actually taken over from ancient Christian apologists and in many cases cannot fully represent the realities of life in ancient worlds.² I will conclude by adding a few arguments about the *Apocalypse of Peter*’s alleged origins.

1. The *Apocalypse of Peter* – Jewish, Christian, or other?

Because there is no complete and reliable witness for the original text of the *Apocalypse of Peter*,³ any scholarly discussion about the text’s origins is full of problems. While the text’s Ethiopic version is usually thought to preserve the overall plot in a fairly reliable manner, many details in this version⁴ are clearly corrupt. In addition to the Ethiopic translation there are a few ancient quotations of the *Apocalypse of Peter* – one of which, however, does not find a

¹ For an overview of the present state of research see Löhr 2013: 413–415; see also B. Pouderon’s balanced paper in this volume.

² For a broader discussion of this question see Nicklas 2014a and 2014b.

³ Even if the Ethiopic manuscripts provide a complete text, in many details this late version is not very reliable.

⁴ Regarding the Ethiopic transmission of the text cf. Buchholz 1988: 119–157; besides Buchholz’s edition of the Ethiopic (162–227), see mainly Marrassini 1994.

counterpart in any manuscript (see Clem. *Ecl.* 41.1–3)⁵ – and two fragmentary Greek witnesses coming from the same miniature codex (Ms. Bodl. G. th. f. 4 [P] + P. Vindob. G. 39756)⁶ that preserve parts of *Apoc. Pet.* 10 and 14 plus one long Greek fragment in the so-called Akhmim-Codex (6th–7th cent. CE).⁷ Although this final fragment offers a text that is closely related to the other witnesses of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, its differences are important enough compared to what we find, for example, in the Ethiopic versions to consider this text an apocryphal writing on its own. Perhaps it should even be read together with the passion and resurrection account of the *Gospel of Peter*, since both texts were copied by the same scribe.⁸

1.1. Although the text-critical problems of the *Apocalypse of Peter* should prompt us to be cautious, the question about its use of written sources can be solved without too many problems. As this paper will demonstrate, the text presupposes ideas from the Old Testament and early Jewish literature, but its only two quotations from the Old Testament – parts of *Ezek.* 37.1–4 in *Apoc. Pet.* 4.7–9 and parts of *Ps.* 23[24] in *Apoc. Pet.* 17.2–6 – are significant. According to Jacques van Ruiten, the quote from *Ezek.* 37 can be called a “summarising quotation”⁹ rather than a direct use of the Old Testament text;¹⁰ the text’s idea of bodily resurrection goes parallel to other early Jewish interpretations of *Ezek.* 37.¹¹ Even if *Apoc. Pet.* 17 does not quote all of *Ps.* 24 (23 LXX), according to van Ruiten “[t]he whole Psalm, in the version of the Septuagint, is presupposed, although only very few phrases are actually taken over.”¹² In other words, we are dealing with an author who is acquainted with interpretations of *Ezek.* 37 as a prophecy of future bodily resurrection and – even if not extensively – writes a Greek text that quotes at least one Scriptural passage in its LXX form.

Regarding Christian writings, only two texts have been broadly discussed as sources of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. While the text apparently makes quite extensive use of *Matthew* in its first and final chapters (Jesus’ eschatological speech in *Matt.* 24 is of special importance for the eschato-

⁵ For a discussion see Kraus, Nicklas 2004: 89–90.

⁶ For a detailed argument see Kraus 2003c.

⁷ For a full edition of the Greek manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Peter* see Kraus, Nicklas 2004: 101–130.

⁸ For a discussion of this problem see Nicklas 2013: 339–349.

⁹ Cf. van Ruiten 2003: 173.

¹⁰ The original text of *Ezek.* 37 with its focus on the future of Israel probably does not presuppose the idea of a bodily resurrection of the individual. For more details see Schöpflin 2009.

¹¹ This, according to van Ruiten (2003: 163–168), does not mean that the text necessarily depends on 4QPseudo-Ezekiel, as R. Bauckham has suggested in Bauckham 1998b (reprinted from Bauckham 1992).

¹² Van Ruiten 2003: 173.

logy of the *Apocalypse of Peter*), the list of motifs that connect the *Apocalypse of Peter* and *2 Peter* do not necessarily mean that the *Apocalypse of Peter* used *2 Peter* as a source. The strong arguments of R. Bauckham and T.J. Kraus about both texts' interdependence do not necessarily mean that the *Apocalypse of Peter* is later than *2 Peter*.¹³ W. Grünstäudl's recent suggestion is quite convincing; he shows that *2 Peter* is not the source of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, but vice versa.¹⁴ Grünstäudl's most persuasive argument is simple: *2 Peter* is clearly dependent on the *Epistle of Jude*¹⁵ but the *Apocalypse of Peter* is not. If *Apocalypse of Peter* used *2 Peter* as a source, it is difficult to explain why the text is not dependent on any of the passages where *2 Peter* uses *Jude*. If, however, *2 Peter* used both the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Epistle of Jude* as its sources, the evidence can be explained very well.

In other words, the only Christian writing that the *Apocalypse of Peter* definitively used is *Matthew*, which was certainly "the" Christian writing with the broadest distribution in pre-Constantinian times. Interestingly, it seems that the *Apocalypse of Peter* did not use *Matthew* because of its "Jewish" features – e.g., its interest in a proper Jesus *halakha* as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matt.* 5–7). Although *Matt.* 5.29–30 may have provided a background for some descriptions of hellish punishments in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, as Istvan Czachesz has supposed,¹⁶ the sins mentioned in its description of hell do not have any clear counterparts in Jesus' discussions of proper justice (see *Matt.* 5.20). If *Matthew* is the only later New Testament writing used by the *Apocalypse of Peter*, this also implies that there is no awareness of a Pauline corpus and (quite probably) that no Johannine literature is present in this text.

1.2. This becomes even clearer when we take a closer look at the text's concept of bodily resurrection at the final judgment.¹⁷ According to the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the resurrection of the dead (contrary, e.g., to *1 Cor.* 15) does not have anything to do with the resurrection of the crucified Christ (who is not even mentioned). Additionally, at least according to the (certainly problematic) Ethiopic version of the text, the day of resurrection and final judgment is called "the day of God" – Jesus Christ only appears on the scene in chapter 6. The resurrection occurring on this special day is described in extremely corporeal terms. God commands Sheol to give back everything in it; even birds and wild animals have to give back the flesh they have eaten. According to R. Bauckham, the whole concept of "giving back the dead" finds its roots in the idea expressed in *1 En.* 61.5 that from God's

¹³ The main arguments regarding literary relationship (but arguing that *2 Peter* is the source of the *Apocalypse of Peter*) have been given by Bauckham 1998a, and Kraus 2001: 386–396.

¹⁴ For his full argument see Grünstäudl 2013: 97–144.

¹⁵ Regarding this literary relationship see, for example, Kraus 2001: 368–376.

¹⁶ Cf. Czachesz 2012: 13.

¹⁷ Regarding the following passage see also (in more detail) Nicklas 2012 and 2015.

perspective no one and nothing can be destroyed.¹⁸ The text's image of bodily resurrection, as we have seen, is explicitly connected to a reception of *Ezek.* 37, the well-known vision of the resurrection of the dry bones of Israel. The question about the possibility of bodily resurrection, finally, is answered with the motif that nothing is impossible for God, the creator of the world (*Apoc. Pet.* 4.5). The most probable background of this argument, which is also used by *1 Clem.* 27.1–3 and Just. *1 Apol.* 18.6 and 19.6,¹⁹ can be found in Old Testament passages as *Job* 42.2 and *Gen.* 18.14. The profile of the author (or perhaps the group) behind the *Apocalypse of Peter* becomes clearer: while no definite influences from Pauline Christianity can be observed,²⁰ the Scriptures of Israel are used (at least partly) in a LXX like version. Early Jewish ideas of bodily resurrection developed from *1 Enoch* and *Ezek.* 37 play a role – this last observation goes so far that without its current context it would be very difficult to decide whether the description of the resurrection of the dead according to *Apoc. Pet.* 4 is what we call “Jewish” or what we call “Christian.” But does this mean that our author comes from a Jewish Christian group – if we still want to use the term “Jewish Christian”²¹ – which demarcates itself more or less from the rest of the world? If we compare the text to what we have, for example, from the Ebionite movement, a very different profile is seen: while the Ebionites were very much concerned with a proper (and even very strong) observation of the Torah, which even included vegetarianism, the *Apocalypse of Peter* does not show clear traces of a typical Torah-bound *halakha* connected to questions of purity, fasting, questions of cult, etc.

1.3. This, however, is not yet the whole picture. The very “Jewish” idea of a bodily resurrection of the dead as expressed in *Apoc. Pet.* 4 is connected to the image of a destruction of the world in fire – *ekpyrosis* – in chapter 5, a motif which is rarely found in early Christian writings. As far as I see, the only New Testament parallel is in *2 Peter*.²² As is commonly known, the decisive

¹⁸ See Bauckham 1998c: 288.

¹⁹ As far as I can tell, Justin and *1 Clement* use the argument independently from the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

²⁰ It is of course, difficult (if not impossible) to prove that there is absolutely nothing in the *Apocalypse of Peter* which could be traced back to ideas also found in Pauline writings.

²¹ As is well-known, the use of the term “Jewish Christian” is highly problematic. I personally regard the cluster of questions developed by Luomanen (2012: 11–12) to develop profiles of different groups as very helpful. See also the definition of “Jewish Christians” offered by Jones 2012: 453–455.

²² For more information regarding the motif in *2 Peter* and in other early Christian literature (*2 Clem.* 16.3; *Sib. Or.* 2.194–213; 1: Just. *1 Apol.* 60.8–9 and *2 Apol.* 7.3; 2: Iren. *Haer.* 1.7.1, and Orig. *Cels.* 4.11–13), see Grünstäudl 2013b. Regarding a possible relation between Peter's martyrdom in fire and the idea of *ekpyrosis* expressed in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, see Nicklas 2015.

idea behind the motif *ekpyrosis* goes back to the myth of Phaeton, whose most well-known version is found in Ov. *Metam.* 2 (which is explicitly connected to Egypt!).²³ Graeco-Roman versions of the myth do not understand the *ekpyrosis* as a sign of the end of the world but as a terrible accident that leads to a new beginning. Based on ideas developed by Heraclitus, different philosophical schools – mainly the Stoa – borrowed ideas of a periodic destruction of the world through fire, and in Jewish and Christian circles this was connected to the idea of an absolute end of the world. If we regard *2 Peter* as dependent on the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Apocalypse of Peter* is the oldest Christian writing describing the end of the world as an *ekpyrosis*, the (probably) oldest Jewish parallel being *Sib. Or.* 5.206–213, where the motif of *ekpyrosis* is limited to a future burning of Ethiopia.²⁴ While it is quite difficult to date *Sib. Or.* 5 exactly (its kernel may be traced back to the time before Hadrian), its clear emphasis on Egypt (5.60–114; 179–199; 458–463; 484–511; see also the relation of Sibyl and Isis 5.53)²⁵ plus the fact that it is quoted for the first time by Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 4.50 and *Paed.* 2.10.99) makes it highly probable that it was produced in Egypt – in which case, Alexandria is always a good choice.

1.4. Additionally, according to both the Ethiopic text of chapter 14 and P.Vindob.G. 39756 (also known as the “Rainer” fragment) Christ will give his called and chosen “a fine baptism in the salvation of what is called the Acherusian Lake, in the Elysian field, a part of justice with my holy ones.”²⁶ This, of course, comes as a surprise – at least if we simply work with the idea of very distinct categories like “Jew,” “Christian,” and “Graeco-Roman.” As Thomas J. Kraus has shown,²⁷ the use of both motifs was fairly widespread in “Christian” circles. According to E. Peterson, it is very possible that the author of the *Apocalypse of Peter* took over this motif from Jewish circles,²⁸ which can be seen by the use of comparable motifs in Josephus (*B.J.* 2.156) and Philo,²⁹ the idea of the *Acheron* as the river around viz. bordering the netherworld and the Elysion as the place for the God’s favorites who do not have to die (like Menelaos or Helena according to *Od.* 4.561–565) or (later) the place where the blessed ones live after their death is first and foremost a widespread idea in ancient Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Thomas Kraus discusses four ancient Christian writings where at least one of the two ideas is mentioned, namely the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Sib. Or.* 2.330–338, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, and the Coptic *Resurrection*

²³ For a much more detailed overview and description see Usener 2013.

²⁴ See Usener 2013: 178.

²⁵ See Gauger 2002: 454–455.

²⁶ Translation according to Kraus, Nicklas 2004: 128.

²⁷ For the following arguments see Kraus 2003a.

²⁸ See Peterson 1959.

²⁹ See the examples given by Kraus 2003a.

of Jesus Christ according to the Apostle Bartholomew.³⁰ Perhaps the closest parallels to the *Apocalypse of Peter* are found in *Sib. Or.* 2.330–338, which connects the motifs of the destruction of the world by fire, intercessory prayer of the pious before God, and eternal life in the Elysion where the waters of the Acherousian lake empty. In the Coptic *Resurrection of Jesus Christ*³¹ the motif of Bartholomew's triple immersion in the Acherusian Lake (see 21.8) before he enters paradise probably goes back to the *Life of Adam and Eve* (37) and seems to be of minor import for the text's overall eschatology. Both *Sib. Or.* 2.330–338 and *Apoc. Paul* 22 seem to be dependent on the *Apocalypse of Peter* regarding this motif.³² As far as we can tell, therefore, the *Apocalypse of Peter* is the most ancient "Christian" writing taking over, combining, and integrating both motifs in its idea of salvation.

Paragraphs 1.3. and 1.4. help shape our image of the author. His eschatology is not only dependent on the interpretation and development of *Matthew* and some Old Testament sources. Concepts from Graeco-Roman religion and mythology are also natural parts of his worldview and form an integral part of both his conception of salvation and the end of the world. Although Acherousia and Elysion are concepts that might be considered "common knowledge," the integration of the *ekpyrosis* into a Jewish and/or Christian concept of the end of the world and its final judgment seems to be an original invention.

1.5. This situation becomes even more complicated when we consider the different ideas about angels in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, in which various angelic figures appear.

1.5.1. According to *Apoc. Pet.* 4.9–10, it is Uriel (according to the Ethiopic version: Urael) who is commanded by God to bring soul and spirit into the bodies of the dead.³³ Certainly not every detail of Uriel's role in the *Apocalypse of Peter* can be explained by the few parallel sources we have. Interestingly, however, *1 En.* 20.2 describes this angel as custodian of the Tartarus, while according to *Sib. Or.* 2.215–220 the archangels (among them Uriel, who is explicitly mentioned in 2.215) have to lead the human souls to God's throne for judgment (see also 2.228–237). As in chapter 4, Uriel's role is repeated in chapter 6, where he is an "angel of God" bringing the souls of the sinners who have died in the great flood and who pray to idols to God's judgment, where they are burned in eternal fire.

³⁰ Besides Kraus 2003a, see also his article Kraus 2003b.

³¹ This text likely dates from between the 5th and (less probably) 9th cent. CE and was probably composed in Coptic; see the remarks by Schenke 2012: 855.

³² For a more detailed argument see Kraus 2003b.

³³ Regarding this figure see Nicklas 2007: 471; regarding the backgrounds of the idea of archangels see Berner 2007.

The description of Uriel is not consistent, however, since in chapter 12 he appears again torturing sorcerers in hell.

1.5.2. Several times an angel named Ezrael appears, acting as God's angel of wrath (see, e.g., chapter 9). The name bears a Hebrew theophoric name which could be understood as "God is help."

1.5.3. According to chapter 8, children which have been killed by their parents are given to an angel called Temlakos in the Ethiopic version. This somewhat mysterious (and perhaps partly corrupt) passage is clearer in a quote from Clem. *Ecl.* 48–49. According to this quote, exposed children are given to a *Temelouchos* angel who, although usually connected to hell, acts in this context as a guardian angel (τῆμελοῦχος = "tutelary, guardian"),³⁴ educating and raising them. The original etymology of the name Temelouchos, according to J.-M. Rosenstiehl,³⁵ however, is *Temeliouchos* (= "in charge of the foundation"), an epithet of Poseidon. Temelouchos is also known from the *Apoc. Paul* 40 (which probably uses the *Apocalypse of Peter* as a source for this figure), the much later *Apocalypse of Mary* and (with many variations in its name, including the strange *Abdimelouchos*) in Coptic literature. Even though it is unclear why the *Apocalypse of Peter* refers to Temelouchos as a guardian angel, the text seems to have taken over a figure from pagan worlds and reinterpreted it as an angel responsible for a special task in the netherworld. Beyond this point, further conclusions can be drawn. According to Rosenstiehl,³⁶ many elements in *Apoc. Pet.* 8 can be understood as an adaptation of elements related to descriptions of hell in the deuterocanonical / apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon*. I find his most convincing observations to be (1) the parallels between *Wis.* 5.21 and the motif that flashes of lightning come from the children's eyes and pierce the eyes of their parents, and (2) *Wis.* 5.1 and the idea that the children face their parents being tortured in hell. This background helps Rosenstiehl identify the role of the Temelouchos-angel in this context: the *Temelouchos* takes over the task promised in *Wis.* 4.10–11 to the just who died in young years but remain in God's hand (*Wis.* 3.1). *Apoc. Pet.* 8 is thus an interpretation of what happens to the just who did even not have a chance to live because their parents exposed or killed them.

1.5.4. The angel Tatirokos (= Tartarouchos or "keeper of the Tartaros"), finally, is attested in chapter 13 of the Ethiopic version.³⁷ According to the *Apoca-*

³⁴ For more references see Lampe 2003. For other etymologies see Rosenstiehl 1986: 48–49.

³⁵ See Rosenstiehl 1986, taken over also by Bremmer 2003: 9.

³⁶ For the following passage see Rosenstiehl 1986; regarding the relation of *Apoc. Pet.* 8 and *Wis.* 2–5, see esp. 50–51.

³⁷ Unfortunately, no parallels in the Greek witnesses are extant.

lypse of Peter his main ask is to torture the inhabitants of hell. The *Apocalypse of Peter* seems to be the most ancient Christian writing where this angel appears³⁸ and possibly provides the entryway for this angelic figure into later Christian apocalyptic literature, where it came to be associated with the devilish prince of the torturing angels of the netherworld (see the apocryphal *Apocalypse of John*).³⁹

Although the *Apocalypse of Peter* is not very interested in the divisions and ranks of mysterious angelic worlds and even if the roles assigned to angels such as Uriel are not very consistent, the few angelic beings named are quite informative. Uriel and Ezrael bear Hebrew theophoric names, with the former being connected in early Jewish literature to the group of archangels, while Temelouchos and Tartarouchos can be linked to Greek concepts. Furthermore, the roles assigned to at least some of the angels are instructive: via Uriel a connection to *Sib. Or.* 2 can once again be established, and Temelouchos functions as an interpretation of concepts found in the *Wisdom of Solomon*. Of course, neither of these two writings were the most widespread, but both are likely connected with Alexandria.

1.6. Among the most widely discussed aspects of the *Apocalypse of Peter* is the background of its description of the places of punishment (usually labelled “hell” even though the text does not use this word). Because few scholars other than Jan Bremmer have published widely on the subject and, as far as I see, his viewpoints have been broadly accepted, it is certainly not necessary to repeat every argument of the discussion and a short summary shall suffice. While the genre “tours of hell” quite probably has Jewish roots⁴⁰ (the *Apocalypse of Peter* contains a vision of hell but should not be too quickly called a tour of hell), Bremmer has shown that the concrete description of hell in the *Apocalypse of Peter* contains elements that are best explained via (direct or indirect) Orphic influence.⁴¹ Bremmer first points to the appearance of the term βόρβορος in the Greek Akhmim version (vv. 23, 24, and 31):

Mire in Hades is well known from the Greek tradition and appears first in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, where Heracles sees those who wronged their guests, struck their parents or committed perjury lying in the mire (145–81, 273). From its other occurrences in Plato’s *Phaedo*

³⁸ *Apoc. Paul* 16, for example, is clearly dependent on the *Apocalypse of Peter*; the angel’s name is otherwise known from magical contexts (PGM IV.2335; Marcellus Empiricus, *De medicamentis*) and several apocalyptic texts, which usually connect him with infernal worlds. It is not as well known that a female form of the angel’s name appears in SEG 44.1279 (a curse tablet from Cyprus) SEG 38.1837, a 2nd/3rd cent. love charm from Oxyrhynchus.

³⁹ For the following passage see again Rosenstiehl 1986: 29–34 plus Bremmer 2003: 8.

⁴⁰ This has been shown by Himmelfarb 1983.

⁴¹ For the full details of the following argument see Bremmer 2003; Bremmer 2010, and Bremmer 2011.

(69C) and *Republic* (363D), it is clear that the mention of *borboros* is typical of the Orphic picture of the underworld.⁴²

As a second argument, punishments related to lists of ethical commandments in the *Apocalypse of Peter* that resemble hell are attributed by Bremmer to Orphic influence.⁴³ This argument becomes even more persuasive if one follows E. Tigchelaar, who identifies doublets in the series of sins in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and concludes that this must be due to redactional activities on an already existing *Vorlage*, perhaps a catalogue of sins.⁴⁴ Bremmer's third argument, which at first seems very convincing, is somewhat problematic:⁴⁵ the motif of the "worship of cats" (*Apoc. Pet.* 10.5–6) finds many parallels in writings from early Egyptian Judaism (*Wis.* 12.24; 15.18; Aristob. fr. 138, Phil. *Decal.* 76–80, *Contempl.* 8; *Leg.* 139, 163) and thus seems to point to an Egyptian origin of the text. On the other hand, one has to admit that "worship of cats" only appears in the Ethiopic version and the existing Greek parallels (Akhm. 33 and Bodl.) do not contain it. Thus, it is very possible in this case that an original text pointing to the adoration of idols was expanded during its history of transmission.⁴⁶

2. Results regarding the text's alleged place and context of origin

The points mentioned above are just a few subjects among a host of others that have bearing on the *Apocalypse of Peter* and that help illumine the text's profile. Other possible topics of interest could include the question of intercessory prayer (cf. *Apoc. Pet.* 14),⁴⁷ the text's image of God,⁴⁸ its description of paradise

⁴² Bremmer 2010: 307f. This is a somewhat problematic argument, as Bremmer (2003: 12), himself concedes: "It is interesting to note that this term does not occur in the corresponding chapters of the Ethiopic translation. This raises the question as to whether it was dropped by the Ethiopic translation or at a later stage introduced into the Greek version. Now the idea of 'boiling mire' is strange enough to be dropped by a translator. This seems particularly clear in c. 31 where the Greek 'another lake, full of discharge and blood and boiling mire' is replaced by the bland Ethiopic 'another place nearby, saturated with filth'. I take it therefore that the mire was part of the original *ApPt.*"

⁴³ See Bremmer 2003: 13f.

⁴⁴ See Tigchelaar 2003: 72, also discussed by Bremmer 2010: 307.

⁴⁵ See Bremmer 2010: 307.

⁴⁶ See Bauckham 1994d: 160, also discussed by Nicklas 2011: 46.

⁴⁷ For a detailed treatment see Kraus 2009.

⁴⁸ I consider it especially interesting to ask whether the relation of God's judgment and its relation to the text's description of the underworld changes Old Testament images of God or perhaps can also be related to ideas about Serapis who can be represented together with Kerberos on images and thus related to Hades. See, for example, Schmidt 2013: 151–154.

(cf. *Apoc. Pet.* 16),⁴⁹ or its focus on the veneration of idols.⁵⁰ It becomes clear, however, that although the label “Jewish Christian” may be applied with some accuracy to the author or the group addressed in the text, this label is not very helpful and might even be misleading in many respects. Questions of proper Torah observance do not play any role in this text, and the author’s depictions of the end time and the otherworld connect sources and (some quite specific) ideas related to Jewish and Graeco-Roman worlds. Categories such as “Jewish,” “Christian,” and “pagan” – typically used to construct the history of groups with distinct cultures and boundaries – do not help to understand this text’s origins. The decisive role of the “nations” with their worship of idols in the *Apocalypse of Peter* makes it clear that the label “pagan Christian” does not make very good sense either. The author seems to be an educated Christ-follower who knows (parts of) what we call the Old Testament, including a deuterocanonical / apocryphal writing like the *Wisdom of Solomon*, who is influenced by the eschatology of *Matthew* (but not by its ethics), has some ideas about angelic worlds (but is not very interested in developing many of their details), and is at the same time influenced by the Hellenistic concepts of Acherousia, Elysion, *Ekpyrosis* and Orphic descriptions of hellish places and related ethics. Of course, such an author could theoretically have written his book anywhere, but he (or she?) would at least have needed to live for some time in a place where these different ideas and worldviews converged.

Is it plausible to understand such a text as a witness of early 2nd-cent. Palestinian Jewish Christianity and as closely connected to the persecution of Christians during the times of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (132–135 CE), as R. Bauckham (and following him E. Norelli) has suggested?⁵¹ Bauckham’s (certainly brilliant) main argument depends on a redactional critical observation regarding *Apoc. Pet.* 1–2 in relation to *Matt.* 24. He writes (1994d: 176):

[W]e should notice, first, that whereas Matthew 24:24 speaks of false Messiahs and false prophets [...], the *Apocalypse of Peter* speaks only of false Messiahs. The author is not interested in people who claimed to be the eschatological prophet, but only in those who claimed to be the Messiah. But notice, also secondly, that whereas Matthew speaks throughout of false Messiahs, in the plural, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, while it begins by following Matthew in this respect and warning against many false Messiahs (1:5), goes on in chapter 2 to focus on a single messianic pretender.

E. Tigchelaar has expressed doubts about the weight of this argument. He finds the description of the false Messiah far too general to ascribe it to Bar Kokh-

⁴⁹ More information about this will be possible with a habilitation project related to the “history of paradise” currently prepared by my assistant Dr. Heike Hötzing, University of Regensburg. See also Adamik 2003.

⁵⁰ See Kraus 2007.

⁵¹ See mainly Bauckham 1998d (reprinted from Bauckham 1994), but also Norelli 1991: 34–62, and Norelli 1997: 157f.

ba.⁵² Additionally, he notes that only the Ethiopic text does not mention false prophets, while vv. 1–2 of the Greek Akhmim fragment of the *Apocalypse of Peter* refer to false prophets. As far as I see, the question about the original text should at least be understood as open.⁵³ Since I have put together a few other arguments against Bauckham and Norelli's hypothesis⁵⁴ – many of them related to the text's description of hell – I do not want to repeat these here but to pose a few questions. Can our (partial!) reconstruction of the text's profile fit any region in early 2nd-cent. Palestine? Wouldn't a text in which the end of the world is closely bound to an identifiable figure like Bar Kokhba face problems very soon after its production (and its unfulfilled prophecies)?⁵⁵ Certainly much weaker is the *argumentum e silentio*, which suggests that Justin Martyr, a native of Flavia Neapolis (modern day Nablus) and the main Christian witness of the Bar Kokhba war (and of Bar Kokhba's alleged persecution of Christians [see *1 Apol.* 31.6]⁵⁶), shows no traces of knowledge about the *Apocalypse of Peter* whatsoever. These arguments give us plenty of reason to consider other possible places of origin for the *Apocalypse of Peter* – especially the great *metropoleis* of the Roman world.

As far as I can see, although the *Apocalypse of Peter* is (probably together with the early 2nd-cent. *Ascension of Isaiah*) the oldest extant witness of Peter's martyrdom in Rome,⁵⁷ Peter van Minnen's (cautious) proposal that the text may have originated in Rome⁵⁸ seems implausible in light of *Apoc. Pet.* 14.4, which describes Rome as "the city that rules over the West," thus showing an Eastern perspective on Rome. Perhaps two more arguments can be added that make places like the Syrian Antioch or Christian centres in Asia Minor or even Macedonia or Achaia implausible.

⁵² See Tigchelaar 2003: 74 where he writes: "The parables of the Fig Tree in *ApPt* 2 describe a false messiah in rather general terms which are also used in other texts (Qumran, pesharim, New Testament, Josephus) to denounce opponents or false prophets. It comes as no surprise that some of these terms were also applied to Bar Kokhba. The only element which is not common apocalyptic stock is the emphasis on martyrdom. This may be a reaction to persecutions during the Bar Kokhba revolt, but we do not have any evidence of large-scale martyrdom in the specific period whereas Justin Martyr even states that whenever the Jews had the power they killed Christians."

⁵³ Bolyki 2003, unfortunately overlooks the fact that the absence of "false prophets" in *Apoc. Pet.* 2 is a decisive argument for the Bar Kokhba hypothesis and relates the motif of "false prophets" in the *Apocalypse of Peter* to Rabbi Akiba.

⁵⁴ See mainly Nicklas 2011 and Nicklas 2006: 33–39.

⁵⁵ As a counter-argument, however, perhaps the survival of *Mark* could be mentioned, whose end time description seems closely bound to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

⁵⁶ For a critical discussion of this witness see Lieu 1998: 283f.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of both witnesses and their relation see Nicklas 2015.

⁵⁸ This proposal has been made by van Minnen 2003: 30, because of two reasons: the *Apocalypse of Peter* is the first text to mention Peter's martyrdom in Rome and is mentioned by the Muratorian Fragment.

2.1. As we have already seen, the text does not show clear traces of a Pauline influence⁵⁹ and, in contrast to other “Jewish Christian” writings, does not react negatively towards Pauline ideas; this is likely also the case for the Johannine writings. Is it probable, therefore, that such a text was written in early 2nd-cent. Antioch, Ephesus, or another city where Paul had preached his gospel and influenced or even founded communities of Christ-followers? This becomes even clearer when we take a look into the *Apocalypse of Peter*’s Christology (and its soteriology):⁶⁰ Jesus’ earthly ministry plays a very marginal role in the text; we do not read about his crucifixion or his resurrection and there is no relation established between crucifixion, resurrection, and salvation, as was the case for Paul and his followers. Judgment according to the *Apocalypse of Peter* is related to deeds, while belief / faith in Christ is not mentioned anywhere as a decisive criterion in the final judgment. Rather, the cross is reinterpreted as a sign of triumph related to Christ’s parousia; Christ (who is never called Jesus or even Jesus of Nazareth) is mainly the “Son of God,” the “Lord,” a heavenly figure installed as king and ruler by God himself.⁶¹ In addition, even if *Matthew* is known, the *Apocalypse of Peter*’s lack of interest in questions of *halakha* makes it extremely improbable that the author belonged to or was closely related to the closer group of (Syrian?) Christ-followers who produced *Matthew* and the *Didache* (and perhaps the *Epistle of James*).

2.2. Of course, a text’s reception history can never be the decisive argument for its place of origin. Nevertheless, the reception history should not be totally dismissed. According to A. Jakab’s overview of the early reception history of the *Apocalypse of Peter* (which is based on D.D. Buchholz),⁶² “in the second century the *Apocalypse of Peter* was known only in Rome and Syria.” This conclusion is simply wrong. Although a lack of extant traces of reception does not necessarily imply that a text was unknown in a certain part of the world, the positive evidence Jakab gives is outdated. Jakab is right to state that the *Apocalypse of Peter* is mentioned in the Muratorian Fragment (whose date, however, has been a matter of debate⁶³), but

⁵⁹ As “Pauline influence” I would even regard anti-Pauline stances as we find them (as far as I see, quite probably) in *Matthew*, quite certainly in the *Epistle of James*, and many texts labelled “Jewish-Christian.” Even John’s *Revelation* takes over parts of Paul’s Letter-form (on this aspect of *Revelation*, see Beasley-Murray 1974: 13).

⁶⁰ For more details see Nicklas 2014a.

⁶¹ I do not want to go so far to see a close relation between this Christology and the few traces of messianism we find in some of the Jewish Sibylline oracles, such as the idea in *Sib. Or.* 3.380–388 of a messianic king who defeats God’s enemies and shows them the darkness of the netherworld.

⁶² See Jakab 2003: 176 (for the following quote) and Buchholz 1988: 398–412.

⁶³ I would, however, follow Verheyden 2003: 487–556, who defends the classical dating with good arguments.

his statement that the *Epistula Apostolorum* (with four parallels to the *Apocalypse of Peter*) was written in the second half of the 2nd cent. in Syria⁶⁴ is nothing but a guess – the text simply does not permit the precise location to be identified.⁶⁵ The same is true with *Sib. Or. 2*.⁶⁶ Jakab also overlooks some evidence. Clement of Alexandria may have written his *Eclogae* (which quotes the *Apocalypse of Peter* several times) in the very early 3rd cent. CE. “Clement’s *Hypotyposeis*” (which, according to Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.13.12 included a lost, short commentary on the *Apocalypse of Peter*) must go back to an early period in which the author was still heavily influenced by his teacher Pantaenus. Additionally, Wolfgang Grünstäudl has recently shown that Clement’s extant quotes of the *Apocalypse of Peter* go back to an older, otherwise lost commentary on the *Psalms*, traces of which can still be found in *Ecl.* 41–65.⁶⁷ This commentary leads us back to the first generation of Christian teachers in Alexandria and is as such a very old witness of the reception of the *Apocalypse of Peter* in Alexandria. Other evidence can be added: as has already been mentioned, *2 Peter* uses the *Apocalypse of Peter* as its source, and Wolfgang Grünstäudl has recently located the origins of this text in Alexandria using arguments independent of *2 Peter*’s relation to the *Apocalypse of Peter*.⁶⁸ Besides these very new discoveries, other traces of the text’s early reception could be discussed: it is at least possible that a kernel of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, which certainly used the *Apocalypse of Peter* as a source, goes back to second or at least early 3rd-cent. Egypt.⁶⁹ There are also good reasons to believe that Lucian of Samosata (120–180 CE) – who at least in his late years lived in or visited Alexandria – used the *Apocalypse of Peter* in his Ἀληθῆ διηγήματα for the description of the Isle of the Damned.⁷⁰ If the clear parallels between the (probably) 3rd-cent. *Apocalypse of Elijah* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* are also taken into account, the 2nd- and 3rd-cent. evidence of the reception of the *Apocalypse of Peter* points convincingly to Egypt. If these final two arguments are combined with the evidence of the text’s tradition- and religio-historical profile and its literary relations, Alexandria is much more than just a good guess about the *Apocalypse of Peter*’s origin.

From another angle, the *Apocalypse of Peter* shows quite clearly that at least in some cases our usual categories of Jewish and pagan Christianity are inad-

⁶⁴ See Jakab 2003: 175f.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Müller 2012: 1064: “Eine genaue Festlegung des Abfassungsortes erlauben Inhalt und handschriftliche Überlieferung nicht. Bis heute werden in der Forschung Kleinasien, Syrien und Ägypten genannt.”

⁶⁶ Regarding the literary relation of the *Apocalypse of Peter* and *Sib. Or. 2* see also Kraus 2003b.

⁶⁷ Grünstäudl 2013a: 268–281.

⁶⁸ Grünstäudl 2013a: 234–286.

⁶⁹ See, for example, the discussion by Copeland 2010: 369–389.

⁷⁰ For a more detailed argument see von Möllendorff 2000: 427–430 (also mentioned by Bremmer 2011: 24) and 2005.

equate. The text bears witness to an early 2nd cent. Christianity that was open to many aspects of the ancient world. On the one hand, this Christianity was faithful to expressions of belief in the Scriptures of Israel and early Jewish literature (and related interpretations), but on the other hand it was also open to concepts from what is commonly called the Graeco-Roman world, which (consciously or unconsciously) comprised various forms of Judaism. The fact that this Christianity not only made use of various traditions but was employed by authors as different as Clement of Alexandria and Lucian of Samosata makes it clear that this world allowed boundaries (or what can be called boundaries from our perspective) to be crossed (even if for the purpose of caricaturing another group and its thought).

The evidence suggests another point. Although the text's profile connects it at least in part with Jewish Scripture and its interpretation, it does not show concrete polemics against Jews. Even hell as described in the *Apocalypse of Peter* does not contain "Jews" (or is at least not interested in Jewish persecutors of Christians). At the same time it stresses the idea of the power of one God who during the "Day of God" will punish all idolatry and will enthrone his Son to establish an eternal kingdom for his elect. Might this general lack of anti-Jewish polemics stem from the fact that the *Apocalypse of Peter* was written after the great diaspora war of 115–117 CE when the Jewish communities of Egypt had been extinguished? Although the evidence is scarce, perhaps a scholarly guess may be permitted: a few sources – including Celsus' *Alethes logos* and possible Alexandrian writings like *Ad Diognetum* and *Barnabae epistula* – show that the (almost total) extinction of the Jewish community of Alexandria did not result in an end of anti-Judaism in Alexandria (which had a long history).⁷¹ For this reason I regard it as highly possible that the *Apocalypse of Peter* was written shortly before the diaspora revolt in a context where being a follower of Christ did not exclude being a Jew.⁷² In this case perhaps the fear of future rumors and martyrdoms could be explained as reactions to a growing fanaticism of Jewish groups in the diaspora, which perhaps had to do with the fact that after the war of 66–70 CE the Diaspora communities of Lower Egypt had to integrate fugitives from Palestine.⁷³ This, however, is nothing more than a (hopefully) good scholarly guess.

3. Conclusion

In his fascinating book *From Paul to Valentinus*, P. Lampe has demonstrated the surprisingly great variety of (sometimes quite small) Christian groups in

⁷¹ For an overview of material relevant for the history of Alexandrian anti-Judaism see Conzelmann 1981: 43–120; see also Nicklas 2014b: 497–499.

⁷² This quite early date would also explain the lack of "Gnostic" influence in the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

⁷³ This idea is mentioned by Tilly 2008: 55.

Rome and their mutual tolerance up to the middle of the 2nd cent. CE and later.⁷⁴ As P. Trebilco has shown, the overall situation in Ephesus was comparable.⁷⁵ It might never be possible to write a similar volume about the early days of Christianity in Alexandria.⁷⁶ The *Apocalypse of Peter*, however, adds an important piece to an otherwise incomplete puzzle. The text points to a group of Christ-followers who on the one hand seem to have been isolated from important strands of earliest Christianity, but who on the other hand were interested in the figure of the apostle Peter, developed the idea of a heavenly Christ who, accompanied by his cross, will come back as a triumphant figure at the end of days. These Christians believed in a powerful God who as creator of the world has the power to resurrect the dead and whose justice means that he will punish every sinner – especially those who do not worship him – in places of eternal torture while reserving a place for the elect in Christ’s eternal kingdom. Additionally, the author (and his group) may have sensed the “winds of change” that both led to the catastrophe of the diaspora revolt and almost totally destroyed Jewish life in Egypt (and many other parts of the diaspora) for more than a century.⁷⁷

The text does not clarify whether it views “Judaism” and “Christianity”⁷⁸ as separate entities, whether “Judaism” as a group stood in opposition to the community of Christ-followers, or whether the Christ-followers were in many ways indebted to Jewish ideas. Nevertheless, the label “Jewish Christianity” (with its many associations regarding Torah practice and lower Christology) seems problematic since this “Judaism” is very different from what we find in the writings of communities like the Nazoraeans or Ebionites. It is a Judaism able to integrate many elements from its diaspora world. On the other hand, the fact that the *Apocalypse of Peter* was read and used by a person like Lucian of Samosata shows that there must also have been many bridges between the groups of “Christ-followers” for whom the *Apocalypse of Peter* was written and their surrounding world.

Perhaps we can even go one small step further: in an important monograph É. Rebillard has discussed the many (and dynamic) “identities” of Christians in pre-Constantine North Africa.⁷⁹ Perhaps the *Apocalypse of Peter* also offers

⁷⁴ Lampe 2003; English translation of Lampe 1987.

⁷⁵ See Trebilco 2004; see similarly Witetschek 2008.

⁷⁶ Fürst 2007 starts much later. Wehnert 2013 gathers together the scarce evidence on Apollos.

⁷⁷ According to Epp 2006: 48–49, the papyrus evidence documents a recovery of Judaism in Oxyrhynchus only for the second half of the 3rd cent. CE.

⁷⁸ This becomes even clearer when we compare it to other 2nd-cent. writings also (possibly) coming from Alexandria like *Barnabae epistula* or *Ad Diognetum*. Regarding the problem of speaking about a “Parting of the Ways” in different 2nd-cent. contexts see Nicklas 2014c.

⁷⁹ Rebillard 2012.

evidence that in many ways, 2nd-cent. Christianities were by no means entities with stable “identities” (if it possible to speak about a stable identity at all) and clear borders delimiting them from what ancient apologists called “Jews” and “Greeks.”

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The Once and Future King of Egypt: Egyptian “Messianism” and the Construction of the *Alexander Romance**

Philippe Matthey

1. The Egyptian origins of the *Alexander Romance*

The origins and exact circumstances of the formation of the famous narrative known as the *Alexander Romance* have eluded specialists for quite a long time now. This piece of literary fiction, which tells a highly imaginative version of the Macedonian conqueror’s life and deeds, was composed in Greek through the combination of multiple and heterogeneous sources, and was at first falsely attributed to the Greek historian and Alexander’s companion Callisthenes. The narrative progressively encountered an incredible success as the Greek original was augmented and then translated, adapted and rewritten quite a few times in various vernacular languages throughout Europe, Africa and Asia until the end of the Middle Ages.¹

In its first, Hellenic version, the *Alexander Romance* is known from a large number of manuscripts, split up in three main families, which often present considerable differences in the way they narrate Alexander’s legendary adventures. What is probably the oldest version of the Greek *Alexander Romance* and the richest in details concerning the Egyptian background of the story is the recension α , which has been reconstructed from a single manuscript, Parisinus G. 1711, also known as text A.² Although this manuscript is dated from the 11th cent. CE, the text itself was probably composed between the 2nd and the 4th cent. CE, with many elements pointing to an early stage of redaction in Alexan-

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¹ See Jouanno 2002.

² See the edition by Kroll 1926 and more recently Stoneman 2007 (with an introduction, commentaries and complete Italian translation). An English translation of some passages of text A can be found in Stoneman 1991. It should be noted that the Parisinus G. 1711 has several lacunae, and that Kroll reconstructed the Greek text with the help of two later translations of the text A’s *Romance*: one in Latin by Julius Valerius (3rd cent. CE; Latin text and Italian translation in Stoneman 2007), and the other in Armenian (5th cent. CE; Wolohojian 1969).

dria during the early years of the 3rd cent. BCE.³ The other main versions – the recensions β (with sub-recension λ) and ε (with sub-recension γ) – were mostly compiled during the Byzantine period.⁴ For the purposes of the present article, only the most comprehensive version of the Greek *Alexander Romance* conserved in text L (Leidensis Vulc. 93, manuscript from the 15th cent. CE) will be considered: an atypical but very complete version belonging to the recension β , it is a rewriting of the story dated from the 5th cent. CE, which pays slightly less attention to the Egyptian background as what is depicted in the text A.⁵

One episode of the *Romance* in particular bears traces of heavy Egyptian influence. It is the famous introduction featuring pharaoh Nectanebo (1.1–14), a character inspired by the historical figure of Nectanebo II, last native ruler of Egypt from 361/360 to 343 BCE before the Second Persian domination. This episode presents a pseudo-historical narrative of the events leading to Alexander the Great's birth, beginning with the depiction of Nectanebo as a potent wizard who uses spells to keep Egypt's enemies at bay. Soon, however, the pharaoh has to relinquish his crown and to flee out of his country after realising that his own gods are backing up the Persian invaders, for reasons that remain unexplained in the *Romance*. An Egyptian prophecy, however, then reveals that the pharaoh will one day come back rejuvenated under the appearance of a younger king, who will avenge his predecessor by defeating the Persians. Meanwhile, Nectanebo, exiled in Macedonia and established at the royal court in Pella under the guise of an Egyptian prophet and astrologist, uses his wiles and his magical powers to convince the queen Olympias that she is fated to have intercourse with the god Ammon. He then disguises himself as Ammon before entering the queen's bed, thus becoming the true father of Alexander the Great, whose eventual conquest of Egypt can be presented as the return of the rightful king.

Such an intriguing narrative has quite often been understood as the result of a certain Egyptian “nationalistic propaganda,”⁶ the product of an Egyptian (sacerdotal) collective whose purpose was to forge a tool of cultural resistance against the hegemony of foreign Greek rulers.⁷ To employ the notion of “nationalism,” of course, is in itself somewhat anachronistic because it presupposes

³ For further discussions on the date of composition of the *Alexander Romance*'s (Hellenistic or Roman period), see Jouanno 2002: 13–17 and 26–28; Stoneman 2007: xxv–xxxiv; Stoneman 2009.

⁴ On the textual tradition of the *Alexander Romance*, see Stoneman 2007: lxxiii–lxxxiii. A fourth tradition – recension δ which was based on recension α but is no longer extant – was the main source used for the *Alexander Romance*'s other translations.

⁵ Editions by Bergson 1965 and Stoneman 2007. Translations in Stoneman 1991 (English) and Stoneman 2007 (Italian).

⁶ Whether the concept of “propaganda” is actually relevant to Hellenistic and Roman-era Egypt is discussed in Simpson 1996 and Vernus 1995a.

⁷ See Eddy 1961: 257–294 and Lloyd 1982: 46–50. The theory is still advocated in Huss 2000: 123–126 and evoked in Whitmarsh 2010: 407–408.

that the Egyptian society during the Ptolemaic period was clearly divided in two opposing ethnic groups, with the Greek-Macedonians settlers on one side and the native Egyptians on the other side.⁸ The political and cultural landscape of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt is, indeed, often presented as one of strife and conflicts, with the indigenous Egyptians set up against the Greek and Roman “invaders.” the various revolutions that took place during the “Ptolemaic period,” for instance, tend to confirm this perception; the most important among them being of course the establishment, during the reign of Ptolemy IV (between 205 and 186 BCE), of a “native” Egyptian counter-kingdom in Upper Egypt by the self-stylised pharaohs Haronnophris (Herwennefer) and Chaonnophris (Ankhwennefer). Recent studies, however, tend to downplay the Egyptian nationalistic elements of such revolts, and to emphasise their social and economical aspects: although Egyptian “revolutionary” movements did integrate anti-Greek or anti-Alexandrian feelings, it’s possible that they were being chiefly directed against the privileged status of the Greeks and of the Greek *poleis* instead of purely motivated by a “nationalistic” agenda.⁹

Elements that we would today call “nationalistic” did of course play a role in the historical insurrections and in the Egyptian literary bedrock on which the prologue to the *Alexander Romance* was built. But, as the present article proposes to argue, such “nationalistic” features might more precisely be coined as “religious” or “ethic” and their presence considered as the by-products of a long-standing Egyptian sacerdotal ideology whose origins can be traced back all the way to the New Kingdom, and which paralleled similar ideologies developed at the same time in other regions of the ancient Near East.

To qualify the Nectanebo story in the *Alexander Romance* as the expression of a nationalistic conflict between Greeks and Egyptians, then, would probably be an oversimplification. Indeed, it seems that the Nectanebo prologue itself could serve two different but tightly interwoven purposes: it appears on one side to cater to an Egyptian readership by making fun of the Macedonian royal power through the description of Olympias and Philipp II’s deception at the hands of Nectanebo, and by claiming that the former Egyptian sovereign gained his power back through the actions of his son Alexander. On the other side, though, it can also be understood as a way to legitimate the Ptolemaic rule in Egypt by presenting the Lagid kings as direct heirs to the pharaohs of old, rather as mere foreign invaders.

Considering the inherent double meaning of this narrative, the present article proposes to refrain from analysing it as the result of a deliberate propaganda

⁸ For differing point of views on the importance of “nationalism” in Hellenistic Egypt, see Veisse 2007 and McGing 2012. On the complex question of ethnic identities and “racial” stratification in Hellenistic Egypt, see for instance the critical studies of Gorre 2007; Torallas Tovar 2010; Tallet 2011; Fischer-Bovet 2013.

⁹ See Clarysse 2004; Veisse 2004.

project constructed in reaction to particular historical events (in this case the Lagid, and then Roman, domination of Egypt). Instead, it will aim to further delve into the complex question of the Egyptian sources of the Nectanebo prologue¹⁰ and to consider it as the product of what Lévi-Strauss called a *bricolage*, assembled without a specific purpose through the workings of the mythopoietic *pensée sauvage* and the borrowings of literary components and sacerdotal traditions present in the intellectual horizon of Hellenistic and Roman Alexandria.¹¹

2. “Apocalyptic” literature in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt

Among the main influences behind the prologue of the *Alexander Romance* are some texts belonging to the corpus of Graeco-Egyptian literature known as “apocalyptic” or “pseudo-prophetic.”¹² The intrigue told in the Nectanebo story presents strong similarities with the core elements of this literary “genre:”¹³ an impious pharaoh somehow realises that the Egyptian gods have decided to cast him down and let Egypt be invaded by chaos-sowing foreigners, but is also informed through a prophecy that justice and balance will eventually be restored in the future with the advent of a saviour king. Such a narrative framework is also consistent with a form of theodicy that was particularly important in Egypt during the Late Period, a trend describing the ideal pharaoh as a model of piety

¹⁰ On the Egyptian influences on the *Alexander Romance*, see Merkelbach 1977; Barns 1955; Jasnow 1997; Dillery 2004; Matthey 2011; Moyer 2011; Rutherford 2013.

¹¹ Lévi-Strauss 1962: 26–36. In the prologue to the *Alexander Romance*, the descriptions concerning the “magical” operations accomplished by Nectanebo, particularly the so-called “lecanomancy,” clearly appear to be reinterpretations of rituals belonging to the Egyptian sacerdotal tradition (Matthey 2012: 194–228).

¹² On “apocalypticism” in Antiquity, and on the pertinence of applying this category to Egypt, see below, as well as Raphaël 1977; Smith 1982; Hellholm 1989; Collins, McGinn, Stein 1998; Schipper 2002. In 1925, Chester McCown was the first to apply the designation “apocalyptic” to the Egyptian texts presenting similarities with the Judaeo-Christian apocalypses (Gr. *apokalypsis*, “revelation,” in reference to the John’s *Revelation*, 1st cent. CE), of which the oldest example would be *1 Enoch* (4th–3rd cent. BCE). See McCown 1925; Collins 1998. The Graeco-Egyptian “apocalyptic” texts have some elements in common with the Judaeo-Christian genre, such as being heirs to earlier traditions of wisdom and prophetic texts, and being characterised by the integration of catastrophic descriptions in a pseudo-prophecy (a prophecy *ex eventu* or *post eventum*, written after the event it describes). “Apocalypses” of both traditions often also feature messianic announcements about the advent of a saviour figure and pay great attention to a theonomic conception of history according to which all events are planned in advance by the divinity (on the notions of theodicy and theonomy see further below, as well as Enmarch 2008 and Leuenberger 2012).

¹³ “Literature,” in the present essay, should be understood in a very wide sense, embracing every written source that is not classified as “documentary.” The notion of “genre” in the Egyptian literature, similarly, is also to be employed in a very loose manner. See Tait 1992.

and observance of the divine law.¹⁴ Generally speaking, the production context of such “apocalyptic” literature, in Egypt and elsewhere in the world, has often been linked to historical situations of crisis or conflict, and understood as the expression of revolutionary aspirations by a community suffering from a real or imagined loss of its privileged status, for instance after a foreign invasion or a sudden social upheaval.¹⁵ But the extent to which these perceived conflicts are actually authentic can widely vary: as the present paper proposes to show, Graeco-Egyptian “apocalyptic” narratives should not be taken to face value.

The tentatively called “apocalyptic” or pseudo-prophetic literature from the Late Period and Graeco-Roman Egypt actually consists in a very small corpus: it is comprised of three main texts known as the *Demotic “Chronicle,”* the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, and the *Oracle of the Potter*, to which can be added for the purpose of this article the complex narrative ensemble formed by the introduction to the Greek *Alexander Romance* and the Greek and Demotic versions of a text known as *Nectanebo’s Dream*.¹⁶

The oldest of these texts, and probably the most complex to analyse, is the so-called *Demotic “Chronicle,”* a sequence of oracular answers accompanied by their explanations, conserved on a unique and very fragmentary manuscript.¹⁷ These oracles were assembled in “chapters” (Eg. *ḥw.t*) of which only half a dozen are still conserved: they concern the Egyptian kings of the 28th, 29th and 30th dynasties and predict in enigmatic terms that a period of troubles will be caused in Egypt because of the impious behaviour of an unnamed pharaoh who can only be one of the rulers of the 30th dynasty, most probably Nectanebo I. The wrongful pharaoh will abandon the (divine) law (Eg. *ḥp*), be cursed by the gods, and will be responsible for the invasion of his realm by various foreigners, namely the Medes (the Persians) and the Greeks.¹⁸ But the oracle also announces that a new king will arise in the town of Herakleopolis and drive the foreign rulers out of Egypt while bringing happiness and order back to the country. In its present state, the text shows different layers of writing: the oracles of the chapters 6 to 8 are pronounced by the ram-god Harsaphes (Heryshef) in his temple of Herakleopolis, and the prediction concerning the advent of the

¹⁴ Johnson 1983; Enmarch 2008.

¹⁵ See Cohn 1957 and Lanternari 1960 for the first academic theories linking the production of world-wide “apocalyptic” literature to social revolutionary movements designed as “millenarian” or “messianic” (i.e. expecting the advent of a golden age or of a saviour leader). More recently, see also Landes 2011 and Lincoln 2013.

¹⁶ Bergman 1989; Griffiths 1989; Collins 1998; Blasius, Schipper 2002; Ryholt 2010: 718–719. For recent translations of some of these texts, see Hoffmann, Quack 2007 (in German).

¹⁷ P. Bibliothèque Nationale 215 = TM No. 48875, dated between the end of the Ptolemaic era and the second half of the 3rd cent. BCE. See Spiegelberg 1914; Johnson 1983; Kügler 1994; Hoffmann, Quack 2007: 183–191; Quack 2009.

¹⁸ On the concept of *ḥep-law*, linked to the observance of Egyptian *Maat*, see Nims 1948 and Griffiths 1989: 281–282.

saviour king explicitly depicts him as a prophet of the same god from Herakleopolis. In the other conserved chapters, however, the allusions to Heryshef and Herakleopolis are dropped altogether, probably because the “*Chronicle*” was updated and (re)written at a later time by authors who weren’t interested anymore in referring to the Herakleopolitan background: it seems that the text was first composed under the reign of Nectanebo II as a requisitory against his immediate predecessors (Nectanebo I and Teos), but was then revised to address other topics such as the Persian domination and the arrival of Alexander the Great’s armies.¹⁹ Taken as a whole, however, the text’s general theme seems to consist in a theory of Egyptian kingship according to which a pharaoh accomplishing good deeds (particularly towards the gods and their temples) is rewarded by a long and prosperous reign, while a ruler neglecting his duties leads the country to its downfall and its capture by foreign enemies.

The second text, known as the *Prophecy of the Lamb* or the *Lamb of Bocchoris*, is also conserved on a single fragmentary manuscript in Demotic.²⁰ It relates the story of a curse pronounced by a miraculous lamb in front of an Egyptian priest named Pasaenhor during the 6th reigning year of pharaoh Bakeref (Bocchoris, last pharaoh of the 24th dynasty from 718 to 712 BCE).²¹ Inspired by the god Pre (Re), the lamb foretells a period of troubles in Egypt under the reign of Bocchoris, including a reversal of the social and moral norms, invasions by foreign armies (Assyrians, Medes and Greeks), and the pillage and plundering of the Egyptian temples and country. The lamb then dies and is buried in a golden shrine like a god, but not before having predicted his own return to bring back order to Egypt after a period of nine hundred years.²² Even though the text of the *Prophecy of the Lamb* as such is only attested in a single manuscript, the story seems to have achieved a certain degree of popularity

¹⁹ On the various writing stages of the Demotic “*Chronicle*,” see Quack 2009.

²⁰ P.Vindob.D 1000 = TM 48888; the scribe has dated the papyrus as having been written on the 1st of August in the year 4 CE. The composition of the text, however, probably goes back to the end of the Second Persian domination or the early years of the Lagid kings. See Kákósy 1981; Zauzich 1983; Thissen 1998; Simpson 2003: 445–449 (English translation).

²¹ The prophecy is thus presented as having been pronounced during Bocchoris’ final year of reign, just like in the cases of the foretelling revealed to Nectanebo in the *Prophecy of Petesis* (*Nectanebo’s Dream*), and of his “discussion” with the Egyptian gods during his lecanomancy ritual in the *Alexander Romance* (see below). According to Manetho (fr. 66 and 67, *apud* Eusebius), Bocchoris was burned alive after having lost his throne to Shabaka, conqueror of Egypt and second pharaoh of the XXV (Nubian) dynasty. In a way, then, Bocchoris embodies another figure of the last native pharaoh before the invasion and domination of Egypt by foreigners, in this case by the Nubian pharaohs and then by the Assyrian kings (from ca. 710 to 656 BCE).

²² Some consider that this mention of a nine-hundred years period could hint to a Graeco-Iranian influence in the composition of the *Prophecy of the Lamb*: it is the canonical length of zoroastrian cycle according to Plut. *Mor.* 370b–c (*Is. Os.* 47). See Griffiths 1989: 286; Hultgård 1998.

as it is referred to both in Manetho's *Aegyptiaca*²³ and in the Graeco-Egyptian apocalyptic text known as the *Oracle of the Potter*.²⁴ Another tradition attributed to Plutarch similarly evokes an Alexandrian expression, "the lamb spoke to you," which supposedly alluded to the prophecy revealed by a monstrous lamb to an anonymous pharaoh.²⁵ A last tradition of the 3rd cent. CE, finally, mentions the prophetic lamb of Bocchoris as a fabulous creature possessing eight legs, two tails, two heads and four horns.²⁶

The third text, the *Oracle of the Potter*, is known through at least five fragmentary papyri dated between the 2nd cent. BCE and the 3rd cent. CE.²⁷ Although all copies of this tale are conserved in Greek, there is a good chance that it was translated from an Egyptian original.²⁸ The core narrative of all versions begins with the account of the encounter between a maddened potter and a pharaoh named Amenophis while the latter is visiting a sanctuary to Osiris and Isis on the "island of Helios." The potter, possessed by the god Hermes, utters a prophecy in front of the king revealing that Egypt will soon be laid to waste in a series of misfortunes apparently mirroring the way the potter's kiln was vandalised during the king's visit. Among the predicted calamities is the invasion by a foreign enemies referred to as "Typhonians,"²⁹ followers of the god Seth, and

²³ Manetho, fr. 64, 65a-b and b Waddell: "Bochchôris of Saïs, for 6 years (44 years in Eusebius' version): in his reign a lamb spoke [...] 990 years."

²⁴ P.Oxy. 22.2332, 32-34 = TM 64149: "But the one (ruling) for fifty-five years, because he is ours, will bring to the Greeks the evils which the lam {m} b announced to [B]acharis."

²⁵ Meyer 1909; Greek text in Crusius 1887: 12.

²⁶ Ael. *Nat. an.* 12.3.

²⁷ A first, anti-Alexandrian version of the text is conserved on three documents: two papyri from Vienna, P.Graf (G. 29787 = TM 68639, referred to as "P1" in Koenen's edition; 2nd cent. CE) and P.Rain.G. 19813 (TM 63927 or "P2," 3rd cent. CE), and on P.Oxy. 22.2332v. (TM 64149 or "P3," late 3rd cent. CE). Fragments of another recension featuring anti-Jewish and pro-heliopolitan elements are conserved on two documents: the PSI 982 (CPJ 3.520 = TM 64035, or "P4," dated either from the 3rd-2nd cent. BCE according to Koenen 2002, or from the 2nd-3rd cent. CE according to the TM database) and the (still unpublished) P.Oxy. [26] 3B.52.B (13) (a) (TM 68640 = "P5," 2nd cent. BCE). See Koenen 1968; Dunand 1977; Bohak 1995; Kerkeslager 1998 (English translation); Koenen 2002: as well as Harker 2003: 123, n. 132 for references to further manuscript fragments.

²⁸ The scribe of P. Rainer claims in the colophon of his manuscript that the Greek text was "translated as best as possible" (*methermeneumene kata to dynaton*). The original Demotic version is thought to have been composed sometimes around the 2nd cent. BCE.

²⁹ The "Typhonians" are related to the Greeks in the anti-Alexandrian version (esp. P.Oxy. 22.2332, 2.33 = TM 64149), but are explicitly identified as Jews in the anti-Jewish version, probably as a parallel to Manetho's "proto-apocalyptic" narrative concerning the Egyptian origins of the Jews: according to this story, "impure" or "polluted" Egyptians once joined with the invading "Shepherd kings," i.e. the historical Hyksos whose tutelary god incidentally was Seth/Typhon, before they all were chased out of Egypt back to Jerusalem where they became the Jewish people (Manetho, fr. 54 Waddell, *apud* Jos. C. *Ap.* 1.26-31). See Volokhine 2007 and 2010.

“girdle-wearers” (*zonophoroi*).³⁰ The main recension of the story depicts how these Typhonians and their impious kings move the Egyptian capital from Memphis to a new city that can be identified as Alexandria,³¹ before their eventual self-destruction allows for the return of Egypt’s exiled cult images to Memphis and the fifty-five years long reign of a just king appointed by Isis and Helios. The epilogue of the story tells how the potter dies and is buried in Heliopolis by the pharaoh. Since the story of the *Oracle of the Potter* takes place in Heliopolis, it has been argued that the first version of the text was produced there by Egyptian priests devoted to Khnum, a god often depicted as a ram-headed potter.³²

A few other texts can be added to this corpus of Graeco-Egyptian “apocalyptic” texts, but the present article will focus on the fragmentary story that can be reconstructed through the comparison of the Egyptian episode of the *Alexander Romance*, the document known as the *Prophecy of Petesis* (or *Nectanebo’s Dream*), and its sequel called *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris*.

3. Apocalyptic elements in the *Alexander Romance*

As mentioned above, the *Alexander Romance* begins with a presentation of Egypt and of the magical skills of its king, pharaoh Nectanebo. While he’s usually able to single-handedly defend his country from any menacing armies thanks to his thaumaturgical powers, Nectanebo one day realises, as he performs his ritual, that his own gods are set against him and are protecting the Persian armada invading his land:

καὶ μόνος γενόμενος πάλιν τῇ αὐτῇ ἀγωγῇ χρησάμενος ἠτένισεν εἰς τὴν λεκάνην. καὶ ὁρᾷ τοὺς τῶν Αἰγυπτίων θεοὺς κυβερνῶντας τὰ πλοῖα τῶν πολεμίων βαρβάρων καὶ τὰ στρατόπεδα αὐτῶν ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ὀδηγούμενα. ὁ δὲ Νεκτεναβὼ τῇ μαγείᾳ πολὺπειρος ὢν ἄνθρωπος καὶ εἰθισμένος τοῖς θεοῖς αὐτοῦ ὁμιλεῖν, μαθὼν παρ’ αὐτῶν ὅτι τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς Αἰγύπτου βασιλείας † εἰσὶν †, ἐγκολπωσάμενος χρυσίον πολὺν καὶ ξυρησάμενος τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὸν πώγωνα

³⁰ For the potential interpretations of this otherwise unattested term, see Clarysse 1991 (it might allude to policemen or soldiers) and Koenen 2002: 180, n. 4 (possible Greek translation of an old Egyptian expression referring to foreign enemies – *rmṯ hr ‘gšw* “men wearing a girdle”). See also Dunand 1977, 42–43 concerning the improbability of an Iranian influence to explain this expression (sometimes falsely interpreted as a reference to girdle-wearing daemons in a Zoroastrian prophecy).

³¹ P.Oxy. 22.2332 (“P3” = TM 64149), 1.1–4 (transl. Kerkeslager 1998): “And he will rule Egypt [after he has enter]ed into the city that is being created, which [will] make the gods anew for itself after it has cast (as in a mold) its own f[o]rm.” The expression *ktizomene[n] polin* “town under construction” corresponds to the Egyptian name of Alexandria, *rꜥ-qdt* “construction, building site” (Hellenised form “Rhacotis;” see Chauveau 1999 and Depauw 2000). The reference to new gods being fabricated there is of course an allusion to the invention of Sarapis.

³² Kerkeslager 1998: 68.

αὐτοῦ καὶ μεταμορφώσας ἑαυτὸν ἐτέρῳ σχήματι ἔφυγε διὰ τοῦ Πηλουσίου. [...] Οἱ οὖν Αἰγύπτιοι ἡξίουσαν τοὺς ὡσανεὶ θεοὺς αὐτῶν, τί ἄρα γέγονεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Αἰγύπτου. ἦν γὰρ πᾶσα ἡ Αἴγυπτος ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων πορθηθεῖσα. ὁ δὲ ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ τοῦ Σεραπείου θεὸς αὐτῶν λεγόμενος ἐχρησιμοδότησεν αὐτοῖς εἰπὼν· “οὗτος ὁ φυγὼν βασιλεὺς ἡξεί πάλιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ οὐ γηράσκων ἀλλὰ νεάζων καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν Πέρσας ὑποτάξει.” καὶ συνεζήτησαν τί ἄρα θέλει τὸ εἰρημένον αὐτοῖς. καὶ μὴ εὐρόντες γράφουσι τὸν δοθέντα αὐτοῖς χρησμὸν ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει τοῦ ἀνδριάντος Νεκτεναβῶ.

And when he (*Nectanebo*) was alone he made all his usual preparations and gazed into the bowl. There he saw the gods of Egypt steering the ships of the barbarians, and the armies under the command of the same gods. Nectanebo, being a man experienced in magic and accustomed to talk with his gods, realised that the end of the Egyptian kingdom was at hand. He filled his garments with gold, and shaved his hair and beard. Thus transformed in appearance, he fled to Pelusium. [...] Meanwhile, the Egyptians asked their so-called gods what had become of the King of Egypt, since all of Egypt had been overrun by the barbarians. And the self-styled god in the sanctuary of the Serapeum spoke an oracle to them: ‘This king who has fled will return to Egypt not as an old man, but as a youth, and he will overcome our enemies the Persians.’ They asked one another what the meaning of this saying might be; but, finding no answer, they wrote down the oracle that had been given to them on the pedestal of the statue of Nectanebo.³³

And Sarapis’ prophecy indeed comes true, albeit much later in the story, when the young Alexander arrives in Egypt some time later:

Ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος παραλαβὼν τὰ στρατεύματα ἐπείγετο εἰς τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἀπελθεῖν. καὶ ἐλθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς Μέμφην τὴν πόλιν ἐνεθρονίασαν αὐτὸν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι εἰς τὸ τοῦ Ἥφαιστου θρόνιστήριον ὡς Αἰγύπτιον βασιλέα. ἰδὼν δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐν τῇ Μέμφῃ ὑψηλὸν ἀνδριάντα ἀνιερωμένον ἐκ μέλανος λίθου ἔχοντα ἐπιγραφὴν εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν αὐτοῦ βάσιν· “Οὗτος ὁ φυγὼν βασιλεὺς ἡξεί πάλιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ οὐ γηράσκων ἀλλὰ νεάζων καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν Πέρσας ὑποτάξει ἡμῖν.” ἐπύθετο οὖν Ἀλέξανδρος, τίνοος ἄρα ἐστὶν ὁ ἀνδριάνς οὗτος. οἱ δὲ προφητῆται εἶπον αὐτῷ· “οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀνδριάνς ὁ ἔσχατος τῆς Αἰγύπτου βασιλεὺς Νεκτεναβῶ. καὶ ἐλθόντων τῶν Περσῶν τὴν Αἴγυπτον πορθήσαι εἶδε διὰ τῆς μαγικῆς δυνάμεως τοὺς θεοὺς τῶν Αἰγυπτίων τὰ στρατόπεδα τῶν ἐναντίων προοδηγοῦντας καὶ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ὑπ’ αὐτῶν πορθουμένην, καὶ γνοὺς τὴν μέλλουσαν ἔσεσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτῶν προδοσίαν ἔφυγεν. ζητούντων δὲ ἡμῶν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀξιούντων τοὺς θεοὺς ποῦ ἄρα ἔφυγεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἡμῶν Νεκτεναβῶ, ἐχρησιμοδότησαν ἡμῖν, ὅτι οὗτος ὁ φυγὼν βασιλεὺς ἡξεί πάλιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ οὐ γηράσκων ἀλλὰ νεάζων καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν Πέρσας ὑποτάξει ἡμῖν.” ἀκούσας δὲ ταῦτα Ἀλέξανδρος ἐμπηδῆσας εἰς τὸν ἀνδριάντα περιπλέκεται αὐτῷ λέγων· “οὗτος πατήρ μου ἐστίν, τοῦτου ἐγὼ υἱός εἰμι. οὐκ ἐψεύσατο ὑμᾶς ὁ τοῦ χρησμοῦ λόγος. καὶ θαυμάζω πῶς παρελήφθητε ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων τείχη ἔχοντες ἀκαταμάχητα μὴ δυνάμενα ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων καταβληθῆναι. ἀλλὰ τοῦτο τῆς ἄνω προνοίας ἐστὶ καὶ τῆς τῶν θεῶν δικαιοσύνης, ἵνα ὑμεῖς ἔχοντες εὐφορον γῆν καὶ γόνιμον ποταμὸν ἀχειροποιήτον ὑποτεταγμένοι ἐστὲ τοῖς μὴ ἔχουσι ταῦτα. εἰ γὰρ ταῦτα ἔχοντες > δωρεάν καὶ <ε>βασιλεύετε, ἔθνησκον [γὰρ] οἱ βάρβαροι ταῦτα μὴ ἔχοντες.”

Then Alexander hastened with his army towards Egypt. When he reached Memphis, the Egyptians put him on the throne of Hephaestus as king of Egypt. In Memphis Alexander saw a very

³³ *Historia Alexandri Magni*, 1.3 (text L; transl. Stoneman 1991). The same passage is present in all the different recensions, with a few minor variants. The mention of the god Serapis is of course anachronistic.

tall statue of black stone which was treated as holy. On its base was this inscription: “This king who has fled will return to Egypt, no longer an old man but a young one, and will subject our enemies the Persians to us.” Alexander inquired whose statue this was, and the prophets told him: “This is the statue of the last king of Egypt, Nectanebo. When the Persians came to sack Egypt, he saw, through his magic art, the gods of the Egyptians leading the army of the enemy, and the land of Egypt being ravaged by them. So, knowing what was to come as a result of their betrayal, he fled. We, however, searched for him, and asked the god where our king, Nectanebo, had fled to. They gave us this oracle: ‘The king who has fled will return to Egypt, no longer an old man but a young one, and will subject our enemies the Persians to us’.” When Alexander heard this, he sprang up and embraced the statue, saying: “This is my father, and I am his son. The oracle that was given to you did not lie. I am amazed only that you were overcome by the barbarians, when you had these invincible walls, which could not be thrown down by any enemy. But this is the affair of Providence above and the justice of the gods, that you, with a fertile land and a river to nourish it – blessings not made with hands – should be subdued by those who do not have these things, and should be ruled by them. For without their help the barbarians would have perished.”³⁴

In an intriguing omission, the narrative of the *Alexander Romance* does not present any internal explanation concerning the reason why the Egyptian gods would be angry at Nectanebo or at Egypt in general to the point that they would decide to support the barbarian armies invading their own land. In order to answer to this question, we have to suppose the existence of a larger narrative concerning the fall of Nectanebo and the last days of the Egyptian realm. Luckily, a handful of other Egyptian surviving literary documents do contain elements of such a narrative.

The first set of documents consists of two versions of the text formerly known as *Nectanebo's Dream* (whose correct title should more precisely be the *Prophecy of Petesis*, see below): one is a Greek papyrus belonging to the Leiden National Museum and containing a unfinished copy of this narrative which was first found in 1820 in the Memphis Serapeum. The other is a very fragmentary Demotic version of the same story which was discovered in 1997 in the Collection of Carlsberg Papyri and which initially belonged to the Tebtunis temple library in the Fayum.³⁵ The Greek version of this *Prophecy of Petesis* relates the story of how, one night during the last year of his reign, pharaoh

³⁴ *Hist. Alex.* 1.34.2–5 (text L, transl. Stoneman 1991). This particular episode, presenting the coronation of Alexander in Memphis and the fulfilment of the prophecy evoked in 1.3, is only present in the older versions of the *Alexander Romance*, i.e. in the recensions α and β as well as in the Latin and Armenian translations directly derived from them.

³⁵ Greek version: P.Leid. 1.396 = UPZ 1.81 = TM 65612 (middle of the 2nd cent. BCE). This papyrus belonged to the archives of Apollonios, brother to the famous Ptolemaios, *katochos* in the Memphis Serapeum. The *editio princeps* is Leemans 1838: 122–129; see also Wilcken 1927 and Koenen 1985. An English translation is given in Oppenheim 1956; for more recent translations and commentaries, see Gauger 2002 (German), Quack 2007: 162–165 (German), Legras 2011: 216–226 (French). Demotic version: P.Carlsberg 562 = TM 56096 (1st–2nd cent. CE); see Ryholt 1998.

Nectanebo receives a dream in which he sees an assembly of gods complaining about his carelessness concerning a temple of the god Onuris (Ares) in Sebennytos, as the decoration of one shrine in this sanctuary was never completed. Upon waking up, Nectanebo takes steps to ensure that this oversight is corrected as quickly as possible: he appoints Egypt's best hieroglyph-carver, an individual named Petesis, and sends him to Sebennytos to take care of the problem, paying him a large salary. But it seems that the king's efforts will all amount to nothing, since the story breaks up just as Petesis, deciding to delay his mission as he longs for a drink, encounters a beautiful girl who seems about to make him forget his task.

The second set of document consists of three Demotic scribal exercises from the same Tebtunis temple library to which P. Carlsberg 562 belongs, now also in the Collection of Carlsberg Papyri. They contain fragments of a novel tentatively called *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris* that appears to be a sequel to the *Prophecy of Petesis*.³⁶ Allusions to the same characters, places and events as the ones evoked in the *Prophecy of Petesis* allow us to understand that the sculptor Petesis died under unknown circumstances after having predicted that foreign countries would soon rise against Nectanebo and invade Egypt. The fragmentary story ends on the preparations made by the pharaoh to consult an oracle of the god Haroeris in order to find out more information about what the future has in store for him.

These two texts present many formal and narrative similarities with the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" texts mentioned above. The Greek title of the *Prophecy of Petesis* for instance – Πετήσιος ἱερογλύφου πρὸς Νεκτοναβὸν τὸν βασιλέα "(Defence or letter) of Petesis the hieroglyph sculptor to the king Nectanebo" – parallels the title of the *Oracle of the Potter*, Ἀπολογία κεραμέως πρὸς Ἀμενώπιν τὸν βασιλέα "Defence of the potter to the king Amenophis;" for this reason, it was proposed to more correctly call the Nectanebo's Dream the *Prophecy of Petesis*.³⁷ The whole narrative scheme of the *Prophecy of Petesis*, moreover, probably was very similar to that of the *Prophecy of the Lamb* and of the *Oracle of the Potter*. In the complete version, Nectanebo, warned by a dream about the rising anger of the gods, probably found himself unable to finalise the dedication of the Sebennytos temple to the god Onuris. The unfortunate Petesis, instrumental to this failure, would then reveal a prophecy announcing that, just as the decoration of Onuris' temple had been neglected, the gods themselves would neglect Egypt and allow its pharaoh to be overthrown by invading foreigners; Petesis would then meet an untimely death after having revealed the prophecy. That is at least what can be surmised from allusions

³⁶ P.Carlsberg 424 and 499 (= TM 56119) as well as P.Carlsberg 559+PSI 60 v. inv.D (= TM 56181), all dated from the 1st–2nd cent. CE. Edition, translation and commentaries in Ryholt 2002 and Ryholt 2013, 157–167.

³⁷ Gauger 2012: 197–198; Ryholt 2013: 232–234.

made by Nectanebo at the beginning of *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris*.³⁸ The death of Petesis, in particular, echoes the grim fate befalling the prophetic mediums and eponymous characters of the *Oracle of the Potter* and the *Prophecy of the Lamb*. In each tale, the tragic prophecy is written down at the behest of the pharaoh so that future generations will be able to learn from it.

It seems fairly certain, then, that what has been conserved of the *Petesis* story was actually a narrative setting introducing a prophecy whose text is now lost, but which probably ended with the promise of a saviour king destined to restore balance to the land and to regain the favour of the gods.³⁹ Moreover, the synopsis of the larger narrative that can be reconstructed by comparing the *Prophecy of Petesis* and its Demotic sequel *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris* would appear to have presented the situation leading to Nectanebo's demise – described in the *Alexander Romance* – as the result of his somewhat impious behaviour, or at the very least as the consequence of his inability to properly take care of Onuris' worship in his temple. As we will see, this fits exactly within the theodicean trend featured so prominently in the Graeco-Egyptian “apocalyptic” texts, especially in the Demotic “*Chronicle*.”

4. Development of the Graeco-Egyptian “apocalypticism”

The “apocalyptic” texts mentioned above seem to mainly revolve around the expression of a deep resentment against the invasion of Egypt by foreign powers, and the despair over the loss of a “golden age” caused by the improper ritual behaviour of a pharaoh. But the formulae used in these motifs, far from being invented during the Late and Graeco-Roman period, are actually inherited from earlier Egyptian literature. The catastrophic descriptions of a world plunged into

³⁸ *Nectanebo and the oracle of Haeroeris*, 5–8 (transl. Ryholt 2013: 164–165): “I am sad because of the (terrible) things that have happened to Petesis, son of Hergeus, the skilled sculptor of Aphroditopolis, in the temple of Sebennytyos. [I] have given orders [to] find out the length of the time in which the said things will take place. I have given orders to find out the might of the foreigners that will come after me. I have given orders to find out the need which they will cause while they dwell in Egypt.” The story's synopsis thus reconstructed perfectly matches the hypothesis proposed by Koenen 1985: 191–193.

³⁹ See Jasnow 1997. Ryholt 2013: 165–167 thinks that the *Prophecy of Petesis* would represent a first stage of the story composed shortly after the end of Nectanebo II's reign but before Alexander's conquest, which would have focused on the catastrophic prophecy itself, maybe without mentioning or at least putting much emphasis on the identity of the saviour king. *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris*, on the other hand, would represent a later development of the story made necessary by the changes in the historical situation (the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great), which would have introduced a second prophecy revealed by the oracle of Haroeris about the advent of Alexander as the future redeemer and liberator of Egypt.

chaos, for instance, are directly borrowed from the *Chaosbeschreibungen* common in the Egyptian genre known as the “pessimistic” literature, represented by texts such as the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, the *Lamentation of Khakheperre-sonbe* or the *Man Who Was Weary of Life*.⁴⁰ Composed for the most part during the Middle Kingdom, these laments already contain a good share of the *topoi* used throughout all ancient Egyptian history (and elsewhere in the world) to describe a situation of “national distress” and general chaos: war, death, and lawlessness are rampant, social conventions are turned upside down, every man steals his neighbour’s goods, temples are being deserted, the son kills his own father, etc.⁴¹ Among the texts belonging to this “pessimistic” literature, a closer precursor to the later “apocalypses” is the *Prophecy of Neferty*, the first example of the “sub-genre” of royal prophecies.⁴² The *Prophecy of Neferty* makes use of a chaotic imagery similar to that of the lamentations, with the addition of a narrative frame involving the revelation of a prophecy to the king and elements of political criticism against the pharaohs of the past. In this story, the lector-priest Neferty is mandated at the royal court in order to entertain the pharaoh Snefru (founder of 4th dynasty). When offered the choice of hearing “a few fine words” concerning what has come to pass or what will come to pass, the king chooses the latter. Neferty then starts a long and dark description of the woes that will affect Egypt in a distant future, when foreigners from the East will invade the country. The account includes the *topoi* known from the pessimistic literature – “evil is spoken with impunity,” “the sun is obscured,” “the river of Egypt is empty,” “I shall show you [...] a son who kills his father,” “the one who was slothful now is filled, but he who was diligent has nothing,” etc. But these descriptions are complemented at the very end by a prediction concerning the advent of a saviour king named Ameny (probably the historical Amenemhat I, founder of the 12th dynasty), who will restore balance to Egypt, please the gods and defeat the foreign enemies and the rebels. It seems quite obvious that this pseudo-prophecy – composed *ex eventu* or *post eventum*, i.e. based on or after the events it is describing – was actually a glorification text written under royal

⁴⁰ Simpson 2003: 188–210 (*Ipuwer*), 211–213 (*Khakheperre-sonbe*) and 178–187 (*The Man Weary of Life*). See also Burkard, Thissen 2003: 123–136, 136–142 and 154–160. A much later, Ptolemaic example of the same kind of lamentation literature is also attested in the P.Berol. 23040 (= TM 69736; 300–240 BCE), another text interpreted as the expression of a cultural resistance against the foreign (Greek) invaders. This particular text, however, does not feature other elements typical of the Graeco-Egyptian “apocalyptic” corpus, such as a divine prophecy and the announcement of a saviour king (Burkard 2003).

⁴¹ See Assmann 1989 for the ubiquitousness of such chaotic descriptions throughout the world’s “apocalyptic” literatures.

⁴² P.Hermitage 1116b = P.St.Petersburg 1116b (Hieratic, dated from the 18th dynasty but probably composed during the 12th dynasty; also known from smaller copies on wood tablets and ostraka). See Assmann 1989: 357–361; Burkard, Thissen 2003: 142–147; Simpson 2003: 214–220.

patronage in order to present Amenemhat I's rise to power in an auspicious light.⁴³ Incidentally, a great number of New Kingdom royal inscriptions make use of the same stereotypic formulae to describe the state of ruin and chaos in which the preceding ruler's impious behaviour had left the country and the temples of the gods, before the new pharaoh came and restored the social and cosmic balance.⁴⁴

Some scholars have been tempted to understand the *Chaosbeschreibungen* present in the pessimistic literature as the expressions of a sacerdotal resistance against societal changes brought by the historical calamities experienced in Egypt after the First Intermediate Period and during the following periods. But the authenticity of these alleged misfortunes has more often than not been put into question. Today, the "pessimistic" descriptions are seen as an accumulation of literary stereotypes not necessarily in direct relation to the historical context in which they have been elaborated, but at the same time not totally impervious to it.⁴⁵ When it comes to the later apocalyptic literature, for instance, the long-lasting popularity of texts such as the *Oracle of the Potter* or the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, which were apparently reproduced, updated, and sometimes translated in Greek over the course of several centuries, implies that they must have been perceived during each of these periods as being somehow relevant to contemporary, historical events. Invasions of Egypt by foreign peoples, in particular, seem to have left a predominant impression in later catastrophic descriptions. Consequently, it seems hardly surprising that the Egyptian pessimistic tradition was developed into the pseudo-prophetic/"apocalyptic" literature during the same period when Egypt repeatedly fell under the domination of successive foreign populations. The most important among them being without any doubt the invasion and domination of the Egyptian Delta by the Middle Eastern population known as the Hyksos during the Second Intermediate Period (17th–16th cent. BCE), before the rulers of the 18th dynasty chased them off. These "rulers of the foreign lands" (Eg. *hqꜣ.w-ḥꜣs.wt*, which the Greeks transcribed into *Hyksos*) remained in the Egyptian imagination as archetypes of the impious invaders, pillaging the temples and calling upon themselves the wrath of the gods. Memories of these Hyksos then resurfaced in some narratives of Egyptian origins, some of them belonging to the apocalyptic tradition.⁴⁶

To even speak of a Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" literary genre is actually questionable, since the concept does not actually correspond to any internal Egyptian category. The proper title of the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, for instance,

⁴³ Posener 1956.

⁴⁴ The main documents are presented in Assmann 1989: 364–368 (see for instance the dramatic description of Egypt in the "restoration stela" of Tutankhamun).

⁴⁵ Assmann 1989; Burkard, Thissen 2003: 131–136.

⁴⁶ Concerning the Hyksos and their place in the Egyptian cultural memory (attested for instance in the Manethonian tradition), see Assmann 1998; Volokhine 2007; Volokhine 2010.

is given in its colophon as the “curse/execration (*shwy*) of Re against humanity.” Both the *Oracle of the Potter* and the *Prophecy of Petesis* (*Nectanebo’s Dream*) are labelled in Greek as an “apology” (or maybe a “letter” for the latter) addressed by the prophetic character to the king, and seem to be constructed as some sort of epistolary stories.⁴⁷ Contrary to the Judaeo-Christian apocalypses, the Graeco-Egyptian “apocalyptic” texts do not always focus on a revelation by a supernatural agent, nor do they provide an eschatological scope: in Egypt, the apparition of the saviour king heralds neither the end of history, nor the final judgment of the dead or the advent of an eternal golden age. The new pharaoh is never presented as anything but the founder of a new dynasty, whose role it is to initiate an era of political stability and religious piousness. Proper end-of-times narrative elements are only inserted much later in Egyptian texts inspired from the “apocalyptic” literature. Such as in the Hermetic treatise known as the *Asclepius*, where the divinity predicts the complete destruction of Egypt, foretelling that the gods will, one day, forsake the land and leave it to become a desert devoid of any life or civilisation.⁴⁸ Because of these very significant differences, some scholars have considered it more appropriate to speak of a “proto-apocalyptic” Graeco-Egyptian tradition,⁴⁹ while others think that the corpus of Graeco-Egyptian prophecies should more precisely be defined by its emphasis on political “messianism,” since the announcement of a saviour king plays a central role in it, rather than be named in reference to a formal structure of supernatural revelation that isn’t always relevant.⁵⁰ But to speak of a “messianic” trend in Egypt could once again misleadingly connote the phenomenon as being related to the Judaeo-Christian notion. While such an heritage is possible, as numerous mutual influences and interferences between the two cultures are well-documented, it must be noted that the theme of the king sent by the gods to restore social balance and justice is also present in the Egyptian royal ideology since quite a long period. In the Valley of the Nile, it is a *topos* deriving both from the concept of the pharaoh’s divine filiation and from the notion of cyclic history with its idea of a return to order and of a “first time” (*sp tpy*) systematically repeated with each new ruler.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Quack 2005: 148.

⁴⁸ *Asclepius*, 24–25 (3rd–4th cent. CE). The *Asclepius* is a Latin translation from a (lost) Greek original. See Copenhaver 1992: 81–82.

⁴⁹ Smith 1978.

⁵⁰ Assmann 2002: 377–388; Gozzoli 2006: 302–304.

⁵¹ Assmann 1982.

5. Historical theodicy in Egypt

There is another literary theme shared by the various Egyptian prophetic texts that provides an interesting parallel to the development of the apocalyptic trend in ancient Israel. This motif consists in a form of theodicy, *i.e.* the tendency to explain disastrous historical events as the consequence of moral transgressions and lack of respect for the divine law. It was at first dubbed a “deuteronomical” aspect by some Egyptologists, because it presented such close similarities with the pattern developed in the post-Exilic books of *Deuteronomy* or *2 Kings*.⁵²

This pattern is especially prominent in the chapter 10 of the *Demotic “Chronicle,”* where law-abiding pharaohs are rewarded with a long reign while impious rulers can’t live long enough to perpetuate their dynasty: the pharaoh Amyrtaeus, for instance, is said to have been overthrown because he had ordered the *hep-law* to be defiled (4.1–2) and another unnamed pharaoh is removed from the throne because he strayed from the god’s path (4.7–8). Pharaoh Achoris’ reign, on the other hand, is prolonged because he was generous to the temples (4.9–10).⁵³ The same trend is perceptible in the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, in the *Oracle of the Potter*, in the *Prophecy of Petesis (Nectanebo’s Dream)*, where Nectanebo seems to incur the wrath of the gods because he wasn’t able to properly take care of Onuris’ temple, and even in the *Alexander Romance* where Alexander, after having found out the existence of the Memphite prophecy announcing his arrival, explains to the Egyptians that their country could not have been invaded if their own gods had not allowed it (1.34.5). Outside of the Graeco-Egyptian “apocalyptic” corpus, an expression of the same theodicy is also very clearly formulated in the *Praise (or “Aretalogy”) of Imuthes/Asclepius*, relating the alleged discovery of a sacred manuscript which begins by explaining how pharaoh Menechres’ reign (*i.e.* Mykerinos, 4th dynasty) was blessed because he had been pious towards the gods:

It is because of this, indeed, that Egypt was then in peace and copiously purveyed with earth’s gifts. For the countries governed by pious kings are flourishing and, unlike them, countries with impious kings perish in misfortune.⁵⁴

⁵² *Deut.* 17.17–20, for instance, contains instructions for the king of Israel to always carry a copy of God’s law and heed it; only doing so will allow him to keep his throne and his children to remain in Israel. In *2 Kgs.* 1–20, the invasion of Samaria and Israel by the Assyrians is explained as the consequence of the divine wrath against the people of Israel, because they had strayed away from the customs and from the law ordained by God. For the first parallel established with the *Demotic “Chronicle,”* see Meyer 1915: 287–311; see also Assmann 2002: 384–385.

⁵³ See the complete analysis by Johnson 1983.

⁵⁴ P.Oxy. 11.1381 = TM 63689, 11.228–244 (Greek, supposedly translated from an unknown Egyptian original; 2nd cent. CE). Translation communicated by Franziska Naether and Heinz-Joseph Thissen during the 26th Papyrological Congress in Geneva; see Naether, Thissen 2012 for further references.

Similar theodicean opinions were actually pervasive in the Egyptian thought long before the Hellenistic period, and are notably expressed in the wisdom literature during the Middle and New Kingdoms. One such wisdom treatise on monarchy conserved on papyri dated from the 18th dynasty, the *Teaching for King Merikare*, provides a would-be king with advices on how to be a good ruler. Instructions include for instance “observe Ma’at, that you may endure long upon earth” or “erect [many] monuments for the gods, for this is a means of giving life to the name of him who construct them.”⁵⁵ A much later Demotic text belonging to the same kind of wisdom literature, The *Instruction of ‘Onchsheshonqy*, contains the same theory and explains how the reign of bad rulers, the upheaval of social order and the occurrence of foreign invasions are ultimately consequences of the god Re’s wrath against a land:

O People [...] listen to me concerning the way in which Pre will display anger at a land!
 [If Pre is angry at a] land, he will cause [...]; he does not [...] it.
 [If P]re is angry at a land, its ruler will abandon the law.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause the laws to cease within it.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause purity to cease within it.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause the truth to cease within it.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause value to be minimal within it.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he does not allow trust to be [within] it.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he does not positions of status [...] to be taken within it.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will elevate its humble men, and he will humble its great men.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause the fools to be rulers of the educated.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will command its ruler to make its people fare badly.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will make its scribe to be the authority over it.
 If Pre is angry at a land, he will make its washerman to be the chief of police.⁵⁶

According to a theory of Pascal Vernus, the elaboration of this historical theodicy in Egypt would have taken place within the frame of an important ideological mutation that can be traced back to the New Kingdom: the apparition in Egypt of a new form of individual religiosity often called “personal piety,” and of the idea that the demiurge god could exercise an influence not only on the individual destiny of a given person, but also on the collective events and on the Egyptian society in general.⁵⁷ This ideological mutation was characterised among other things by the development of a religious theory about history, a theory very similar to the one coined out in the 6th cent. BCE Judaea. Namely,

⁵⁵ *Teaching for King Merikare*, 47 and 61 (P.St.Petersburg 1116a[v.], other manuscripts include P.Moscow 4658 and P.Carlsberg 6; Hieratic, 18th dynasty; transl. Simpson 2003: 157–158).

⁵⁶ *Instruction of ‘Onchsheshonqy*, 5.1–13 (P.Brit.Mus. 10508; Demotic, end of the Ptolemaic period; transl. Simpson 2003: 504).

⁵⁷ On this “great ideological mutation,” see Vernus 1995b (especially 88–95). On the theories concerning the development of an “individual religiosity” or a “personal piety” at the beginnings of the Ramesside period, see Luiselli 2008.

that the succession of fortunate and ill-fated historical events is the direct result of a divine will. Vernus understands this major change in the royal ideology – officially proclaimed under Ramses XI's reign – as the first step on the path of the Theban theocracy's establishment during the 20th dynasty, whereafter the expressions of this Egyptian theodicy get more often attested as the ascendancy of the Egyptian (Theban) clergy grows stronger. Just as in the “apocalyptic texts,” local troubles and foreign invasions are presented as divine sanctions against the acts of an impious king. But a prosperous reign is the reward promised to the ruler who stays faithful to the gods, by following a code of proper religious behaviour whose composition is the prerogative of the sacerdotal circles. This ideological transformation in turn leads to an adaptation of the pharaoh's image, whose status and legitimacy appear to become more and more submitted to and sanctioned by a divine approval. Such approval is expressed for instance during oracular consultations and once again controlled by the clergy. According to Vernus' hypothesis, then, the importance of the theodicean aspects in the Graeco-Egyptian “apocalypticism” are directly connected to this evolution in the New Kingdom religious paradigm, and should primarily be understood as a sign of a sacerdotal takeover on the royal power.⁵⁸

6. Production of “apocalyptic” literature in ancient Egypt. A conclusion

The long-standing tradition of defining the Graeco-Egyptian pseudo-prophecies according to their “apocalyptic” form, to their “messianic” content or to their use of a “deuteronomic” (theodicean) trend has been, of course, heavily influenced by the scholarly tradition of biblical studies. Such taxonomy should be used with a great deal of prudence, lest it leads to an erroneous understanding of these texts, of their function and of the way they were composed.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that the *Demotic “Chronicle,”* the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, the *Oracle of the Potter*, the *Prophecy of Petesis (Nectanebo's Dream)* and the beginnings of the *Alexander Romance* do share many similarities and constitute a literary corpus of some sort. Constructed as stories revolving around the pharaoh and providing a narrative setting for an *ex eventu* or *post eventum* prophecy, their content seems to be influenced – to an extent that remains to be determined – by historical events. And while these texts appear to have been developed as a form of propaganda material supporting a double ideology, both royal and sacerdotal, it would be an oversimplification to consider them as a literature of cultural resistance that was solely elaborated for contemporary political purposes. A vast catalogue of influences and literary borrowings played a crucial role in their composition.

⁵⁸ Vernus 1995b.

To better understand the construction process of apocalypticism in Egypt, it can be useful to conclude briefly on some reflexions by two famous scholars of the University of Chicago concerning propaganda production and the relationship between royal authority and intellectual elites in the ancient Near East in general, or in other words between kingship and scribalism.⁵⁹ In the eyes of J.Z. Smith and B. Lincoln, wisdom literature and pseudo-prophetic or “apocalyptic” literature both consist in a form of propaganda composed for the benefit of the king in the former case, or of a social, political and/or religious group in the latter. They share the common trait of equating the political order with the cosmic order itself, an element central to the agenda of any imperial propaganda. But they work in opposite ways. Royal propaganda (and wisdom literature) constructs an official and “sacred” history by rewriting the past in order to stabilise the present and prevent any future alteration to a situation presented as ideal. Apocalypticism, on the other hand, constructs a pseudo-prophetic utterance concerning the present or the future in order to bring change to a condition perceived as intolerable.⁶⁰

Apocalyptic literatures all around the world, in Lincoln’s view, are often produced within a social group that has lost its privileged situation or that feels threatened of losing it. More precisely, he observes that apocalypticism in the ancient world is mostly associated with the expression of “nationalistic” tendencies directed against foreign enemies and intended to restore a native form of authority. Lincoln partly bases his interpretation on previous observations by J.Z. Smith, according to whom wisdom literature in the Near Eastern context is usually produced by scribes under royal tutelage. But it tends to take on apocalyptic accents when a foreign king ascends the throne and when the scribal caste finds itself lacking a native royal patron.⁶¹ Wisdom literature (which Lincoln calls imperial propaganda) and apocalyptic texts do share a similar narrative form, but the latter is actually produced by rebels challenging an established authority. Throughout history, some of those rebel groups were successful and adapted their apocalyptic narratives into proper imperial propaganda (Lincoln refers to the examples of Darius’ inscription at Behistun). Most others failed, but even then the apocalyptic texts they had produced sometimes lingered on and were later adopted, updated and reused by other disgruntled groups. This constant updating process of apocalyptic narratives, attested in Egypt by the different versions of the *Oracle of the Potter*,⁶² means however that they slowly lose the specificity of their original context, as former references to contemporary historical events become literary *topoi*.⁶³

⁵⁹ See Smith 1978 (on Babylon and Egypt); Smith 1982 (Babylon); Lincoln 1998 (on the Persian empire); Lincoln 2013 (on the contemporary uses of apocalyptic discourses).

⁶⁰ Lincoln 1998: 466.

⁶¹ Smith 1978: 86; Smith 1982: 94.

⁶² Smith 1978: 77–78.

⁶³ Lincoln 1998: 468–469.

While Smith and Lincoln's theories pertain to the Near Eastern world in general, their conclusions do apply relatively well to the Egyptian situation and to the societal changes described by Vernus. The royal prophetic literature produced during the Middle and the New Kingdom by the Egyptian clergy does appear to serve the interests of the state propaganda, whether it is ultimately controlled by the pharaoh or by the priests. But the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" texts from the Late Period, on the other hand, seem to be mainly preoccupied with supporting the aspirations of various regional opponents to the central royal power perceived as impious and/or foreign. It might be an overstatement, however, to understand this literature solely as the expression of an authentic nationalist resistance pitting the Egyptians as a whole against foreign invaders such as the Persians or the Greeks. It is more probable that the circles who composed the various texts of the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" corpus chose the topics of their narrations according to interests and grievances focussed on the experience of their local community, and that these texts only infrequently attained a transregional or transnational echo: the revolt of the pharaohs Herwennefer and Ankhwennefer (205–186 BCE) would be a good example of such a far-reaching success, and the integration of the "apocalyptic" motif of Nectanebo's end of reign in the *Alexander Romance* would be another. But it would be excessive to search those Graeco-Egyptian apocalypticism for actual proofs of historical interethnic conflicts, and to understand them as the expression of an authentic despair of the native Egyptians confronted to the slow demise of their own culture, as has sometimes been the case in former studies. In conclusion, the long-standing literary motifs and themes used in said texts by their authors shouldn't be unilaterally interpreted as the true reflection of struggles and traumatism sustained by Egypt.

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Demonology between Celsus and Origen: A Theoretical Model of Religious Cohabitation?

Antonio Sena

Relationships between different religions in a metropolis, such as Alexandria in ancient times, were between the actual people that followed them. These relationships often placed themselves in the ambiguous grey areas of their own conceptions that lent themselves to misunderstandings, distortions, and varied interpretations. From the 1st to the 3rd cent. CE one of these grey areas could be the daemon category, both in its popular, thaumaturgical meaning and in its Platonic philosophical sense.

In *Contra Celsum*, Origen is often forced to face problems linked to demonology because of his pagan interlocutor Celsus, who had utilised it to denigrate the supposed novelty of Christian beliefs and to explain the order of the world with words he considered “natural.” In this essay, I intend to review a few main points of this debate by taking two essential factors into account:

- 1) Celsus understood one way or another the Christian belief in the 2nd cent., and therefore the related apologetics (even if one could not agree with the thesis by Andresen¹ about Celsus directly replying to Justin);
- 2) Origen replies about seventy years later, in a religious context that has changed both around him and within the Christian community.

Therefore, I attempt to understand the religious meaning of such a relentless controversy over demonology and to what extent it has also implied a theoretical model of religious coexistence in the Roman Empire, which is the model from the 2nd cent. that Celsus refers to as well as of the 3rd cent. when Origen lived.

¹ Andresen 1955: 308–400. Pelagaud 1878: 414ff. had already insisted on Celsus’s polemic towards Justin as the main source of the knowledge he had acquired of Christianity. On the interpretation that Andresen gives about Celsus also cf. Borret 1976: 153–182 (general interpretation), 184–190 (on the relationship between Celsus and Justin) and Nock 1956. A clear summary of all the arguments in favor of the thesis according to which Celsus knew Justin and considered him as a polemic purpose can be found in Chadwick 1966. On *Contra Celsum*’s background, see the seminal assessment carried out by Perrone 1998.

1. Origen's education and Celsus' background

The starting point of the debate must be Origen's Alexandrine education, being reliably outlined by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 6.2.1–15) as can be judged from the works of the Alexandrine theologian themselves. Implying a good foundation in general knowledge, Origen's general studies had allowed him to serve as a teacher for a living, as you can find in 6.2.7. His father had him study the Scriptures yet it was thanks to his secular studies that he was able to compete in the biblical exegesis even reassessing the traditional methods of exegesis and those of Greek philology.

Moreover, Origen's contacts during this time period were extremely important: he lived in the house of a widow that also hosted a famous Gnostic named Paul who had been a strong intellectual influence upon him (*Hist. eccl.* 6.2.13–14). Having to stop teaching catechesis because of persecution, he moved into literary teaching, and came into contact with pagans who have met him in order to understand the Christian doctrines. Eusebius quotes the brothers Plutarch and Heraclas (*Hist. eccl.* 6.3.2). When he was instructed by bishop Demetrius to take care of catechesis only, he stopped teaching grammar and sold his secular books.

We now have developed a more historically clear and interesting picture: as a child Origen learnt the Scriptures, he had the chance to compare the Gnostic teachers in Alexandria and to gain a clear idea of those theories that he will eventually often refute in his works after he receives a full classical education and also works as a grammarian. We can find these three elements in his works of exegesis yet they take on their greatest importance in *Contra Celsum*, where they appear to be essential requirements for an effective work of confutation. Celsus is namely a pagan Platonic philosopher that knows quite well the gnostic trends whose ideas he often uses to attack Christianity, Hebrew Scriptures and Christian texts. *Contra Celsum* is a late writing, close to Origen's death, around 248 in Caesarea, but its cultural background strongly recalls Origen's intellectual experiences in Alexandria.

Celsus' origin is unknown. However, I believe that considering what we know now, the Alexandrine hypothesis is the one to take into greater account. We can at least assume, with a reasonable critical awareness that Alexandria is the "origin of the religious culture of the pagan philosopher," as G. Rinaldi, who has collected a series of considerable clues,² sensibly states: I confine myself to merely quote the knowledge of even minor Gnostic sects that were multiplying in Egypt at the time (specifically referring to the Sibyllists) that

² Rinaldi 1998: 1.111–112, nos. 90 and 91 systematically collect the clues of different importance that sustain the Alexandrine hypothesis and that I partly assume in the text. A review of the hypotheses and the clues about the place where the *Alethes logos* was written is in Borret 1976: 139–140 (however this author does not take a clear position).

had become popular in Egypt. There is a similarity in some of the reasons of his Anti-Judaic controversy with the *topoi* of the Alexandrine anti-Judaism as well as his knowledge in the allegorical interpretation of the scriptures. Besides these points, Ambrose, a converted Valentinian who showed Origen the book by Celsus, suggested him to confute it, was a known Alexandrine.

2. Demonology as an integration proposal

If this is the cultural background of the dispute, we can consider Celsus's demonology not as a side issue, a scholastic summary (mostly fragmentary) of a doctrine largely present in all the representatives of the so-called mid-Platonism, but as a tool of controversy that Celsus skillfully uses when he needs it to make his dispute even more incisive. Therefore, I do not think that Puiggali hits the target when he states that Celsus does not explain

a very rich and subtle demonology. The fiercely polemic tone of his work, full of demonstrations which are often schematic and of repetitions can partly explain this relative poverty.³

It is exactly this polemic tone that offers us better information and makes us realise what specific role demonology had in the polemic confrontation with Christianity, which were its weak and its strong points in the attempt to deprive the opponent of authority or to integrate them into its own religious vision. That allows us to attribute a real polemic meaning to the more or less scholastic explanations we find in Alcinus, Maximus of Tyre, Apuleius, and in the sophisticated stories by Plutarch.

Discussions on demonology are essentially focused on two passages in the work: 5.2–54 and 8.12–62, that are in different books and do not have the same objectives. The first one, in the 5th book, attacks the fundamentals of Christianity as the basis of the world according to the “pagan” religious philosophy. The second one, in the 8th book, explains the practical order of the religious world and the creed in the light of the real and effective presence of the demoniac world. It is possible to make this distinction between different levels if we pay attention to the way *Contra Celsum* is written. The essential passage to understand in which way Origen has decided to oppose Celsus' work can be found in chapter 6 of the *Praefatio*, written by Origen after he had already written

³ Puiggali 1987. The essay is extremely useful as a systematical recognition of the theme; however, the general depreciation of Celsus's demonology implies an understanding of the aims of the Platonic polemist which is not always clear. The particularly questionable idea is “the meaning of his slow and patient justification for the cults of the demons that is made clear towards the end of the work: it is first of all carried out for a political aim [...]. He carries out his fight not so much as a theologian but as a royalist politician, rightly worried about the work of excavation performed by Christianity inside the huge building of the Roman society, whose keystone was the Emperor” (Puiggali 1987: 40). See also Fédou 1998: 264–272.

some of his refutation. In this chapter the author informs us about a change in the layout, a decision that will have decisive consequences in the delivery of the text. Origen states:

The preface may serve as my apology for the fact that I wrote the beginning of my answer to Celsus on one plan but after the first part followed a different one. At first I contemplated making notes on the main points and giving brief answers to them, and then putting the work into definite shape. But afterwards the material itself suggested to me that I would save time if I were to be content with the points which I had answered in this way at the beginning, and in what followed to combat in detail Celsus' charges against us to the best of our ability. We therefore ask indulgence for the part at the beginning following the preface.⁴

The consequences of this method followed by Origen are clear since we do not have some isolated fragments of Celsus' work, such as in *Contra Christianos* by Porphyry and in *Contra Galilaeos* by Julian the Emperor, but at least starting from 1.28, we keep the original structure of the book, the sequences and the logical layout of the argumentations. We can therefore see how Celsus had planned his attack on Christianity and organised his accusations. We can also verify how he made use of the argument of demonology from different points of view, according to the argumentative progression of his text. The indiscriminate quotation of fragments from 5th and 8th books, for reconstructing the systematic demonology of Celsus, can therefore be misleading.

In 5th book, Celsus puts the problem of the fundamentals of reality and refutes the Christian idea of the descent onto Earth of a God or of a son of a God. So he starts (5.2):

Jews and Christians, no God or child of God either has come down or would have come down. And if it is certain angels of which you speak, whom do you mean by them, gods or some other kind of being? You presumably mean some other kind – the daemons (τίνας τούτους λέγετε, θεοὺς ἢ ἄλλο τι γένος; Ἄλλοτι ὡς εἰκός, τοὺς δαίμονας).

This is the only Middle-platonic literary text where such a casual equalisation between ἄγγελος and δαίμων⁵ is suggested. Celsus does not hesitate in drawing his own conclusion in a later fragment (cf. 5.52):

We leave on side the many arguments which refute what they say about their teacher; and let us assume that he really was some angel (ἄγγελος). Was he the first and only to have come? Or were there also others before him? If they were to say that he is the only one, they would be convicted of telling lies and contradicting themselves. For they say that others also have often come, and, in fact, sixty or seventy at once, who became evil and were punished by being cast under the earth in chains. And they say that their tears are the cause of hot springs.

The conclusion is final:

⁴ For the translation of *Contra Celsum*, I refer to Chadwick 1980. For Italian translations, see Colonna 1989 and Ressa 2000. For the *excerpta* directly attributed to Celsus by Origen, see Bader 1940.

⁵ Cf. Puiggali 1987: 18.

If therefore others also were sent, obviously Jesus too came from the same God. Apparently he had a mission of greater significance, because, for example, the Jews were doing something wrong, or were debasing their religion, or were behaving impiously; for these things are hinted at.

I leave out the discussion about the more or less specific knowledge that Celsus had about the Christian demonological conceptions of Judaic derivation (wicked angels cast in chains, etc.) and I concentrate on the proposed model. It seems clear to me that what we are witnessing is a drastic process of integration that Celsus wanted to impose on the Judaic and Christian creeds absorbing them into the philosophy of his Platonic concept. In more general terms, here is a process to consolidate the creeds into the only vision that could justify religious coexistence and the search for the final truth about the universe inside the multi-ethnic empire, of which he belonged to. The passage seems solid in its polemic force but it is necessary to break it up into the different themes that define it, in order to verify how Celsus has built his reasoning and why.

The first obvious problematic aspect is Jesus having been reduced to a divine “messenger.” He is considered similar to the many prophets that the human race has welcomed in the course of centuries that are part of the chain of inspired men that *together* link the human to the divine. Surely the entire context of Celsus’ assertions about Jesus clearly shows us the provokingly polemic and insincere nature of such a proposal. However, what is interesting here is the logic which is not necessarily deceitful. Even if the proposal were sincere, if Jesus could be considered like a *tessera* of the great mosaic of the Divine, this idea would be extremely insulting and provocative for the Christians. By apparently helping, Celsus exposes a raw nerve of Christianity at his time. Jesus, in the eyes of the Christians, was starting to play a role yet to be defined into clear conceptual categories. He was not seen as a simple “messenger” anymore, even if variations in the Christian belief about his nature and role were well known in the time of Celsus. It is important to reassert that the casual but carefully considered, trans-religious equalisation ἄγγελος–δαίμων created by Celsus was unique in contemporary Middle-platonic philosophy. It had to establish itself with at least a semblance of plausibility within a context of a more indistinct Christian reflection. Here it gained certain ability in puzzling and confusing his opponents, although it also persisted in being consciously offensive to many. Justin’s discussion in his *1 Apologia* turns out to be really interesting, in confirmation of the difficulty in finding the right terminology or in giving new meanings to the traditional one.

Now the Word of God is His Son, as we have before said. And He is also called Angel (ἄγγελος) and Apostle (ἀπόστολος): for He declares whatever we ought to know, and is sent forth to declare whatever is revealed; as our Lord Himself says, “He that heareth Me, heareth Him that sent Me.” [...] But these words (*scil.* God’s words to Moses in the book of *Exodus*), are proof, anyway, that Jesus Christ, is the Son of God and His Apostle, that he was first just the Word, appearing sometimes in the form of fire, and sometimes in the likeness of angels;

and that now, having become man by the will of God and for the salvation of the human race, He endured all the sufferings which the demons instigated the senseless Jews to inflict upon Him.⁶

The “theology of the word” is the broadest context of thought where Justin tries to prove that God’s revelations in the Old Testament are actually due to the word as an intercessor. The quoted passage is especially important for our purpose as it introduces the title of “messenger” in an argument that also includes other definitions of the Word and therefore outlines a complete picture of this messenger figure. The word is a “messenger” and an “apostle,” it is the Son of God and it has become human in Jesus. It is a “messenger” as it declares “whatever we ought to know” and as an “apostle” it is still linked to the ἀγγέλλειν as it “explains whatever is revealed.” Besides, it has also suffered because of the persecution of the demons who therefore undertake a completely negative identity, far from any form of ἄγγελος. However, this “messenger,” who is such “because [...] He brings messages to those to whom God the Maker of all things wishes [messages to be brought]” (*Dial.* 56.10), is also the Son of God and has become man by God’s will.

Talking about an ἄγγελος, the bearer of his own authority, who becomes the sole paragon of life and behavior, hinges upon religious worship, and also *Logos* does not make any sense to such a philosopher as Celsus. He namely considers the same multiplicity of ἄγγελοι inside the Judeo-Christian tradition as a crucial reasoning in order to put the Christian claims over Jesus back into perspective.

Contrarily according to Justin, ἄγγελος is a functional qualification of a divine figure, the word. This word is that which in the universe performs interventions where the transcendent God is denied yet is also considered as a revelation of that God. Most importantly of all is that this word outlines in Jesus a distinctive figure of a divine apostle so that no other divine figure can ever be compared to him.

According to Celsus, the ἄγγελοι and the δαίμονες have a significance as they are numerous and akin to men in a variety of roles. They direct religiousness but they do not monopolise it. The religious man’s duty is to understand God’s project which is the reason for the universe and not a personal entity to start a dialogue with. According to the platonic philosopher, it was relatively easy to get into this spiritual field resulting from the emerging theological Christian ideas that also wanted to use philosophical-religious Greek categories in order to show how logically incoherent the opposing positions were. We cannot assume here a textual dependence of Celsus’ controversy based on Justin’s writing since such derivations are always hard to prove. However, it is clear that the same anti-Christian purpose in Celsus’ controversy implies that he knows, either

⁶ *I Apol.* 63.4–5; 10. English translation by Dods, Reith 1885.

through oral or written tradition, Christian argumentations. These took advantage of the title ἄγγελος when referring to Jesus in order to present a vision of the world based upon an alternative model that hinges upon these very intermediate entities.

Regarding the controversy about the inadequacy of the word ἄγγελος to name the divine word, we can also find traces in a passage from a work probably composed during the 2nd cent. later than Justin's work, *Ad Diognetum*. In 7.2, the anonymous writer states:

But the truly all-powerful God himself, creator of all and invisible, set up and established in their hearts the truth and the holy word from heaven, which cannot be comprehended by humans. To do so, he did not, as one might suppose, send them one of his servants or an angel (ὀπηρέτην τινὰ [...] ἄγγελον) or a ruler or any of those who administer earthly activities or who are entrusted with heavenly affairs, but he sent the craftsman and maker of all things himself, by whom he created the heavens [...].⁷

Actually, the phrase “as one might suppose” (οὐ καθάπερ ἂν τις εἰκάσειεν ἄνθρωποις), suggests a clear polemic approach and the intended audience can be quite varied. The controversy seems to hit both the Gnostics (with reference to the ruler) and the Christians that subordinate the Son to the Father in a more clear way than the pagans of the Platonic inclination. It is towards those that the distinction between people that rule earthly things and the ones who are entrusted with the government of things in the heavens could be referred to; this distinction reminds us of the hierarchies among demons. Yet it is clear that the author is not thinking about a possible identification of the Word with a demoniac being. He might have wanted to dispel any linguistic misunderstandings, aware that his pagan audience might be attempting to utilise a similar profane analogy, just like Celsus attempts.

Celsus considers the word ἄγγελος clearly ambiguous and he commits himself to explain that it is inappropriate to define the divine Word. He credits Jesus, in an absolutely unique way, with a title from Christian language usage and assimilates it into his classifications. By readapting the Christian title into his philosophical world, he tries to re-employ and neutralise the opposing vision. From this point of view, Justin's passage is for us a precious witness of a Christian argumentation that could be used by pagans for their polemic purposes.

We can see how Origen's reaction is determined and directed at cancelling any ambiguity. Origen particularly accepts the provocation and comments upon it in 5.53:⁸

Next, as he supposes that he can say of the Saviour by way of a concession “Let us assume that he really was some angel,” we say that we do not accept this from Celsus as a concession. But we consider the work of him who visited the whole human race by his word and teaching,

⁷ Greek text and English translation in Ehrman 2003: 144–145.

⁸ On the so-called “angelic Christology,” see Arcari 2015: 154–162.

according as each one of those who believe him was able to receive him. This was not the work merely of an angel (ἔργον ἦν τοῦ, [...] οὐχ ἀπαξαπλῶς ἀγγέλου) but, as the prophecy about him says, of “the angel of the great counsel” (*Isa.* 9.6).

Origen’s angelology is complicated while being coherent yet it is different from the conception of Jesus as the Savior which Origen refers in this chapter to the first two books of the *Contra Celsum*. Here we are faced with a form of Christology which is more conscious compared to the one known by Celsus. Origen is clearly embarrassed to use the word ἄγγελος for Jesus. He needs to surround it with clarifications and to state strongly that this angel was different, and had a prominent position, using a quotation from *Isaiah*.

If integration had failed in the 2nd cent., while fragmentation into different Christian philosophies clearly shows unease, even more so it was rejected in the 3rd cent. when doctrinal bases regarding the figure of Jesus started (and it is necessary to underline started) to become stronger.

3. A model of cultic integration

A similar argument can be framed for the section upon cults. While defending the philosophical integrity of monotheism on demonological bases, Celsus attacks and puts the Christian religious proposition into perspective on these same bases.

In the 2nd cent. Celsus had been able to suggest this violent integration into the imperial religious universe because the same Christian thought seemed to be willing to make its own way among the ideas of the pagan religiousness. In the 3rd cent. Origen planned a stronger and more aggressive attack. Thanks to an intimate assimilation of Greek philosophy, he was able to take advantage of a deeper division in his opponents and of the decline of philosophical demonology. Thus was imposed a demonology only concerning evil forces, the “devilish” or “demoniac” indeed not simply “demonic.”⁹

The integration of cultures is one of the main problems in the *Alethes logos*, which in heated cross-examination by the most oriental among the oriental religions, to paraphrase similar expressions by Nock,¹⁰ is made to try a new synthesis, widening the meshes of the rigid structures of the diverse schools.

⁹ A clarification about the evangelic terminology of these forces is now necessary: διάβολος is the malignant personal enemy of Jesus, the leader of legions of evil forces; δαιμόνια are the evil forces that cause diseases, possessions (distorted mental conditions of our sensitiveness) and that Jesus drives out of people. Only in *Matthew* about the demon-possessed men from Gadarenes (8.28–34), yet also in *Mark* and *Luke* (they only talk about a single person, though), these evil forces are called δαίμονες. It is the only presence of this word in the Gospels and I would not know how at present to explain it, granted that it has a precise explanation.

¹⁰ Cf. Nock 1933: 206–207; 267–268.

It is fundamental to observe this view when comparing Greek knowledge to “barbarian” knowledge as a decisive question to test the possibility of a real “ecumenical” knowledge and to expose the false ones, as well as dealing in general statements that have a programmatic properties. The extremely well known fragment 1.2 is particularly explicit in this respect. I am quoting it in the widest Origenian context:

Next he says that “the doctrine (obviously meaning Judaism with which Christianity is connected) was originally barbarian.” Having an open mind he does not reproach the gospel for its barbarian origin, but praises “the barbarians” for being “capable of discovering doctrines;” but he adds to this that “the Greeks are better able to judge the value of what the barbarians have discovered, and to establish the doctrines and put them into practice by virtue.”

Celsus’ argument is clearly fragmented by Origen but an essentially clear picture stands out, even as a result of its gloss. Celsus considers the Hebraic doctrine to be barbarian. Therefore, he also considers the Christian doctrine to be barbarian, being aware of the close relationship between the two. However, he does not discredit the doctrine simply for this reason. He explains a distinctive concept of his that corrects the classicistic one about purity in Greek creations: Barbarians are good at discovering doctrines but Greeks are superior at making these doctrines useful for carrying out virtue. This means that Barbarians provide raw concepts that only the superior Greek mind is able to mold into a structure, useful to man’s reasoning.

To confirm this statement from Celsus commentators quote a passage from *Epinomis*, a platonic dialogue considered spurious already by Diogenes Laertius who attributed it to Plato’s contributor Philip of Opus, which is accepted by modern criticism. It is a dialogue chronologically close to Plato, and very clear in expressing his latter thoughts. The passage which is better to quote in full (987d–988a), in its widest context, fits in a discussion about the identification of gods with stars. Therefore, comparison to the astrological knowledge of other traditions becomes natural and so astrology itself was one of the topics for debate over questions of primacy.

But there is one point which every Greek should bear in mind – that of all Greeks we have a situation which is about the most favourable to human excellence. The praiseworthy thing in it that we have to mention is that it may be taken as midway between a wintry and a summery climate; and our climate, being inferior in its summer to that in the region over there as we said, has been so much later in imparting the cognizance of these cosmic deities. And let us note that whatever Greeks acquire from foreigners is finally turned by them into something nobler (κάλλιον τοῦτο εἰς τέλος ἀπεργάζονται);¹¹ and moreover the same thing must be borne in mind regarding our present statements – that although it is hard to discover everything of this kind beyond dispute, there is hope, both strong and noble, that a really nobler and juster respect than is in the combined repute and worship which came from foreigners will be paid

¹¹ It could be translated also as “We should be anyway certain that what Greeks gained from Barbarians, has been made better up to perfection.”

to all these gods by the Greeks, who have the benefit of their various education (παιδείαις [...] χρωμένους), their prophecies from Delphi, and the whole system of worship under their laws.¹²

The whole passage is quite interesting. First of all it confirms the clearly platonic context in which Celsus operates, even though more than four centuries later, in his attempt at a philosophical and religious synthesis. Then secondly, it presents some observations which form the outline developed by Celsus.

The author states the difficulty of reaching final discoveries in the field of the Divine but also reasserts the hope in a Greek superiority due to three clear reasons: the παιδείαι, the Δελφῶν μαντεῖαι, the θεραπεία κατὰ νόμους. The first is the classical and inexpressible kind of Greek intellectual formation, expressed through the term παιδεία; then, the Delphic Oracles, and finally the cult being subject to regulations. Rationality, listening to God's voice through the oracles, a cult in accordance with traditional meaningful regulations are also the three principles that inspire the analysis of Celsus and his defence of the Greek mental universe, even if set in the manifold reality of the 2nd-cent. Roman Empire. Better still, they are the three principles that help him to find his way in interpreting this reality and to achieve a satisfactory synthesis.

Importantly in the *Alethes logos*, Celsus shows in practical terms how it is possible to interpret "barbarian" doctrines into an acceptable philosophical form, to highlight their core truths and to absorb them within Greek learning. He therefore aims to create an explanatory model of the religious truth, open within certain limits to the comparison with the ancient "barbarian" common sense and its assimilation. This attitude mirrors the historical situation at his time. It shows how the classicist defence in some intellectual Greek circles was not regarded as the best way to reply to the religious challenges of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire. Especially when the peace brought by Hadrian after the wars of Trajan and the easiness of communication fostered by the Emperor himself had encouraged even more links between the different provinces of the empire.

Let us now observe how this principle is applied to demonology in the worship of gods. Observing the fragment quoted in 8.58, Celsus first reasserts the inevitability of sins and the ungratefulness of Christians towards intermediate beings upon which the concrete administration of the world depends. Then He confirms his concept by referring to a "different" knowledge, namely the Egyptian one. Origen says:

After this Celsus says: "That in these matters, even including the very least, there is a being to whom authority has been given, one may learn from the teaching of the Egyptians. They say that the body of man has been put under the charge of thirty-six daemons, or ethereal gods of some sort, who divide it between them, that being the number of parts into which it is divided (though some say far more). Each daemon is in charge of a different part. And they know the

¹² For the Greek text and the English translation, see Lamb, Fowler 1927: 470–473.

names of the daemons in the local dialect, such as Chnoumen, Chnachoumen, Knat, Sikat, Biou, Erou, Erebiou, Rhamanoor, and Rheianoor, and all the other names which they use in their language. And by invoking these they heal the sufferings of the various parts. What is there to prevent anyone from paying honour both to these and to the others if he wishes, so that we can be in good health rather than be ill, and have good rather than bad luck, and be delivered from tortures and punishments?”

The value of this example can be considered in its right meaning: the reference to “Egyptians” can prove to be misleading here. It is not a question of Egyptian religion as it is recalled in other fragments with tones of disdainful superiority, such as in regards to the cult of animals. It is indeed a precise theory that could be considered Egyptian just because it was based upon a mysterious and fascinating landscape of divine figures. This discussion refers to the so-called *Melothesia decanica* known in the field of that *corpus* of texts by modern scholars as Hermeticism or *Corpus hermeticum*.

According to this theory, in the section concerning the demonic presences, the human body is divided into parts (μέλος) which are given to supervisors or “decans,” who are in charge of the health of the individual organs and such. A complex medicine emerged developing upon this basis. This medicine had a religious but also an astrological foundation, which is an aspect unconsidered in the fragment by Celsus.¹³

Once more, beyond the details and the apparent form of learning, Celsus is interested in the basic confirmation offered in regards to a truth acknowledged by Greek speculation. The demons’ barbarian names can also be considered as absolutely unimportant and incidental evidence; and indeed in 8.37 Celsus was ironically wondering whether demons had power only if invoked by their barbarian name whereas they did not have any when invoked in Greek or Latin. What really counts is that an ancestral knowledge, like the Egyptian, if suitably interpreted and cleansed of any uselessly superstitious element, can confirm the essential assumption: the world is ruled by intermediate forces that are practically effective in human life. Demonology proves to be fundamentally right in the Greek vision of the world, and likewise a comparison with other kinds of knowledge confirms this. This assumption, well fitted into the polemic outline of the discussion on demonology confirms the Christian extraneousness because its nature could not blend into any acceptable doctrine.

None the less, Celsus was highly absorbed into a difficult religious situation where exchanges and superimpositions of cults and religious theories had occurred between different people in different times yet with an age-long predominance of Greek culture. All that prevented him from contemplating or

¹³ For a detailed analysis of these concepts based on textual knowledge and interpretation cf. Festugière 1944: 115ff. (in particular 118–120); here it is found a long passage quoted by Stobaeus, particularly on the thirty-six deans’ role. For the fragment by Celsus cf. Puiggali 1987: 32–33.

discerning how well he could value other people's knowledge in its authentic reality and not merely in its Greek disguise. Essentially, he could not see how the "ancient" and ancestral teachings, which existed among all peoples and that he was thinking of elaborating through the categories of the Greek knowledge, were already a Hellenised hybrid.¹⁴

In the last part of his book, Origen partly explains his angelology as a consequence of this new attempt for an integration made by Celsus who states that true religiousness is to render worship to the only very high true God on the one side, but also to honour all beings and presences that from Him come on the other side. As everybody knows, he has already widely discussed this in *De principiis* and it has been the object of investigation since his lively intellectual life in Alexandria. Therefore in *Cels.* 8.64, polemically referring to Celsus, he states that:

We ought, then, to propitiate the one supreme God and to pray that He may be gracious, propitiating Him by piety and every virtue. But if Celsus also wants us to propitiate others besides the supreme God, let him realise that, just a moving body is followed by the movement of its shadow, in the same way if the supreme God is propitiated it follows that all the angels who are dear to Him, and souls, and spirits, are kindly disposed as well.

Origen does not confine himself to merely giving explanations in a more or less detailed manner about the demons' nature and their genesis as found in apologists from the 2nd cent. that contaminate traditions of different origin. His time needed certainties. The "humanistic" empire of the Antonines had given way to the increasingly militaristic ones of the Severi with their pervasive Syrian cults: imperative is hierarchy even in the Church, in heaven as it is on earth. He rewrites in positive terms those presences that he also thinks must surround God and bring him near to human beings without denying His perfection, and that is indeed the angelology widely investigated by the scholars. When Celsus polemically states that if Christians do not want to be demons' table companions in the sacrificial practice, they must not eat bread, drink wine, taste fruit, drink water or breathe as it is the demons that supervise all these realities (*Cels.* 8.28), Origen objects:

For we say that the earth bears the things which are said to be under the control of nature because of the appointment of invisible husbandmen, so to speak, and other governors who control not only the produce of the earth but also all flowing water and air. For this reason also the water in the wells and in the natural springs becomes rain and circulates, and the air is kept free from pollution, and becomes capable of giving life to those who breathe it. We certainly do not maintain that these invisible beings are daemons. But, if we may go so far as

¹⁴ The argument here is connected to the wider one about relationships between Greeks and other cultures, dealing with a deep insight into the Hellenistic age by Momigliano 1975. The essay "L'errore dei Greci," added to the Italian edition (Momigliano 1980: 159–167), is indeed very stimulating for my research. The same job done by Momigliano for the Hellenistic age in Droysenian sense (3rd BCE–1st cent. CE) should perhaps be done for the first three centuries of our age. There are valuable clues from the essay in Italian previously quoted.

to say what, if not these, are the works of daemons, we would say that they are responsible for famines, barren vines and fruit-trees, and droughts, and also for the pollution of the air, causing damage to the fruits, and sometimes even the death of animals and plague among men (*Cels.* 8.31).¹⁵

The reversal has an undeniable symmetry. Celsus was expressing the Greek *élites* that were trying once again to absorb everything they believed was possible to assimilate from the different cultures of the empire, even though generating alternative interpretations and drastic amendments. It seems to me that by ascribing solely a negative meaning to the word demon, Origen attempts to restore the ideological function of the demonological system in his angelology forever entrusting the demonic to the evangelical and not to the philosophical category of the demoniac and of the devilish.

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¹⁵ Cf. Monaci Castagno 2000: 8: "The expression by Origen *omnia angelis sunt plena* is to be interpreted literally; a pervasive angelical presence is first of all manifest in the order of nature even in its constitutive elements; an angel is put in charge of each element (earth, water, fire, air) [...] they are present in the alternating of seasons, in the growing of the fruits, in the regulation of the water cycle" (English translation is mine).

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“Basilides” and “the Egyptian Wisdom”

Some Remarks on a Peculiar Heresiological Notice (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.20–27)

Daniele Tripaldi

Now that some knowledge of the lost civilizations has been regained, it is important to pay special attention to them. Let us try to see what was there before and around Hellenism, and not only celebrate singular achievements but spell out the results of interaction and dialogue in a continuing eastern Mediterranean *koine*.

Walter Burkert

Ps.-Hippolytus’ report on Basilides of Alexandria stands alone in the whole heresiological literature on this early Christian teacher. With the following contribution, I aim to shed new light on this rather neglected text, tracing its possible sources and comparing it with other images we have of Basilides, his literary production, and teachings.¹

My analysis will unfold through three subsequent stages: first of all, as it needs to be done for any quotation, whether it be long or short, I will make an attempt to understand Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice on Basilides within the redactional context in which it was embedded. Next I will re-locate the text in the overall setting of Basilides’ and his followers’ teachings as known them from Clement of Alexandria.

In a third step, I will take Ps.-Hippolytus at his word as he charges his “Basilides” with a full-blown *paideia* on Egyptian lore: I will extract two original fragments from Basilides’ work quoted *verbatim* out of Ps.-Hippolytus’ long and complex *résumé*, and search Egyptian and Graeco-Egyptian sources for literary parallels.

¹ The groundbreaking monograph on Basilides is still Löhr 1996, who comments extensively on Ps.-Hippolytus’ report (284–323). For more recent treatments from different perspectives, see Biondi 2005; Bos 2005; Pearson 2005; Saudelli 2006; Quispel 2008; Métrope 2009. Unfortunately, I have not been able yet to read Hertz 2013, who devotes one chapter to Ps.-Hippolytus’ report and a whole section to Basilides’ non-Being God, under the title: “Trouve-t-on dans d’autres sources antiques une telle conception du principe?”.

Finally, I will explore the possibility that the wide-ranging exegetical activity presupposed by the text and intended as an integral part of a “Christian” world-view within a multi-religious culture may in fact stem from the *Exegetika* on Parchor the Prophet attributed to Basilides’ son, Isidore, or from a literary enterprise of a similar nature. At any rate, whether my tentative proposal be accepted or not, the profile will emerge of an Alexandrian Christian intellectual milieu striving to combine theogony, cosmogony and *Heilsgeschichte*, Greek philosophical teachings and “barbarian wisdom,” Hebrew scriptures and older traditions of early groups of Jesus’ followers, with a degree of complexity wholly matched by the socio-cultural diversity of its urban environment.

1. Contesting authority: the meaning of a literary frame

Ps.-Hippolytus’ report is skillfully framed by two remarks, intended to direct the hearers’ – and readers’ – interpretation:

Haer. 7.20.1: Βασιλείδης τοίνυν καὶ Ἰσίδωρος, ὁ Βασιλείδου παῖς γνήσιος καὶ μαθητής, φασὶν εἰρηκέναι Ματθίαν αὐτοῖς λόγους ἀποκρύφους, οὓς ἤκουσε παρὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος κατ’ ἰδίαν διδασχθείς. ἴδωμεν οὖν πῶς καταφανῶς Βασιλείδης ὁμοῦ καὶ Ἰσίδωρος καὶ πᾶς ὁ τούτων χορὸς οὐχ ἀπλῶς καταψεύδεται μόνου Ματθίου, ἀλλὰ γὰρ καὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος αὐτοῦ.

– 7.27.13: ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ἃ καὶ Βασιλείδης μυθεύει, σχολάσας κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον καὶ παρ’ αὐτῶν τὴν τοιαύτην σοφίαν διδασχθείς, ἐκαρποφόρησε τοιοῦτους καρπούς.

As can easily be seen, Ps.-Hippolytus opens by noting that Basilides and his son and disciple Isidore purport to have received secret teachings from Matthias, who in turn is supposed to have been taught by and have heard them from Jesus himself. Facing such claims, Ps.-Hippolytus feels the need to expose their lie – and that is what he aims to do, relating their doctrine. Unsurprisingly then his concluding remarks echo these opening lines (μαθητής ~ σχολάσας; παρὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος [...] διδασχθείς ~ παρ’ αὐτῶν [...] διδασχθείς) in order to subvert the “tradition” as invented by the adversaries: all in all, as a result of his exposition, Ps.-Hippolytus can openly assert that Basilides was actually imbued with Egyptian wisdom, the Egyptians and no disciple of Jesus, nor Jesus himself, actually being involved in the teaching and schooling activity which formed the “heretic.”

One is now left to wonder: is such an assertion to be historically discarded as a heresiological stereotype depicting heretics as Barbarians, that is, as intrinsically alien to “Jewish” and “Christian” *paradosis*? Is it to be understood against the background of 2nd- and 3rd-cent. CE Egyptomania? Or, in other words, the alternative running as follows: does Ps.-Hippolytus know what he is talking about, when it comes to speaking of “Egyptian wisdom,” or does he somehow have access to and familiarity with actual Egyptian or Graeco-Egyptian traditions, enabling him to detect Egyptian materials as such, beyond any obvious polemical intent?

A brief excursus will give a few clues as to the answers to these questions: in *Haer.* 4.43.4–44.3, Ps.-Hippolytus reports a specimen of Egyptian "wisdom" centring on the self-development of an unbegotten and undivided Monad, duplicating itself into a Dyad and then a Tetrad, until turning finally into a Decad, "beginning and end of numbers, so that the Monad becomes first and tenth" (cf. also *Haer.* 6.21–24). (Neo-)Pythagorean influence is evident,² but as undisputable as this conclusion is, Egyptian texts do actually provide us with a cultural framework into which Greek philosophical language and ideas could have been and probably were fittingly integrated, thus justifying Ps.-Hippolytus' attribution: on the coffin of a priest of Amun who lived under the 22nd Dynasty (10th to 8th cent. BCE) is written:

I am the One [= Atum] who turned into Two. I am the Two who turned into Four. I am the Four who turned into Eight. I am the One after him: I am Khepri.³

Comparing this passage with other theogonical progressions of numbers, attested for example in CT 76 and BD 7, the Egyptian side of the story slowly surfaces, which surely fuelled the process of cultural interplay of two worlds and languages.⁴ Even later writings of Christian Egyptian origin, such as *Ap. John* 4.2; 6; 23–26 and *Untitled Text* 4 (the One who's mother of the All is "the first unknowable one, mother of the Ennead, who, starting from the Monad of the Secret One, attains her full completion in the Decad"),⁵ still show clear traces of the encounter and intermingling of Egyptian theogonical motifs with Greek philosophical lexicon of Pythagorean flavour, in terms reminiscent of Ps.-Hippolytus' notice.⁶

² Thus Magris 2012: 124, n. 132, who goes so far as to speculate that Ps.-Hippolytus reproduces here a "gnostic" source comparable to Mark the Magician's numerological theosophy. On the occurrence of Egyptian theogonical themes in the latter, see Förster 1999: 182–192.

³ For an "Orphic" parallel to the "One after the many" concept, cf. the remarkable *μοῦνος ἐγένετο* referring to Zeus in the Derveni theogony, after every existing thing, gods included, has come out of him (col. 16[12].3–6). The theogony's compatibility with Egyptian beliefs has been discussed and argued for by Burkert 2007: 93–95.

⁴ These findings pair with Magris' comments on Ps.-Hippolytus' surprising reliability as historical source on Indian lore in *Haer.* 1.24.2–6 (2012: 87–88, n. 60). Conversely, Ducœr 2011: 173, discusses Ps.-Hippolytus' report on Brahminical doctrines as a "construction savante provenant de milieux intellectuels et philosophiques neo-pythagoriciens et/ou neo-platoniciens." On Ps.-Hippolytus' acquaintance with authentic Graeco-Egyptian magic texts, see Kehlhofer 2007: 522–526.

⁵ On the Egyptian background of the *Apocryphon of John*, see Tripaldi 2012. Denzey Lewis 2013: 170–177, has recently included the whole *Codex Brucianus*, transmitting the *Untitled Text* among other writings, in her list of the literary products of late Antique Egyptian "national" revivalism.

⁶ Cf. also *Corp. herm.* 4.10–11 and 13.12. On the Egyptian roots of *Hermetica*, see recently Van den Kerchove 2012 and Bull 2014. The text on the coffin of the priest of Amun is edited and commented on by Maspero 1916: 165–166. For a thorough interpretation, see

Overall, then, if something is to be made of these correspondences on a more general level, Ps.-Hippolytus' reference to Egyptian wisdom should not be simply and hastily dismissed as a mere heresiological tool aiming to degrade the adversary's teaching into something neither Christian nor "biblical," nor even Greek.⁷ Rather, if a critical appraisal is to be made as to the historical reliability of his information, the latter deserves a careful and deeply probing investigation by cross comparison. That is what I attempt to do, after assessing the relationship between Ps.-Hippolytus' report and some of the fragments of Basilides and his school preserved by Clement of Alexandria.

2. Basilides or not Basilides?

The ascription to the "historical" Basilides of the teachings recorded by Ps.-Hippolytus has always been heatedly debated. Méhat assumed it,⁸ whereas Vigne more specifically proposed to identify the source of Ps.-Hippolytus' notice with the work of one of Basilides' followers, probably dating between the end of the 2nd cent. CE and the beginnings of the 3rd.⁹ By comparing it with the "original" fragments transmitted by Clement, Löhr, on his part, seriously questioned Basilides' authorship and left four possibilities open:

- a) Ps.-Hippolytus' *Vorlage* depends on Clement's *Vorlage*;
- b) Ps.-Hippolytus' *Vorlage* draws directly on Clement's text;
- c) both Ps.-Hippolytus and Clement quote from a common source of Basilidean provenance;
- d) Ps.-Hippolytus' report builds on the *Stromata*.¹⁰

Kees 1956: 155–171, who highlights the allusions to the Heliopolitan Ennead and the Hermopolitan Ogdoad. It is probably no coincidence that the theology ascribed to the Egyptians by Ps.-Hippolytus goes on linking the Monad with the numeric progression three, five, seven, nine; it further interprets the multiplication of the first Principle still persisting in its unity as separation of the natural elements; it introduces groups of nine as basic constituents of the Universe (*Haer.* 4.43.7–8; 11): are these features traces of a philosophical re-elaboration of the aforementioned Heliopolitan cosmogony? Cf. *Corp. herm.* 1.4–5; 3.1–2, Stob. *Flor.* 23.50–51, and some remarks by Assmann on the latter as "Elementenlehre" (2004: 17–18; 2005: 15–24).

⁷ In *Haer.* 7.33.1, Ps.-Hippolytus ascribes Cerinthus's doctrine that the world was not created by the first God to his Egyptian *paideia*. One may reasonably doubt that Cerinthus had actually had such an education and that his assumption really rested thereon, but late Egyptian theology did distinguish between one primordial God beginning existence before anything else and another God performing the physical act of "creation" – and Greek writers were also well aware of that distinction: cf. Porph. *Amalg.* fr. 9 and Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 8.2–3, with Mendel 2003: 25–26.37–43.64–74, and Klotz 2012: 121–126.133–139.403–404. See also Clark 2008: 178–189.

⁸ Méhat 1974: 366, n. 4 and 368–369.

⁹ Vigne 1992: 294.

¹⁰ Löhr 1996: 318–323.

Conversely, Bos, Biondi, and Métrope all presuppose the authenticity of the report without questioning the tradition.¹¹ Layton maintains that Ps.-Hippolytus has recorded the speculations of later disciples of Basilides’ which do not put us in direct contact with the master himself;¹² following Layton, Pearson rejects Ps.-Hippolytus as a reliable informant on the authentic Basilides.¹³

I cannot delve now into the entire question, complex and multifaceted as it is. I wish to focus instead on fr. 4 Löhr, and its lexical and thematic correspondences with some passages from Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice, and make a number of comments on them:

Clem. Str. 2.7.35.5–8.36.1: ὁθεν “ἀρχὴ σοφίας φόβος θεοῦ” θείως λέλεκται. Ἐνταῦθα οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Βασιλείδην τοῦτο ἐξηγούμενοι τὸ ῥητὸν αὐτόν φασιν Ἀρχοντα ἐπακούσαντα τὴν φάσιν τοῦ διακονουμένου πνεύματος ἐκπλαγῆναι τῷ τε ἀκούσματι καὶ τῷ θεάματι παρ’ ἐλπίδας εὐηγγελισμένον, καὶ τὴν ἐκπληξιν αὐτοῦ φόβον κληθῆναι ἀρχὴν γενόμενον σοφίας φυλοκρινητικῆς τε καὶ διακριτικῆς καὶ τελειωτικῆς καὶ ἀποκαταστατικῆς· οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἐκλογὴν διακρίνας ὁ ἐπὶ πᾶσι προπέμπει.

Haer. 7.26.1–2: Ἦλθεν οὖν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πρῶτον ἀπὸ τῆς νιότητος, φησὶν, διὰ τοῦ παρακαθημένου τῷ ἀρχοντι υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸν ἄρχοντα, καὶ ἔμαθεν ὁ ἄρχων ὅτι οὐκ ἦν θεὸς τῶν ὅλων, ἀλλ’ ἦν γεννητὸς καὶ ἔχων αὐτοῦ ὑπεράνω τὸν τοῦ ἀρρήτου καὶ <ἀ>κατονομάστου οὐκ ὄντος καὶ τῆς νιότητος κατακείμενον θησαυρόν καὶ ἐπέστρεψε καὶ ἐφοβήθη, συνιείς ἐν οἷα ἦν ἀγνοίᾳ. τοῦτό ἐστι, φησὶν, τὸ εἰρημένον· “ἀρχὴ σοφίας φόβος κυρίου”· ἦρξατο γὰρ σοφίζεσθαι, κατηχούμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ παρακαθημένου Χριστοῦ διδασκόμενος τίς ἐστὶν ὁ οὐκ ὢν, τίς ἡ νιότης, τί τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, τίς ἡ τῶν ὅλων κατασκευὴ, ποῦ ταῦτα ἀποκατασταθῆσεται.

– 7.27.8: ἵνα ἀπαρχὴ τῆς φυλοκρινήσεως γένηται τῶν συγκεχυμένων ὁ Ἰησοῦς (cf. also 9.12); 7.26.9: ἡ δύναμις τῆς κρίσεως; 7.27.11 φυλοκρίνησις καὶ ἀποκατάστασις.

The introductory formula used by Clement (οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Βασιλείδην ... φασιν) leaves little doubt on the authorship of the fragment, and excludes that it stems directly from Basilides whom Clement quotes by name whenever he reports his opinions or excerpts passages from his works. Clement’s oscillation

¹¹ Bos 2005: 414–415 and n. 69, rests on Méhat 1974: 369. Later, in 2011: 104–105, he wrote: “But the author (*scil.* of the *Elenchos*) repeatedly gives the impression of being well documented. In his account of Basilides he often uses the words ‘(as) he says,’ which might suggest that he used (a summary of) a work attributed to Basilides. And he quotes a number of biblical passages which Basilides is said to have referred to in a way that is congruous within the framework of Basilides’s overall system. And the system which he ascribes to Basilides is itself well-constructed and seems remarkably original.” On Biondi’s attempt to harmonise Ps.-Hippolytus and Clement, see Saudelli 2006: 218 and 221. Métrope 2009: *passim* variously mentions Basilides, or Basilides and his son Isidore, as author(s) of the text transmitted in Ps.-Hippolytus’ *Adversus haereses*, but does not address the problem any further.

¹² Layton 1995: 418–419, n. 2.

¹³ Pearson 2005: 3.

between οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Βασιλείδην and οἱ ἀπὸ Βασιλείδου as introductions to other fragments (*Str.* 2.112.1–114.2 and 3.1–3 = fr. 5–6 Löhr) makes clear that Basilides does not belong to the group mentioned, as the use of ἀμφὶ might have implied.¹⁴ Therefore, οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Βασιλείδην can be none other than the circle of his followers gathered around him, his “school.” Moreover, in fr. 5–6 Löhr, Clement moves from summarizing in *oratio obliqua* to reporting the very words in *oratio recta*, and from the reference to “Basilides’ followers” to the mention of Isidore, Basilides’ son and disciple, as his immediate source. This quotation praxis has led Löhr to assume that in both passages the more vague and indirect reference to Basilides’ followers is to be intended as later specified by means of, and as a direct quotation from Isidore’s works.¹⁵ Unfortunately, that is not the case with fr. 4, which has only *oratio obliqua* with no mention of any more specific source. However, such a matter of fact has not prevented Pearson from speculating that fr. 1–4; 9; 16 Löhr might actually reflect Isidore’s teachings.¹⁶

That being said, what about the relationship between the fragment transmitted by Clement and the texts reported by Ps.-Hippolytus? I have tried to highlight the corresponding vocabulary by putting it in italics. As a result, it seems to me that the aforementioned passages share a common world-view expressed in a recurrent cluster of key-words and expressions (ἄρχων; εὐηγγελισμένον ~ εὐαγγέλιον; φόβον ~ ἐφοβήθη; σοφίας ~ σοφίζεσθαι; ἀποκαταστατικῆς ~ ἀποκατασταθήσεται / ἀποκατάστασις; φυλοκρινητικῆς ~ φυλοκρινήσεως / φυλοκρίνησις; διακριτικῆς / διακρίνας ~ κρίσεως) and centring on the exegesis of *Prov.* 1.7. The sapiential text is expounded in order to provide with biblical foundation, and therefore to sanction, basically the same cosmological and eschatological model, revolving around the conversion of the *Archon* as the first step in the restoration of all things through the gospel of Jesus. Löhr is firmly convinced that we are dealing with

die Rezeption eines basilidianischen Motivs in einem neuen theologischen Kontext [...]. Die Art der Rezeption erlaubt nicht den zwingenden Schluss, dass die Vorlage des Referates von einem (späteren) Basilidianer verfasst wurde.¹⁷

I do not share Löhr’s skepticism: there is no doubt that the divergence of the literary context of occurrence and some more differences in detail (the role of the Spirit in Clement played by the Christ in Ps.-Hippolytus; the simultaneity of audition and vision, as well as the relevance of the *Archon*’s amazement in the former; the doubling of the *Archon* and the intervention of the son, along

¹⁴ Cf. LSJ: s.v. ἀμφὶ c.3 [89]; s.v. ἀπὸ iii.1.c. [192].

¹⁵ Löhr 1996: 80–82.

¹⁶ Pearson 2005: 28, n. 107.

¹⁷ Löhr 1996: 322. See Bos 2011: 105–106, for a critical re-appraisal (with literature) of Löhr’s judgement on the “tensions” in Ps.-Hippolytus’ text.

with the list of the specific contents of the "Gospel" in the latter) exclude any hypothesis of direct dependence of Ps.-Hippolytus' report on Clement's text, or of the former's source on the latter's, whether *via* Clement's text itself or not. Furthermore, assuming that Ps.-Hippolytus is dependent here on Clement, his freedom in dealing with the text of the Alexandrian radically contrasts with the greater accuracy he usually shows in drawing explicitly or implicitly from other authors and re-editing them: see, for example, the long, almost literal quotations from Irenaeus (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.42 with Iren. *Haer.* 1.14.1) and Flavius Josephus (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 9.18.2–28.2 with Jos. *B.J.* 2.8.2–13).

Ultimately, then, my educated guess is that the common tradition underlying both reports goes back to exegetical debates animating groups of Basilides' followers in Alexandria in the second half of 2nd cent. CE – at the earliest.¹⁸ The hypothesis that such ideas were actually circulating in 2nd- and/or 3rd-cent. Alexandria or at least Egypt is further strengthened in my view by the occurrence of an analogous and yet conflicting scheme of "evangelisation" in the material shared in common and variously reworked by the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II,4; end of the 2nd/beginnings of the 3rd cent. CE) and the *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II,5; Greek end redaction dating to the last quarter of 3rd cent. CE [?]), two writings of almost undisputed Egyptian, if not Alexandrian, provenance and background:¹⁹ according to these versions of the "myth," one of the sons of the *Archon* is illuminated by *Pistis Sophia* (!) or her daughter *Zoe*, and hears that his Father is not the one and only God, or alternatively that an immortal luminous Man pre-exists him, as a fiery powerful angel exhaled as a breath (!) out of *Zoe*'s mouth appears, or as the image of *Pistis Sophia*'s greatness flows on the primordial waters; he converts without informing the Father, and is taken up and established over the seventh heaven; he then creates his own court, completely neglecting his ignorant, raging parent and leaving him to his fate of doom (cf. *Hyp. Arch.* NHC II,4.95.1–96.17 and *Orig. World* NHC II,5.103.15–106.3). Compared to Ps.-Hippolytus' report, both texts clearly lack the last passage in the chain of "evangelisation," that is, the preaching of the son to the father, but equally as clearly do recurring motifs emerge and bring the story close to our Basilidian source (the illumination and "conversion" of a son who turns out to be greater than his Father and reigns over the heavens; the revelation of the God who is above all; a connection with

¹⁸ Löhr 1996: 322–323, n. 135, following G. May, writes "dass die Vorlage des Hippolyts-referats als Ganze später als die Clemensfragmente zu datieren ist; wir können nicht ausschließen, dass auch hinter der Vorlage späte Basilidianer stecken." See also 305–306 and 312. The familiarity of the original author(s) of our Basilides text with Philo's vocabulary and thought stressed by Runia 1999: 135, and Saudelli 2006: 216–218, may be a further sign of its Alexandrian origin.

¹⁹ See Barc 1980: 4–5; Painchaud 1995: 117–121; Kaiser 2001: 218; Bethge 2001: 237; Pearson 2007: 75–78 and 221–225; Denzey Lewis 2014: 214–216.

sapiential tradition as the revealer is represented by Wisdom-like figures): are we dealing with competing versions of the same basic account?²⁰

3. Back to which Egypt?

Coming now to the core of my analysis, I first continue to adhere to what is most “certain, to the words on the page, and to the relationships” which can be reconstructed “among the words” and through them among texts.²¹ Therefore once again I intend to conduct the main, initial comparisons on a strictly formal, structural and lexical basis.

In *Haer.* 7.21.5, an adjective that Ps.-Hippolytus employs probably signals that a literal quotation from “Basilides” is about to follow. The adjective in question is καταφανέστερον:

“ἵνα δὲ καταφανέστερον ποιήσω τοῦτο ὅπερ ἐκεῖνοι λέγουσι· καθάπερ ὦν ὄρνιθος εὐποικίλου τινὸς καὶ πολυχρωμάτου, οἷονεὶ τοῦ ταῶνος ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς ἐπὶ μᾶλλον πολυμόρφου καὶ πολυχρωμάτου, ἐν ὧν ὅμως ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῷ πολλὰς οὐσιῶν πολυμόρφων καὶ πολυχρωμάτων καὶ πολυσυστάτων ιδέας, οὕτως ἔχει τὸ καταβληθέν, φησὶν, ὑπὸ τοῦ οὐκ ὄντος θεοῦ οὐκ ὄν σπέρμα <πανσπερμίαν> τοῦ κόσμου, πολύμορφον ὁμοῦ καὶ πολυούσιον.

Corresponding to the use of καταφανῶς in 7.20.1, καταφανέστερον ποιέω here means “to show even more clearly, to bring more fully to light” (see Herodot. *Hist.* 2.120; Isocr. *Bus.* 11.4; Plat. *Gorg.* 453c), therefore lending itself *ipso facto* to introduce reports on and summaries of another’s words and thought (cf. Xenoph. *Cyr.* 1.6.14). Furthermore, the closing φησὶν echoes the opening λέγουσι and confirms that the preceding and immediately following words are part of a quotation. Hence, there seems to be no reasonable doubt that we are dealing with the reproduction of an original fragment from Ps.-Hippolytus’ written source. Following in the steps of J.-M. Roesli, A. Bernabé identified a close parallel with our fragment in *Ps.-Clem.* 6.5.2 (OF 120) and pushed the linguistic and thematic comparison further. He eventually – and convincingly – argued for an Orphic source being commented on in both texts:

Este paralelo tan estrecho me inclina a pensar más bien que los basilidianos y Apión derivan de una fuente órfica y que la comparación con el huevo de pavo real estaba en el texto poético (donde también cabrían palabras como πολυχρωμάτος). El texto basilidiano parece haber apro-

²⁰ Fallon 1978: 86, n. 194, refers to Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.26.1–7 as reporting a similar conception to the Valentinian doctrine on the Demiurge, which I actually do not regard as similar as he does. He maintains, however, that the son of the Archon’s account in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* fits most appropriately into the latter half of the 2nd cent. (1978: 88). On his part, Painchaud 1995: 102–103 and 117–118, assumes that *Orig. World* 103–106 goes back to the first redaction of the text and argues for a date in the second half of the 2nd cent. CE (around 175) as well.

²¹ I am partly quoting, partly paraphrasing Brodie 2001: 104.

vechado la comparación (que es muy similar) y haber modificado la segunda parte. En todo caso parece claro que en el poema órfico que intentamos reconstruir se afirmaba que el huevo contenía en sí la capacidad de crear todo lo existente.²²

His conclusions can be corroborated by noting that the explanation of the Orphic cosmogony put in Apion’s mouth in *Pseudo-Clementina* and Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice on Basilides, begin with almost identical words:²³

Ps.-Clem. 6.3.1: Ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐδέν ἦν πλὴν χάος καὶ στοιχείων ἀτάκτων ἔτι συνπεφορημένων μίξις ἀδιάκριτος, τοῦτο καὶ τῆς φύσεως ὁμολογούσης καὶ τῶν μεγάλων ἀνδρῶν οὕτως ἔχειν νενοηκότων.
Haer. 7.20.2: Ἦν, φησὶν, ὅτε ἦν οὐδέν· ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τὸ οὐδέν ἦν τι τῶν ὄντων, ἀλλὰ ψιλῶς καὶ ἀνυπονοήτως δίχα παντὸς σοφίσματος ἦν ὅλως οὐδέν. ὅταν δὲ λέγω, φησί, τὸ ἦν, οὐχ ὅτι ἦν λέγω, ἀλλ’ ἵνα σημάνω τοῦτο ὅπερ βούλομαι δεῖξαι, λέγω, φησὶν, ὅτι ἦν ὅλως οὐδέν.

In Ps.-Hippolytus’ text, once again, the simultaneous occurrences of φησί(ν) and of the verbal forms λέγω, σημάνω and βούλομαι assure that a work is being quoted, the original author, certainly not Ps.-Hippolytus, speaking now in the first person. It is probably no mere coincidence that such a proem distinguishes these two texts in the whole Greek literature: a search on the TLG online has sorted out only two comparable parallels in Alexander of Aphrodisia’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysica* (Alex. Aphr. *Comm. Metaph.* 689.30, 37 Hayduck). Here, however, the tenability of the hypothesis that “there was a time when nothing existed,” which according to Alexander would follow the assumption that all and every act is preceded by a power, is contested and explicitly denied together with its logical premise. Two lexical and structural clues now make much of a proof that “Apion” and “Basilides” are producing two philosophical interpretations of an Orphic theology, probably close to that preserved in the *Rhapsodies*.²⁴

Moving now to a wider, thematic comparison, as far as we can guess from Ps.-Hippolytus’ selective and unsystematic exposition, Basilides’ work seems to have assimilated, combined and expanded other Orphic motifs as well as sharing significant interpretive features with later (Neo-)Platonic exegesis of Orphic materials.

Among the former one may count:²⁵

1. the emergence of a first God out of the cosmic egg / seed, who irradiates light

²² Bernabé 2008: 91–92, here 92.

²³ On the relationship between *Ps.-Clem.* 6.3.1 and Orphic traditions, see Bernabé 2008: 82–89.

²⁴ Bernabé 2008: 97–98. See also Biondi 2005: 128–129 and 131, who however asserts, rather than demonstrates. On the exegetical value of 1st persons of *verba dicendi* as introducing personal comments on former allusions to or quotations from other texts, see, for example, Plot. *Enn.* 1.6.2.1–11: here Plotinus first alludes to *Symp.* 206c–d (ll. 2–6) and then expounds it in the light of *Phaedr.* 250a (ll. 7–11), the switch from statement and allusion to explanation being marked by φάμεν δὲ (l. 7), which actualises the initial λέγωμεν (l. 1). Cf. 2.1.7.19–33, and 2.3.16.4–5 (freely quoting *Phaedr.* 246c.1–2).

²⁵ See also Gabriele 2014: 142–145, commenting on the Orphic hymn in Porph. *Agalm.* fr. 3.

- and ascends to the heights (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.3–8; cf. *Ps.-Clem.* 6.5.4; 6.2);
2. the separation of the substance inside the egg/seed corresponding to different density and weight (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.7; cf. *Ps.-Clem.* 6.3–8.1; Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5; Achilles Tatius, *Introductio ad Arati Phaenomena*, p. 32 Maass; Epiph. *Pan.* 8.4);²⁶
 3. the role played by the πνεῦμα as cosmically active, raising and dividing force (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.10–13 and 23.1–3; cf. *Ps.-Clem.* 6.4.2–3; Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5; Epiph. *Pan.* 8.2–3);
 4. the formation of the heavens out of the seed / egg and the separation of the heavenly world from the space below through the action of the πνεῦμα (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.23.1–3; cf. *Ps.-Clem.* 6.5.4; 7.5–8.2; Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5; Ach. Tat. *Intr. Arat.* p. 32 Maass; Epiph. *Pan.* 8.2–3);

The latter include:

1. the re-elaboration of the primordial state of indistinctiveness as allusion to the incomprehensible, ineffable and unified nature of the First Principle (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.1–2; cf. Damascius, *De principiis*, 123);
2. the concept of the preexistent Totality hidden in the One as symbolised by the seed /egg (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.3–22.2; cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, 1.427.25–428.10 Diehl and 430.5–10 Diehl);²⁷
3. connected to 2., the πλῆθος σπερμάτων motif (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.3; 5; cf. Dam. *Princ.* 123²);
4. the triadic structuration of noetic Being as represented by embryological imagery (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.5 and 22.7; cf. Dam. *Princ.* 123; and 124², here relating and interpreting the teachings of Pherekydes of Syros [A8 Schibli]);²⁸
5. the identification of the first child emerging out of the seed / egg as Intellect (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.8; cf. Procl. *Comm. Tim.* 1.427.6–430.18 Diehl and Dam. *Princ.* 123).²⁹

²⁶ On the Orphic connection of Epiphanius' notice on the Epicureans, see Pini 2010: 163, n. 1. Some useful remarks on Basilides' ideas can be found in Simonetti 1993: 443, n. 40 and Biondi 2005: 141.

²⁷ See Hadot 1993: 269 and n. 443; Turner 2001: 540–541, n. 37; Thomassen 2008: 306–307.

²⁸ Triadic divisions of divine principles are not just late Neo-Platonic speculations: they go back at least to the *Chaldean oracles* (second half of the 2nd cent. CE). See Zambon 2002: 251–294. Brisson 1995: 2885–2887, regards divine triads as original and integral features of the Orphic *Rhapsodies* (end of 1st–beginning of 2nd cent. CE), ascribable to Middle-Platonic influence. According to Schibli 1990: 35–38, Pherekydes' work originated “in the same mythopoietic and speculative milieu” that informed some of the oldest Orphic cosmological accounts, or a similar one. Breglia 2000: 191–194, argues instead for Pherekydes' dependence on Orphic theogonies. Both concur, however, that a “genetic” link with Orphic traditions cannot be denied.

²⁹ On Basilides' first Sonship as *nous*, see Simonetti 1993: 443–444, n. 40; Biondi 2005: 137–138; Saudelli 2006: 217–218; Magris 2012: 255, n. 26.

Where is Egypt in all of this? I do not intend to delve into the *vexata quaestio* of the supposed Egyptian and Oriental “origin” of Orphic theogonies.³⁰ I limit myself here to just a few remarks.

By Roman times Egyptian priests had long been claiming Egyptian roots for Orphic *theologoumena* and rites, and had also long been engaged in spreading their versions of this story among others across the Mediterranean basin, especially among and through Greek writers (cf. Herodot. *Hist.* 2.81–82; 142; Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 1.23; 92.3; 96.2–5 and 4.25.3; Plut. fr. 212; Eus. *Praep. ev.* 1.6.4 and 3.9.12).³¹ Did the native informants go completely astray in inventing and handing on the tradition? And were their hearers, who later became our informants, simply naïve to trust them blindly?

Two points need to be made in this regard: building on P. Hadot’s and J. Turner’s work, E. Thomassen has convincingly argued for a common source lying behind the apparently related protologies of the Valentinians, the *Chaldean oracles*, the later Platonists, the Platonising Sethians, and Victorinus and Synesius. Though not easy to pin down exactly, this common source must have encompassed a reinterpretation of older Orphic theogonies, and particularly of “the myth of Phanes emerging from the cosmic egg.”³² In a more recent contribution, besides focusing on one of Phanes’ epithets, Πρωτόγονος as a lexical equivalent to the Sethian name Protophanes and further exploring the Orphic connection of the latter, the Norwegian scholar has detected and commented on two occurrences of the term πρωτοφανής in two different sections of PGM IV.³³ The first one appears in the second of two lines (PGM IV.943–944) which accumulate almost literal Greek renderings of ancient Egyptian epithets referring to Re.³⁴ Thomassen concludes:

[...] it is not without interest to observe that the Sethians adopted a vocabulary in their description of primal ontogenesis that would make good sense for an Egyptian familiar with traditional creation mythology and solar religion. It is not unlikely that the Sethians who introduced this vocabulary had an Egyptian background, and those Egyptians who translated and read the Sethian texts as well can easily be assumed to have seen a connection with traditional themes in their native religion.³⁵

His conclusions may obviously apply to the corresponding Orphic vocabulary as well, which Sethians had appropriated, as Thomassen himself does not fail to remark.³⁶ My second point: before comparing the Greek – not only Orphic

³⁰ See Morenz 1950, West 1983: 187–190 and 199–204; West 1994: 303–307. More cautious Breglia 2000: 164–166.

³¹ Frankfurter 1998: 224–237.

³² Thomassen 2008: 291–307.

³³ Thomassen 2013: 64–71.

³⁴ Thomassen 2013: 66–67.

³⁵ Thomassen 2013: 67.

³⁶ Thomassen 2013: 64. On the historical and cultural continuity between “Orphism” and

– and Phoenician versions of egg cosmogonies, M. West quoted in a note, a passage from Porphyry which deserves further attention (*Agalm.* fr. 9):³⁷

Τὸν δημιουργόν, ὃν Κνήφ οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι προσαγορεύουσιν, ἀνθρωποειδῆ, τὴν δὲ χροιάν ἐκ κυανοῦ μέλανος ἔχοντα, κρατοῦντα ζωὴν³⁸ καὶ σκῆπτρον, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς κεφαλῆς πτερὸν βασίλειον περικείμενον, ὅτι λόγος δυσεὔρετος καὶ ἐγκεκρυμμένος καὶ οὐ φανός, καὶ ὅτι ζωοποιός, καὶ ὅτι βασιλεύς, καὶ ὅτι νοερῶς κινεῖται· διὸ ἡ τοῦ πτεροῦ φύσις ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ κεῖται. Τὸν δὲ θεὸν τοῦτον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος προῖεσθαί φασιν ὦδόν, ἐξ οὗ γεννᾶσθαι θεὸν ὃν αὐτοὶ προσαγορεύουσι Φθαῖ, οἱ δὲ Ἕλληνες Ἥφαιστον ἐρμηνεύουσιν δὲ τὸ ὦδόν τὸν κόσμον.

Taking into consideration that Κνήφ is definitely to be deciphered as Kematef, the primeval form of Amun by Roman times,³⁹ and therefore can manifest himself as wind and shining air deity,⁴⁰ four correspondences out of ten can be detected between Porphyry's report and West's subsequent reconstruction of a common archetype lying behind Greek and Phoenician cosmogonical accounts: motifs 3 ("The role played by the wind"), 7 ("Appearance of the bright Aither"), 8 ("The production of an egg"), and 10 ("In his role as demiurge, Phanes-Eros has a counterpart in Moch's Khušor-Ptah, who presumably not only opens the egg, but fashions its two halves into heaven and earth, and perhaps performs other creative acts").⁴¹

Correspondences increase as we move on to read Porphyry against original Egyptian sources. Daniela Mendel has persuasively proposed identifying the Egyptian specimen of Porphyry's account with a cosmogonical text carved on the West Wall of the Bark Chapel of Khonsu Temple at Karnak around the middle of 1st cent. BCE: according to the inscription, Kematef before beginning creation, floated in the waters of the windy and dark primeval ocean, Nun, as indistinct as it was unlimited (motifs 1–2 and 4 in West's model, Mendel 2003: pl. 3, ll. 11–14; pl. 4, l. 16; pl. 6, ll. 34–38). At his will, sky appeared and spat out a falcon-egg from which Ptah came into existence. Upon being brought forth, Ptah fertilised and shaped the egg as space and solid ground for an ordered creation to take place.⁴²

Egyptian "theology" and ritual praxis under Greek and Roman rules, see more generally Herero de Jáuregui 2007: 63–72. The complex interplay of influences exerted *on* "Orphic" literature by Near Eastern traditions, pre-Socratic philosophy, Plato, and the Stoa, and influences exerted *by* "Orphic" literature on pre-Socratic philosophy, Plato, Stoic, Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic thought – and one may add at this point, Egyptian tradition – has been variously highlighted over the past twenty years by Brisson 1995: 2883–2885, and Bernabé 2005 and 2009.

³⁷ West 1994: 292, n. 12.

³⁸ I read ζωὴν with Drexler, Smith, Schwyzler and Gabriele for manuscripts ζώνην (Gabriele 2014: 259, n. 150)

³⁹ Thissen 1996.

⁴⁰ Klotz 2012: 61–66 and 133–142.

⁴¹ West 1994: 304.

⁴² Mendel 2003: 183–189, suggesting the mediation of Chaeremon about a century later.

The case Mendel has focused on is not isolated: as a matter of fact, Egyptian texts of Graeco-Roman times feature even more characteristic motifs paralleled so far only in the Orphic theogony circulating under the name of Hieronymus (1st cent. CE?): I refer especially to the bisexual serpent *alias* the couple of entwined serpentine gods, male and female, emerging at the dawn of creation from water and mud (cf. Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5 and Dam. *Princ.* 123 with Urk. 8.18c; 79c.h and Esna 2.64.1; 3.216.3 [13])⁴³ and extending through or encircling the universe (cf. Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5 and Dam. *Princ.* 123 with Urk. 8.112.1, Edfou 6.16.5–6, and PGM VII.583).⁴⁴ Furthermore, Egyptian texts persuasively account for the double equation of the two snakes with Time / Heracles and *Ananke* / *Adrasteia* respectively, as the *interpretatio graeca* of the Egyptian couple Khonsu-Shu and Hathor-Ma'at, appearing together out of Nun as primeval life-sustaining and ordaining cosmic forces (cf. Athenag. *Leg.* 18.5 and Dam. *Princ.* 123 with Mendel 2003: pl. 6, ll. 37–39; pl. 8, ll. 48–49; pl. 15, ll. 31 [describing Khonsu-Thoth as the heart of *Ḍt*-time and tongue of *Nḥḥ*-time]).⁴⁵

In his discussion of Iambl. *Myst.* 8.3, Clark 2008: 180–181, follows her conclusions, but correctly adds: "In any event, there is of course no evidence that Iamblichus knew directly or even indirectly the Khonsu cosmogony, but if Mendel is correct, she can at least offer not unreasonable evidence that valid knowledge of late Egyptian theology was passing to apparently interested parties like Porphyry via likely well informed intermediaries of Egyptian provenance, such as Chaeremon. How much, however, these sources distorted or by reinterpretation shaped the transmission is also with the present state of evidence not easy to determine" (180, n. 41). Improved readings of the hieroglyphic text, further commentary on the inscription, and more Egyptian parallels to single motifs can be found in Klotz 2012: 105–108 and 137–138.

⁴³ Klotz 2012: 123 and 170–174.

⁴⁴ Klotz 2012: 137–139.

⁴⁵ On the whole subject, see West 1983: 176–212, here especially, 188–198, who, however, limits himself to referring to much older – one would be tempted to say "classical" – Egyptian texts. I find his own attempt to explain the Time–Heracles connection (192–194) as "not completely satisfactory" (193) as the one which he himself discards. Cf. also Klotz 2012: 404, n. 9 on the authentic elements of the Theban cosmogony involving Khonsu-Shu as they appear in Damascius: "a crocodile (*sic!*) form of Heracles–Chronos (cf. Khonsu-Shu) creates the cosmic egg which produces aether, chaos and darkness (cf. the Ogdoad)." On the convergence of both Egyptian concepts of time, *Nḥḥ* (cyclical time articulating itself in hours, days, months and years) and *Ḍt* (sameness, enduring permanence of what has taken place in time and has come to its end), on representations of Khonsu, see also Urk. 8.54f; 84c; 107(1) and the insightful comments in Assmann 1975: 36–41 and 61–65, and Klotz 2012: 84–88. Quaegebeur 1975–1976: 469–472 surveys the evidence on Heracles as Greek counterpart of Khonsu, as well as the latter's representations as lion and falcon, and his acknowledged role as "Lord of life-time." On *Ananke* / *Adrasteia* as Greek concepts basically overlapping with the Egyptian Ma'at in her cosmic role, cf. Chaeremon quoted by Porphyry in Eus. *Praep. ev.* 3.4 (ἀνάγκη); *Corp. herm.* 3 and 11; 2; 4–6; Stob. *Flor.* 12–14 (ἀνάγκη) and 23 (Ἀδράστεια), and PGM IV.2306–2309 (ἀνάγκη; cf. BD 65!) and VII.646–649 (the solar deity is invoked as ὁ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνάγκης

Summing up: we have been following some lexical and structural hints in Ps.-Hippolytus' notice which have brought us to assume that Basilides' text is offering a Platonising commentary on an "Orphic" cosmogony. That, in turn, has led us to search for a possible Egyptian connection for "Orphic" materials: leaving aside the question of the Oriental origins of what we call Orphism, we have come across a historical and cultural continuity between Orphic and Egyptian texts under Graeco-Roman rules, documented by distinctive recurring epithets, features and motifs in both traditions.⁴⁶ Long-time claims by Egyptian priests carried out the rest and spread the "official" version of the Egyptian cradle of Orphic mysteries. Its success was astonishing and reached Christian polemicists too: Eusebius of Caesarea did not miss the chance to trace Greek theologies back to barbarian lore and, relying on Chaeremon's authority, he ascribed the Orphic verses admired, cited but – in his own view – misinterpreted by Porphyry, to an Egyptian *logos* (cf. Eus. *Praep. ev.* 3.9.1–2; 12–15 with 3.4). So probably did Ps.-Hippolytus as well (cf. *Haer.* 5.7.22–28; 20.4–5. and 7.33.1).⁴⁷

However, this might not be the whole story.

τεταγμένος [= Egyptian *nb m3'f?*]), with the analysis of ancient Egyptian texts about Ma'at provided by Assmann 1990: 160–199. The German Egyptologist has devoted some pages also to highlighting and investigating the connection between Ma'at and Time on the cosmogonical level (169–171). The primeval twin, male-female couple, Shu and Tefnut, embodies cosmic principles, such as Life and Ma'at, *Nhh*-time and *Dt*-time, already in CT 78 and 80: see the commentary by Allen 1986: 24–27. On his part, Klotz 2012: 121–125.134–138.171–174.222, shows how deep Theban theology under Roman rule is indebted to Heliopolitan speculations on the primal triad, Atum-Shu-Tefnut.

⁴⁶ It is not without interest to note here that an Orphic fragment was actually interpolated into the Hermetic *Kore kosmou*, which also reports a "hellenised" version of the ancient Egyptian *Myth of the Heavenly Cow*: ὀφθαλμοὶ τὰς οὐκέτι τοῦ θεοῦ ψυχὰς χωρήσουσιν ἄλογοι, καὶ παντελῶς μικρὸν τῷ ἐν τούτοις ὑγρῷ καὶ κυκλίῳ τὸν ἑαυτῶν πρόγονον οὐρανὸν ὁρῶσαι στενάζομεν αἰεὶ, ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ οὐ βλέπομεν [ἐνθεν Ὀρφεύς τῷ λαμπρῷ βλέπομεν, τοῖς δ' ὄμμασιν οὐδὲν ὁρῶμεν]· ἄθλια γὰρ κατεκρίθημεν καὶ τὸ βλέπειν ἡμῖν οὐκ ἀντικρὺς ἐχαρίσθη, ὅτι χωρὶς τοῦ φωτὸς ἡμῖν τὸ ὁρᾶν οὐκ ἐδόθη· τόποι τοίνυν καὶ οὐκέτι εἰσὶν ὀφθαλμοί (Stob. *Flor.* 23.36). Spells circulating under the name of Orpheus are also known to the authors of PGM (cf. PGM XIII.933ff.). More generally, on the osmosis between Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman dimensions of gods, religious worldviews and practices in Graeco-Roman Egypt, see Frankfurter 2012; Bommas 2012; Tallet, Zivie-Coche 2012; Stadler 2012. On late Egyptian temples as centres of intellectual innovations in traditional lore, cf. Betrò 2003. Camplani 2003 has in-depth discussion and proposals to offer on religious interaction in Roman Alexandria.

⁴⁷ On Ps.-Hippolytus' acquaintance with Orphic writings and ideas, see Arcari 2013.

4. A “non existing” source?

Ten years ago, reflecting on the fact that “l’inesprimibilità di Dio non contempla per se stessa anche la sua inesistenza e che Dio non venne detto da Basilide “inesistente” perché inesprimibile,” Biondi assumed that “non existing” did not relate to a *ratio cognoscendi*, but rather to a *ratio essendi*. On that basis, he concluded that “l’idea di un Dio inesistente non ha altri riscontri prima di Basilide,” being unparalleled even in the most extreme, Platonic apophatic speculations on the first god before Porphyry.⁴⁸ Consequently, he turned to Egyptian writings as the possible source for the whole complex of themes revolving around the non existing God in “Basilides”, and found a thick correspondence in the Heliopolitan tradition: the god of pre-existence, Atum, whose name can be interpreted as “the Not-Being,” ejaculates semen (σπέρμα καταβάλλω in Greek: cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.1–2; 4 and 22.1.7, with Galen, *De semine*, 4.516.10 Kühn; Julius Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 2.6.1; Clem. *Ecl.* 50.1 and 3) as well as creating the egg as foundation of Being; immediately thereafter the Ogdoad springs out of the egg.⁴⁹ Does his comparison and the hypothesis relying thereon stand closer examination? Even more important: can his suggestion definitely explain “l’attribuzione delle dottrine basilidiane al patrimonio egizio,” as he appears to believe?⁵⁰

As usual, I begin with some lexical observations on a passage which I believe we can assign with some confidence to Basilides (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.1):

Ἐπεὶ <οὐ> οὐδέν <ἦν> οὐχ ὕλη, οὐκ οὐσία, οὐκ ἀνούσιον, οὐχ ἀπλοῦν, οὐ σύνθετον, οὐ νοητόν,⁵¹ οὐκ αἰσθητόν, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐ θεός, οὐδὲ ὅλως τι τῶν ὀνομαζομένων

⁴⁸ Biondi 2005: 110–116 (quotations: 112). In a recent communication (“Un Dieu ‘pas même indicible’, οὐδὲ ἄρρητος [*Élenchos*, VII, 20, 3]: examen de la théologie de ‘Basilide’ dans son rapport polémique aux théologies contemporaines,” Colloque “Dire Dieu,” Tours 17th–18th April 2015), G. Hertz maintained that Basilides is here deliberately contesting and challenging contemporary Middle-Platonic theologies on the basis of his own reading of Plato’s *Sophist*. Métrope 2009 insisted instead on the dependence of “Basilidian” ontology of the First Principle on the exegesis of Plato, *Parm.* 141e–142a. However, as Biondi 2005: 116, points out, “la concezione platonica non fu [...] una professione del nulla: nel *Sofista* il non-essere è ciò che è diverso dall’essere, ma non è un qualcosa per se stesso, se assunto senza relazioni ad altro, e tanto meno è Dio o il bene; nel *Parmenide* l’ipotesi ‘se l’uno non è’ (analoga nelle conclusioni apofatiche all’ipotesi ‘se l’uno è uno’) non conduce a definizioni soddisfacenti atte a definire cosa sia l’uno o il non-essere.” On Porphyry and the modes of Not-Beings, see Hadot 1993: 144–147. Turner 2011: 545–550, deals among other things with the jargon of the modes of Not-Being in Victorinus, *Zostrianos*, and other “Sethian” treatises, arguing that it originated with a Middle-Platonic theologico-metaphysical interpretation of Plato’s *Parmenides*.

⁴⁹ Biondi 2005: 103–108 and 116–132.

⁵⁰ Biondi 2005: 104.

⁵¹ I accept Jacobi’s correction νοητόν for P’s corrupt reading ἀσύνθετον.

ἢ δι' αἰσθήσεως λαμβανομένων ἢ νοητῶν πραγμάτων, ἀλλ' οὕτω καὶ ἔτι λεπτομερ<εστέρ>ως πάντων ἀπλῶς περιγεγραμμένων, <ὁ> οὐκ ὄν θεός – ὄν Ἀριστοτέλης καλεῖ νόησιν νοήσεως, οὗτοι δὲ οὐκ ὄντα – ἀνοήτως, ἀναισθήτως, ἀβούλως, ἀπροαιρέτως, ἀπαθῶς, ἀνεπιθυμήτως κόσμον ἠθέλησε ποιῆσαι.

This passage clearly echoes the distinctive language of the first “Basilidian” fragment which can be isolated in Ps.-Hippolytus’ notice (*Haer.* 7.20.2–4), thereby building on and developing its linguistic and metaphysical reflections: οὐδὲν ἦν (cf. 21.1.1 and 20.2.1), οὐδὲ ὅλως (cf. 21.1.3 and 20.2.3), ὀνομάζομαι – δι’ αἰσθήσεως λαμβάνομαι // τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐκλαμβάνω – (νοητὰ) πράγματα (cf. 21.1.3–4 and 20.3–4), ἀπλῶς (cf. 21.1.5 and 20.3.1). Moreover, the following direct quotation from Basilides in *Haer.* 7.21.2 both provides 7.21.1 with further explanation on the employment of the terms “he wanted” and “world,” and presupposes the six adverb chain which occurred in the preceding lines, reducing it to a new series of three: τὸ δὲ “ἠθέλησε” λέγω, φησί, σημασίας χάριν, ἀθελήτως καὶ ἀνοήτως καὶ ἀναισθήτως· “κόσμον” δὲ οὐ τὸν κατὰ διαίρεσιν γεγεννημένον καὶ ὕστερον κατὰ πλάτος διεστῶτα, ἀλλὰ γὰρ σπέρμα κόσμου. All in all, then, it is not far-fetched to assume that Ps.-Hippolytus is here too explicitly citing his source or at least paraphrasing it almost *verbatim*, the gloss on Aristotelian and Basilidian terminology compared obviously representing his main, if not his only one, redactional intervention.

In the attempt to describe in further detail the absolute nothingness before the very first creative “act” of the Not-Being God, “Basilides” appears to be acquainted (through literary or oral transmission) with a Hermetic text well known to later Christian Alexandrian authors as well (Didymus; Cyril) – or at least to have had access to traditions which influenced or were influenced by this writing. I quote from Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum Imperatorem*, 1.48.13–22:

Λέγει δὲ καὶ Ἑρμῆς ἐν λόγῳ τρίτῳ τῶν ‘Πρὸς Ἀσκληπιόν’· “Οὐ γὰρ ἐφικτόν ἐστιν εἰς ἀμνηστους τοιαῦτα μυστήρια παρέχεσθαι· ἀλλὰ τῷ νοῖ ἀκούσατε. ἐν μόνον ἦν φῶς νοερὸν πρὸ φωτὸς νοεροῦ καὶ ἔστιν αἰεὶ, νοῦς νοὸς φωτεινός· καὶ οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἦν ἢ τούτου ἐνότης· αἰεὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὢν, αἰεὶ τῷ ἑαυτοῦ νοῖ καὶ φωτὶ καὶ πνεύματι πάντα περιέχει.” Καὶ μεθ’ ἑτέρά φησι· “Ἐκτὸς τούτου οὐ θεός, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐ δαίμων, οὐκ οὐσία τις ἄλλη· πάντων γὰρ ἐστι κύριος καὶ πατήρ καὶ θεός καὶ πηγὴ καὶ ζωὴ καὶ δύναμις καὶ φῶς καὶ νοῦς καὶ πνεῦμα· καὶ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτόν ἐστι” (fr. 23 Nock–Festugière).

The phrase οὐδὲν (ἕτερον) ἦν and the series of negated substantives οὐ θεός, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐκ οὐσία match perfectly in the two texts under focus. As a research on the TLG online shows, such a double match sets them apart from the whole *corpus* of ancient Greek literature.⁵² Moreover, both the statement of not-ex-

⁵² Cf. also Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.29.5; *Trip. Trac.* NHC I, 5.53.21–37; Plot. *Enn.* 5.2.1 and 5.6; Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium*, 1.49.9–17, as the closest parallels which I have been able to find. The passage from *Adversus Arium* does not seem to stem from the Middle-Platonic source Marius Victorinus shares in common with *Zostrianus* (see the synopsis in Turner 2011: 528).

istence and the negative triplet occur at the outset of a theogonical and cosmogonical account (cf. fr. 23–24; 27–28; 31–32b Nock–Festugière with *Chronicon Paschale*, 85.16–86.5), insisting on the sheer nothingness which surrounded the first God, just as in Basilides’ fragment. These cannot be mere coincidences. Such negative formulas are no radical innovation of Hermetic literature, but have a long history in ancient Egyptian writings alluding to the state of the pre-existence of Being, as Atum, sole God and Lord of Totality:⁵³

PT 486: “(The deceased king) was brought forth in Nun,/ as the sky hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as the earth hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as the two columns (= the gods Shu and Tefnut, children of Atum) hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as even disorder hadn’t come into existence yet;” 571: “(the deceased king) was procreated by his father, Atum,/ as the sky hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as the earth hadn’t come into existence yet,/ as humans weren’t there yet,/ as gods hadn’t been generated yet,/ as even death didn’t exist yet.”⁵⁴

CT 80.47–53: Atum was alone in the waters “not finding a place in which I could stand or sit,/ before Heliopolis had been founded, in which I could exist,/ before the Lotus had been tied together, on which I could sit,/ before I had made Nut so she could be over my head and Geb could marry her,/ before the first Corps was born,/ before the two original Enneads had developed and started existing with me;” 261.5–9: Magic speaks: “I am the one whom the Sole Lord made,/ before two things had developed in this world,/ when he sent his sole eye,/ when he was alone,/ when something came from his mouth.”⁵⁵

P.Berol. 3048 (New Kingdom): Ptah is the one who “begot himself by himself, without any development having developed,/ who crafted the world in the design of his heart./ [...] Who built his body by himself,/ without the earth having developed,/ without the sky having developed,/ without the waters having risen yet.”⁵⁶

P.Leid. 1.350 (Ramesside period), 80th Chapter, 12–14: “You (*scil.* Amun) began developing with nothing,/ without the world being empty of you on the first occasion./ All gods are developed after you;” 100th Chapter, 2–5.8.10–11: Amun is the One “who began development on the first occasion,/ Amun, who developed in the beginning,/ whose emanation is unknown,/ no god developing prior to him,/ no other god with him to tell of his appearance [...]. Who smelted his egg by himself. [...] Divine god, who developed by himself/ and every god developed since he began himself.”⁵⁷

P.Berol. 3055 (Ramesside period; ÄHG 122.6–10): “Du bist der Gott, der zu Anbeginn entstand,/ da noch kein Gott entstanden, da noch der Name keines Dinges ersonnen war./ Du öffnest deine Augen, dass du sähest mit ihnen,/ und es entstand das Licht für jedermann/ durch den Glanz deiner Augen, als der Tag noch nicht entstanden war.”

P.Bremner-Rhind 5–19 (British Museum, EA 10188.1; beginnings of the Ptolemaic rule): the Lord to the Limit (Egyptian equivalent to Greek πάντων κύριος!) speaks: “All developments

⁵³ These and other significant passages are listed and commented in Grapow 1931 and Hornung 1992: 156–158.

⁵⁴ Italian translation in Bresciani 2001: 11–12.

⁵⁵ English translation in Allen 1986: 22 and 37.

⁵⁶ English translation in Allen 1986: 39–40.

⁵⁷ English translation in Allen 1986: 50 and 52.

developed after I developed,/ developments becoming many in emerging from my mouth,/ without the sky having developed,/ without the earth having developed,/ without the ground or snakes having been created in that place./ It was out of the Waters, out of inertness, that I became tied together in them,/ without having found a place in which I could stand./ I became effective in my heart,/ I surveyed with my face./ I made every form alone,/ without having sneezed Shu,/ without having spat Tefnut,/ without another having developed and acted with me./ When I surveyed with my heart by myself,/ the developments of developments became many.”⁵⁸

Urk. 8.3b (Ptolemaic era): just like Atum, Amun was not-existing, then he “began creation before anything had come into existence (or: without anything having come yet into existence),/ all creation came into existence after he came into existence,”⁵⁹ 188e: Ptah-Tatenen is “he who came about in the beginning,/ namely He-whose-name-is-hidden (*Imn-rn=f*), who made what exists,/who came about by himself, all alone,/without the sky having been lifted or the earth founded,/while Nun was stormy, mixed with utter darkness,/there was nothing before him.”⁶⁰

Esna 5.253 (Roman era): Neith came into existence at the beginning, appearing out of the primordial waters by herself “as the earth was still in darkness,/ as no ground had yet emerged,/ as no plant was sprouting yet.”⁶¹

The hypothesis of “Basilides” acquaintance with Hermetic tradition might be further corroborated by observing that the two mention and share the innovating cosmological view of the Ogdoad as astral configuration (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.23.5–7, and *Corp. herm.* 1.26.2–5 and 13.15.2–3).⁶² Moreover, Hermetic writings provide us with assertions on God coming as close as possible to “Basilides” concept of Not-Being God.⁶³ Finally, the motifs of the supreme and solitary God

⁵⁸ English translation in Allen 1986: 28. Italian translation in Bresciani 2001: 16.

⁵⁹ English translation in Klotz 2012: 59. Amun then proceeds to plan creation in advance, or in Egyptian terms: “he began thinking in order to found the earth,” “he predicted what was to come. [...] He created the conditions of what would exist later on” (Klotz 2012: 59–60 and nn. 99–100). Cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.21.4–5 and 22.6.

⁶⁰ English translation in Klotz 2012: 203. Thereafter, according to Edfou 6.16.5–6, Ptah-Tatenen creates the primeval lotus “from the ejaculate of Nun, lifting it all up as the mysterious egg.”

⁶¹ Italian translation in Bresciani 2001: 30.

⁶² See already Biondi 2005: 105 and 108. In the *Hermetica*, however, as reshaped through the astrological filter as they are, some ideas revolving around the Ogdoad still show traces of their distinctively ancient Egyptian origin: cf. *Corp. herm.* 1.22–27 and 13.15–20 with Cairo CG 42225.42230–42232, Urk. 4/3.158–160, ÄHG 129–130, and the texts surveyed in Assmann 2010: 82–88. The use of the name *Abrasax* for the great archon of the Ebdomad and its 365 heavens (Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.26.6) points to the influence of Graeco-Egyptian magical traditions (see PGM I.300–303; VII.510–521; VIII.41–49; XII.71–74; LXI.32–33), which have indeed much in common also with Hermetic writings and religious practice (cf., for example, *Corp. herm.* 5.11 and 13.13–15, and *Disc.* 8–9 [NHC VI,6] 26.61–67 Camplani with PGM VIII.1–51 and XIII.177; 795).

⁶³ *Corp. herm.* 5.9–11: ἔστιν οὗτος καὶ τὰ ὄντα αὐτὸς καὶ τὰ μὴ ὄντα. τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὄντα ἐφανερώσε, τὰ δὲ μὴ ὄντα ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῷ. οὗτος ὁ θεὸς ὀνόματος κρείττων [...] σὺ γὰρ πάντα

ejaculating, and creating light by his word coalesces into allusions to the *Genesis* account both in Ps.-Hippolytus' notice and in the aforementioned Hermetic fragments, all of them most probably stemming from one and the same work like the prologue which we focused on earlier (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.1–6 and fr. 27–28; 31–32b Nock–Festugière).⁶⁴

Appealing with some reason to Hermetic literature or, alternatively, to the complex processes of cultural and religious interaction leading to its production, transmission and diffusion helps our analysis bypass as historically unjustified Biondi's basic dilemma (Greek philosophy or Egyptian wisdom?) that we started out with.

Indeed, as Alberto Camplani put it, writing on the *Hermetica*:

I materiali filosofici di matrice platonica, aristotelica e stoica, non sono immessi per redigere una disordinatissima dossografia filosofica, ma appaiono piuttosto utilizzati ai fini della costituzione di un discorso religioso, e anche culturale, il cui senso potrebbe trascendere e distorcere quello delle singole unità concettuali che lo compongono. [...] La citazione dell'altrui scrittura [...] esprime ad un tempo *self-definition* e valorizzazione delle tradizioni parallele, quasi che le verità filosofiche e religiose sostenute o le pratiche religiose proposte possano essere corroborate dalla loro compresenza in altre tradizioni, come quella iranica e quella giudaica, viste come qualcosa di altro ma non per questo non omologabili almeno a livello lessicale e concettuale. Un'élite egiziana in evoluzione ha dunque esperito un continuo processo di traduzione, di interpretazione, di adattamento e di transcodifica culturale, di aggiornamento della cultura atavica.

He then wondered:

Quale legame possiamo stabilire tra tale sofisticata operazione di fusione culturale, di cui l'ermetismo è soltanto uno degli esempi (altri se ne potrebbero aggiungere sia nel campo della produzione testuale che in quello della produzione artistica o architettonica) e la dialettica culturale e organizzativa della comunità cristiana alessandrina?⁶⁵

εἴ καὶ ἄλλο οὐδὲν ἔστιν· ὃ μὴ ἔστι, σὺ εἶ. σὺ πᾶν τὸ γινόμενον, σὺ τὸ μὴ γινόμενον; 10.2: τί γάρ ἐστι θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἢ τὸ τῶν πάντων εἶναι οὐκ ἐστὶ ὄντων † ἀλλὰ ὑπαρξιν αὐτὴν τῶν ὄντων †; τοῦτο ὁ θεός, τοῦτο ὁ πατήρ, τοῦτο τὸ ἀγαθόν, ὃ μὴδὲν πρόσσεστι τῶν ἄλλων (cf. also Plot. *Enn.* 5.2.1). Both texts seem to reflect and update the traditional notion of the Egyptian creator God as foretelling, thinking, determining, making or giving birth to "what is (*ntt*) and what is not (*iwt*)" (P.Leid. 1.350, 400th Chapter, 3; cf. Text XIII.4–11 in Allen 1986: 39). On "existing" and "not-existing" as dialectical cosmological categories in Egyptian thought, Hornung 1992: 154–164, is still fundamental. The names used for the primordial God, *Im* and later *Km–3t=f*, play on the very same paradox of his being "all, whole, complete" and at the same time "not-existing (yet/anymore)," as he sets to and finishes developing into the whole of reality (see Allen 1986: 9 and 67, n. 56, and Klotz 2012: 133–134).

⁶⁴ On the Egyptian frame of reference for the shaping / invention of creation out of the semen-egg / (by) the word of (a) creator(s) god(s) standing on the solid ground which first emerged from Nun-waters, see P.Berol. 3048; P.Berol.Dem. 13603 1.8–12.14–17.24; PSI 7(a) inv.D, fr. 1 ll. 6; 13; 18–21; Esna 5.142–144; 253–255; Edfou 6.16.2–9; 180.10–181.11. Cf. also Mendel 2003: pl. 6, l. 33–pl. 7, l. 47, and pl. 13, l. 17–pl. 14, l. 23.

⁶⁵ Camplani 2003: 33 and 35.

Camplani's insightful considerations and his stimulating question bring me directly to my next point – and to a further, last step towards providing the answer to the second problem raised at the beginning of the section as originating with Biondi's conviction.

5. A teacher's legacy

“Le citazioni sono tratte da un'opera basilidiana non identificabile.”⁶⁶ In these terms Aldo Magris has recently expressed his radical pessimism on that matter. For my part, I am convinced that a suggestion on the identification of the written work from which Ps.-Hippolytus draws might be actually advanced or at least something more can be said on its genre and nature. In 1996 Löhr assumed

dass es geradezu ein Kennzeichen von antiker Schulliteratur ist, dass Widersprüche unausgeglichen nebeneinander stehen können. [...] Zur Vermutung, die Vorlage des Basilidesreferats könne eine (möglicherweise unausgefeilte) Niederschrift aus dem Lehrbetrieb gnostischer Zirkel sein, passt die Beobachtung, dass das Basilidesreferat zunächst durchaus ‚diatribeartig‘, mit fiktiven Zwischenfragen und Antworten anzufangen scheint.

He then went on to speculate that

die Vorlage möglicherweise noch unfertig war und im Schulbetrieb ihren Sitz im Leben hat. Die internen Widersprüche könnten auch auf ungelöste Probleme der Schuldebatten verweisen, vielleicht auch das unter Aufnahme heterogener, vor allem valentinianischer Motive durchgeführte Gedankenexperiment eines spekulativ begabten Theologen darstellen.”⁶⁷

The continuous interlacing of *exegesis* and *zesis*, which structures the whole of Basilides' writing, represents probably the main evidence supporting Löhr's conclusions:⁶⁸ all throughout Ps.-Hippolytus' report, Homer and Heraclitus,⁶⁹ Hebrew scriptures,⁷⁰ and early Christian writings⁷¹ are quoted or alluded to,

⁶⁶ Magris 2012: 254, n. 25.

⁶⁷ Löhr 1996: 305–306. Later on, he refers to the same writing as “eine Art spekulativer Schulübung eines gnostischen Zirkels” (312).

⁶⁸ On philosophical schools, the use and production of texts, and distinctive features of the latter, see more generally Snyder 2010: 33–44.110–116.139–146.

⁶⁹ *Haer.* 7.22.8 = *Hom. Od.* 7.36; *Haer.* 7.22.13 = Heraclitus, fr. 61 D.–K.

⁷⁰ *Haer.* 7.22.3: *Gen.* 1.3; *Haer.* 7.23.1 = *Gen.* 1.7; *Haer.* 7.25.4 = *Exod.* 6.2–3; *Haer.* 7.26.4 = *Ps.* 31.5–6; 50.5; 51.11; *Haer.* 7.22.15 = *Ps.* 132.2; *Haer.* 7.26.2 = *Prov.* 1.7, 9–10. The preceding list is obviously far from complete.

⁷¹ I offer here only a small selection of passages: *Haer.* 7.27.4 = *Matt.* 2.1–2; *Haer.* 7.26.9 = *Luke* 1.35; *Haer.* 7.22.4 = *John* 1.9; *Haer.* 7.25.5 = *Rom.* 5.13–14; *Haer.* 7.25.2 and 27.1 = *Rom.* 8.19, 21–22; *Haer.* 7.26.3 = *1 Cor.* 2.7, 13; *Haer.* 7.26.7 = *2 Cor.* 12.4; *Haer.* 7.22.13 and 25.5 = *Eph.* 1.21; *Haer.* 7.25.3, and 26.7 = *Eph.* 3.4–5; *Haer.* 7.26.4 = *Eph.* 3.9; *Haer.* 7.25.2 = *Col.* 1.26–27.

discussed and commented on, whereas rival theo- and cosmogonical theories, namely, the προβολή-theory of “Valentinian” origin, are recalled, then debated, and eventually discarded (cf. Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.22.2–6). Both exegetical practice and zetetical examination are openly intended to provide the “Christian” *hairesis* with a “story” framing, explaining and legitimating its very existence, its religious practices, and its world-view (see the “we-sections” in *Haer.* 7.25.2; 5).

In developing from such activity and aiming at such goals, our text would easily fall into the literary genre of *Exegetica* (or treatises), as James Kelhoffer aptly described it, analysing the remnants of the authentic literary production of Basilides.⁷² We know indeed that both Basilides and his son Isidore wrote *Exegetica*, and devoted much attention to barbarian wisdom as a *corpus* of possibly ancient and revered traditions corroborating exegetical praxis, shedding light on origins and premises of Greek philosophical / “theological” thought, and supporting their own reflection in the field (cf. Clem. *Str.* 4.81.1 and 6.53.2–5, and Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai*, 67.5).⁷³

It is therefore tempting to equate Ps.-Hippolytus’ Basilidian source with Isidore’s Τοῦ προφήτου Παρχῶρ Ἐξηγητικά (Clem. *Str.* 6.53.2), granted that Basilides’ Ἐξηγητικά seems a far less likely candidate:⁷⁴ on the one hand, Isidore shows acquaintance with Pherekydes of Syros and the allegorical interpretation of his work (Clem. *Str.* 6.53.5), which, as we have seen, either influenced or was influenced by “Orphic” tradition;⁷⁵ on the other hand, the name Παρχῶρ, if it is correct just as it stands, sounds Egyptian and might actually be of Egyptian origin, possibly the Greek transcription of *P(3)-n-k3-Hr*, “The one of the *K3* of Horus,” a specular formation to Coptic ΠΑΡΜΣΟΥΤΗ, “The one of Amenhotep,” deriving from Late Egyptian *P(3)-n-Imn-Htp*.⁷⁶

⁷² Kelhoffer 2005: 129–132, who concludes (132): “[...] the inference that Basilides’ writing offered “explanations” (Ἐξηγητικά) of, or “treatises” (*Acta Archelai* 67.5a: *tractatum eius*) on, his system accords with what the surviving fragments reveal about his work, as well as with the customary use of Ἐξηγητικά until Origen in the mid-third century C.E.”

⁷³ It is worth noting that concluding his investigation of the fragment of Basilides’ *Exegetica* transmitted in Latin by the *Acts of Archelaus*, Bennett 2007: 165, concurs *de facto* with the overall results of my own analysis on Basilides’ unknown work (see *supra*). He writes: “the background against which the fragment is best understood is not the primal conflict narratives of Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism, but rather the Middle Platonic interpretation of Plato’s *Ti-maeus*, with the closest parallel being found in Plutarch’s *De Iside et Osiride*.” Cf. Löhr 1996: 219–249, and Biondi 2005: 88–90.

⁷⁴ Cf. *supra*, 88–92.

⁷⁵ Cf. *supra*, 96–97.

⁷⁶ Cf. also Greek Παμόντης (“The one of Mont”) and Πατβῶς (“The one of *Db3*,” or perhaps better “The man of *Db3*”) in Preisigke 1967: 280–281. On *P3-n-k3* in name formations, see *P3-n-k3-hwt-ntr* (Pn 1.111, no. 11; cf. Greek Παχνοῦτις?). On *k3-Hr* as theophoric element in Egyptian personal names, see *P3-dj-k3-nfr-Hr-p3-hrd*, “The one whom the perfect *k3* of Horus the Child (= Harpocrates) has given” (Sandri 2006: 284, n. 73). An-

Were my hypothesis correct, the title which Παρχώρ bears, “prophet,” would have originally translated Egyptian *ḥm-ntr*, “servant of the god” (Wb 3.88), thereby characterising him and his role, whether he be a historical figure or not, as deputed mediator between ancestral Egyptian lore and the much younger and secondary Greek philosophy (cf. Chaeremon in Porph. *Abst.* 4.8.26–27, Abammon in Iambl. *Myst.* 1.1, and Pachrates in PGM IV.2446–2455).⁷⁷ As such, if we want to trust the (self-)presentation of Hermetic authors, προφήται were pivotal to the production and transmission of books circulating under the name of Thoth–Hermes (cf. Stob. *Flor.* 23.68, and the figure of the “prophet” Βίτυς / Βίτος [probably Egyptian *P3-(n)-t3*, “The one belonging to the land”] in Iambl. *Myst.* 8.5 and 10.7, and Zosimos of Panopolis, *Q*, 7–8).⁷⁸ That being said, however, in the absence of any solid external evidence or sufficient textual support, the identification I propose remains mere speculation.

All in all, then, we are left only with the reality of a written document, which, as dismembered and distorted by Ps.-Hippolytus’ reading and interventions as it is, still embodies and continues the historical Basilides’ effort to integrate different sources of “truth,” traditions and scriptures into a unified discourse

other plausible proposal would be to interpret Παρχώρ as *P3-i.ir-k3-Hr*, “the one whom the *k3* of Horus has made:” cf. Greek Παρά(μ)ων from Egyptian *P3-i.ir-ḥmn* (Preisigke 1967: 279). A derivation from *P3-nḥ-(n)-Hr*, “Life is in/belongs to Horus,” seems to me possible, but less probable, as the *n* in non initial “*nḥ*” is usually transliterated in Greek with *v* or *γ*: cf. Παχομπαβιήνχις / Παχομβιγγις from *P3-ḥm-(n)-(p3)-B3-nḥ* (Preisigke 1967: 295). Alternative suggestions on the name and figure of Parchor, not taking into account an Egyptian origin, are quickly surveyed: Simonetti 1993: 438, n. 10, tentatively identifies Parchor with Parkos, a priest of Mithras mentioned in *Act. Archel.* 63 as forerunner of Mani. Along the same lines, Biondi 2005: 90, speaks of a presumably Persian prophet. The hypothesis of Παρχώρ being a textual corruption for Βαρκώρ, one of the two prophets that Basilides was supposed to have “invented,” according to his contemporary Agrippa Castor (*apud* Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 4.7.7), is cursorily referred to in Löhr 1996: 199, n. 5, with further bibliography. On his part, Löhr 1996: 199, given that we know next to nothing about Parchor, moves on to safer ground, assuming “dass mit dem Propheten Parchor eine vielleicht zeitlich weit zurückliegende, auf jeden Fall aber orientalisch-exotische Offenbarungsquelle als Autorität präsentiert wird.”

⁷⁷ Roughly similar Löhr 1996: 206: “Laut Isidor ist die (griechische) Philosophie nur eine sekundäre und abgeleitete Beschäftigung: Sie versucht zu entschlüsseln, was frühe Dichter wie Pherekydes in allegorischer Weise verlauten ließen. Doch auch Pherekydes ist keine Originalquelle: Er bezog seine Lehre von einem Propheten der Urzeit, wie Cham. Man darf vermuten, dass nach Isidor auch Parchor zu diesen urzeitlichen Propheten gehörte. Der Theologe Isidor verstand sich als der authentische Exeget dieser vorzeitlichen Weisheit. So konnte er beanspruchen, sich mit dem Ursprung der Weisheit aller Zeiten zu beschäftigen.”

⁷⁸ On scribal mastery of sacred texts as “prophecy, proclamation” (*sr/sl*) in the demotic *Book of Thoth*, see Butler 2013: 230–241. On the Egyptian priestly “upper class” translating temple traditions into Hellenistic idiom during the Roman period, see Frankfurter 1998: 221–224.

on reality, as coherent and organic as possible.⁷⁹ This effort is undertaken to propose and promote a specific socio-religious project of Jesus' fellowship within the diversified cultural environment the author(s) of the text live(s) in. It thus further profiles itself as an intellectual enterprise aimed at opening and extending adherence to the multifaceted Alexandrian Jesus' movement to the educated classes of both Greek *and* Egyptian origin.⁸⁰ As such, just like the cultural contacts and exchanges it presupposes over time, it does not consist of fragments but rather amalgams, difficult to analyze. And probably we should not even insist on separating neatly what testifies to interconnections.⁸¹

6. Towards a conclusion

We began by questioning without prejudice Ps.-Hippolytus' pretension to derive Basilides' system from his supposed Egyptian education. For Ps.-Hippolytus to recognise the materials contained in the text at his disposal as Egyptian in flavour, it probably sufficed to find a distinct primordial God existing as solitary Monad before any begotten being (cf. *Haer.* 1.2.2; 6–10; 18, and 4.43.4–5, with 6.21–23; 29–30) and not involved in the physical act of creation (cf. *Haer.* 7.33.1), as well as the magical name *Abrasax* (cf. *Haer.* 4.28.1–4).

Ps.-Hippolytus' basic insight, however, proved far more fruitful and far-reaching than he himself was in the position to realise: it gave us the opportunity, relying in first place on strictly verbal and lexical comparisons, to track down the literary survivors of an experiment in religious hybridity carried out in late 2nd- and early 3rd-cent. Alexandria.⁸² The picture has emerged of a Christian environment drawing on some elements of Egyptian theology most likely through the medium and filter of Orphic and Hermetic traditions, and combining them with, while repressing or rejecting others in favor of, Jewish and Greek themes and ideas.⁸³ Hence, Ps.-Hippolytus' "Basilides" has no purely ancient Egyptian myths to offer ancient and modern hearers or readers, as paradigms or parallels for his "system;" rather, whoever it was that authored Ps.-Hippolytus' source, her/his work testifies to the on-going cultural fusion of Egyptian indigenous tradition with Greek poetry and philosophy, and *hieroi logoi* of all sort and provenance, including Orphic literature and Hebrew scriptures – and at this point one should add, early Christian proclamation of Jesus too –, by Roman times at home both in and out of Egypt (cf. *Haer.* 5.6.16–7.41,

⁷⁹ Cf. the dense *résumé* on the authentic Basilides in Löhr 1996: 325–335.

⁸⁰ Camplani 2003: 35–36.

⁸¹ Burkert 2007: 123.

⁸² For another experiment of this sort, see Tripaldi 2012.

⁸³ So far I have been paraphrasing Denzey Lewis 2013: 170 and 173.

and Plut. *Is. Os.* 45–51 [*Mor.* 369d–372a]).⁸⁴ And that is certainly the main reason why a little later in Rome Ps.-Hippolytus did not fail to brand “Basilides” and his teachings as originating with “Egyptian wisdom.”

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⁸⁴ Kügler 1997: 15–81 and 234–244, argued for the influence of Egyptian “Königstheologie” on Philo. Clem. *Str.* 5.14.120–126, builds his “Christian” discourse on God, the world, and judgment on a chain of extracts from Menander, Diphilus and the Orphic poems, taken as “paraphrases” of the Hebrew scriptures. By alleging the Orphic divine attribute μητροπάτωρ as source and starting point for speculations on προβολαί and God’s σύζυγος, Clement gives us a small clue on the impact Orphic literature could have had, in his view, and probably really had on Alexandrian Christian milieus and their theologizing. On the ancient Egyptian and Gnostic connections of the epithet, see Tripaldi 2012: 98. On the Naassenes, Plutarch and Egyptian “mysteries,” see Lancellotti 2000: 212–220 and 250–252.

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Demosthenes and (Late) Ancient Miniature Books from Egypt

Reflections on a Category, Physical Features, Purpose and Use

Thomas J. Kraus

1. Introduction

Today we are used to the lending or sharing of books, to recommend titles and give them to others, and to go to libraries or even order books from someone else. Even in times of the Internet, of easy and sometimes permanent availability of information and literature, this common practice has not really stopped. Books are still there and books are still read, though new formats may have altered their individual handling and use, if we just fancy e-books and complete books accessible on the Internet. Also small formats of books are still there, and this not only as collectibles for bibliophiles¹ or paperbacks of standard literature;² and this is not an innovation of modern times. Small books have already had an impressively long history. For quite some time the word “book” has been associated with a codex, but in (late) antiquity also the roll served as the standard format of documents, for literary texts, and for diverse purposes of writing. The major materials were papyrus, parchment, and wood, the latter, of course, as a prototype or model of the codex.³ And this is also the case for the “small” books in (late) antiquity. But one by one and let us not put the cart before the horse.

On the recto of a private letter from the second half of the 5th cent. CE (P.Berol. 21849 = SB 12.11084 = C.Pap.Hengstl 91) a certain Victor writes to a certain Theognostus as follows:⁴

Τῷ κυρίῳ μο[v]

¹ For more information see Kraus 2010: 79–81; Kraus forthcoming: “Introduction.”

² See, for instance, the *Universal-Bibliothek*, the fixed standard paperbacks (9.5cm wide and 14.8 cm high) of the German publishing house Philipp Reclam jun. GmbH in Stuttgart (<http://www.reclam.de>; last access 01/09/2015).

³ For further information see Kraus 2010: 84–85.

⁴ Cf. transcription and notes are dependent on the first edition by Maehler 1974 (images of recto and verso on pl. 10 between pages 310 and 311), and Hengstl 1978: no. 91 (227–229).

ἐναρέτω ἀδελφῷ [Θεογνώστῳ]
 Βικτωρ χ(αίρειν).
 Κατα[ξι]ούτω ἡ σὴ λογιότης διδόναι Ἡλία
 5 π[.]υλω τῷ παιδὶ τοῦ κυρίου τοῦ γραμματι-
 κοῦ τὸ βιβλίον ὅπερ δέδωκα τῇ σῇ ἀ-
 δελφότητι τυγχάνοντι ἐπὶ τῆς Ἑρμουπο-
 λιτῶν· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ θεός, ἀναγκάζομαι {α}
 οὐχ ὥς ἔτυχεν / ἔστιν δὲ Ἀλεξάνδρου Κλαυ-
 10 δίου τῷ[ν ὑπ(ομνημάτων)]⁶ εἰς Δημοσθένην τὸν ῥήτορ[α τὸ (πρῶτον)]⁷
 [καί]⁸ Μενάνδρου τέχνην ἐν τάχ[ι. . . .]

And then he continues on the verso, first across the fibres and in the lefthand corner of the papyrus,

καὶ μεθόδους
 καὶ ἐγκώμια
 ἐν τάχ[ει]

and then with the fibres, roughly in the middle of the fragment:

Ὑπομνηστικὸν πρ(ὸς) Θεόγνω-
 στον π(αρὰ) Βίκτορ(ος)

In English the letter reads as follows:⁹

(*recto*) To my lord and virtuous brother Theognostus, greetings (from) Victor. May your eloquence deign to give Elias P. ylus (?), the school master's slave, the book which I gave your brotherliness when you were in Hermupolis – for God knows, I am in direct need – namely (the commentary) on the orator Demosthenes by Alexander Claudius (and) Menander's "Art," quickly (*verso*) and the "Methods" and the "Eulogies," quickly.
 (*address*) "Reminder to Theognostus from Victor"

The letter found at Hermopolis (= Hermopolis Magna between Upper and Lower Egypt) on January 5, 1905, represents a friendly, succinct, and slightly enthusiastic reminder for Theognostos to return a book he borrowed from Victor in Hermopolis. Moreover, Victor adds the name of the author of this book and

⁵ Maehler 1974: 308: "There is a blank space after the ω, then a gap for 2–3 letters. One might suggest something like τῷ[ν ὑπ(ομνημάτων), abbreviated ΥΠ] [= Maehler has Y on top of Π; author's note] εἰς Δημοσθένην τὸν ῥήτορ[α τὸ ἀ (exempli gratia), although the blank space after τῷ would be against it." Hengstl 1978, 227: "τῷ[ν ὑπ(ομνημάτων)] bietet sich als Ergänzung an, wenn man nicht in τῷ[eine Verschreibung sehen will (ω anstatt ο ist möglich)."

⁶ According to Hengstl 1978. Maehler 1974, has [].

⁷ Hengstl 1978: 227, adds a reconstruction ("Das Zeilenende τὸ πρῶτον ist beispielhalber ergänzt."). Maehler 1974; 308: "The gap at the end of this line, after ῥήτορ[, may have contained 5–6 letters."

⁸ According to Hengstl 1978. Maehler 1974: 306, has []. Further see 308: "There is a blank space before Μενάνδρου."

⁹ The English translation follows Maehler 1974: 306. For comments on letter forms, uncertain letters or letter traces, see Maehler 1974: 306–308.

three more titles he obviously requires for a specific purpose. The first book is attributed as τὸ βιβλίον, i.e., with a diminutive form; and this may lead to miniature books from (late) antiquity, their physical features, usages, contents, and, above all, purposes.

2. The papyrus letter, ancient rhetors, and τὸ βιβλίον (l. 6)

The papyrus reminder “turns out to be of considerable interest”¹⁰ and “ist in mehrfacher Hinsicht reizvoll”¹¹ (“is attractive one way and another”) so that a selection of relevant peculiarities are of significance for the present study: sender and addressee are Christians as they are denoted as ἀδελφός (l. 2) and, above all, τῇ σῇ ἀδελφότητι (ll. 6–7). The latter phrase does not occur before the 4th cent. and the phrase and the address does not determine a degree of kinship (“brother”).¹² Another phrase, οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ θεός (l. 8), represents a Christian formula frequently attested in letters from the 3rd cent. onwards.¹³ Furthermore, the addressee is styled as ἡ σὴ λογιότης, i.e., with an honorary title that is regularly applied to advocates.¹⁴ The term λογιότης is derived from λόγιος, qualifying a person as “learned,” “erudite” and “skilled in words,” “eloquent” or “oracular.”¹⁵ Consequently, λογιότης alludes to Theognostos as a person skilled in words and speeches, i.e., an orator and, as it is used in that specific formula, was an indication that the denominated person is a lawyer. The whole text and the terms used for the two people in the papyrus letter suggest that Victor was a lawyer and an orator, too.¹⁶ The scribe writes in “a practised but inelegant cursive which resembles P.Merton II.95.”¹⁷ In l. 8 he tried to make a correction: first he wrote ἀναγκάζομεθα, corrected εθ to αι, and forgot to obliterate final α. That means Victor proof-read his letter and detected and corrected a mistake; but he erroneously left the final vowel, probably out of uneasiness and not due to a lack of competence.

Victor expresses clearly and concisely what he wants to have and on which occasion Theognostos received the books from him. He might have stayed with

¹⁰ Maehler 1974: 305.

¹¹ Hengstl 1978: 228.

¹² Cf. Maehler 1974: 307. See also Hengstl 1978: 228.

¹³ Cf. Maehler 1974: 307.

¹⁴ Cf. Maehler 1974: 306. Maehler distinguishes between advocates (σκολαστικοί) and *defensores* (ἐκδικοί) and provides a number of documents for reference. SB 12.11084.4 is given as reference for the use of λογιότης as an honorary title in *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden. Supplement 3*, s.v. λογιότης.

¹⁵ Cf. LSJ: s.v. λόγιος i-iii.

¹⁶ Cf. Maehler 1974: 308.

¹⁷ Maehler 1974: 305.

his colleague, Theognostos, at Hermopolis on his way to another place. Maehler tentatively refers to Alexandria,¹⁸ but this is far from certain. Be that as it may, Theognostos should hand over the book to the slave Elias (whose second or nickname cannot be reconstructed).¹⁹ This book is determined as the main purpose of the letter because the recto of the papyrus is then full and the rest of the main body is added in a corner of the verso. The book is qualified further by two names:

Alexander Claudius: Apparently, he is in urgent, even desperate need of a book that Alexander Claudius has written about a work by Demosthenes. The *Suda* (A 1128) from the 10th cent. distinguishes between Alexander Claudius, called there a sophist, and Alexander Numenius (or, according to the *Suda*, Alexander son of Numenius), a Greek rhetorician from the first half of the 2nd cent.²⁰ Besides, the *scholia* on Demosthenes mention a certain Alexander among those who commented on the great Athenian statesman and orator.²¹ What is known for sure is that an advocate with the name Victor needed his book back again, probably urgently and for practical reasons.

Demosthenes: It comes as no surprise that the lawyer Victor owns a copy with text from and comments about Demosthenes and wants to have it back now. Demosthenes (i.e., his rhetoric, style, and orations) was regarded as a role model for contemporaries and generations of authors to follow (cf., for instance, Plut. *Dem.* 3.1, where Plutarch starts to parallel the lives and careers of Cicero and Demosthenes); and, of course, his judicial speeches with their varied topics for various opportunities became famous and were used by lawyers for preparing their own lawsuits.

Having written this, Victor may have realised that he is also in need of other books he has lent Theognostos once and which come to his mind now. He adds Menander's Τεχνή without formulating an adequate phrase to link this to the previous construction. Final ἐν τάχι[supports the impression that this was a spontaneous idea. Then he turns over his piece of papyrus and writes additional demands to receive two other texts as soon as possible, both by Menander, too; and these are just added by means of καί and supported by repeating the prepositional phrase ἐν τάχει expressing his impatience once more.

Menander: The three titles required by Victor are rather enigmatic because neither of them is known as such as the work of Menander Rhetor, a Greek rhetorician from Laodicea on the Lycos (not to be confused with Menander, the dramatist). Only two of his works are undoubtedly known today. These are the *Division of Epideictic Styles* (Διαίρεσις τῶν Ἐπιδεικτικῶν) and *On Epideictic Speeches* (Περὶ Ἐπιδεικτικῶν). Neither the Τεχνή nor the Μέθοδοι or Ἐγκώμα

¹⁸ Cf. Maehler 1974: 308.

¹⁹ Cf. Maehler 1974: 306.

²⁰ Cf. Maehler 1974: 308.

²¹ Cf. *Scholia Graeca* (Dindorf), xviii and 190–191 (= Κατὰ Φιλίππου Δ 131.1).

are known under such a title. Does one of his treatises on epideictic speeches have to do with Menander's Τεχνή?²²

Be that as it may, we have the lawyer Victor who requires his copies of a commentary (or *scholia*) of Demosthenes and three works by Menander Rhetor back. In other words, he needs orations by one if not the most admired rhetor with comments by Alexander Claudius and the more theoretical treatises by a rhetorician. So it can be assumed that he had to compose a speech urgently for which a role model and theoretical works would be pivotal. Possibly, he was engaged in a lawsuit and had to write a speech for his client. That could explain why Victor seems to be in a hurry or feels under pressure.²³

Unfortunately, the letter does not give any hint about how the books by Menander looked like. Victor's notes are unplanned additions that came to his mind spontaneously. The (*scholia* or) commentary on Demosthenes, however, are determined by the term τὸ βιβλίον.²⁴ Equally to βίβλος the diminutive βιβλίον is derived from βύβλος and denotes "Egyptian papyrus, from whose strips writing material was manufactured"²⁵ or "the Egyptian papyrus, Cyberus Papyrus."²⁶ Usually, a diminutive qualifies something as small, i.e., in this context a book as "a little book" or a document as "a short document" (cf. *Matt.* 19.7; *Mark* 10.4). Of course, it was also applied to longer written texts.²⁷ Besides, it may also tell something about the peculiarity of a book (e.g., a book divided into subdivisions; the place where books were kept; as a plural for "the Scriptures" as in *I Macc.* 12.9). And it was also used synonymously with βίβλος (e.g., a "book of accounts or records") and βιβλίδιον ("petition"). Other diminutives like βιβλίον and βιβλίδιον (and βιβλιδάριον) determine a (document and/or) roll as being "small."²⁸ These are real diminutives, while βιβλίον could have received a wider range of meanings and might have been substituted by the real diminutives in its function to diminish a codex or roll.²⁹

Although a definite diminutive meaning of βιβλίον cannot be proven and might be second choice when the date of the papyrus letter is concerned, it cannot be ruled out that the term could have designated the book as "a small book" (or, less likely, "a short book"). Nonetheless, this is nothing to form a solid basis for a thesis. In addition, for the 5th cent. it is adequate to imagine the book as a codex.

²² For this and other speculations to identify the three texts see Maehler 1974: 309–310.

²³ Cf. Maehler 1974: 310–311.

²⁴ For further details and references on all the relevant lexemes see the standard lexicons. Further cf. Schrenk 1933; Balz 1980; Kraus 2006: 299–300.

²⁵ Cf. Danker 32000: s.v. βιβλίον.

²⁶ Cf. LSJ: s.v. βύβλος (and βίβλος), with reference to Herodot. *Hist.* 2.92.

²⁷ Cf. Danker 2000: s.v. βιβλίον (1). Cf. *Luke* 4.17, 20; *Rev.* 6.14; 20.12.

²⁸ Above all, this is the case in *Rev.* 10.2, 8, 9, in 10.2 v.l. and 10.9 v.l.

²⁹ So Schrenk 1933: 615.

3. Ancient rhetors and miniature books – spot on famous Demosthenes

Even if the term τὸ βιβλίον does probably not determine the size, i.e., the dimensions of the book with Alexander Claudius' commentary on Demosthenes, it indicates that manuscripts (or fragments of them) offer physical features and that their materiality is of significance. It is an appeal to take them as what they are: archaeological artefacts that were produced and used by people. In 1977, Eric G. Turner published his groundbreaking study of the codex, and his categories have been used as standard groups since then. For him the dimensions of the codices (and/or their extant fragments) define the categories he lists. The relevant groups for “small books” are “Group 11 (‘Miniature,’ defined as less than 10 cm. broad)” for papyrus³⁰ and “XIV Miniature (Breadth Less Than 10 cm.)” for parchment codices.³¹ Obviously, these miniature codices formed a rather peculiar but special group of books in (late) antiquity. Years ago I have collected information about approximately ninety Greek miniature books. In 1977 Turner could only take into account nine miniature codices on papyrus and forty-seven on parchment, by far most of them of Christian origin. This and subsequent speculations by Colin H. Roberts³² in his lectures from the same year prompted scholars to follow to form the assumption that miniature codices were heavily preferred by Christians and even a Christian invention. The database from 2007 and published in a slightly revised form in 2010, though not up to date anymore, proves that such notions are inappropriate and exaggerated because non-Christian miniature codices are mostly ignored. Thus, Turner and Roberts remain the basis for most of the assertions on miniature books by (Christian) scholars even today.³³

There are twenty-seven (fragments of) manuscripts with classical authors and texts. Among them Demosthenes is the best attested author with five miniature formats followed by Isocrates and Menander (mainly Menander the dramatist), while most other authors (or texts) are only represented once, only Homer twice.³⁴ A closer look at the five miniature formats with Demosthenes – all of them from Egypt – should help to shed light on the physical/palaeographical features and thereafter on the individual or common practical use of these items. All this should be compared with what is expressed in Victor's papyrus letter/reminder. As delineated above, I have five items with Demosthenes in my conspectus of Greek miniature formats from (late) antiquity but

³⁰ Cf. Turner 1977: 22 (see also 25).

³¹ Cf. Turner 1977: 29–30.

³² See Roberts 1979: 12.

³³ For the criticism and modifications and corrections to such views cf. Kraus 2010: 89–91; Kraus forthcoming (“5: Contextualising the two miniature books of the Rylands Library”).

³⁴ Cf. Kraus 2010: 95–97.

never had time to scrutinise most of them carefully and in detail. What do they look like or, in other words, what do their physical features tell about them? Do they really belong to Turner's groups of miniature codices/formats? What were their actual purposes, how were they used?

3.1. Miniature books with Demosthenes put to the test

In the preliminary list of Greek miniature codices from 2007 and 2010 respectively are four (fragments from) codices, while a fifth one is a fragment of a roll. They should be described in more detail in order to find out if they are of miniature format and what physical/palaeographical features they offer:

(1) P.Amh. 2.24 (Leuven Database of Ancient Books [LDAB] 746; TM 59644; Merton-Pack [MP] 0263)³⁵ is a small parchment fragment 6.3 cm wide and 4.8 cm high. Obviously, it had two columns on the same page. Originally it was approximately 12 cm wide with 26 lines per page. The fragment was cut from the original leaf on the right and the left. It was found somewhere in Egypt, but its exact provenance is unknown.³⁶ There are breathings, some elision marks, interlinear insertions by the scribe himself, and there is some punctuation. In line 5, recto, a second hand added something above the line later on. The scribe's hand is an impressive biblical majuscule of high quality or, in Grenfell and Hunt's words, an "upright calligraphic"³⁷ that the piece is dated to the second half of the 4th cent., when the biblical majuscule had reached its height of perfection.³⁸ The hand leaves a professional and aesthetic impression. Even though the parchment fragment might have been too wide for Turner's group xiv (miniature codices), the extant folio represents a "leaf of a small codex"³⁹ with Demosthenes, *Epistulae*, 2.1 and 5, and a title.⁴⁰

(2) P.Ant. 2.80 (LDAB 747; TM 59645; MP 0321) is a fragment of a parchment folio with two columns on each page from Antinoopolis. The scribe writes a biblical majuscule with well-formed letters which are rather closely spaced. There are smaller letters near the end of the lines. The ink is brownish and has faded here and there. Usual corrections are made by the scribe ("a surprising

³⁵ Cf. the detailed study by De Robertis 2015: 161–164 (no. 35).

³⁶ Grenfell and Hunt write about that (cf. P.Amh. 1v. [preface]) as follows: "[...] the Greek papyri have been bought for Lord Amherst by us at various places in Egypt [...]." They do not add any other information about the provenances of the Amherst papyri in P.Amh. 2 so that there is not more that can be said about the provenance of P.Amh. 2.24.

³⁷ This is what they write in their *editio princeps* (P.Amh. 2.24).

³⁸ For more details and images see Cavallo 1967: 64 and pl. 39c.; Cavallo, Maehler 1987: no. 13c (34).

³⁹ Cavallo, Maehler 1987: no. 13c (34).

⁴⁰ Demosthenes' second speech against Philipp is also attested by P.Amh. 2.24 (4th cent. CE), P.Köln 4.183 (3rd cent. CE), P.Hamb. inv. 735v. (2nd cent. CE), P.Oxy. 62.4323 (3rd cent. CE), and 4324 (1st cent. CE). For more information see De Robertis 2015.

number of careless corrections⁴¹), while others (punctuation, breathings, etc.) were carried out by a second hand. The fragment is dated to the 4th cent. and measures 11.2 x 10.8 cm (wide/high), so that it originally was larger and the page had about 25 lines.⁴² Again, a fragment designated as miniature does not really and originally attest to a miniature codex as Turner defined this category. The codex might have had dimensions of 14 x 21 cm.⁴³ The text preserved is Demosth. *Timocr.* 73–77.

(3) P.Berol. inv. 13274 = Pap.Flor. 4.10 (LDAB 757; TM 59655; MP 0270 + 0271 + 0273) consists of two parchment *bifolia* with text in one column on each page. The first *bifolium* is almost complete, on the second about half of a page is missing. The scribe forms a biblical majuscule “nella fase della decadenza del canone”,⁴⁴ employs *dieresis*, middle point, and *paragraphos*. Ruling is still visible and the text is aesthetically arranged with homogeneous line beginnings and endings. The letters appear irregular and inhomogeneous with a tendency of decoration (e.g., *sigma* and *epsilon*). The two parchment *bifolia* stem from a longer codex.⁴⁵ The parchment fragments are dated to the (end of the) 5th cent. and were found in Egypt, though their exact provenance is unknown. Images are available online that visualise the awkward format of a codex with pages that are rather high in relation to their width.⁴⁶ One page is 8.5 cm wide and 17.5 cm high, i.e., the codex was (more than) twice as high as wide, so that its width may point to Turner’s group xiv (miniature codices). Its extraordinary height, however, qualifies this codex as a member of his group xiii.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, this codex may be regarded as miniature or close to miniature because of its narrow (but high) page dimensions. Also extravagant is its aesthetic impression with its ample blank space around the writing, above all with broad top and bottom margins. The parchment *bifolia* preserve passages from three different works by Demosthenes: *De classibus*, 41 (with end title), *Pro Rhodiorum libertate*, 14–16 and 27–28, and *Pro Megalopolitanis*, 9–11, all three with end titles.

(4) P.Berol. inv. 17067 (LDAB 706; TM 59604; MP 0326.01) is a papyrus fragment that is 6.4 cm wide and 3.4 cm high found at Hermopolis (= Hermo-

⁴¹ Barns, Zilliacus 1960, in: P.Ant. 2.68.

⁴² Cf. Cavallo 1967: 72 and pl. 52a.

⁴³ Cf. Turner 1977: 104 (no. 56).

⁴⁴ Orsini 2005: 64. Orsini offers the most detailed palaeographic description (63–64; apart from Hausmann).

⁴⁵ Cf. Hausmann 1978: 53–67; Orsini 2005: 64.

⁴⁶ For the complete set of photographs of all sides of the two *bifolia* see the Photographic Archive of Papyri in the Cairo Museum (<http://ipap.csad.ox.ac.uk/4DLink4/4DACTION/IP-APwebquery?vPub=Pap.Flor.&vVol=4&vNum=10>; last access 10/09/2015). Images of one side of one of the *bifolia* are in Schubart 1921: 125 (no. 26); Turner 1977: xix (no. 8).

⁴⁷ Cf. Turner 1977: 29; Orsini 2005: 64. Turner’s group xiii only consists of two entries, one of them is the codex under discussion here.

polis Magna).⁴⁸ The papyrus is damaged (i.e., broken) at all its sides. The scribe seems to have been a well-trained professional writing in a literary hand that formed rather small if not tiny letters in black ink. The piece is dated to the 3rd cent. Taken for granted that the codex originally had one column only the dimensions of the reconstructed page would have been 10 cm wide and 11 cm high. This is calculated on the assumption of 26 to 28 letters per line and margins of about 1.5 cm. The first editor, William M. Brashear, however, regarded it as more probable that there was a preceding column on the one and a following column on the other page so that the original page dimensions would have been far larger as those of a miniature codex. Consequently, the codex would have had the same or standard dimensions as most of the other codices.⁴⁹ The fragment has Demosth. *Aphob.* 60 and *Onet.* 1.

(5) P.Lond.Lit. (or P.Lit.Lond.) 130 + 134 = Brit.Lib. inv. 133 + 134 = Pap. Flor. 8.44 (= LDAB 2431; TM 61289; MP 1234 + 0337) are from a papyrus roll that was acquired in 1889. It seems that P.Lond.Lit. 130 with Demosth. *Ep.* 3, has not been dealt with in detail up to now in contrast to 134 (Hyperides),⁵⁰ though it has been described several times.⁵¹ The first part of the roll carries Hyperides, *In Philippidem*, in 9 columns, which occupies a part of the role that is 49.3 cm wide and 24 cm high with columns 4.3 cm wide and 15 cm high and margins with 3.5 cm at the top and 5 cm at the bottom. The script is bilinear (except for ϕ and ψ) with rather regular majuscules. Lines tend to begin further to the left one after each other. The part with Hyperides is dated to the 2nd cent. BCE.⁵² There is a blank space of about 30.4 cm between the Hyperides and the Demosthenes texts and though P.Lond.Lit. 130 is written by a different scribe, it also ought to be from the same time as the Hyperides text.⁵³ There are

⁴⁸ For full information cf. Brashear 1994: 25–28 and plates 12–13.

⁴⁹ Cf. Brashear 1994: 25.

⁵⁰ Cf. Johnson 2004: 320: “*P.Lond.Lit* 130 descr. (Demosthenes). This large piece deserves a full reporting, which it has not yet received.”

⁵¹ Cf., for instance, the first edition by Milne 1927: nos. 130 (98) and 134 (100); Kenyon 1871: 42–55 (Hyperides) and 56–62 (Demosthenes) with plates 2–3; Hausmann 1978: 74–97. Further see the useful information provided by the third edition of the Mertens-Pack online database on the pages of Cedopal (<http://promethee.philo.ulg.ac.be/cedopal/indexanglais.htm>; last access 12/09/2015), no. 337 (the preceding part with Hyperides, *In Philippidem*, is no. 1234). In addition, see now Horváth 2014.

⁵² Further palaeographic details about the Hyperides are provided by Cavallo, Maehler 1987: 80 (no. 46); Johnson 2004: 319–320 (+ pl. 15 with a colour image).

⁵³ This is supported by palaeographical observations and by the fact that the two texts belong to the same roll and have a considerably large space in between them. Cf. Kenyon 1891: 56: “The date of the MS. [*P.Lond.Lit.* 130; author’s note] must be contemporary with that of the Hyperides, as so large a space of empty papyrus would not long be preserved unused at the end of the latter; it is therefore probably of the 2nd century B.C.” Consequently, Kraus 2010: 95, with “I v.Chr.–I n.Chr.” must be corrected to “II v.Chr.”

twelve columns; three more would have been necessary to keep Demosthenes' complete third letter to Philipp.⁵⁴ With 17 cm the columns are longer than those of the Hyperides section and consist of 29 to 36 lines with 28 to 30 letters per line. The column width is about 5.7 cm, so that at least this might have prompted the assignment of "miniature" by the LDAB. Nonetheless, the long columns remind of the awkward format of (3) P.Berol. inv. 13274. All in all, Demosth. *Ep.* 3.1–38, covers an area that is 86 cm wide and 24 cm high. The hand is "an extremely small and fine uncial, not so graceful as that of the other text, but very delicate and clear."⁵⁵ The text can be read easily in spite of its tininess. There are fewer ligatures than in the Hyperides text and a circumflex marks sense pauses in the text together with a blank space. Of course, the extent of text and, above all the height of the papyrus roll qualify this manuscript as being far from a miniature format, although its column width – also together with the spaces between two columns – would fit Turner's definition, though this was made for codices only. Consequently, if at all, this roll could be compared to a codex like (3) P.Berol. inv. 13274.

3.2. *Summary of and conclusions drawn from 3.1.*

As delineated above, with (1) P.Amh. 2.24 and (2) P.Ant. 2.80 two of the five entries for miniature codices with Demosthenes are actually larger than the dimensions given for the category "miniature" by Turner, even if the page dimensions of (2) suggest a rather small format. Another entry, (3) P.Berol. inv. 13274, fits the criterion of having pages less than 10 cm wide, but the extravagant format that originally was twice as high than wide qualifies this small codex as a member of Turner's group xiii and not xiv ("miniature"). Even (4) P.Berol. inv. 17067 does neither necessarily belong to the category of miniature codices nor should it have a legitimate place in a database of Greek miniature codices from late antiquity. The qualification as being "miniature" on LDAB for these four items ought to be corrected or, at least, a qualification without the term "miniature" should be given there (maybe, "rather small" page width), just in case LDAB follows Turner's categories of papyrus and parchment codices.

Equally, the roll (5) P.Lond.Lit. 130 + 134 should not be classified as miniature either. Its column width might be interesting in that respect, above all the mentioned differences between the two sections with Hyperides (P.Lond.Lit. 134) and Demosthenes (P.Lond.Lit. 130), e.g., the column widths, the number of lines, and the hands. The height of 24 cm, however, does not permit to call this item a "miniature" roll. In comparison with other rolls of actual miniature

⁵⁴ For further information see De Robertis 2015. De Robertis deals with the seven papyrus codices (P.Oxy. 62.4310; P.Berol. inv. 21280; P.Wash.Univ. 2.66; P.Oxy. 62.4323; P.Rain.Cent. 21; P.Laur. 4.135, and P.Oxy. 62.4326) and the four parchment codices (P.Gen. 3; PSI 2.129; P.Amh. 2.24; P.Mich. inv. 918).

⁵⁵ Kenyon 1891: 56.

or small format, P.Lond.Lit. 130+134 apparently represents a fairly usual format. A few example cases should be sufficient here: (a) 11QPsApa (= 11Q11), a parchment roll from cave eleven around Qumran, presents Hebrew *Ps.* 91 (= *Ps.* 90 according to the Septuagint) together with three other hymn- or psalm-like texts. The unopened and damaged roll is 8.5 cm high and 3.5 cm wide. When opened the parchment measures 73 cm and must originally have been 9.5 cm high.⁵⁶ (b) P.Berol. inv.10562 + 10571 = BKT V 1/BKT V 2 (LDAB 212, TM 59117, MP 1598), a papyrus roll of the 1st cent. CE with epigrams (some from the *Anthologia palatina*) that is between 4 to 5 cm high according to its present state (but remains of the top and bottom margin are preserved). (c) P.Lond.Lit. (or P.Lit.Lond.) 44 = P.Oxy. 4.659 (LDAB 3742, TM 62560, MP 1371), a papyrus roll of the 1st cent. BCE with five columns from two texts by Pindar is 12.8 cm high and 49 cm wide and, thus, at least a roll of small format.⁵⁷ (d) P.Lond.Lit. 96 = P.Egerton 1 (LDAB 1164, TM 60050, MP 0485 + 1877), “a papyrus roll of small format (height 120 mm, including upper margin 20 mm, lower 25 mm.)”⁵⁸ with Herodas (Herondas), *Mimiambi* (with marginalia) dated to the 1st or 2nd cent. CE, possibly to the time around 100. (e) P.Oxy. 54.3723, a papyrus roll from the 2nd cent. CE with two columns of elegiacs⁵⁹ written on the verso of a document. This roll is only 7.6 cm high with a column height of circa 5.5 cm.

All in all, rolls of small dimensions, i.e., of small height must be checked in detail to figure out whether they may be “miniature” or just small or even of common format. The LDAB provides a considerable number of rolls denominated as “miniature.” Be that as it may, it must not be forgotten that there are significant differences between rolls and codices when it comes to talk about their practical use and handling and their dimensions. The width of columns is interesting, but it is only partly comparable to columns widths of codices. In single codices the page dimensions with full margins are something else than the column height and width of a roll, where the column shares left and right margins with other columns.⁶⁰ But the comparison between rolls and codices is a special topic that cannot be dealt with *in extenso* here.

⁵⁶ In addition, its text of *Ps.* 91(90) – in comparison with the Masoretic psalm and the Septuagint version – offers interesting parallels and differences. But this must be researched into thoroughly in the future, also together with the Syriac and Latin versions. For some preliminary results see Kraus 2011: 58–61.

⁵⁷ See Cavallo, Maehler 1987: 126–128 (no. 84). Another text on the papyrus roll is P.Lond.Lit. 61 = P.Oxy. 4.662 with an anthology (Leonidas, Antipater Sidonius, Amyntas, *Anthologia palatina*).

⁵⁸ Turner 1987: no. 39. Further see Kenyon 1891: 1–41.

⁵⁹ Maybe, a love elegy; perhaps, elegiacs on Antinous. Cf. the *editio princeps*.

⁶⁰ Cf. Kraus 2010: 107, and the very helpful reflections by Johnson 2004: 86: “The codex page has no true counterpart in the roll. The physical presence of the page, with its block of text surrounded by upper, lower, and side margins, cannot be paralleled in the roll, where upper

What is for sure is that on the basis of the palaeographical details of potential miniature formats with Demosthenes, my database of miniature codices/rolls requires urgent inspection *and* rectification. Moreover, Turner's categories must be applied with care in the future. Even though some fragments might have been "less than 10 cm. Broad"⁶¹ or have had a "Breadth Less Than 10 cm,"⁶² which certainly implies smallness at first glance, their height is also a considerable criterion for judging a manuscript. Its handiness and portability depends on both measures, width and height. Just imagine to put (4) P.Berol. inv. 17067 – on the assumption of page dimensions of 10 x 11 cm – into a bag or a pocket, which could work but might not be that easy, or (3) P.Berol. inv. 13274 = Pap.Flor. 4.10 that was 8.5 cm wide but 17.5 cm high, whose height might make it rather difficult to store it away while travelling.

Nonetheless, (1) P.Amh. 2.24 and (2) P.Ant. 2.80 (and possibly [3] P.Berol. inv. 17067) are at least rather small, neat, and handy in comparison with codices of more common page dimensions; and this handiness, flexibility, and portability fits both (a) the purpose of a miniature codex, no matter which precise width and height it might have had originally, and (b) Demosthenes' orations as rhetorical role models and reference texts for training and preparing for specific occasions and for memorizing polished and concise phrases and passages on the go. So, Demosthenes, all in all widely attested by manuscripts and fragments and absolutely popular with contemporaries and generations to follow,⁶³ was obviously perfect for such purposes, too. Above all, the Demosthenes manuscripts would perfectly suit the purpose described for the papyrus letter P.Berol. 21849 = SB 12.11084 = C.Pap.Hengstl 91. All these (fragments from) codices and even the roll could have been used for preparing a speech for a lawsuit or a similar occasion.

In addition, a closer look at rolls of considerable small format, i.e., small height (and some with narrow columns), shows that these are older than the bulk of miniature codices. Could it be possible that the "miniature" rolls served as forerunner of "miniature" codices? Might it be possible that Christians here preferred the miniature format as something new (but cf. miniature codices with classical texts and authors aside those of Christian origin) and, thus, were exclusively in favour of this invention, regarding it as the future model of small books? Of course, this remains pure speculation. But such reflections require much more

and lower margins are continuous and where the intercolumn belongs to no single column but (excepting start and end) to two [...]. But we must leave behind the image of a notional 'page' consisting of a written column plus the surrounding margins, for that makes no sense in the context of the roll [...]. Nor does it make sense to import from codex culture notions of book production."

⁶¹ Turner 1977: 22 and 25.

⁶² Turner 1977: 29–30.

⁶³ See, for instance, Hausmann 1978; De Robertis 2015.

time and concentration on the mostly palaeographic features of the relevant manuscripts.

4. Miniature codices as representatives of Graeco-Roman book culture in Egypt?

Interestingly, all the manuscripts dealt with previously are from Egypt. It is a pity that for (1) P.Amh. 2.24, (3) P.Berol. inv. 13274 = Pap.Flor. 4.10, and (5) P.Lond. Lit. 130 + 134 exact provenances are not known. It is for sure that all three are from Egypt, as (1) was obviously purchased somewhere in Egypt by Grenfell and Hunt for Lord Amherst's collection, (3) came from Egypt to Berlin, and there is no reason to doubt that, and (5), acquired "in 1889,"⁶⁴ was found in Egypt, too.⁶⁵ Therefore, the manuscripts may tell something about book production, the use and purpose of books in Egypt. With Hermopolis (= Hermopolis Magna; Ἑρμοῦ πόλις μεγάλη) as the provenance of (4) P.Berol. inv. 17067 and the papyrus letter discussed in the introduction to this study (P.Berol. 21849 = SB 12.11084 = C. Pap.Hengstl 91) and Antinoopolis (Ἀντινόου πόλις) as the location of (2) P.Ant. 2.80, conclusions about books may even be narrowed down geographically to a certain region.⁶⁶

At least we get a glimpse of how books looked like in late antiquity on the basis of the fragments discussed here. Unfortunately, we can only speculate about the binding and the exact look of the codices.⁶⁷ What can be derived from the palaeographical features of the three parchment and two papyrus fragment, i.e., the four codices and the roll respectively is that they were produced with some care. That does not necessarily mean that their material was of first class, nor does this refer to the potential making of the book/roll itself. All five items present scribes who formed letters of considerable quality and aesthetic impression. For (1) P.Amh. 2.24, (2) P.Ant. 2.80, and (3) P.Berol. inv. 13274 = Pap.

⁶⁴ Milne 1927: 98.

⁶⁵ Cf. Kenyon 1891: 45: "[...] and in this case we gain a not inconsiderable specimen of the style and language of the orator [= Hyperides; author's note] who [...] was apparently hopelessly and entirely lost to the knowledge of the modern world, until, less than half a century ago, he began to be given back to us from the tombs of Egypt." Nevertheless, the bulk of papyri found in the major places were unearthed from rubbish mounds. Cf. Luijendijk 2012.

⁶⁶ Hermopolis Magna is the capital of the fifteenth Upper Egyptian nome, the Hare nome in the Heptanomis, roughly in the middle of the north-south expansion and on the west bank of the Nile. Antinoopolis is a Roman city on the east bank of the Nile, just opposite Hermopolis Magna. For specific literature see Rupprecht 1994: 38, 168 (Hermopolis Magna), 68–69 (Antinoopolis).

⁶⁷ But see, for instance, P.Ryl. 1.28 (a papyrus booklet or miniature codex with a text dealing with palmomancy) that offers very interesting clues about binding and handling. Cf. Kraus 2017: section 4.

Flor. 4.10 the scribes' hands are described as biblical majuscules with corrections by the scribe for (1) and (2) – that implies some sort of proof-reading – and a tendency of decoration at some letters for (3). For all of them the quality of writing is stressed (e.g., an “upright calligraphic” for P.Amh. 2.24), though there are some rather careless corrections in (2). The literary hand of (4) P.Berol. inv. 17067 appears to belong to a well-trained professional who was capable to produce a text of a remarkable aesthetic impression at a substantial speed. The two hands of (5) P.Lond.Lit. 130 + 134 = Pap.Flor. 8.44 are different from each other but both are of good quality. While the Hyperides is written in a regular majuscules, the Demosthenes appears to be less aesthetic but of equal quality with its tiny and fine letters, which can be read without any difficulty.

In addition, the columns of the five items with Demosthenes are arranged with care to provide a harmonious impression with a tendency of homogenous line endings and beginnings. So all five manuscripts make a very good impression as far as letter forms (scribes' hands), layout, column arrangement, and even the reliability and accuracy of the text from Demosthenes are concerned. Apparently, it was regarded as significant to have manuscripts with Demosthenes available that satisfied a certain expectation of quality and readability. These manuscripts may all serve the purpose indicated or implied by Victor's letter to Theognostos (P.Berol. 21849 = SB 12.11084 = C.Pap.Hengstl 91). All these may have suited the lending of Demosthenes for the purpose of copying *and* personal or even professional use, though a different way of handling must be considered for the roll of noticeable dimensions with Hyperides and Demosthenes.

Eventually, it is imperative to stress that the places the remains of the three parchment and two papyrus manuscripts were found need not be the production site of the codices and the roll. They could have been produced/written somewhere else, brought to, for instance, Hermopolis and Antinoopolis, and were discarded there. Herwig Maehler's inspirational idea of Victor lending books to his companion Theognostos in Hermopolis on his way to Alexandria is plausible, though it will remain speculation. Such a scenario does not necessarily depend on miniature codices (or rolls); the smallness of a manuscript does not play an important role here because the school master's slave Elias was just only sent to bring the lent books back to Victor, wherever this Victor actually lived. So, Elias should have been prepared to carry and transport the required books, even if they were of common or standard size.

Altogether, this study terminates with conclusions drawn from forms of books – i.e., codices and a roll – with texts by Demosthenes which are not of miniature format and should be deleted in a database that focusses on miniature codices according to Turner's established typology and definition. The lending of books as it is depicted in a papyrus letter from Victor to Theognostos dated to the second half of the 5th cent. does not explicitly refer to small books. Furthermore, the diminutive τὸ βιβλίον is not a designation of the lent book as being

small or miniature. But letter and diminutive help to determine the purpose and use of books with Demosthenes in (late) antiquity in Hermopolis Magna and Antinoopolis and – if it is taken for granted that manuscripts need not be manufactured and principally used in the place they were actually found – in every major and significant place of Graeco-Roman Egypt. All these observations depend on scrutinizing research on papyri (i.e., this term includes parchment and other materials as well) as archaeological objects; and results like these are only possible if (fragments of) manuscripts are respected in their whole integrity or, in other words, if their physical features, their palaeography, are respected and taken seriously.

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Remains of Gnostic Anthologies and Pagan Wisdom Literature in the Coptic Tradition*

Paola Buzi

1. Premise

It is well known that a complete and satisfying “history of Coptic literature” is still a *desideratum*. Among the other causes contributing to the difficulty of such an enterprise are the fragmentary status of the codices which preserve the texts and the fact that a great part of the surviving literary manuscripts date from the 9th to the 11th cent.¹ This means that we have only relics of the early Coptic literary production, and therefore of the tastes, orientations and cultural formation of those groups which, between the 4th and the 5th century, were creating a new literature in the Coptic language.

Despite these difficulties, however, it is clear that the Coptic literary tradition was, from its inception, with very few exceptions, mostly of religious content.

Documentary sources, on the other hand, show that even up to the 6th–7th cent. classical studies played a great part in the scholastic education of Christian Egypt and, consequently, – although this may appear less obvious – in the literary production and in the creation of private and institutional libraries.

We will leave aside here the famous cases of the so-called Bodmer Papyri (2nd–6th cent.), with all the problems and interrogatives related to them,² and of the library of Dioscorus of Aphroditto (6th cent.),³ the latter defined as an ex-

* I would like to thank Gianfranco Agosti, Alberto Camplani, Tito Orlandi and Carlo Pernigotti for their valuable suggestions.

¹ Boud’hors 2012: 224–228.

² For an account – not shared by all the specialists – of the manuscripts belonging to the ancient library of the so-called “Bodmer Papyri,” see Robinson 1987; Robinson 1990; Robinson 2013. See also Kasser 1991. Moreover, a detailed *status quaestionis* of the manuscripts which should be attributed to the (original) library is dealt with in the theme section of *Adamantius* 21 (2015): “I Papiri Bodmer. Biblioteche, comunità di asceti e cultura letteraria in greco, latino e copto nell’Egitto tardoantico.” Cf. above all the articles of Jean-Luc Fournet (“Anatomie d’une bibliothèque de l’Antiquité tardive,” 8–40) and Paul Schubert (“Les Papyrus Bodmer: contribution à une tentative de délimitation,” 41–46).

³ MacCoull 1988; Fournet 1999 and 2003. On the importance of the finding of the Homeric works (and the related *scholia*) in Dioscorus’ library see Fournet 1995 and 1999: 673–674. These are preserved in codices datable to 4th–5th cent., therefore already ancient at Dioscorus’ time.

ample of “Hellenism in Late Antiquity.”⁴ They represent two book collections, in which classical texts are consciously preserved alongside religious ones, but where Coptic is used only to transmit Christian works and never to preserve classical texts.

2. Classical works in the Coptic language

The few cases of classical works translated into Coptic, which are known so far, represent a different phenomenon. Among them mention should certainly be made of the short reference to the Aristophanes’ *The birds* included by Shenoute in one of his homilies,⁵ a probable echo – we do not know how conscious – of his scholastic formation, and a quotation, partially manipulated but still clearly recognisable, of *Od.* 4.261–263, inserted in the *Exegesis de anima* in the Nag Hammadi Codex II.⁶

Still remaining in the context of Nag Hammadi an extremely interesting but at the same time thorny case is the famous fragment of Plato’s *Respublica* preserved in the Nag Hammadi Codex VI,⁷ studied by Peter Brashler,⁸ Tito Orlandi⁹ and Louis Painchaud,¹⁰ the latter having recently devoted new atten-

⁴ Bowersock 1990: 63–64. See, moreover, Fournet 1999: I.1–4: “Dioscore n’est pas un bon poète au sens normative où l’on entend ce mot [...] il peut être considéré comme représentative de la culture grecque de la période protobyzantine mise en pratique, non par quelques figures d’exception, mais par l’homme de lettre moyen. Mieux encore: les influences littéraires que dénote son œuvre et qui n’ont jamais fait l’objet d’un relevé systématique permettent d’esquisser le profil littéraire d’un petit notable de province se piquant de poésie et, à travers lui, le choix littéraires opérés par une époque.” On the supposed mediocrity of his poetry: Baldwin 1984. Dioscorus’ poems were edited for the first time by Maspero 1906–1910. For Dioscorus’ life cf. Maspero 1911; Bell 1944. See also van Minnen 1992.

⁵ Erman 1894: 134–135; Amélineau 1907: 1.386; Orlandi 1990; Chuvin 2012. For a different interpretation of the reference see Spanoudakis 2010.

⁶ Orlandi 1984a; Orlandi 1990; Pernigotti 2003.

⁷ Brashler, Jackson, Parrot 1988: 318–320. See also Krause, Labib 1971: 166–169; Poirier, Painchaud 1983 and Matsagouras 1976.

⁸ Brashler 1979. Brashler hypothesises that “this succinct statement of a main theme in Plato’s *Republic* was taken from a collection of edifying quotations (δοξογραφαί) said to have circulated in late antiquity as handbooks for students and others with intellectual aspirations but little philosophical sophistication.” Brashler 1979: 325.

⁹ Orlandi 1977. Cf. also Mayer 2007. Orlandi observes: “Risulta chiara, a nostro avviso, la diversità concettuale del contenuto dei due brani. C’è stato un intervento molto deciso da parte non di un traduttore, ma di un *redattore* che ha preso il brano platonico come puro pretesto per scrivere un vero e proprio brano gnostico” (Orlandi 1977: 54).

¹⁰ Painchaud 1983. See also Painchaud 2017, a paper originally entitled “From Plato, *Republic* (NH,5) to the *Gospel of Judas* (CT 3): Some Reflexions on Translation, Rewriting, and Interpolations.”

tion to it. We have no idea if this text was part of a longer – and maybe even complete – Coptic version of the Plato's work. What we have, however, is not a faithful translation but rather a targeted and forced re-reading of the original, in a heterodox sense. Despite this, however, it shows how deep the influence of a classical education and pagan literature was, even in an unorthodox milieu such as that of the Nag Hammadi community and in its composite library, in which, by the way, Hermetic works are another example of the appropriation of pagan literature, sometimes not devoid of a moral character, although much less classical. We certainly have to take into consideration, however, that the Nag Hammadi library is the product of a fluid tradition. Not only have the texts undergone some changes during their translation into Coptic, but several elements lead us to believe that the copyists enjoyed ample freedom of action. In brief, the works found in the Nag Hammadi Codices do not testify to a stable literary tradition.

If these examples constitute sporadic incursions of classical antiquity into Christian Egypt, sometimes merely occasional borrowings from a distant cultural past, the *Cambyse Romance*¹¹ – a Coptic original creation based on classical material – and above all the *Alexander Romance*¹² seem to have had a larger and more generally widespread circulation, although the tradition of both works would require a complete census of the Coptic manuscripts which transmit them.

In this paper, we will focus our attention on a case of the reuse of the classical textual heritage, which till now has not received the attention it deserves – at least among Coptologists –, dealing not with a single classical text translated into Coptic, but rather with a literary genre in its own right: gnostic anthologies.

We will endeavour to understand through which *itineraria* and with what aims Christian Egypt preserved examples of a pagan wisdom literature and to delineate the environments that were responsible for its circulation.

3. The *Menandri sententiae*

Among the examples of *gnomai* transmitted in Coptic, the *Menandri sententiae* (CC 0022)¹³ certainly deserve special attention.¹⁴

¹¹ Ludin Jansen 1950; MacCoull 1993.

¹² See von Lemm 1903; Selden 2011a; Selden 2011b; MacCoull 2012. On the Copto-Arabic tradition of the *Alexander Romance* see Doufikar-Aerts 2016; see also Doufikar-Aerts 2012: 61–79.

¹³ The attribution of the CC is based on the classification operated by the CMCL.

¹⁴ For a detailed description of the collections of philosophical and moral sentences which circulated in Syria see Bettio 2003 and 2004. Although far from the geographical limits of

As is well known, the *Menandri monostichoi* or *Menandri sententiae* are collections of one-verse sayings and moral precepts, ordered according to the first letter, that started to circulate, in Greek, from at least the 3rd cent. CE, under the name of Menander, although only a few of them may be directly referred to the authorship of the comedy writer. Their contents, in fact, draw material in almost equal proportion both from Greek philosophy, tragedy and comedy and from the Old Testament.

Their nature of an “open work”¹⁵ – potentially expandable to infinity – and their wide circulation – they are known also in Syriac, Arabic, and Slavonic and were transmitted by papyrus and parchment codices, *ostraka* and wooden tablets – made possible a constant insertion of textual material of different types and the formation of several variants of the “original.” Because of this extremely complex and fluid tradition, which did not have a linear development but rather came into being through accumulations, juxtapositions, convergences and linkages, it has not been possible to identify an archetype of the collection of sayings, but only to attempt to describe the different recensions of the same typology of text.

The *Menandri sententiae* lie outside the forms in which Coptic literature is normally expressed: they do not appear in booklists¹⁶ – themselves not very numerous – and there is no trace of them in the book properties of the most important Coptic libraries. Despite this, eight witnesses of the *Menandri sententiae*, all dated between the 5th and the 7th cent., come from late antique Egypt: four of them are bilingual,¹⁷ in Greek and Coptic, four are in Greek.¹⁸ A new edition and study of the entire “Egyptian” *corpus* of the *Menandri sententiae* has just been published by Carlo Pernigotti and myself.¹⁹

Unfortunately only four of these witnesses have a known provenance: the first is the *ostrakon* O.EdfouIFA0 11 (7th cent.),²⁰ in Greek and Coptic, from

this study, it is worth mentioning the case of the preservation of the Greek wisdom literature in the medieval Castilian literary production, through the Arabic literary tradition. See Rodríguez Adrados 2009.

¹⁵ Pernigotti 2008: 11.

¹⁶ For examples of lists of Christian books on papyrus, both in ecclesiastic and private libraries, see Otranto 1997 and Maehler 2008.

¹⁷ They are: 1) P.Vat. inv.G. 17 + P.Rain.UnterrichtKopt. 269.1 = P.Copt. 1 (= MS 37); 2) P.Lond. inv. 8 = P.Copt. 2 (= MS 38); 3) O.Vindob. K 674 (= MS 40); 4) O.EdfouIFA0 11 (= MS 39). The first three are of unknown provenance.

¹⁸ These are: 1) P.Mon.Epiph. 2.615 (= MS 20); 2) O.Frange 751 (= MS 11); 3) inscription from Dongola (= MS 568); 4) P.Ryl. 1.41 (= MS 28), this last containing on the verso seven lines of writing in Coptic.

¹⁹ The edition of the Graeco-Coptic *Menandri sententiae* is now published in the *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini*. Parte II.2–3: *Sentenze di autori noti e “Chreiai”* (ed. by M.S. Funghi). I owe to Maria Serena Funghi my involvement in such a stimulating project.

²⁰ Bacot 2009: 32–33 and Delattre, Fournet 2011: 81–82. “[...] très probablement dans

Bawit, whose contents, recently identified by Alain Delattre and Jean-Luc Fournet, unfortunately consist only of seven lines; the second is the *ostrakon* P.Mon.Epiph. 2.615 (7th cent.),²¹ in Greek, from the Monastery of Epiphanius in Western Thebes; the third is the *ostrakon* O.Frange 7, in Greek, found in New Kingdom tomb TT 29, later reused as a cell by the monk Frange;²² lastly, the fourth witness is an epigraphic text, in Greek, found in the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, located not far from Dongola.²³

Of particular interest, however, although of unknown provenance, is P.Copt. 1 (P.Vat. inv.G. 17 + P.Rain.UnterrichKopt. 269.1), consisting of eight papyrus leaves, each of them containing 18–19 lines of text. The manuscript presents a regular sequence of 64 Greek sentences followed by a Coptic translation.

The Greek text is very incorrect, with frequent phonetic mistakes and, above all, the syntax of several sentences appearing extremely simplified compared with the other Greek *Menandri sententiae* recensions that contain the same sayings. The Coptic version, on the other hand, presents far fewer orthographic, grammatical and syntactical mistakes compared to the Greek version, but at the same time shows frequent misunderstandings in the translating process.

All these elements suggest that the copyist of the manuscript had much more familiarity with Coptic than with Greek. The book in question was probably one of the tools he and other possible users made use of to improve their knowledge of Greek (but also of Coptic).

Interestingly enough, P.Copt. 1 is not an *unicum*, since P.Copt. 2 (P.Lond. inv. 8), again in Greek and Coptic, seems to be an exact copy of it, although only 23 sentences have survived. This fact suggests the existence in Egypt of a fairly stable tradition of this specific variant of the Menandrian collection of sayings. Moreover, although most of the *sententiae* included in P.Copt. 1 are known from other collections, about 20 of them represent an original insertion, showing the capacity of the Egyptian milieu to create texts similar to those transmitted by the tradition.

Among these new verses there are, for instance, a series of sentences created on the theme of *grammata*, a fact that supports the hypothesis that such works are to be referred to the context of cultural formation. These manuscripts, however, do not represent a typical example of a scholastic exercise, since the

un contexte scolaire.” Delattre, Fournet 2011: 81. The Greek texts from Tell Edfu had been already published by Bruyère et al. 1937; Michałowski et al. 1938–1939 and Michałowski et al. 1950. For a report of the excavation works at Tell Edfu cf. Rutschowskaya, Bénazeth 1999: 55–58.

²¹ Winlock, Crum 1926: 41–44; Jäkel 1964: 16–18 (no. 13); Bucking 1997: 134; Delattre 2012: 301–302.

²² Boud’hors, Heurtel 2010: 396.

²³ Łajtar 2009. I owe this information to Ewa Wipszycka.

script, both in Greek and Coptic, is skilful.²⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that Raffaella Cribiore, while supporting the hypothesis that they “may have been used in schools,”²⁵ does not include P.Copt. 1 and P.Copt. 2 among the real school exercises, specifying that “they are proficiently written and are alike to have been professionally produced books.”

The term “book” is crucial: in evaluating the function of P.Copt. 1 and P.Copt. 2 one should not forget that they are fragments of papyrus codices, therefore of real books. Like every other book, for instance, they could be commissioned, purchased and borrowed.²⁶ Moreover, the fact that P.Copt. 1 and P.Copt. 2 transmit exactly the same sequence of sentences permit the conjecture that they were copies of the same model, that circulated in the context of high education and that must have reached a certain textual fixity, as is also suggested by the fact that the two witnesses share the same mistakes.²⁷

More than as exercises P.Copt. 1 and P.Copt. 2 should be therefore intended as handbooks instrumental in providing a moral orientation, a superficial philosophical formation and, at the same time, to favour an in-depth comprehension of Coptic and Greek grammars.

The structure of the bilingual witnesses of the *Menandri sententiae* – brief sentences with text-to-face – could in fact facilitate the learning of grammatical and syntactical rules in a land where Greek and Coptic normally co-existed, sometimes with the marginal contribution of Latin.²⁸ It is the same didactic and cultural scenario suggested by other tools for cultural education, such as the bilingual late Roman and late antique Greek–Coptic dictionaries²⁹ and the so-

²⁴ It should not be forgotten that very few are the direct references to the schools of Graeco-Roman Egypt – term to be intended here *lato sensu* – and that there is no exercise mentioning the place where it has been written (see Cribiore 1996b: 18–19; 169, n. 22). In this perspective, a sure archaeological context, although not well preserved, has a great value. On the school education in Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt see also Cribiore 1999; Cribiore 1996a; Cribiore 2007b; Cribiore, Davoli 2010.

²⁵ Cribiore 1996a: 45 and n. 74. It is important to stress that the palaeographic observations elaborated by Dieter Hagedorn e Manfred Weber, and the consequent chronological attribution of P.Copt. 1 and P.Copt. 2 – accepted also by Monika Hasitzka –, although plausible, should be evaluated with extreme caution, due to the still unsatisfactory study of Coptic palaeography, cf. Hagedorn, Weber 1968: 23–25; Hasitzka 1990: 201–210.

²⁶ As we know, the loan was an effective method of texts dissemination, considering the high costs of book manufacture. On the diffusion of book loan see Kotsifou 2007: 54.

²⁷ Morani 1996: 133.

²⁸ Cavenaile 1987; Rochette 1997; Buzi 2005. See also Carlig 2013.

²⁹ C.Gloss.Biling. 1–2. See in particular the six papyrus leaves belonging to a Latin-Greek/Greek-Latin glossary dated to the 6th cent. (Göttingen, App. Dipl. 8 C/D + Edition Th. Chr. Tychsen + Köln, Hist. Archiv, inv. W *351; C.Gloss.Biling. 1.4); the list of months in Latin and Greek (in which Latin is transliterated in Greek) from *Euemeria*/Qasr el-Banāt, dated to the 4th cent. (P.Fay. 135v.; C.Gloss.Biling. 1.11); the Greek–Latin glossary (in which Latin is transliterated in Greek) with *lemmata* referring to daily life, dated to the 4th cent.

called “conversation manual” in Greek, Coptic and Latin dated to the 5th–6th cent. (P.Berol. inv. 10582; C.Gloss.Biling. 1.15)³⁰ collected and edited by Johannes Kramer.³¹

In brief, P.Copt. 1 and P. Copt. 2 represent an extremely interesting case of formation of a *corpusculum* of *Menandri sententiae* among tradition, simplification, contamination and innovation, this last aspect being represented by some original *sententiae* fabricated *ad hoc* and not attested to elsewhere. The following are some of the most meaningful examples: “without beating none learns the letters” (P.Copt. 1.25–30), “the reasoning of those who know the letters is sure” (P.Copt. 1.37–40), “learn the letters and you will have beautiful hopes,” “you will have a life without troubles if you do not talk to a woman” (P.Copt. 1.49–51), “be correct till your old age, since you are a man” (P.Copt. 1.92–95), “the most beautiful hope is for those who know the letters” (P.Copt. 1.126–129), “an inappropriate word is like a song of mourning” (P.Copt. 1.201–204). The theme of *grammata* is dominant, these original sentences being added to those on the same subject known from other collections: “the character of a man is known by the word” (P.Copt. 1.9–12), “the good beginning of life is letters” (P.Copt. 1.22–25), to give but two examples.

The other evident *leitmotiv* is misogyny, well represented in P.Copt. 1 both by original and traditional sentences. Examples of these last are the well-known “the beginning of sin is in the woman” (P.Copt. 1.1–3), “an old man in love is the worst misfortune” (P.Copt. 1.55–57), “do not touch a woman and you will not open a tomb” (P.Copt. 1.72–74), and the famous “do not entrust your life to a woman” (P.Copt. 1.70–72), to mention again but a few examples. But what kind of circulation did these kinds of texts have in Egypt? A partial answer may come from O.EdfouIFAo 11 (in Greek and Coptic) and from P.Mon.Epiph. 2.615 (in Greek), both witnesses of certain provenance and from monastic settlements.

It is well known how widespread the re-use of the pharaonic monuments of Western Thebes was in Late Antiquity:³² while anchorites and small mon-

(P.Lond. 2.481; C.Gloss.Biling. 1.13); the curious Latin–Greek glossary (in which Greek is transliterated in Latin) containing terms related to hospitality and food, dated to the 7th cent. (P.Louvre Eg. inv. 2329; C.Gloss.Biling. 1.14).

³⁰ P.Berol. inv. 10582; C.Gloss.Biling. 1.15. Even examples of calligraphic exercises show that a copyist had to acquire familiarity both with Greek and Coptic glyphs. Fournet 2012.

³¹ Kramer 1983 and 2001.

³² Lecuyot, Thirard 2008: 137–144. See also Wipszycka 2009. For a geography of the Theban temples and tombs in dynastic period see Strudwick, Strudwick 1999. In the Monastery of Phoibammon, built on the remains of the funerary temple of the queen Hatshepsut, several school exercises and a painting with an alphabet and a hexameter verse, both in Greek – today disappeared – have been found. Bachatly 1965; Bachatly 1981; Godlewski 1986; Godlewski 1991: 780–781. For the most recent discoveries of monuments and texts in the Theban region, and in particular on the West Bank, see Gabra, Takla 2010 and Wilfong 1989: 89–147. For the discovery of some Coptic codices by Tomasz Górecki and his team in the

astic groups preferably found shelter in hypogeous tombs that could easily be adapted as cells or hermitages, more articulated urban settlements found lodging space in the abandoned temples. This is the case, for instance, of the village of Djeme, built inside the *temenos* of the mortuary temple of Ramses III.³³ The Monastery of Epiphanius, in particular, re-used the structures of the 11th-dynasty tomb of Daga (TT 103),³⁴ whose exploration was carried out from 1911 by a team of the Metropolitan Museum Egypt Expedition. It is in the area denominated “Lower East Buildings,” and in particular in “Cell A,” that the *ostrakon* from Epiphanius was found,³⁵ as part of a group of texts that Walter E. Crum defined “devotional extracts.” There is enough material to deduce that the learning of Greek had an important role in the cultural formation of Epiphanius’ monks. But, as we have already noted, this is in no way surprising in a bilingual society like that of late antique Egypt.³⁶ On the other hand, the literary works found in the monastery are also in both Greek and Coptic,³⁷ although the former is much less present. Interestingly enough, among the Coptic homiletic materials (nos. 50–83),³⁸ there were some texts that Crum described as “a series of maxims without apparent mutual connection” (no. 76).

The common wisdom and ethics represented by the *Menandri sententiae* were clearly perceived as appropriate for the formation of monks – at least for those of the monasteries of Epiphanius and of Bawit –, who, in copying, reading and maybe reciting these kinds of texts contributed to the formation of their spiritual perfection, not to mention their education. But it would be an error to circumscribe the area of diffusion of gnomic anthologies only to monasteries. Moreover, the *Menandri sententiae* are not the only example of classical wisdom literature preserved in Coptic, another stimulating case being represented by the *Sexti sententiae*.

necropolis of Sheikh Abd-el-Gourna, and more precisely in a Middle Kingdom tomb (“pit 1152”) reused as a cell see Górecki 2007. An example of Coptic documentation from a New Kingdom tomb, reused as hermitage, is the dossier of Frange: Boud’hors, Heurtel 2010.

³³ For the town of Djeme see cfr. Hölscher 1954. See also Crum 1912. Numerous are the Theban monasteries in which forms of school education are documented. Cf. Cribiore 2001: 24.

³⁴ Winlock, Crum 1926; Crum, Evelyn-White 1926.

³⁵ Winlock, Crum 1926: 41–44. The monastery was part of a wider Christian settlement, the general structure of which can be partially deduced thanks to a description contained in the will of Jacob to Eliah (Crum, Evelyn-White 1926, Part ii, Appendix iii). In Cell A more letters than in other rooms have been found. Part of these letters refers to book products. Cf. Crum, Evelyn-White 1926, Part ii, nos. 374, 382, 394, 395 (?), 555 (?). On Cell A see Bucking 2007.

³⁶ For Greek–Coptic bilingualism see Bucking 2012.

³⁷ Crum, Evelyn-White 2006 (Part ii).

³⁸ These are extracts from the works of Shenoute, fragments of episcopal letters, and incomplete homilies, mostly from Cell A.

4. The *Sexti sententiae*

Whatever the reason why the copyist of the Nag Hammadi Codex XII decided to include the *Sexti sententiae* (CC 0690)³⁹ in the manuscript, it is clear that they were perceived as appropriate for that context.

As is known, the *Sexti sententiae* are a collection of 451 maxims traditionally attributed to the philosopher Quintus Sextus.⁴⁰ They are transmitted in Latin – through the translation by Rufinus – in Syriac, in Armenian and in Arabic. A confirmation of their widespread popularity and consideration is given by Origen, who in his *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* states: “But Sextus says in the *Sentences*, a book referred to by many as trustworthy...,”⁴¹ while in the *Contra Celsum* he defines the gnostic anthology as a book “which even the multitude of Christians have read.”⁴²

The work does not present a consistent and well definable philosophical doctrine, but rather, like the *Menandri sententiae*, proposes pills of wisdom, which are arranged in small thematic units. It represents a “wisdom tradition formed over time which expanded as new verses were added.”⁴³ In this respect the *Sexti sententiae* are an “open work,” exactly like the *Menandri sententiae*.

The origin of this work has long been debated: if it is generally accepted that the collection was formed mainly in the 2nd cent. CE, in Greek, there is no consensus on the milieu responsible for its creation.⁴⁴ Chadwick’s thesis, however, appears still the most convincing: “a Christian compiler has edited, carefully revised and modified a previous pagan collection (or perhaps collections).”⁴⁵

Concerning the identity of Sextus, as in the case of Menander, he is probably just a name used to give more credibility and authority to the sentences, not certainly a credible author. The practice of associating anonymous wisdom material from the oral tradition with well-known figures was common in ancient literature.

The Nag Hammadi version of the *Sexti sententiae* is at the moment the only extant Coptic witness (but the Greek tradition is in its turn represented by only two manuscripts: Codex Patmiensis 263, 10th cent., and Codex Vaticanus Grae-

³⁹ Poirier, Painchaud 1983: 7–28; Wisse 1988.

⁴⁰ On the Greek tradition of the *Sexti sententiae* see Chadwick 1959; Wilken 1975: 143–168; Carlini 1985; Carlini 2004; Peverello 2013. On the Syriac tradition see Lagarde 1858: 1–31; Ryssel 1895; Ryssel 1896; Ryssel 1897; Bettolo 2004. See also de Paola 1937; Turner 1996. The fortune of the work is clearly demonstrated by the 16th-cent. edition by Ludwig Hillesheim: Hillesheim 1574.

⁴¹ Orig. *Comm. Matt.* 15.3 (PG 13:1257–1260).

⁴² Orig. *Cels.* 8.30 (PG 11:1560).

⁴³ Wilken 1975: 145.

⁴⁴ Domach 2013: 30.

⁴⁵ Chadwick 1959: 138

cus 742, 14th cent.). Only 10 pages out of the 49 originally destined to contain the work have survived, but they are enough to confirm that among the sayings there are eight unique variants that are peculiar to the Coptic tradition. We have therefore once again a demonstration of freedom, interpolation and originality in the Christian Egyptian milieu.

Like the *Menandri sententiae*, the *Sexti sententiae* must have been perceived as a compendium of basic moral and ethical *praxis*, since the ascetism, silence, and seclusion proposed therein were values held in common with the Nag Hammadi community.⁴⁶ Of great interest in this respect is saying 164b, – “[While it is] a skill [to speak], it is also [a] skill [to be silent]” – which closely recalls Menander’s sayings 258 and 455. But the *Sexti sententiae* also have another value: they attest to the fact that gnomic anthologies of classical origin did not circulate only in school circles – although, as we have seen, P.Copt. 1 and P.Copt. 2 cannot be considered school exercises *stricto sensu* – but found space also in book collections, whatever the nature of the Nag Hammadi library is.

5. The *Dicta philosophorum*

The literary dignity of these kinds of texts is testified to also by the third example that we will take into consideration here.

A fragmentary miscellaneous codex from the White Monastery of Shenoute (MONB.BE),⁴⁷ dated from the 10th–11th cent. and containing *excerpta*, preserves a text that Walter Till appropriately defined as *Dicta philosophorum*.⁴⁸ We include it in this analysis, despite the fact that it is later than the 6th cent., because it clearly makes use of older textual material.

MONB.BE is one of the less careful manuscripts from the Shenoute library. Its layout is characterised by one column, where the *excerpta* are introduced by

⁴⁶ Camplani 1997: 143. Another expression of “Christian Hellenism” is represented by the *The Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII). Cf. Peel, Zandee 1988. Recently Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott have re-proposed the hypothesis that the Nag Hammadi Codices are to be referred to a monastic community. Cf. Lundhaug, Jenott 2015.

⁴⁷ MONB.BE contains the following works: Horsiesi, *Logoi de Pascha*, *Life of Barthanouba*; *Dicta philosophorum aut dicta monachorum*; Carur, *Prophetiae*; Severus of Antioch (?), *excerptum*; Costantine of Siout, *excerptum*; Atanasius of Alexandria, *excerptum*; Demetrius of Antioch, *excerptum*; Archelaus of Neapolis, *excerptum*; Basil of Caesarea, *excerptum*; Rufus of Shotep, *excerptum* (from a catechesis on *Matthew*); prayer. The classification of the Coptic codices from the White Monastery is based on the researches of the *Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari*. See also Orlandi 1972 and 1984b. For the content of the codex see Lucchesi 2010.

⁴⁸ Till 1934–1937: II.165–175; Crum 1905: 97–98, no. 217 [*Or* 3581 A (45)]. The *Dicta philosophorum* are transmitted by some parchment fragments preserved in Vienna, Nationalbibliothek: K 943, K 944, K 945 and K 946.

extremely brief titles, very unusual for this period, all of which are located at the end of the work they refer to, a characteristic which is typical of much older manuscripts.⁴⁹

On the *recto* of a leaf now preserved in Vienna (Nationalbibliothek, K 944),⁵⁰ we find the final title of what is presented as a collection of philosophical sentences (CC 0844):

ΣΕΝ ΣΥΝΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΠΤΕ ΣΗΦΙΛΟΦΟΡΟΣ

Sayings of some philosophers.

The text starts with a series of six sentences attributed to Diogenes – preceded by a maxim of Anacharsis, (misspelt as Narchaosis, in the Coptic text) –, in some of which, although they were strongly manipulated, Serena Funghi was able to identify the original version of the sayings of the Cynic philosopher (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, K 944r.).⁵¹

A small *corpus* of anonymous sentences the sense of which is often obscure (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, K 944v.–K 946r.),⁵² all characterised by a similar *incipit* (“another philosopher said [...]”), and the so-called story of the three friends follow the sayings of Diogenes. The last section, very fragmentary, consists of an explanation of the subdivision of peoples and nations according to their origin in Noah’s sons.

What makes the *Dicta philosophorum* particularly interesting is clearly the place they come from: the shelves of one of the most important libraries and cultural centres of Coptic Egypt. Of no less importance, on the other hand, is the book form. They are transmitted by a codex, also containing *excerpta* of homilies. In this case, therefore, we are certainly dealing with a literary manuscript.

It could be objected, however, that this is the only evidence of gnostic anthologies coming from a sure “orthodox” literary context, and that it is therefore insufficient to demonstrate the fortune of this literary genre and its role in Coptic literature.

Some time ago, however, while working on a completely different topic – the perception of Judaism in Coptic literary tradition⁵³ – and re-reading for this purpose the *De passione* attributed to Evodius of Rome (CC 0149; BHO 0149),⁵⁴

⁴⁹ On this subject see Buzi 2011.

⁵⁰ For a detailed description of the section on Diogenes and for the value of the sentence attributed to Anacharsis, cf. Funghi 2004: 375–380, with a partial new edition of the *Dicta philosophorum* by Alberto Camplani. On the role of the *sententiae* of Diogenes in the school education, cf. Cribiore 1996b: 46. For the Arabic tradition of the sayings of Diogenes see Gutas 1993 and Overwien 2005.

⁵¹ Funghi 2004.

⁵² The fragment of the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna K 945 is almost unreadable.

⁵³ Buzi 2014.

⁵⁴ For the edition of the *De passione*, see Rossi 1891 and Chapman 1991.

I made what I consider to be an interesting discovery. In the first part of the homily, Evodius, or the fictitious author of the homily, in denigrating the “ungrateful attitude” of the Hebrews towards God, makes use of two of the maxims contained in the White Monastery codex:

One of the wise men said: “It is better to do good for a dog and a lion than to spoil an ungrateful man. As for the dog, if they (*sic*) are genuine in keeping the friendship of the one who nourishes them, the ignorant one, on his part, not only fails to keep friendship, but you find that you do good for him while he is seeking to rob your house and place you in the hands of your enemies,”

and also

Another of the wise men also said: “Just as teeth of human being are gnashing because of sour grapes, so tongue of human being affects his friend when he is not with him and dries up in his throat.”

Then the narration moves again to the facts of the passion of Jesus Christ.

This is a clear demonstration, I think, that such material, probably learned during a high stage of educational training, represented a cultural fund that an author of the 6th–7th cent. – the period to which probably the work in question should be ascribed – was still considered appropriate to use.

Codices such as MONB.BE were anthologies or collections of selected texts, assembled through the copying of brief passages, probably to be read on specific occasions of the liturgical calendar, as is suggested by the frequent mention of the date in the final titles. The presence of the *Dicta philosophorum* shows that, on occasion, even material of classical origin, but by then completely Christianised, could be used for the same purpose and to contribute to the rhetoric of the narrative thread of a new work.

Despite the undeniable classical origin of these kinds of gnomic collections, very likely, at least from the end of the 5th cent., they were not perceived any longer as “pagan,” but rather as another expression of the appreciated genre of the *apophthegmata*: edifying sayings and precepts, whose function was essentially that of providing an ethical and behavioral model to monastic, but also non-monastic, communities.⁵⁵ The contiguity of the literary genres of *chreiai*, sayings and *apophthegmata* has already been analysed convincingly by Teresa Morgan and Kathleen McVey, while the relationship between *apophthegmata* (the *Apophthegmata patrum*, in particular) and *gnomai* has been explored, still very recently, by Lillian Larsen.⁵⁶ Moreover, Claudia Rapp has observed that *gnomai* and sayings were occasionally used as material to construct hagio-

⁵⁵ On the contiguity of the literary genres of *chreiai* and *apophthegmata* cf. Morgan 1988; McVey 1998. On the *Apophthegmata patrum* and their literary and moral role see Larsen 2001; Larsen 2006; Larsen 2007; Larsen 2008; Larsen 2013a; Larsen 2013b.

⁵⁶ See Larsen 2017; this paper was originally entitled “‘Know Thyself’: Nag Hammadi Gnostic Sentences in Conversation.”

graphic works, such as the *Life of John Colobus*, showing the “fluidity between *vitae* and *apophthegmata*.”⁵⁷ She has also stressed that in the preface to the alphabetical collection of the *Apophthegmata patrum* “the desert fathers are cast as teachers (*didaskaloi*), automatically transforming their audience into disciples.”

It is very likely, therefore, that the *Menandri sententiae*, the *Sexti sententiae* and the *Dicta philosophorum* were for Christian Egypt, on the one hand, one of the expressions of a wisdom literature comparable also to the *apophthegmata*, useful in forming the virtuous man who does nothing unworthy of God,⁵⁸ and, on the other, the endurance of scholarly models in use for centuries, if it is true that

Christian community of late antiquity never developed or even contemplated an alternative Christian educational system, whether at the primary or secondary level

as Cameron observes.⁵⁹

The emphasis assigned to the importance of learning – “learn to write and you will earn a good perspective;” “by what you have learnt of them you will preserve for yourself their intelligence” (P.Copt. 1.61–64), etc. – does not necessarily implicate an organised monastic environment, where however, as is well known, illiteracy was certainly scarcely tolerated.⁶⁰ The value of the learning is not an exclusive prerogative of more or less organised and institutionalised communities: the wooden tablet, found in Antinoupolis, on which the students of Flavius Kollouthos arduously strove to copy the maxim “letters

⁵⁷ Rapp 2010.

⁵⁸ A good example in this respect is offered by P.PalauRib. inv. 225v. (4th–5th cent.) edited by Carlini 1985: 10–12.

⁵⁹ Cameron 2007: 29. New researches, however, are demonstrating that the situation was probably more veiled. The forthcoming proceedings of the conference “Pratiche didattiche tra centro e periferia nel Mediterraneo tardoantico” (Rome, 13–15 May 2015, edited by G. Agosti and D. Bianconi) will certainly shed more light on these aspects. See also Morgan 1988: 123–124: “What pupils learnt was a collection of ideas and instructions whose literary derivation guaranteed their greekness and cultural authority, while they were diverse enough and imprecise enough in content to apply to almost any social situation [...]. All the same *gnomai* appear in monasteries in the fifth and sixth centuries as appeared in Greek and Graeco-Roman villages in the pre-Christian era. *Gnomai* are a more Greek than a Roman phenomenon.”

⁶⁰ It is interesting to notice how the aspect of the learning of *grammata* is much less present in the Syriac “Menander,” being documented only by one saying (“And, if your son will come out from his childhood humble and wise, teach him the letters. Because it is good to teach him the letters [...]). More developed, on the other hand, with three occurrences is the theme of silence (“Nothing is more beautiful than silence,” “it is beautiful being always silent,” “even a foolish, when is silent, is believed a wise person”). I am grateful to Paolo Bettio for having let me consult his unpublished translation of the Syriac Menandrian sentences.

are the best beginning of knowledge” – a saying which by the way sounds very similar to *Menandri Sententia* “the good beginning of life are the letters”) – demonstrates the widespread fortune of this kind of text.⁶¹

Whatever the spread of this successful textual production – a matter which still needs to be fully explored – we have the impression that its ethical value and educational function took precedence over any interest in a true and thorough comprehension of the text, and above all in its original authors. On the contrary, Coptic Egypt seems not to have been at all concerned with transmitting and preserving the classical “pagan” textual heritage through copying and quoting this kind of literature.⁶²

To conclude, the classical gnomic anthologies and pagan wisdom literature documented in Coptic go a long way back. Along karstic paths they travelled from milieu to milieu, from context to context, from faith to faith, but, thanks to their format as manuals of universal ethics, they acquired a new life, being used as chrestomathies to improve reading and writing skills, but also as anthologies of moral teachings that, both in theme and structure, drew upon the classic tradition.

“Gnomic sentences, sayings and stories were routinely drafted into the service of scribal, grammatical and rethorical training.”⁶³ They were easily memorised, recited and re-used, even as a literary work such as the *De passione* of Evodius of Rome demonstrates.

Personally, I would not be surprised to discover other examples of *gnomai* inserted in narrative threads of other Coptic literary works. In my opinion, research in this direction would be very stimulating.

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⁶¹ Cribiore 1996b: n. 160.

⁶² “Habits of rather pedantic attention to specific points in a text at the expense of context, and of writing compositions centred on literary texts with few personal contributions and little creativity, are as pronounced in this as in previous periods.” Cribiore 2007a: 49.

⁶³ Larsen 2013a: 2.

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Part Two
Ideological Debates as Images of Cultural
and Religious Cohabitations

“Jewish,” “Christian” and “Gnostic” Groups in Alexandria during the 2nd Cent. Between Approval and Expulsion

Bernard Pouderon

1. Introduction

The topic I was assigned is not amongst the easiest ones: on the one hand, it is commonly acknowledged that the Jewish community in Alexandria was almost extinguished during the 2nd cent.; on the other hand, it is widely agreed that everything that concerns the first Christian community of the city is surrounded by legend, that is to say, nothing more than a later reconstruction without any historical foundations; it is not a chance that many scholars acknowledge that the history of early Christianity in Alexandria belongs to “dark” times.¹ While it is difficult to debate about these two communities separately, it is all the more complex to establish their mutual relationships or the ones they had with those marginal Christians today labelled as “Gnostics” and with those Greeks who shared the same belief in the uniqueness of God.

However, starting from what it is possible to know about the mutual relationships between these communities, in this article I will try to identify both their perceptions of each other and their individual features.

2. The various groups

2.1. Being “Jewish” in Alexandria after 115 CE

What did it mean to be Jewish in Alexandria during the 2nd cent.? According to the various literary sources, the Jewish community, very influent during the 1st cent., had almost disappeared throughout the 2nd cent. after the disastrous Jewish riot in Egypt and Cyrenaica. Appian, Cassius Dio and Eusebius’ accounts agree with those in TJ:

In our days, under the Roman emperor Trajan, who exterminated the *genos* of Egyptian Jews (ἐξολλύντα τὸ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Ἰουδαίων γένος), it (the sanctuary of Nemesis in Alexandria) was demolished by Jews due to war needs (App. *Bell. civ.* 2.13.90).

¹ For instance, see Le Boulluec 2000.

During this time, the Jews of Cyrenaica, guided by Andreas, massacred Romans and Greeks [...] for a total of two hundred and twenty thousand (τὰς πάσας δύο καὶ εἴκοσι μυριάδας). They committed similar crimes in Egypt and in Cyprus, guided by a certain Artemion; also in these places, two hundred and forty thousand men died (μυριάδες τέσσαρες καὶ εἴκοσι) [...]. Among others who subdued the Jews was Lusius (ἄλλοι τε καὶ Λούσιος [...] κατεστρέψατο), who was sent by Trajan (Cassius Dio, *Historiae Romanae*, 68.32 [*Epitome* by John Xiphilinus]).

Around the eighteenth year of the emperor (Trajan, around 115), another Jew riot took place during which a great number of them died (πᾶμπολυ πλῆθος). Actually, both in Alexandria and in the rest of Egypt (and in Cyrene as well), they rebelled against the Greeks who were living with them. The rebellion grew notoriously and the following year (around 116), they provoked a war of vast proportions during the time when Lupus was governor of Egypt. Certainly, during the first engagements, the Jews prevailed over the Greeks; these ran away to Alexandria, looked for the Jews living in the city and killed them (ἀπέκτειναν). Left without the help they were expecting, the Jews of Cyrene continued to ransack Egypt under Lucuas' guide. The emperor sent Marcius Turbo against them with infantry, ships and cavalry. With great effort, he held the war against them in many occasions and for a very long time. He killed thousands of Jews, not only those of Cyrene but also those of Egypt who had rebelled with Lucuas, their king." (Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 4.2.2–3).

In three biblical passages, Israel is warned about not coming back to Egypt. [...] However, they came back three times and for three times they had to surrender. [...] during Trajan's time [...]. He (Trajan? Marcius Turbo?) thought he could get there in ten days and, instead, it only took him five. When he arrived, he found them (the Jews) involved in a comment of this verse: the Lord will raise up a distant nation (*Deut.* 28.49). He asked them: What are you doing? He said: Is it about me, about the fact that I should have arrived in ten days and it only took me five? So, he sent his legions against them and massacred them [...] Trajan said to the Jew women: If you surrender to my legions, I will not kill you. They answered: What you did to the stronger ones, you shall do to the weaker ones. So, he blended their blood to their husbands' and there was enough blood up to Cyprus. In this moment, all glory was lost for Israel and it shall find again its own place only when the son of David shall come again (that is, the Messiah) (TJ, *Sukkah*, 5.1.55b [Schwabb 6.2]).

Despite the diversity of their origin (Jewish, Christian or pagan,) their affinity or distance from historical facts, these different tales are contestable since each of their authors was interested in worsening the misfortune that struck the Jewish community. The most explicit among them, Eusebius, evidently overlaps the disaster of 132–135 (which saw the end of the Jewish population in Jerusalem) with the one which took place in 115–117 CE.

The papyrological and epigraphic documentation does not offer contrastive elements. However, it is much more difficult to interpret it than the literary sources. This documentation similarly shows a decrease or a weakening of the different Jewish communities in Egypt. Let us examine some instances from the work of Joseph Méléze-Modrzejewski, one of the major experts in this topic. The first instance concerns the collection of the Jewish Tax (*fiscus Iudaicus*) in the city of Apollinopolis Magna (Edfou, near Assuan, in the Northern Egypt).

According to Méléze's study,² after 116, that is, after the end of the riots and of their repression, only one single *ostrakon* witnesses the payment of the Jewish Tax whereas during the previous period many more proofs of the payment existed: therefore, the population submitted to the payment of this tax considerably decreased. Similarly in the quarter of Karanis, which counted around a thousand adult men, a fiscal list dated back to the ninth year of Antoninus (around 145/146 or 168/169 depending on whether we refer to Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus) mentions a single deposit of the Jewish Tax. This seems very little for a region such as Fayyum, where the existence of numerous Jewish communities is attested.³ Other sources also attest to the confiscation of Jewish goods – e.g., see P.Oxy. 3.500 (CPJ 2.48) which mentions the Jews as "deprived" (ἀφαιρημένοι).⁴ Joseph Méléze argues that "the losses suffered by the rebels actually represent the totality of goods possessed by the Jews of Egypt."⁵

However, it seems to be certain that there were some survivors as well as some returned back after the end of the riots. Let us examine two instances.

The first instance is to be found in the so-called "Acts of the pagan martyrs." The *Acta Pauli et Antonini* mentions two Greeks of Alexandria, Paulus and Antoninus, judged beside Hadrian (*cognitio extra ordinem*) for episodes of violence. They attest to the presence of survivors from the massacres as well as a new conflict with the Greeks after the liberation of prisoners that were either ill-treated or molested.⁶ Musurillo dates the event between 117 and 120, shortly after the end of the riot. Therefore, there must have been enough Jews in Alexandria, as it is suggested by the fact that some of them appeared in a trial. The papyrus also attests to the transfer of Jews who had survived the massacres only to be scattered into different areas or to isolate them in a ghetto, thus reconstructing a germ of a new community.⁷

The second instance is consecutive but extremely significant. Actually, in his works Origen mentions, more than once, a Jew that had been his master.⁸

² Méléze-Modrzejewski 1997: 293–294 (according to CPJ 2.229); Mimouni 2012: 836.

³ Méléze-Modrzejewski 1997: 295.

⁴ Méléze-Modrzejewski 1997: 296–297.

⁵ Méléze-Modrzejewski 1997: 298.

⁶ See Musurillo 1954: 49–59 and 179–193 (P.Lond. inv. 1; P.Louvre 2376 bis): 50.2.8–12: "They (the Greeks) took them from prison and [...] molested them." – Caesar [Hadrian]: 'I have been informed about these events [...]; we must not persecute all Alexandrian people but only the authors of these brutalities'."

⁷ Musurillo 1954: 52 (P.Louvre 6.8–17): "Antoninus [a Greek of Alexandria]: 'Caesar, for your fortune I am speaking without lying, as a person that has little time to live: when such misfortune was affecting us, several letters were sent to you to inform you that he [the prefect] ordered the transfer of unholy Jews in places where they could attack us without any difficulty (οὗ οὐ παραβόλως ἔσχον ἀναπίπτειν) [or: where they could take us by surprise] and fight our propitiously named city [...]'."

⁸ *Princ.* 1.3.4 ("a Jewish master"); *Sel. Ezech.* 9.2 = PG 13:800 C ("one of the Jewish

Origen obviously met this “Jew” of Palestine in Alexandria, and as such, according to P. Nautin’s definition, makes him a “migrant.”⁹ Therefore, after the second Jewish war between 150 and 200, there is a migration from Palestine towards Egypt that had become once again a welcoming. In the same way as Simon C. Mimouni does, we can conclude that

this riot and its following repression did not provoke the total disappearance of numerous (Egyptian, Cyprian) Jewish communities but it only caused their weakening.¹⁰

2.2. Being “Christian” in Alexandria during the 2nd cent. CE

The documentation concerning the first Christian church in Alexandria is very scarce and it mostly depends upon later documentation. Our best source, Eusebius, only mentions Mark’s evangelic mission and provides a list of “bishops” among whom only the first one bears a Jewish-sounding name: Anianus (*Hist. eccl.* 2.24; 3.14: Nero’s eighth year); Avilius (3.14.21: Domitian’s fourth year); Cerdon (3.21: Trajan’s first year); Primus (4.1.4: Trajan’s twelfth year); Justus (4.4: Hadrian’s third); Eumenes (4.5.5; 11.6: Hadrian’s twelfth year); Marcus (4.11.6: thirteen years later); Celadion (4.11.6; 4.19: ten years later); Agrippinus (4.19; 5.9: Marcus Aurelius’s eighth year). Yet, the precision of this list is in contrast with the silence on the life of this community, thus creating doubts on its exactness.¹¹

Does this mean that there were no Christians in Alexandria at the beginning of the 2nd cent.? It is not very likely: not only the mission by the Apostle Mark¹² or the list of “bishops” made by Eusebius, but also the mentioning of Apollos (a Jewish Alexandrine who was “instructed in the way of the Lord” before his arrival in Ephesus) in the *Acts of the Apostles*¹³ shows that the Christian mission began earlier. Is this a single instance? Several official and papyrological documents seem to prove the contrary:

- if authentic, Hadrian’s letter to consul Servianus (around 134) preserved in the *Historia Augusta* (*Firmus, Saturninus, Proculus et Bonosus*, 8.1 = SHA 3:398–401) confirms both of a Jewish presence (“not the head of a synagogue, nor a Samaritan, a Christian priest, an astrologist, a haruspex or healer”) and a

ones”); *Hom. Jer.* 20.2.130 (“a Jewish tradition that got to our days through a man who had run away because of his faith in Christ and because he had abandoned the Law [...]”).

⁹ Nautin 1977: 347 “this Palestinian Jew converted to Christianity and migrated to Alexandria” (English translation is mine).

¹⁰ Mimouni 2012: 836.

¹¹ For instance, see Mimouni, Maraval 2006.

¹² According to Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 2.16.1 (around 45 CE according to the *Chronicon*, 179 Helm), Paul would have refused to preach there since he only wanted to do it in virgin territories: *Rom.* 15.20 (certainly during winter 57/58: “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known”). See Krause 1981.

¹³ *Acts* 18.24–28 (activity in Ephesus); see also *1 Cor.* 1.12; 3.4–11, 22 (in Corinth), *Titus* 3.13 (same mission).

very syncretic Christian presence (“the followers of Serapis are called Christians and the bishops of Christ are Serapis’ followers too”);

- the most ancient papyrological documents concerning the Gospels, the Papyrus G. John Rylands 457 (P52), the origin of which could be Oxyrhynchus or Fayyum (dated before 125), attests to the circulation of John’s Gospel in Egypt since the beginning of the 2nd cent.;
- several biblical papyri attest to a Christian presence in Egypt during the 2nd cent.: for instance, C.H. Roberts enumerates eight of them dated back to the 2nd cent. as opposed to forty papyri during the 3rd cent. when Alexandrian Christianity was largely spread, and sixty eight during the 4th cent., when Christianity had already triumphed.¹⁴

We could think that these first disciples of Christ were probably Jewish as Apollos was, and that their ethnic identity allowed them to mingle with the Jewish population in Alexandria. This caused their disappearance from the sources concerning the Jewish riots in 115–117.

After all, we are aware that two “apocryphal” gospels used to circulate in Egypt during the 2nd cent:

- the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, known through Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Pseudo-Hippolytus and Epiphanius;¹⁵
- the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the original (Jewish or Aramaic) text of which was certainly translated in Alexandria, as the quotations made by Clement and Origen clearly attest.¹⁶

To these texts, we could add another very debated and significant one. In the Greek version of the Pseudo-Clementine *Homiliae*, during his travel from Rome to Caesarea in Palestine, the young Clement stops in Alexandria where he meets Barnabas the Apostle who preaches for him.¹⁷ Since no source attests to a mission by Barnabas in Alexandria, we could interpret the presence of this character as a means to confirm the presence of Christians in the huge Egyptian city (these events probably took place shortly before Peter’s mission in Syro-Phenicia, between 35 and 45 according to the general dating), and to stress its Jewish-Christian anchorage.

Contrary to the Christians of Greek origin, who probably kept themselves away from the riots and were spared from reprisals, these Christians of Jewish

¹⁴ According to Roberts 1949: 157.

¹⁵ See Nicklas 2013: 394–395.

¹⁶ See Mimouni 2013.

¹⁷ *Ps.-Clem.* 1.9–14 (*Homiliae*). In the Latin *Recognitiones*, Clement meets Barnabas in Rome, he does not stop in Alexandria. About the major authority of the *Homiliae*’ account compared to the *Recognitiones*’ and about the antiquity of the former (end of the 2nd cent., beginning of the 3rd cent.), see Pouderon 2012: 706–708. However, it has to be noticed that Barnabas was probably Mark’s cousin (*Col.* 4.10); hence, an Alexandrian text made the two cousins “forerunners” as for the introduction of Christianity in southern Egypt. This point of view has been shared by Mimouni 2012: 706–708.

origin had probably to undergo the same destiny of their peers. In fact, it seems to be very unlikely that there were no Greeks amongst the newly-converted, even though modern scholars would define these Gentile Christians as “Jewish-Christians,” both for their beliefs and their customs. Whatever their number was, they did not seem to stand for Jews or to be considered Jews themselves because in this case Eusebius would have referred to them as “martyrs” – the conflict concerned ethnicity not religion.

Actually, if we exclude the uncertain “bishops” mentioned by Eusebius, the first orthodox Christians whose presence is certain in Alexandria have been Clement of Alexandria’s masters. We will here leave out the figure of Athenagoras whose presence in Egypt has been widely discussed.¹⁸ One of the “saint men” who educated Clement came from Egypt (ἀπ’ Αἰγύπτου: *Strom.* 1.11.2). The context seems to suggest that Clement had met him in Magna Graecia but this information is not certain as he could have met him in Alexandria.¹⁹ However, the stay in Egypt of this master took place much later than the riot of 115–117. Since during Clement’s education (between 165 and 175), half a century had already gone by. It is then unlikely that Clement defined as an Egyptian someone who had left Egypt fifty years before. Hence, he must be either someone who survived the massacres or a newcomer in Egypt.

Another example is that of Pantaenus. We do not know whether he came from Athens (as Philip of Side argues), from Sicily (as in a metaphor by Clement which defines him as “a bee of Sicily”) or whether he was a native of Alexandria. According to the little information that Clement gives us, he was a refined connoisseur of the Bible, both the Jewish and the Christian versions. It is not unreasonable to think that he was a Jewish-Christian, either he had Jewish origins or he had educated by Jewish-Christians.

To this list of Christians in Alexandria mentioned in the sources, we could possibly add the converted matron whose trials are told by Justin in his *2 Apologia*.²⁰ As a rich Roman woman, in all probability she had to stay both in Rome and in Egypt where her libertine husband would have taken shelter to conduct his immoral life smoothly. However, her master has a very diffused name in Egypt, that of Ptolemaeus. Yet, Ptolemaeus had been sentenced by

¹⁸ It is stated by a Byzantine historian of the 5th cent. CE, Philip of Side. See Pouderon 1997: 1–70.

¹⁹ Everything depends on how the very ambiguous phrase is constructed and on the way prepositions are interpreted: τούτων ὁ μὲν ἐπὶ τῆς Ἑλλάδος, ὁ Ἰωνικός, οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑλλάδος (τῆς κοίλης θάλασσης ἀπὸ τῶν Συρίας ἦν, ὁ δὲ ἀπ’ Αἰγύπτου), ἄλλοι δὲ ἀνὰ τὴν ἀνατολήν· καὶ ταύτης ὁ μὲν τῶν Ἀσσυρίων, ὁ δὲ ἐν Παλαιστίνῃ Ἑβραῖος ἀνέκαθεν· “one of the two in Greece, the Ionian, the others in Magna Graecia, one of the two in Coele-Syria, the other in Egypt; others in the West; and, for this [region of the Empire], one in Assyria, the other, with Jewish origins, in Palestine.”

²⁰ Just. *2 Apol.* 2.

prefect Urbicus in Rome and not in Alexandria.²¹ It is then very difficult to describe the itinerary of both of them.

As we have seen, our information is very limited. It is probably the reason why not only Eusebius entirely invented a list of bishops starting from the names transmitted by the tradition, but he also mistook a community of *therapeutae* based upon the shores of lake Maryut (honoured by Philo of Alexandria with a dedicated work²²) for a Christian community founded by the apostle Mark.²³

2.3. Being "Gnostic" in Alexandria during the 2nd cent.

What about the ones that are nowadays defined as "Gnostics"? About these, we have the most detailed documentation thanks to the work of heresiologists and the documents found in Nag Hammadi.

The first remark to be done concerns the ethnic and cultural origin of the Egyptian "Gnostics." If we consider the names of the different aeonic elements that appear in their myths concerning genesis and fall, we have to admit that they are imbued with Jewish culture. The demotion of the God of the Old Testament to the rank of a secondary divinity typical of their theological systems is not a rebuttal of this theory, on the contrary, it is a certain clue to their affinity with Jewish culture: someone is to be refused only if he gets close to oneself.

On the basis of our sources, here is the list of the main Gnostic masters who preached or were educated in one of the Greek cities of Egypt.

- The most famous of them, Valentinus, according to Epiphanius,²⁴ was a native of Paralia in Lower Egypt, had his school in Alexandria, and went through Cyprus before leaving to Rome. In Rome his teaching was judged incompatible with that of the apostles. Eusebius dates his conviction in the year 143.²⁵ The fact that an Egyptian branch of Valentinianism²⁶ was attested in the works of Nag Hammadi proves that Valentinus' teaching in Alexandria was already crossing the limits of the "righteous faith."
- According to Irenaeus,²⁷ Basilides also taught in Alexandria, independently

²¹ Just. 2 *Apol.* 2.12.

²² The *De vita contemplativa*.

²³ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 2.17.2: "when [Philo] describes the life of our ascetics (τὸν βίον τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀσκητῶν) [...]."

²⁴ Epiph. *Pan.* 31. See Thomassen 2006: 417–422, which situates Valentinus' activity in Rome, between 136 and 160.

²⁵ Eus. *Chron. ad annum* 143 (202 Helm).

²⁶ We are not evaluating on a doctrinal basis the distinction between an "Eastern" and a "Western" branch of Valentinianism made by Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.35.5–6, that focuses on the nature of the body of Jesus.

²⁷ Iren. *Haer.* 1.24.1; Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 4.7.3. Thomassen 2006 does not list him among the Valentinians.

- from Valentinus; influenced by Valentinus and his disciple Secundus,²⁸ his son Isidore continued his teaching.
- The names of Valentinus’ direct or indirect disciples who studied or lived in Egypt are uncertain; among them, we can name Secundus,²⁹ Epiphanius the Gnostic³⁰ and Isidore, Basilides’ son.³¹
 - Both being Valentinus’ disciples, after having probably been educated in Alexandria, Ptolemaeus and Heracleon left to go to teach in Rome around 155.³² Understanding whether Ptolemaeus the Gnostic is to be identified with the master of the Roman matron executed in Rome around 155 and whether the matron in question is to be identified with Flora (the recipient of the *Epistula ad Floram*) is not unproblematic, even though it is very doubtful.
 - Exclusively known through some extracts from Clement of Alexandria’s work,³³ Theodotus the Gnostic belonged to Valentinus’ school and this probably meant he was in Egypt around the middle of the 2nd cent.

²⁸ According to Epiph. *Anc.* 13.3; *Pan.* 2.22 (32.1), and *passim*: “the Secundians with whom Epiphanius and Isidore are associated [...]”

²⁹ About Secundus, see Iren. *Haer.* 1.11.2; Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.38; Epiph. *Pan.* 32 (about the Secundians: “Secundus, who was among them” concerning the masters who originated from Valentinus’ preaching). See Thomassen 2006: 497–498.

³⁰ Epiphanius the Gnostic is a mysterious character. Thomassen 2006 does not include him among the Valentinians. However, see Epiph. *Pan.* 32 (Epiphanius and Isidore, both associated with the Secundians); Clem. *Strom.* 3.2.5.2 (“Epiphanius is Carpocrates’ son and his mother is Alexandrian – if the person in question is the same”).

³¹ Isidore has been known through the work of Clem. *Strom.* 2.20.113.3 and *passim* (“Basilides’ son of Isidore”). Epiphanius includes him among Valentinus’ disciples (in a wider sense): *Pan.* 32 (tit.), “against Secundians to which Epiphanius and Isidore are associated,” and 32.1.3, “these masters descending from Valentin.” But nothing proves that Isidore’s activity was carried out in Egypt except for his name. Thomassen 2006 does not include Isidore among Valentinians.

³² About Ptolemaeus, see Iren. *Haer.* pr. 2 (“the doctrine of those who belong to Ptolemaeus’ circle who is the best of Valentinus’ school”); Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.29.1 (“Valentinus, Heracleon, Ptolemaeus and the rest of their school”); 6.35.6 (“the Italic school to which Heracleon and Ptolemaeus belong”); Epiph. *Pan.* 33.1.1 (“Ptolemaeus succeeds Secundus, and the man named Epiphanius who got the cue for his own opinion by barter from Isidore”). Ptolemaeus’ Egyptian origin are not certain even though they could be deduced both from his name and from his link with Secundus. Thomassen 2006: 494–495 does not mention Egypt in his work and refuses to identify Ptolemaeus the Gnostic with the martyr mentioned by Justin. About Heracleon see Iren. *Haer.* 2.4.1, (associated with Ptolemaeus), Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.29 (associated with Valentinus and Ptolemaeus) and 35 (“the Italic school to which Heracleon and Ptolemaeus are associated”). Heracleon’s Egyptian origin could be deduced from Clement’s mention (*Strom.* 4.9.71.1–72.4), while quoting a passage written by the one that he considers as “the most eminent personality belonging to Valentinus’ school,” and Origen’s mention (*Comm. Jo.* 2.14.100, “Valentinus’ well-known disciple, Ptolemaeus,” and *passim*), that provide further information about him. See Thomassen 2006: 495–496.

³³ The *Excerpta ex Theodoto*. See Thomassen 2006: 503.

- Carpocrates is known through Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Hippolytus and Epiphanius. The latter considers him to be Epiphanius the Gnostic’s father and associates him with the Valentinus’ Alexandrian school.³⁴ Actually, his doctrine is closer to the Ebionites than to “Gnostics;” the numerous mentions (nine exactly) made by Clement of Alexandria reinforce the thesis of his presence in Egypt.
- Cerinthus, whom Irenaeus believes to be born in Asia, is included in the Egyptian school by Pseudo-Hippolytus (<καὶ> αὐτὸς Αἰγυπτίων παιδεία ἄσκηθεὶς) although he taught in Asia and in Galatia – without any doubts, Irenaeus intends to say that he shared the doctrines developed by Valentinus and his disciples without having stayed in Egypt.³⁵
- Paul, the master of the matron who protected Origen, is certainly a Gnostic,³⁶ and his teaching should be situated between the end of the 2nd cent. and the beginning of the 3rd cent.

Thomassen (2006) mentions other Gnostics that are somehow linked to Valentinus’ school, but he gives no evidence of their location in an Egyptian context.

- A certain Alexander is mentioned by Tertullian, but the fact that the Carthaginian is the only one to mention him should situate him in the western scene.³⁷
- Mark the Magician, one of the main targets of Irenaeus, is placed by this heresiologist in Asia Minor.³⁸
- Eusebius makes us aware that Florinus has been attacked by Irenaeus in one of his works, but the historian places his actions in Rome without any doubt.³⁹
- A certain Cassian is named among Valentinians by Theodoret,⁴⁰ yet it is not sure whether he should be identified with one Julius Cassian that Clement includes among the Valentinians – or with Tatian (the text is uncertain).⁴¹ The multiple references (five in total) that Clement makes of Cassian are linked to the fact that he uses the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.⁴²

³⁴ Iren. *Haer.* 1.25.1–3; Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.32; Epiph. *Pan.* 32.3–4 (“Epiphanius was Carpocrates’ son [...]”); Clem. *Strom.* 3.2.5 and *passim*. Thomassen 2006 does not mention him among the Valentinians.

³⁵ Iren. *Haer.* 1.26.1; Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 7.33; Epiph. *Pan.* 28; Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 2.28 (Dionysius of Alexandria mentions Cerinthus in one of his works). Thomassen 2006 does not mention him among the Valentinians.

³⁶ According to Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.2.14, who situates this protection shortly after Severus’ persecution (212), when Origen was not 18-years-old yet (Nautin 1977: 21).

³⁷ Tert. *Carn. Chr.* 16–17.

³⁸ Iren. *Haer.* 1.13.5.

³⁹ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 5.15; 5.20.

⁴⁰ Theodoret, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium*, 1.8.

⁴¹ Clem. *Strom.* 3.13.92.2.

⁴² Clem. *Strom.* 3.13.93.1.

- Theotimus only appears once in the *Adversus Valentinianos* written by Tertullian,⁴³ and no certain elements allow us to link him to Egypt.
- Axionicus is mentioned both by Pseudo-Hippolytus and by Tertullian, but it is especially the second one who situates him in Antioch.⁴⁴

Even though no elements prove that all of them have operated in Egypt, concerning the writings of the Nag Hammadi, scholars generally tend to classify them into two main tendencies, a Valentinian and a Sethian one. The Sethian tendency can hardly be linked with any of the Gnostic characters named above. Emphasising the main characteristics of this tendency, John Turner argues that instead of

being aware of the precise identity of their enemies, heresiologists often used atypical names to identify the Gnostic background from which these writings come from: “Ophites,” “Barbelo-Gnostics,” “Sethians,” “Arcontics” or “Gnostics.”⁴⁵

Special attention should be given to one of the writings from Nag Hammadi, the *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3) that many scholars ascribe to Valentinus on the basis of Irenaeus’ witness.⁴⁶

Whatever their precise link to Egypt and the city of Alexandria was, still many of these “Gnostics” certainly originated from a Jewish background and some of them can also be defined as “Jewish-Christians,” despite their refusal of the Mosaic law and the degradation of God. Concerning Carpocrates, this master follows an Adoptionist doctrine close to that of the Ebionites, according to which Jesus was born from the encounter between a woman and a man and was chosen for Justice receiving the Christ in himself at the moment of his baptism.⁴⁷

The amount of Gnostic masters’ names that can be linked to hellenophone Egypt (thus mainly to the Alexandrine Egypt) is surprising. In fact, it is significant to notice how the tradition had preserved their memory while the memory of orthodox masters before Pantaenus and Athenagoras has been lost. This phenomenon could be due to the fact that the Gnostics actually “invented” Christian schools by building them in the same way as philosophical schools, where only a catechistic teaching was carried out previously. Without a predominant institutionalised Church and without a solid clerical hierarchy, the

⁴³ Tert. *Val.* 4.3.

⁴⁴ Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 6.35 (“the Western school to which Axionicus and [B]ardesan belong”); Tert. *Val.* 4.3 (“Axionicus is the only one who actually preserves Valentinus’ memory”).

⁴⁵ Turner 2001. For a synthesis, see Mahé, Poirier 2007: xxxvi–lxiv.

⁴⁶ Iren. *Haer.* 3.11.9 (about Valentinus’ disciples): “they [named] *Gospel of Truth* a work recently composed by them [...]” See Mahé, Poirier 2007: 45.

⁴⁷ According to Iren. *Haer.* 1.25.1: “Jesus, born from John, similar to all other men, was superior to all [...]” parallel in Epiph. *Pan.* 27.2.2. Carpocrates’ linking to the Gnostic tendency can be found, among others, in Epiph. *Pan.* 27.1.1.

Gnostics filled the scene with their writings, teachings, and internal polemics. Thanks to the writings of heresiologists, and to the sands of the Egyptian deserts, their names have lasted for ages.

3. The relationships between the groups

3.1. “Jews” and “Christians”

As I have already stated above, the first Christian community in Alexandria should have been “Jewish-Christian” and it should have been formed both from Jews who converted from Judaism to Christianity and Greeks who came into contact with Christianity through Judaism or the Jewish-Christian community. The absence of Christians in Greek (Cassius Dio, Eusebius) and Christian (Eusebius goes back to Greek sources unknown to us, more probably to non-Christian source) historiographic sources about the Jewish riot is peculiar. We could think that this community had been considerably weakened by the war and that, when it had been restored, it did not consider itself as Jewish anymore.

It is hard to ascertain the perception that the Jews of Alexandria could have had toward Christians after 115 without any pertaining documentation available. However, we can certainly evaluate the different opinions about Judaism that emerge from Christian texts such as the *Kerygma Petrou*, *Barnabae epistulam* or *Ad Diognetum*. If we are uncertain about whether all these texts come from a Greek-Egyptian background, it is very likely that at least one of them comes from this same background. Generally speaking, such sources seem to show that there was an actual separation between Jews and Christians.

Known in quotations from Clement and Origen’s works, *Kerygma Petrou* was mainly circulating in Egypt. This is also attested by the use that Heracleon the Gnostic, who appears to had an Egyptian origin, makes of the text.⁴⁸ This text is to be dated shortly after the end of the riot (115–117), as well as before Aristides’ *Apologia* (124–125), and it is exactly from this text that the division of human kind into three species seems to stem (Greek, Jewish and Christian).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ According to Orig. *Comm. Jo.* 13.104, who includes him among the “heterodox” ones. See Thomassen 2006: 493, “The fact that writings by Heracleon were known in Alexandria, while western heresiologists offer non-precise information about Heracleon’s doctrines, may be significant. It suggests that followers – or perhaps more accurately, admirers of Heracleon were to be found in Alexandria in the time of Clement and Origen.” This means that Heracleon had more disciples when he was in Alexandria than after when he left to the West.

⁴⁹ Actually, Aristides (according to the Syrian version) adds a fourth γένος in his list, i.e. the “Barbarians,” recalled as the worshippers of elements: *Apol.* 2.2ff. [Syriac version]: “The Barbarians, the Greeks, the Jews and the Christians” (different from *Apol.* 2.2 [Greek version]: “the worshippers of the Gods, the Jews and Christians.” The *Kerygma Petrou* did not take into consideration this category which Aristides listed to start a new polemic strategy.

The editor in the *Corpus Christianorum* is inclined to maintain that the text has an Alexandrine origin.⁵⁰ Significantly, a section concerning zoolatry (then considered as typical of Egyptian religion) is included in the chapter about the Greeks.⁵¹

The Jewish religion is considered as belonging to another “kind” (γένος) of piety compared to the Greeks and Christians, even though in fr. 5 the author is not identifying the Christians as a third “race” different from the Jewish one.⁵² In fr. 4, the author considers the link between the old and the new Israel to be broken: the Jews are certain to know God but they ignore him and stoop to worshipping angels and stars.⁵³ This theological difference also assumes a polemical tone in writing such as the *Kerygma Petrou*, which could be considered as the first *adversus Iudaeos* writing in Christian literature.⁵⁴

The *Barnabae epistula* is much more harsh towards Judaism. If its author remains anonymous for us (was his name Barnabas or is it a pseudepigraphical fiction?), it seems to be almost certain that he was a Christian coming from a Jewish background as both his name and his appeal to Paul’s support would demonstrate. The location of the writing in Egypt or in Alexandria is frequently assumed, but it is far from being certain. It is especially based on the use of Alexandrine allegory⁵⁵ (which can be defined as spiritual) in addition to Syro-Palestinian typology.⁵⁶

The refusal of Jewish cults in the *Epistula* is based on the prophets’ tradition (as in Justin) and, partly upon the Old Testament texts. *Isaiah*, for instance, is quoted around thirty times in the *Epistula*⁵⁷ regarding the refusal of cruel sacrifices⁵⁸ and other external signs of piety (circumcision,⁵⁹ fasting,⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Cambe 1997: 7; Cambe 2003: 382–383.

⁵¹ Fr. 3 in Clem. *Strom.* 6.5.39.4–40.2.

⁵² *Kerygma Petrou*, fr. 5 (about the Christians as belonging to a third γένος).

⁵³ *Ker. Petr.* fr. 4 (about the Jews).

⁵⁴ The polemic against Judaism appears in six out of the ten fragments preserved: in fr. 1 (which implies that Christ-Logos is the new Law); in fr. 4 (“do not worship [God] in the same way as Jews”); in fr. 5 (“the new covenant, the third *genos*”); in fr. 6 (about the Jews’ conversion); in fr. 9 (“the torments that the Jews inflicted to [Christ]”); in fr. 10 (the Christians who speak in compliance with the Scriptures).

⁵⁵ Dietary restrictions are to be understood in a spiritual sense: the men who live in their own pleasure are pigs; thieves and bandits are crows, sparrows and kites; the Sabbath represents the third millennium, that of rest (*Barn.* 15); the actual temple is the heart of men (*Barn.* 16).

⁵⁶ For instance, *Barn.* 11–12 (the types of water and cross used).

⁵⁷ See the index in Wengst 2004.

⁵⁸ *Barn.* 2.

⁵⁹ *Barn.* 9.

⁶⁰ *Barn.* 3.

food provisions,⁶¹ respect of the Sabbath and other feasts based on astronomy⁶²) to the advantage of spiritual and moral purification. Moreover, in the *Epistula* there is a distinction between the two "people" (*Barn.* 13.1: λαός) and not only between the two kinds of cults. There is not only a difference in the interpretation of the same Law but also a distinction concerning the very essence of the two people.

This distinction is associated with a veritable appropriation of the covenant which is both the sign of an affiliation and a refusal:

and do not liken yourselves to certain persons who pile up sin upon sin, saying that our covenant remains to them also. Ours it is; but they lost it in this way for ever, when Moses had just received it.⁶³

This allusion to Moses' breaking the tablets of the Law (*Exod.* 32.15–24) allows us to make a distinction between a first Law and a first Covenant, coming from God himself, and second Law – maintained by the Jews –, which does not comply with the Covenant anymore. This means that Jews and their forefathers must be rejected out of any covenant with God – not that God's gift was denied, but only that it must be accepted and welcomed:

Yea verily, but as regards the covenant which He swear to the fathers to give it to the people let us see whether He hath actually given it. He hath given it, but they themselves were not found worthy to receive it by reason of their sins (*Barn.* 14.1).

Nevertheless, the notion of "legacy" that the anonymous author uses ("Now let us see whether this people [οὗτος ὁ λαός] or the first [ὁ πρῶτος] people hath the inheritance [κληρονόμος], and whether the covenant [ἡ διαθήκη] is for us or for them:" *Barn.* 13.1) is the sign of a kinship: the implicit image is that of brothers who compete for the same inheritance, that of a common ancestor, an inheritance that originates from Moses. The term πρῶτος, as applied to the Jewish people, shows a succession throughout time where the younger son takes the place of the first born.

The third writing which could have an Alexandrine origin is *Ad Diognetum*. Again, we cannot be certain that it has been composed in Alexandria even though it is commonly acknowledged by scholars. Its date is uncertain even though it can be connected to apologetic writings of the 2nd cent. Clearly the author is not Jewish since Diognetus, the interlocutor, implicitly blames him for not following Greek religious customs and this would not make sense for a Jew (*Diogn.* 1.2). Even though it seems impossible to identify the author precisely, it is evident that Diognetus does not belong to Judaism.

Going much further than the author of the *Kerygma Petrou*, the author of *Ad Diognetum* considers Christians as a new γένος, totally different from that

⁶¹ *Barn.* 10.

⁶² *Barn.* 2.5; 15.

⁶³ *Barn.* 4.6–7.

of the Jews – since the notion of “newness” (καινόν) seems to exclude that of kinship – while its interlocutor includes them in the same religious family of Judaism:

what God they trust in, and what form of religion they observe, so as all to look down upon the world itself, and despise death, while they neither esteem those to be gods that are reckoned such by the Greeks, nor hold to the superstition of the Jews; and what is the affection which they cherish among themselves; and why, in fine, this new kind of piety has only now entered into the world, and not long ago?⁶⁴

But the distinction that the anonymous author makes between Jews and Christians is very similar to the one made in the *Kerygma Petrou*: it is an evidence for its author that Jews acknowledge the existence of the one God, but he disapproves the “pagan” forms of their worship, which place them between the Christian truth and the mistakes of the Greeks:

And next, I imagine that you are most desirous of hearing something on this point, that the Christians do not observe the same forms of divine worship as do the Jews. The Jews, then, if they abstain from the kind of service above described, and deem it proper to worship one God as being Lord of all, [are right]; but if they offer Him worship in the way which we have described, they greatly err.⁶⁵

This means disapproving of the practice of cruel sacrifices as performed in Judaism since it is considered as a “pagan” practice. Yet the anonymous author goes even further, he condemns food restrictions, the respect of the Sabbath and the practice of circumcision by using almost offensive terms and exposing their “ridiculous nature,” their “impiety” and their “foolishness.”

But as to their scrupulosity concerning meats, and their superstition as respects the Sabbaths, and their boasting about circumcision, and their fancies about fasting and the new moons, which are utterly ridiculous and unworthy of notice – I do not think that you require to learn anything from me.⁶⁶

This absence of respect towards cultural practices that the tradition made venerable (which at least the allegory could have preserved) cannot have been shown by a “Jew” in the ethnic sense of the term, since he would have at least respected his ancestors’ traditions even without observing them. Therefore, the author must have had an Hellenised Christian background. Moreover, we can also add that the biblical argumentation (based upon the Hebrew Bible) is totally absent from the literary work, even though some parallels between some passages of the Bible and some of the expressions the author uses could be drawn. This writing was destined for both a well read and a pagan audience – weakening the range of its argumentation itself.

⁶⁴ *Diogn.* 1.1.

⁶⁵ *Diogn.* 3.2.

⁶⁶ *Diogn.* 4.1 (tainted text). The continuation of the text (4.2–5) uses the words ἀσεβές, χλεύης, ἄξιον, ἀπροσύνη.

Therefore, if we consider these three texts as an expression of early Alexandrine Christianity, it is possible to see an evolution of the Christian community throughout the 2nd cent. and what concerns its relationship with Judaism at that time. This group was initially entirely Jewish, then from the moment that the great riot of 115–117 breaks out, it became Jewish-Christian. The authors of *Kerygma Petrou* and *Barnabae epistula* stayed well aware of their earlier Jewish origins (through the notions of covenant and inheritance or the appeal to the patronage of the two "Jewish" apostles) but violently rejected them. Subsequently, it became Pagan-Christian, as shown by *Ad Diognetum*, which considers the Jewish piety from the outside, as a perfectly foreign and incomprehensible world.

3.2. "Christians" and "Gnostics"

What were the internal relationships inside the Christian movement? What was the link between the Christians of the Great Church and the Sectarians?

The heretics, who were called "Gnostics,"⁶⁷ appear in the literature only starting from the beginning of the 2nd cent. Our opinion – not yet demonstrable – is that they initially had a Jewish background and were the product of two disasters: the Alexandrine riot and the second Jewish war. Robert Grant⁶⁸ is certainly right when he links the concept of the degradation of the God of the Bible (one of the main characteristics of the Gnostic movement) to his loss of consideration and prestige in the eyes of some of the Jews.

Still, many of the Gnostic masters are connected to Alexandria after the riots of 115–117. The most famous of them is Valentinus. Born in Lower Egypt, he was educated in Alexandria where he preached and held his school before his departure to Rome. According to Epiphanius, his teaching had always been acceptable as long as he stayed in Egypt. However, this way of presenting Valentinus' shift towards heterodoxy is misleading: if it is true that there was an Eastern Valentinian school founded before his departure to Rome, his doctrine was already going beyond the limits of orthodoxy. Nag Hammadi's Valentinian works and the names of Secundus, Epiphanius the Gnostic, Isidore, Heracleon and Ptolemaeus (who were certainly Egyptian before leaving for Rome) belonged to this Egypt-based school.

Also, it is interesting to notice that the *Kerygma Petrou* was used by Heraclion the "Gnostic" who, according to Origen, quotes one of its passages – a precious proof of how Gnostic Christians not only used the Evangelical tradition and Paul's writings but also "other" writings.

⁶⁷ We are using this convenient expression to indicate the authors of the writings denounced by Irenaeus and by heresiologists since they professed a "gnosis," without arguing whether this designation was shared by the various masters who were involved. Hence, a consistent part of the Nag Hammadi writings will be generically placed under the aegis of Valentinus and his disciples.

⁶⁸ Grant 1966.

It is much now to quote the words of Heracleon that are taken from a book entitled “The Preaching of Peter” and to take a stand about those words. We would also have to examine that little book to see if it is genuine at all, or spurious or a mixture. Consequently, we intentionally put this off, noting only that Heracleon cites the following words as though they were Peter’s teaching: “We shall not worship as the Gentiles do, for they accept material things and serve wood and stones.”⁶⁹

We shall then hypothesise that the mid-century Alexandrine Christianity was rather tolerant or that there were not fixed “borders” within the community as yet. However, once the unacceptable features of the doctrine were identified, this harmony was broken. Irenaeus, whose work evidently concerns Western Valentinians but not Egyptian Valentinians, argues that these sectarians did not share the places of worship of the Great Church’s followers, if they even had a stable place of worship themselves; a more or less analogous critique seems to emerge also in Tertullian:

But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession, and assemble themselves together in any place whatsoever, [looking upon them] either as heretics of perverse minds, or as schismatics puffed up and self-pleasing, or again as hypocrites, acting thus for the sake of lucre and vainglory. For all these have fallen from the truth.⁷⁰

Hence it is [supposed] that schisms seldom happen among heretics, because, even when they exist, they are not obvious. Their very unity, however, is schism.⁷¹

This distinction is valid also for what concerns sacraments. Einar Thomassen wrote a long chapter about the liturgical practices performed by Valentinians according to the Nag Hammadi sources. These sectarians imitate or “make a parody” in some heresiologists’ opinion, of the Great Church’s custom from which they wanted to be separated. The Valentinians also perform baptism by way of immersion,⁷² as well as the unction;⁷³ they celebrate the Eucharist with bread, wine and oil;⁷⁴ they observe peculiar funeral rituals in compliance with their eschatological beliefs;⁷⁵ they dedicate themselves to a mysterious ritual in the bridal room,⁷⁶ totally extraneous to the Great Church.

⁶⁹ Orig. *Comm. Jo.* 13.104 = *Ker. Petr.* fr. 3b.

⁷⁰ Iren. *Haer.* 4.26.2.

⁷¹ Tert. *Praescr.* 42.10.

⁷² According to Clement in *Exc.* 83; *Gos. Phil.* NHC II,3.72.30 (89); *Val. Exp.* NHC XI,2.40–42.

⁷³ According to Clement in *Exc.* 82; *Gos. Phil.* NHC II,3.74.90–93 (the unction as being more important than baptism); *Val. Exp.* NHC XI,2.40.

⁷⁴ According to Clement in *Exc.* 82 (“and the bread and the oil are consecrated”); *Gos. Phil.* NHC II,3.75.98 (“so are the bread, the chalice and the wine”).

⁷⁵ *I Apoc. Jas.* NHC V,3.32–35 (God’s revelation to James about the souls’ resurgence, associated with the ritual of dying people) to be confronted with Iren. *Haer.* 1.21.5 (description of the redemption’s ritual).

⁷⁶ *Gos. Phil.* NHC II,3.69–71 and 76–88 (the ritual of the bridal room interpreted as an

It is hard to establish the precise moment in which the Gnostics' speculations caused them to be rejected by the Church. At the end of the century Clement fights them, yet is it possible to identify a previous date? If Philip of Side's writing about Athenagoras' presence in Alexandria towards 175–180 is accepted, then it is possible to date a controversy concerning the resurrection of the flesh back to these years. Are there any other relevant writings to be taken into consideration for this period? They could be identified among the Nag Hammadi collection, the dating of which is uncertain. However, it seems that towards the end of the 2nd cent., Christians belonging to the Great Church were not sharing a communion with Gnostics anymore. We could consider Eusebius's testimony about Origen as a significant example:⁷⁷ at the beginning of the 3rd cent., when his father was executed due to crimes against Christianity, Origen was protected by a rich matron who was also protecting another Gnostic master named Paul. The latter's audience was both composed of "orthodox" Christians and heretics. Nevertheless, Origen never wanted to "join him in prayer." If Athenagoras' treaty *De resurrectione* dates back to 180,⁷⁸ then we would have another proof concerning the refusal of Gnostic theories by a master coming from Athens into Egypt in order to spread the Christian message.

As for what concerns the Gnostics' polemics against Christians, it has been studied by Koschorke⁷⁹ who mainly relied upon the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Witness of Truth*. Such polemics do not show at all refusal of tradition: unlike Christian polemicists, the Gnostics do not oppose their truth to the orthodoxes "lie" or "mistakes" but they claim to go beyond the Church's faith considered as "secular."⁸⁰ Nonetheless, some Gnostics do not hesitate to address the Great Church's followers as servants of the Demiurge (this issue can be also found in the *Gospel of Judas*⁸¹) as well as to openly attack some practices and beliefs such as the faith in the resurrection of the flesh.⁸² However, their polemics mainly concern the members (or some members) of the clergy (as in the *Gospel of Judas*⁸³), by which they are excluded and defamed. It does not concern the Great Church's followers that they instead endeavor to attract them to their own cause.⁸⁴

extension of christening: baptism, redemption, bridal room); to be confronted with Iren. *Haer.* 1.21.3 (about Mark's followers: the bridal room's mystagogy, destined to the initiated).

⁷⁷ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.2.12–14.

⁷⁸ According to Philip of Side's highly discussed writing. See Pouderon 1997.

⁷⁹ Koschorke 1978.

⁸⁰ Koschorke 1978: 9, 186 and 203.

⁸¹ *Gos. Jud.* 39 (27 Kasser¹).

⁸² *Testim. Truth* NHC IX,3.32; 34.6f.; 36.26–37.2; Just. *Dial.* 80.4 (those who deny the resurrection of the flesh).

⁸³ *Gos. Jud.* 38 (26 Kasser¹).

⁸⁴ Koschorke 1978: 80–85 and 222–224.

The Gnostics simultaneously claim their belonging and their distinction, thus differentiating themselves from the Great Church's polemicists who deprive them of the name of Christians, such as what had happened to Justin in Rome with regards to the Western Valentinians.⁸⁵ The main accusations that the rising clerical hierarchy and the first theologians cast against the Gnostics – apart from their freedom of thought – essentially concern the degradation of the supreme God down to a mere demiurge, a secondary and inferior God, and their opinion about Christ's nature. They also contest the Gnostics' negation of the resurrection of the flesh, their belief in the superiority of the "gnosis" as a condition for salvation to the detriment of faith and the passion of Christ. This syncretism draws on both philosophical doctrines and traditional religions as well as on their "free" exegesis of Scriptures which distorts its authentic sense with an extremely imaginary mythology.

Is there a complete agreement among the so-called Gnostics? It does not seem so. Besides the wide variety of their systems, the multiplication of the masters and schools, the diversity of the doctrines often denounced by the heresiologists (Irenaeus' "Hydra" with a thousand heads or Pseudo-Hippolytus' "labyrinth"⁸⁶), there certainly was an internal polemic within the Gnostic schools or rather a rivalry between the different schools and the different masters. At the same time, there was a more or less wide freedom towards the dogma (δόγμα) that was prevailing for the majority (the "Great Catholic Church"). For instance, in the *Treatise of the resurrection* (or *Epistle to Rheginus* [NHC I,4]), there is a sort of "third way" between the carnal and the spiritual resurrection proclaimed by Valentinians, probably directed against the less moderate believers among them.⁸⁷

3.3. "Educated" Christians and pagans

We have already seen how during the Jewish riot in Egypt, Christians could hardly be distinguished either from the Jews (as they actually were for the majority of them) or from the pagans.⁸⁸ Yet, when Christianity was affirmed in its

⁸⁵ Just. *Dial.* 35.2–8.

⁸⁶ Iren. *Haer.* 1.30.15; Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 10.5.1.

⁸⁷ See the cautious statements in Mahé, Poirier 2007: 87–95. We could question ourselves about the identity of these intellectuals who propose their views about resurrection to the audience (*Treat. Res.* NHC I,4.43.25–44.1). It is difficult to identify them as pagan philosophers whose point of view would not be taken into consideration by Rheginus in his quest for the truth: the debate which animates Rheginus and the author of the treaty who replies to him concerns the type (or the modality) of resurrection, thus, he keeps into account the very idea of resurrection. Also, the anonymous author situates the addressed intellectuals "within the word of Truth" even though he believes that they are not "firmly established" in it and he sees in their studies a quest for "peace" which he had already received from the Savior.

⁸⁸ Similarly, as in the case of "Gnostic," we will not discuss the use of this term that indic-

specificity, Greeks and Christians as well as Jews and Christians were perceived and perceived themselves as perfectly distinct communities (γένη) both for their cults and their ethnic origin. This is the distinction of the three γένη found in the *Kerygma Petrou* and *Ad Diognetum*.

The classification of humanity into three “breeds” allows us to consider Jews and Greeks as both representatives of error. However, since Judaism and Christianity share the belief in one God as well as the same Scriptural tradition, one may believe that the disapproval of the “Greek” error is stronger than the one pertaining to the misdirection of the Jewish community. This is not always true, as we can observe in the *Kerygma*, whose provenance from Hellenophonic Egyptian environments is quite probable. In this text, Greek thought is debated with relative indulgence through the category of “the most illustrious among the Greeks.” This expression is found in several passages of the *Kerygma*, which have not been given enough attention:

fr. 2a: In the *Kerygma*, Peter says that the most illustrious (οἱ δοκιμώτατοι) [among the Greeks] know God not through science (ἐπίγνωσιν) but through approximation (περίφρασιν) (in Clem. *Strom.* 6.5.39.1);

fr. 3a: He then continues: “Worship this God but not as the Greeks do,” because, evidently, the most illustrious among the Greeks (οἱ δοκιμώτατοι) worship the same God as us without having enough knowledge about him since they did not receive His Son’s teachings (in *Strom.* 6.5.39.4);

fr. 4a: It shall be said that the Greeks and us (ἡμῶν τε αὐτῶν καὶ Ἑλλήνων) know the same God, although in different ways, he (Peter in the *Kerygma*) will say this with these words [...] (in *Strom.* 6.54.41.1).

Even though it is difficult to discern Clement’s words from Peter’s words in the *Kerygma Petrou*, it is clear that Clement considers Peter’s teaching as a form of integration between philosophic theism (Plato) and Christian monotheism.

4. Conclusions

My research is limited to the period following the end of Marcus Aurelius’ reign. I have not expanded the analysis to include Clement and Origen’s works, whose relationships with Gnosticism and Judaism have been the object of many important studies. By including those objects of study, my argument would have been much too broad. What has mainly caught my attention is the transition in Alexandria of a “dark” Christianity deeply rooted in Judaism

ates both the followers of different polytheistic religions (Greeks, but also Romans, Egyptians, Syrians etc.) and the followers of different religion-related philosophies or followers of the Greek *paideia*. Hence, it cannot be substituted by the term “Greeks” nor by “nations.”

towards visibility and affirmation also thanks to Pantaenus, Clement and Origen's writings and teachings.

Unfortunately, this transition is not properly documented. Many of the witnesses that I have listed can be rejected – but not all of them. But even if we would accept only a part of them, it seems that early Alexandrine Christianity had initially been Jewish-Christian before affirming itself through the refusal of its Jewish roots. Certainly, it had also been very diversified and tolerant since the “Gnostic” ideas were not immediately rejected and Greek culture could be considered as a possible ally. We will not be amazed by the fact that Judaism received a much stricter treatment compared to Gnosticism and philosophic theism since this is a consequence of early Alexandrine Christianity's needs of self-definition and/or affirmation. However, the refusal of the Jewish customs does not go, as in Marcion, at the same pace with the contempt of the Jewish Scriptures. On the one hand, the critique of Jewish customs was based upon the prophetic tradition, as in Justin. Whereas on the other hand, a spiritualistic exegesis allowed biblical texts to preserve their strength through allegory or typology: the quest for identity was performed through both the refusal and the acceptance of the “ancestors,” using a much later expression, “accordingly to God's word.”⁸⁹

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Messengers from Heaven: Divine Men and God's Men in the Alexandrian Platonism (2nd–4th Cent.)

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The divine man was a popular topic between the 2nd and 4th cent. both in the debate between the educated pagans and Christ's followers and in the competition between different philosophical schools. Celsus' *Alethes logos* shows clearly how the figure of Christ was understood and attacked on the grounds of Graeco-Roman traditions concerning divine men. Celsus criticised the incoherence of Jesus' followers who worshipped him as a god but denied analogous worship to the likes of Pythagoras, Orpheus or Asclepius, whom compared to Jesus' cultural and historical modesty, were more worthy of such worship.¹ This controversy should then be placed in the wider background of the competition and propaganda of the philosophical schools and Christian groups; competition in which the intensive use of the philosopher's *bios*, which was acquiring an ever more distinctly religious character, appeared to be the most effective form of communication intended to consolidate and strengthen consensus.²

This web of interests and discursive practices, that were commonplace among the different groups of educated society in late antiquity, has been studied especially in regard to its functional aspects for the success of such groups.³ The aspect that I will draw attention to has instead remained in the background: the debate between the pagan and Christian intellectuals – who belonged to the Platonic current of late antiquity – was also a theoretical debate about the identity of these exceptional figures. The greater the interest in them, the more the educated people began to question what could be considered specifically human or divine. Under the impact of strong criticism, they were pushed to reflect upon divine men of their own tradition. To reexamine their nature they wondered, for example, how these exceptional men could be explained on the basis of an anthropological and cosmological model that – either directly or indirectly through the interpretation of the Bible – was anchored to the Platonic dialogues.

¹ Orig. *Cels.* 1.67; 3.22. See the Italian edition in Lanata 1997: 15–16; Le Boulluec 1998; in-depth study: Monaci Castagno 2004.

² The work of Bieler 1935–1936 is still useful; du Toit 1997 introduces a periodisation in the use and meaning of that expression. Cf. Anderson 1994; Goulet 1998; Hägg 2012; Hägg, Rousseau, Høges 2000.

³ Talbert 1978.

I intend to examine a dossier consisting of texts of Origen (approx. 185–261), Eusebius of Caesarea (260/264–339/340)⁴ and Iamblichus (265 [?]-320/326). In the case of the former two, the link with the Alexandrian culture is self-explanatory. We have limited reliable data about Iamblichus' biography;⁵ whilst there is no certainty that he was Porphyry's pupil, it is sure that his philosophy had established a critical dialogue with those of Plotinus and Porphyry, among other Platonic authors, and exerted a great influence on the Alexandrian and Athenian Neoplatonism of the 4th and 5th cent.

It is not my intention to propose a genealogy, but if I am interpreting correctly the scientific project of this conference, it would be fair to draw attention – rephrasing L. Wittgenstein and the cultural anthropologists who have grasped his methodological lesson⁶ – on that familiar resemblance, relationship, and circularity of problems and solutions that, religious boundaries notwithstanding, formed the conceptual common plot of these texts that were only apparently distant from each other.

1. Origen

In the writings of Origen, the Alexandrian Christian teacher, the topic that interests us is closely related to the issue of the pre-existence of souls and their fall from their condition of original perfection into the bodies. Origen saw in it a secondary creation with respect to that *principaliter* of the *intellectuales naturae*⁷ that possessed free will.

In the doctrine of the descent of the *noes* into the bodies there is a confluence of the dictate of Scripture and its interpretation in the light of the Platonic tradition. Both dictate and interpretation can be said to be far from unambiguous. The Bible, starting from the story of the fall of Adam and Eve – which Origen believed to be referring to the whole human kind⁸ – featured exceptional figures characterised by a divine election, even while still in the womb. Such figures were Jacob, Jeremiah and John the Baptist.⁹

⁴ Morlet 2012.

⁵ Martone 2014: 13–43.

⁶ E.g., see Remotti 2008: 102.

⁷ Orig. *Princ.* 1.2.2. For a commented translation, see Simonetti 1968.

⁸ About the issue of the preexistence of souls see Sfameni Gasparro 2000. Recently, see Arruzza 2011: 129–138, who values, along with the Platonic component, the influence of Stoic psychology.

⁹ For Jacob, the problem started in *Gen.* 25.22 (oracle of the Lord concerning Esau and Jacob fighting in the womb of the mother Rebecca). Jacob, despite being second-born, is chosen to inherit the birthright and to be the patriarch of Israel (Esau of Edom). For Jeremiah, see *Jer.* 1.5 (“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you”). Along with *Luke* 1.41 (John the Baptist who rejoices in the womb of his mother Eliza-

To these characters Paul dedicated statements that – as we will presently see – seemed to deny that the incorporation of the souls had been preceded by a sin. Yet Origen was a keen reader of the Platonic *Dialogues* quoted mainly in his *Contra Celsum*, among which were the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*.¹⁰ The Athenian Philosopher proposed divergent solutions regarding the incorporation of the souls. In the former two dialogues he highlighted the issue of the body as a jail in which the soul has fallen, having been unable to hold itself above; in the latter, he considers the incorporation itself as a providential design to perfect the *kosmos*.¹¹

To sum up this dilemma in a nutshell: if material creation is a secondary creation with respect to that of the rational creatures, due to their fall, does this mean that all rational creatures found within a body have sinned? Origen espouses the theory – widely accepted by the Platonic tradition and beyond – of the animation of the heavenly bodies, but excludes that their incorporation had been the result of a sin. To support these conceptions, he quotes *Rom.* 8.19–22, interpreted as follows: incorporation is the “vanity” to which the souls of the heavenly bodies have been subjected; the cause is not the sin, but the will of God that has subjected them in order to serve the world; the end is the hope of deliverance and return to God.¹² It is interesting to note that he expresses the same position in his interpretations of certain biblical figures.

In the 2nd book of his *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis*,¹³ a work that belongs to the '20s of the 3rd cent., commenting *John* 1.6: (“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John”), Origen expands questions concerning John’s provenance and his time of coming. Beside the literal interpretation – John was sent from God to the people of Israel so that they would be converted – Origen puts forth, according to the zetetic¹⁴ form, a deeper one: the place where John was sent is the world – “the earthly place, where there are men;” the Baptist comes from one another place where his soul lived besides this world – “before his body and previously existing” (see *John* 1.7).¹⁵ Then the exegete

beth) these passages contrasted with the guiding principle of Origen’s theology: God’s justice, which is expressed in the reward or the punishment of each one according to the use they have made of free will. In fact, they assumed a divine election before birth. Hence the need to resort to the pre-existence of souls that in other worlds had accumulated or lost merits: on these topics: Orig. *Princ.* 1.7.4; 3.1.

¹⁰ Dorival 1992: 194–195; Romaniuk 1961.

¹¹ *Phaed.* 62b; *Phaedr.* 247–248; *Tim.* 30b.

¹² Amongst the many texts, the broadest is *Princ.* 1.7: see Lebeau 1970; Scott 1991.

¹³ Orig. *Comm. Jo.* 2.29. For a commented translation, see Corsini 1968.

¹⁴ As it often happens, Origen puts forth his boldest theses as the result of a research that demands to be checked and confirmed, not as certain doctrinal statements.

¹⁵ Orig. *Comm. Jo.* 2.30.181: Τῷ γὰρ τηροῦντι τὸ μηδὲν ἀδίκως μηδὲ κατὰ συντυχίαν ἢ ἀποκλήρωσιν ποιεῖν ἀναγκαῖον παραδέξασθαι πρεσβυτέραν οὕσαν τὴν Ἰωάννου ψυχὴν τοῦ σώματος καὶ πρότερον ὑφειστώσαν πεπέμφθαι [...].

wonders, since in this sense all souls have been “sent” by God, how could John’s phrase be understood in a way peculiar to John the Baptist? Origen proceeds by stating:

Every man for having being created by God is, generally speaking, a man of God and yet this name does not apply to every man, but only to the one who adheres to God (in the manner of Elijah and others who in the Scriptures are called men of God); in the same way it can be said, in the common sense, that every man is sent from God, but in the proper sense, is sent from God only that who comes to life for the service of God and for the benefit of the salvation of mankind.¹⁶

On the basis of *Mal.* 3.1, Origen then suggests that an angel was sent as a precursor of Jesus, or, better said, the soul that on the basis of previous merits had deserved to join an angelic body and that, in imitation of Christ, incarnated for love of men, wanted “to serve the kindness of God with a body like his.” The exultation of the Baptist in the womb of his mother during his meeting with the already pregnant Mary is considered proof of the superiority of John regarding common human nature. The juxtaposition of the “men of God” with Christ is not random; it is to be read against the background of Origen’s particular Christology. He believed that in the incarnation, the Logos had joined not only the flesh but also a very special soul that, while sharing rationality and free will with other souls, had unfailingly joined the Logos from the beginning. Therefore, also this soul is in the body not due to a sin, but only to serve the purpose of salvation.¹⁷ Indeed, it is the belief of Origen. that the peculiar way in which Jesus’ soul is linked to the Logos in Christ, and the reason for its descent into the body – the love for men – constitute the model from which to understand the nature and the reason for the presence of the divine men/men of God in the world.

In a passage of the *Commentarium in Ephesios*, Jerome, on the margin of *Eph.* 1.4 (“even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world”), summarises Origen’s position in the following way:

So, they say,¹⁸ before souls were precipitated in the world and the world was made composed of the souls that inhabit it, God chose Paul and those before him that are like him, who were

¹⁶ Orig. *Comm. Jo.* 2.30.183: πᾶς ἄνθρωπος τῷ ὑπὸ θεοῦ ἐκτίσθαι ἄνθρωπός ἐστι θεοῦ, ἀλλ’ οὐ χρηματίζει πᾶς ἄνθρωπος “θεοῦ,” ἢ μόνος ὁ θεὸς ἀνακείμενος – ὃν τρόπον Ἠλίας καὶ οἱ ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς ἀναγεγραμμένοι “ἄνθρωποι θεοῦ” –, οὕτως δύναται κατὰ μὲν τὸ κοινότερον πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ἀπεστάλθαι ἀπὸ θεοῦ, κυρίως δὲ λέγεσθαι ἀπεστάλθαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ οὐκ ἄλλος ἢ ὁ ἐπὶ διακονίᾳ θεῆς καὶ λειτουργίᾳ σωτηρίας γένους ἀνθρώπων ἐπιδημῶν τῷ βίῳ.

¹⁷ In Orig. *Cels.* 4.17 – one of the last works of Origen (approx. 248/249) – the same ideas are expressed: the union of Jesus’ soul with his body is “an exceptional descent resulting from the great love for men and for their conversion” (μίαν ἐξαιρετον ἀπὸ πολλῆς φυλάνθρωπίας κατὰβασιν ὑπὲρ οὗ ἐπιστρέψαι).

¹⁸ In due time Jerome will admit that the reference is to Origen: Jer. *Ruf.* 1.22.15ff.; cf. the comment of this passage in Pieri 2009: 236–238.

holy and blameless. [...] and as the prophets Ezekiel, Daniel, the three young men, Haggai and Zechariah [...] were sent into captivity in Babylon, not because they deserved so but to be a comfort to the people, so also in the fall of the world those who had been chosen by God were sent to instruct and teach the sinful souls, so that thanks to their preaching they would return to that place from which they had fallen.¹⁹

Among other places in Origen's works in which the same position is supported,²⁰ there are yet another two passages – taken respectively from the *Commentarii in Romanos* and the *Contra Celsum* – that deserve to be mentioned because they dwell upon an issue to which we will return later. Paul's soul, despite being innocent, at the time of the union with the body is affected by both needs and natural instincts:

the desire for food, the modesty before the excrements, the restraint from procreation, the way in which children are conceived, created, nurtured, and observes in all that how much vanity and corruption are there, to which the soul – while not wanting it – has been subjected.²¹

Following – after having quoted 2 Cor. 5.6 and Phil. 1.23–24 – Origen adds:

Here clearly (sc. Paul) points out that he served corruption and vanity unwillingly, in what regard the things he was conscious of in his soul, but by reason of him who has so established and because of us.²²

The same observation is to be found in *Contra Celsum*, regarding the soul of Jesus as well. Origen admits that, while not changing anything in its essence, Jesus' soul had “suffered something” in its union with the body “for the great love for men.”²³

¹⁹ Jer. *Comm. Eph.* 1.446d–2.447c.8: *Itaque priusquam animae, inquit praecipitentur in mundum, et mundus ex animabus fieret cum habitatricibus suis, in infimum ipse deiectus elegit Paulum Deus et similes coram se, qui erant sancti et immaculati* (Eph. 1.4b). *Quomodo autem in Babylonia captivitate [...] missi sunt prophetae Ezechiel, Daniel, tres pueri, Aggeus, Zacharias, non quo et ipsi meruerint captivitatem, sed ut essent in solatio captivorum, ita et in illa deiectione mundi eos, qui antequam mundus fieret, electi erunt a Deo, missos esse in eruditionem et magisterium animarum peccatricium, ut ad praedicationem eorum revertentur et ad eum locum unde corruerant.*

²⁰ Orig. *Princ.* 2.9.7; 3.5.4; *Comm. Jo* 1.17. These are other passages of Origen's works where the idea of the incorporation of some souls for the sake of man's salvation is stated: *Comm. Eph.* 1.4 *apud* Jer. *Ruf.* 1.22.

²¹ See a deeper analysis in Orig. *Princ.* 3.2.2–7.

²² Orig. *Comm. Rom.* 7.2.4–10; Hammond Bammel et al. 2011: 260–273.

²³ *Cels.* 4.17: εἰ δ' ὅτι πάσχει τι ὑπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀνακεκραμένη αὐτῷ καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ τόπου, εἰς ὃν ἐλήλυθε, καὶ τί ἄτοπον ἀπαντᾷ τῷ λόγῳ. Origen develops the issue of the *sordes* arising from the body in *Hom. Luc.* 14.

2. Man or God? Discussions about Apollonius of Tyana between the 3rd and 4th cent.

The criticism that Celsus addressed to the followers of Jesus was twofold and according to Origen, intimately contradictory. From the surviving fragments reported in *Contra Celsum*, the *Alethes logos* on the one hand criticised Christians because they “cannot bear to consider them (sc. the Dioscuri, Heracles, Asclepius, Dionysus) as gods because they were men before.” Yet on the other hand, Jesus’ followers consider him a God, giving credence to the stories of the Gospels on the miracles he performed. Celsus also emphasised that despite the extraordinary stories about some divine men “nobody considers them gods.”²⁴ This part of the *Alethes logos* was abridged by Origen, and we cannot really determine whether, as claimed by the Alexandrian Teacher: “Celsus was smart not to make it clear that neither him worshipped them as gods,”²⁵ in order not to be considered an “atheist” and without pretending to have beliefs that he did not share. The issue is related to Origen’s uncertainty about Celsus’ philosophical identity (Epicurean or Platonic), but what interests us here is just to emphasise how already in the *Alethes logos*, Celsus – more or less coherently – let show the discomfort of the philosophical discourse regarding the myths and the traditional devotions about divine men.

During the same years in which Origen dictated *Contra Celsum*, Philostratus, driven by Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus, reworked (literary fiction?) the memories of Damis disciple of Apollonius of Tyana, to draw a detailed account of his life.²⁶ This figure of a Pythagorean philosopher from the 1st cent. has played, as we shall see, a prominent part in the controversy between Christians and pagans, but the work of Philostratus makes no reference to Christians and builds up Apollonius who embodies the Severian religious programme; a programme that included the different cults within a hierarchy of which the apex was represented by the cult of *Sol invictus*. Among such cults there was one dedicated to Apollonius, which portrayed him as the archetype of the traditional divine man: a son of god, possessing every physical, moral and intellectual quality, an ascetic miracle worker of whom there is no tomb in existence.

Already at the centre of a cult dedicated to him, Apollonius is repeatedly declared a god (by others),²⁷ but we also note that in Philostratus’ story there is a second interpretation (entrusted to Apollonius himself) which reveals the continuing discussions and a more precise focus on the problem. When in court in front of the Emperor, Domitian asks him: “why do men call you God?”. Apol-

²⁴ *Cels.* 3.29 and 31.

²⁵ *Cels.* 3.22.

²⁶ Bowie 1978 with *status quaestionis*; see also Billaut 2000; Del Corno 1978; Dzielska 1986; Speyer 1974.

²⁷ *Philo Vit. Apoll.* 1.19; 5.24; 7.32; 7.38. See Hanus 1997 and 1998: 229.

lonius answers: “Because every man who is believed to be good gets the title of God,” and then delivers an eloquent speech in which the affinity of the virtuous and wise man with the divinity is stated.²⁸

During the successive generation, Apollonius started to be openly compared to Jesus,²⁹ and this comparison, at the beginning of Diocletian’s persecution, is clearly formulated in Sossianus Hierocles’ *Philaethes* (*The lover of truth*),³⁰ a lost work that we can partially reconstruct through Lactantius’ *Divinae institutiones* and especially through Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Contra Hieroclem*.³¹

In the parts where Eusebius quotes the *Philaethes* we note that the long melee with Christians on the crucial topic of divine men has borne fruit. Firstly, Sossianus Hierocles brings the comparison onto a more homogeneous field. Jesus is no longer compared to people of the mythical past (Heracles, Asclepius, and others), but to a man belonging to his own century about whom testimonies of philosophers worthy of trust can be produced, whereas the witnesses of the historical life of Jesus are “liars, ignoramuses and magicians.”³² Secondly, in order to show the absurdity of the divinity of Jesus (and the inferiority to Greeks of Christians), Sossianus Hierocles openly denies it to Apollonius: “We do not consider the man who has made these wonders to be a god, but we consider him a man who pleased the gods.”

For him, this does not constitute a denial of the truth of the prodigious feats that he could carry out thanks to his proximity to the gods.³³ Looking at the arguments, nothing is really new, even Celsus had, as mentioned, already foreshadowed the argument of the superiority of the Greeks over the Christians, upon the basis of their different behavior with respect to the recognition of the divinity of these exceptional figures. However, what is new, even compared to Philostratus, is the unambiguous demythologisation of the figure of Apollonius.

Eusebius’ answer is extremely cunning:³⁴ the *Philaethes* – as the *Alethes logos* to which he had attached it – dealt with many other topics, but Eusebius

²⁸ *Vit. Apoll.* 8.7.

²⁹ Porphyry in Macarius, *Apocriticus*, 3.1; about the comparison, see Anderson 1986: 135–154; Baur 2000: 29–44; Speyer 1974.

³⁰ According to Forrat 1986: 20, the work has been written before the persecution, when Sossianus held the position of Eastern Vicar, and it became known at Nicomedia in 303, among the intellectual elites and the imperial circle, as stated by Lact. *Inst.* 5.4.1; Eusebius’ answer would date from a decade after the persecution was over.

³¹ Forrat 1986. On Sossianus Hierocles, see Forrat 1986: 20–26; Traverso 1997. The Eusebian authorship of this text is an object of debate. Against it are: Johnson 2013. In favour of it: Borzi 2003. The latter’s conclusions seem to me more persuasive, and are confirmed by my research on Eusebius’ *bioi*: Monaci Castagno 2013.

³² Eus. *Hier.* 1.102.27.

³³ Philostratus’ Apollonius had already justified his own powers in this sense: *Vit. Apoll.* 8.7.

³⁴ Mendelson 1992.

declares his intention to focus only on the comparison between Jesus and Apollonius. He considers the sole original part of a piece of work that is presented essentially as a plagiarism of previous authors (Celsus and Philostratus). This allows him to abandon the *Philalethes*, not to conduct a detailed rebuttal of the treaty of Hierocles, but instead to refute the *Vita Apollonii*. This text reflects a stage of the conception of the divine man that could be different than that of Hierocles. On the basis of the *Vita Apollonii* and partially quoting it, it became easier for Eusebius to sustain the unreliability of a writing that on the one hand intended to present Apollonius “as a divine man superior to a philosopher, in a word, as a being of superhuman nature”³⁵ and on the other hand, incurred in continuous contradictions. His “fairy tales-mythoi” had made his hero unbelievable and implausible.

Unlike Sossianus, who believed that Apollonius was a man, and *at the same time* a miracle worker, Eusebius flatly denied that this was possible by bringing the issue down to philosophical grounds. This is the argument developed by Eusebius in chapter 6: 1) the universe is ruled by indissoluble laws and by indestructible bonds; 2) every living being is subject to limitations that cannot be exceeded; 3) also man, who possesses soul and body, is subject to such limits: his body in fact cannot hover in the air, and his soul cannot reach the inaccessible; 4) the wise man has his feet rooted in the ground and can raise his soul propping himself on “paideia and philosophy;” 5) he, though, “can pray for someone to come to help from somewhere above, from the heavenly mansions, and that appears as master of salvation from above”³⁶ and is not contrary to the rule of providence “if ever a divine nature capable of benefitting, saving and providing for the beings were to establish a relationship with men.”³⁷ 6) God gives abundantly the grace of His light to the immortal souls that have free will. Concerning the last recalled aspect, he adds:

He sometimes sends the closest among those around him to save and sustain the men of this world; and if to one of these were to be granted,³⁸ after purifying his mind and dissipated the cloud of his mortality, he will be considered truly divine [...] having in his soul the image of a great god. Certainly, such a character will stimulate the human race and more than a sun will illuminate the inhabited world, allowing also the future generations to see the work of eternal divinity, giving an example of nature inspired by God not inferior to the sculptures taken from lifeless matter. In this way human nature can enter into communion with that divine,

³⁵ Eus. *Hier.* 7.116.4.

³⁶ Eus. *Hier.* 1.112.28: εὐξαίτο δὲ καὶ τινα συνεργὸν ἄνωθεν ποθεῖν ἐκ τῶν κατ’ οὐρανὸν διατριβῶν ἐλθεῖν καὶ τῆς ἐκεῖσε διδασκαλίας αὐτῷ φανῆναι σωτηρίαν;

³⁷ Ibid.: ὅθεν δὴ θεῖαν μὲν φύσιν εὐεργέτιν οὖσαν καὶ σώτειραν καὶ προνοητικὴν τῶν (ἐπι)όντων ἀνθρώποις ποτὲ εἰς ὁμιλίαν ἐλθεῖν.

³⁸ [...] ὅν εἰ τῷ εὐτυχῆσαι γένοιτο; a rather ambiguous expression. Is the encounter with one of these God’s closest the result of some kind of choice/selection by God, who in any case expects man to demonstrate self worth throughout the ascesis? And what is their role, regarding mankind down here?

but otherwise it cannot go beyond its limits, nor to practice the art of birds with a body, nor when one is a man, to mingle with the things of the gods.³⁹

In his attempt to reflect upon the ontological status of the “truly divine man,” Eusebius fails to achieve his aim and seems particularly distressed when he is forced to leave the widely shared set of concepts⁴⁰ to explain the circumstances and manner in which man, confined within his natural limitations, can overcome them in order to get in contact with the divine sphere.

Who is Eusebius referring to with the following circumlocutions,

καί τινα συνεργὸν ἄνωθέν ποθεν ἐκ τῶν κατ’ οὐρανὸν διατριβῶν; δὴ θεῖαν μὲν φύσιν εὐεργέτιν οὔσαν; τῶν ἁμφ’ αὐτόν, ἔστιν ὅτε τοὺς μάλιστα προσεχεῖς εἰς τὴν τῶν ἐπίταδε σωτηρίαν τε καὶ ἀντίληψιν ἐκπέμπων?

W. Hadrill believed *Contra Hieroclem* to be one of Eusebius’ early works, and considered these words inspired by Plutarch, with whom Eusebius would have shared the same problem of harmonizing the necessary order of nature with man’s freedom.

Regarding the messengers/*prosecheis*, he also noted that the words used by Eusebius could hardly refer to functions that Christians attributed to angels. They would rather be semi-divine figures (lower gods or demons). This concept is also inspired by Plutarch’s thought about the lower gods or the demons that oversee the order established by the first god and keep an eye on the actions of men.⁴¹

Currently the drafting of *Contra Hieroclem* is dated in the years following the persecution, in a time of Eusebius’ maturity in which it is much more difficult to think of a dependence on Plutarch. In this work, Eusebius does not specify

³⁹ Eus. *Hier.* 6.114.44: τῶν ἁμφ’ αὐτόν, ἔστιν ὅτε τοὺς μάλιστα προσεχεῖς εἰς τὴν τῶν ἐπίταδε σωτηρίαν τε καὶ ἀντίληψιν ἐκπέμπων, ὧν εἴ τῳ εὐτυχῆσαι γένοιτο, τὴν διάνοιαν οὗτος ἀποκαθαρθεῖς καὶ τὴν τῆς θνητότητος ἀποσκεδάσας ἀχλὺν θεῖος ἀληθῶς ἀναγραφῆσεται μέγαν τινὰ θεὸν ἀγαματοφορῶν (ἐν) τῇ ψυχῇ. κινήσειε δὴτ’ ἂν οἷα τηλικούτος τὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων γένος καὶ μᾶλλον ἡλίου τὴν οἰκουμένην καταλάμψει τοῦργον τῆς αἰδίου θεότητος καὶ εἰς τὸν ἐπίοντα συνορᾶσθαι καταλείπων χρόνον οὐ μείον τῶν ἐξ ἀψύχου ὕλης δημιουργημάτων τὸ τῆς ἐνθέου παράδειγμα φύσεως παρεσχημένος. καὶ ταύτῃ μὲν ἀνθρωπεῖα φύσις τῆς ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων κοινωνήσαι ἂν, ἄλλως δ’ οὐ θέμις τοὺς ὄρους ὑπερβαίνειν, οὐδ’ ἄπτερον ἔχοντα τὸ σῶμα τὰ τῶν πτηνῶν ἐπιτηδεύειν, οὐδ’ ἀνθρώπων ὄντα τὰ τῶν δαιμόνων πολυπραγμονεῖν.

⁴⁰ As Kertsch 1980 has demonstrated.

⁴¹ Wallace–Hadrill 1960: 151 “He will dispatch the most intimate of His messengers from time to time for the salvation and succour of men here below. Anyone so favoured by fortune as to be illuminated by one of these messengers, ‘having cleansed his understanding and dissipated the mist of immortality, may well be described as truly divine, and as carrying in his soul the image of some great God. Surely so great a personality will stir up the entire human race and illuminate the world of Mankind more brightly than the sun, and will leave the effects of his eternal divinity for the contemplation of future ages.’ To this extent human nature can participate in the super-human.”

how these “divine natures,” are to be understood, nor does he explain what is their function – enlightening? – regarding man, so that he can become “truly divine.” However, an explanation may be sought in his biographical writings. I refer mainly to the *bios* of Origen, which occupies most of the 6th book of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, and to the *Vita Constantini*. Eusebius, consistent with his principles, does not portray such characters as miracle workers, but as people that have left a lasting impression in history. They have been teachers of doctrine and salvation for mankind and have been gifted with a particular assistance of and proximity to one/the divine spirit.⁴²

3. Pythagoras and Iamblichus

The last significant text is taken from Iamblichus’ *De vita Pythagorica*. As already mentioned, among the characteristic features of the Hellenistic *theios anēr* were the stories of extraordinary births from a god and a goddess. Both Porphyry – who also writes a *Vita Pythagorae* – and Iamblichus distance themselves from these type of tales, not only in regards to the birth, but also due to the circumstances of the death of Pythagoras. The argument traditionally gave rise to stories related to miraculous disappearances.⁴³ Unlike Porphyry, Iamblichus expresses himself in the strongest terms in favor of the natural birth of his hero and of a demythologisation that reflects a stage of the discussion with which he is contemporary. However, he also reflects much more deeply about the ontological status of Pythagoras.⁴⁴ The Apamean philosopher tells that the Pythia of Delphi had announced to Pythagoras’ parents the birth of a child of extraordinary beauty and wisdom. After quoting Epimenides, Eudoxus and Xenocrates – who state that Apollo would have generated Pythagoras by impregnating his mother – he adds:

But this by no means can be accepted. However, nobody could deny that Pythagoras’ soul, under the guidance of Apollo – be it as a companion or united to this God in a more intimate manner – has been sent down among men: this can be recognised in both the circumstances of his birth and in the multiform wisdom of his soul.⁴⁵

⁴² Regarding Origen, see Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.2.11; regarding Costantine, see *Vit. Const.* 1.20.1–2; 28–29; 47.2; 2.12.2; *Hist. eccl.* 1.2.21. On Eusebius as biographer, see Monaci Castagno 2013.

⁴³ Precisely as it is pointed out in Hägg 2012: 364–365.

⁴⁴ I do not agree with Edwards’ interpretation, whom, on the basis on *De vita Pythagorica*, 31 states that Iamblichus intended to present Pythagoras as an intermediate being and thus suggests to his educated pagan readers that the philosopher was superior to men, and thus also to Jesus. For other traces of intertextual allusions to the Bible cf. Hägg 2012: 367.

⁴⁵ Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 2.8: τοῦτο μὲν οὐδ’ αὐτῷ δεῖ προσέσθαι. τὸ μέντοι τὴν Πυθαγόρου ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀπόλλωνος ἡγεμονίας, εἴτε συνοπαδὸν οὔσαν εἴτε καὶ ἄλλως οἰκειότερον ἔτι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν τοῦτον συντεταγμένην, καταπεπέμφθαι εἰς ἀνθρώπους οὐδεὶς ἂν ἀμφισβητήσει

The term συνοπαδός is a reference to that section of the *Phaedrus* in which Plato describes the nature of the soul and the reasons for his fall with the image of the winged chariot with two horses led by the charioteer.⁴⁶ The horses and charioteers of the gods act in unison and thus run across the heaven and remain there permanently, following the winged chariot of Zeus easily and neatly, each fulfilling its task. Their wings are nourished by the vision of the hyperuranian realities. Other vehicles proceed with difficulty since, to varying degrees, the discordant movements of the charioteers or of one of the horses fail to rise to the vision of hyperuranian realities, the only ones capable of nourishing the wings and holding the chariots above. Only the souls that remain companions of the god, escape – at least for a while – the union with the body, while the others are incorporated even in men of decreasing value in proportion to the extension of the vision of intelligible realities, beginning with the noblest man, who is he who loves knowledge and befriends beauty.

Despite his usage of the Platonic image, Iamblichus moves away from the Athenian philosopher when he says that the soul of Pythagoras, while being a companion of the god, descends and joins the body. It is not, however, a contradiction but rather a precise reference – not without a bit of controversy – to his own doctrine of the incorporation of the souls, that differed markedly from other platonic masters such as Porphyry and especially Plotinus.

The latter clearly poses, in the 4th *Enneas*, the dilemma presented by the descent of individual souls according to Plato's works: "He – says Plotinus – does not say the same things anywhere, so that anyone can easily know his intentions," since in the *Phaedrus*, Plato seems to condemn the descent of the soul in the body, while in the *Timaeus* he "praises the cosmos" and believes that the soul was infused in the universe and in each of us so that everything would be perfect.⁴⁷ The *Phaedrus* suggested that the descent was linked to a sin, therefore voluntary, and that the union with the body was always negative, the *Timaeus* instead presented it as a positive fact aimed at achieving order and beauty in the cosmos, and tied to a necessary law. The solution of Plotinus was, in some ways, paradoxical: he argued that the upper part of the soul does not descend but, albeit unawares, remains united to the Intellect. He also claimed that, from the point of view of the essence, there is no difference between the souls; the soul is the same everywhere.

Iamblichus' interpretation, followed by subsequent Neoplatonists, is very articulate;⁴⁸ it also stemmed from the reinterpretation of the Platonic myth,

τεκμαιρόμενος αὐτῇ τε τῇ γενέσει ταύτῃ καὶ τῇ σοφίᾳ τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ τῇ παντοδαπῇ. καὶ περὶ μὲν τῆς γενέσεως τοσαῦτα.

⁴⁶ *Phaedr.* 246a.

⁴⁷ Plot. *Enn.* 4.8.1 (25).

⁴⁸ The doctrine of Iamblichus can be reconstructed from fragments of his lost work *De anima* (Finamore, Dillon 2002) and from fragments of his *Letters*, see Taormina, Piccione 2010.

but with a very different outcomes from those of Plotinus. According to Iamblichus, the charioteer (the upper part of the soul) of the *Phaedrus* that sometimes fails to hold the winged chariot high is proof that not even this part of the soul is always granted the intellection of heavenly realities.⁴⁹ Moreover, he argues that the causes of the descent of souls are different and that is why also the ways in which the souls descend are different:

For the soul that descends for the salvation, purification, and perfection of this realm is immaculate in its descent. The soul, on the other hand, that directs itself about bodies for the exercise and correction of its own character is not entirely free of passions and was not sent away free in itself. The soul that comes down here for punishment and judgment seems somehow to be dragged and forced.⁵⁰

In another part of the *De anima*, Iamblichus returns to the subject using a language in which reference to the *Phaedrus* is more explicit, and in which the issue of the incorporation of souls is tackled from the starting point of the diversity of the lives that have preceded it:

One must also consider the lives of souls before they entered into the body, since these lives have great individual variation. From different manners of life souls experience a different first encounter with the body. For, those who are ‘newly-initiated’, who have seen much of reality and are companions and kinsmen of the gods (οἱ [...] πολυθεάμονες τῶν ὄντων, οἱ τε συνοπαδοὶ καὶ συγγενεῖς τῶν θεῶν) and who are fully perfected and encompass the parts of their soul complete are all first implanted free of passions and pure into body. As to those, on the other hand, who are sated with desires and full of passions, it is with passions that they first encounter bodies.⁵¹

Here likewise, on the one hand, the dependence on *Phaedrus* is striking,⁵² and on the other hand distance is taken from its wording as Plato says that the first type of soul does not descend, “is not embodied in the next round and if it is able to do so, it remains immune forever.”⁵³ Whereas Iamblichus deems the problem solved by saying that these souls, while they descend into the bodies, they do so in a pure fashion so as to remain free from the influence of matter and in contact with the intelligible. Yet not always and not in essence (otherwise Iamblichus’ position regarding these souls would be identical to that of Plotinus), however, such souls can ascend to the intelligible more than other

About the issue of the fall of the soul in Plotinus and Iamblichus: Festugière 1953; Finamore 1985: 59–104; Steel 1978: 36–53.

⁴⁹ Steel 1978: 54.

⁵⁰ Iamblichus, *De anima*, 29; Finamore, Dillon 2002: 57. About the quoted passage, see also Finamore 1985: 102.

⁵¹ Iambl. *An.* 30; Finamore, Dillon 2002: 59.

⁵² Pointed out by Festugière 1953: 223, n. 1.

⁵³ *Phaedr.* 248c: ἥτις ἂν ψυχὴ θεῶν συνοπαδὸς γενομένη κατίδη τι τῶν ἀληθῶν, μέχρι τε τῆς ἐτέρας περιόδου εἶναι ἀπήμονα, κἂν αἰ τοῦτο δύνηται ποιεῖν, αἰ ἀβλαβῆ εἶναι.

mortal beings.⁵⁴ As stated in the commentary on *Phaedrus*,⁵⁵ these are souls that have not lost touch with the intelligible realities, and that descend to serve voluntarily in agreement with the cosmic laws that they make their own.⁵⁶ They are, as stated in Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*,

the few that possessing a supernatural intellectual power, disengage from nature, rise towards the separate intellect, not mixed; and at the same time they become superior to physical powers.⁵⁷

Who are they? Certainly the theurgists,⁵⁸ and among the *oligoi* there was Pythagoras, whose soul has descended as all the others have done, following a cosmic law, but voluntarily for the sake of the salvation, purification and refinement of all things down below. The points of contact with Origen's doctrine are undeniable. However, one can also notice that Iamblichus' solution – concerning this particular type of soul – is more radical than that of Origen, which even admitted, for these extraordinary souls, some form of contamination resulting from the union with the body.⁵⁹

In the light of what has been said so far about Iamblichus, we can better understand what Iamblichus says later on regarding Pythagoras' identity by quoting Aristotle's work on the Pythagorean philosophy (defined as Πυθαγορικῆς φιλοσοφίας διαίρεσις). The quotation is located within a section dedicated to the admiration aroused by Pythagoras in his Crotonian followers. In the first section, Iamblichus reports the citizens' opinions on the philosopher. They counted Pythagoras among the divine beings, considering him “a benign demon and entirely friendly with mankind,” who “appeared at that time in human form” in order “to save and put the lives of men to rights,” as well as,

to give the mortal nature the saving spark of happiness and philosophy that was and would always be the greatest good sent as a gift from the gods, precisely through Pythagoras.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Iambl. *Myst.* 5.18; Finamore, Dillon 2002: 162.

⁵⁵ In *Phaedr.* fr. 7 (Dillon 1973: 98–99).

⁵⁶ Iambl. *An.* 27; Finamore, Dillon 2002: 55 “According to another principle of division, some kinds of descent are thought to be voluntary (when the soul itself either chooses to administer the terrestrial realm or obeys its superiors) and others involuntary (when the soul is forcibly dragged to an inferior existence.” It is the same “wanted necessity” that Origen refers to in relation to Christ's soul; about the concept of ““wanted necessity,”” related to the doctrine of Plotinus, see Martone 2014: 252.

⁵⁷ Iambl. *Myst.* 5.18: Ὀλίγοι δὲ τινες ὑπερφυεῖ δὴ τινι δυνάμει τοῦ νοῦ χρώμενοι, τῆς φύσεως μὲν ἀφιστάνονται, πρὸς δὲ τὸν χωριστὸν καὶ ἀμιγῆ νοῦν περιάγονται, οἵτινες ἅμα καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν δυνάμεων γίγνονται κρείττονες.

⁵⁸ Martone 2014: 260. According to Finamore, Dillon 2002: 162 “Iamblichus must have envisioned thinkers such as Pythagoras and Plato;” but they have not taken into account the passage of *De vita Pythagorica* that could have confirmed their hypotheses.

⁵⁹ Cf. above n. 23.

⁶⁰ Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 28–30.

In the second part Iamblichus reports the Aristotelian fragment where it is said that among the best kept secrets of his followers there was the following distinction: of all the living beings endowed with reason, the first one is god, then comes man, and thirdly Pythagoras.⁶¹ It is only with relation to this statement that Iamblichus expresses his consent, seeing in Pythagoras that who has announced to men the knowledge of the intelligible and perceivable realities, as well as indications for a better way of life for both individuals and cities.⁶² As Iamblichus says in the preface of the *De vita Pythagorica*, philosophy can be learned only from the gods and, after them, only through *egemones* such as Pythagoras, to whom it had been given as a gift. The salvific value of these figures for the whole of humanity finds its philosophical justification in the peculiarity of their soul, incarnated in a body without contamination which remains in contact with the intelligible. For this reason, Iamblichus can agree with Aristotle who defines Pythagoras as the “third one,” after God and other men.

4. Conclusion

In what sense can the adjective divine – or “of God,” as preferred by Jesus’ followers – be applied to a man who lived on earth? Some men – patriarchs, saints, Jesus himself, some philosophers – are deemed teachers of salvation and models of perfection. They have enlightened, purified, converted the world and are objects of worship. How can one explain this considering that, being human, they are attached to a body and this attachment is seen as the result of a fall as well as of their inability to remain? Between the 2nd and 4th cent., in the cross-fire of controversy between pagans and Christians, to answer similar questions meant to explore the issue of what is human and what is divine, and how the two worlds could establish a communication through the channel of exceptional men whose *bioi* continued to be written. The identity of such extraordinary men was gradually clarified in the context of the close dialogue between the educated champions of late antiquity Platonism – both Christian and pagan.

Some dropped the mythological burden that was no longer useful to their own purposes, others such as Origen and Iamblichus, albeit militating in opposite sides, found similar solutions to the same problem in the potential of the doctrine of pre-existence of souls and in the conceptual framework of imperial Platonism: men of God, the saints and some philosophers are souls sent into the world, not fallen, who have voluntarily accepted the ministry imposed upon them for the salvation of the world.

⁶¹ About the superior types of souls cf. Finamore, Dillon 2002: 190–194.

⁶² Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 28–30; 31–33.

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Late Antique Alexandria and the “Orient”

Mark J. Edwards

The term “Orient” is employed with deliberate looseness in this essay. As we all know, it denotes not a place but the mirror from which an imaginary Other looks back at “Occidental Man.” If the two eyes of this mythical physiognomy are India and Egypt (with the bridge of the nose in Persia), it is obvious that the second of these territories is physically closer to Europe than the first. Physical proximity or remoteness, however, does not dictate the cartography of cultural exchange, as will be evident to anyone who studies the deep homologies between Indian and European thought that are postulated by George Dumézil and Martin West.¹ Both India and Egypt have been nominated in recent scholarship as likely sources of new developments in Alexandrian (that is to say, in Greek) theology or philosophy of the Roman era. That is the reason for treating them together in this paper, though I shall argue that this is a case in which the accidents of geography do in fact confer an advantage, so that Egypt, the contiguous culture, is also the one more likely to have exerted an influence upon the Greek (or rather Hellenistic) mind.

1. Preliminaries

I shall begin by setting out three criteria which will need to be satisfied if we are to assign a high probability to any of these theories.

Comparability. The tributary must resemble its putative source more closely than it resembles any other source that might reasonably have been proposed. The story of the healing of a paralytic by Jesus in *Matthew* is more likely to be based on a cognate passage in *Mark*, with which it coincides word for word at many points, than on some other story, such as that of the healing of the lame man at Bethesda in *John*, to which it shows only a tenuous similarity.² The point should not need to be laboured, yet all too often, and especially when the antecedents of Christian texts are in question, historians adduce their parallels and neglect to weigh them.

Continuity. It must be possible to construct a genealogy which links the earlier text to its putative heir. No-one, to my knowledge, has traced a line of

¹ Dumézil 1920; West 2008.

² *Mark* 2.1–12; *Matt.* 9.1–9; *John* 5.1–16.

ancestry from the *Vita Pachomii* to a Taoist text which assigns the same consequences to the eating of leeks;³ but if we would think it absurd to look for the springs of early Christian thought in China, we must explain why it is less absurd to look for them in India. The argument will require us to take a position on the dating of texts whose origins are notoriously elusive, and to plot a route for the carriage of ideas from India to the Roman world across the full breadth of the Parthian Empire. I do not say that this is impossible, only that it is a hard task which we should not hope to evade.

Explanatory power. The supposed aetiology must account for facts that could not be accounted for without it. We do not need to prove that Plotinus elicits much of his philosophy from the dialogues of Plato; if we wish to demonstrate that he has fallen under the influence of some other author whom he does not name, we must first consider and exclude the possibility that the texts which he cites from Plato would suffice to explain the conclusion at which he arrives. The acceptance of this principle by students of ancient philosophy has given a lucidity and coherence to their readings of Plotinus which could not be achieved so long as scholars held that only their Plato was the true Plato; even today, however, there are many who do not extend this principle to the study of ancient Christianity. Classicists are still apt to assume that whatever reminds them of Plato is Platonic, and even the most conservative of modern theologians are not so willing as the Fathers to pursue the logical consequences of believing in the seamless inspiration of Holy Writ.

2. Comparability: Neoplatonism and India

It is often not the intellectual system of Plotinus but (as we might say) his religious sensibility that is assimilated to that of India, or of some particular Indian thinker. There is always a danger that such arguments will become nebulous – never more so than when the term “God” is employed with greater latitude than our sources warrant on one or both sides of the comparison. Max Müller’s caveat against the use of this English word to render the Sanskrit *deva*⁴ has been ignored by those who have made it their task to render Indian thought intelligible to western readers. Translators of Plotinus have no choice but to use “god” as an equivalent to *theos*, though the decision to turn this into the proper name “God” will always betray at least one contestable assumption, and may give rise to assumptions on the reader’s part that were not foreseen by the translator. Certainly there are treatises which speak of an aspiration to become *theos*, or to be united with *theos*, and in many instances this can only be an honorific synonym

³ See *Vita Pachomii* (B), 48 (ed. Veilleux 1980); Cleary 1999: 17.

⁴ Müller 1898: 135–136.

for "the One" or "the Good." These expressions, however, often seem to be interchangeable with others that speak of attaining godhood or generating gods:⁵ readers of Plotinus (or originally, his pupils and interlocutors) are left to determine whether there is, properly speaking, one *theos* with whom every aspirant hopes to be united, or whether *theos* is what every aspirant becomes on attaining perfect unity. Even if the former is the preferred formulation, any notion that this "God" is an entity, or that any entity can be the object of his thought, his love or his volition, is rigorously excluded from the teaching of Plotinus. If we are to compare his "God" with the object of devotion in any Indian tradition, we need take no account of sects – the *Vaishnavas*, for example, who maintain that personality is an inseparable property of this object.

Nor can a true analogy be found in what scholars have called (for want of a more felicitous term) the dualism of Ramanuja: while Plotinus holds that the One, though inscrutably transcendent, is present to all things as the first condition of being, he could never have said, with Ramanuja, that the cosmos is the body of this first principle, or that its nature is best understood through ritual practice.⁶ No system in which Atman is the ultimate principle can be a perfect mirror to that of Plotinus, for Atman is always in some sense the soul,⁷ and this could never be affirmed of the One or the Good in the *Enneades*. Legitimate comparisons may be drawn with the "non-dualistic" thought of Sankaracharya, which (as commonly read) sets Brahman above personality;⁸ but Brahman for Sankara, as in the *Upanishads* on which he founds his system, is the seat of infinite consciousness, and consciousness (as we have already noted) cannot be predicated of the One. The Sankhyas, against whom Sankara formulates his teaching,⁹ denied that even consciousness remains when we have reached the ground of being; it is not clear, however, that they opined, as Plotinus does, that what is prior to consciousness must be superior to all predicates, even to the merely grammatical predicate of existence. If we turn from Hinduism to Buddhism, we can argue that Nagarjuna is even more thoroughgoing than Plotinus in his denial of every property to that which he holds to be ultimate;¹⁰ the Nirvana of the Buddhists, however, is not the One of Plotinus because the One is the origin of all that comes after it, whereas Buddhism in its strictest forms has no cosmogony. It does not require one because it maintains that nothing truly exists, and that every object of mentation is illusory. For Plotinus, on the other hand, true being – the being of that which is essentially, eternally and

⁵ *Enn.* 6.9.9; cf. Edwards 2013.

⁶ Radhakrishnan 1923: 2.682–690.

⁷ See further Smart 1958: 104–107.

⁸ Radhakrishnan 1923: 2.533–561. For an Occidentalising attempt to make a personal theist of Sankara see Otto 1932.

⁹ Thibaut 1890: 46–80.

¹⁰ See Garfield 1995.

inalienably what it is – is accessible to contemplation once we escape the toils of the body and enter a timeless existence on the plane of *nous*, or intellect. All Platonists, of course, would have said as much: the One in the *Enneades* is not a superadded element, but the logical precipitate of an argument, quite foreign to any Buddhist's way of reasoning, that because the manifold realm of essence cannot supply its own principle of unity, that principle must be sought above the manifold in that which is superior to essence.

The coping-stone to the system of Plotinus, therefore, could not easily be placed upon any Indian structure. There are none the less features of his and later Neoplatonic systems, not entirely detachable, which find closer parallels in Sanskrit literature than in Greek. In certain works of Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus, the intellectual world is resolved into mind (the contemplating subject), being (the contemplated essence) and life or power (the movement by which being engenders mind).¹¹

The elements of this triad are to be found in Plato's *Sophista*, and adumbrations of it have been detected in the *Enneades* of Plotinus; it also figures in Coptic texts from Nag Hammadi which bear the same titles as the Greek apocrypha named by Porphyry in the 16th chapter of his *Vita Plotini*.¹² In the mercurial prose of the Christian Marius Victorinus, the three terms are correlated with the persons of the Trinity, but from time to time "mind" (*intellectus*) is replaced by "blessedness" (*beatitudo*), without obvious warrant in the philosophical tradition. Some centuries earlier, Indian philosophy had condensed the three principal attributes of Brahman into one polysyllable, *sancitananda*, formed from the everyday terms which denote existence, intellection and blessedness.¹³ Does this Sanskrit noun provide the missing analogue to the nomenclature of Victorinus? For two reasons at least, we must pronounce this improbable. First, while the coincidence is striking, the correlation is not exact, because the elements of the triad in Victorinus are never being, *mind* and blessedness but always being, *life* and blessedness. Second, since it is only in Victorinus that the term "blessedness" enters the triad, we have no reason to look outside the Greek world to account for its more primitive formulations. Is it likely, then, that, just as the Platonists were giving a more schematic form to these hints from the *Sophista*, a Latin imitator should have discovered the three attributes of Brahman and interwoven them with the Greek triad, producing a hybrid faithful to neither? It has now been shown, in fact, that Victorinus was acquainted with the Gnostic writings which invoke the intelligible triad; in one of these texts, the Allogenes, blessedness is coupled first with divinity and perfection, then with divinity and silence, to form a triad whose relation to the Platonic analysis of intellect remains obscure.

¹¹ Hadot 1965; Edwards 1990.

¹² Hill 1992 seeks analogues in Plato and Aristotle.

¹³ See Tardieu, Hadot 1996.

We may have better cause for looking east to explain another conceit, which is not foreshadowed in Platonic literature and could be excised from the writings of Plotinus without any injury to his intellectual system. In a parenthetical argument at *Enn.* 5.5.5 he contends that because the Greek participle *on*, which signifies being, differs only by the pressure of an aspirate from the word *hen*, which signifies unity, those who use the Greek tongue are constantly bearing witness to the dependence of all that exists upon the One. Two generations later, Theodore of Asine¹⁴ embellished the thought by resolving the word *hen* into four components: the aspirate which in itself is unutterable, the vowel which takes its quality from the aspirate, the final consonant which mirrors the aspirate and voicing of the syllable *hen* itself as a single phoneme.¹⁵ A reader who knows the *Mandukya Upanishad* cannot fail to be reminded of its teaching that if we enunciate every letter of the word AUM with concentrated breath, the A will correspond to the waking state, the U to the dreaming state, the M to sleep and the monosyllabic utterance of the whole word to the Atman which is prior to all.¹⁶ But here we encounter the problem that was raised in the foregoing paragraph: Plotinus is the master, Theodorus the disciple, but it is only the disciple who gives evident signs of acquaintance with the Indian prototype. And perhaps they are not so evident: belief in the magical properties of letters is attested in Christian writings of the 4th cent., both monastic and philosophical, and, while they owe their efficacy in these works to the shapes of the written characters, the Jewish *Sefer Yetzirah* differentiates these characters with reference to our manner of breathing when we utter the corresponding sounds.¹⁷

3. Continuity: Ammonius the "Saka"?

The second of my preliminary observations was that if we are to posit influence on the Greeks from afar, we must be able to propose a credible channel of influence. A number of scholars, noting the oddity of the cognomen Sakkas, have argued that Ammonius Sakkas, the teacher of Plotinus, may have been so named because his original home was among the Sakas of India. The latest proponent of such a theory, E. DePalma Digeser, cites the catholic scholar J. Daniélou as a precursor,¹⁸ but appears to be unaware of the earlier scholarship on which he

¹⁴ See Deuse 1973.

¹⁵ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem commentaria*, 7.52.19 Klibansky; *Comm. Tim.* 2.274.10–277.20 Diehl. See further Gersh 1978: 289–304.

¹⁶ *Mandukya Upanishad*, 9–12, in Radhakrishnan 1935: 700–701; cf. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 1.2–4 at Radhakrishnan 1935: 338–343.

¹⁷ Trans. Kaplan 1990.

¹⁸ DePalma Digeser 2012: 40, n. 80, citing J. Daniélou at second hand from Gregorios 2002: 16. Daniélou, however, was echoing Seeberg 1941, and Benz 1951. For the contrary position

was relying. It goes without saying that she is also ignorant of the criticisms to which these erudite but tenuous arguments were subjected: she imagines, indeed, that European scholars were unable to stomach the notion of Indian influence on the Greeks until the fall of the 19th-cent. empires weakened their belief in the congenital superiority of western culture. Here she subscribes to Martin Bernal's fallacious assumption that it is always the higher culture that is credited with an influence on the lower;¹⁹ in fact, it was a standard resource of Hellenophilic scholars to explain the distasteful elements of Greek culture as accretions from without, and it is more than a hundred years since Edouard Zeller²⁰ temporarily convinced the learned world that Plotinus owes more to the *Upanishads* than to Plato. The labours of Dodds, of Harder, of Hadot and many others have repeatedly exposed the falsity of this caricature, and anyone who wishes to maintain that it is after all a true portrait must be able to adduce something more substantial than an imperfect likeness of names. Theodoret, who spoke Greek well, asserts that Ammonius was called Sakkas because he had been a porter;²¹ *sakkas* appears as a common noun in the lexicon of Liddell and Scott, which traces it to a Semitic root, and no doubt this root survives in the use of *sakka* to mean a water-carrier in the Arabic of modern Egypt.²²

If there were any good reason to believe that Plotinus joined the army of Gordian III in the hope of making his way to India, we might surmise that an interest in the Brahminic life had been kindled in him by his tutor. It is all too clear, however, that his biographer Porphyry is ascribing to him the motives on which he himself would have acted and had no independent knowledge of his goals.²³ The plausibility of Porphyry's narrative is not enhanced by comparison with the *Vita Apollonii*, which is no doubt one of his models: how many camels would we be forced to swallow if it became the rule to argue that whatever an ancient novelist could invent must have possessed some verisimilitude for his readers?²⁴ While, however, Plotinus "never reached India,"²⁵ he fell only a little

see Hindley 1964. His arguments were perhaps unknown to Telfer (trans.) 1955: 262n; Fédou 1988: 205–206.

¹⁹ Bernal 1991. This book is an extended libel on German philology in the 19th cent. Thus someone called "Max-Müller" is alleged at page 237 to have remained "very German" throughout his academic career in England, despite his (unnoted) contention at *Natural Religion* (Müller 1907: 533) that the Greeks had learned the laws of hospitality from the Phoenicians. On the other hand, R. Brown's *Semitic Influence in Hellenic Mythology* (Brown 1898) is repeatedly extolled, although it was chiefly to explain the irrational elements in Greek culture that Brown looked to the Levant.

²⁰ Zeller 1980: 34. The oriental character of Plotinus is a datum for L'Orange 1951.

²¹ *Curatio Graecorum affectionum*, 6.61.

²² Pickthall 1908: ix and 6.

²³ Edwards 1994.

²⁴ Swain 1995.

²⁵ Armstrong 1926: 28. It is possible that some light has been shed on the present question

short of reaching Persia at a time when an isthmus between the Christian world and the remoter east was being created there by Mani,²⁶ a self-proclaimed apostle of Jesus Christ, Zoroaster and the Buddha. While there is no reason to think that Plotinus had heard of Mani, the intrusion of the Manichees into Egypt at the beginning of the 4th cent. was observed and deplored by an Alexandrian bishop and by the Platonising Christian or Christian Platonist Alexander of Lycopolis.²⁷ To both authors Mani was a Christian heretic, but he was also the founder of monastic brotherhoods which were dedicated to poverty and to cleanliness in diet, speech and conduct. Similarities between these and Buddhist institutions have been traced in detail,²⁸ though it may not be possible to determine the likely direction of influence. Perhaps it is not the Buddhists whom we should be citing for comparison: the tenet for which the Manichees were most ridiculed is that light and darkness enter us with the food that we ingest,²⁹ and the only other religion of ancient times to have inculcated a similar doctrine is Jainism, which is centuries older than Mani and has outlived him by centuries more.³⁰ The comparisons drawn by Woschitz,³¹ if they are sound, might support the argument that it was not the Indus that flowed into the Tiber (as Zeller opined), but the Euphrates into the Nile.

4. Explanatory power: Egyptian Gnosticism

Pagan and Christian occupied contiguous domains in Roman Egypt, where Christ was a younger contemporary of the Pharaonic gods. Only the first and third of my criteria are contestable here, and Wallis Budge's opinion that Coptic Christian writings made free use of the native patrimony has been corroborated, as he hoped, by modern research. Granting that Sophia in Valentinian

by an excellent discussion of another case in which a Greek philosopher is alleged to have borrowed from India. Pyrrho the sceptic is said to have accompanied Alexander in his campaigns and to have talked with the Indian sophists; what more natural, then, that he should have carried home the philosophy of negation – of saying on all occasions that "it is not" – which we associate with the Buddhist Nagarjuna? A close examination of the sources, however, suggests to Richard Bett (2000: 169–178) that the doxographers knew no more than we do of Pyrrho's itinerary, and that putative correspondences between scepticism and Buddhism lie only on the surface.

²⁶ Puech 1978 suggests that Plotinus joined the army of Gordian (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 3) because he had heard of Mani, but chronology hardly allows this.

²⁷ See van der Horst, Mansfeld 1974.

²⁸ See Lieu 1992: 219–304.

²⁹ See now BeDuhn 2000.

³⁰ See now Tatia 1994. Max Weber (2007: 194–195) suggests that the Jains were the "gymnosophists" of the Greeks.

³¹ Woschitz 1989: 105–108.

mythology is the Solomonic figure of Wisdom crossed with Eve and the biblical personification of Israel as a harlot; granting that the androgynous primal man is the supernal form of Adam when created male and female (*Gen.* 1.26); granting that the apocalyptic reveries of the Sethians are sometimes hung on a scaffolding of recondite Platonism – granting all this, there is much in Gnostic literature for which we find no congeners outside Egypt. The most obvious case is the Ogdoad, a group of eight aeons or paradigmatic energies, which according to the Valentinian scheme came into being by successive emanations of “syzygies” or conjugal pairs from the Father and his consort Silence. No such family is attested in any Greek or biblical tradition, but Egypt can offer both the Ogdoad of Hermopolis – a “mysterious company of eight divine beings,” who fall into “four pairs of male and female counterparts”³² – and the more famous Ennead of Heliopolis, which, as John Gwyn Griffiths remarks, is in fact an Ogdoad under the presidency of Aten. The correspondence is not exact: in the Valentinian myth there are four successive generations, each consisting only of a brother twinned with a sister, whereas at Heliopolis only three generations are required to produce eight deities, because, after Geb and Nut proceed from Shu and Tefnut, they bring forth two couples, first Isis and Osiris then Nephtys and Set. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a salient resemblance, that a chain of transmission is easily established, and that the pantheons of Hermopolis and Heliopolis furnish an aetiology for important features of Gnostic myth that would otherwise lack a source.³³

We may add that it is not uncommon in Egyptian myth for individual deities to be androgynous.³⁴ In the Valentinian scheme an individual aeon is always male or female, yet the fallen Sophia in her repentant phase can impregnate her unwitting son, the Demiurge.³⁵ No doubt we are intended to recall the begetting of Eros in the *Symposium* of Plato (203b–e), though there the procreative female, Poverty, is seeking a rich father for her offspring, whereas Sophia is in every sense the more resourceful partner in the Valentinian couple. Gnostic myth is a fertile permutation of elements from all quarters of the known world; so much is apparent from the Naassene sermon, in which Osiris, fraternal consort of Isis, is one of many avatars of the Demiurge,³⁶ and again from the juxtaposition of Hermetic and Platonic texts in the Nag Hammadi Codices. The presence of nat-

³² Brandon 1963: 43 and 46.

³³ It also appears that two epithets of the more august Egyptian deities, “first-born” and “self-begotten,” recur as Greek names in a variety of Gnostic texts: see Budge 1904: 1.295; 1904: 2.32 and 93.

³⁴ Sauneron 1961.

³⁵ See e.g. Iren. *Haer.* 1.2 on the Valentinians. Ismo Dunderberg reminds me that androgyny is a characteristic of individual figures in Gnostic but not Valentinian myth: see *Ap. John* NHC II, 1.12.1–8; *Gos. Eg.* NHC III, 2.51–52; *Apoc. Adam* NHC V, 5.64–65.

³⁶ Ps.-Hipp. *Haer.* 5.7. See also Helderman 1981.

ive Egyptian matter in the Greek *Hermetica* has been amply demonstrated by Garth Fowden and Peter Kingsley,³⁷ while the inventory of survivals from the Pharaonic era in Gnostic literature has been enlarged by D. Parrott, B. Pearson and J. Gwyn Griffiths (to name but three).³⁸ Nevertheless, I hesitate to follow the last of these authors all the way to the conclusion of his magisterial volume, *Triads and Trinity*, in which he maintains that the evolution of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in Egypt cannot be fully explained by adducing only Greek and biblical precedents, without reference to vernacular beliefs.

Gwyn Griffiths observes (and no-one will contradict him) that any notion of a triune God or an equal Trinity of three persons is at best inchoate in the New Testament. In pursuit of a philosophic prototype, he briefly reviews a number of Platonic speculations in which the successive planes of being are shaped by a linear hierarchy of three supramundane principles. He rightly observes, however, that "a religion in which a triad of divine beings was regarded as a unity"³⁹ is not to be found in the writings of any Platonist: even those who deified some or all members of the supramundane triad never affirmed that they were consubstantial, and never worshipped them, either as three or as one. By contrast, Gwyn Griffiths argues, consubstantial triads had been revered for centuries in Egypt, the nursery of Christian reflection on the Trinity up to the Council of Nicaea. Gwyn Griffiths quotes with circumspection a previous scholar's attempt to detect the worship of a triune divinity before the new Kingdom, and does not preclude Greek influence on some of the late attestations of this practice.⁴⁰ Furthermore, he observes that, while there are many inscriptions from Egypt in which three names are said to designate one deity, either severally or collectively, the texts in which one god is expressly said to have become three are not so plentiful; nor should it be forgotten that there are numerous acclamations of divine unity which are "neither triadic in form nor Egyptian in content." For all that, the triads formed by the syncretism of hitherto autonomous deities when their nomes coalesced into one political unit seem to him to exhibit a "composite unity" which is "on the high-road to trinitarianism," while the three chief gods of Thebes itself, the capital of the New Kingdom, were worshipped as one in both "tritheistic" and "modalistic" cults.

Gwyn Griffiths concludes that the doctrine of the Trinity represents a "confluence of two traditions," that is the Greek and the Egyptian: he ought to have said "three," for we cannot set aside the fact that all Christian formulations of this doctrine (unless an exception is made for Theophilus of Antioch) take their nomenclature from Christ's command to baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the holy Spirit (*Matt.* 28.19). If it is true that the earlier theologians

³⁷ Fowden 1993; Kingsley 2000.

³⁸ Parrott 1987; Pearson 1980; Gwyn Griffiths 1996.

³⁹ Gwyn Griffiths 1996: 229, citing Gressmann 1930: 50.

⁴⁰ Gwyn Griffiths 1996: 255, citing Morenz 1960: 150ff. and 270ff.

were binitarian rather than Trinitarian, and were driven to Procrustean measures in their attempts to distinguish the work of the Spirit from that of the Son, they were thereby giving proof of their unwillingness to reason outside the bounds set for them by scripture and the liturgy. And binitarianism, the simultaneous adoration of “one God” and “One Lord Jesus Christ” (*1 Cor.* 8.4) is not the fruit of syncretism or cerebral assiduity, but the spontaneous expression of a new faith engendered by the proclamation of Christ’s rising from the dead. In their endeavours to reconcile the easter faith with the monotheistic patrimony of the church, apologists and exegetes could avail themselves of one text after another in which some distinction appears to be drawn between God as he is in himself and God as he is in his manifestations. Neither this angelology nor the worship of Christ as God incarnate can be traced to Egypt, though we may credit its inhabitants with the first doctrine of creation by the Word,⁴¹ the first salutation of a deity as “god and son of god,”⁴² the first cult of a “mother of god”⁴³ and the first commemoration of a “medicine of immortality.”⁴⁴ It is likely enough that the native religion of Egypt, like the Greek schools of philosophy, furnished the church with verbal resources and conceptual tools that were lacking in the original deposit; the prodigiously learned case that has been advanced by Gwyn Griffiths undoubtedly meets the second, and perhaps the first, of my three criteria. If it is to have the explanatory power demanded by the third criterion, close attention must be paid to the immanent logic of the development that it professes to explain.

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⁴¹ Atwell 2000: 441–477.

⁴² Budge 1904: 1.120. See Eus. *Oratio Constantini ad coetum sanctorum*, 9.

⁴³ Budge 1904: 2.108 and 220.

⁴⁴ Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 1.25.

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How Insurmountable was the Chasm between Monophysites and Chalcedonians?*

Ewa Wipszycka

When reading the writings of those who took part in the Christological controversy, one has the impression that there is just a single, clear and simple answer to the question formulated in the title of my paper: the chasm was so deep that it could not have been overcome by anyone except for those who performed a public, therefore painful, act of conversion. The polemic literature written after the Council of Chalcedon is extremely malicious as it presents its opponents as instruments of Satan and handles those who have doubts as rough and ignorant people who can only hope to receive the necessary help to get back on the “righteous” track towards Christ.

The historiography of the 19th and 20th cent. has accepted a vision of a Christian world deeply divided from this controversy for a long time since it could not find enough information to contest it in its sources.

This concept is especially conveyed by Egyptian anti-Chalcedonian texts. The Monophysite Church built its historical self-awareness with great attention and efficacy through the help of polemic writings. Fighting against its opponents who could count on the support of the state, it needed to legitimate its hierarchy as well as to prove itself to be the only heir of the past of the Alexandrine Church, starting from Mark the Evangelist and Peter “the last of the martyrs.” In addition, for obvious reasons the Egyptian Monophysite literature was much better preserved than the Chalcedonian one. The Egyptian orthodox Church only speaks to us through those works that have been preserved by the Byzantine as part of their culture (such as the texts written by John Moschus and Sophronius and the *Lives* of John the Almsgiver). The rest of Chalcedonian literature disappeared very soon. There is one exception, the *Chronicon* by Eutychius, patriarch of Alexandria in 933–939/940. However, this particular work has not been preserved in Egypt, but in the Chalcedonian monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai, thanks to the fact that it was resumed and continued in Syrian by Yahya ibn Sa’id of Antioch, who wrote in the time period from 1010 to 1034.¹

* This paper is a revised version of the last chapter of my book *The Alexandrian Church. People and Institutions*. The Journal of Juristic Papyrology. Supplement 25. Warsaw: Journal of Juristic Papyrology, 2015.

¹ Breydy 1983.

The papyrological documents, which in other fields can be confronted with the literary evidence, cannot be used for this purpose in this particular field. They do not provide useful information for the study of religious divisions. For instance, they provide the names of the saints who were worshipped in that or the other city or village but they do not specify whether this or that *martyrion* was owned by the Chalcedonians or anti-Chalcedonians.

This limitation of the usefulness of papyrological documents is well-known to me because of a very unpleasant personal experience. Many years ago, I wrote a book about the resources and the economical activities of the Egyptian Church. There, in the *Introduction*, I mentioned the Christological controversy only once.² I was at peace with myself, considering that my research did not concern Alexandria and that the papyrological documents that were the basis of my book never mentioned the dogmatic divisions. Today, having read again and again the literary sources that had long been available and having had the possibility to study many literary sources newly published, I find myself to be in a better situation. Moreover, many recent researches done by others on hagiographic (for instance those by A. Papaconstantinou³) or historiographic texts (above all those by A. Camplani⁴) have shown how to read literary works written in Egypt – or concerning Egypt – and how to decode their message about the Church's past, its heroes and its *bêtes noires*. Finally, my work on ecclesiastical and monastic institutions has given me the occasion to look for such details that did not match the conception of a deeply divided Christianity.

What I intend to present in this paper is a set of isolated pieces of information I was able to find, and of hypotheses based on them. I am aware that I am putting forward mere hypotheses, but I hope they will trigger further research. Taking the risk to formulate new hypotheses is better than sticking to the idea that there is nothing to look for. Unfortunately, the materials that I have managed to find did not allow me to build a detailed and coherent picture. So, the only possible strategy that I can follow in this paper consists of reviewing what I found in each category of sources.

1. Historiographical sources

Let me then start with the historiographical sources. The most interesting information is offered by the *Chronicon* of John of Nikiu (Nikiu was a city of average size on the Nile Delta). The author lived in the second half of the 7th cent.,

² Wipszycka 1972: 33.

³ Papaconstantinou 2004; 2006a; 2006b; 2007.

⁴ Camplani 2015. See also Camplani 2004, 2006, 2009. On the symbolic meaning of this ritual gesture, see Camplani 2011.

a time when Egypt was already under Arab domination.⁵ Besides providing information obtained from the Byzantine chronicles (above all the one by John Malalas) and mostly concerning emperors, usurpers, and wars, John of Nikiu extensively speak about the most important (in his opinion) events which took place in Egypt. He addresses the dispute between the cities of the Delta (known as the riot in Aykelah, the Greek Metelis), which took place at the beginning of the 7th cent., as well as Niketas' conquest of Egypt (previously ruled by Phokas), and above all the Arabic conquest, which he narrates in detail.⁶ There are no doubts about the fact that concerning Egypt, his account is clearly based upon a local tradition of which there is no trace in Byzantine historiography.

John of Nikiu's *Chronicon* is not much used by late-ancient Egypt scholars because the text, which underwent two translations – from Greek or Coptic to Arabic and from Arabic to Ethiopian – is in lamentable condition. Since the scholars who know Ethiopian are very few, this work is often ignored. In order to be able to properly study it, one should have a deep knowledge of Ethiopian language. Almost 120 years after its publication by H. Zotenberg, studies related to the content of this chronicle are very rare (except for the studies concerning the Arab conquest). Despite being aware of the obstacles which make it difficult to use this text, I will use those sections of it that relate to events inside Egypt: these are very important to me, because I believe they allow us to get an idea of how the elite of the cities in the Nile Delta worked and of how the military operations, led by local chiefs, were carried out.

In John of Nikiu's account on the various divisions inside the society in the Nile Delta, doctrinal divisions rarely appear. The author mentions two Chalcedonian patriarchs, Eulogius and Theodorus Skribon, because of their attitude towards the conflicts in the area of the Delta and in Alexandria, but he does not express a negative judgment on them, he just gives information.⁷ Of course he talks about Benjamin, a Monophysite patriarch, but he does it only towards the end of the *Chronicon* (chapter 121) and this passage is also brief and contains

⁵ Zotenberg 1883. The English translation generally cited is Charles 1916 (however it is not very good). It needs to be checked by comparing it with the French translation by Zotenberg: see Booth 2011. See also J. Jarry's papers published in 1964 and 1974.

⁶ I am referring to chapters 97 (riot in Aykelah), 105 (riot in Achmin), 107–109 (riot against Phokas in Egypt), 111–122 (Arab conquest of Egypt). About the events which took place in the Delta, see Jarry 1964 and 1974.

⁷ Zotenberg 1883: 97.11: Eulogius reaches an agreement with the rebellious leaders of Aykelah; 107.6: Theodorus Skribon learns about the conspiracy against Phokas and, together with the governor of Alexandria and the leader of the wheat barns, he writes a letter to the Emperor to inform him of the imminent betrayal; 107.16: during the civil disorders that exploded, when Niketas, appointed chief of the army by Heraclius, enters the city of Alexandria, Theodorus hides in a church. Instead, Theodorus' killing is not mentioned: probably, this fact did not seem relevant to the chronicler.

no judgment.⁸ The synod of bishops belonging to both churches that Cyrus managed to arrange in 634, is not mentioned at all. The author could have used this episode to condemn the betrayal of Monophysite bishops but he chose not to do it.

The part of the *Chronicon* that depicts the role of Cyrus (a Chalcedonian man) during the final phase of the Arab conquest is noteworthy. When Cyrus, exiled by Heraclius who had been dissatisfied by his negotiations with the Arabs, comes back to Alexandria after the emperor's death, having been entrusted by Empress Marina with the task of making peace with the Arab leader, "elderly and young people, men and women" greet him. He retires in a monastery together with the high officials in order to decide what to do. Then, when he goes in a solemn procession to the Kaisareion (Alexandria's most important church), people cover the streets with carpets and mill around to see the patriarch who carries the Holy Cross taken from the Tabennesiots' monastery. The first meeting between Cyrus and Amr in Babylon (an important fortress in Memphis) is described with respect and sympathy. Having obtained peace, the patriarch goes back to Alexandria and is paid homage by the chiefs of the army. When they learn about the tax level established by the peace treaty, a part of the city's inhabitants rebelled. With tears in his eyes, Cyrus tries to pacify them by stating that he has accepted the agreement with the Arabs to save them and their children. When the Greeks sailed away from Alexandria, Cyrus remained in the city. Sometime later he died (643?) disheartened by the attitude of the Arabs, who had not complied with the conditions of the treaty.

In other texts written by Monophysites (for instance, in the *Life of Samuel of Kalamun*⁹), Cyrus is described as "a bloodthirsty beast," whereas in John of Nikiu's *Chronicon* he is described in a matter-of-fact way with perhaps even a hint of sympathy. In the eyes of this chronicler, doctrinal conflicts do not seem to be decisive for the destiny of Egypt. It is true that the great attention he dedicates to local wars can be explained as an effect of the literary model he follows (that is, the chronicle genre). Yet it is a fact that his representation of Egyptian society does not put the religious conflicts into the foreground. We have to keep in mind that he is a Monophysite bishop.

While the doctrinal division is not so evident in his *Chronicon*, the role of "the colours," i.e. the "green" and "blue" groups which we know from the horse rides in hippodromes, is emphasised. What their nature was within the conditions of Egypt at that time is not entirely clear (the evidence is scanty) but one thing is certain: they did not correspond to a doctrinal division. According

⁸ "And abba Benjamin, the patriarch of Egyptians, returned to the city of Alexandria in the thirteenth year after his flight from the Romans, and he went to the Churches and inspected all of them. And every one said: 'This expulsion (of the Romans) and victory of Moslems is due to the wickedness of the Emperor Heraclius and his persecution of the Orthodox through the Patriarch Cyrus'."

⁹ Alcock 1983.

to what we know about the behavior of the “colours” in Constantinople and Antioch, we can also suppose that in certain situations in Egypt these groups supported Chalcedonians or Monophysites. However, they are never, even in Constantinople, associated with one or the other ecclesiastical hierarchy. The best hypothesis about the nature of these groups is perhaps one that considers them as groups of interests of the local elite.¹⁰

While John of Nikiu’s *Chronicon* is useful to me, the works belonging to the genre of ecclesiastical history do not offer much relevant information relating to my subject. Engaged in Christological controversies, their authors were unable to perceive any fact that did not conform to the pattern determined by their doctrinal option. The work that, being of Egyptian origin, could be expected to yield the greatest amount of relevant information, i.e. the *History of the Coptic Patriarchs of Alexandria*, is in fact a passionate apology of the Severian tendency – one of the tendencies inside Monophysitism – and it is completely lacking any element of self-criticism. Despite having a wider historical perspective than the one in the *History of the Coptic Patriarchs*, two non-Egyptian authors, Zacharias of Mythilenes and John of Ephesus, also do not give us enough information to evaluate the extent of the dogmatic division. Liberatus of Carthage, the author of a *Breviarium* in between polemic and historiography, offers much information about the development of Christological controversies (especially those in Egypt), but he does not mention anything that lets us understand the way in which the controversies affected common people. All these authors are “professionals of the doctrinal polemic” and their representation of historical reality is subordinated to this purpose.

2. Hagiographical texts and sanctuarial contexts

Very interesting data is contained in hagiographic texts linked to sanctuaries that had a wide range of clientele, not an entirely local one. We have four Egyptian *dossiers* belonging to this genre: the *miracula*, recounted in the already mentioned work by Sophronius; the *miracula* and the *enkomia* of Saint Menas, worshipped in Abu Mena, a small town in the Libic desert 40 km west of Al-

¹⁰ See Booth 2011. This article rejects the interpretation of the “colours” proposed by A. Cameron in his famous book published in 1976. Cameron was definitely contrary to the idea of associating the “colours” with groups organised for political purposes; he wanted to find an explanation of their meaning in the sphere of hippodrome spectacles, by confronting them with modern football supporters’ groups. In fear of possible criticisms from Cameron, historians have avoided discussing the issue for a long time. Booth 2011 analyses John of Nikiu’s work with great attention and, in my opinion, in a very convincing way.

exandria;¹¹ the *enkomia* in honour of Saint Claudius,¹² spoken in his sanctuary situated in Pohe, a village nearby Lykopolis; the *miracula* and the *enkomia* of Saint Kollouthos, worshipped in Antinoe and in Pneuith nearby Panopolis.¹³

If we put aside the case of the *martyrion* of Cyrus and John for a moment, we can say that in these *dossiers* neither Chalcédonians nor Monophysites are mentioned. Instead, there is information about special cases of Jewish, Samaritan, Melitian, pagan, and Zoroastrian pilgrims who have been miraculously healed by Saints. If we could not read anything but these three *dossiers*, then we would not be able to know about the main doctrinal conflict of that time, the conflict between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians. In these texts, the stance of the clergy of a given sanctuary is not made clear. Certainly, they would not be neutral and their stances must have been known to the faithful, since it was revealed by the reading of the diptychs during the mass (that is, by the reading of the list of both living and dead bishops and patriarchs belonging to one doctrinal option). Moreover, those who frequently attended a sanctuary used to know which bishops visited it. However, for those who arrived to ask for the intervention of a saint (or the saints), the knowledge of these facts was

¹¹ Drescher 1946; Jaritz 1993 (see especially chapter 4.5: “Andersgläubige,” 305–307).

¹² Godron 1970.

¹³ Schenke 2013; Godron 1970. See also Grossmann 2010 and 2012. Grossmann tries to find an explanation for the coexistence of two worship centres linked to St. Kollouthos: one in Antinoe and the other in Pneuith, a village situated 20 km north of Panopolis. We know them thanks to the *enkomia* written by two bishops, Phoibammon of Panopolis and Isaak of Antinoe (about the first we know that he was active during 30's and the 40's of the 6th cent., the years of patriarch Timothy III; about the second, we do not know anything and the *enkomion* written by him is to be imprecisely dated in a period of time that goes from the 5th to the 7th cent.). Grossmann is convinced that the coexistence of those two centres is due to doctrinal conflicts: in his opinion the sanctuary of Antinoe was probably Chalcedonian while that of Pneuith was probably Monophysite. He writes (Grossmann 2012: 91–92): “Da im Hinblick auf die bis in die Spätantike wirksame Entstehungsgeschichte der Stadt Antinoopolis damit zu rechnen ist, daß die Mehrheit der Bevölkerung das griechische bzw. alexandrinische Bürgerrecht besaß und damit mehrheitlich wohl auch zu den Anhängern des chalcédonischen Bekenntnisses zu zählen ist, dürfte sich das Kolluthosheiligtum der Stadt im Besitz der chalcédonischen Kirche, also der von den Kopten als melkitisch (‘kaiserlich’) geschmähten Kirche, befunden haben. Die monophysitischen Kopten hätten sich damit bei gegebenen Anlässen an ein ihrem Glauben fremdes dyophysitisches Heilungszentrum wenden müssen, was sicher auch dem monophysitischen Klerus nicht gefiel. Um das zu ändern, hat daher Phoibammon in seiner Diözese ein Heilungszentrum geschaffen, an das sich bei Bedarf die Monophysiten wenden konnten.” Grossmann's statements are not based on the sources; they are conclusions drawn from the preconceived opinion that the conflict between the worshipers of the two churches was too harsh for them to pray in the same place and to ask for healing. The coexistence of one or more sanctuaries related to a popular Saint is too frequent a phenomenon for Grossmann's argument to be considered as valid. In the *enkomion* spoken in the sanctuary of Pneuith, there is no reference to the presence of the Saint's relics while it is said that drops of the Saint's blood were poured in the water contained in the tank from where the pilgrims used to drink.

probably not so important. I believe that, at that time, clear-cut differences in the liturgical field did not exist.

The two sanctuaries in Northern Egypt that were previously mentioned (that of Saint Claudius and that of Saint Kollouthos), were certainly Monophysite. The texts available relating to them were written by Monophysite bishops who are well known to us. The case of Abu Mena is much more complicated. The *enkomion* in honour of Saint Menas, an important source for the history of this sanctuary, mentions, among those who most contributed to its development, the Monophysite patriarch Timothy Ailouros, Damian and Emperor Zeno, who supported, to a certain extent, the Monophysites. This could seem enough to identify the stance of Abu Mena's clergy. However, it is legitimate to have some doubts. The *enkomion* in question was probably written by a Monophysite patriarch of Alexandria, John III (677–686). I wonder whether the anti-Chalcedonian genealogy drawn by him was consistent with the truth or was invented as a defence against the Chalcedonians who claimed that the sanctuary had belonged to them before the Arab conquest. This question seems justified since this *enkomion*, in its entirety, is not a very reliable source. Could it be that Abu Mena's clergy changed positions? I would not exclude that the chiefs of this wealthy and powerful sanctuary, which had a large clientele (even from outside of Egypt), had their own policy according to the situation. When the Chalcedonians asked Marwan II (the last Umayyad Caliph, 744–750) for the restitution of the sanctuary, the caliph passed the request along to the governor of Egypt Abd el-Malik. The Chalcedonian patriarch Cosmas I (742–768) and the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch Michael I (743–767) confronted each other in front of Abd el-Malik and an Islamic judge chosen by him. The Arab authorities treated the question in a serious way. The case was won by the Monophysites, who were definitely stronger at that time.

As appears from the findings of Saint Menas' ampoules, which contained blessed oil, the sanctuary of Abu Menas was known in Italy, southern Gaul and also on the west coast of the Black Sea – wherever ships departing from Alexandria arrived.¹⁴ The pilgrims who came from far away must have been indifferent concerning the doctrinal stance of the sanctuary. Whether they were Monophysite or Chalcedonian, the clergy of this sanctuary were not holding doctrinal confrontations within its walls.

East of Alexandria, approximately 24 km from the city, there was another important sanctuary that attracted ill people: the sanctuary in which the relics of Cyrus and John were kept and where ill people subjected themselves to the rite of incubation. Not all of the devote pilgrims were Chalcedonians. We for-

¹⁴ It is odd to notice that the recovery of these ampoules is extremely rare in Egypt except for Alexandria and the coast. Scholars do not usually mention this fact. I do not know how to explain it. Certainly, we cannot suppose that the cult of Saint Menas' was not widely spread in Egypt: its diffusion is abundantly documented.

tunately possess an extensive text which allows us to see how this sanctuary worked: the *Miracula* composed by Sophronius, a fervent Chalcedonian, who later became the patriarch of Jerusalem. Sophronius knew this sanctuary thanks to his personal experience: he declares that it was there that he had been healed from an eye disease during his stay in Alexandria (610–620).¹⁵

Sophronius is positive: according to him, the efficacy of the miraculous therapy depended on whether the ill person followed the Chalcedonian creed (and of course also on whether he/she observed the principles of Christian morals). It was the Saints themselves who asked the Monophysite pilgrims for conversion, posing this as a condition for the healing, in which the Eucharist offering (the true one, not tainted by heretics) would played a fundamental role. The Saints threatened the ill with punishment in case of disobedience, or they inflicted them pain, sometimes they swore that the Chalcedonian creed was the only orthodox one and that its opponents would enter heaven.

Can we, from these lively accounts, conclude that the sanctuary's clergy demanded the conversion of its non-Chalcedonian visitors? This is not evident at all. We have a good reason to think that Sophronius' work reflects his own beliefs rather than the actual behavior of the sanctuary's clergy. Vincent Déroche has recently published an account of *miracula* which is independent from Sophronius', was written in the same sanctuary between 615 and 641/642, and has been preserved in a Byzantine menologium from the 10th cent.¹⁶ In this account of five miracles, the idea that a Monophysite pilgrim had to convert if he wanted to obtain a miracle is not mentioned at all. Instead, there is the idea that if a pilgrim does not obtain the hoped for miracle from the Saints, it is because he doubted their capabilities.

Sophronius was not only a fervent defender of Chalcedonian faith, he also was a narrator of paradoxical cases that can be relevant for my research. In the 12th *Miraculum*, he tells the story of a Monophysite Alexandrian notable who had been healed by the Saints and had converted, but because of shame had hesitated to manifest his faith publicly by partaking in the Eucharist offering with the Chalcedonians. To push him towards a full conversion, the Saints lured him into a trap. They suggested that on Christmas day, he should go to the church consecrated to Mary, called the Church of Theonas (the most ancient and prestigious church of Alexandria), stay there until the end of the reading of the Gospels, go out before the Eucharist offering, and then, after the end of the mass and after everybody left the Church, return there to take part in the Eucharist offering without being seen by everybody. He followed the instructions but, in the moment he was taking the Eucharist offering, a hundred of Gaianite presby-

¹⁵ Edition: Fernández Marcos 1975. A French translation with a wide and important commentary is Gascou 2006. See also Gascou 2008 and Booth 2014: 44–89 (chapter “Sophronius and the Miracles”).

¹⁶ Déroche 2012.

ters¹⁷ (supporters of Julian of Halicarnassus, members of a group internal to the Monophysites) entered the church to pray, “as they used to do.” in this way, his conversion stopped being a secret. It is interesting to notice that these Gaianites did not refrain from attending a Chalcedonian Church although they did not take part in the Eucharist offering. From their point of view, the Chalcedonian Eucharist offering was not the real one, but if they wanted to pray they had to use a Church even if this was being held by heretics. Certainly, this line of thought may seem incoherent, but it was quite typical in the world of Late Antiquity.

The protagonist of the 36th account is a man who persisted in his heretic faith despite the numerous admonitions that the Saints lavished upon him in his dreams. At a certain point (36.14–15), the Saints, who appear in a dream as a deacon, invite him to enter a baptismal chamber where the Eucharist is preserved, but he says:

No, I will not enter because I follow a doctrine which is not that of the Church. I am waiting for my mother to bring me the Eucharist offering. Until then, while the gates of the sepulcher are opened, please allow me to take the oil for the lamp.” In fact, many of those who do not commune with us follow this practice: they take the oil which burns in the lamp of the Saints instead of Christ’s holy body. In my opinion, they are not aware of what they do and they do not acknowledge the seriousness of the offence.

Another episode, in 38.5–6: a Monophysite named Stephen, warned by the saints in his dreams, converted and was then healed. Sometime later, “although he was a barbarian” his servant converted too. The devil then tried to ruin the actions of the Saints:

After his healing of the soul and of the body and after both of them recovered their sight, while still in the sanctuary the servant asked Stephen: “Master, having obeyed the orders of the Saints, we became members of the Catholic Church. But when we will, with the help of God, return to the place where we belong will we have to remain faithful to those orders or will we have to go back to our previous condition.” His master replied “While we are here, let us do what seems good to the martyrs but when we will leave, we will resume our previous faith, the one that our fathers have given to us.”

Obviously, Stephen is first punished and then forgiven.

3. The *Synodikon* of the West Syrian Church (1204)

We still have another text that allows us to get a sense of the behavior of people following different doctrines when they happened to live together. This specific

¹⁷ It is significant that Sophronius imagines these Gaianites entering the church as presbyters and not as simple worshipers. The number – a hundred – is totally unrealistic (in those years, the entire sect did not reach such a high number of presbyters).

text has not been used by students of Church history, therefore I believe it is appropriate to quote long passages from it. This is one of the texts that compose the *Synodikon* of the West Syrian Church, preserved in a manuscript written in 1204. The text has the following title: “The ecclesiastical canons which were given by the holy Fathers during the time of persecution.” The persecution to which the title alludes to is one ordered by Justinian against the Monophysites.¹⁸ In the beginning, all the bishops from whom these canons originated are listed:

Qōnstantīnā, Antūnīnā, Tūmā, Pelag, Eustat, holy bishops who, during the persecution, were in the town of Alexandria during the life of the late Patriarch Mār Severus and when Patriarch Theodosius was on his throne, in the thirteenth year that is called ‘Indiction’ by the Greeks.¹⁹

The bishops mentioned here can be identified thanks to the fact that their names appear in Severus’ correspondence during his years in Antioch (512–518).²⁰ They had escaped into Egypt to avoid the persecutions organised by the Chalcedonians just as many other ecclesiastical men, known for their anti-Chalcedonian attitude, had done. The text was destined to the Syrian Monophysite Church. It is written in the form of questions and answers. Here is part of these:

Question 2: “Is it allowed for orthodox monks who are persecuted – since they do not have monasteries – to go and dwell in the martyries kept by those of two natures? Is it proper to perform services there?”

The answer: “When these friends of God, persecuted monks, are in want of lodging and enter and dwell in these martyries of which you speak, they shall make their services (there) – for not even a single violation occurs to the ecclesiastical canon on this account.”

This canon is surprising. We have to consider that if the Monophysites celebrated Mass in a *martyrion* held by the Chalcedonians, they could not do it in secret since they needed the consent (explicit or implicit) of the Chalcedonian chiefs of the sanctuary or even that of the Chalcedonian bishop.

Question 3: “It occurs, indeed, in the martyries kept by the orthodox that at the time when orthodox clerics complete the sacred mysteries, there are present persons who join without distinction the adherence of the Council of Chalcedon and (also) join in participating in the holy mysteries celebrated by one of the orthodox priests; it even occurs that they bring in the

¹⁸ Vööbus 1975: 159–163.

¹⁹ As we can see, the document was written in a moment when there were two patriarchs operating at the same time, Severus of Antioch and Theodosius of Alexandria (both exiled), hence between 535 (the date in which Theodosius was appointed as bishop) and 538 (the date in which Severus died). Between these two dates, the 13th indiction falls in the period from September 534 to September 535. The information about the indiction in this document guarantees that the writers of the *Synodikon* had either the document itself or a text of the same period in their hands. Usually, in works such as these canons we do not find dates indicated. These dates were useful in circular letters. The writers who put together collections of canons usually skipped dates as well as the names of the people to whom circular letters were addressed.

²⁰ See Alpi 2009 (for the prosopographical repertory, see vol. 2:114–176).

tenth or that which is called offerings; (we desire) to learn whether it is proper to give them of the sacred mysteries and whether the orthodox may receive any thing which they bring.”

The answer: “The exact canon of the church remains (valid); they cannot without distinction receive those who have fellowship with the heretics, and their holy offering cannot be given to them by the orthodox priests and they shall also not receive anything that they bring. But since the orthodox have difficulties in making distinction between them because of the multitude of the people, even as in times past, in the days of the holy fathers, as they saw that they were not able to distinguish the orthodox because of the multitude of the people, they regulated this matter with prudence as they could. So you shall also regulate this matter as you can (in such a way) that you will not be accused of neglecting strictness and so that you will not give cause for trouble and commotion (among the crowd).”

A similar strategy can be observed in the canons following this one. If in the *martyria* there are ill people who are not able to distinguish the orthodox Eucharist from the heretic one, and if disorders or damages are to be expected in case they are not allowed to take part in the Eucharist offering, then they must also be allowed to take part in it; however, the priest has to warn them that, after their healing, they will have to remain in the orthodox community (that is, the anti-Chalcedonian one). We can imagine that the possible “disorders and damages” could have been caused by the protests of the families of the ill people deprived of the Eucharist offering. What is more, these protests could have been backed up by the crowd present in the sanctuary.

Characterised by pragmatism, the suggestions of these canons are in contrast with the rigorous principles expressed by normative texts. Timothy I, patriarch of Alexandria (380–385), in his canonical answer states that the heretics cannot be present at the Eucharist offering.²¹ In the apocryphal and very popular *Questions and Answers to Antiochus*, a work attributed – undoubtedly wrongly – to Athanasius, people who receive communion from heretic priests or administer it to heretics are sharply condemned (“do not give what is holy to the dogs, says the Lord”).²²

The canons of the Syrian *Synodikon* were created to be used in the Syrian Monophysite Church but it is legitimate to think that they could have been useful in Egypt as well. Let us remember that their authors were men belonging to the entourage of Severus, who, ever since he was deprived of Antioch’s throne, lived in Egypt and enjoyed there a great prestige. He had a deep knowledge of Egyptian customs thanks to his numerous journeys throughout the country. It was probably in Egypt that his opinion about the strategy to follow in mixed communities was developed. I think that the strategy suggested by the canons

²¹ Joannou 1963: 245–246.

²² Joannou 1963: 81. Composed in the form of answers and questions, this work has been written little by little: probably, various pieces were added to the original core during the 5th cent. and, again, during the 7th cent. This forces us to consider every single piece separately. As regards the piece I am quoting, the *terminus ante quem* for its dating is obtained from the fact that it was included in the *Canons of the Holy Fathers*.

of the Syrian *Synodikon* could have been influenced by what happened in the two large sanctuaries nearby Alexandria, that of Abu Mena and that of Cyrus and John.

In the big *martyria* and in the churches of the biggest cities, then, the principle of exclusion of believers of a different faith did not apply. Did things work differently in the churches of small communities, where everybody knew each other and those who took part in the cult were always the same people? A tiny archive of documents coming from a small ensemble of hermitages named Labla, situated near the pyramid of Hawara (in Fayyum), warns against making premature conclusions.²³ In a pot buried in a corner of a room, archaeologists found three documents from the first years of the 6th cent. that regulated the legal situation of a hermitage that had to be used as a pledge for a loan. The parts of the loan contract are a Melitian monk who had converted to “orthodoxy” (we cannot know what this term indicated in the Fayyum area at the beginning of the 6th cent. since all Christians called themselves orthodox) and some other Melitian monks (among which is a presbyter). The witnesses of the contract are two presbyters: a Melitian one and an “orthodox” one, both exerting their functions in their respective *katholike ekklesia* (parish church) within the *monasterion* of Labla. What *katholikai ekklesiai* were within a small ensemble of hermitages presents a problem. As for my own reflections, what is relevant is the fact that all the monks appearing in these documents used to live together in Labla, and their belonging to two different faiths did not seem to create any difficulties.

These three documents are also important from another point of view: they remind us of the fact that small religious groups professing a faith which is not that of the majority of the society in which they live, can persist for a very long time.²⁴ For this reason, it is very difficult for me to believe that in Egypt, in regions where, according to Monophysite sources, the Monophysites had completely won, there were not any groups of Chalcedonians left.

I came to the same conclusion after reading Mikhail 2014, which is extremely useful because it illustrates the problems of Egyptian history in an Arab (not Byzantine) perspective and it examines Arab sources in a critical and original way. In many passages of the book, the author shows facts that prove the strength of pro-Chalcedonian circles during the Arab period. These were a minority and were getting narrower as time passed, yet they persisted for a much longer period than we used to think. However, as the author points out, our knowledge in this sector is limited to the area of the Delta; for Middle and Southern Egypt we do not have any information.

²³ P.Dubl. 32–34; see my comment in Wipszycka 2009.

²⁴ While I was writing these words, in August 2014, the world’s public opinion was realising the existence, in North Iraq, of very small religious communities. These had been living there since ancient times until nowadays – until Islamic extremists committed to their extermination arose. This information is instructive for a historian of the Church.

4. At the same table? Monastic environments and doctrinal controversies

One of the practical difficulties that arose in the relationships between followers of different doctrines consisted in taking part in meals, especially solemn meals. The *Canons of Basil* (canon 67) report a norm that had been established before: the presbyters could not accept invitations to eat from heretics.²⁵ Yet the authors of the *Synodikon* have a different approach towards invitations:

It is not right particularly for the orthodox clerics to eat with the heretical clerics and with the laymen. But it is good also for the orthodox laymen to avoid eating with those. If, however, it happens and (an occasion of) necessity which they cannot avoid obliges them to eat, the orthodox shall take it upon themselves to make no prayer with the heretics, not even that one called the benediction over the food and drink placed before them.

It is obvious that the monastic environments were particularly engaged in doctrinal controversies and showed a clear tendency towards extreme stances. Even if not all of them did, it was usually the monks who put pressure upon the bishops so that they did not accept any compromise. It was them who provoked tumults within the churches, and them who went out into the streets and fought their opponents. The history of the conflicts in Alexandria linked to the Christological question shows that they arose in the outskirts full of monasteries. Impressed by the intensity and the frequency of the conflicts in which the Monophysite monks were involved, scholars are convinced that in the neighborhood of Alexandria, apart from the Pachomian monastery in Canopus, orthodox monasticism was almost nonexistent. Yet actually the situation was not that simple. During the years in which he was living in Alexandria (beginning of the 7th cent.), John Moschus, the famous author of the *Leimonarion*, friend of Sophronius and defender of the Chalcedonian orthodoxy, had relationships with many particularly pious monks belonging to monastic communities located in the outskirts. In particular, he found interlocutors in the monastery of Enaton, the “community of the ninth mile,” the place where more than one Monophysite patriarch stayed.²⁶ (Enaton was a huge monastic complex, made of various *laurai* and autonomous monasteries; it used to have a chief, who was endowed with prestige, but not with the power to guide the monks). It is therefore clear that groups following different doctrines as well as groups who did not want to take part in doctrinal conflicts could live together in the same monastic centre.

²⁵ Riedel 1900: 267.

²⁶ The Enaton is mentioned in chapters 145, 146, 147, 148, 184. The only (very poor) edition of the *Pratum* is in PG 87/3:2852–3112. English translation: Wortley 1998. About the work of John Moschos, as a source for the history of Alexandrian monasticism, see Haas 2002. I do not agree with Ch. Haas for what concerns the dimensions of the groups of Chalcedonian monks in the area surrounding Alexandria.

The number of non-Chalcedonians in the monastery of Enaton must have been quite remarkable, otherwise the Monophysite majority would have made them to leave: they would not have used violent methods but they would have simply created an unfriendly atmosphere that would have impelled the Monophysites to leave. We have to bear in mind that the Egyptian monks did not consider the stability of the place as a binding rule.

The fact that non-Monophysites were present in the monastery of Enaton can be also learned from the information provided by the anonymous *Vita* of the Chalcedonian patriarch John, known as John the Almsgiver. In order to assist Palestine, invaded by Persians, he sent a considerable amount of money together with wheat, wine, oil and clothes to Ctesippus, who according to the text was the “chief of Enaton.”²⁷ Certainly, this monk could not have managed the whole monastery; he probably was the Archimandrite of one of the monasteries in Enaton – a Chalcedonian monastery. (For some time, I took into consideration the possibility that Ctesippus was a Monophysite known for his honesty, but I later persuaded myself that the patriarch John– who, despite not being a fanatic, was a fervent Chalcedonian– would have never chosen a Monophysite for this mission).

The monastic milieu of Alexandria’s immediate surroundings was not the only one taking an active part in Christological conflicts. The big monasteries in the interior of the country, having a long tradition and good libraries and being aware of their prestige and thus convinced of having a mission towards the less active brothers, were inclined to manifest their beliefs in a violent way. A text concerning the 6th-cent. Pachomian monks, recently published by Goehring, gives us a sense of what used to happen in Pabau, in the most important Pachomian monastery, a place shaken by internal conflicts.²⁸ The abbot of Pabau, Abraham of Farshut, a convinced Monophysite, had to deal with the opposition of a group of monks in his monastery that eventually force the local authorities to arrest him and to send him to Constantinople under an armed guard. Justinian tried in vain to obtain his conversion to the Chalcedonian creed. Removed from his role as abbot, Abraham went back to Egypt and, with the help of two monks who had left Pabau, he managed to establish a new monastery in his native village of Farshut. The management of the monastery of Pabau was committed to one of the opponents of the ex-abbot. The new monastic community established by Abraham was not persecuted in any way, despite the fact that it was a Monophysite community and that Justinian still ruled the Empire.

As we see, in Pabau it was an internal conflict at the monastery that made it possible for the state authorities to intervene and to remove a Monophysite abbot without putting the existence of the community at risk. This is confirmed by the fact that the Monophysite monastery of Shenoute in Sohag – the so-

²⁷ See Delehay 1927: 10.23.

²⁸ Goehring 2012.

called White Monastery – did not undergo any oppression: its internal cohesion did not allow the authorities to intervene. Probably, the other anti-Monophysite persecutions to which our sources refer to used to happen in analogous situations as the one described in the monastery of Pabau – apart from the cases in which riotous individuals caused revolts in the streets of Alexandria and had to be punished.

The Pachomian monastery of Canopus, called the monastery of Metanoia or monastery of the Tabennesiots (from the name of the village of Tabennese, in which Pachomius established the first of his monasteries), is generally considered as Chalcedonian. It was from this community that three of the most important Chalcedonian patriarchs came: Timothy Salophakiolos, John Talaia and Paul Tabennesiotes. However, the Metanoia is mentioned in a definitely anti-Chalcedonian text, the *Panegyricus* in honour of Macarius of Tkow (Antaiopolis), which, according to the statements that it contains, was written by the patriarch Dioscorus in person. In this *Panegyricus*, we are told that Paphnutius, Archimandrite of the Pachomian congregation, stayed in the Metanoia monastery for a year while waiting for the return of Macarius from Constantinople (Shenoute the Great had told him that in order to be healed from gout he had to put his feet in Macarius's sandals). When, after the Chalcedonian council, the Saint comes back to Alexandria on a ship belonging to the monastery of Tabennesiots, Paphnutius persuades him to go with him to Canopus. This text is a product of the anti-Chalcedonian propaganda and was written during the 6th cent., probably in the second half of the century.²⁹ As we can see at that time, a fervent Monophysite does not hold any grudge against the Monastery of Canopus, rather he considers it a friendly place.

In a passage from the *Vita* of Severus of Antioch (clearly a Monophysite text) where he describes the Alexandrine student environment, Zacharias states that Peter Mongus asked the monks in Metanoia to help a group of *philoponoi* students to destroy a pagan site in Menouthis (in a year between 482 and 489).³⁰ When he came to own a precious relic (allegedly the piece of cloth with which Christ had dried the feet of the Apostles), the Monophysite patriarch Timothy III (517–535) brought it to the church of the Tabennesiots.³¹

We have to ask ourselves: do these facts which imply the existence of good relationships between Monophysite patriarchs and the monastery of Metanoia

²⁹ Johnson 1980: 15.116–119 (text); 90–93 (translation). The opinion on the relevance of this text for my research depends on how this text is dated. Its editor denied that it had been written by Dioscorus and tried to prove that it had been actually written in 6th cent. Later, Moawad 2007 and 2010: 210–212, he stated that the *Urtext* had to be associated with the name of Dioscorus despite the fact that it contained many passages that could have not been written around the half of the 5th cent. This opinion does not seem very convincing to me.

³⁰ PO 2/1.6:27.

³¹ John of Nikiu, *Chronicon*, 91.

also testify to temporary changes in the doctrinal stance of the monastery? Jean Gascou, who studied the history of the Alexandrine Church in particular, suggested this hypothesis.³² However, I think that it is possible to explain these facts in a different way. The participation of state officials in the persecution of Monophysite monastic communities does not necessarily mean that the relationships between the state and the Monophysites were always bad. Sometimes, Monophysite bishops were treated with immense respect by the imperial authorities.

5. Homilies and panegyrics

In one of the last years of the 6th cent. or the first years of the 7th cent., the Monophysite patriarch Damian preached a solemn sermon in the most important church of Alexandria. The sermon was pronounced in the presence of a special delegate of Emperor Maurice – the *logothetes* Constantine Ladrys – and Amantius, a powerful eunuch in the Palatine hierarchy.³³ (The Emperor had sent his dignitaries to arrest the leaders of the riots in the cities of the Nile Delta.) A large crowd took part in the ceremony, including the elite of the city. Much is surprising: the Emperor is a Chalcedonian, Alexandria's *katholike* church belongs to the Chalcedonians and there is a Chalcedonian patriarch in Alexandria, Eulogius. Nonetheless, the sermon is pronounced by the Monophysite patriarch. We are certainly dealing with a political gesture originating from a previous agreement between the two parts. (Had Eulogius compromised himself during the riot of the Delta and had he thus been forced to carry out this gesture? This just a possibility, nothing more).

In the *History of the Coptic Patriarchs of Alexandria*, we can find a similar case:³⁴ according to this text the Monophysite patriarch Anastasius preached a homily in the church of John the Baptist, an extremely prestigious church in the hands of the Chalcedonians. In his homily he cursed Phokas, and this information reached the usurper through the witness of the Chalcedonian Eulogius. Due to this episode, the church of Saints Cosmas and Damian was taken away from the Monophysites. I am not able to evaluate the reliability of this account, but in any case, it is interesting to note that the author who was the primary source of this part of the *History of the Coptic Patriarchs of Alexandria* and who wrote at the beginning of the 8th cent., did not find it strange that a Monophysite had preached a homily in one of the main Chalcedonian churches of the city.

³² Gascou 2007: 278–279.

³³ Crum 1913, no. 7. The designation of Constantine Ladrys as governor of Alexandria is mentioned by John of Nikiu, *Chron.* 97.27. In the text, he says that Constantine arrested a few people. This happened at the end of the riot in Aykelah.

³⁴ PO 1:479.

The colophon of the manuscript of the first Panegyric in honour of Saint Claudius, written by Constantine, a Monophysite bishop of Lykopolis, reports that during a celebration at the sanctuary in which the inhabitants of three cities (Panopolis, Hermopolis and Lykopolis) took part, there were the *eparchos* and the *stratelates* (the *dux*?) of the Thebaid and a *magistrianos* sent by the Emperor with “letters of peace.” The colophon of the manuscript of the second Panegyric, written by the same author, mentions the presence of the patriarch’s vicar Andronicus: on his return to Alexandria the vicar made a report of the miracles that had happened thanks to Saint Claudius. The Bishop Constantine who had been appointed by Damian (578–605/607) lived until 640.³⁵ We do not know what was contained in the “letters of peace;” neither do we know whether the emperor was Phokas (602–610) or Heraclius (614–641). The second Panegyric must have been written in 619, when the Alexandrine throne was already taken by Andronicus but before the Persians came from northern Egypt: this happened in 619 but in the text there is no allusion to an imminent danger and the vicar easily returns to Alexandria. At that time, the empire was governed by a particularly fervent emperor who had committed himself to a holy war against the Persians in order to gain back lost territories as well as the true Cross.

Another example is provided by the colophon of the *enkomion* written by Phoibammon, Bishop of Panopolis, in honour of the martyr Kollouthos. This *enkomion* was spoken by him in the sanctuary of Kollouthos in Pneuith (see above). The great *eparchos* of Antinoe and Hermopolis and some officials from Panopolis were attending the ceremony.³⁶

6. Conclusions

Let us review the considerations thus far. If the traditional opinion according to which there was an insuperable chasm between Chalcedonians and Monophysites were held to be true, some of the various facts that I have listed would be considered as anomalies. Actually, these facts show that the situation concerning the relationships between the representatives of the two Churches in Egypt during the 6th–7th cent. was indeed very fluid and depended on the

³⁵ Garitte 1950: 287–304. See also Orlandi 2010.

³⁶ This text has been published by Schenke 2013: 161–164. In Schenke’s opinion, the great *eparchos* of Antinoe and of Hermopolis was the governor of the province of Thebais. This seems a bit surprising to me. When talking about someone else, the author of the colophon used the term *dux*: why would he, in this case, have called the *dux* of Thebais in this way? I think it is more probable that he was referring to the pagarch of two cities close to each other. In John of Nikiu’s *Chronicon*, in 97.409, there can be found a reference to a case in which a single person is the pagarch of two *nomoi*.

line-up of the social forces (not just ecclesiastical ones) in a certain place, at a certain historical time. Ecclesiastical leaders and state officials did not all have to show the same behavior in Alexandria as in Lykopolis, in Oxyrhynchos as in Arsinoe etc. The traditional view ignores these differences and this distorts our perception of historical reality. In many occasion, Monophysites and Chalcedonians reached compromises as we have seen in some of the examples within this paper. This is normal in social life. Also, it is normal that those who obtained the final victory did not want preserve the memory of such compromises when they wrote literary works meant to create an image of the past that would be favorable for the Monophysite Church.

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Vel si non tibi communicamus, tamen amamus te

Remarques sur la description par Liberatus de Carthage des rapports entre Miaphysites et Chalcédoniens à Alexandrie (milieu V^e–milieu VI^e s.)

Philippe Blaudeau

L'ouvrage de Liberatus, diacre de l'Église de Carthage, le *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum* consiste en un opuscule traitant en 24 chapitres des controverses christologiques en Orient, depuis la prédication de Nestorius jusqu'à la promulgation du 1^{er} édit de Justinien contre les Trois Chapitres (428–544). Composée après 555 (mort de Vigile) et peu avant sinon en 566,¹ cette narration forme un condensé original d'informations ecclésiastiques de grande importance. Elle s'apparente à une histoire de l'Église sans en revêtir le titre, et lui préfère un vocable plus humble (*Breviarium*), qui indique l'intention d'en faire une sorte de guide de lecture à l'intention de tous ceux qui souhaiteront compléter leurs connaissances des origines historiques de la controverse des Trois Chapitres.² À propos de Liberatus, qui se dit dégagé des soucis du temps tandis qu'il compose,³ Garnier a suggéré qu'il aurait pu accompagner Reparatus de Carthage, condamné à l'exil sous un prétexte politique par Justinien (fin 551).⁴ Cette hypothèse ne peut guère être explicitement confirmée par des faits puisés à d'autres sources. C'est pourquoi elle a été repoussée par Schwartz et dernièrement encore par Meier.⁵ Établissant une sorte de parenté implicite avec l'ouvrage de Théodore le Lecteur, qui accompagna son archevêque Macédonius de Constantinople dans son bannissement et ses tribulations,⁶ cette reconstitution a pourtant le mérite d'expliquer certaines des particularités narratives du texte (cette mise à l'écart éventuelle confortant le choix formé par le diacre de ne pas traiter du déroulement de la controverse tricapitoline mais de ses origines seulement). Si donc Liberatus a accompagné son évêque, il a pu ne pas faire l'objet d'une condamnation personnelle. Dans ce cas, c'est dès après le décès de Reparatus (7 janvier 563), qu'il aura pu enfin profiter de la liberté

¹ Barnish 1989 : 160 ; Troncarelli 1998 : 26.

² Sur les raisons d'un tel choix, voir Blaudeau 2015a.

³ *Aliquatenus feriatus animo a curis temporalibus*, *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 98.32–33.

⁴ Victor de Tunnuna, *Chronicon*, éd. C. Cardelle de Hartmann, CCL 173A : 552.145.47.

⁵ Cf. E. Schwartz dans ACO 2.5 : 16 ; Meier 2010 : 132.

⁶ Sur Théodore, cf. Blaudeau 2006 : 551.

d'esprit relative à laquelle il fait allusion, qu'il séjourât alors au Vivarium ou fût en rapport étroit avec le monastère de Cassiodore.⁷ Outre les fatigues et les pérégrinations évoquées,⁸ Liberatus souffrit sûrement de ne pouvoir retrouver sa place dans l'appareil ecclésial carthaginois après que son nouveau chef, Primosus, eut admis la condamnation des Trois Chapitres. Aussi, Liberatus aura publié son ouvrage, conçu comme une protestation de fidélité à la mission qu'il reçut au jour de son ordination. Il consisterait en une narration rendant sobrement compte des origines d'une controverse dont, comme nombre d'autres africains, évêques, clercs ou moines, il avait eu à payer, dans sa chair et son esprit, le prix d'une conviction irréductible à la volonté impériale.

Si telle est notre compréhension du parcours et du propos de Liberatus, elle ne peut être tenue pour absolument certaine. En revanche il est assuré que, dès la reconquête justinienne de l'Afrique, le Carthaginois avait participé à d'importantes missions : c'est ainsi qu'il vint à Rome en 535, en tant que membre de la légation qu'envoyèrent l'archevêque Reparatus et son synode pour s'assurer de la reconnaissance, par le pape, des décisions organisationnelles prises par l'assemblée après la reconquête africaine de Bélisaire.⁹ Son récit permet d'ajouter qu'il se trouvait dans la ville pontificale un an plus tôt¹⁰ et qu'il se rendit aussi à Alexandrie, une première fois peut-être pour y porter des lettres de communion à Paul le Tabennésiot (vers 538),¹¹ et de façon certaine à un autre moment, après le strict milieu du VI^e s.¹² Or, le travail du diacre cartha-

⁷ On appréciera la convergence de la confession énoncée par le patrice devenu moine avec celle du diacre carthaginois, sans la tenir pour plus qu'un indice de l'intérêt mutuel sans doute formé par les deux hommes autour de leurs projets réciproques. Cassiodore ne se dit-il pas en effet *longa peregrinatione fatigatus* (Inst. 1.26.1) ? Mais l'on sait que la forme des *Institutiones* que nous connaissons date du début des années 580. Sur les rapports de Liberatus avec le monastère du Vivarium, voir en dernier lieu Blaudeau 2010 : 545–546 ; Patzold 2010 : 233–234.

⁸ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 98.32 : *peregrinationis necessitatibus defatigatus*.

⁹ Comme l'atteste la lettre conciliaire des évêques rassemblés à Carthage et destinée au pape Jean (*Collectio Avellana* 85 : éd. O. Günther, CSEL 35 : 329.15–16) et la réponse de son successeur Agapet, CSEL 86.331.1.

¹⁰ Envoyé par son évêque Boniface sûrement. Cf. *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 134.27.

¹¹ Cf. Blaudeau 2010 : 554–555.

¹² Selon ce qu'il indique lui-même : *nam nos ista nuper Alexandriae de Graeco in Latinum translata suscepimus* (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 119.7–8), la traduction latine des actes de Chalcédoine à laquelle il a accès est donc la *versio antiqua correctata* (φρ). Elle a été identifiée par Schwartz, en raison de la place spécifique que le diacre assigne aux lettres *ante gesta* et aux canons chalcédoniens en suivant le modèle qu'il a consulté (ACO 2.5 : 116.17–117.3 ; 119.23–27 et 123.8–10 ; v. Schwartz, ACO 2.5 : xviii). Le philologue allemand signale encore que c'est de cette même version que le diacre romain Rusticus se servit au moment où il entreprenait son travail d'édition (φρ) à l'aide en premier lieu d'un manuscrit grec trouvé dans la bibliothèque du monastère des acémètes, là où il séjournait. Ainsi, la *versio correctata* (φρ) est-elle de peu postérieure à la *versio antiqua* (φα), elle-même sans doute commencée (sur l'initiative de Facundus

ginois se distingue spécialement par une richesse d'information peu commune qui provient spécialement d'Alexandrie comme il l'indique lui-même. La formule par laquelle il évoque cette source reste allusive : *nectens temporum illa quae in Graeco Alexandriae scripto accepi*.¹³ On a considéré qu'il avait pu puiser, lors de son passage (vers 538, en 563 ?)¹⁴ dans les *ephemerides* (recueils où étaient notifiés les événements ecclésiastiques au quotidien)¹⁵ qui sont à la base du processus historiographique alexandrin déjà attesté sous Athanase. Mais une analyse, récemment présentée par Bruno Bleckmann,¹⁶ laisse à penser que le diacre carthaginois a eu accès à un récit plus ambitieux, un travail d'histoire ecclésiastique réfutant de façon plus détaillée les composantes alexandrino-égyptiennes de la narration homologue écrite par Zacharie le Rhéteur/Scolastique. Puisque l'ouvrage du Rhéteur empruntait largement sa narration des faits à la version miaphysite alexandrine (en puisant notamment à l'œuvre de Timothée Aelure),¹⁷ la composition diphysite lui aurait donc opposé un récit

d'Hermiane ?) peu avant 547 et achevée peu après le concile de Constantinople (553 ; cf. E. Schwartz, ACO 2.3.1 : vii). Cette date vaut donc comme *terminus post quem* pour le (ou l'un des) séjour(s) que Liberatus effectua à Alexandrie. En effet, la *correcta* marque une série de modifications par rapport à la première traduction latine quasi complète des actes (φα). Le fait que Liberatus a tiré profit de la *versio correcta* (φς) n'est donc pas sans conséquence : un tel emploi tend à insérer un peu plus étroitement encore le Carthaginois dans le réseau d'informations développé par les défenseurs africains entrés dans une résistance redoublée après les décisions conciliaires. Citons Schwartz en effet : « Plus grave s'avère le changement par lequel les canons ont été déplacés depuis leur lieu légitime, après l'*actio* VI vers un lieu nettement postérieur, qui se trouvait entre l'*actio* tenue au sujet des deux évêques de Perrhée et la dernière *actio* concernant les privilèges du siège de Constantinople. J'ai (Schwartz) expliqué autrefois qu'au moment où la controverse des Trois Chapitres se déchaînait, on fit cela avec l'intention que l'autorité des *actiones* particulières, surtout celles durant lesquelles Théodoret et Ibas furent rétablis, fût la même que celle des *actiones* qui précèdent les canons, me trompant en cela seulement que j'avais fait de Rusticus lui-même le coupable de la transposition, et non le correcteur de la *versio antiqua* qui lui est plus ancien Et cependant les canons n'ont pas été rejetés en toute fin des *gesta*. En effet, les défenseurs occidentaux des Trois Chapitres et du concile de Chalcédoine considéraient fâcheux, par la transposition des canons, de combattre aussi pour ce décret chalcédonien qu'à partir de Léon aucun pontife romain n'avait publiquement agréé » (ACO 2.3.3 : xi). Ajoutons que Wallraff 2010 : 65 a suggéré que la φς pourrait avoir été réalisée théoriquement à Alexandrie mais il signale que des indices supplémentaires ne plaident pas en faveur de cette hypothèse : ainsi la lettre même de la formule employée par Liberatus incite-t-elle à penser qu'il ne tient pas Alexandrie pour le lieu où la *correcta* fut élaborée.

¹³ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 99.2.

¹⁴ Sur l'hypothèse des deux déplacements de Liberatus à Alexandrie, voir Blaudeau 2010 : 554–555. Rappelons que Paul de Tabennèse, ordonné à Constantinople, débarque à Alexandrie à la fin de 537 sans doute (Maspero 1923 : 138).

¹⁵ Wipszycka 2008 : 100.

¹⁶ Bleckmann 2010.

¹⁷ Sur Zacharie et le contenu alexandrin de son *Historia ecclesiastica*, voir Blaudeau 2006 : 495–617.

alternatif. Surtout, cette version chalcédonienne aurait pris appui sur la dénonciation de Talaïa conçue par le Rhéteur, pour introduire variantes et détails, recombinaison l'ensemble et produire une justification de l'action du diphysite. C'est dans ce même ouvrage sans doute que Liberatus aurait trouvé le texte de l'Hénotique¹⁸ et l'aurait traduit en latin (de sorte qu'il est le seul parmi les auteurs antiques à le produire *in extenso* dans cette langue).¹⁹ Dans la mesure où la narration exploitée par le Carthaginois traitait l'ensemble de la période couverte par Zacharie (jusqu'en 492, en puisant peut-être pour la décade 482–492 à quelques compléments informels et indépendants de clercs et moines protériens au monastère de la Métanoïa par exemple),²⁰ dans la mesure ainsi où elle apportait encore des éléments narratifs, le plus souvent polémiques,²¹ qui s'étendaient jusqu'à l'arrivée de Paul (537/538), avec un appauvrissement très net de l'information disponible entre 492 et 536 cependant, on peut conclure à une rédaction de l'ouvrage grec utilisé par le Carthaginois sous l'épiscopat d'un patriarche chalcédonien entre 537 et 566. À cet égard le candidat le plus sérieux est Paul de Tabennèse, dont le traitement dans le *Breviarium* comporte deux leçons fortement contrastées (la première particulièrement favorable, la seconde beaucoup plus sombre).²² Notre hypothèse est donc que Liberatus trouva à Alexandrie, un récit sélectif composé vers 537–538 qui réfutait la matière alexandrine de l'*Historia ecclesiastica* de Zacharie et ajoutait quelques notes complémentaires notamment consacrées à l'opposition entre Gaïanus,

¹⁸ Rappelons que bien connu à Alexandrie, il avait été diffusé par une collection alexandrine qui, sans doute formée à la fin des années 480, nous est conservée (Codex Vaticanus G. 1431) et a été éditée par E. Schwartz. L'*Hénotique* figurait encore dans l'ouvrage de Zacharie. Sur l'ensemble de cette question, voir Blaudeau 2006 : 204–206, 370–375 notamment.

¹⁹ Dans le but de contester plus durement la politique de Justinien, Facundus d'Hermiane en avait publié, en 550, quelques extraits traduits en latin au dernier livre de son *Pro defensione trium capitulorum* (12.4). Il entendait ainsi établir un lien logique évident avec le règne de Justinien, et souligner combien Zénon s'était en son temps arrogé un insupportable droit : celui de définir la foi au lieu de la recevoir de l'Eglise, expliquée par ses évêques. Voir encore Pewesin 1937 : 112–124.

²⁰ Sur l'activité de recueil et de diffusion d'informations menée par les chalcédoniens dans ce lieu peu après 482, voir Blaudeau 2006 : 209, 488. Sur la réalité confessionnelle du mouvement monastique et sa diversité, cf. Wipszycka 1996 : 309 ainsi que la contribution de cette même savante dans le présent volume.

²¹ Cf. Bleckmann 2010 : 192.

²² La césure est frappante : établi grâce au *divino nutu* (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 139.1) Paul voit son action à Alexandrie contrariée par l'*interventu diaboli* (ACO 2.5 : 139.6). Cette articulation assez sommaire permet au diacre carthaginois de souligner ensuite les graves responsabilités de Paul dans l'affaire de la mort du diacre Psoïs, même si la mort de ce dernier ne lui est pas directement imputée. Cf. Gleede 2010 : 114–115. Sans doute le long développement qu'il consacre à cette affaire lui provient-il d'une consultation des *gesta* de la procédure judiciaire (mentionnés deux fois dans le *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 139.24, 25), *gesta* qui furent sans doute lus lors du synode de Gaza (540/541). Voir encore infra.

ses partisans incorrupticoles et le sévérien Théodose,²³ avant de magnifier les débuts de Paul.²⁴ Le Carthaginois l'articula avec une version plus personnelle visant à perdre la réputation du diacre romain Pélage²⁵ (et donc de Paul dont il avait recommandé l'élévation).²⁶ On peut donc croire que Liberatus mit la main sur un récit de refondation alexandrin qui, pour créditer l'opération de restauration chalcédonienne audacieusement lancée par Justinien, s'était concentré sur le passé diphysite du siège alexandrin. Or, une telle opération supposait un double mouvement : récuser la pertinence de l'*Historia ecclesiastica* de Zacharie, dont l'impact demeurerait notable encore,²⁷ en lui opposant une narration ciblée, munie d'informations originales et précises qui établissait une période de référence identifiée pour l'essentiel aux années 451–482. Tout porte à croire qu'au début de l'épiscopat de Paul de Tabennèse, cette tâche, menée par un auteur anonyme, fut facilitée par la consultation d'un travail de mémoire déjà disponible qu'il convenait d'aménager et de compléter. Aussi peut-on suggérer que l'opuscule historiographique exploité par Liberatus avait été en quelque sorte préparé par une composition engagée, élaborée à partir des pièces et de la consignation précise des événements ecclésiastiques jour après jour. Continuant peut-être l'ouvrage rédigé à compter de la fin du IV^e s. et nommé *Storia dell'episcopato di Alessandria (SepA)/History of the Episcopate of Alexandria (HepA)* par A. Bausi et A. Camplani,²⁸ cet enrichissement mettait en valeur le

²³ Liberatus précise que, convoqué à Constantinople, Théodose repoussa les propositions formulées par Justinien qui cherchait à lui faire accepter Chalcédoine (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 135). C'est alors qu'il fut assigné à résidence. Selon Jean d'Éphèse, *Vies des bienheureux orientaux*, edited and translated by E.W. Brooks, PO 17 : 35 ; 18 : 326, ce fut à Derkos. Maspéro 1923 : 132 identifie cet endroit au lieu signalé par Liberatus en pensant à un édifice religieux de la localité de Derkos, à quelques dizaines de kilomètres de Constantinople. Peu après, Schwartz conjecture que la formule du Carthaginois, transmise de façon imprécise (elle porte un équivoque *aris focae*), était : *missus est iuxta basilicam martyris Focae in via quae ducit ad Stomae Ponti* (ACO 2.5 : 135, apparat critique). Maraval 1985 : 408 identifie le sanctuaire à la basilique située à 2 milles au-delà de l'Anaplous sur la côte européenne du Bosphore au nord de la capitale, existant encore au VI^e s., ce qui est relativement proche de Sika, lieu indiqué par Victor de Tunnuna, *Chronicon*, CCL 173A : 540.126. Quoi qu'il en soit, Liberatus ne connaît pas l'autorisation à s'établir dans la capitale dont Théodose bénéficie bientôt (Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, éd. J.-B. Chabot, 9–21 : 195). Cf. encore Maspéro 1923 : 107–132.

²⁴ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 138–140. Voir infra.

²⁵ La mise en cause de Pélage dès le pontificat de Silvère (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 137.19–20) puis à la fin du chapitre xxiii (ibid. 140.3–7), nullement réductible à une simple insertion préparatoire d'un éventuel deuxième rédacteur comme on l'a supposé, illustre la grave tendance du diacre romain à la *varietas*, ce qui paraît préfigurer une attitude ultérieure bien connue (défense des Trois Chapitres puis acceptation en forme de reniement du pontificat).

²⁶ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 139.1–2.

²⁷ Rappelons que lors de la dernière décade du VI^e s., Évagre le Scolastique jugera utile encore d'en saper le contenu avec une remarquable application. Cf. Blaudeau 2006 : 657–668.

²⁸ Cf. Camplani 2015. Parmi les informations chronologiques ordinairement réunies dans

combat de Protérius, de Salophaciol et pour un plus court moment, de Talaïa. Il reprendrait le même motif pour décrire les débuts de Paul de Tabennèse, non sans insérer entre ces deux ensembles des notations (au sujet de Dioscore II, des théodosiens et des gaïanites ainsi que des thémistiens ou agnoètes) elles-mêmes reprises à la continuation miaphysite de la *SepA* miaphysite (notamment au chap. XVIII ou au chap. XX)²⁹ ou tirées des souvenirs de l'historiographie, un clerc chalcédonien d'Alexandrie.

Cette information alexandrine originale, recueillie par Liberatus, présente des communautés unies par la même référence à la foi nicéenne mais séparées par les décisions chalcédoniennes. Elles entretiennent des relations difficiles, marquées par un rapport mimétique qui engendre des modalités de cohabitation délicates et peut en certains cas engager à une montée aux extrêmes. Pourtant, en dépit de l'enjeu représenté par le contrôle de l'appareil ecclésial, le conflit n'est pas le seul mode de règlement de leurs rapports mis en évidence par le diacre carthaginois. La richesse de sa source principale l'amène à proposer une représentation plus complexe des interactions qui signale à l'occasion des formes de concession ou un souci de pondération inattendues.

Sans doute celui-ci n'atteint-il pas le domaine strictement confessionnel et doctrinal. En la matière le propos, destiné à des lecteurs eux-mêmes qualifiés de frères catholiques,³⁰ est clair et le critère de discernement intangible : ceux qui acceptent la foi de Chalcédoine, conformément à l'enseignement traditionnel de Rome énoncé par Léon,³¹ sont expressément désignés par le vocable de catholiques³² ou d'orthodoxes.³³ Face à eux, sans l'ombre d'un doute, Liberatus dénonce les chefs antichalcédoniens, Aelure et Monge en particulier, ainsi que

un tel ouvrage, à l'instar du *Liber pontificalis*, on notera ainsi la durée d'épiscopat de Timothée Salophaciol (« Timothée Salafacialus mourut dans sa 23^e année et son 6^e mois d'épiscopat » : *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 126.10–11). Ajoutons que ce laps de temps n'est pas absolument conforme à ce que la critique historique peut lui assigner : si elle admet de ne pas tenir compte de l'interruption des années 475–477, elle aboutit plutôt à 22 ans d'épiscopat à peine (du printemps 460 à la fin de l'hiver 482 ; voir Blaudeau 2006 : 162 et 200–201).

²⁹ L'indication du bref moment d'épiscopat de Gaïanus (103 jours, cf. *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 135.11) pourrait venir de là, de même que la durée d'épiscopat dans la cité alexandrine assignée à Théodose après l'expulsion de son concurrent (1 an et 4 mois, ACO 2.5 : 135.15–16).

³⁰ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 99.6.

³¹ Sur ce point, voir Blaudeau 2010 : 557–558.

³² Protérius et les siens, affreusement massacrés (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 124.14) ; Timothée Salophaciol et sa communauté (125.5–6). Salophaciol lui-même (125.11, 19 ; 126.34 ; 129.8 ; 130.25, 26) ; les destinataires des messages du pape (130.35) ; les évêques égyptiens chassés par Pierre Monge après son adhésion à l'*Hénotique* (131.26).

³³ Ainsi des nombreux évêques expulsés par Timothée Aelure (457 *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 133.30) ; ou encore Paul (de Tabennèse) lorsqu'il confesse la foi chalcédonienne (138.26–27).

leurs partisans comme des hérétiques,³⁴ ainsi que l'y incite notamment l'opuscule historiographique romain (*Gesta de nomine Acacii*) dont il dispose sans doute dès son premier séjour à Rome.³⁵ À l'instar de sa source alexandrine probablement, le recours à l'emploi des surnoms est polarisé : la charge péjorative placée dans le terme Salophaciol (σαλοφακίαλος) par un Zacharie le Rhéteur notamment est désamorcée,³⁶ tandis qu'à contrario le sobriquet de Monge est commenté³⁷ (étonnamment, celui d'Aelure ne fait pas l'objet d'une explication étymologique). Surtout, Liberatus se plaint à montrer combien les miaphysites se dispersent en groupes sectaires qui s'affrontent (dioscorites,³⁸ incorrupticoles,³⁹ thémistiens⁴⁰) mais il écarte l'emploi du terme acéphale pour désigner ceux qui parmi les miaphysites, refusent l'autorité de Monge.⁴¹ Cette catégori-

³⁴ Sont désignés de la sorte les partisans de Dioscore (cf. *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 124.6 et 125.5.10.12) ; Liberatus dit encore que Pierre Monge est élu par des hérétiques (cf. 125.17 et 126.16) puis le dénonce à nouveau comme hérétique (129.23) ou comme hérétique et adultère à mesure qu'il prétend au siège d'Alexandrie (126.17 ; 126.19). Sont encore qualifiés d'hérétiques Athanase II (132.20), Théodose d'Alexandrie, en compagnie d'Anthime de Constantinople et de Sévère d'Antioche (136.23 ; 138.19), et nombre d'évêques et clercs que Paul de Tabennèse est censé expulser dès après son arrivée à Alexandrie (139.3). Voir encore Brennecke 2010 : 77–79.

³⁵ Voir Blaudeau 2015a.

³⁶ Cf. Greatrex et al. 2010 : 150. Voir encore Greatrex et al. 2010 : 131, n. 7 et Blaudeau 2006 : 357. Liberatus use du vocable Salafacialus et propose en effet de comprendre Timothée le Blanc (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 125.5) au lieu de Timothée Chapeau-branlant.

³⁷ Pierre le Bègue : *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 125.18 : *Petrum cognomento Mongum, qui vocatus est blaesus*. Sur le sens probable d'une telle caractérisation, voir Blaudeau 2006 : 358–359.

³⁸ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 132.24–25 : « sous sa présidence (de Jean Ier (II) Hemoula), l'Église d'Alexandrie avait connu la division des dioscorites à cause de Pierre Monge comme s'il avait communiqué au synode ». Selon Timothée de Constantinople, au contraire les dioscorites s'étaient constitués au moment de l'épiscopat de Timothée Aelure, mécontents qu'ils étaient alors de la réconciliation de certains clercs ayant servi sous Protérius (*De iis qui ad ecclesiam accedunt*, éd. J.-B. Cotelier [1686] = PG 86/1 : 44C) ; voir encore Maspero 1923 : 191.

³⁹ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 134–135.

⁴⁰ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 134.18–22.

⁴¹ En son nom propre, Liberatus recourt à cet emploi, en précisant ce qu'il entend en la matière : « ceux qui alors n'ont pas entériné cette lettre (d'Ibas), je les tiens pour les devanciers des acéphales qui n'ont pas Cyrille pour chef et ne montrent point qui ils suivent » (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 110.8–10). Puis il l'applique aux représentants du parti miaphysite lors de la conférence constantinopolitaine de 532 (110.3) qui les met aux prises avec les chalcédoniens. Il en use encore pour dénoncer Askidas (140.14.22), ceux qui pensent comme lui et les miaphysites censés se réjouir de la condamnation des Trois Chapitres par l'édit de 544 (140.21–22 ; 24). Son objectif est donc de viser par ce sobriquet des acteurs du parti miaphysite qui influent considérablement sur la politique de Justinien. Sur le sens du terme acéphale usité par d'autres sources dans le contexte du rejet de l'autorité archiépiscopale de Monge, voir Blaudeau 2006 : 785.

sation en effet, ne sert pas son propos, tout entier destiné à perdre la réputation de l'Alexandrin. De même se garde-t-il de coupler le topos hérésiologique de l'émiettement en conventicules avec l'idée de violences religieuses de longue date commises dans une cité turbulente et meurtrière, idée pourtant repérable dans un ouvrage qu'il connaît, l'*Historia ecclesiastica* de Socrate de Constantinople,⁴² mais qui se révèle contraire à la représentation tout à la fois loyale et critique qu'il développe de l'épiscopat de Cyrille d'Alexandrie.

Pour camper la situation ecclésiale d'Alexandrie, Liberatus ne se contente pas de répartir les groupes en fonction des logiques d'appartenance doctrinale. Il insiste volontiers sur l'attachement des populations aux chefs de file. Sans rien renier de sa mise en cause du personnage de Dioscore, déjà suggérée avant même que l'affaire d'Eutychès ne soit traitée,⁴³ Liberatus ne cache cependant pas le lien de filiation qui continue d'unir à lui nombre d'Alexandrins après sa condamnation à Chalcédoine.⁴⁴ Cela lui permet de justifier, à la suite de sa source alexandrine, la tentative de Timothée Salophaciol consistant à réintroduire son nom dans les diptyques. En revanche, le Carthaginois s'acharne contre Aelure, limite autant qu'il le peut l'importance de ses soutiens, réduite à certains évêques, clercs et partisans sans plus de précision⁴⁵ et condamne avec une virulence inhabituelle son suicide, pour mieux dénoncer la prétendue prophétie qu'il aurait énoncée sur sa propre disparition.⁴⁶ Ce dispositif narratif, uniment hostile à l'adversaire de Timothée Salophaciol, lui permet à meilleur compte de souligner l'affection paradoxale que les miaphysites alexandrins montrent à l'égard de l'archevêque chalcédonien. La formule est remarquable en effet : « les gens d'Alexandrie l'aimaient et lui criaient sur les places et dans les églises : même si nous ne sommes pas en communion avec toi, nous t'aimons bien ». ⁴⁷ Mais l'Africain n'ignore pas les conséquences de cet attachement, à front renversé pourrait-on dire. Certaines de ses ouailles dénoncent simultanément la trop grande douceur de Salophaciol à l'égard des antichalcédoniens. Ainsi ceux-là mêmes qui devraient être ses soutiens les plus solides contestent-ils leur pasteur en s'en prenant au bien-fondé de l'opération de reconquête des cœurs qu'il a lancée.⁴⁸ Comme si la relation personnalisée entre l'archevêque et sa communauté supposait une exclusivité confessionnelle indépassable, à moins de risquer une grave crise identitaire.

⁴² Sur ce point, voir Martin 2008 : 50 et Blaudeau 2009 : 95–100.

⁴³ Notamment parce qu'il maltraita les héritiers de Cyrille pour mieux distribuer en faveurs populaires les biens mal acquis auxquels ils avaient droit (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 133.6–11).

⁴⁴ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 123.28–31. Voir aussi infra.

⁴⁵ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 124.20.

⁴⁶ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 125.15–17 ; la prédiction prétendue aurait été colportée par ses *sequaces* sans plus de précision. Voir aussi Bleckmann 2010 : 176.

⁴⁷ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 126.10–11.

⁴⁸ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 126.5–9.

Liberatus articule cette mise en évidence des enjeux pastoraux complexes avec une certaine conscience des rapports de force sociologiques à l'œuvre dans les processus d'adhésion ou de rejet des hiérarques par les laïcs. Sans doute n'offre-t-il pas en la matière un panorama complet. Rien n'est dit des *philoponoï* par exemple.⁴⁹ Mais la représentation fournie est suffisamment riche pour ne pas verser dans la caricature. Ainsi si la foule (*turba*), violente, est placée tout entière du côté de l'hérésie de Dioscore,⁵⁰ le peuple (*populus*), quant à lui fait l'objet d'une approche plus nuancée. Selon le constat énoncé dans le *Breviarium*, l'élection de Protérius suscite une fracture originelle en son sein.⁵¹ Ensuite, il paraît davantage se ranger à la suite de l'archevêque miaphysite : Monge bénéficie de sa prédilection,⁵² tandis que Talaïa apparemment en est dépourvu. Si le peuple (*populi*, un pluriel, en l'occurrence) se commet encore en faveur de Gaïanus⁵³ et rejette Théodose, Paul de Tabennèse un moment paraît en situation de le ramener vers Chalcédoine.⁵⁴ Bref, le peuple pris dans son ensemble comme un troupeau maquant d'un berger véritable, reste une préoccupation constante de la conscience chalcédonienne. Quant aux corps constitués et aux élites, Liberatus signale leur positionnement avec parcimonie. Il relève que les gens de haute condition (*nobiles*) avaient choisi Protérius en 451⁵⁵ mais manque de dire qu'en 457 d'après la lettre même de l'empereur Léon qui introduit aux réponses consignées dans le *Codex Encyclius*,

le peuple (*populus*) d'Alexandrie, les dignitaires (*honorati*) et les décurions (*curiales*), les *navicularii* également le [Timothée Aelure] réclam[ai]ent comme évêque.⁵⁶

Or, il n'est guère douteux que Liberatus ait connu ce passage.⁵⁷ Mieux, il entre en résonnance avec une formule fameuse qui figure dans la description du phénomène gaïanite :

Fort du soutien de certains clercs, des principaux propriétaires (*possessores*) de la cité, des corporations, des soldats et des nobles et de toute la province, Gaïanus demeura évêque 103 jours.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ Sur ceux-ci et leur influence en matière de formation d'une conscience ecclésiale, voir en dernier lieu Camplani 2014 : 132–143 spécialement.

⁵⁰ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 125.6.8.

⁵¹ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 123.33.

⁵² *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 127.2.

⁵³ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 135.6.17.

⁵⁴ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 139.4–6.

⁵⁵ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 123.26.

⁵⁶ ACO 2.5 : 11.18–19.

⁵⁷ Liberatus fait référence à cette pièce ouvrant au *Codex Encyclius* au sens strict : *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 124.25–27. Sur l'exploitation de cette collection par Liberatus, cf. notamment Schwartz, ACO 2.5 : xix ; Drecoll 2010 : 13, n. 32.

⁵⁸ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 135.9–11.

Comme si ce dont la mémoire miaphysite, timothéo-sévérienne aimait à se prévaloir, l'unité quasi unanime des couches sociales de la cité, ne lui appartenait pas. Comme si Liberatus entendait souligner qu'elle pouvait même être revendiquée par plus radicale qu'elle, qu'elle impliquait même nombre de clercs et moines et ne garantissait rien de durable, au regard de la communion à établir. Dans ce même esprit, le diacre carthaginois admet de signaler le rôle des *patroni* de Monge pour expliquer comment l'empereur Zénon a pu être convaincu de reconnaître le miaphysite comme l'archevêque légitime d'Alexandrie.⁵⁹ On souhaiterait en savoir plus à leur sujet mais tel n'est pas le dessein de Liberatus : ne méconnaissant le rôle performatif de ces personnages formant réseau, il limite leur efficience à une portée conjoncturelle et s'empresse de montrer comment Monge s'affirme comme une figure de contradiction qui divise clercs et monastères. Bref, le Carthaginois ou bien sa source ne considèrent pas que l'espace social de la cité d'Alexandrie soit à ce point polarisé que l'orthodoxie ne puisse s'y enraciner à nouveau, même si l'échec de Paul de Tabennèse, dévoilé une fois sa source alexandrine quittée, lui laisse à coup sûr un sentiment d'amer échec à la mesure des espoirs soulevés.

Cette conviction procède également d'une deuxième série d'observations où se manifeste une certaine capacité à comprendre et traduire en partie la perception de l'adversaire. En considérant les identités miaphysite et chalcédonienne, Liberatus donne en effet à penser qu'elles sont toutes deux blessées et inscrites dans un rapport mimétique, même s'il n'accorde pas une égale pertinence, on l'a déjà vu, à leurs revendications. Il remarque en particulier que l'une et l'autre communautés se réclament d'un traumatisme en quelque sorte fondateur. Or, en la matière, le diacre carthaginois n'hésite pas à aborder la question, épineuse pour les chalcédoniens, de l'élection de Protérius. A la suite de sa source grecque alexandrine, comme l'atteste l'emploi d'un mot exceptionnel, conservé sous la forme inexacte de *patralyae* (pour *patroloae*/ parricides, dont Liberatus serait un des très rares témoins latins),⁶⁰ le Carthaginois fait état de l'angoisse éprouvée par ceux qui devaient élire le remplaçant de Dioscore. Puisque celui-ci vivait toujours, ils craignaient en effet de passer pour parricides : cette incrimination qui agitait alors les consciences, n'était pas aisée à écarter. En présentant la situation sous cet angle, à rebours de la version historiographique chalcédonienne, grecque ou latine, dominante, Liberatus, après sa source, admet qu'au moins dans un premier temps, avant que le choix ne s'exprime en faveur de Protérius cette allégation a pu paraître vraisemblable. Inhabituelle, cette concession prend un relief plus significatif encore : l'atroce lynchage de Protérius n'est pas défini comme un parricide, alors même que les

⁵⁹ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 126.32 ; 127.13. Voir encore Blaudeau 2006 : 336.

⁶⁰ Le vocable grec de référence est *πατραλοίας* : *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 123.29 ; voir surtout Bleckmann 2010 : 170.

papes Léon, puis Simplicie et Hormisdas l'avaient dénoncé de la sorte.⁶¹ Ainsi le Carthaginois évite de reprendre à son compte une attaque peu pertinente dans le contexte alexandrin,⁶² car elle s'expose à une réciproque qui, usant de l'argument d'antériorité, paraît également plus convaincante en ce que Protérius avait été l'archiprêtre de Dioscore,⁶³ tandis qu'Aelure avait toujours refusé de se mettre au service du Chalcédonien. En outre nul n'ignorait à Alexandrie que le rituel par lequel Protérius avait été consacré n'avait pu, par définition, être conformé à la tradition bien établie qui conférait une place importante à la présence corporelle du défunt prédécesseur.⁶⁴ Aussi Liberatus, assez concis dans sa description de la *passio* du chalcédonien, préfère-t-il suggérer que Protérius est devenu un archevêque-martyr, ce qui l'inscrit implicitement dans la succession illustre de Marc et de Pierre d'Alexandrie⁶⁵ et définit ainsi plus étroitement la communauté solidaire de sa mémoire.

Dans ces conditions, le souvenir entretenu de la violence subie rejaillit sur la participation sacramentelle. En effet par la lecture des diptyques lors de la synaxe, une publicité personnalisée et explicite est donnée à la filiation dans laquelle chaque fidèle est appelé à s'insérer au moment de recevoir l'eucharistie. C'est bien pourquoi Timothée Salophaciol essaie d'attirer à lui en réintroduisant, un moment, le nom de Dioscore dans le répertoire des défunts.⁶⁶ Il ne sait que trop que la pratique sacramentelle repose sur une exigence d'exclusivisme communautaire à ce point discriminante qu'elle l'incite à prendre cette mesure périlleuse. Signifiée encore par d'autres gestes, la mansuétude de Salophaciol lui attire certes l'affection des miaphysites mais elle ne les conduit pas davantage à accepter sa communion. Quant à ceux qui contestent sa trop grande bénignité, ils réclament que les antichalcédoniens ne puissent tenir ni rassemblement liturgique ni baptême.⁶⁷ A cet enjeu de strict police des mœurs et des conduites communautaires, qui après la proclamation de l'*Hénotique* conduit les adversaires de Monge à tenir des assemblées séparées,⁶⁸ correspond la recherche d'une visibilité assurée par le contrôle des édifices. Ce n'est pas que

⁶¹ Jusques-et y compris dans le célèbre formulaire de ce dernier. Cf. Blaudeau 2006 : 182.

⁶² On notera que, s'adressant à l'empereur Léon, les évêques et clercs protériens eux-mêmes n'avaient pas davantage recouru à cette accusation. Cf. ACO 2.5 : 11–21.

⁶³ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 123.31 voir encore Blaudeau 2006 : 142.

⁶⁴ Sur celui-ci voir Blaudeau 2011 : 92–95 ; voir encore Wipszycka 2006 : 78.

⁶⁵ On remarquera que le siège d'Alexandrie est référé à St. Marc dans le contexte précis de la mort de Protérius et de ses conséquences (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 124.13). Une seule autre occurrence apparaît dans le récit à l'occasion de la remise du pallium du défunt archevêque à son successeur. Sur l'importance identitaire et mémorielle des St. Marc et St. Pierre d'Alexandrie, voir encore Camplani 2015.

⁶⁶ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 126.33–127.1 ; sur le moment de cette initiative et le rôle imputé en la matière au conseil de Talaïa par ses adversaires, voir Blaudeau 2006 : 476.

⁶⁷ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 126.8–9.

⁶⁸ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 131.34.

Liberatus fournisse nombre de renseignement sur la topographie ecclésiastique d'Alexandrie. Seul le Kaisaréion, siège cathédral d'où Monge condamne Chalcédoine, est spécifiquement nommé dans son récit.⁶⁹ Mais l'Africain sait l'impact des déploiements de force et les lieux adéquats aux manifestations. C'est dans les églises et sur les places publiques⁷⁰ que les miaphysites s'adressent à Salophaciol pour lui signifier leur gratitude. C'est en faisant occuper les églises et les monastères dans et à proximité d'Alexandrie ou en nommant aux sièges épiscopaux dans toute l'Égypte qu'Aelure, puis Monge, qui déplace même la sépulture de Salophaciol,⁷¹ galvanisent leurs soutiens,⁷² enracinent leur mouvement et s'arrogent le contrôle de l'appareil ecclésial dans la vallée du Nil.⁷³ En une occasion, Liberatus fournit même un indice ténu qui vaut peut-être pour une indication fragile d'une certaine répartition des adhésions confessionnelles par quartiers. Chargé de réprimer le soulèvement gaïanite (535–536), Narsès,⁷⁴ selon le récit de Liberatus « remporta par le feu une victoire que le fer ne lui avait point procurée ».⁷⁵ On peut certes penser que repoussés par la force armée, les insurgés se soient retrouvés acculés dans un espace qui, s'il pouvait répondre à quelque avantage tactique, n'avait rien de particulièrement familier. D'autant que Liberatus insiste sur l'aspiration fédératrice de leur combat à l'échelle de la cité, comme si toute entière elle avait rallié la cause. Toutefois, on l'a dit, ce propos procède d'un argumentaire polémique de type hérésiologique et mérite d'être nuancé. Il reste donc plus probable que les gaïanites se soient repliés sur des positions bien tenues, sans que nous puissions mieux identifier ce qui constituait comme une solide base arrière.

D'autres modalités par lesquelles s'affichent les appartenances en vue de produire en public des mouvements d'adhésion ou de réconciliation sont encore signalées dans le *Breviarium*. C'est ainsi que l'on relève la mention d'une déclaration, proposée par un *scholasticos* du nom de Socrates,⁷⁶ et authentifiée par un acte établi par un *defensor* (sans doute un ἐκδικος de la cité), faisant office de greffier assermenté. Par celle-ci l'archevêque Dioscore II faisait savoir qu'il recevait l'Hénotique « en condamnation du synode (de Chalcédoine) ».⁷⁷ Comme si, répondant à un usage déjà attesté, ce genre d'au-

⁶⁹ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 130.5–6.

⁷⁰ *In plateis et in ecclesiis*, *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 126.10.

⁷¹ Après avoir retiré évidemment son nom ainsi que celui de Protérius des diptyques (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 130.24–26). Sur ce geste et son interprétation, cf. Blaudeau 2006 : 347–348.

⁷² *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 124.12–13 ; 131.26–27.

⁷³ Wipszycka 2008 : 94.

⁷⁴ Il n'est alors que spathaire (« Narsès I », PLRE 3 : 913).

⁷⁵ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 135.20.

⁷⁶ Qu'il faut peut-être identifier à un certain Hippocrates, *scholasticos* alexandrin et correspondant de Sévère : cf. « Hippocrates », PLRE 2 : 566 et « Socrates 3 », PLRE 2 : 1019.

⁷⁷ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 133.1–7. Signalons au passage que, assez peu conforme à la leçon de l'ouvrage tout entier, la mention de cet épisode (la résorption d'un schisme dans l'héré-

thentification mise en scène était susceptible de mieux convaincre. A en croire Liberatus, les composantes de la cité peuvent encore être touchées par une autre forme de présence occupant en l'espèce l'espace médiatique par le jeu de la diffusion d'ouvrages. C'est ainsi que le débat entre Julien d'Halicarnasse et Sévère d'Antioche, tous deux repliés au monastère de l'Enaton, près de la ville, s'amplifie :

Ils se mirent donc à écrire des livres l'un contre l'autre. Or, ces livres furent diffusés auprès des foules (*multitudinem*) de la cité : ainsi Sévère et Julien divisèrent cette Église d'Alexandrie.⁷⁸

Ce genre d'initiatives, leur impact remarquable (quoi qu'il en soit de l'emphase du propos) encore renforcés par la notoriété et le talent polémique des auteurs, attestent le caractère concurrentiel et instable des relations entre communautés. Le rapport de Liberatus en la matière ne contribue pas à clarifier la situation. Car à la suite du récit ecclésiastique alexandrin, et selon un procédé qui ressemble fort à celui qu'Évagre utilisera⁷⁹ (sans que l'on puisse croire qu'il a eu accès à la même source), le Carthaginois entretient largement l'ambiguïté sinon l'illusion sur le rapport des forces confessionnelles. À lire son propos en effet, les oppositions auxquelles est confronté Monge et dont la responsabilité lui incombe entièrement, proviennent de personnes scandalisées par son exploitation de l'Hénotique, sans que l'on puisse bien discerner toujours si elles la trouvent trop ou trop peu antichalcédonienne. Ainsi, dans un passage à l'état textuel difficile, Jean l'higoumène du monastère de Diolcon⁸⁰ et Néphalius⁸¹ sont-ils être dépeints comme de farouches partisans de la doctrine diphysite alors même qu'ils sont de l'autre bord à ce moment, même si l'on sait (tout comme l'auteur diphysite alexandrin qui en joue sûrement) que le second changera ensuite de camp au tout début du VI^e s.⁸² L'incertitude est encore entretenue par le fait que les partis en présence sollicitent volontiers la décision impériale, même si le soutien qu'elle apporte peut s'avérer des plus inconfortables. Cette relation dynamique avec Constantinople est spécialement mise en évidence par Liberatus quand des ambassades inquiètes et souvent opposées se pressent à la cour : au

sie) s'explique sûrement par la volonté de condamner Monge et de contrer l'enseignement de Zacharie le Rhéteur. Celui-ci évoque une semblable démarche menée par le successeur d'Aelure vers 483–484 mais à des fins opposées, pour tromper les chalcédoniens en prétendant les rassurer sur ses convictions. Sur l'ensemble de cet épisode, voir Blaudeau 2006 : 226.

⁷⁸ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 134.15–16.

⁷⁹ Voir Blaudeau 2006 : 663–664.

⁸⁰ Schwartz suggère qu'il est identique à Jean de Sébennytyos. Cf. Schwartz, ACO 2.5 : 131, n. 28 et Greatrex et al. 2010 : 211, n. 6.

⁸¹ Bleckmann 2010 : 189, n. 101.

⁸² Sur le parcours de Néphalius, cf. Möller 1944. Voir encore Blaudeau 2006 : 227, 230 et Greatrex et al. 2010 : 22.

moment de l'affirmation d'Aelure (457),⁸³ de la recherche par Salophaciol de garanties contre Monge,⁸⁴ de la préparation de l'Hénotique⁸⁵ ou des démêlés d'Athanase II et de ceux qui n'admettent pas sa commémoration de Monge lors de la synaxe.⁸⁶ Ce n'est pourtant pas que la force coercitive du soutien impérial suffise à éradiquer les oppositions éventuelles, au contraire. De Protérius, il est largement suggéré que la vindicte alexandrine l'emporta dès que la protection militaire lui fit défaut.⁸⁷ Le cas du protégé de Théodora, Théodose, est spécialement remarquable : à en croire Liberatus, l'exercice de la répression armée pour l'imposer comme archevêque face aux gaïanites dépassa en violences tout ce qui avait eu cours jusque-là. Elle conduisit même le miaphysite à renoncer à l'exercice de sa tâche, non par volonté d'apaisement mais simple constat de son incapacité à rallier.⁸⁸ Bien sûr, une telle présentation hostile à Théodose s'inscrit dans le discours polémique d'ensemble présenté par le *Breviarium*. Ainsi, le pape Vigile, qui aurait exprimé par lettre son intention d'entrer dans la communion de l'Alexandrin, est-il davantage compromis.⁸⁹ Mais cette logique narrative offre sans doute davantage : la clef d'interprétation susceptible d'expliquer le saisissant revirement du propos consacré à Paul de Tabennèse. C'est la crainte du sort de Protérius⁹⁰ qui précipite la fin de l'archevêque, pourtant doté de pouvoirs inhabituels,⁹¹ en le conduisant à une série d'initiatives fatales tant au diacre Psoïs qu'à sa propre réputation.⁹² Comme si, quittant sa source alexandrine pour se répandre, au terme de son récit, contre Askidas et

⁸³ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 124.11–18.

⁸⁴ D'après ce qui ressort de *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 125.24–29.

⁸⁵ Texte censé permettre l'acceptation de la reconnaissance de Monge. Au sein du parti travaillant en sa faveur, et donc à la perte de Talaïa, rappelons que se trouve Gennade d'Hermopolis. Cf. *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 126.29–127.7.

⁸⁶ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 132.12–20 Le déplacement de Paul, venu comme abbé contesté dans sa propre communauté monastique pour faire valoir sa cause à la cour de Justinien et reparti patriarche (*Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 138.18–139.3) ne relève pas de la même catégorie des affaires impliquant immédiatement l'archevêque.

⁸⁷ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 123.34–124.6.

⁸⁸ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 135.22–23.

⁸⁹ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 136.21.

⁹⁰ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 139.10–11.

⁹¹ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 139.2–3.

⁹² Il fut condamné au concile de Gaza (540–541). Victor de Tunnuna dit de façon assez inattendue que sa déposition fut motivée par le fait qu'il célébrait la mémoire de Dioscore (*Chronicon*, CCL 173A : 541.128.41). On peut évidemment considérer qu'il s'agit d'une accusation destinée à le perdre plus sûrement encore lors du concile de Gaza (cf. Maspero 1923 : 148–150), mais si l'on accorde créance à cette indication et à son inspiration, au contraire, elle pourrait bien contribuer à définir un peu plus précisément le *Sitz im Leben* du récit consulté par Liberatus, si favorable à Timothée Salophaciol dont Paul aurait imité l'exemple pour proposer aux populations des modalités d'adhésion positives.

Pélage,⁹³ le Carthaginois récapitulait subtilement l'enseignement de l'histoire récente du siège de Saint Marc : la faillite de toute action misant en priorité sur l'emploi pérennisé du recours à la contrainte de l'Etat impérial plutôt que sur la confiance dans la foi conciliaire proclamée. Cela ne revient pas à faire de la leçon du récit une protestation de principe revendiquant une parfaite non violence. Au contraire Liberatus exprime la conviction qu'une pédagogie de la menace peut s'avérer profitable pour le plus grand nombre. A ses yeux en effet, Paul de Tabennèse aurait pu amener « toutes les villes et tous les monastères à accepter le concile de Chalcédoine par la crainte de sa personne et par son énergie ». ⁹⁴ Mais en énonçant cette observation, Liberatus ordonne et hiérarchise la juste démarche qu'il recommande : fidèle à l'enseignement de 451, la conviction mobilisatrice, dont en quelque sorte Protérius a manqué, peut être accompagnée par l'appui de la coercition pour résoudre les contradictions de la situation religieuse spécialement manifestées à Alexandrie, mais elle doit l'emporter sur toute logique de stratégie ou combinaison politique, nuisible à l'Eglise tout entière, spécialement sous le règne de Justinien,⁹⁵ comme l'attestent, selon lui, les indignes stratagèmes de Monge ou la triste fin de l'expérience épiscopale menée par Paul de Tabennèse.

Au total, Liberatus offre une représentation de la cohabitation des communautés confessionnelles dans l'Alexandrie des V^e et VI^e s. qui frappe par sa qualité démonstrative, sans équivalent dans le monde latin. Surtout, cette description évite en plusieurs passages la caricature qu'aurait pu inspirer une application par trop systématique du discours hérésiologique, même si celui-ci gouverne en général le sens du propos. Elle montre en effet une propension conditionnée certes, mais assumée, à admettre que l'interprétation d'événements de références, introduisant

⁹³ Dénoncés vigoureusement comme terriblement responsables des déchirements engendrés par la controverse des Trois Chapitres, comme en atteste spécialement le point d'orgue du récit : « C'est une évidence pour tous, je pense, que ce scandale est entré dans l'Eglise par l'entremise du diacre Pélage et de Théodore évêque de Césarée-de-Cappadoce, parce que Théodore lui-même a proclamé publiquement que lui et Pélage devaient être brûlés vifs, eux par qui ce scandale entra dans le monde » ; *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 141.7–11.

⁹⁴ *Breviarium*, ACO 2.5 : 139.5–6. On sait qu'il avait privé les miaphysites d'églises à Alexandrie. Il aurait usé de violences dans la vallée du Nil d'après la tradition répercutée par l'*Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie* de Mawub Ibn Mansur Ibn Mufarrig (*History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*. Edited and translated by B. Evetts, PO 1 : 466–467). Procope de Césarée l'accuse encore de tentative de corruption sur Justinien après sa déposition (*Arc.* 27). Voir aussi Stein 1949 : 390–392.

⁹⁵ Sur l'appréciation de la politique religieuse de Justinien formée par Liberatus, voir Blau-deau 2015b.

à des déchirements a pu être conçue diversement, à commencer par l'élection de Protérius. Si comme il est probable, Liberatus fait état d'un modèle de réflexion historiographique qui procède de la mémoire active et institutionnalisée du siège de Saint Marc, telle qu'elle fut exploitée par un membre du clergé chalcédonien, la dimension à la fois réaliste, polémique et programmatique du propos prend une acception renforcée. Ennemi d'Aelure et de Monge, loués au contraire par Zacharie le Rhéteur, très médiocrement disposé à l'égard de Théodose, sauf pour souligner la puissance de l'adversité à laquelle il se confronta, le récit alexandrin médiatisé par Liberatus semble signifier que les initiatives bienveillantes de Salophaciol constituent un modèle de cohabitation pacifiée à méditer. Peut-être cette publication, destinée à Paul de Tabennèse, vise-t-elle à équilibrer le modèle d'action et à pondérer le risque qu'il n'apparaisse que comme le lieutenant de Justinien. Toujours est-il qu'un détail incite à croire que le patriarche chalcédonien ne méconnut pas l'histoire ainsi narrée. L'évêque et chroniqueur africain Victor de Tunnuna dit en effet de façon assez inattendue que sa déposition fut motivée par le fait qu'il célébrait la mémoire de Dioscore.⁹⁶ On peut évidemment considérer qu'il s'agit d'une accusation destinée à le perdre plus sûrement encore lors du concile de Gaza,⁹⁷ mais si l'on accorde créance à cette indication et à son inspiration, au contraire, elle pourrait bien contribuer à définir un peu plus précisément le *Sitz im Leben* du récit alexandrin également consulté par Liberatus. À côté des mesures coercitives dont l'éventuelle application était délibérément facilitée par les compétences nouvelles attribuées par l'empereur, il se serait donc agi de proposer aux populations des modalités d'adhésion positives à la ligne néo-chalcédonienne et d'envisager une perspective d'avenir commun, à partir d'une relecture documentée, habile et orientée des contentieux surgis du passé (y compris en brouillant à l'occasion les lignes d'appartenance).

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⁹⁶ *Chronicon*, CCL 173A : 541.128.41.

⁹⁷ Maspero 1923 : 148–150.

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Part Three
Cults and Practices as Spaces for Encounters
and Interactions

Love and Hate?

Again on Dionysos in the Eyes of the Alexandrian Jews*

Sofia Torallas Tovar

The panorama of religions encompassed within the Jews' "other" in antiquity was a colourful mosaic. The "idolaters" differed in language and culture, and their gods were many and variegated. In their contact with these different religious traditions, the Jewish communities of the Diaspora probably had a range of reactions which are difficult but not impossible to trace in the ancient sources. Their relationship with these religions was not necessarily one of opposition, but often of tolerance and even of exchange. Amongst these religions the position of the cult of Dionysos stands out.

There are a great number of works on this or similar topics, and much has been said too about my more specific topic, the relationship of the Jews to Dionysos. What I will try to do in this essay is to limit the query to Hellenistic and Roman Egypt and, more specifically, Alexandria,¹ and to outline the views of the cult and the followers of Dionysos as the Greek "other" in two works of Judeo-hellenistic literature, *3 Maccabees* and Philo's *In Flaccum*. I will try to place these views in the broader context of attitudes towards the cult of Dionysos in Judeo-hellenistic literature more generally. Both the expounding of negative and of positive features of the cult of Dionysos, and the warnings against that cult reflect changes in Hellenistic Jewish identity, and help us reconstruct stresses and anxieties within it. Historical context plays an important part in the increasingly negative view of mystery cults, and I shall attempt to address that context, although the task is complicated by the fact that most of the works I will mention have a controversial date.

* I had the opportunity of presenting an earlier version of this paper in New York, at Columbia University in October 2013, for which I thank Jesús Rodríguez Velasco. I also thank Luca Arcari for inviting me to Naples to revise my first ideas and to publish them in this volume. And finally, I also have to express my gratitude to my friends and colleagues David Nirenberg, Alberto Bernabé, Marco Antonio Santamaría and Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui for their kindness in dedicating their time to reading the draft of this paper and giving extremely valuable comments and revisions.

¹ On the Jewish community of Alexandria there is an enormous amount of studies. For practical reasons, I will not be exhaustive, but refer to a few main works on this: a classic is Kasher 1985; Méléze-Modrzejewski 1997; more recently Schimanowski 2006 and Gambetti 2009.

Egypt provides a very interesting laboratory within which to study dynamics of the representation of the other, since it provides an exceptional advantage, the preservation of texts both literary and documentary, and to this I may add the fact that the Septuagint, the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, was produced in Alexandria beginning in the 3rd cent. BCE. That translation itself can already serve us as a source for Hellenistic Jewish representations of their non-Jewish neighbours. But *3 Maccabees*² is one of the books of the so-called Old Testament which was not translated from a Hebrew original, but rather was originally composed in the Greek language in Alexandria, probably in the period between the 1st cent. BCE and the 1st cent. CE.

3 Maccabees starts with the events following the Battle of Raphia (217 BCE), fought between Ptolemy IV and Antiochos III (224–187 BCE).³ After the attempted assassination of Ptolemy IV Philopator (1.1–7), in which a body-double replaced the sleeping king in his tent in the military camp, the victorious king Ptolemy visits the city of Jerusalem where he is struck by the architectural splendour of the temple (1.9).⁴ He is however denied entry, and when he insists, the people respond with a dramatic reaction against the defilement of the most sacred place. Philopator remains insistent, but after a prayer by the high priest Simon (2.1–20) he is possessed with a seizure of divine origin that renders him incapacitated (2.21–24). After this unfortunate episode he returns to Alexandria where, enraged against the Jews by the events of Jerusalem, he decrees their registration and “servile status” (2.28), orders that the ivy leaf sign of the cult of Dionysos to be tattooed onto the Jews’ arms (2.29),⁵ but offers citizenship (*isopoliteia*) to those Jews willing to abandon their ancestral religion and embrace the royal cult of Dionysos (2.30):

But if any of them prefer to join those who have been initiated into the mysteries (ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τὰς τελεταῖς μεμνημένοις), they shall have equal citizenship with the Alexandrians.

This proposition meets with widespread refusal, provoking Philopator’s further decree (3.1–10) that the Jews of the city and countryside are to be rounded up for a registration (*laographia*)⁶ and annihilated (3.1–2).

Ptolemy plans to annihilate the Jews in the hippodrome with rampaging elephants made mad with an intoxicating admixture of wine and frankincense (5.45–51), but his efforts are successively intercepted by divinely induced states of sleep, forgetfulness, and, finally, a visitation by the deity itself. In the end,

² The bibliography on *3 Maccabees* is also very wide. The latest monograph is Croy 2006. A selection of works on this text: Hadas-Lebel 1953; Parente 1988; Passoni dell’Acqua 1995; Passoni dell’Acqua 2000; Johnson 2004; Johnson 2005; Hacham 2005; López Salvá 2013.

³ See Croy 2006: 37–41.

⁴ Cf. Abrahams 1897: 34–58.

⁵ Renaut 2006; Tondriau 1950.

⁶ On this see esp. Tcherikover 1961; a discussion in Renaut 2006: 219–220.

Ptolemy is forced to capitulate to the God of the Jews, becoming their benefactor (7.1–9).

What is interesting for us here is how this text portrays the King Ptolemy IV Philopator as a follower of Dionysos in all the most negative features of that cult, in order to convey the work's most visible message: the superiority of Yahweh over Dionysos.⁷ If Dionysos is, first and foremost, the god of wine, then Philopator is characterised as his loyal follower,⁸ identified with the god through his taste and inclination for wine and banqueting. The text repeatedly has Ptolemy appear in symposia and in feasts, toasting Dionysos and others with wine (5.15–17 and 36; 6.33). After having registered the Jews to be tortured he, “filled with exceeding and continuous joy, set up revels at all his idols” (4.16).

I have already mentioned the difficulty of assigning these texts a date or historical context, or even accepting the historical character of this narrative. This short story, though placed in the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator, may well have been produced at a later moment, when relations between the Jewish community of Alexandria with both the government and with the Greek population of the city were degenerating.⁹ We may compare the context of Philo of Alexandria's *In Flaccum*,¹⁰ which narrates the 1st century CE riots that broke out in Alexandria during the summer of 38 CE, when the Jewish community of Alexandria was decimated, tortured, expelled from their houses and deprived of their property and businesses. The treatise begins with the description of an exemplary governor, Flaccus, who for various reasons is turned by the influence of the anti-Jewish faction of Alexandria into a cruel and pitiless governor who is instrumental in the persecution of the Jewish community. The trouble seems to start when the recently appointed Jewish King Agrippa I, the grand-

⁷ Perhaps as a response to the syncretic tendencies which had identified Bacchus/Dionysos with Yahweh; see Herrero de Jáuregui 2010: 114. Representative of this syncretic view is the text of Plutarch: see Nieto Ibáñez 1999 and Geiger 2010.

⁸ Polybius (*Historiae*, 5.34.10) speaks of the monarch's continuous and irrational drunken sprees. Plutarch (*Cleom.* 33.2) affirms that the king had such a corrupt soul because of wine and women, that in his most sober moments he would have ritual celebrations and with a small drum he would gather people in his palace. The historian Justin (*Epitome Trogi* 30.1.8) also mentions this behavior of the King (*noctes in stupris, dies in conviviis*). Euphronios (Powell 1925: 176) gives Philopator the same nickname that had been given to Alexander: “The New Dionysos.” Clement of Alexandria (*Prot.* 4.54.2) also asserts that Ptolemy IV was called “Dionysos.”

⁹ For a discussion on the date, I refer to Croy 2003: xi–xiii, or Collins 2000: 121–131. I tend to agree with those who date the production of this book some time in the Roman period, from the eve of the Roman conquest to the reign of Caligula. See Willrich 1904; Tcherikover 1961; Hadas-Lebel 1953: 18–21.

¹⁰ Again, the bibliography on Philo and on his historical treatises is wide. Cf. Van der Horst 2003; Gambetti 2009.

son of Herod the Great, visits Alexandria on his way to Jerusalem from Rome. According to Philo, his presence in Alexandria inflamed tensions between Jews and Greeks. Word spread to the inhabitants of the city about the arrival of the Jewish king, leading to the event that sparked the conflict. A town fool named Carabbas, was dressed like the Jewish king, placed in the gymnasium, and mocked (*Flacc.* 36–39): an episode which has been compared to the mocking and passion of Christ.¹¹ Since the public mockery of an imperial appointee and companion constituted an offence to the emperor, the mob responsible for the affront blamed the Jews for the offence in order to escape the sovereign's potential wrath.

According to Philo, the Alexandrians' mischief was due to an "innate enmity," harboured by the inhabitants of the city (*Flacc.* 28–29), the Egyptians, against the Jews. It is plausible that such hatred existed, since the Jews had been supportive of the successive administrations, were sometimes placed as military detachments in order to control the native population,¹² had some access to the higher administration in Alexandria, and had even at some points been considered "Hellenes" with tax privileges.¹³

In any case, the native population is not the only one to appear as the enemy of the "chosen people." A number of Greek citizens, mentioned by name by Philo (Dionysius, Lampo and Isidore), were instrumental in governor Flaccus' conversion from an excellent governor into a fierce and frenzied adversary. When these individuals from the strong anti-Jewish faction of Alexandria are described, there is an interesting parallel with the characterisation of Ptolemy IV in his furious attack to the Alexandrian Jews:

for they became executors of all the plans which they had devised, treating him like a mute person on the stage, as one who was only, by way of making up the show, inscribed with the title of authority, being themselves a lot of Dionysiuses,¹⁴ demagogues, and of Lampos,¹⁵ a pack of cavillers and word-splitters; and of Isidorese,¹⁶ sowers of sedition, busy-bodies, devisers of evil, troublers of the state; for this is the name which has, at last, been given to them (20).

Philo represents the associations in Alexandria as the origin of sedition and political rebellion. This appears even more clearly in his reference to Isidore. After describing his misdeeds, he continues with the disqualification of associations:

And Isidore was in no respect inferior to him in wickedness, being a man of the populace, a low demagogue, one who had continually studied to throw everything into disorder and

¹¹ Fernández Marcos 2007.

¹² Cowey, Maresch 2001; Capponi 2007; Gambetti 2009: 23–55.

¹³ See for example Clarysse 1994; Gambetti 2009: 48–50.

¹⁴ This Dionysios appears not only here in Philo, but also in the *Acta Alexandrinorum* (1), and perhaps in the *Epistula Claudii ad Alexandrinos* (17: CPJ 2.153), as an ambassador to Claudius in 41, against the Jewish community. See also CPJ 2.44.

¹⁵ Also in CPJ 2.69–70.

¹⁶ Isidore appears in CPJ 2.156, 41 CE, as gymnasiarch in Alexandria. See *Legat.* 355.

confusion, an enemy to all peace and stability, very clever at exciting seditions and tumults which had no existence before, and at inflaming and exaggerating such as were already excited, taking care always to keep about him a disorderly and promiscuous mob of all the refuse of the people, ready for every kind of atrocity, which he had divided into regular sections as so many companies of soldiers. There are a vast number of parties (θίασοι) in the city whose association is founded in no one good principle, but who are united by wine, and drunkenness, and revelry, and the offspring of those indulgencies, insolence; and their meetings are called synods and couches (σύνοδοι καὶ κλῖναι) by the natives. In all these parties or the greater number of them Isidore is said to have borne the bell, the leader of the feast, the chief of the supper, the disturber of the city (συμποσίαρχος, ὁ κλινάρχης, ὁ ταραξίπολις; 135–137).

Let me just remark that in contrast to this, at the beginning of the book, Flaccus is described as a good governor, who has

prohibited all associations and meetings¹⁷ (τάς τε ἐταιρείας καὶ συνόδους) which were continually feasting together under pretence of sacrifices, making a drunken mockery of public business, treating with great vigour and severity all who resisted his commands (4).

Philo will argue in his treatise *De ebrietate* that lifestyle in the club is characterised by gluttony, drunkenness and indulgence,¹⁸ connecting it at the same time to the worship of pagan gods, and to the body.

In both *3 Maccabees* and *In Flaccum* the enemy of the Jewish people is portrayed as a drunken enthusiast of symposia, in a language which is very much related to the cult of Dionysos.¹⁹ In both cases too, divine intervention turns the fortune of the Jews and saves them from suffering, meting exemplary punishment to king Ptolemy, and even more cruelly, to Flaccus, who is exiled and finally dies at the hands of soldiers sent by Caligula. Both recognise with regret the power of God, and concede their mistake in treating his people unjustly. In both works the contraposition between the god of the Jews and Dionysos is clearly established, and both use this image as a basis on which they defend the political and social position of their people. It seems likely that both works

¹⁷ Probably under Tiberius' policy. The associations are mentioned later in paragraph 136, where Philo refers to the clubs where the members partied and drank excessively. See van der Horst 2003: 95–96, and 214. Athenaeus (*Deipn.* 146c–e) writes about royal banquets and Alexander's companions, and the expenses for those dinners. Later on (246c) he mentions Agesarchus of Megalopolis, who talks about γελοιασταί, Ptolemy Philopator's party companions. Plutarch (*Ant.* 28.2) calls one of these associations in Alexandria σύνδοξ ἀμμητοβίων, for the continuous and unmeasured partying. On associations in Alexandria see Seland 1996: 110–127. See also Borgen 1997: 170–171.

¹⁸ *Ebr.* 14–15; 20–29; 95. See Borgen 1997: 170–171.

¹⁹ Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, 39.8–9, 39.14, 39.18–19, 39, provides an account of the “Bacchanalian affair,” so called by Gruen 1990: 34–78. The abominations described about the despised religion: debauchery and murder, lustful acts, human sacrifice, are all negative, and often false. This is hardly confined to Rome, and although we do not have further information for other areas, we may assume that the rejection of some of the most remarkable features of the rite were extensive to other areas of the Mediterranean.

were produced in a period when the relationship of the Jewish community with the Greek population and the government had very much deteriorated: that is, beginning with the end of the Ptolemaic period, and mostly under Roman rule, when the problem of Alexandrian citizenship had placed the community in a very uncomfortable position.

Although it is difficult to establish chronologically any kind of evolution from friendly identification and syncretism to rejection and condemnation of Dionysiac or mystic practices, these can in any case be understood as two contemporary trends, which can sometimes be at least partly explained by historical context.²⁰ At some point, the characterisation of the worship of Dionysos was restricted to the negative features of the cult, as seen in *3 Maccabees* and *In Flaccum*. But we need to compare these negative representations with different available attitudes towards this cult.

We know that Greek mystery cults reached the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and that these communities sometimes found those cults attractive, and reconciled aspects of them with their native religion.²¹ As described by Gruen, Jewish apologists were often reluctant to engage in confrontation and tried to find links with their own traditions instead.²² At times the Jews even embraced their own associations of the cult and temple of Jerusalem with wine in order to strengthen Dionysiac resonances. The assimilation has been described as “iren-ic,” as an attempt to approximate both cultures.²³ While some Jews accepted this,²⁴ for other Jews, however, any rapprochement or engagement with the mysteries of Dionysos went against a fundamental commandment, that of exclusive worship of the one and only God. It is well known that the refusal of this latter group to worship the protecting gods of the cities in which they dwelt gave rise to accusations, widespread in the ancient world, of the Jews’ religious separa-

²⁰ Kirkpatrick 2014, places a marked tendency towards syncretism between the two revolts in Palestine, I am trying to argue that the rejection can be a consequence of the deteriorating situation of the Jews under Roman rule. This is hardly demonstrable, since opposite trends appear simultaneously at different historical moments.

²¹ Smith 1975; Herrero de Jáuregui 2010: 114; Kirkpatrick 2014.

²² Gruen 1988: 137–188. Particularly on Orphism and its connections and conciliation with the Jewish traditions, see Herrero de Jáuregui 2010: 108–112. Matusova 2015: 107 explains and gives examples of the eagerness of the Jews to play along with Greek ideas, starting by calling their own Torah a *ἱερὸς λόγος*. This would also bring about a comparison with mystery cults. On the universality of the cult of Dionysos, and thus its appeal to a large number of people, see Henrichs 1982.

²³ This assimilation was very ancient, and it has even been basis to interpret the expulsion of the worshippers of Bacchus from Rome (edict *De Bacchanalibus*, attested by Livy), as an expulsion of the Jews of Italy: cf. Hengel 1973: 478, Méléze-Modrzejewski 1997: 107–108; Bickerman 1958, esp. 145 and 150.

²⁴ One may bring up here a text like the so-called *Testament of Orpheus*, a piece recognised as Jewish work. See “Orphica” in Charlesworth 1985: 2.795–801; Riedweg 1993, and Sfameni Gasparro 2010.

tism.²⁵ What is much less often noted is that many other Jews chose the path of social and political integration, through the worship of local gods and participation in Hellenistic mystery cults.²⁶ As an extreme example, one finds offerings to pagan gods by persons who present themselves as Jews: for example in CIJ 2.749, a Carian inscription, we find the *metoikos* Niketas, son of Jason, the Hierosolymite, contributing 100 drachmas to the festival of Dionysos.²⁷

This situation of tolerance towards and even participation in gentile “superstitions” generated a defensive reaction (*3 Maccabees* and *In Flaccum* might themselves be interpreted in this sense) which can be traced for example in the translation of Septuagint. The problem is, as often with ancient sources, that the scholar has to rely on scarce or succinct pieces of evidence. In this case, that evidence consists in the semantics of terms like θίασος, τελετή, τελέομαι, τελεσφόρος,²⁸ which are related to Orphism and the mystic cult of Dionysos, but might also be interpreted otherwise in some contexts. There are four instances in the Bible containing the condemnation of the heresies or abominations that are translated into Greek by using these terms related to the initiation into the mysteries of Dionysos, placing the abomination in the present and making not only a linguistic translation, but a cultural translation too.²⁹

The earliest example is *Deut.* 23.17. Its Hebrew standard text has (in NASB translation): “None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute.” The Greek (LXX) version translates:

Οὐκ ἔσται πόρνη ἀπὸ θυγατέρων Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ οὐκ ἔσται πορνεύων ἀπὸ υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ.

There shall not be a prostitute among the daughters of Israel; there shall not be one that practices prostitution among the sons of Israel.

But adds a doublet right after it:

οὐκ ἔσται τελεσφόρος ἀπὸ θυγατέρων Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ οὐκ ἔσται τελισκόμενος ἀπὸ υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ.

²⁵ Already in Hecataeus, and his “Jewish mysanthropy” (*apud* Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 40.3), see Berthelot 2008; later see criticism in, for example, Tac. *Hist.* 5.2–5.

²⁶ Bickermann 1988: 253. He interprets the passage in *Deuteronomy*, *1–4 Kings* and *Hosea* (see below), as injunctions introduced by the translators of LXX to prevent Jewish participation.

²⁷ See Schürer 1987: 3/1.25 and Bickermann 1988: 252.

²⁸ For a complete discussion on these passages, see Boyd-Taylor 2008.

²⁹ The first problem that underlies the use of LXX is that the only sure date we have is for the earliest text, *Deuteronomy*, translated with the rest of the Pentateuch under Ptolemy II Soter in the 3rd cent. BCE. All subsequent translations come closer to the period when the situation of the Jewish community is less peaceful, and we find the disqualifications in *3 Maccabees* and Philo’s *In Flaccum*. For example, *Wisdom of Solomon* has been recently dated even to the Roman period, under Augustus, reflecting then a situation parallel to the one that lies behind *3 Maccabees* and *In Flaccum*.

there shall not be an initiate (τελεσφόρος) among the daughters of Israel, there shall not be anyone initiated (τελισκόμενος) among the sons of Israel (transl. NETS).

In 3 Kgs 15.12–13 (Hebrew text), Asa rids the land of cultic personnel and he removes the idols. The Greek version, though, does not have cultic personnel, but τελεταί. The Queen Mother, accused in the Hebrew text of making an “abominable image,” in the Greek version instead “helds a gathering (σύννοδος) in her sacred grove (ἄλσος).” Does she become the leader of a Dionysiac *thiasos*? In *Hos.* 4.4–19, the prophet accuses his audience of illicit sexual relationships, meaning temple prostitution, while in the Greek translation they are offering sacrifices μετὰ τῶν τετελεσμένων, “with the initiates.”

The case of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, written probably in Alexandria in 1st cent. BCE, is somewhat different, since it was originally produced in Greek. This text contains a condemnation of the Caananites (12.3–11), who are described as “initiates of an association,” μύστας θιάσου, who “practice unholy rites” τελετὰς ἀνοσίους. In the same text, but later on (14.15), in a diatribe against idol worship, the terms μυστήρια καὶ τελετάς, “mysteries and initiations,” are used.³⁰

But there are in fact other documents, Alexandrian too, that point to some exchange of Jewish and Dionysiac influences. The *Letter of Aristeas*³¹ is a long text in epistolary format, pretending to be written by a Greek praising the Jewish religion, but in fact produced by an Alexandrian Jew to narrate the story behind the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in Alexandria in the 3rd cent. Some scholars, like J. Scott,³² have seen Dionysiac elements in this text. Although I am not convinced that the *Letter of Aristeas* portrays the Jewish religion as a Dionysiac mystery cult as Scott claims,³³ some Dionysiac elements have clearly found their way into it: the Torah is treated as a *hieros logos*, the sacred text typical of mysteries, and the *ekphraseis* or descriptions of the temple at Jerusalem or of the gifts sent by Ptolemy II to Jerusalem present elements like grapes and ivy.³⁴ The description of the sacrifice and ritual that took place in Jerusalem has also acquired some Dionysiac elements: the priests are described as tearing the limbs off a victim, resonating with the Dionysiac

³⁰ Herrero de Jáuregui 2010: 114 explains it as a response to the attempts of Antiochos Epiphanes at hellenizing Judea through the establishment of the worship of Dionysos in 167 BCE (see 2 *Macc.* 5–6). L. Grabbe (1997: 66) states that the aim is the condemnation of Canaanite practices in order to justify their removal from the land. This is an interesting context for the use of Orphic or mystery terminology. On the second passage of *Wisdom*, see Herrero de Jáuregui 2010: 158–159; West 1983: 172, n. 101; Burkert 2005: 184.

³¹ Honigman 2003; Rajak 2009. The most recent work is Matusova 2015.

³² Scott 2007.

³³ I find that both Herrero de Jáuregui 2010: 109 and Matusova 2015: 95 are also not convinced by his claims.

³⁴ Kirkpatrick 2014: 178–180.

sparagmos, the dismemberment of the bodies of the sacrificial victims. The final symposium of Ptolemy and the seventy sages has also been claimed as a Dionysiac element: not only because it is a banquet, but because it is a banquet at the court of a Ptolemaic king, the Ptolemies being a dynasty well connected to the cult of Dionysos.

I find more convincing evidence for the conscious use of mystery/Dionysiac terminology in Philo of Alexandria. Philo, whom I have already mentioned when describing – albeit indirectly – in his historical treatises the enemy of the Jewish people as a follower of Dionysos, also adopted the terminology of the mysteries in his philosophical works.³⁵ For example, he uses the term *ιεροφάντης*, for the translators of Septuagint, being the hierophant the one who explains the secrets of the sacred texts.³⁶ Dionysiac banqueting also served Philo as a very convenient metaphor for divine inspiration, for the “drunkenness and folly” produced by “drinking” the unmixed love of God, the *sobria ebrietas*.³⁷ He in fact uses Dionysiac terminology as a means to describe initiation and divine inspiration, dissociated from idolatry and as a fitting metaphor for things common to the cult of Dionysos and the Jewish religion. Especially in his work on the Contemplative life, Philo describes a Jewish religious community, the Therapeutae, for which this treatise is the only source, who live a life in complete virtue. In their “heaven-sent passion” which induces in them a sort of frenzy, they are compared by Philo to the Bacchants or Corybants (*Contempl.* 12):

οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ θεραπείαν ἰόντες οὔτε ἐξ ἔθους οὔτε ἐκ παραινέσεως ἢ παρακλήσεως τινῶν, ἀλλ’ ὑπ’ ἔρωτος ἀρπασθέντες οὐρανίου, καθάπερ οἱ βακχευόμενοι καὶ κορυβαντιῶντες ἐνθουσιάζουσι, μέχρις ἂν τὸ ποθοῦμενον ἴδωσιν.

But they who apply themselves to this kind of worship, not because they are influenced to do so by custom, nor by the advice or recommendation of any particular persons, but because they are carried away by a certain heavenly love, give way to enthusiasm, behaving like so many revellers in bacchanalian or corybantian mysteries, until they see the object which they have been earnestly desiring.

Later (85) he compares the Bacchant’s drinking of wine to the Therapeutae’s drinking of God’s love (since in fact, this community abstained from meat and wine):

εἴτα ὅταν ἐκάτερος τῶν χορῶν ἰδίᾳ καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ἐστιαθῇ, καθάπερ ἐν ταῖς βακχεΐαις ἀκράτου σπᾶσαντες τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς, ἀναμίγνυνται καὶ γίνονται χορὸς εἰς ἐξ ἁμφοῶν.

³⁵ On Philo’s use of mystery terminology, see Riedweg 1987: 108–115 and Cohen 2004. See also Scott 2009.

³⁶ *Mos.* 2.40; 150; *Somn.* 1.164; 2.3; 29; 109; *Spec.* 2.201; 3.135; 4.177; *Virt.* 75; 163; 174; *Sobr.* 20; *Post.* 16; 164; 174; *Gig.* 54; *Deus* 62; 156; *Leg.* 3.151; 173; *Cher.* 42; 49; *Sacr.* 94; *Det.* 13; *Conf.* 149; *Migr.* 14; *Fug.* 85.

³⁷ On *sobria ebrietas*, the classic work is Lewy 1929.

Then, when each chorus of the men and each chorus of the women has feasted separately by itself, like persons in the bacchanalian revels, drinking the pure wine of the love of God, they join together, and the two become one chorus.

While Philo had denounced the extravagancy and ostentation of Greek (and Dionysiac) banquets when referring to the enemies of his people, he now, in stark contrast, uses Dionysiac terminology to present the symposia of the Therapeutae as models of piety and godliness.³⁸

A tolerant and participative attitude of the Jews of the Diaspora towards the religions of the others, and especially towards the mystery cults, generated first some sort of precaution that on occasion became rejection, without that rejection producing any purge of Hellenistic mysteries from the Jewish theological imagination. The distillation of some “positive” elements of the cult of Dionysos remained as very useful metaphor in philosophical contexts, but the negative elements served too as a very effective characterisation of the opponent in an increasingly hostile socio-political context under Roman rule.

I do not see the Jews considering their own religion comparable to the mysteries of Dionysus, nor even daring to compare God to Bacchus. But Hellenistic Jews were exposed not only to the Greek language, which they learnt and made their mother-language, but also to a heavy cultural load carried by that language,³⁹ and the dangers and opportunities of transfer were present from early on. The multiplicity of warnings is proof of awareness of the danger and of the existence of some Jews who were felt to have crossed a line. At the point when *3 Maccabees* and *In Flaccum* were produced, the same cult that loaned fitting terminology to a Jewish cult also provided the negative image of an opponent engaged in Dionysiac debauchery and wild banquet. Both works share a similar structure in which a clear opposition emerges between the God of the Jews and Dionysos, though not in the form of the Greek deity himself, but through a representative who presents his most distasteful features (excessive drinking, murder, etc.): the King Ptolemy IV and the governor Flaccus. Both end up receiving a harsh punishment for their ruthless aggression on the Jewish people, and at the end in contrition they both acknowledge the superiority of God. The use of mystery and Dionysiac terminology (in the LXX translations) in some cases seems to serve primarily as a warning to Jews against unreligious behaviour. But an assimilation of Bacchic celebrations to the abominable⁴⁰ emerges as Alexandria becomes an unfriendly place, most notably under the Romans, after a long period in which the Jewish community had flourished under the Ptolemies. The loss of civil rights brought about the fall of the bounty

³⁸ Gruen 2002: 216.

³⁹ Gruen 2002: 214.

⁴⁰ We could compare this to the warnings against “unreligious behaviour” in Christian authors, using the Dionysiac rites as examples: Orig. *Cels.* 4.10 (1:281.2 Koetschau), about the terror of the Underworld.

and prosperity of a community that a century later would virtually disappear from Egypt.

I do not believe that there was a brand of Egyptian Judaism that constituted a higher form of Dionysiac-like mysteries,⁴¹ nor that the use of mystery and Dionysiac terminology in Philo is a reflection of such a cult. I rather prefer to interpret Philo's terminological use as metaphoric,⁴² perhaps reminiscent of a period of peaceful co-existence of both cults, and due to the fact that there might have been unrelated parallelisms in the religious practices that were heuristically useful. If indeed the Dionysiac cult had a privileged position in Alexandria, the negative portrait of the cult in both *3 Maccabees* and *In Flaccum*,⁴³ serves an author and a people complaining of the loss of their own privileges. At this point, the parallelisms previously observed and accepted between their religions become differences. Explicitly in *3 Maccabees* the common features are distinguished: gluttonous partying among the Egyptians is instead thanksgiving among the Jews (6.31; 36):

τότε οἱ τὸ πρὶν ἐπονείδιστοι καὶ πλησίον τοῦ ᾗδου, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐπ' αὐτῷ βεβηκότες ἀντὶ πικροῦ καὶ δυσαιάκτου μόρου κώθωνα σωτήριον συστησάμενοι τὸν εἰς πτώσιν αὐτοῖς καὶ τάφον ἡτοιμασμένον τόπον κλισίαις κατεμερίσαντο πλήρεις χαρμονῆς.

Then those who were once objects of contempt and next to Hades, or rather at it, united for a feast of deliverance rather than one of bitter and mournful doom, and filled with joy they apportioned to parties of revelers the place that had been prepared for their destruction and burial.

τὰς προειρημένας ἡμέρας ἄγειν ἔστησαν εὐφροσύνους, οὐ πότου χάριν καὶ λιχνείας, σωτηρίας δὲ τῆς διὰ θεὸν γενομένης αὐτοῖς.

they resolved to celebrate the aforementioned days in merriment, not for the sake of drink and gluttony, but for the deliverance that had come to them through God.

The same about song and dance (6.32):

ἀνέλαβον ὥδην πάτριον τὸν σωτῆρα καὶ τερατοποιὸν αἰνοῦντες θεόν· [...] χοροὺς συνίσταντο εὐφροσύνης εἰρηνικῆς σημεῖον.

They [...] took up an ancestral song, praising the savior and wonder-working God, [...] they began organising dances as a sign of peaceful joy.

The Jews have in a pure and gentle form what the Dionysian cult offers in a vulgar, disgusting way.⁴⁴

Of the three dispositions of Jews towards the cult of Dionysos, one can hardly propose a historical frame for any evolution, since within the Jewish community

⁴¹ As stated by Scott 2009: 50.

⁴² As generally in Late Hellenistic Philosophy, see also Cohen 2004.

⁴³ Hacham 2005: 170, 174, 176, describes the aim of *3 Maccabees* as ridiculing and denigrating the cult of Dionysos.

⁴⁴ Hacham 2005: 181.

the multiple potentials co-existed: from the most syncretistic to the strictest purist. Hence at one point in time one finds both warnings against any contact, and friendly exchanges. The third mood is that of the two works here compared: at a moment when the whole community was feeling the real danger of marginalisation, the voices of Philo and the author of *Maccabees* use a narrative structure to establish a clear distinction and de-ambiguation of both gods. After a dramatic collision the God of the Jews, devoid of any assimilation to Dionysos, punishes the representative of Dionysos, thereby confirming his superiority.⁴⁵ Although the parallelism with the political situation in Alexandria is perhaps not enough of an argument to date *3 Maccabees* to the Roman period, I suggest we consider its strategic invocations of the cult of Dionysos, so close to those presented by Philo's *In Flaccum*, as a response to a political situation. This is not a new suggestion: both Tcherikover⁴⁶ and Collins,⁴⁷ among others, see a reflection of the situation of the Jews in Roman Egypt. Other interpretations, like that of the exemplification for Jews of the perils of assimilation,⁴⁸ are not incompatible with this either. There is a warning against the conversion (to Dionysism) required clearly by Philopator as the price to social advancement, and the exemplary Jews resist apostasy in the most heroic manner. This is partly true too of the Alexandrian Jews portrayed by Philo.⁴⁹ When placed in an extreme situation and asked to convert, the Jews resist and thus reject the "other's" religion, which at the same time becomes not just a "neighbouring faith" as in the past, but an imposition. Under the Ptolemies there was some kind of official arrangement that facilitated the peaceful co-existence of Jews in their pagan surroundings, but as Fraser⁵⁰ suggests, it was at the end of the 2nd cent. BCE when the picture changes, and the attitude towards the contemporary pagan world in some circles became extreme.

Why would the Jewish author of *3 Maccabees* in the Roman period choose to place his narrative in the Ptolemaic period? Perhaps exactly for the reasons adduced above. The enemy had to be portrayed in a powerful way, and the figure of the worshipper of Dionysos presented a perfect fit for the role of the villain. The Ptolemies, especially Ptolemy IV Philopator – the New Dionysos – and

⁴⁵ Not far from the claim of Cousland (2001) who concludes that the purpose of *3 Maccabees* is the aretalogical claim that the God of Israel is the real and the only ruler of the world.

⁴⁶ Tcherikover 1961.

⁴⁷ Collins 2000: 123–125.

⁴⁸ Other interesting interpretations include that of Williams 1995, as a defence of the Jews in the Diaspora *vis-à-vis* the Jews of the Land of Israel, while Johnson 1996: 63, has rather focused on the Alexandrian context, suggesting that the purpose of the book is "to assist pious Jews to steer a middle ground between the evils of separatism and the perils of assimilation."

⁴⁹ Philo distinguishes three types of apostates: lovers or luxury, socially ambitious and freethinkers. See Feldman 1960, and Wolfson 1947: 1.77.

⁵⁰ Fraser 1972: 299.

his court offered an adequate⁵¹ staging, since contemporary (Roman?) authorities would not provide a visible religious opponent as powerful as a Bacchic monarch.⁵² The conflict had two intertwined extremes, the political and the religious. Conversion and apostasy would save the Jews from a social and political marginalisation and annihilation, and had thus become a real temptation for less strict coreligionaries. That is what both our authors are battling.

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⁵¹ On how history is mined by the author of *3 Maccabees* in order to convey a message, by creating a convincing illusion, see Johnson 2005.

⁵² One may also argue that the template provided by *Exodus*, with the enemy Pharaoh defeated by the Jews through the intervention of God, was in the minds of the Jews in Roman times too.

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Devotees of Serapis and Christ?

A Literary Representation of Religious Cohabitations in the 4th Cent.

Francesco Massa

1. Endgame? The destruction of the Serapeum

I have heard some dispute which was the greater temple: this one that now no longer exists [*scil.* the temple of Edessa] or that of Serapis, which we hope shall never have to suffer the same fate.¹

The hope uttered by Libanius, around the year 387, in his oration to Theodosius *Pro templis*, was not fulfilled. Shortly thereafter, in 392 (following Johannes Hahn's dating),² the temple of Serapis was destroyed by Christians, perhaps as a consequence of the promulgation of an edict the previous year, desired by Valentinian I, Theodosius, and Arcadius, against sacrifices, access to the temples, and veneration of sanctuaries.³ According to the literary sources, a *martyrium* and a few churches were constructed in the temple's place, signalling the progressive transformation of Alexandria's religious typography into a Christian city that had already been ongoing for a few years. This is a time in which Christian authors convey the image of a forced Christianisation of the imperial territory, carried out, in part, by groups of monks who took upon themselves the destruction of pagan temples, such as in northern Gaul, North Africa, and Phoenicia.⁴

Unum et solum spectaculum novum in omni mundo, to quote the Anonymous 4th-cent. author of the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*,⁵ the Alexandrian Serapeum was one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world.⁶ Its destruc-

¹ Libanius, *Orationes*, 30.44.

² Hahn 2008.

³ *Cod. theod.* 16.10.11. In February 391, Theodosius had initiated a series of laws that intended to suppress the sacrifices and visiting of temples: cf. *Cod. theod.* 16.10.10.

⁴ Cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, 13, Aug. *Parm.* 1.10.16, and Theodor. *Hist. eccl.* 5.29. On this issue, see Frend 1990: 50–51. On the problem of the discrepancy between the literary representations and archaeological data regarding the transformation of temples into churches, see Hahn, Emmel, Gotter 2008.

⁵ *Expos. tot. mund.* 35.

⁶ Among the ancient sources containing descriptions of the temple: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Historiae*, 16.12.13, Ruf. *Hist.* 2.23, and Quodvultdeus, *Liber promissionum*, 3.38.42.

tion left a profound mark on the Christian and pagan consciousness of the era, as various literary sources attest: the works of Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Eunapius allow us to form a general idea of this event and of the various interpretations offered by both pagan and Christian authors.⁷ In fact, according to Jerome, the destruction of the Serapeum was the subject of a short literary work by Sophronius, *De subversione Serapis*.⁸

Nonetheless, from a historical and archaeological standpoint, the reconstruction of this event is far from simple: as the most recent bibliography indicates, many aspects remain unclear, and some doubts have been raised regarding the actual destruction of the temple and above all regarding the construction, immediately afterwards, of Christian cult places on the ruins of the Serapeum. But of greatest interest in this context is the fact that the episode of 392 is crucial for the study of Christian-pagan relations in late antiquity, since it allows us a better understanding of their topographical cohabitation and of the means by which Christian authors gained access to the “knowledge” of pagan deities.

2. Why Serapis and the Christians?

The events of 392 were the result of a growing conflict between Alexandria’s religious communities that intensified especially in the second half of the 4th cent. Still, at least since the late 2nd cent., pagans, Jews, and Christians had managed to live together in this large and multicultural Egyptian city.⁹ Their cohabitation was, admittedly, not without its tensions and conflicts, but still far from the degeneration of their rapport that took place during the final years of the 4th cent.

The present article proposes to analyse the sources that shed light on the overlap between Serapis and Christ, and on the competition between the followers of the two divinities in the 3rd and, especially, 4th cent. My analysis will take its cue from a passage in the *Vita Saturnini* in the *Historia Augusta*, in which the author states that there are no differences between the followers of Serapis and

For the archaeology and architecture of the sanctuary, see primarily Rowe, Rees 1957; Empereur 1988; Fragaki 2011: 9–11; Tkaczow 1993: 68–70; McKenzie, Gibson, Reyes 2004; Sabottka 2008.

⁷ See Ruf. *Hist.* 11.22, Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.16–17, Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 7.15.2–10, Theodor. *Hist. eccl.* 5.23, Eunapius, *Vitae sophistarum*, 6.107–111.

⁸ Cf. Jer. *Vir. ill.* 134. The bibliography on the destruction of the Serapeum is immense: cf. Schwartz 1966; Orlandi 1968; Gaudemet 1972; Thelamon 1981: 255–273; Chuvion 1990: 70–71; Trombley 1993: 129–147; Errington 1997; De Giovanni 2000: 128; Hahn 2008: 337–357; Martin 2008; Kristensen 2010: 162–167; Burgess, Dijkstra 2013.

⁹ On the cohabitation of Christians, Gnostics, and Jews in the Alexandria of the 2nd cent., see the article by Bernard Pouderon in this volume.

the Christians and that, consequently, the two religious forms may overlap and mingle. My objective is to understand the internal (i.e. rhetorical and literary) as well as external (i.e. historical) reasons that prompted the biographer of the *Historia Augusta* to draw that parallel.

It is not so much a question of constructing generic parallels between a pagan god and Christ or between two different religious practices, which a certain modern criticism undertook to do, especially at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th cent., in the wake of the German *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, and which occasionally some recent contributions continue to do.¹⁰ We also do not wish to entertain the notion, as some do even today, that the cult of Serapis was in a certain sense a “preparation” or “opening of the path” for Christianity.¹¹ This hermeneutic perspective remains fundamentally marked by the Christian paradigm of the “preparation for the Gospel.”¹² What is interesting to analyse, rather, is the ancient testimonies (both Christian and pagan) that directly address the relationship between Serapis and Christ and between their respective adherents. On this basis it becomes possible to reflect genuinely on Alexandrian religious conflict and cohabitation.

It was inevitable that Serapis would immediately attract the attention of Christians in religious practices and literary portrayal. He did so not only through his role in Alexandria as both public and poliadic deity (in his capacity as Isis’ spouse) around whom the identity of the city’s inhabitants formed itself, but also by being a “new divinity,” as we shall see later. Serapis, in fact, is a god whose cult was “designed” by the Ptolemies in the Hellenistic era through a fusion of mythical elements from both the Egyptian (Osiris and, perhaps, Apis) and Greek (Zeus and Asclepius) traditions, as a few important essays by Philippe Borgeaud and Youri Volokhine have clearly demonstrated.¹³

A first fundamental area of competition and overlap with the followers of Christ was the therapeutic cults. Serapis was an important healer and saviour, as various literary, epigraphical, and papyrological sources illustrate.¹⁴ During late antiquity this dimension of Serapis grows to a universal valence, and thus a tendency develops to honour the deity as an omnipotent force, often associated with Isis, especially in the area of aretalogy.¹⁵

¹⁰ On the German *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, see Colpe 1961; Simon 1975; Krech 2002: 124–126; and Jenssen 2011.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. Capponi 2010: 129: “The Egyptian worship of Serapis certainly played a role in preparing a spiritual background for the diffusion of Christianity.”

¹² A paradigmatic instance of this approach is the work of F. Cumont, particularly Cumont 2006. In this regard, see e.g. Bonnet 2006.

¹³ On the *interpretatio* of Serapis, see e.g. Tac. *Hist.* 4.84.5. For the design of the Serapis cult, see Borgeaud, Volokhine 2000 and Borgeaud 2014. More generally, see also Turcan 1989: 78–126, Pfeiffer 2008, and Devauchelle 2012.

¹⁴ Cf. Bricault 2008.

¹⁵ On the aretalogies, see Longo 1969; Bricault 1996; and Bricault 2013: 518–519.

It is possible, even, to imagine that the iconography of Christ was partially influenced by that of Serapis. As part of the “war of images” that had been unleashed in the opening centuries of our era, the depictions of Christ as a mature, bearded man in all likelihood referred back to the iconography of Serapis, in addition to that of Zeus and Asclepius. In spite of a few theoretical reservations of mine, it seems to me that Thomas F. Mathews is right when he writes that the religious competitions of the first centuries of our era also took the form of a war between the representations of the different divinities. The “clash of gods” to which the iconography attests is exemplified by the case of Christ and Serapis, of which we possess precise iconographic models, particularly in the case of icons. Mathews cites two Egyptian specimens in this regard.¹⁶ The first is one of the three panels of a triptych, recovered in the Fayum and preserved today in the Paul Getty Museum: Serapis occupies the left panel, with Isis on the right; the central panel is reserved for a bearded man. By a comparison with analogous pieces, this work is dated to the second half of the 3rd cent. CE.¹⁷ The second specimen is an icon of Christ of St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, traditionally dated to the 6th cent.¹⁸

I am not going to enter here upon the delicate iconographic issue, which itself poses two problems. The first is related to the difference between the simple recovery of iconographic models and pure exterior forms on the one hand, and the new interpretation of images and symbols on the other. We have here two different cultural processes: a simple resumption of traditional imagery, and the adaptation and semantic reinterpretation in light of a new context of inclusion. In some cases, in fact, the recovery of a representational form does not reflect its original significance, which suggests a deliberate process of reinterpretation. In other words, it is difficult to distinguish between the cultural and cultic levels, especially when the chronological deviation, as in the case cited by Mathews, is significant.

The second problem is that, often, the iconography of Christ is the end result of the representations of many different deities. The case of Serapis is illuminating in this instance. His iconography combines the imagery of the Greek gods Zeus and Asclepius. The formation of Christ, in turn, takes place through various models, so that one cannot speak of a direct derivation from a particular Greek or Roman deity. This observation allows us to highlight another preliminary question of methodology. Within the panorama of the traditional cults of the Roman Empire there were many divine figures comparable to Christ, as evidenced by the intense debate between Celsus and Origen on the topic.¹⁹ This

¹⁶ Mathews 2005: 94–96 and figures 142–143. For a critical approach to Mathews’ work, see Poilpré 2005 and Caillet 2010.

¹⁷ For the triptych, see Thompson 1978–1979.

¹⁸ Cf. Weitzmann 1976: 77–78.

¹⁹ See Orig. *Cels.* 3.22; 7.53.

multiplicity of possible analogies excludes, generally speaking, direct and exclusive competition between a single pagan deity and Christ. The general logic and functioning of polytheistic religions should indeed never be forgotten.²⁰

3. *Qui Serapim colunt Christiani sunt...*

One of the most interesting documents regarding possible overlaps between Christians and the adherents of Serapis is found in the *Historia Augusta*, a collection of the lives of the Roman emperors, presumably written in the final decade of the 4th cent. The author's name has not come down to us, and his identity is at the centre of a lively scholarly debate: the recent studies by Stéphane Ratti, in particular, have suggested Nicomachus Flavianus senior, a *haruspex* under emperor Theodosius.²¹

The passage in question is found in the *Vitae Firmi, Saturnini, Proculi et Bonosi*, part of the section devoted to the “thirty tyrants” and attributed to the fictitious writer Flavius Vopiscus. It recounts the life of Saturninus, a usurper probably invented by the biography's author (Flavius Vopiscus), who would have lived at the time of emperor Gallienus (253–268 CE). The *Vita* takes place against an Egyptian backdrop, and the author offers a highly critical judgment on the inhabitants of this Roman province (*vani, ventosi, furibundi, iactantes, iniuriosi*, etc.).²² Further, the text emphasises early on that the Egyptian community was composed of various groups, among whom were Christians and Samaritans (<In> *eis Christiani, Samaritae*).²³ The Egyptian world is immediately cast in the shadow of variety and as a melting pot. At this point, in order to support his claim, the biographer cites what he identifies as a letter by Emperor Hadrian to the consul Servianus, which states:

Aegyptum, quam mihi laudabas, Serviane carissime, totam didici levem, pendulam et ad omnia famae momenta volitantem. Illic qui Serapim colunt Christiani sunt, et devoti sunt Serapi qui se Christi episcopos dicunt. Nemo illic archisynagogus Iudaeorum, nemo Samarites, nemo Christianorum presbyter non mathematicus, non haruspex, non aliptes. Ipse ille patriarcha cum Aegyptum venerit, ab aliis Serapidem adorare, ab aliis cogitur Christum [...]. Unus illis deus nummus est: hunc Christiani, hunc Iudaei, hunc omnes venerantur et gentes.

I have learned that Egypt, which you praise to me, is superficial, instable, and distracted by every change of rumour. Over there those who honour Serapis are Christians, and the devotees

²⁰ For this issue I allow myself to refer to Massa 2014: 20–23.

²¹ See esp. Ratti 2007a and Ratti 2007b, now gathered in Ratti 2010. For a presentation of the theories regarding the identity of the author of the *Historia Augusta*, see Bertrand-Dagenbach 2014.

²² *Firm.* 7.4 (SHA 3:398–399).

²³ *Firm.* 7.5 (SHA 3:398). On the role of the Christians in the *Historia Augusta*, see, in addition to S. Ratti's important contributions already cited, Stertz 1977.

of Serapis are those who call themselves bishops of Christ. Over there, there is no head of the Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian priest who is not also an astrologer, soothsayer, healer. The same patriarch, when he arrives in Egypt, is forced by some to worship Serapis, by others to worship Christ [...]. Their only god is money: this is what the Christians, Jews, and all gentiles venerate.²⁴

It seems unlikely to me that Hadrian's letter is authentic.²⁵ Recently, Alessandro Galimberti has argued that the letter might furnish some important elements in the reconstruction of Hadrian's religious policies.²⁶ And Livia Capponi, in an interesting essay on Serapis, the *Boukoloi*, and the Christians in the years from Hadrian's reign to that of Marcus Aurelius, has also adopted this hypothesis.²⁷

I do not enter here upon the question of authenticity or the degree of verisimilitude with Hadrian's actual policies, which is of little interest in the present context. What in my view is more important is to note that the passage tells us more about the era in which the *Historia Augusta* was composed than about the previous centuries. In addition, the text must be read within the rhetorical construct of the *Vita Saturnini* and, more generally, in light of the narrative strategies used in the *Historia Augusta* as a whole, and not merely analysed for its content. Most important of all, if the *Historia Augusta* was composed between 392 and 394,²⁸ the author was probably aware of the riots between pagans and Christians that led to the destruction of the Serapeum. The echo of this event in the Roman world leaves little doubt on the matter.

The letter begins with another negative judgment of Egypt and its inhabitants. The anti-Egyptian discourse falls within a more general attitude widespread in the ancient world: philosophers and intellectuals, be they Greek or Roman, often expressed a negative view on Egyptian mores and customs, as some of Cicero's and Plutarch's work clearly illustrates.²⁹ This stereotype is also attested in Hellenistic Judaism, for example in the *Letter of Aristeas* and in Philo of Alexandria, and was later adopted by ancient Christian writers as a key polemic in their conflict with what was to them that particularly degenerate

²⁴ *Firm.* 8.1–4 and 7 (SHA 3:398–400): my translation.

²⁵ Cf. Paschoud 2001: 243–246 and Fündling 2006: 1166–1168.

²⁶ Galimberti 2010.

²⁷ Capponi 2010: 126: “it has long been orthodox to believe that this letter is completely spurious. However, both in his recent book on Hadrian and in the present volume, Galimberti suggests that it contains some clues to Hadrian's authentic religious policy. The letter shows clearly that Hadrian was surprised by the presence of Christians in the *Serapeum*, as if this was an anomalous situation, different from the developments of Christianity in the rest of Mediterranean. This “Egyptian anomaly” is worth further investigation.” For this passage of the letter in general, see also Schmid 1966.

²⁸ On the dating of the *Historia Augusta*, see Ratti 2012: 18–19, in addition to the works cited in n. 21. See also Schwartz 1968: 95.

²⁹ See Cic. *Nat. d.* 3.15.39 and Plut. *Is. Os.* 71–76 (*Mor.* 379c–382c).

form of paganism that venerated animals.³⁰ In a certain sense, the *Vita Saturnini* is to be situated within the same cultural climate.

One has to wonder what the reasons could be that prompted the author to introduce this “letter” and why he was interested in offering such a view of the Egyptian religious world. It seems to me that we can isolate two different motives. First, the author suggests a holistic anti-religious polemic: as it clearly says in the conclusion of the letter, everyone (Jews, Christians, gentiles) is subservient to money. Incidentally, this division (*Christiani, Iudaei, gentes*) suffices for us to date the text to the second half of the 4th cent. at the earliest, since this approach towards religious identity would have been unthinkable for a pagan writer at the time of Hadrian. Regardless of appearances, all treat money as their one true god. We have here a common *topos* of ancient literature, according to which the representatives and authorities of the various cults are beholden to money and power.³¹

Nonetheless, the lack of sectarianism in this religious polemic, where the differences between the various religious groups are ironed out, does in my view hide a second, much more important motive, all the more so since we find ourselves in the years of heightened tensions between Christians, Jews, and pagans.

Let us now analyse the first part of the alleged letter by Hadrian. According to the author, Serapis’ worshippers in Egypt are Christians, and the Christian bishops are devoted to Serapis. This claim may seem surprising at first and involves the definition of religious identity and the wish of Christian writers to present their religion as a new system far removed from Judaism and paganism.³² The charge is clear: there is no distinction between the devotees of Serapis and those of Christ. Both religious groups – we should say pagans and Christians – have the same forms of worship. In the following sentence, the pagans and Christians are joined by the Jews, but the focus shifts to the cultic “agents” of the three religions: on the one hand the *archisynagogus*, *Samarites*, and *presbyter*, who define the Judeo-Christian world, and on the other the *mathematicus*, *haruspex*, and *aliptes*, who are of the traditional religious world of the Empire.

These two sets, again, suggest the absence of boundaries between religious practices, in spite of the attempts at defining their respective identities. As François Paschoud notes in his commentary on the *Vita Saturnini*, the term *ar-*

³⁰ To mention just a few examples, see *Let. Arist.* 138 and *Phil. Contempl.* 9; *Athenag. Leg.* 1.1 and 14.2, *Arist. Apol.* 12, *Just. 1 Apol.* 24, *Theoph. Autol.* 1.10, *Orig. Cels.* 3.21, *Min. Fel. Oct.* 28.8, *Eus. Dem. ev.* 2.3.34 and 5.4.16.

³¹ Just within the Classical Greek world, one may think of the accusations against Tiresias in the tragedies, or of the allegations against Apollo’s sanctuary at Delphi in the context of Athenian 5th-cent. politics.

³² On this issue, see the important position of Eusebius of Caesarea, who for the first time identifies a new religious taxonomy between “Judaism,” “Christianity,” and “Paganism:” *Praep. ev.* 1.5.12 and *Dem. ev.* 1.2.1. I refer also to Massa 2016.

chisynagogus is also used in another passage of the *Historia Augusta* to identify Emperor Severus Alexander as the head of the Syrian synagogue.³³ In “pagan” literary Latin, however, the term is not attested; it is found only in epigraphic or juridical texts. If we also consider the fact that two words, namely *episcopus* and *presbyter*, are attested nowhere else in the work, it seems to me that the biographer wanted to use terms belonging to the technical jargon of the Christian and Jewish communities in order to lend greater credence to his portrayal of the religious scene in Egypt. The second set of terms invokes those professions that in the Roman world could be considered to belong to the domain of magicians and charlatans, which is why the term *alipites* here does probably not enjoy the neutral meaning of “masseur,” but rather the negative one of *iatralipites*, “masseur-healer.”³⁴

Although all the religious groups are to be found at the centre of the text, the emphasis seems to be placed more on the behaviour of the Jews, Samaritans, and Christians than that of the adherents of Serapis. Their priests are to be identified with sacral professionals who did not have a very good reputation in the Roman world, especially not in the Empire of the second half of the 4th cent.,³⁵ so that the priests of the public and official cult of Serapis stand to gain from the comparison.

As we proceed with our reading of the passage, the religious reality becomes even more complex. The biographer states that when the *patriarcha* travels to Egypt, “he is forced by some to worship Serapis, by others to worship Christ.” Contrary to what one might think at first glance, *patriarcha* does not seem to refer to a Christian office, because this term enters technical Christian language only in the 6th cent.³⁶ It is more likely that it refers to the Jewish world, with the meaning that is found in many Christian writers.³⁷ If this hypothesis is confirmed, the confusion between the religious communities would be even more pronounced and their areas of overlap even more intricate, with the head of the Jewish community obliged, when in Egypt, to worship Christ or Serapis.

If the followers of Serapis and the Christians can overlap and mingle, if Christ and Serapis can be worshipped equally, if all the offices and religious functions are the same, the author wants to use this circumstance to reflect on the contemporary religious scene. Stéphane Ratti has clearly proven the existence of an attempt in a few sections of the *Historia Augusta* to promote “reli-

³³ *Severus Alexander*, 28.7 (SHA 2:234) and the commentary by Paschoud 2001: 251. For *archisynagogus*, see Moes 1980: 219–220 and Rajak, Noy 1993.

³⁴ Cf. Cameron 1964: 365 and Paschoud 2001: 251.

³⁵ See e.g. a legislative text of Theodosius concerning this type of practice: *Cod. theod.* 16.10.12.1.

³⁶ Cf. Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 9.15.3, and 7, and Gregory the Great, *Epistulae*, 2.50 and 5.41.

³⁷ Cf. e.g. Tert. *Idol.* 17 and Aug. *Pecc. merit.* 2.34.56. For the Jewish presence and role in the *Historia Augusta*, see Gola 1988.

gious tolerance,”³⁸ an idea that precisely in this final decade of the 4th cent. lost practically any chance of surviving, as imperial laws against pagans, Jews, and heretics illustrate.³⁹

It seems to me that the passage should be read in parallel with that of the *Vita Severi Alexandri* in which the biographer writes that the emperor used to keep in his lararium, apart from the portraits of his ancestors, the images of (unspecified) “deified emperors” and “of the best men and sacred spirits” (*optimos electos et animas sanctiores*), among whom featured Apollonius of Tyana, Abraham, Orpheus, “and other similar ones.”⁴⁰ We know how the lararium presented all a person’s and family’s tutelary figures together. It was, to quote Maurizio Bettini, “una sorta di diario intimo, in forma iconografica, delle inclinazioni, dei sentimenti e delle esperienze individuali.”⁴¹ The passage has been variously interpreted, but in this case as well it seems to me that it becomes more easily decipherable if read in the context of the political and religious reality at the end of the 4th cent. It is as if the biographer were telling his readers that there was a time when even at the highest imperial echelons several different gods could be worshipped at the same time without those prohibitions and limitations that were imposed under Theodosius.

Another parallel, albeit with a contrary purpose, can be found in the *Vita Heliogabali*, where the Jewish, Samaritan, and Christian communities appear, just as in the *Vita Saturnini*. In one of the first chapters of the biography, the author explains the desire on part of the emperor to centralise all religious groupings under his power, which is why he had a temple erected to himself and wanted to install there the sacred image of the Mother, the fire of Vesta, the palladium of Minerva, and “everything that is to be worshipped by the Romans” (*omnia Romanis veneranda*). He stated additionally that “they also had to transfer the religions of the Jews and Samaritans, and the Christian worship” (*Iudaeorum et Samaritanorum religiones et Christianam devotionem illuc transferendam*). In this context of imperial centralisation it is clear that for the author, to mention the “Jews,” “Samaritans,” and “Christians” is tantamount to listing the whole of “other” religious practice. This is the reverse process of that which we find in the *Vita Severi Alexandri*, because the sketch of Heliogabalus that emerges from the pages of the *Historia Augusta* is highly negative. And his conception of the governing of religions shapes our image of this emperor as deviant and degenerate.

³⁸ Ratti 2012: 108.

³⁹ The notion of “tolerance” does not feature among the categories of Greek and Roman thought. It was, rather, forged in Europe during the wars of religion. See e.g. Athanassiadi 2010: 39–40.

⁴⁰ *Sev. Alex.* 29.2 (SHA 2:234). For a general overview of this biography and its main interpretative problems, see Bertrand-Dagenbach 2014.

⁴¹ Bettini 2014: 39.

The author of the *Historia Augusta* plays with various references and historical reconstructions in order to convey a message on the contemporary political situation. It is as if in the face of the religious conflicts at the end of the 4th cent. he proposed a reading of pagans, Christians, and Jews through the lens of the *interpretatio*.⁴² Everyone honours the same god, whether he is called Serapis, Christ, or something else. As opposed to those today who would speak of “exclusive monotheism,”⁴³ the biographer behaves like a proper pagan by showing how everyone could worship the same deity, simply calling it by different names.

To conclude with the passage from the *Vita Saturnini*, we may confirm that, more than just informing us of Hadrian’s religious politics or of religious cohabitation in the 2nd cent., it contains a crucial testimony of the fact that for some people of the 4th cent., there were many analogies and parallels between Serapis and Christ, allowing an explicit comparison between the two deities and, especially, their adherents. I thus think it more interesting to inquire into the reason for the overlap suggested by the author of the *Vita Saturnini*.

4. Serapis and Christ: new gods

A first suggestion can be gleaned from the work of Christian authors who endeavoured to reject the alleged similarities between the Empire’s traditional divinities and Jesus. The Roman Empire was populated by a multitude of divine figures and a heterogeneous set of myths and cultic practices, so that it became crucial for the followers of Christ to individuate their own religious identity through a comparison with others. The biographies of the imperial divinities presented various analogies with the accounts to be found in the sacred texts of the Christians. And Christian writers, in their works, often oscillated between, on the one hand, an acknowledgement of such parallels that could legitimise the figure of Christ in the eyes of imperial authorities and, on the other hand, a total rejection of those same analogies.⁴⁴

The Christian polemics against certain aspects of the pagan deities often hide an attempt to demonstrate that the supposed analogies between Christ and a pagan god are unjustified. Thus the fact that the Christian authors often focus on Serapis as a “new deity” is in all probability a sign that there was a potential overlap between that god and Christ.

Two writers inextricably linked to Egypt and Alexandria point in this direction. In the *Protrepticus*, written towards the end of the 2nd cent. CE, Clement

⁴² On the category of *interpretatio*, see Graf 1998; Borgeaud 2004: 71–72; Ando 2008: 43–58.

⁴³ Cf. Assmann 2003.

⁴⁴ For this issue, see Massa 2014: 81–120.

of Alexandria dwells in great detail on the statue of Serapis, its origin and construction.⁴⁵ In his apologetic and polemic work in particular, Clement compares Serapis to the deified Antinous, Hadrian's favourite, in order to discredit the divine virtues.⁴⁶ His objective was thereby to portray Serapis as a simple man subsequently deified by the will of a king.

Origen develops an even more interesting thought on the question. In his *Contra Celsum*, written around the middle of the 3rd century (probably between 244 and 249 CE), he offers a systematic rebuttal of a Greek text composed about seventy years earlier by the philosopher Celsus, who had criticised the religious beliefs of Christ's followers.⁴⁷ In the 5th book of *Contra Celsum*, Origen argues that there are two types of laws: the law of nature, established by God (τῆς φύσεως νόμου, ὃν θεὸς ἄν νομοθετήσαι), and the written law of the city (ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι γραπτός). He obviously requires the absolute dominance of the former over the latter. In this vein, Origen writes:

Εἰ δὲ καὶ Ναυκρατίταις ἄλλα μὲν ἔδοξε σέβειν τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις, τὸν Σάραπιν δὲ τοῖς χθῆς καὶ πρώην ἀρξαμένοις, τὸν οὐ πρόποτε γενόμενον θεόν, προσκυνεῖν· οὐ παρὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς νέον τὸν οὐ πρότερον ὄντα θεὸν οὐδὲ γνωσθέντα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις φήσομεν εἶναι. Ὁ δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ υἱός, ὁ “πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,” εἰ καὶ νεωστὶ ἐνηνθρωπηκέναι ἔδοξεν, ἀλλ’ οὔτι γε διὰ τοῦτο νέος ἐστί.

And even if the most ancient Naucradians decided to worship other gods, and yesterday or the day before began to revere Serapis, who was never a god, we shall still not make a new god from him who previously was not a god and not even known to men. But the Son of God, “firstborn of all created beings,” although he might seem to have been made a man recently, is not new at all.⁴⁸

Despite appearances – this is what Origen wants to say – Christ and Serapis are different, without overlap, because Christ has always existed and is prior to all creation. And when, a little later, Celsus interjects that the Christians do not worship the gods of their country of origin and therefore repudiate “ancestral traditions” (τὰ πάτρια, as the Greeks call them), Origen claims that Serapis is merely a human invention, a king's caprice, the product of demoniacal sorcery.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Clem. *Protr.* 4.48.1–6. Cf. Belayche 2011.

⁴⁶ Clem. *Protr.* 4.48.1–6.

⁴⁷ The dating of the *Contra Celsum* is obtained from Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.36.2. For an overview of the relationship between pagan cults and Christianity in Origen's *Contra Celsum*, see Fédo 1988.

⁴⁸ Orig. *Cels.* 5.37: my translation.

⁴⁹ Orig. *Cels.* 5.38.

5. And if Serapis was none other than Joseph?

A second factor that might explain the relationship between Serapis and Christians derives from Hellenistic Jewish literature, which had identified Serapis with the biblical personage of Joseph, due to an etymology suggested by Rabbi Judah ben Ilai around the middle of the 2nd cent. CE.⁵⁰ This connection was echoed by Christian writers at different times. We find it Tertullian's *Ad nationes* in a passage on Egyptian religions. "In fact, this Serapis," Tertullian says, "is no other but a certain Joseph" (*Nam Serapis istequidem olim Ioseph <dictus> fuit*). He even claims that Joseph had been nicknamed Serapis due to the diadem crowning his head; the Egyptians consequently came to associate that figure with Anubis and worshipped him like a god.⁵¹

But the most interesting passage in this regard is without a doubt that by Firmicus Maternus, who incorporates, in part, Tertullian's explanation. In the *De errore profanarum religionum*, written in the 340s and addressed to the sons of Constantine, with the objective of promoting the destruction of paganism and with a degree of violence that had thus far been absent from other apologetic and polemic works, Firmicus reconstructs the history of Serapis:

Ioseph erat Iacob filius [...]. Huic post mortem Aegyptii patrio gentis suae instituto templa fecerunt et, ut iustae dispensationis gratiam posteritas disceret, modius quo esurientibus frumenta diviserat capiti superpositus est. Nomen etiam ut sanctius coleretur ex primo auctore generis accepit. Nam quia Sarrae pronepos fuerat, ex qua nonagenaria Abraham indulgentia dei susceperat filium, Serapis dictus est Graeco sermone, hoc est Σάρπας παῖς, sed hoc invito Ioseph, immo mortuo. [...] Hic in Aegypto colitur; hic adoratur; huius simulacrum neocororum turba custodit et ad memoriam vetustatis errans populus ordinem sacrorum in honorem integerrimi ac prudentissimi hominis constitutum contentiosa hodieque animositate custodit.

It was Joseph, son of Jacob [...]. After his death the Egyptians reared temples to him in accordance with the traditional custom of their race; and that posterity might know of their gratitude for his just stewardship, they represented him with his head bearing the measure with which he had apportioned the grain to the hungry. Furthermore, to enhance the sanctity of his cult, they gave him a name from the first author of his line. For because he was the great-grandson of Sara, the nonagenarian by whom Abraham through God's favour and begotten a son, he was called in Greek Serapis, i.e., Σάρπας παῖς – but this took place through no wish of Joseph's, in fact after his death. [...] In Egypt this Joseph is worshiped and adored; his statue is guarded by a throng of temple wardens, and in memory of old time the misguided people with stubborn enthusiasm still today clings to the liturgy of a cult established in honour of a man most upright and most wise.⁵²

Apart from the false etymology, which in Hellenistic Judaism had allowed the assimilation of Joseph into Serapis, it seems to me that the Christian resumption

⁵⁰ Cf. Mussies 1979: 194–195; Bohak 2000: 228–230; and Barbu 2014.

⁵¹ Tert. *Nat.* 2.8.

⁵² Firm. *Mat. Err. prof. rel.* 13.1–3 (transl. by C.A. Forces).

of this tradition should be interpreted within the context of the charges brought against Egyptian religion. The Egyptians, indeed, were not only accused of worshipping as gods all sorts of animals; Firmicus also accuses them of misappropriating the cultural and religious traditions of others and of bending them to their own shameful practices. And associating Serapis with Joseph was also a means of discrediting Alexandria's poliadic divinity at a time when that city was one of Christianity's most prestigious centres.

It seems to me that this Jewish and subsequently Christian tradition could lie at the base of the suggested construction in the *Historia Augusta*. If Serapis had already been identified with a biblical figure like Joseph, why could he not also be assimilated into the god of the Christians? All the more so when one considers the interaction between the various religious communities in the passage from the *Vita Saturnini* and the role played by the Jewish and Samaritan communities in the *Historia Augusta*.

6. Shared spaces, stolen spaces

A third and final factor to consider is the religious topography. Christian cult buildings had coexisted in Alexandria, as in other parts of the Roman Empire, with those of Serapis for at least a century.

It is however, as several studies have shown a particularly complicated task to reconstruct the topography of Christian buildings in Alexandria.⁵³ For the earliest topographical phase, it is above all literary sources that alert us to the presence of churches in the city: Epiphanius of Salamis, for example, in his account of the conflict between Arius and Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria (thus in the first half of the 4th cent.), mentions the existence of ten churches (*Pan.* 69.2.2 and 4). It is interesting to note, in contrast, that the pagan writers who describe Alexandria, for instance Ammianus Marcellinus and the anonymous author of the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, make no mention of Christian buildings.

For some time at least, there must have been daily religious cohabitations, with an allocation of space that allowed direct contact between the various groups of the faithful. Surely by the beginning of the 4th cent., the cohabitation had also become architectural to the extent that a few Christian buildings were being erected as a result of Constantine's "new" religious policies.

An event of great symbolic importance for interreligious relations appears to have occurred under Constantine. If one is to believe Socrates of Constantinople, author of a *Historia ecclesiastica* between 439 and 450 CE,⁵⁴ Con-

⁵³ Cf. Martin 1984; Martin 1996; Martin 1998: 12. Cf. also Gascou 1998 and McKenzie 2011: 237–242.

⁵⁴ For the dating, see Maraval 2004: 9–10.

stantine had the cubit that was used to measure the level of the Nile transported from the Serapeum into an unspecified church.⁵⁵

Λεγόντων δὲ τῶν Ἑλλήνων, ὡς ἄρα ὁ Σάραπις εἶη ὁ τὸν Νεῖλον ἀνάγων ἐπὶ ἄρδεϊα τῆς Αἰγύπτου, τῷ τὸν πῆχυν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ Σαράπιδος κομίζεσθαι, αὐτὸς εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τὸν πῆχυν Ἀλεξανδρέων μετατιθέναι ἐκέλευσε. Τῶν δὲ φημιζόντων, ὡς οὐκ ἀναβήσεται. ὁ Νεῖλος ὀργῇ τοῦ Σαράπιδος, ἥτε ἄνοδος τοῦ ποταμοῦ τῷ τε ἐξῆς ἔτει καὶ εἰς τὸ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐγένετό τε καὶ γίνεται· ἔργῳ τε δέικνυται ὡς οὐ διὰ θρησκείαν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τοὺς ὅρους τῆς προνοίας, ἡ τοῦ Νεῖλου ἀνάβασις γίνεται.

Since the pagans said that it was Serapis who made the Nile flood and irrigate Egypt, the moment the cubit had been transported into the temple of Serapis he himself [*scil.* Constantine] ordered its transfer into the church of the Alexandrians. Although they predicted that the Nile would not overflow due to Serapis' divine wrath, the flooding of the river took place the following year, and in the year after that, and still today; this proves that the flooding of the Nile is not the result of religious practice but of the decrees of providence.⁵⁶

In a certain way this act marks the beginning of the 4th-cent. hostility between the followers of Serapis and the Christians. Socrates is the only writer to discuss this move, and there have been much doubt whether it actually ever took place. Eusebius of Caesarea, for instance, in the *Vita Constantini*, refers to the fact that the flooding of the Nile continued as usual even after the emperor's measures against traditional religion, but makes no mention of the event involving the cubit.⁵⁷

Regardless of the historicity of the event, it is interesting that Socrates describes a rivalry between the Serapeum, symbol of Alexandria, and a Christian church. Additionally, it is important to highlight the fact that the measuring device, stored in the Serapeum, was above all of a symbolic and religious significance by dint of Alexandria's geographical position at the focal point of the Nile, where the flooding raised the water level by only one metre.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the small size of the cubit allowed it to be easily carried during cultic processions but also to be easily moved from the Serapeum to a Christian place of worship. And, indeed, the cubit would be returned to the Serapeum by order of Emperor Julian, which proves again its important symbolic function. The Serapeum and the church existed side by side in Alexandria's new topography.

I mentioned Emperor Julian. Four letters of his, addressed to Alexandrians or others concerning the city (60, 110, 111, and 112) are of great interest for an understanding of the cohabitations between Christians and the followers of Serapis. The name *πολιόρχος θεός*, "tutelary god" of the city, is evoked several times in the letters. It is surely no coincidence that Serapis appears almost exclusively in Julian's letters to the people of Alexandria or their functionaries, i.e. in an Al-

⁵⁵ Cf. Martin 1998: 13.

⁵⁶ Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 1.18.2–3; my translation.

⁵⁷ Eus. *Vit. Const.* 4.25.3.

⁵⁸ Thus Wild 1981: 29–34, who also follows the observations of Engreen 1943.

exandrian context.⁵⁹ What is at stake is nothing less than Alexandria's religious identity, which still oscillates between "city of Serapis" and "Christian city." When the emperor accuses the Alexandrians of not heeding their own history and glorious past and of submitting to the Christians, to those who have betrayed ancestral traditions (the *patria*, again),⁶⁰ it is Serapis who is invoked. This is an unequivocal sign of a religious landscape characterised by the presence of Serapis and Christ. In a letter to Ecdicius, prefect of Egypt, Julian requests that Athanasius, "the enemy of the gods," leave Egypt, and that if he does not, the prefect will incur a fine.⁶¹ Julian's wrath stems from the fact that Athanasius had baptised Greek women (Ἑλληνίσας γυναῖκας). Also in this case the emperor pronounces an oath by Serapis.

7. Return to the destruction of the Serapeum, and conclusion

According to a few Christian sources,⁶² when the Christians entered the great temple of Serapis in Alexandria, they destroyed all the statues of the poliadic god, obliterated all the inscriptions with his name, and painted them over with the cross to symbolise the victory of Christ. Among the symbols of the ancient Egyptian language, one in particular caught the attention of the pagans: the *ankh*, the cross with a handle, which expressed the idea of eternal life (Rufinus calls it *vita ventura*), and which led to the identification of the Egyptian *ankh* with the Christian cross. This overlap between Egyptian and Christian symbolism caused some of the Serapeum's priests to convert to Christianity: from this fact it happened that "some priests or ministers of the temple converted to the faith" (*qui errant ex sacerdotibus vel ministris templorum ad fidem converterentur*).⁶³

The interpretation of these signs embodies a new connection between Christ and Serapis and facilitates the transition between the two religious forms. Of course, in the Christian sources the conversion is one-way. But the idea of finding a demonstration of affinity between the two sides within Serapis' temple necessarily leads us back to the scenario depicted by the author of the *Vita Saturnini*.

The sources analysed here allow us to comprehend how conflict, competition, and cohabitation are inextricably linked to each other. To go beyond the conflicts and contrasts between pagans and Christians we must read between the

⁵⁹ In the discourses, the only references to Serapis are at Julian, *Ad Helium regem*, 10.9 and 13; *Caesares*, 7.6.

⁶⁰ Julian, *Epistulae*, 111.433b.

⁶¹ Jul. *Ep.* 112.376b.

⁶² Especially Ruf. *Hist.* 2.29, Socr. *Hist. eccl.* 5.17.1–6, and Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.10, but the three reports exhibit a few variations. On these passages, see Thelamon 1981: 264–273 and Schmid 1966: 161–171.

⁶³ Ruf. *Hist.* 2.29.

lines of the religious competitions, since these competitions are sometimes our only means of understanding other aspects of religious cohabitations. With these aspects of religious life in the first centuries of our era as a starting point, it is possible to study the relationships between the groups whose religious identities were in the process of being constructed.

Serapis and Christ, or rather, their two groups of adherents, participated in this dynamic of identification through the 3rd and 4th cent. That the conflict became so fierce, resulting in the destruction of the Serapeum in 392, is further proof of the fact that the two deities were acting on similar terrain and that their divine status and characteristics could in some cases become intermingled. It is on this level that the author of the *Historia Augusta* is operating, and that Christian writers endeavoured to illustrate, on the one hand, the accessibility of Christ within the religious panorama of the Roman Empire, as well as, on the other, his uniqueness and exclusiveness.

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Between Cyril and Isis

Some Remarks on the Iatromantic Cults in 5th-Cent. Alexandria

Mariangela Monaca

Having visited the martyrs Cyrus and John, because of an eye disease, we stayed in their temple. Considering the great number of healings, we wanted to read the documents that would have taught us the battle of the martyrs, and shown some of the miracles previously performed. We could not find any of that, except for two small homilies of Cyril, great champion and defender of the truth, and we were overwhelmed by an irrepressible indignation. [...] And if they shall concede us the rescue of our sight, we will thoroughly narrate their fight, and we will arrange a collection of miracles that they have accomplished with the assistance of the divine *charis* and *dynamis*.¹

That is how Sophronius, Bishop of Jerusalem,² described the story of his disease and introduced his work as a votive offering in honour of the Saints Cyrus and John, composed around 610 according to P. Bringel, or around 614–615 according to Jean Gascoü.³ Sophronius tells his personal story saying that he turned to religious medicine (the usual choice for his peers) due to the failure of traditional medicine. In fact, as early as the 3rd cent. CE, within basilicas dedicated to saints with strong thaumaturgic prerogatives, there was a healing process that went beyond the limits of human medicine and was also intended as a new option for salvation accomplished by the God of the Christians through conversion and re-

¹ Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Praefatio ad Laudem SS. Cyri et Iohannis*, 1. See also *Miracula SS. Cyri et Iohannis*, 70.8–10: suffering from an incurable eye disease, Sophronius regains his sight after having met Saints Cyrus and John, who appear respectively in the likeness of John Mosco (who was the spiritual father of the patient who went to the shrine to ask for healing) and of the praetorian prefect Peter of Alexandria. The two ask him to give up the “Homeric blindness” in order to regain sight: it is a healing of body and soul together, made through the conversion, the profession of faith and the abandonment of the pagan culture, of which Homer becomes the symbol. The *corpus* on Saints Cyrus and John – handed down to us under the name of Sophronius – consists of a *Laus SS. Martyrum Cyri et Iohannis et miraculorum quae ab eis gesta sunt ex parte Narratio*, a *Vita et conversatio et martyrium et partialis narration miraculorum Sanctorum illustrium anagyrorum Cyri et Iohanni*, and a *Vita Acephala*. As far as the edition is concerned: Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Laus*, PG 87/3:3379–3434; *Miracula*, PG 87/3:3423–3675; *Vita et conversatio*, PG 87/3:3677–3690; *Vita acephala*, PG 87/3:3689–3696.

² The identity of the author is still under discussion. He may be Sophronius, Bishop of Jerusalem between 634 and 639, cf. Gascoü 2006.

³ See Gascoü 2007, Bringel 2008. Cf. Detoraki 2007.

vealed to the faithful through the epiphanic manifestation of his intermediaries, holy men and monks. This practice was born and appeared as a counterpoint to the many and widespread thaumaturgic practices typical of the pagan iatromantic practices,⁴ already successfully performed since the 4th cent. BCE, both in *Asklepieia*⁵ and later in Isis sanctuaries and in Serapea,⁶ as well as by people known for their special powers such as Apollonius of Tyana.⁷

The experience that Sophronius wanted to tell during his visit to Menuthis where he was confronted with a vibrant reality, refers to a multitude of the faithful, of a crowd of sick people that through incubation received the healing by the active grace and power of God manifested in the two Saints. The battle of the two athletes of Christ takes over: it is a reflection of the more complex “battle” between a Christianity that was becoming a majority cult (but that inside was divided by Christological and Trinitarian disputes) and the last exponents of the “pagan” religion (that were in the minority yet at the same time tenacious and faithful in preserving their traditional cults) that constitutes one of the privileged scenarios in Alexandria during the 4th and 6th cent.⁸

Thus, the story of Sophronius offers important insight that is useful for the definition of the political and religious scenario in which the “new structure” of the iatromantic cult based on incubation of the Saints Cyrus and John in Menuthis (currently Abu Kir, near Canopus) that replaced the older and iatromantic one of the goddess Isis.

These cults are characterised by oracle, incubation and thaumaturgy and constitute a useful area of confrontation, which focuses on showing how the belief in such practices (whether they come from pagan gods such as Asclepius, Serapis and Isis, or from Christ and his saints) was still so widespread, pervasive and vital in that society. These adherents permitted a “move beyond the conflicts” of their religious beliefs, to act as a *trait d'union* between the main representatives of the two opposing sides through the creation of alternatives that were equally valid, effective and accessible. The philosophical and doctrinal disputes, the accusations made by one against the others, as well as the repressive legislation demonstrate the pervasiveness of these beliefs and the cohabitation of them in the daily life of the common man. As such, the faithful turned towards new soteriological instances in order to seek guarantees of *intra* and *extra* earthly salvation.

On the Christian side, the different authors point out the distance between the demonic and contingent nature of the operating healing powers among the pagans and those who are implementing the miraculous healing in the Christian world. The timeframe is not limited to the person of Jesus or to the apostolic

⁴ For a general frame work see Sfameni Gasparro 2008, Monaca 2009a, Del Santo 2012.

⁵ Edelstein-Edelstein 1998.

⁶ Bricault 2008 and 2013.

⁷ Sfameni Gasparro 2008: 31–37.

⁸ See Camplani 2004 and Caseau 2011: 548ff.

times, but it is achieved also in modernity since believers in Jesus continue to heal people and to give visible signs of the power received by the Holy Spirit due to their faith.

It is certain that even in 5th and 6th cent. the iatromantic centres attracted lots of faithful, pagans and baptised Christians, despite the Church inviting the faithful to abandon the false demons and turn to the one God and through his “athletes” obtain the healing of the body which was accompanied by conversion and salvation of the soul.

Alexandria represents an example of this scenario, but it is not the only one. Another good example is attested in the exhortations by Cyril of Jerusalem. Chapter 8 of his *1 Catechesis mystagogica* (*19 Catechesis*) is aimed for the abandonment of superstitious practices, spells, and magical “demonic” arts, made by the ancient gods of the polytheistic cults. Renouncing Satan and his worship – says the bishop – meant abandoning all pagan cults, primarily the divinatory and iatromantic ones, in order to not suffer the same fate as that of Lot and his daughters:

Then add renouncing Satan and his cult. [...] The prayer that is said in the temple of idols and every other honour made to these inanimate idols represents the worship of the devil. So some people, misled by their dreams or demons, believe they can find healing from physical ailments or to obtain other advantages, lightning lamps and burning incense at the sources of rivers: do not take part in these observances. Some draw auspices, exercise divination, interpret signs, carry amulets, write on sheets, make magic and evil spells: these and many other practices are acts of worship of the devil. You absolutely have to flee them, because if you fell in such observances after giving up on Satan and signing enlisted under the banner of Christ, you would know the real tyrant. First, when he fooled you, perhaps you were treated familiarly and he made you not feel the hardships of slavery; but since he is now strongly irritated with you, Christ will not be with you and you will experience his true nature.⁹

It was to stem the survival of these practices that from the 4th cent., in some cities that had known the presence of centres of iatromantic cults, the veneration of local oracular and healing deities was joined (firstly) and replaced (secondly) by the cult of thaumaturgical saints, whose outstanding iatromantic prerogatives were well-known (as in the case of Cyrus and John in Menuthis, Thecla in Seleucia, Cosmas and Damian or Artemius in Constantinople). Certainly, we cannot speak, as some have proposed, of a Christian “reinterpretation” of pagan gods or alternatively of a “replacement” or “succession” of them. In fact I believe that the focus should be placed on the “metamorphosis” suffered by these rites (practiced in Greece from the 5th cent. BCE, and still widespread in the late empire) within Christian areas, and especially on their persistence and their continued relevance in the social and religious scenario.

It is known that the spread of ritual incubation was attributed to certain pagan gods. This was well known to the church authorities and was tolerated by them

⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *1 Catechesis mystagogica* (*19 Catech.*), 8 (cf. Riggi 1993: 440).

to some extent. The church was aware of its pervasiveness within the social scenario, especially in that of Alexandria. An example could be the story of Zacharias Scholasticus concerning the events that occurred in Menuthis (on which we will return to shortly). This story suggests complicity within the clergy of Menuthis in favor of the ancient cults.

The representatives of the local clergy were aware, to various extents, of the popularity of these sanctuaries among the faithful. Simultaneously, they knew of the refusal by the Church regarding each magical or superstitious practice attributed to the ancient gods. The Church regarded the ancient gods as demons hence corrupters of mankind. That was the reason why, without diminishing the belief in the healing and miraculous power of the divine, the Church decided to offer to the patients a Christian alternative. This practice took form in the establishment of similar places of worship and healing and required shifting of relics of saints recognised as miracle workers into basilicas near to the ancient places of pagan worship.

Considering such scenarios, the narration of Sophronius is perfectly understandable offering the framework of a conclusive story. Giving his own testimony, as well as narrating the popularity that the cult of the Saints Cyrus and John still enjoyed in the 7th cent., he focuses on the issue of the transfer of the relics, accomplished at that time by the Bishop Cyril of Alexandria. The detailed report that Sophronius gives in his *Panegyricus* of Saints focuses his interest on the will of Cyril to put a gap between the *prius* (demonic, forger, briber) and the *nunc* (divine, true, redeeming). However, the replacement process does not take place in a peaceful manner.¹⁰ In the year 414 (during the reign of Theodosius II), Cyril of Alexandria, wanting to continue the battle against the polytheistic cults undertaken by his predecessor Theophilus (285–412),¹¹ decides to defeat the demon “that manifested itself in the appearance of

¹⁰ The case was the subject of an extensive discussion in the recent contributions by Gascou 2006 and 2007, Sfameni Gasparro 2007, Teja 2007.

¹¹ In 389–391, Theophilus had ordered (cf. *Cod. theod.* 16.10.11) the destruction of the Serapea in Alexandria and in Canopus (cf. Camplani 2004: 172ff.). In them they practiced healing through iatromantic and incubation practices. Next to the Serapeum of Canopus, there probably was a small place of iatromantic worship in honour of the goddess Isis, of which there are evidences of cures (*therapeiai*) and *ex-voto* (Bricault 2008: 57ff.). Moreover, even outside Egypt, there were *iatreia*, both public and private, in honour of Serapis and Isis coming as oracular and healing divinities (cf. RICIS 202.019; 202.0198; 202.0245). On the archaeological situation around Canopus see Pensabene 1993: 217.320–324. On the Theophilus initiative the Monastery of Tebennesiotes (followers of Pachomius) was erected in place of the Serapeum, near the church dedicated to the Apostles. However, the most famous Monastery in Canopus was that of Metanoia, that was very rich because it had as an income a portion of the annona. In the nearby town of Menuthis – continues Pensabene in relation to the facts we are analysing – already in the Ptolemaic period there was a rather famous place of worship in honour of Isis (the one destroyed by Bishop Cyril, who in its

a woman, procuring false appearances and lying oracles, healing through the imposition of certain drugs.” This was a demon “that was terrifying and Egyptian, named Menuthis, dwelling in a village of the same name in a feminine form.”¹² Probably it refers to the *Isis of Menouthis*, already venerated in the 2nd cent. CE, and was invoked according to the testimony of a hymn handed down by the P.Oxy. 11.1380, with the name of *Truth* because of her oracular powers.¹³ The goddess, who had a long tradition of worship in Canopus, was revered in the nearby town of Menuthis, as evidenced by two inscriptions (found in the area of Rome and Ostia) that mention respectively, the offering to Isis Pharia of a picture “of *Isis of Menouthis* for the salvation of our autokrator Lord Antonino” and the *xoanon* of Serapis “with *Isis of Menouthis*.”¹⁴

Theophilus, having realised how dangerous this cult was, had ordered it to be destroyed and to have built a new church in its place dedicated to the Evangelists. Succeeding him in 412, Cyril was worried because not only pagans but also “the faithful and those who carried within it the *symbola* of Christ”¹⁵ turned to the goddess with the hope of recovering health. Then, the new bishop decided to invoke God and ask of him a sign that indicated the path. An angel appears to him in a dream at night and ordered him to move the relics of Cyrus (according to the tradition, he was a martyred monk-doctor in Canopus under Diocletian) from Saint Mark’s Church in Alexandria to the one recently erected by the Evangelists in Menuthis. Having gone to the grave to fulfill the command, Cyril sees that the bones of Cyrus are mixed in a single tomb with those of John, a soldier of Edessa martyred along with Cyrus. Therefore he decides to move both together.

The narrative of Sophronius, as well as the outline for the coordinates of the event, offers interesting food for thought for our purposes: note how the epiphanic and oneiric event constitutes once again a link between the *before* to be destroyed and the *after* to be set up. Cyril receives a dream and a divine epiphany to obtain the information necessary to destroy the goddess regarded for centuries as “the giver of dreams,” and that turns out now instead to be “the one who mystifies dreams.”

After interpreting the dream, Cyril orders both relics to be transferred to the Church of the Evangelists in Menuthis. Upon having accomplished this duty,

place consecrated a church dedicated to the Evangelists: here the bones of the martyrs Cyrus and John were transferred). The two centres were progressively abandoned over the centuries and then finally torn down in the 19th cent., around 1917–1918, when the ruins were used as materials to construe a British airfield. The digs of Breccia (cf. Breccia 1926) unearthed some architectural fragments of the Serapeum and the Sanctuary of Isis in Canopus. On the Egyptian Monasticism see Wipszycka 1996 and 2009, and Filoramo 2010 (in particular the Monastery of Metanoia: 102–112).

¹² Cf. *V. Aceph.* 3689c–3696c.

¹³ Sfameni Gasparro 2007: 329.

¹⁴ RICIS 503.1204 and 503.1212.

¹⁵ *Laus* 25 (3409d–3412a).

“the *phantasia* that was going on in that place” vanishes. Upon the arrival of the relics, in fact, the “demon” that attracted crowds of men and women eager to get health, is symbolically defeated: the feminine *temenos* and *xoanon* are covered by the sand of the sea, and in their place emerges a new sanctuary that inherits all the therapeutic functions from the previous one.¹⁶

In some public homilies, transmitted to us by Sophronius,¹⁷ Cyril warns the faithful that the new Saints “are called Cyrus and John” and that they will protect the people who are invited from now on to attend their church, and invites them “to invoke the Kyros, not the Kyra, the Lady:” at the new iatreion, in fact,

no one mystifies dreams, nor is there anyone to give notice to those who come in: “The Lady,” she said, “do this and do that;” perhaps the Lady may be God and wants to be worshiped?

In this way Cyril exhorts the faithful to abandon the “old women’s fairytales and the old illusions of the sorcerers” and by converting themselves,

come to the true doctors appointed from above, to which the Almighty God has bestowed the power to heal, saying, “Heal the sick; you have received for free and you give for free.”

The Bishop of Alexandria exorcised the cult of Isis as an expression of a demonic power, and once again becomes the involuntary witness of its spread and success. This is a sign of the pervasiveness among the faithful of the belief in coexisting miraculous practices, especially as regards what was considered as the source emanating the *dynamis*.

Sophronius – telling how the female demon is instantly placed on the run and defeated upon the arrival of the martyrs, and how its statues were covered by sand – focuses on the role played by the priestly staff who attended the translation: they were immediately converted asking for baptism. On that place, in the *nunc*, the sanctuary of the two martyrs arose like a “beacon,” “touching the sky with its roof” and it appears to those sailing to Alexandria as a desirable and saving show. The replacement work is complete: the *salutaris* goddess Isis – also *Fortuna* patroness of pilgrims and sailors – has been replaced by the two new Saints.

The story outlined above, testifying to the cohabitation in Alexandria during the 5th–6th cent. of the tradition of Isis and the tradition of martyrdom, is also useful to attest of the strong vitality of the former that could be directed into the latter,

¹⁶ *Laus* 26–29 (3411b–3418a).

¹⁷ PG 77:1099c–1106b, transmitted in *Vita* 3689b and in *V. Aceph.* 3696a. Sophronius, expressing his disappointment at the lack of sources on the two Saints, declares to use, in addition to oral tradition, the two homilies given by Cyril in occasion of the translation, following the example of the *Hellenes* that, while having to adduce nothing but lies, “wrote so many books about demons.”

verso l'assunzione di quelle finalità oracolari e medicali che avevano fondato il successo e la popolarità persistente della religiosità isiaca nel suo proporsi come risposta alla necessità umana di un rapporto diretto con la divinità, espresso nella dimensione epifanica, oracolare e onirica insieme, di una salvezza nella crisi drammatica dell'infermità fisica.¹⁸

However, the hagiographic story offered by Sophronius raises numerous problems of interpretation in relation to the variations in the manuscript tradition of the Sophronian text, in the lives of the two martyrs, and in relation to the report made by a later source, Zacharias Scholasticus. The *Vita Severi* by Scholasticus seems to ignore entirely the work of Cyril and to post-date the destruction of the sacred home of Isis in Menuthis. He attributes this destructive process to the Alexandrian Patriarch Peter Mongus (487–490) and to the Monks of Tabenna in Canopus.¹⁹

The Sophronian text, recently republished by Jean Gascou, has survived in a manuscript from the 10th cent. being stored in Grottaferrata of the Vaticanus G. 1607 (C). Besides the *Panegyricus*, it contains a text of the *Praefatio* to the collection of *Miracula*, together with two apocryphal lives of the Saints (V1 Acephalous and V2) and the three *Orantiunculae* attributed to Cyril. These texts were published in 1840 by Angelo Mai in the *Spicilegium romanum* 3 (1–696) and were included in the volume 87.3 of PG (except for the three prayers in the volume of PG 77) among the works of Cyril.²⁰

The two *Vitae*, once mistakenly attributed to Sophronius, reproduce the biography of the Saints and the record of the trial and the martyrdom that occurred in Canopus. However, they have some differences: V1 *Acephalous* narrates, as Sophronius does, the translation of the relics by Cyril who had been instructed in a dream, the disappearance of the oracular demon called Menuthis and the conversion of his priestly body. The Church of Saint Mark in Alexandria is mentioned as the place of the translation. V2 instead presents a description of Canopus and its pagan monuments, and recalls the construction of the Church of the Holy Apostles by Theophilus. However, John is described as an eastern man of Edessa who came to Alexandria to meet Cyrus, whose fame as a doctor had come to his ears. In its earliest version, V2 does not mention Menuthis and Cyril but attributes the actions to Theophilus, who in the later versions becomes the “predecessor” of Cyril. V2 also provides us with June 28 as the date of the translation of the relics, a date that Sophronius does not seem to know.²¹

¹⁸ Sfameni Gasparro 2007: 336.

¹⁹ Zacharias Scholasticus, *Vita Severi*, 18.26–35.

²⁰ Besides, another Latin manuscript, the Vaticanus L. 5410 (L), contains the text of V1 and V2. V1 can be found also in other manuscripts, like the Ambrosianus G. f. 144 and the Kutlumuhiu 37. V2 also has a broader tradition, it can be found in manuscripts written in Coptic and Arabic. Since it is not possible to dwell here on the manuscript tradition and the codicological scheme, see Gascou 2007 and Bringel 2008.

²¹ The *Synaxarion* of Constantinople (945/959) agrees with V2, commemorating Saints

At the end of its composition the author of V2 mentions the *logoi microi* that Cyril seems to have pronounced on the occasion of the translation, the same referred to by Sophronius. In the manuscript, the three speeches are preceded by three *inscriptiones* that, besides wanting to confirm the attribution to Cyril, provide a date: three prayers in fact are respectively dated June 26th (two days before the translation), July 1st and July 2nd:

- the first inscription says: “by the blessed Cyril, talk to the monks of Tabenna in Canopus, in Metanoia, on the holy martyrs Cyrus and John, Epiphi β;”
- the second inscription says: “by the same author, Epiphi ζ, two exegeses in honour of the holy martyrs Cyrus and John who lie here, for which the Father has provided the valuable passion and deposition of the holy relics. The first one is pronounced at Metanoia, that is the Church of the Holy Apostles (i.e. Canopus);”
- the third inscription says: “by the same author, Epiphi η, in the Church of the Evangelists (i.e. Menuthis), where the relics of the holy martyrs Cyrus and John were transferred in a single tomb, two miles from Canopus, in Menuthis.”

Regarding the three prayers, the first is the courage of the martyrs. The second one retraces what occurred during the translation, i.e. that the bodies of the martyrs lay indistinctly and then (despite the angel only having spoken to Cyril about Cyrus) the relics were transferred together to the Church of the Evangelists, and it ends with an invitation to meet again the day after to honour the two Saints. The third describes the replacement of the cult attributed to the medical female demon with that of the Saints, and shows the reflections on the *Lady* that we have already mentioned above.

We cannot dwell here on issues of authenticity, of the order and date of the prayers (for which reference should be made to recent studies of Gasco) and in particular on the problematic history of the registrations that appear to be later than the text of the homily, instead I would like to draw attention to the “audience” that according to the testimony of the *inscriptiones* seems to be the one chosen by Cyril: the monks of Tabenna in Canopus and the Pachomius of the Monastery of “Penance” (Metanoia). This reference, which is totally absent in Sophronius, plays for us some interest for achieving a broader understanding of the scenario.

As made clear by Camplani, in the aftermath of the events related to the destruction of the Serapeum of Canopus by Theophilus, there was a monastery of Pachomius built called “the Metanoia.” It is attested by the so-called *History*

Cyrus and John both on the day of their martyrdom (January 31) and in that of the transfer of the relics (June 28): if in the commemoration of the first episode Cyrus is described as a doctor of Alexandria and John comes from Edessa to meet him, in the second commemoration the two are both described as doctors. This dating – not known to Sophronius – probably must have been accredited after 615.

of the Church of Coptic Alexandria²² and by Eunapius of Sardis²³ that gives us an account of what happened after the destruction of the Serapeum: men, called “monks” were forced to live in that place and charged with practicing a cult addressed “to some slaves,” that the Christians call “martyrs.” This demonstrates how Theophilus did sustain the battle against paganism through a fervent Christian building activity, aimed at the construction of a specific Alexandrian identity within the Christianised Mediterranean.

As Alberto Camplani observes,

Non può non apparire carico di simbolismo il fatto che non lontano dal Serapeo, ormai in evidente stato di decadenza, vennero costruiti un “martyrium” di Giovanni Battista e una chiesa (Rufino, *HE* II 27) dedicata a Giovanni Battista ed Eliseo. Nelle vicinanze si costruiscono due chiese, una in onore di Teodosio e l'altra di Arcadio, a emblema del rapporto tra la metropoli e l'Impero romano d'Oriente. A Canopo viene costruito il monastero pacomiano della Metanoia, proprio nel luogo di un antico tempio distrutto. Forse ancora sotto Teofilo è costruita quella chiesa dedicata all'arcangelo Raffaele sull'isola di Pharos, la cui funzione simbolica era quella di sostituire la figura dell'arcangelo alla protezione esercitata per secoli da Iside “Pharia.” L'edificazione di “martyria” sembra accentuarsi rispetto al passato, con il crescere dell'importanza del culto dei martiri nella pietà popolare.

Perhaps this is an attempt of Alexandrian “self-legitimation” within the Mediterranean context, well outlined by Camplani, which also must have entered the presence of the *inscripciones* about the monks of Metanoia and their parti-

²² As seen in Orlandi 1997 and 2005: 104–105, the *History of the Church of Coptic Alexandria* is useful to understand the events we are analysing. It was probably created at the time of the anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian Bishop Timothy II, called Elurus, who inspired it. It consisted of two parts. The first part was the translation of the first 7 books of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius of Caesarea; the second part consisted of 5 books. The story probably began with an account of the persecution of Diocletian, and continued with the Melitian crisis, the Council of Nicaea, the Arian crisis, the patriarchy of Theophilus with the destruction of the pagan temples, especially Canopus which is in one of the major centres of Pachomian monasticism (the monastery of Metanoia). It talked about the successors of Theodosius and the conflict between John Chrysostom and Eudoxia. This leads to the final and crucial part of the *Historia*. Cyril is described as he was held in high regard by the imperial court, and how he might destroy the works of Julian the Apostate against the Christians; then his relationship with Nestorius and the Council of Ephesus; then the last events of Nestorius, his relations with the monk Shenoute (who played a leading role at the head of the White Monastery, both in relations with the not so small part of the population still tied to traditional religions, both in the Christological controversies culminating in councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon) and his death in exile in Egypt. Finally they recounted the tragic events of Dioscorus and the Council of Chalcedon; and immediately after the troubled period of the two rival bishops Timothy Elurus and Timothy Salofaciolus (*infra*). Perhaps it is the work that reflects more than any other the emergence of a national consciousness of the Egyptian Church, which is still considered an integral part of the great Church, but begins to reflect on its own history to find a particular identity and the reasons for its loyalty to the true tenets and the true traditions of Christianity. See also Goehring 1999.

²³ Eunap. *Vitae sophist.* 6.11.8. Cf. Camplani 2004: 173ff.

cipation – albeit as auditors – the story of the translation of the relics of the two martyrs in Menuthis. Furthermore, this participation characterises the other narratives transmitted to us in relation to the destruction of the cult of Isis in Menuthis. The biography of his friend Severus the Patriarch of Antioch in 512–538 was written by Zacharias Scholasticus in 518.²⁴ It is a testimony to the vitality characterizing the traditional religions in Egypt and Syria between the 5th and 6th cent. and to the solid grounding of them within the cultured circles of Alexandrian society. In fact it was in Alexandria that Severus had gone to study. There were various schools available there being taught by teachers and attended by Christian and pagan followers of different religious streams. The diversity included devout Christians like the biographer Zacharias and *Philoponoi*, both regulars of the local church. Also present were those whose faith was still being defined, oscillating between loyalty to the traditional religions of their family origins and an adhesion to the new Christian religion. Among them there was a certain Paralios of Aphrodisias from a family of pagan observance in the traditional religions, yet with a brother who had converted to Christianity and then had become monk. His story is intertwined with that of the cult of Isis in Menuthis, described as being brightly practiced at the time of the narration²⁵ in the second half of the 5th cent.

First he claimed the cohabitation within the same family and more widely within the same cultural circle of opposing religious, philosophical and doctrinal conceptions

che peraltro non risultano in conflitto o in situazione di rottura ma appaiono piuttosto disponibili alla convivenza e al dialogo, anche se talora con toni accesi. Si assisterà ad uno scambio singolare di esperienze e a dibattiti fra i diversi fronti religiosi, che porteranno infine alla conversione di Paralios, frutto di una meditata valutazione delle ragioni dei “due partiti.”²⁶

Among these, the oracular practice and in particular the use of magic and miraculous practices is a key element, representing the

nocciolo duro di un quadro religioso variegato e differenziato quale era quello delle tradizioni religiose dei popoli mediterranei, omogeneo tuttavia nella credenza del benefico intervento degli dèi salvatori e taumaturghi e nella pratica oracolare.

The scene takes place around a centre of traditional worship, which was the cult of the Isis of Menuthis, who was still active at the end of the 5th cent., despite the action of Cyril described as “devastating” by Sophronius. The central episode concerns the request for a divine intervention to obtain a son by Asclepiodotus of Alexandria, a member of the philosophical circle of Horapollon. The pace of the story of Asclepiodotus and his stop at the shrine of Isis

²⁴ A detailed analysis of the text and of the events narrated in Sfameni Gasparro 2006, whose lines of interpretation are hereby followed.

²⁵ See the episodes narrated in *Vita Sev.* 16–20 (ed. Kugener).

²⁶ Sfameni Gasparro 2006: 290–292.

rispecchiano perfettamente i parametri consueti di un “pellegrinaggio” presso una sede oracolare alla ricerca del sogno rivelatore e dell’intervento miracoloso della divinità.²⁷

Despite the polemical tone and derogatory language used by Zachariah to describe the miraculous divine intervention, the “miracle” takes place and the couple returns home carrying a child in their arms, arousing enthusiasm among the faithful of the traditional religions that praised Isis of Menuthis. “a village of the goddess where someone, making a good action, submerged in the sand the temple of Isis,”²⁸ A clear reference to the indigenous tradition came to us through the Sophronian version in the following century, but that of Zacharias referred to another character, as we will see later. In the eyes of the Christian Zacharias, the miraculous event performed for Asclepiodotus turns out to be a deception (a priestess of Isis from the village of Astu had given her son to the couple, and the wife of Asclepiodotus, despite the cures proposed by the goddess, had herself been sterile and had not received any healing!). However, that was not the perspective of Paralios who still oscillated between supporting ancient cults and the new *religio* when he made a detailed account to his “Christian” brother and considers this a point in favor of the traditional faith. Zacharias then tells that Paralios choose to address the goddess of Menuthis, in order to request clarification upon the interpretation of a dream in which the goddess – that had manifested to him – had alerted him against an opponent described as a “magician.”

Having gone to the place for the worship of Isis to request an oracle to consult the Isis of Menuthis, he had “seen” the goddess “that is the demon that represents the goddess,” “after waiting for a long time and offering many sacrifices,” Paralios became irritated and found fallacy in the Isiac revelations. He then has “more doubts about the evil doctrine of demons” and decides to convert to Christianity. Making a prosecution of what was happening in Menuthis, emphasising the tacit approval of local authorities and of a weak clergy despite ecclesiastical legislation prohibiting the practice of pagan cults, Paralios kicks off the process that will lead to the destruction of the place of worship. Subsequently clashes followed between pagans and Christians, yet upon the insistence of the monks and the allegations of Paralios, Eutrichios, the prefect of Egypt, despite being defined by Zacharias as a “secret adept of the pagans,” establishes a process against those not in compliance with federal Imperial laws that continue to practice the magic cults. Further stressed by the insistence of the monks, Peter Mongus (Patriarch of Alexandria between 487 and 490) decides to “break down the demon gods of the pagans” and orders the destruction of the cult of Isis that – according to the narration of Zacharias – will be accomplished by the Patriarch and the monks of the monastery of Tabenna in Canopus.

²⁷ Sfameni Gasparro 2006: 294–295.

²⁸ *Vita Sev.* 18 (ed. Kugener).

Zacharias is presented as an eyewitness of the event: the delegation that reached Menuthis goes to the sacred place, “a house, which was then completely covered with pagan inscriptions,” recently closed by a wall for fear of Christian incursions and still “inhabited by a priestess.”²⁹

Inside the idols were kept in a secret recess, connected to the house by a window through which “the priest could enter.” It was therefore a place of worship still active: the monks burst inside, seized the idols and destroyed them, not just to convert the pagans, but to rebuke the Christians and the local clergy that had proved “weak in faith to the point that they were enslaved to the gold that the pagans gave them lest they prevent them to offer sacrifices to idols.” The reluctance of Zacharias to support these attitudes reflects in an irrepressible way, highlighting, albeit controversially, to the possible strategies of coexistence (or perhaps connivance?) implemented in Alexandria during the 5th–6th cent. The narration told by Zacharias, enlightening from his point of view, is different in the times and characters, but not in substance, from the Sofronian narrative that arrives almost a century later. The first obvious difference is the choice of the protagonists, followed by the choice of the timing of the episode:

- Cyril and the destruction of the Isiac cult in 414, according to the story handed down from the hagiographic text of Sophronius the bishop of Jerusalem, probably written after 610;
- Peter Mongus and the destruction of the Isiac cult in 487–490, according to the story of Zacharias Scholasticus, in a work that describes his friendship with Severus (bishop of Antioch between 512 and 518) from his years of study in Alexandria (485–487), and then in Berito between 487 and 492.

We will notice right away that the story of Zacharias, which is so rich in detail about the religious situation of Menuthis, does not face any nod to the “possible” previous interventions by the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Theophilus and Cyril. Their aim to destroy the cult of Isis and to set up in the same place, a similar iatromantic structure dedicated to the two holy unmercenary physicians Cyrus and John was left out of his version. It is remarkable when Zacharias attests in the 6th cent. that the vitality of the cult of Isis was still maintained and therefore the supposed operation performed by Cyril about 70 years earlier had perhaps only just scratched the surface without being decisive.

Thus, the textual inconsistencies do not provide the modern scholar with a clear framework for the historical narration, extricating between the different details of the different sources. One possible way to achieve greater clarity could be offered by a reading that looks *ad intra*, glancing from the pagan cults to doctrinal disputes within the Church of Alexandria demonstrating the Christological questions contained the presence of elements of constant disagree-

²⁹ *Vita Sev.* 26–35 (ed. Kugener).

ment.³⁰ While the cohabitation of miraculous practices was made possible by the faith of each person in the soteriological power of one God, the strength and violence of attempts to destroy paganism could be a reflection of the need for self-legitimation of orthodoxy against heresy. This historically demonstrates a clash between the Chalcedonian and the various currents of Monophysitism (miaphysitism, monoenergism and Monothelitism). However, these types of doctrinal disputes did not interest the diverse pilgrims who visited the iatromantic shrines (of Isis and Serapis, as well as of Cyrus and John) and they did not infringe upon their belief in the miraculous divine power. In this sense, the story of Menuthis may allude to a larger context, varying not only between the cult of Isis and the cult of martyrdom, or between Christianity and the cohabitation of persistent paganism, but even among proponents of a post-Chalcedonian orthodoxy and the leaders of the Monophysite heresy in its many faces.

There are clear signs of this competition in the narration of the miracles of Sophronius: saints Cyrus and John who had healed Sophronius of his blindness, in fact give severe reprimands to those patients who are not *omodoxoi*, that show not to be a follow the true faith, which for Sophronius coincides with the dogma of Chalcedon.³¹ In the text of Sophronius, there seems to appear the Christological debates of the 6th–7th cent. It is a typical practice of introducing – according to an iatromantic Christian practice, for example at the shrine of Cosmas and Damian in Constantinople³² – soteriological perspectives of the soul and of combining it with the healing of the body, which becomes secondary. Who does not believe “properly” cannot obtain physical healing:³³

- in *Mir.* 12 Julian – a supporter of Gaian of Alexandria (530/540), who in opposition to the Theodosians (supporters of Severus of Antioch) affirmed the incorruptibility of Christ’s human nature – is plagued by a terrible pain: the Saints invite him to abandon his heresy and not to follow anymore Gaian nor Theodosius, but to turn to the true doctrine;
- in *Mir.* 36, Theodore, who suffered from gout, is a follower of Julian of Hali-carnassus. Saints promise him that if he converts to the “true faith” he will get healed. Despite a number of procedures, the patient does not heal. Then he has an “anguish” dream wherein the two Saints appear posing a *rhabdos* on the head of the sick person who repents and enters the *katholike ekklesia*;
- also in *Mir.* 37, the intent is to return to orthodoxy a follower of Monophysites: “after Theodore,” John is the name of the one affected by *leukomata*. The blindness of the patient cannot be cured because his friends want him

³⁰ For a general frame work let us refer to Monaca 2014 and to the bibliography thereby cited.

³¹ Fernández Marcos 1975: 67–75.

³² Monaca 2009b: 169–176. Usually the pagans have to be warned and converted as in *Mir.* 32, in Fernández Marcos 1975: 187.

³³ In Fernández Marcos 1975: 180–192.

- to become a deacon of their sect, in replacement of his recently dead father;
- *Mir.* 38 continues the sequence of miracles that are designed to lead the Egyptian Church back to the faith of Chalcedon (it is a *paideutike thaumatourghia*): Saints ask Stephan to agree in entering into “communion with the *katholike* Church” and that this will be done with a rite that has all the characteristics of an initiation. The patient goes to the ritual and receives a cross of gold and precious stones as an amulet of protection;
- finally, Peter, the paralytic of *Mir.* 39, is forced into conversion to obtain healing from his disease. The Saints appear to him and speak to him with a gentle tone: Peter is reluctant to abandon monophysite conceptions to accept the dogma of Chalcedon, but when the Saints say that they first believed in the truth of those dogmas and prove it by a profession of faith expressing that “the right faith and revealed doctrine are those defined by the synod,” then Peter converts believing in the words of the Saints.

From the reading of the *Miracula*, it is clear that the attempt of Sophronius is to defend the dogma of Chalcedon, and his purpose is to rid the centre of Menuthis from the suspects of monophysitism.

This perspective is reflected in the choice of the authors, Zacharias and Sophronius, to attribute the events of Menuthis to one or the other protagonist.

It is best to begin by analysing the presence/absence of the monks of Pachomius of Metanoia that, as we have already pointed out, are totally absent in the Sofronian report. However, they seem to be an active part in the story of Zacharias and in the later inscriptions transmitted to us in the manuscripts and projected into the prayers of Cyril. The fervent activity of the monks in the territory of Alexandria is known from many sources in Greek and Coptic literature. For example, the *Vita Melaniae iunioris* (383–440) refers to a meeting in Alexandria between the Benefactress,³⁴ the Abbot Victor of the Pachomian monastery of Canopus and Archimandrite of Tabenna. At the time of Melania (and therefore in the period of our interest) in the Egyptian territory there were over 6000 monks of Pachomius.

The monks of Pachomius, as Tito Orlandi points out,³⁵ respecting the rule of life proposed by Pachomius, lived in many monasteries scattered around from Northern (Canopus) to Southern (Pbow) Egypt. They perceived themselves as a unified group under the command of the successor of Pachomius living in Pbow. From the doctrinal point of view, they were routinely aligned with the positions of the Patriarch of Alexandria. It was probably for this reason that, from time to time, sources in Greek or Coptic present them as faithful to the orthodoxy of Chalcedon or more often as followers of Monophysitism. In fact, the events following the Council of Chalcedon saw the monks becoming involved in the choice of the

³⁴ Špidlík 1996: 111.

³⁵ Orlandi 2005: 92–93.

Egyptian Church to intend their separation from the imperial church institutions. The Council, in fact, inserted the monks within an ecclesiastical framework perfectly structured and gravitating around the bishop. Regarding the Church of Alexandria, which caters to our interest, the presence of anti-Chalcedonians was strong: it should be noted that according to Maria Chiara Giorda,³⁶ the monks' ability to influence the various patriarchs of Alexandria was dissolving. Among the various testimonies, the *Panegyricus in Macarium* (6th cent.), attributed to Dioscorus of Alexandria (the successor of Cyril who had supported the monks inclined towards Monophysitism and had managed to have approved by Ephesus in 449 the Monophysite formula of Eutyches, then repudiated in Chalcedon) shows that sitting alongside the seats of Chalcedon were the bishop Dioscorus and the monk Macarius and gives us an insight into the monastic world of the time, its activities and protagonists. The importance of the monks and their influence in the doctrinal questions after Chalcedon, is given by their presence at the side of one or another of the bishops, i.e. their departure from the monasteries. A good example are the events that followed the deposition of Dioscorus: those monks who had supported the Monophysite bishop and had been proven opponents of Proterius, also a priest of Dioscorus who was denied positions and became the patriarch of Alexandria, were expelled from their monasteries. According to the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Zacharias,³⁷ when the monk Longinus of the Enaton organised (with the support of the Monophysite bishop of Gaza, Peter the Iberic) the election of Timothy Elurus, monks became an integral side of the theological disputes, and a part of them constituted a group of dissidents refusing the homilies of Elurus against the dogma of Chalcedon. The group of dissident monks was then the victim of a harsh crackdown by Peter Mongus (482–489): Zeno then sent a delegation led by its dignitary Cosmas and composed of bishops and deacons and two hundred Archimandrites chosen from a crowd of monks, to try to find an agreement between the parties. The monks alongside Timothy had therefore constituted a bulwark: among the dissidents, those who accepted the policy of the patriarch were reintroduced into monasteries from which Peter Mongus had driven them out. Others formed the group of the *Acephaloi*.³⁸

In the scenario that was briefly described, “i monaci furono spesso a fianco di vescovi egiziani, aderendo a fazioni diverse, partecipando o estraniandosi

³⁶ Giorda 2010: 97ff.

³⁷ Zacharias Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 7.1–2. Following the interpretation of Giorda 2010.

³⁸ Cf. Orlandi 2005 and Camplani 2014. Orlandi (2005: 107–108) also reports other evidence in that sense: in the *Panegyric in honour of Apollo*, it is said that Apollo, the archimandrite of the Monastery of Pbow at the time of Justinian, who knew Severus of Antioch and Theodosius of Alexandria, having remained faithful to the tradition of Dioscorus, was expelled from the convent and he founded another one in Hnes. The same happened to “Matthew the poor” who walked away from the monastery of Pbow, which was in line with the Alexandrian Chalcedon hierarchy, and founded a new monastery in Aswan.

dai conflitti.”³⁹ After the Council, it seems certifiable that the presence of a faction of Chalcedon, albeit a minority, had its own centre at the monastery of Metanoia. According to the testimony of Phocas, a monk of Scetis, there were two factions of monks, the Orthodox and the schismatics, who were distributed among the various monasteries of Egypt (including Scetis, Enaton, Metanoia). However, it would be wrong to think of a “consistent and continuous” story of the doctrinal positions of the monks of Metanoia, “così come ad una affiliazione alla dottrina calcedonese da parte di tutto il movimento monastico pacomiano.”⁴⁰ When Timothy Elurus, who was faithful to Dioscorus, had condemned the *Tome of Leo* he had been exiled by the pope and was deposed. Then in his place was chosen Timothy Solofaciolus, a monk of Metanoia of the Chalcedonian faith. When Basiliscus had rehabilitated Timothy Elurus, he took refuge again in his monastery in 476 returning to the seat of Alexandria. From this Pachomian monastery emerges other leading figures within the Chalcedon church, such as John Talaia at the time of Zeno and Paul of Tabenna during the time of Justinian.⁴¹

This context of doctrinal oscillation by the monks of the Metanoia monastery between Monophysitism and Chalcedonism, is also reflected in the image later given by John Moschus, friend and companion of Sophronius, on his trip to Egypt during 614, in his *Pratum spirituale*. Moschus, champion of Chalcedon orthodoxy, referred as heretics and schismatics both to the “sect of Severus” and the *Acephali* monks. He defined them as confused and lost and claimed the victory in Egypt by the followers of Chalcedon.⁴² Sophronius himself, in recounting some of the *Miracula* performed by the Saints Cyrus and John, expressed his reluctance towards the excessive power of the monks and criticised their religious fanaticism and their adherence to Monophysitism.⁴³

None the less, throughout the 5th–6th cent. the Pachomian monasteries animated the Egyptian religion. Due to embracing the Chalcedonian dictates as a whole or in part, the monks of Pachomius were not considered “completely orthodox,” especially by some of the Chalcedonian bishops, nor were they part of the monophysite Egyptian Church who had distanced itself from them. This fate also came upon the monks of Metanoia who intermixed, as we have seen, followers of Chalcedon and supporters of the anti-Chalcedon spirit like Papnute (Archimandrite of the Tabenna Monastery and supporter of Dioscorus who lived a year in Canopus before the Council), Macarius bishop of Tkouw an opponent of the Chalcedonians, and Benjamin the patriarch of the monophysite church who began his own career at Metanoia.⁴⁴

³⁹ Giorda 2010: 99–102.

⁴⁰ Giorda 2010: 102.

⁴¹ Giorda 2010: 112.

⁴² Giorda 2010: 104–105.

⁴³ Fernández Marcos 1975: 70.

⁴⁴ Giorda 2010: 112.

In addition to the monks, the other protagonists of the story offered by Zacharias and Sophronius present themselves as representatives of one or another doctrinal current that during the 4th–7th cent. tried to respond to questions on the nature and the person of the Son.

Cyril was a leading exponent of these Christological debates. His ideas were put forward in opposition to those of the Antioch school. They seemed to embrace the monophysite concepts, declaring “one nature of the incarnate Logos” had begun to disperse over time eventually defining themselves during the Council of Ephesus in 431 as an opposition to the conceptions of Nestorius. Thus, the “formula of union” in 433 sanctioned the affirmation that the presence of the Son consisted of two distinct natures such that

Jesus the only Son of God, the same truly God and truly man [...] consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity, being the union of two natures.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 promulgated that in Christ are recognised “two natures” that “agree in one nature or hypostasis.” The figure of Cyril was then totally redeemed by the pre-Ephesian positions and the Council of Constantinople in 553 declared him the bulwark of orthodoxy, one “among the saints who preached the true faith of Christians” (*Enchiridion symbolorum*, 437).⁴⁵

After the formulations of Chalcedon, the patriarchate of Alexandria saw the leaders of the two currents counterposing one another. The patriarchate had to fight from time to time the violent reactions of the people and monks caused by this discrepancy, which eventually led the imperial policy to maintain a conciliatory and oscillating attitude in the decades to follow.

After the death of Dioscorus, who was a supporter of Eutyches, there were two lines of patriarchal succession in Alexandria: one faithful to Chalcedon, the other opposing. Dioscorus was succeeded by his opponent Proterius who counted on the support of certain sectors of the population in Alexandria and some bishops and monks of the Pachomian monastery of Metanoia. Then he was succeeded by the anti-Chalcedon Timothy Elurus who was opposed by the Chalcedon Timothy Salofaciolus.⁴⁶ In this scenario, we have the work of Peter Mongus who was appointed as the patriarch of Alexandria after Elurus, between 477 and 490. His doctrine was non-Chalcedonian. However, he kept an ambiguous attitude towards doctrinal trends. Eventually, the policy of Zeno was in favour of a conciliation towards the Monophysites, and the emperor in October 482 officially recognised Peter as the Patriarch of Alexandria. As such, the bishop was forced to accept the dictates of the *ikon* that, as “a document of union” explicitly directed to the Egyptian Church, had the intention of creating a consensus among the various doctrinal trends, yet without defining the hot

⁴⁵ Cf. Rinaldi 2010: 796–808.

⁴⁶ Cf. Camplani 2014.

topics upon the nature of Christ and not siding with the Monophysites or with the dogma of Chalcedon.

Peter Mongus tried to adhere to these guidelines, which allowed him to meet the faithful guidance of Chalcedon. So he also won the support of Acacius of Constantinople, who despite seeing him as an avid antichalcedonian, recognised him as a good mediator. Even still, a part of the Egyptian monastic and Episcopal world gave him strong opposition. During these years, there was the cited schism of the Monophysite extremists or the so-called *Acephali*.

After the death of Zeno in 491, Anastasius allowed for the election of antichalcedonian bishops. So Severus the bishop of Antioch from 512 to 538, a member of the moderate Monophysitism, was elected. He condemned Eutyches and Nestorius, but programmatically referred back to the pre-Ephesian theology of Cyril and to that expression upon the only divine nature that lent itself to confusion. Severus thought it was more correct to speak of only one nature of the Incarnate Logos without denying the independent pre-existence of the divine and human natures before the hypostatic union. He tried to maintain a middle way between the theology of the “two natures” by Chalcedon and the Monophysite extremism of Eutyches. For this reason Severus was considered a moderate member of the current that was called miaphysitism. This is a theological current that eventually gave rise between the 6th and 7th cent. to Monoenergism and Monothelitism, doctrines maintaining the belief that in Christ there are two natures united in the person operating under one energy and one will.

It was in the early 7th cent. around 610, that Sergius (patriarch of Constantinople) became the promoter of Monotheletism at the court of Emperor Heraclius⁴⁷ and at the court of Cyrus (patriarch of Alexandria in 633). In those years, the monk Sophronius, later to become the bishop of Jerusalem, remaining faithful to the orthodoxy of Chalcedon, fought strongly the ideas of Cyrus and Sergius. In this tradition he is described as a defender of orthodoxy with the same stylistic feature that characterised the “second Cyril” being the “orthodox” Cyril, who had coped with determination the opponents of Christianity and at the same time the theological tendencies within the Church.

On this basis, it is thus possible that the story told by Zacharias and Sophronius in relation to the destruction of the cult of Isis via the establishment of a cult of martyrdom with similar iatromantic prerogatives, presents itself as a tableau of a complex age, in which the Christian internal strife is combined with a struggle *ad extra*, against the pagan cults. The presence of the monks of Metanoia – whose doctrinal tendencies seem to have fluctuated over time – and from time to time the choice of one or another leading protagonist, could find its reasons in and allude to tensions within the Egyptian Church of the time. The diversity in the traditions relating to the establishment of the new cult of the Saints and the destruction of the ancient cult of Isis suffers those doctrinal

⁴⁷ Cf. Rinaldi 2010: 878–880.

trends followed by the two sources that have been handed down the story to us. There are many clues that allow us to support this hypothesis and to imagine that, while setting as a common goal the description of the victory of Christianity over the ancient cults that cohabited in the land of Egypt, the different authors had to confront themselves with a Christianity under development and decided to propose solutions that were more convenient to them. It should be observed that Zacharias Scholasticus, a friend of Severus, presents Peter Mongus as the protagonist (both as a representative of the Monophysitism of which Severus was a spokesman, and perhaps also because he was able to appreciate the conciliatory policy) along with the monks of Pachomius whom had played a key role on his side influencing the ecclesial spheres. However, Chalcedon Sophronius, almost a century later, cannot even recall the work of Peter whose doctrinal positions strongly differed from his, and chose to return to Cyril portraying him as the unique “champion” of the event, in his role as a defender of Christianity against the Monophysite theological drift, the ecclesiastical corruption and the pervasiveness of the ancient cults, without paying attention to the work of the Pachomian monastery known for its theological fluctuations. For similar reasons, Zacharias chose to neglect the work of the patriarch of Alexandria, whose human events were still too vivid in the eyes of the young man who had studied in Alexandria, and whose doctrinal landing (which he had made the emblem of the Chalcedonian orthodoxy) was difficult to reconcile with the theological positions of his friend Severus (who appreciated the pre-Ephesian ideas by the bishop of Alexandria).

Among them the conciliatory position seems best represented by the author of the later inscriptions, perhaps a supporter of the Patriarch of Alexandria, who just as Sophronius chose to align with Cyril and as Zacharias introduces the monks of Metanoia, the later inscription merged the two traditions finding their unifying element in defence of the faith and of the orthodoxy.

Nonetheless, all of the concerned authors maintain the shared need to defeat the ancient cult that cohabited with the *new* religion and was likely to affect it: this testifies for the modern scholar of the pervasiveness of an iatromantic and thaumaturgic practice, as well as its persistence over time being either attached to the old gods or to the new champions of Christ.

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Part Four
“Open” and “Closed” Groups

Open-air Festivals and Cultural Cohabitation in Late Hellenistic Alexandria

Marie-Françoise Baslez

This paper deals with ways and manners Jews and Greeks coexisted and put up with each other in Late Hellenistic and Roman Alexandria. Its thesis originates in a paradox found not only in *3 Maccabees*, which was written among the Alexandrian Jewish community,¹ but also within the whole collection of texts known under the generic name of “Maccabean Literature.” The word “Maccabean” applies to a time of persecutions, and its corresponding literature.² However, most of these texts end up with a scene of reconciliation and rejoicing, which is sometimes followed by the foundation of a festival. *3 Maccabees* narrates an extermination attempt made on the Egyptian Jews by an antagonistic Court and the king’s miraculous change of mind about the Jews’ fate. The story ends with the setting up of seven days of rejoicing and elation, a “Salvation Day.”³ The feast is paid for by the royal treasury, which goes to show a settlement between the king and the harassed Jews. *2 Maccabees*, an abridged version of a work composed in the second half of the 2nd cent. BCE by Jason of Cyrene, a Jew from the Alexandrian diaspora, ends up on a typically Greek scene of conviviality and diversity built around the crater,⁴ even though the martyrdom stories from the same texts are among the oldest.

The book of *Judith* tells a story which falls within a persecution setting, legitimising the use of religious violence, but its Greek version, which could very well originate from Alexandria,⁵ ends up on a “Rejoicing Day” in the Greek

¹ For the reference edition of this text, with a very rich and helpful historical commentary, see Méléze-Modrzejewski 2008.

² See Baslez 2014. See also Méléze-Modrzejewski 2008: 29–33.

³ *3 Macc.* 6.36; 7.15 and 18–19.

⁴ *2 Macc.* 15.39: the text’s conclusion as written by the person who abbreviated Jason of Cyrene’s original work. The Greek way of living is established as social and cultural standard, which compels us to revise our understanding of his intents and his position about the cultural dominion of Hellenism. See Baslez 2014: 73.

⁵ The corroborating material is mostly lexical. The use of the word *potos* in place of *symposion* is uncommon in Greek but can be found in some *papyri*. The very modern use of the non-biblical toponym “Erythraean Sea” in reference to the Exodus story (*Jdt.* 5.13), has to be to subsequent to the publication of the treatise *De mare Erythraeo* by Agatharchides in Alexandria. The author undoubtedly knows of the existing Alexandrian anti-Judaism, according to which the Jews are a “brood from Egypt” (*Jdt.* 6.5). *Judith* itself is referred to as a secluded

manner.⁶ At last, the very way *3 Maccabees* is written can and should be linked with the Greek additions to the book of *Esther*; a colophon, which can either be documentary proof or literary addition,⁷ connects the writing of the Greek *Esther* with the reign of a king Ptolemy and the Alexandrian Court.⁸ These two books share the same general composition and the same narrative structure: the Jews in danger of extermination, the complete shift in the situation, and, to finish with, the setting up of a commemorative day of rejoicing. These texts are not limited to the persecution pattern but they broaden to hint at a possible peaceful coexistence under the sovereignty of a foreign ruler, with festive practices playing a decisive part. Of course, this material is quite difficult to date, either regarding the original versions or their current state. Some scholars date them back to the 2nd cent. BCE, asserting that they were written during or closely after the events they refer to, whereas others favor a later dating, in the middle of the 1st cent. CE, on the basis of a comparison with the works of Philo or Flavius Josephus. These two authors themselves stressed the importance of festivals in the weaving of links between Jews and Greeks in Alexandria: Philo describes an “open” celebration in Pharos, commemorating the translation of the Bible into Greek;⁹ Josephus tells of a Salvation Day set up after a persecution attempt under the reign of Ptolemy VI.¹⁰

In any case, the use of festivals as a place of contacts and exchange¹¹ in Alexandria has to be analysed in both medium and long-term perspectives. We will first focus on the political stakes behind the festive practices, before drawing up parallels between the ways Alexandrian-Jewish authors depict Jewish festivals and the actual proceedings of royal festivities, whose impact on religious sociology in Alexandria seems quite certain. We will end this paper by contemplating the possible consequences of cohabitation between Jews and Greeks.

therapeuoussa (*Jdt.* 11.12), alluding to the *Therapeutae* brotherhood of Alexandria described by Philo. From another viewpoint, a diasporic origin of the book of *Judith* can be traced back through the use of irony and mockery.

⁶ *Jdt.* 15.12–13.

⁷ Add *Esth.* F 11 10.31. Cavalier 2012: 28–29 discusses this critical point.

⁸ See Méléze-Modrzejewski 2008: 36–37 and Cavalier 2012: 122–125. The book of *Esther* and *Purim* were still very successful under the Roman rule.

⁹ *Phil. Mos.* 2.41–42. See Birnbaum 2011: 63–79.

¹⁰ *Jos. C. Ap.* 2.53–55, J.M.G. Barclay’s edition with commentary (2013: 198–199), indicates the parallels between *3 Maccabees* and *Esther*. See also Méléze-Modrzejewski 2007: 50: those may be two different foundation stories, written on behalf of the same festival.

¹¹ This aspect was first brought up in the 1980’s: see Dunand 1978. More recently, Chaniotis 1997.

1. The political stake of royal festivities

The narrative structure of *3 Maccabees* is based on the king's deep anti-Judaism, rooted in his strained relationship with the Temple in Jerusalem and the Judeans at a time when the Seleucids gained dominion over the area from the Lagids.¹² This royal anti-Judaism also fuelled by lobbying and court intrigues; "the Greeks in the city" condemn the persecution of the Jews, judging those measures unjust, and try to alleviate them by helping their Jewish neighbors and business partners, contrary to the hostile inhabitants of the *chora*.¹³ This fictional account sheds a new light on intercommunity tensions between Jews and Greeks in Alexandria. Since Antiquity, these communities have been described as two strong colliding minorities: on one side, the active Jewish population, which increased until the Roman conquest, and, on the other side, the withdrawn Alexandrian civic community, which, for the first time in the world of Greek cities, experienced being a minority. Jewish authors from the beginning of the Common Era, such as the author of the book of *Wisdom*, Josephus and Philo, held such an opinion. They all wanted the Jews to acquire civic equality (*isopoliteia*) with the Alexandrians, in agreement with the historical right of the first Macedonian, Greek and Jewish settlers who were part of the city since its founding. The anti-Jewish lampoons, collected at the beginning of the 3rd cent. CE under the name of *Acta Alexandrinorum* bear witness to bursts of communitarianism both among the Alexandrian Jews, relying on Jewish kings or on some key figures of the Roman empire, and among the Alexandrian civic community, in relation to cultural and political institutions such as the *gymnasion* and the *Sarapieion*, under the authority of the Gymnasiarch.¹⁴ Each community had its heroes and its martyrs. Philo's account of the pogrom in the years 39–41 also describes this event as a clashing of communities, where the antagonisms are similar to those seen in the *Acta Isidori*.¹⁵

However, *3 Maccabees* reveals another context, not only dealing with intercommunity relationships, but with royal politics at stake. The plot unravels within the court, and questions royal prerogative.¹⁶ Some Jews belong to the court and one of them even acts as the model courtier, saving the king's live

¹² The reference to the battle of Raphia (in 217), which, for a time, stopped the Seleucids' expansion under Antiochus III, is explicit (*3 Macc.* 1.1). The king's rejection by the Temple and his divine punishment is a duplicate of Heliodoros's story in *2 Macc.* 3.22–30.

¹³ *3 Macc.* 2.35; 7.3–5; 3.8–10.

¹⁴ The most explicitly anti-Jewish of these texts are the *Acta Isidori*, which deal with the 39–41 pogrom and the *Acta Hermaisci*, written at the beginning of Trajan's reign, before the suppression of the revolt in 115–117 and the demolition of the Synagogue.

¹⁵ Phil. *Flacc.* 20, 125–130; and *Legat.* 355: the protagonists – Dionysius, Lampon and Isidore – are the same in both material texts, even though they originate from antagonistic communities.

¹⁶ Méléze-Modrzejewski 2008: 48–62.

in the opening instalment.¹⁷ Working as counter-models, the bad advisors are denounced as responsible for the persecution, as in the book of *Esther*.¹⁸ More precisely, the triggering factor of the persecution is a royal edict¹⁹ added to a tax census which offer both promotion in status and complete integration into the civic community, on the condition that the candidate agree to become an adept of a particular religion, probably the Dionysian mysteries which are mentioned in the same context and well documented under this reign.²⁰ A basic comparative study reveals the connection between this fictional edict and an historical one, where the king Ptolemy IV ordained the inventory of all the Dionysiac ministers and their *hiera* (sanctuaries or religious objects) as well as of their writings.²¹ The Jews were subjects to this edict insofar as their god was often confused with Dionysus, at least during the imperial period.²² This edict has been interpreted as the mark of a new religious policy under Ptolemy IV, not only in order to promote the worship of Dionysus, which the king fervently supported, but also to strengthen the royal stranglehold on cults and to control cultic practices, since religious centralisation was characteristic of all Hellenistic kingdoms.²³

Whatever the case may be, we need to consider things from the Palace's viewpoint, especially considering that the quoted edict was put up on a tower close to the palace.²⁴ However, in the light of *3 Maccabees*, we can see that there is something else at stake,²⁵ since religious integration acts as a prelude to political integration. As a matter of fact, agreeing to become an adept of Dionysus or refusing to do so results in dividing the Jews in two categories with drastically different status: Jews either become subjects, like the Egyptian natives, at the end of the *laographia* which is conducted by the royal administration, or they

¹⁷ *3 Macc.* 1.2–3 (see Polyb. *Hist.* 5.81). The name given to this character by the author – “Dositheos, known as the son of Drimylos” – allows us to identify him with a prominent historical figure who had important religious duties and managed the dynastic cults (CPJ 1.127a–d), which made him appear as an apostate.

¹⁸ *3 Macc.* 7.3; 6. See the developments of Haman's character in the various versions of the book of *Esther* in contrast to Mordechai, the good Jewish advisor (see Cavalier 2012: 86–95).

¹⁹ *3 Macc.* 2.28–30.

²⁰ Hacham 2005.

²¹ Lenger 1964: no. 29. See the useful clarification by Massa 2013: 215–218, about the transition to a written medium and its recording as a way of controlling both ministers and religious practices. This procedure is likely not a prelude to the suppression of the Dionysian cult. Dionysian *hieroi logoi* may have consisted of theological writings or instructions about the initiation ceremonies as seen in a recently published Gourob Papyrus.

²² Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 4.6 (*Mor.* 671d–672b).

²³ Dunand 1986; Tondriau 1946: 149–156.

²⁴ *3 Macc.* 2.27.

²⁵ There is no need to elaborate on the religious syncretism hypothesis, devised by Méléze-Modrzejewski 2008: 106–107, as there is no material to support it.

get civic equality on par with the Alexandrians. The religious change is clearly depicted as a way to get into the court and become close to the king himself.²⁶ The only attested political device remotely resembling to the procedure depicted in *3 Maccabees* is a *politographia*. One was conducted under the very reign of Ptolemy IV after the battle of Raphia in 217: either because of town-planning or military needs, the king decided to create a bunch of new citizens and placed this procedure under the patronage of Dionysus; eight *demes* were created and given Dionysian names, and a new tribe, which was called “Dionysias,”²⁷ was created. In all the Hellenistic kingdoms, *politographia* usually concerned the soldiers of the royal army:²⁸ Ptolemy IV may have opened the one he conducted to the Jewish soldiers of the Lagid army.²⁹ This kind of citizen-making procedure was not always endorsed by the descendants of the first Macedonian and Greek families of citizens in Alexandria. This explains why Ptolemy IV developed and exploited Dionysian festivals: to coordinate and unify the diverse components of his entourage. According to ancient sources, Alexandrians found the mixed aspect of the king’s feasts and festivals regrettable, as he was said to collect drinking companions from all over the city.³⁰ He reanimated the royal *thiasus*, which furthered the notion of a buffoon-king, even though he actually meant to strengthen a loyal military network.³¹ Above all, he created a “Uniting Festival” (*synoikia*), which soon became known as the “Wine-flasks carrying Festival” (*lagynophoria*): a crowd-pleasing festival and criticised as such, an open-air festival where the attendants feasted lay on beds of leaves, bringing branches (a clear reminder of the Dionysiac *thyrsus*) and his own wine-flask.³²

In *3 Maccabees*, we find remnants of Ptolemy IV’s royal imagery: several times, the king is described at a *symposion*, surrounded by his officers as well as his royal Friends and Parents, who lay at his own table;³³ in the *chora*, he sets

²⁶ *3 Macc.* 2.31.

²⁷ Satyrus, *De demis Alexandrinorum* (FGH 631 F 1).

²⁸ For example, the *politographia* of Larissa in 219–214 (SIG 3.543). See Baslez 2008: 305–306; Lonis 1993.

²⁹ The edict ordering the incarceration of the non-abiding Jews, reconstructed in *3 Macc.* 3.12, is shaped like a royal letter sent to military commanders (*strategoi*) and to soldiers. Moreover, in *3 Macc.* 4.11 the existence of business relationship between the rebellious Jewish prisoners and the troops stationed in Alexandria is alluded to. The fact that Jews from the *chora* are treated differently from Jews of the Alexandrian city implies that the latter accepted the *politographia* and its religious integration (*3 Macc.* 3.1 et 4.12; see Méléze-Modrzejewski 2008: 151).

³⁰ Ptolemy of Megalopolis, FGH 161 F2, quoted by Athen. *Deipn.* 246c.

³¹ Clem. *Protr.* 4.48. See Dunand 1986: 87–88.

³² Athen. *Deipn.* 276a–c, quoting Eratosthenes, *Arsinoe* (FGH 241 F16). This festival was still held during the Roman Empire.

³³ *3 Macc.* 2.25; 5.3.

up feasts for the people which are paid for by the royal treasury.³⁴ An officer “in charge of guests” is tasked with greeting the guests and getting them settled.³⁵ The Jewish Salvation Day, ordained and paid for by the king immediately after his change of mind, is described as very similar to the “Wine-flask carrying Festival.” Referred to as a “Drinking-cup Festival” (*kothon*),³⁶ it is an open-air festival where everyone needs to find his place and where people settle in groups.³⁷ In Egypt, the royal authority devised a crowd-pleasing festival policy, which we will know assess in the light of the Jewish source material.

2. The rejoicing festival: a mean of social interplay between Jews and Greeks

We will base our study on a comparative analysis of the festivals depicted in Maccabean Literature as well as in Philo and Josephus’ works, looking for the origins of the Jewish authors’ adopted patterns.

2.1. *The Festival described in the book of Judith and the great procession of Alexandria*

To begin with, we can broach the intriguing problem posed by the description of the festival on which the book of *Judith* ends, at least in its Greek version: according to the literary background, it works as a Victory Day, since it follows the attack of the enemy encampments, their defeat and the freeing of the country; incidentally, the festival includes a military parade of armed soldiers.³⁸ However, the depiction of this festival does not match with the Hasmonean standards of Victory Day, such as the one that was celebrated in 141, following the taking of the Jerusalem *akra* by Simon Maccabeus, according to a ceremonial that Jewish tradition dated back to the time of King David:³⁹ it was a Palm Festival, where

³⁴ 3 Macc. 4.1.

³⁵ 3 Macc. 5.14.

³⁶ About *kothon* in the meaning of “drinking bout” or “religious banquet” in a Greek inscription of Thasos, see Roussel 1927: 220.

³⁷ 3 Macc. 6.30–31.

³⁸ *Jdt.* 15.13 (*enhoplismenoi*). It cannot appear as a counter model or riposte against the Antiochus IV’s *pompe* or triumph in 167 (Polyb. *Hist.* 30.25), following the Roman model of the triumph, where the military parade plays a major part.

³⁹ 1 Macc. 13.51 (see also *Megillat Ta’anit* 5). Parallel with 1 Chr. 15.28 and 16.4–6 (the setting-up of the Ark of the Covenant); 2 Chr. 5.12–13 (Temple dedication by Solomon), 29.27 (Temple purification under King Hezekiah). The Maccabean author uses of a Semitic-like vocabulary, thus stressing to reference to a tradition going back to King David. However, the word *bais* (“palm”), of Egyptian origin, is only found in papyri and in the works of the Alexandrian author Chairemon (1st cent. CE) as quoted by Porph. *Abst.* 4.7.8.

soldiers marched to the sound of traditional musical instruments like lyres, cymbals and harps while singing and shouting. In the book of *Judith*, there is no Palm Festival but a Thyrsus Festival: Judith and the women's chorus all wear these arrangements of branches mounted on a stick. In a strictly Maccabean context, this trait led scholars to read into this festival a duplication of Hanukkah, since Hanukkah was created in 164 as a copy of Sukkot rituals.⁴⁰ Sukkot main ritualistic feature consists of a bunch of branches (*lulav*) of varying sort,⁴¹ which is named *thyrsos* in *2 Maccabees*.⁴² This translation has furthered a lasting *interpretatio graeca* of Sukkot as a Dionysian ritual.⁴³

In the final instalment of the book of *Judith*, the formation of a women's chorus and the duty as *thyrsophoros* that Judith takes upon herself, like an inverted figure of Dionysus, could support the hypothesis of an imitation of a Dionysian ritual,⁴⁴ maybe in an ironic way. However, this interpretation does not account for several other features: the crowns worn by the rejoicing people are made from olive-tree, not from ivy, and are more consistent with the cult of Apollo.⁴⁵ In the end, the procession described in the book of *Judith* is of such a diverse nature that it could not refer to the actual rituals of a historically accurate festival. However, if we are looking for inspiration for this festival, we probably need to take into account the Grand Procession that was held in Alexandria under the reign of Ptolemy II,⁴⁶ since the similarities between the two are noteworthy. This dynastic celebration emphasised the place of the Dionysian cult as the official ideology of Lagid rule; the thyrsus appeared as one of its main pattern, but was given a military meaning which is particularly relevant in connection with Judith's character. Dionysus was staged carrying a "gold wand-lance" (*thyrsos*-

⁴⁰ Bogaert 1984 and 1988, thus concludes that the book of *Judith* held a liturgical function and was supposed to be read during the festival.

⁴¹ *Lev.* 23.40 NRSV: "On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook." LXX: "goodly fruit of trees, and branches of palm trees, and thick boughs of trees, and willows and branches of osiers from the brook." A slightly different version is given by *Jos. A.J.* 3.145: "a bouquet made up of myrtle and willow-branch together with a branch of palm with the fruit of a *persea*" and 13.312 (thyrsus made from branches of the palm tree and citron tree).

⁴² *2 Macc.* 10.5–8: "Holding thyrsus and branches bearing ripe fruit, and palm fronds."

⁴³ *Plut. Quaest. conv.* 4.6 (*Mor.* 671d–672b). However, *Jos. A.J.* 3.245, suggests another *interpretatio graeca* of the Sukkot ritual, this one of the apollonian kind, by paralleling the Sukkot bunch to the lucky olive-branch carried during the Pyanopsia and Thargelia festivals; see *Plut. Thes.* 22.

⁴⁴ See Villanueva Puig 2009. About Dionysos Thyrsophoros, leader of the *thiasos*, see *Eur. Bacch.* 556.

⁴⁵ About symbolism of crowns, specific to each divinity, see Burkert 2012: 178.

⁴⁶ Description by Callixenus of Rhodes, quoted by *Athen. Deipn.* 197d–203b, with the exhaustive study of Rice 1983.

lonchon), a reminder of the fact that “the god arms women’s *thiasos*.”⁴⁷ One of the marching women carried a palm-branch and a crown made of *persea*, two plants that were described as part of the Sukkot’s ritual bunch of branches by Greek-speaking Jews.⁴⁸ Even though the god, the divinities accompanying him and the *Bacchae* were crowned with ivy,⁴⁹ as it is usually the case, there was also an olive-tree crown worn during the Procession of Alexandria: it adorned a statue of Virtue personified (*Arete*).⁵⁰ The parallel with the figure of Judith is quite obvious, even more so that the accounts of the achievements of great women were collected under the title *Virtuous women* (*Areton gynaikeion*).⁵¹ Further down history, Origen of Alexandria, commenting the book of *Judith*,⁵² would describe her as the embodiment of Virtue.

Even though absolute certitude is impossible, the possibility that the author or translator of the Jewish book of *Judith* knew about the Grand Procession of Alexandria appears quite convincing. This reinforces the idea that the book of *Judith* was created for the diaspora, probably for the Jews of Alexandria. This is the first clue as to the fact festivals were a time of interactions, maybe of encounters, between Greeks and Jews.

3. Open-air festivals: a widespread custom

As we showed earlier, the Salvation Day which celebrates the end of the persecution in *3 Maccabees* is essentially an open-air festival, where the guests drank and ate in groups, and is quite similar to the “Wine-carrying flasks Festival” which was created by Ptolemy IV. We do not know how the Salvation Day took place in the time of Josephus, which described it as the annual meeting of the Alexandrian Jews’ society.⁵³ There may even have been two different “Salvation Day,” since there are varying accounts of the festival’s origins.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Athen. *Deipn.* 200d.

⁴⁸ Athen. *Deipn.* 198b. *Persea* is the Egyptian name of a fruit from the laurel-family, the most common specie being the avocado, listed by Jos. *A.J.* 3.245, instead of the citron (*A.J.* 13.372). The Bible does not specify any type of “fruit.”

⁴⁹ Athen. *Deipn.* 198b (Satyrs), 198e (Bacchants), 198f (Nysa), 201c (Priapus).

⁵⁰ Athen. *Deipn.* 201d: “Then there were statues of Alexander and Ptolemy, crowned with ivy-crowns made of gold. The statue of Virtue which stood beside Ptolemy has a gold olive-crown.”

⁵¹ The most famous was written by Plutarch, *Mulierum virtutes* (*Mor.* 242e–263c).

⁵² Orig. *Hom. Judic.* 9.1.

⁵³ *C. Ap.* 2.53–56: *hanc diem Judaei in Alexandria constituti, eo quod aperte a deo salute promeruerunt, celebrare nosuntur*. This definition of the festival is very close to the one given in *3 Macc.* 6.36, where the festival is founded based on a communal decision.

⁵⁴ Jos. *C. Ap.* 2.55, must be drawing on two different versions of the story, since he gives alternate names for the king’s mistress who is held responsible for his sudden change of mind. *3 Macc.* 6.36 and *3 Macc.* 7.19 duplicates the festival’s foundation.

Most critics support the idea of a unique celebration, commemorating the “miracle of the elephants:”⁵⁵ those animals, instead of crushing the Jews awaiting slaughter in the hippodrome, turned against the royal body-guards. This one festival would have given rise to two different liturgical stories, linking the miracle with two different reigns: either Ptolemy IV according to *3 Maccabees* or Ptolemy VI according to Josephus, whose account – either his source material or his own interpretation – owes a lot to the story of Esther because of the decisive meddling of one of the king’s mistresses.

The Salvation Day was supposed to be permanent: even if the liturgical story was constantly enriched and diversified, we have no reason to believe that its ritual would have changed, all the more so that the Alexandrian Jews had created and carried on celebrating a similar open-air feast, described by Philo in *De vita Mosi*.⁵⁶

This particular festival had nothing to do with persecution, since it commemorated the translation of the Bible into Greek. It took the form of a pilgrimage on Pharos, where, according to a tradition dating at least from the 2nd cent. BCE,⁵⁷ the translators settled and where the miracle of a unanimous translation happened. The celebration was about “honouring the place” by turning the place of a miracle into a place of pilgrimage. Long after, the area was converted into a “relic-landscape:”⁵⁸ one could visit the cells where the translators supposedly lived and worked.⁵⁹ The celebration began by a prayer of thanksgiving and votive prayers for the “divine mercy.” Then, people pitched tents on the shore or feasted lay on the sand with friends and family.

Some saw in this a reenacting of the Jewish rituals of Sukkot, which would have acted as a general and polyvalent reference in Judaism since the end of the 2nd cent. BCE, since its ritual bunch of branches was transferred upon Hanuk-

⁵⁵ Thackeray 1926: 314. Reinach 1930: 57, n. 1. Barclay (2007: 199) stresses that Josephus’s phrasing about the festival is very similar to *3 Macc.* 6.36.

⁵⁶ According to the background recapped by Josephus, the story still originates in a clash between the Jews and the king (see Modrzejewski 2008: 45–46). One should nevertheless note that Ptolemy VI’s reign was known for its continuous violence (see Barclay 2007: 199, n. 189).

⁵⁷ *Mos.* 2.41–42.

⁵⁸ According to the definition which is given for the Late Roman Empire by Tardieu 1990.

⁵⁹ The *Letter of Aristeas* canonises a tradition, which steers Honigman 2003: 135, to date the funding of the festival based on the approximate date of the text’s composition. The French edition by Pelletier 1962, takes to *Letter* to have been composed around 168, during the Maccabean crisis and the clash of civilisations between Hellenism and Judaism. However, convincing arguments tend to date the text from the Hasmonean era during the second part of the 2nd cent. BCE: this latter dating is based on the number of “Maccabean” names found in the translators’ list and fits with the period when Judean embassies began to be sent abroad, since the author introduces himself as such an ambassador. It seems excessive to suggest that the festival was founded immediately after the translation, for institutionalising the assembly who received the translated text as interpreted by Hadad 1951: 221.

kah as well as upon all the festivities described in *Judith* and in *3 Maccabees*, even though there is no mention of the pitching of tents linked with those.⁶⁰

However, the Greek notion of a festive gathering of the *eranos* kind cannot be excluded. This kind of celebration was described by Aristoteles in his analysis of association phenomenon, dramatised by the playwright Menander, and appeared as a framework of religious and social life within many inscriptions from the Hellenistic and Roman eras.⁶¹ It was originally a picnic, where the attendants shared whatever food and drink they brought with them and feasted on beds of leaves. That was not all there was to it:⁶² those feasts were usually part of a pilgrimage to a rural sanctuary or to a sacred place. There could be prayers, sacrifices or procession, as shown, for the Egyptian area, in the Nilotic mosaic of Palestrina, which is dated from around 100 BCE.⁶³ Successive reconstructions of the mosaic render its interpretation quite difficult, but its lower section indubitably shows a procession led by Egyptian priests, carrying either a statue or a ritual object and followed by musicians and attendants wearing crowns; his depiction is connected with the preparations for a royal *symposion* of soldiers under a great velum; in another part of the mosaic, which was probably closer to the procession in its original state, some other attendants are depicted feasting under a kiosk.⁶⁴ As in the epilogue of *2 Maccabees*, the crater's symbolism is emphasised in the *symposion* panel. The last published monograph on the subject believes this mosaic to be a depiction of the Osirian festival of Choiak, which celebrated the flooding of the Nile. The author locates it in Canopus, where Strabo describes similar open-air festivals in the beginning of the Roman era.⁶⁵ Like the Grand Procession of Alexandria, open-air festivities, set up by the kings and sometimes presided over by them, are meant to illustrate the people's wellbeing and the king's goodwill, an ideal of *tryphe* by the royal propaganda's standards.⁶⁶

The parallels between the depictions of the Alexandrian festivals and those made by Jewish authors about their own festivals seems abundant enough to

⁶⁰ According to Late Christian and rabbinic sources: the Pseudo-Justin's quote in Azariah De Rossi (16th cent.). See Weinberg 2001: 179. This relic-section elaborates on the solitary retreat theme, as introduced by Phil. *Mos.* 2.34; 36–37, but absent from the *Letter of Aristeas*.

⁶¹ Foucart 1873: 178–179 and Gernet 1999. Arnaoutoglou 2003: 99, underlines that *erani-stai* appeared in the 1st cent. BCE.

⁶² Birnbaum 2011: 64 sees the festival described by Philo as an expression of “beach-behavior.”

⁶³ Mostly based on stylistic arguments; it has been previously dated from Sulla's time (around 70 BCE), from the Roman conquest of Egypt or even from Hadrian's reign (beginning of the 2nd cent. CE); see the recently published monograph by Meyboom 1995: 16–19.

⁶⁴ Meyboom 1995: 55–59 and 69–70.

⁶⁵ Strab. *Geogr.* 17.1.16.

⁶⁶ About *tryphe*, see Fraser 1972: 200. This kind of festivals was held in contempt during the Roman period.

prove that the latter knew about the festive customs of the former. However, is this sufficient to state that processions and open-air festivities as cultic practices were propitious for interactions and encounters between two religiously and culturally different communities? In the very beginning of the Roman era, Philo of Alexandria sets us on this course when he describes the commemorative festival of the Bible's translation as a general gathering, a Greek *panegyris*, a public celebration open not only to Jews but also to non-Jews.⁶⁷

4. Criteria and requirements for truly open festivals

In order to understand in which conditions Jewish-Alexandrian authors experienced civic festivals and why they choose to describe Jewish celebrations by referring to the Greek model, we need to contextualise their writings. Do they amount to a purely rhetoric work or do they evidence real-life interactions? Even if we consider them to have a mostly literary and pedagogical device, resorted to in order to make Jewish rituals easier to understand,⁶⁸ then one question remains: for what kind of intended readers was the reference to the festive Greek model helpful? Moreover, what does this interpretative process imply regarding the relationship between culture and religion?

The debate first arose regarding Philo of Alexandria, whose internal contradictions were pointed out in a recently published essay.⁶⁹ Philo introduced the Pharos Festival as attended by non-Jews; he held non-Jewish "wisdoms" in high regard, thus implying that he believed in the equality between all cultural setups.⁷⁰ However he also advocated the religious and cultural pre-eminence of Judaism: in *De vita Mosis*, the same book where he describes a festival in which anyone could take part, he asks non-Jews to forsake their specific customs:

I think that in that case every nation, abandoning all their own individual customs, an utterly disregarding their national laws, would change and come over to the honour of such a people [the Jews] only.⁷¹

In this sentence, Philo imply that the civic community needs to be homogenous, in contradiction with the Hellenistic principle that allowed each people to "live as a citizen (*politeuesthai*) while keeping to their own ancestral customs" and

⁶⁷ *Mos.* 2.41: "even to this very day, there is every year a solemn assembly held and a festival celebrated in the island of Pharos, to which not only the Jews but a great number of persons of other nations sail across."

⁶⁸ About the festival described in the "Maccabees saga," see Nodet 2005: 170–178.

⁶⁹ Birnbaum 2011.

⁷⁰ *Spec.* 2.44–48.

⁷¹ *Mos.* 2.44.

made civic integration easier by protecting ethnic specificities.⁷² *3 Maccabees* is in accordance with this principle, stating that the Jews, who remained loyal towards the dynasty, “worshipped God and conducted themselves as citizens (*politeuomenoi*) according to his law.”⁷³ The author immediately reminds his readers of the cultic specificities of the Jews and reaffirm their need to eat apart: “they kept their separateness with respect to foods.”⁷⁴ Even if the Jewish author of this book joins into the festive policy of the rulers, the Salvation Day that he describes is split in two: the Jewish feast (*euochia*) is paralleled with a royal *symposion*, two simultaneous but separated events.⁷⁵ In such a context, it would seem logical that the Greeks who, according to Philo, attended the Pharos Festival, were indeed sympathisers or Torah observant, and may have even been full-fledged proselytes, since these are the main topic of *On the Life of Moses*.⁷⁶ To sum up, if we limit our study to the cultural framework of the time, the description of “open-festivals” by Jewish-Alexandrian authors seems to fall under the apologetic category or to mark a step on the path of conversion.

However, if we now turn to the social background which prevailed in the city of Alexandria at the beginning of the Common Era, it seems that the requirements for the staging of open-air festivals bringing together both Jews and Greeks were largely met, since the existing neighboring and solidarity networks endured even in times of persecution. In *3 Maccabees*, the Alexandrians appear to be deeply chocked by the discriminatory policy enforced against the Jews, which are deemed symptomatic of a tyrannical regime, and are willing to help the persecuted. While dealing with the pogrom of the years 38–39, Philo describes the same phenomenon.⁷⁷ As Joseph Méléze-Modrzejewski, having studied all the available textual and papyrological source material, concluded, Greeks and Jews coexisted in harmony most of the times; the Alexandrian hostility towards the Jews only erupted sporadically.⁷⁸ These circumstances may also have been a result of the royal policy, which allowed all ancestral idiosyncrasies, however diverse they might be. Our Jewish-Alexandrians authors, who wanted to keep the good relationship between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors, fellow soldiers or friends going, devised up an open-table pattern where the Jews

⁷² Cf. Baslez 2008: 77–90.

⁷³ *3 Macc.* 3.3–4; 7. The book of *Judith* likewise ends with the description of a Greek-looking festival after having reaffirmed the need to keep with the Jewish dietary rules and to eat apart, even when taking part in a courtly feast. Cf. Bogaert 1999.

⁷⁴ *3 Macc.* 3.4. All Bible translations are taken from the NRSV. This principle is usually stated at the end of all persecution narrative (*2 Macc.* 11.25). According to Méléze-Modrzejewski 2008: 143, this implies that the Greek translation of the Torah had become a law of the land, applicable to Jews.

⁷⁵ *3 Macc.* 6.30–31; 33.

⁷⁶ *Mos.* 2.17–25. See also *Legat.* 211.

⁷⁷ *3 Macc.* 3.8–10; *Flacc.* 62.

⁷⁸ Méléze-Modrzejewski 2008: 85–89.

feasted apart. Broached, as we saw earlier, in *3 Maccabees* with the two-fold Salvation Day, this compromise is explored in *Joseph and Aseneth*, where the Jewish courtier becomes a guest of the Egyptian priest while eating apart.⁷⁹ This solution is built up in the *Letter of Aristeas*:⁸⁰ during a symposium offered by the Ptolemaic king to the Judeans who came to translate the Bible into Greek, all the guests can share the same table because the food is prepared according to kosher rules. The common feast begins with a Jewish-type prayer, as was the case during Pharos Festival according to Philo's testimony: the discussion then focuses on the Law, so that the table becomes a place for catechesis.

The "open-festival" hypothesis is also consistent with the global evolution of religious feeling that can be identified, at the time, within Judaism as well as within the whole association movement which was typical in the Hellenised East. Festivals were no longer essentially defined by particular rituals pertaining to group identity but by their contents, as an expression of "rejoicing and gladness" based on a theology of mercy and joy, both regarded as divine gifts. This feeling pervades through the final chapters of *3 Maccabees* as well as through the story of the Hanukkah festival.⁸¹ These types of rejoicing festivals were not specific to Jewish communities, but were also held in some Greek sanctuaries or in the Syrian *marzeah* described by Poseidonios of Apamea at the beginning of the Roman period;⁸² they appear to have been a main feature in many cults of the Mediterranean East.⁸³ In the historiography of the Greek world, these types of associations, which were for a long time known and seen only through polemical source material and thus disregarded as "recreational clubs," are now considered as evidence of a religious dynamic of festive rejoicing, which gave birth to "merry-making companies."⁸⁴ The question of possible interactions between various religious communities was tackled for the first time in 1927, when Pierre Roussel published letters of invitations from the sanctuary of a native Zeus in Panamara (Caria):⁸⁵ those letters invited all men, from wherever, to partake in a "common

⁷⁹ *Jos. Asen.* 7.1; 20.5; 21.6–8. The novel, which legitimises intermarriage under the condition of conversion, was probably written in the Jewish community of "Onias's land" in Egypt, at the end of the Hellenistic period or at the beginning of the Roman one. See Bohak 1996: 273–284.

⁸⁰ *Let. Aris.* 181–185.

⁸¹ On "rejoicing" (*euphrosyne*), see *3 Macc.* 6.36 and 7.15–16. In *1 Macc.* 4.56 and 59 (Hanukkah), *euphrosyne* indicate the thanksgiving sacrifice; in 5.54, a celebration upon the return from a military campaign. The phrase reads "to make mercy joyful (*epiterpe charis*)," an indubitably religious statement.

⁸² Baslez 2013.

⁸³ Baumgarten 1998.

⁸⁴ Bowersock 1999, following L. Robert's works. The discoveries of these inscriptions compelled historians to take into account what was previously regarded as a literary motive.

⁸⁵ Roussel 1927, updated by Çetin Şahin 1981. The first editor drew on his biblical knowledge to lay the hypothesis of a Jewish influence since Jewish communities were many in

table” in “equal dignity” so that they could have a share in “sacred matters” and “take the rejoicing meal together” in front of the god.⁸⁶ Even if these types of rejoicing rituals progressively became widespread, their audience remained, by definition, fickle, as *3 Maccabees* highlights.⁸⁷

Since we are now able to describe both rejoicing festival and rejoicing feast as a place of interaction for a cultic community with the outside world, we are left with the following question: were such festivals regarded as shared rituals or did they become devoid of any religious content and reduced to places of social contacts as the original cultic practices became deconsecrated?

If the reminiscing of the Grand Procession of Alexandria in the book of *Judith* pertains to visual impressions, did the Alexandrian Jews see it as entertainment like when they attended the theatre?⁸⁸ Angelos Chaniotis stressed that the royal festive policy undertaken by Hellenistic rulers in general and the Lagids in particular were intended to turn citizens into “passive receptors,”⁸⁹ whereas cultic activity contributed to the definition of citizenship.

In the Pharos Festival, a topical example of such polysemous rejoicing festivals, non-Jews may have attended only in order to keep good neighboring relationships, without any intention of delving deeper into Judaism nor of adopting Jewish practices, as was the case for many benefactors and patrons of synagogues.⁹⁰ Even if the shared feast could, on occasion, provide a place for religious debates, the prayer rite appears to have been reduced to the minimum in Pharos.⁹¹ Accordingly, if we can conclude, while remaining cautious, to the existence of “open-festival” that brought together Jews and Greeks in late Hellenistic Alexandria, we need to distinguish between “to celebrate a festival” and “to attend a festival,” between the sacred and the secular, a distinction that precisely began to appear at the beginning of the imperial period.

Asia minor. These letters were written by the priest in the name of his god; on these letters, see also the recent study of Williamson 2014: 219–231.

⁸⁶ The attendants of this common meal are said to be *isotimoi*, seemingly the equivalent of the *isopolitai* status which was conferred unto to those who attended the Ptolemaic royal festivities (see *supra*).

⁸⁷ *3 Macc.* 4.1: when the king puts together celebrations on the occasion of his anti-Jewish policy, the festival is immediately attended by a large fraction of the city’s inhabitants.

⁸⁸ The theatre parallel in *Jdt.* 5.22 relies on a pun on the word *proskēnion*, which means both “forestage” and “foretent” and is used to describes Holophernes’s entrance.

⁸⁹ Chaniotis 1997.

⁹⁰ Cumont 1906; Bowersock 1999.

⁹¹ The word used by Philo in *De vita Mosis*, *kateuche* instead of *euche*, is not found in the Septuagint and usually conveys the idea of toast in Hellenistic Greek; here wishes are made for the wellbeing of the king which are deemed acceptable by all the attendants. Generally speaking, several targumim and Jewish texts of the intertestamentary period are envisioning the welcoming of non-Jewish guests at a common table by including them into the food blessing.

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The Common Roots of Egyptians and Jews: Life and Meaning of an Ancient Stereotype*

Livia Capponi

1. The Jewish-Egyptian association: a stereotype imposed by the conquerors?

The idea of a kinship between Jews and Egyptians was deeply rooted in antiquity. Sources of Egyptian origin, such as Manetho, Chaeremon, Lysimachus and Apion, identified the founder of the Jewish state as Moses or Osarseph, a philosopher and priest of the city of Heliopolis, associated the Jews with a group of lepers, and the exodus with their expulsion from Egypt.¹ In Roman common opinion, at least of the 1st and 2nd cent. CE, the Jews descended from the Egyptians. Tacitus indicated that, at his time, the most commonly accepted view was that the Jews were lepers expelled from Egypt.² Both Tacitus and Suetonius reported that, in 19 CE, the emperor Tiberius expelled Jews and followers of Isis from Rome together, as if they were two branches of the same religion, although we must be cautious in interpreting the simultaneous expulsion as an overlapping of the two peoples.³ What the causes of the dramatic and sudden expulsion of 19 CE were remains obscure; all that emerges is that, for Tiberius, the Jewish and Egyptian *sacra* were similar foreign superstitions that could contaminate Roman society.⁴

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¹ *C. Ap.* 2.122; see also 2.20–27 on the plague suffered by the Jews in Egypt. Barclay 2004: 114. Manetho *apud* Jos. *C. Ap.* 1.227–250; Chaeremon *apud* Jos. *C. Ap.* 1.288–290; Lysimachus *apud* Jos. *C. Ap.* 1.304–311. In Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 40.3, derived from Hecataeus, the Jews were expelled at the time of a plague, but not because they were ill, although in 34/35 (1.1–2) they have contracted the disease. In Pompeius Trogus (*apud* Justin’s *Epitome* 36.2) the Jews, originally from Damascus, are expelled from Egypt after a plague. Another legend calls the Jews an Egyptian colony without mentioning the plague: Herodot. *Hist.* 2.104; Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 1.28.55, probably Hecataeus of Abdera in Strabo 18.2.5 (cf. Strabo, *Geogr. apud* Jos. *A.J.* 14.118) and Celsus (*apud* Orig. *Cels.* 1.22; 3.5–6). A further tradition depicts the Exodus as led by Hierosolymos and Judas: Tac. *Hist.* 5.3; Plut. *Is. et Os.* 31 (*Mor.* 363c–d).

² Tac. *Hist.* 5.2–3; 5.3.1.

³ Tac. *Ann.* 2.85.4; Suet. *Tib.* 36. Gruen 2002: 29–36 recommends caution.

⁴ On the lack of explanation for the expulsion of 19 CE, see Rutgers 1994: 74, Schäfer 1998: 109–111, for whom *externae caerimoniae* were among the *plebs urbana* and the Roman elites even without massive proselytising.

For some scholars, the association between Jews and Egyptians was a stereotype superimposed by the Greek, and then Roman, conquerors, a simplification that depicted these populations as branches originating from the same stock. This simplification had an “etiological” purpose, as it explained the most exotic and obscure peculiarities of Jewish religion, such as the Sabbath, abstinence from pork and, above all, circumcision. As a matter of fact, since Egyptian priests were circumcised, too, it was believed that the Jews had learnt the practice from the Egyptians.⁵ In the stereotyped Graeco-Roman mentality, this conflation of Jewish and Egyptian customs facilitated the comprehension of the most peculiar and “barbaric” aspects of these populations. Obviously, each of these peoples had no right to correct or rectify any prejudice imposed on them.

However, we know that some Jews, at least in Egypt, did see themselves as Egyptians. Some Jews probably liked to think that they descended from Moses–Osarseph, the wise priest from Heliopolis, a figure that was known in Egyptian literature, as a sage and inventor, who even taught Plato. In the Hellenistic period, the Alexandrian-Jewish priest Artapanus wrote that Moses was the inventor, among other things, of the division of Egypt into districts (*nomoi*) and the animal cults associated with each of them. Artapanus deliberately exaggerated the accomplishments of the Jews and openly promoted Jewish-Egyptian integration by turning the Jewish patriarchs into Egyptian Hellenistic heroes. In Zellentin’s words,

Artapanus uses the narrative of the biblical Exodus and Greek sources on the heroes of Egypt [...] in order to recast the Jewish patriarchs in the tradition of the Osiris, Sesoosis (= Sesostri) and Dionysus myths.⁶

Further cases of interplay between Egyptian and Jewish history may be found. Aristobulus, the Jewish philosopher who taught King Ptolemy VI Philometor (180–145 BCE), reworked Orphic texts into Jewish prayers, and wrote an *Interpretation of the Law of Moses* for his royal pupil. The novel of *Joseph and Aseneth* perhaps originating in the Hellenistic period, recounts the love story and the wed-

⁵ For Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 1.28.3 and Athen. *Deipn.* 299–300, all Egyptians were circumcised. For Jos. C. *Ap.* 2.141 only the priests were. Phil. *Spec.* 1.2 admits that Jews and Egyptians were both circumcised, but for independent reasons. On the food taboos see Ael. *Nat. an.* 10.16, Sext. *Emp. Pyr.* 3.223; C. *Ap.* 2.141. On the food taboos as abstention, respect or protection from impurity see the discussion on mice in *Let. Arist.* 144–171; Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 4.5 (*Mor.* 669c–670e). See Barclay 2004: 115.

⁶ Zellentin 2008: 29 points out that we do not know the ethnicity or provenance of Artapanus, and is inclined to think that he was an Egyptian speaking to the Jewish military aristocracy of Ptolemaic Egypt, at the end of the reign of Ptolemy VIII Physcon (145–116 BCE). Cf. Zellentin 2008 for the most recent and exhaustive discussion of the fragments of Artapanus and a summary of the related literature. On Artapanus as a Jew who tried to reconcile Egyptian history and culture, Collins 1985; for Gruen 2002, Artapanus embodies the point of view of diaspora Jews.

ding between a Jew and the daughter of an Egyptian priest from Heliopolis. The Jewish temple of Leontopolis in the Heliopolite nome was founded by the Jerusalemite high priest Onias in the 2nd cent. BCE on the ruins of a traditional Egyptian temple to the feline goddess Bubastis-Bastet, a detail that annoyed some Jews in Judea.⁷ Egyptianised Jews also emerge in *3 Maccabees*, written perhaps for an Egyptian audience in the 2nd or 1st cent. BCE, while the *Letter of Aristeas*, written by an Egyptian Jew in the 2nd cent. BCE, does not show any secure evidence of hatred between Jews and Egyptians. TB mentions Rabbi Hanan “the Egyptian” who was active in Palestine in the 2nd cent. CE, as a figure of Sage respected and worshipped by all.⁸ A Greek-hebrew inscription from Joppa, CIJ 2.930, mentions a certain Isaac the son of Lazaros as “Egyptian priest,” *iereos (E)gip[ti]o[u]*.⁹ Finally, the epigraphic evidence shows beyond doubt that there was a high level of syncretism between Jews, Greeks, and Egyptians in Ptolemaic Egypt.¹⁰

From these sources one might hypothesise that, in the Hellenistic period, at the time of the major waves of migration of Jews from Palestine to Egypt under the first two Ptolemies, and also at the time of the Maccabean revolt, when Ptolemy VI opened the doors of Egypt to a number of Jewish refugees and exiles, both the Ptolemaic monarchy and the Jewish *élites* who settled in Egypt favoured the view that Jews and Egyptians had common roots to facilitate the integration of the new Jewish communities within the Egyptian cultural background. The fact that both Hecataeus of Abdera and Manetho, who worked at the courts of Ptolemy I and II respectively, stand out among the earliest authors of the story of the Jews as a “colony” of Egypt, lends some weight to the above hypothesis. If the Jews and the Egyptians had an ancient tie of kinship, it would have been easier to justify the fact that some of them went back to Egypt to work for the Ptolemaic state. This paper will attempt to check what the point of view of the peoples in question was by looking at the available Jewish and Egyptian sources and will try to establish when and why a more definite line between the two peoples was drawn.

2. A first argument for division: Philo and the riots of 38–41

The ethnic and legal boundaries between Romans, Jews and Egyptians acquired new weight after the conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 BCE and, above all, the conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE by Augustus, who imposed the Roman

⁷ On this temple, see Capponi 2007.

⁸ TB, *Sanhedrin*, 17b.

⁹ CIJ 2.136.

¹⁰ Cf. CIJ 2.1537–1538, two inscriptions of thanksgiving to a god (*theos*) posed by the Jews Theodotos, son of Dorion, and Ptolemaios, son of Dionysios, in the temple of Pan at Edfu (also called Apollinopolis Magna).

provincial census and a capitation tax (*laographia*) levied at different rates according to ethnic–social status. While Romans and Alexandrians were exempt, all foreigners including Jews and Egyptians paid the full rate. The status of the Alexandrian Jews had been at the centre of debate since the first years after the conquest. According to a recent study by Sandra Gambetti, in the reign of Augustus, the Jewish military settlers who had lived at Alexandria from the time of Ptolemy I somehow enjoyed equal social standing with the Greeks, were allowed to enjoy some rights of residence in the quarter called “Delta,” and probably had a discount on the poll-tax, while the Jews who arrived later were downgraded to the rank of Egyptians and had to pay the poll-tax at full rate.¹¹

The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria denies any relation between Jews and Egyptians and attempts to construct a form of solidarity or congeniality between Jews, Greeks, and Romans against the Egyptians, whom he depicts in negative terms as an outdated civilisation with ridiculous religious traditions. Philo places all the blame for the riots of 38 CE on the Egyptians in the *Legatio ad Gaium* and the *In Flaccum*, works that originated from his role as the delegate of the Alexandrian Jews before Caligula in 39 CE. Significantly, he depicts Helicon, Caligula’s Egyptian freedman, as the origin of all evils, and calls the Alexandrian gymnasiarchs Isidore and Lampon “Egyptians” while we are accustomed to seeing them as “Greeks,” also due to the characterisation of this conflict by the scholarship of the early 20th cent. as a clash of civilisations between Judaism and Hellenism.¹² Why Philo does that is unclear. One may point out that the term *Hellenes* had different meanings and implications – for instance, in the Gospels, the Jews of the diaspora communities are divided into *Ioudaioi* and *Hellenistai* or *Hellenes*, that is, Hellenised Jews.¹³ It must be noted, however, that Philo’s hatred for the Egyptians pervades all his work and was probably reinforced by his own historical and political context, that is, from the subjection of both Egypt and Judea to a third superpower, Rome.

In the embassy to Caligula, Philo’s main opponent was the Egyptian poet and scholar Apion, who defended the cause of the Alexandrians against the Jews. Although Philo never mentions him directly, perhaps following a rule of rhetorical etiquette imposed during imperial audiences, from Josephus’ *Contra Apionem* we can deduce that Apion talked about the rights of Alexandrian citizenship. The only words quoted directly from Apion’s speech are the following: “Why, if they (*sc.* the Jews) are citizens, do they not worship the same

¹¹ Gambetti 2009.

¹² *Legat.* 166, 205. Egyptian gymnasiarchs: *Phil. Flacc.* 17; 29; 92; *Legat.* 162–163; 172; 183; see Jones 2005: 300.

¹³ In the New Testament, the diaspora communities are divided into “Greeks” or *Hellenistai*, and Jews. On the identification of the *Hellenistai*, see Troiani 1988 and 2009: 83.

gods as the Alexandrian citizens?”¹⁴ This ideology may also be found in the words of the Alexandrian gymnasiarch Isidore at his own trial before Claudius, probably in 41 CE, in the texts – between history and fiction – of the so-called *Acta Alexandrinorum*:

They [the Jews] are not of the same temperament as the Alexandrians but live in the manner of the Egyptians. Are they not on the same level of those who pay the *laographia*?¹⁵

Again, in the famous *Letter to the Alexandrians* of 41 CE, the emperor Claudius warns the Alexandrian Jews that their customs are going to be respected but that they have to be content with the rights that they had under the Ptolemies and Augustus, and reminds them that they have an ‘abundance of good things in a foreign city’. Claudius then forbids the Jews from entering the gymnasium, a Greek institution that only the Alexandrian citizens could access.¹⁶

The aforementioned sources suggest that Philo chose to emphasise the division, the difference, the historical boundary between Jews and Egyptians in order to defend the Jews from the charges of sedition and support their request for Alexandrian citizenship. In his highly rhetorical speech, made to convince the Roman emperor, Philo adopted a pro-Roman point of view and tried to align the Jews with the Graeco-Roman civilisation, by depicting the Jews as Greeks and cutting off the Egyptians as Barbarians. Undoubtedly, in the philo-hellenic imperial status-system created by Augustus, founded on Graeco-Roman religion and culture, it was more convenient to be classed as “Greek” rather than as “Egyptian.”¹⁷

Fifty years later, Josephus inherits and develops Philo’s attitude in the *Contra Apionem*, one of his last works, where he accuses the Egyptians of fanning the flames of the riots of 38–41 CE.¹⁸ According to Barclay, the fact that Josephus thought it necessary to return to this topic shows that Apion’s anti-Jewish charges were still used in Josephus’s time, especially after the disastrous end of the Jewish rebellion of 66–70 CE.¹⁹ However, the reasons why, in the *Contra Apionem*, and only in this work, Josephus decided to have the last

¹⁴ *C. Ap.* 2.41–42; 65: *quomodo ergo, inquit, si sunt cives, eosdem deos quos Alexandrini non colent?* On the possible structure of the speech by Apion before Gaius, see Troiani 1977: 139–140. On the silence of Philo on Apion, there are no current explanations. It may be due either to a rule imposed by Rome, in order to prevent speeches before the emperor from becoming personal invectives, or to the overwhelming power and fame of Apion, whom Philo could not hope to defeat.

¹⁵ CPJ 2.156, 2.8–10. *Acta IV. Acta Isidori* Recension C (P.Berol. 8877): Οὐκ εἰσιν Ἀλ[εξανδρεῦσιν] ὁμοιοπαθεῖς, τρόπον δὲ Αἰγυπτ[ίων]] οὐκ εἰσι ἴσοι τοῖς φόρον τελοῦσι; transl. by Musurillo 1954.

¹⁶ P.Lond. 6.1912, CPJ 2.153, 88ff.

¹⁷ On Philo’s attitude towards Egypt, see Niehoff 2001: 111–136.

¹⁸ *C. Ap.* 2.68–70.

¹⁹ *C. Ap.* 2.65, 68 and 2.73. Barclay 2004: 125.

word on the presumed common roots of Egyptians and Jews, by denying that these roots existed and launching a violent attack against Egyptian religion, have not yet been fully clarified and need further investigation.

3. The radicalisation of the conflict: Flavian policies towards Jews and Egyptians

In the *Contra Apionem*, Josephus, following Manetho, reports that the Jews had been masters of Egypt in the period of the Hyksos domination. Moreover, Josephus identifies the Hyksos/foreign invaders with the Jews, and removes in this way any possible tie of kinship between Egyptians and Jews.²⁰ In many passages, Josephus emphasises the solidarity between Jews and Romans against the Egyptians, pointing out that the Jews of Egypt helped Julius Caesar against the Egyptian army, and received privileges and honours in exchange. He also reinforces that the Jews of Egypt hated Cleopatra, historical enemy of Rome.²¹

In the *Contra Apionem*, in sum, Josephus reiterates many times that the Jews were not Egyptians, and emphasises at the end of the work that

our forefathers were neither Egyptians by descent nor were they expelled because of a disfiguring illness or any other similar disgrace.²²

Josephus also cites a passage by Apion according to which the Hebrew term Sabbath derived from the Egyptian word *sabbatosis*, the plague that the Jews took after six days of march in the desert, during the Exodus.²³ The association of the Jews with the plague was a prejudice present since the Hellenistic period and was perhaps revived in the Roman republican or early imperial period, when waves of prisoners of war arrived to Rome (e.g. after Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE), and when new epidemic diseases appeared in Italy. Pliny noted that leprosy had appeared in Italy under Pompey, while Josephus registers a plague in Judaea in 25/24 BCE, and Dio notices that in 23/22 BCE the plague had moved to Italy where it raged for two years.²⁴ Interestingly, in the aforementioned *Letter to the Alexandrians*, Claudius forbids any immigration of Jews from Syria or Egypt into Alexandria, warning the Jews that, in case they trespass his order, he will persecute them as if they raise a worldwide plague.²⁵ It is even possible that some established a link between the plague that killed 30.000 people in

²⁰ *C. Ap.* 1.75–92, 228.

²¹ Julius Caesar: *C. Ap.* 2.61, 72–73. Cleopatra: 2.57–61.

²² 2.8; cf. 2.28 and 122. Barclay 2004: 113.

²³ *C. Ap.* 2.21. Cf. commentary *ad loc.* by Barclay 2007.

²⁴ Plin. *Nat.* 26.5.7. Jos. *A.J.* 15.300; Cass. D. *Hist. Rom.* 53.33.1; 54.1.2.1–2.

²⁵ P.Lond. 6.1912 = CPJ 2.153, 99–100 καθάπερ κοινήν τείνα τῆς οἰκουμένης νόσον ἐξεγείροντας.

Rome in autumn CE 65 and the breakout of the Jewish revolt against Rome.²⁶ Interestingly, Pliny indicated Egypt as the *genetrix* of the plague, perhaps reviving a Roman political invective against Cleopatra that turned her religious representation as Isis–Venus *Genetrix*, into a negative one, as the “mother of the civil wars.”²⁷ The parallelism plague = revolution was deeply rooted both in Jewish and in the Graeco-Roman cultures. For this reason, it is entirely possible that Josephus aimed to purify the Jews from both the charge of being rebellious and of being plague-sowers. In all his works, it is quite evident that Josephus attempts to convince his readers that the Jews were not a turbulent population, that they loved law and order, and that the revolt of 66–70 was a degeneration led by a few “terrorists.”²⁸

Recently, scholars like Barclay and Jones have argued that Josephus tried to unify Jews, Greeks and Romans in the common hatred of the Egyptians in order to increase the prestige of the Jews in the social, legal and cultural *honour scale* established by the Romans.²⁹ Barclay interpreted Josephus’ anti-Egyptian stance in the *Contra Apionem* as a carefully crafted “politics of contempt,” in which the vituperation of the Egyptians served to align the Jews with the Romans’ common opinion on culture religion and history.³⁰

This explanation is valid, but raises further questions. It is still unclear why Josephus was silent on this problem in his earlier works, and why he decided to talk in the *Contra Apionem* only. One may also wonder whether all the Roman public opinion was consistently anti-Egyptian, or the sensibilities and attitudes were more nuanced. In fact, even if we can be sure that the Jews were anti-Egyptian, and against idolatry, it is not guaranteed that all of Josephus’ Roman readers were consistently anti-Egyptian. The Flavian emperors, for example, consistently promoted a pro-Egyptian policy, on which Josephus prefers to be silent both in the *Bellum Judaicum*, written under and for Vespasian and Titus, and in the *Antiquitates*, published when Domitian was still in power. The importance of Egypt for the rise to power and the existence of the Flavians is notorious. On 1st July

²⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 16.13 and Suet. *Nero* 39.1 *pestilentia unius autumnii quo triginta funerum milia in rationem Libitinae venerunt*. It was cholera according to the commentaries by Furneaux 1979–1982 and Koestermann 1963–1968. Cf. also Bradley 1978: 236 on Suetonius. For a list of the most important plagues in the ancient world, see Pazzini 1947: 1.304–305 and Duncan-Jones 1996.

²⁷ Plin. *Nat.* 26.3–4. On the iconography of Cleopatra as Isis or Venus *Genetrix*, see her statue placed by Julius Caesar in the temple of Venus *Genetrix* in the *Forum Julium* at Rome, on which Roller 2010, Appendix 1.

²⁸ The bibliography is exterminated. See Rajak 1998 and the recent Edmondson, Mason, Rives 2005.

²⁹ Barclay 2004: 117–119 and Barclay 2005. Jones 2005: 301–302.

³⁰ Barclay 2004 coined the phrase “politics of contempt.” For Barclay 2005: 326 “trading on the disdain which the Romans generally showed towards Egypt [...] his vituperation of the Egyptians aligning him with the common views of history and religion held by the Romans.”

69, Vespasian was acclaimed emperor *in absentia* by the Roman troops in Alexandria, thanks to the machinations by the prefect of Egypt Tiberius Julius Alexander. Interestingly Tacitus describes Tiberius Julius Alexander as “Egyptian,” while he was an Alexandrian Jew.³¹ The Egyptian clergy strongly supported Vespasian, as we learn from Tacitus’ account of the stay of Vespasian in Alexandria: the emperor established a close link with the god Serapis, incubated in the *Serapeion*, and even operated miraculous cures on two ill people, but above all met the chief of the Egyptian clergy, a certain Basilides, who greeted him as the new emperor.³² A papyrus document shows the reception of Vespasian in the hippodrome of Alexandria in 69: Tiberius Julius Alexander greeted him as “saviour and benefactor” in the Hellenistic fashion, the crowd as “New Serapis,” “Son of Ammon” and “Rising Sun,” like an Egyptian pharaoh.³³ Another document presents us with the date of the entrance of Titus in Alexandria after the Jewish campaign: 25th April 71 CE, day of the great festival of Serapis, on which we get some snapshots from the novelistic sources.³⁴ As Suetonius informs us, Titus then participated in the deification of the Apis Bull in Memphis wearing an Egyptian-style crown, a fact for which many eyebrows were raised in Rome.³⁵ Josephus, who accompanied Vespasian to Alexandria, chose to omit all details about Vespasian’s stay in the city, except reporting the night before the great triumph over Judea, in 71, Vespasian and Titus stayed in the temple of Isis and Serapis in Rome, a significant indication of the Flavians’ devotion to the god.³⁶

After the fall of Jerusalem in 70, ethnic and religious definitions acquired a new importance, and Egypt had a decisively better press than Judea. Vespasian and Titus hijacked the tax once paid by the Jews to their temple into a new “Jewish tax,” a form of punishment for the revolt, that was collected by a newly-created treasury, the *fiscus Iudaicus*, and destined to the rebuilding of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. Under Domitian, and probably also before, violence was used to raise this tax, and informers were paid by the government to chase all those who lived a *vita iudaica*.³⁷ Meanwhile, Domitian

³¹ Tac. *Hist.* 1.11.

³² Tac. *Hist.* 4.82; Suet. *Vesp.* 7.1. Scholars have suggested that Tacitus used an Egyptian aretalogy of Serapis among his sources: Henrichs 1968; Montevicchi 1998: 171–185 and 188–197.

³³ P.Fouad 8; CPJ 2.418a; SB 16.12255.

³⁴ P.Oxy. 34.2725, a private letter from an anonymous (Alexandrian?) sender to the brothers Adrastus and Spartacus in the Egyptian *chora*, talks about business affairs and promises to send them the *akta ton timon* of an event that he had witnessed – the entry of Titus in the city on 25th April 71 CE. Snapshots of Serapis festival: Achilles Tatius, *Leucippes and Clitophon*, 5.2.

³⁵ Suet. *Tit.* 5.3.

³⁶ *B.J.* 7.123.

³⁷ Jewish tax used to rebuild temple of Jupiter Capitolinus: Jos. *B.J.* 7.218. Domitian and Jewish tax, Suet. *Dom.* 12.2: *praeter ceteros Iudaicus fiscus acerbissime actus est; ad quem*

erected in Rome an Egyptian obelisk, whose hieroglyphic inscription called him “beloved by Isis” and dedicated it to the rising sun.³⁸ Around 85, he also ordered a new Greek translation of the Egyptian religious law, the “sacred Law Terenouthis,” showing a continuing interest and sympathy for Egyptian religion.

The analysis of the Egyptian documentation made by Yoyotte in 1963 shows that the priestly circles of traditional Egyptian temples were xenophobic, and hated both the Greeks and the Jews since when the latter militated in the army of the Persian king. The Egyptian priests basically regarded foreigners as barbarian destructors of their temples according to an archetypical schema, the mythical enmity between the goddess Isis and Typhon, the latter being the epitome of evil, who was associated with foreign invaders, impurity, famine and desert, and all causes of chaos and disorder.³⁹ That this schema was actually applied in everyday life emerges from numerous documents on the Jewish diaspora revolt of 115–117 CE, where the Egyptians constantly denigrate the “impious Jews” (*anosioi Ioudaioi*) and identify them with the Typhonian enemies, that were once chased out of Egypt by the wrath of Isis.⁴⁰ To what extent this xenophobic attitude was homogeneous throughout Egypt and consistent from the Hellenistic until the Roman period we do not know. It would be interesting to find out whether the impact of Roman rule worsened the Egyptian-Jewish conflict and whether the Flavians, in their post-70 policy, fostered Egyptian anti-Judaism as a weapon against the danger of further Jewish revolts.

4. Josephus’s interlocutor in *Contra Apionem*

Why did Josephus choose to say the last word on the Egyptians and their religion in *Contra Apionem*? The material examined above suggests a possible path of investigation. Although the precise date of publication of *Contra Apionem* is not known, it is certain that the work was later than the *Antiquitates*, published in 94 CE, when Josephus was 56.⁴¹ Recent studies are inclined to think that the

deferebantur, qui vel[ut] inprofessi Iudaicam viverent vitam vel dissimilata origine imposita genti tributa non pependissent. Interfuisse me adolescentulum memini, cum a procuratore frequentissimoque consilio inspiceretur nonagenarius senex, an circumsectus esset. Cf. also Cass. D. *Hist. Rom.* 67.14.1–3 on the murder of the consul Flavius Clemens under the charge of atheism.

³⁸ The so-called *obeliscus Pamphilius*, now on the Bernini fountain in Piazza Navona, see Heslin 2007.

³⁹ Barclay 2007: 345 talks in terms of a “timeless schema of conflict.”

⁴⁰ CPJ 2.438, 443, 450, 520. Frankfurter 1992, Barclay 2007: 346–347.

⁴¹ *A.J.* 20.267. The death of King Agrippa II, mentioned in *Vit.* 359, took place around 100 CE for Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 33, but this source is unreliable according to Barclay 2007: xxvii and cannot be used to date the *Contra Apionem*.

work was written under Nerva (96–98 CE), on the basis of the identification of the dedicatee (and sponsor) Epaphroditus with M. Mettius Epaphroditus, a grammarian originally from Chaeronea, former freedman of a prefect of Egypt, and the owner of a library of 30,000 volumes in Rome, who lived until 98 CE, as documented by CIL 6.9454, an inscription on the basis of his statue.⁴² The title *Contra Apionem* is dubious, as Josephus never gives it. Partial titles referred to each of the two books, i.e. *On the Antiquity of the Jews* and *Against Apion*; for Porphyry it was *Against the Greeks*, for Schreckenberg *On Our People*, for Niese *In defence of the Jews*.⁴³ The aim of the work was to respond to accusations and insults against the Jews and the Law of Moses, first of all that the Jews were of Egyptian origin.⁴⁴

Who the target readership of the *Contra Apionem* was is debated.⁴⁵ Goodman thought that the description of the Temple as the central element of Judaism in *C. Ap.* 2.193–198 may have been directed to Roman audience, in a historical situation in which there was still hope for its reconstruction, i.e. after the end of the Flavian dynasty; the work is not only “a literary conceit or an antiquarian study [...] but rather an impassionate rhetorical plea.”⁴⁶ If we read the work as the last, desperate rhetorical plea by a Jew in a new political scenario where the Jews could still hope for a radical change in the imperial policy, it is impossible not to think of Nerva as its ideal interlocutor.⁴⁷

The religious juxtaposition between Jews and Egyptians may be read in the context of the radical regime-change of 96 CE, a change that was both political and cultural. In the first weeks of power in 96 CE, Nerva took public measures to mark the regime change and show how different from Domitian he was going to be in the most explicit way. Between September and the end of October

⁴² Cotton, Eck 2005: 51 are inclined to think that the Epaphroditus to whom Josephus dedicated the *Antiquitates* and *Contra Apionem* was not the freedman killed under Domitian mentioned by Suet. *Dom.* 14.4, but, possibly, the M. Mettius Epaphroditus grammarian. Cf. also the commentary by Barclay 2007 to *C. Ap.* 1.1.

⁴³ Barclay 2007: xxx.

⁴⁴ *C. Ap.* 2.289–290 and Barclay 2007: xxxii. On the fact that the *Contra Apionem* had not only an apologetic aim but also a rhetorical one, and on the artificial construction of its polemical arguments, see Goodman 1999: 52–53; Gruen 2005.

⁴⁵ Barclay 2007: xlv n. 101 talks of “an extremely wide set of possible audiences.” For Kasher 1996, Josephus wanted to supply a handbook of instructions of (militant) resistance for the Jewish people or “present to the Diaspora Jews a guide for the debates that they entertained with the enemies of Judaism.” Mason 1996 convincingly points out that in *Contra Apionem* there is some kind of mission, not only an apology. The impact of *Contra Apionem* on Christian apologetics was important: cf. Orig. *Cels.* 1.16; Hardwick 1996. For Schreckenberg 1977: 48–53, however, there are no certain proofs of an active usage of *Contra Apionem* by the Diaspora.

⁴⁶ Goodman 1999: 57–58.

⁴⁷ Goodman 1999.

CE 96, he minted coins with ideologically charged words such as *Pax*, *Iustitia*, *Salus publica*, *Victoria*, *Fortuna* that clearly advertised the beginning of a new, more equitable era; in the meantime, Domitian's name was erased from inscriptions empire-wide.⁴⁸ He then abolished the Jewish tax and the *fiscus Iudaicus*, condemned informers and announced this important change in three series of coins, minted between November 96 and the summer 97 CE, with the words *Fisci Iudaici calumnia sublata*, literally meaning "the calumny of the Jewish treasury having been abolished."⁴⁹ He released all those who had been arrested with the charge of *asebeia* or impiety, recalled the exiles, and prevented anyone from accusing anyone else of impiety, atheism or Jewish "way of life."⁵⁰ These radical changes may explain, in my view, Josephus's sudden urge to write a book attacking the Egyptians, and rehabilitate the Jews as a population worthy of the Romans' trust. In the *Contra Apionem*, Josephus depicts the Jews as loyal servants of the Hellenistic monarchies and Roman generals and people who had always been safeguarded by the "best" Roman emperors.⁵¹ Josephus tries to convince his readers that Rome can only benefit from the alliance with the loyal Jews by emphasising that "when all the kings from every regions were hostile to the Romans, only our people were kept as allies and friends because of their loyalty."⁵²

The denigration of the Egyptian religion in the *Contra Apionem* may also be explained in the context of the rise of Nerva as Josephus's attempt to align the Jews with the conservative, traditionalist religious attitude of Nerva against the extravagant Egyptian sympathies of Domitian. Josephus argues that "our form of piety differs from what is practised by them;" he denigrates Egyptian religion as ridiculous, contrasting it with the *semmotes* of Jewish theology, a term that echoes the *gravitas* personified by Nerva.⁵³ As noted by Barclay, in *C. Ap.* 2.65–68 Josephus depicts Judaism as honourable, safe, and compatible with the Roman *ethos*.⁵⁴ As Goodman suggested, the rhetorical apex may be found at the end of the 2nd book, where Josephus presents a praise of the Jewish Law, conveniently summarised and simplified for a Roman audience. He emphasises that it is not true that the Jews do not worship the emperor, they only pray

⁴⁸ Cf. Grainger 2003: 47–50.

⁴⁹ RIC 2.227, no. 58; 228, no. 82; the tax was then restored by Trajan, according to the interpretation by Goodman 2005: 168ff. The older, most commonly held view according to which Nerva did not lift the tax but only the abuses connected with it, is followed by Cotton, Eck 2005.

⁵⁰ Cass. D. *Hist. Rom.* 68.1.2; Goodman 2005: 168.

⁵¹ *C. Ap.* 2.61–64.

⁵² *C. Ap.* 2.134

⁵³ *C. Ap.* 1.224–225. On Nerva as a noble, but unmilitary man, son of a legal expert, who devoted his career to "intrigue, discussion and consultation," see Grainger 2003: 29–30. See also Henderson 1968.

⁵⁴ "Reasonable and traditional piety" in the words of Barclay 2004: 123.

alone (2.76–77), and argues that the Jews oppose innovation (2.182–183), value sobriety (2.204), prefer the community over the individual (2.186), oppose homosexuality (2.206), control their women (2.201), honour guests (2.206), love justice and avoid extravagance (2.219).⁵⁵ This section ends emphatically with the consideration that “many of our people often preferred to suffer every torment rather than utter a single word against the Law” (2.219). This conclusion must be interpreted as the idealised portrait not only of the Jews’ loyalty and legalism but also of the loyalty, legalism and sobriety of Nerva against the excesses of Domitian.

The legalistic, philosophical religion described by Josephus mirrors and overlaps with the values adopted by Nerva, “champion of the ancient nobility cultivated and rich,” whose links went back to the Julio-Claudian family, “moderate and loyalist member of the senate under the Flavians,” ideal *princeps*, poet and protector of the philosophers. Remarkably, Nerva had been *consul collega* of Vespasian in 71 and Domitian in 92, a sign that he was active in Rome on Vespasian’s behalf during the civil wars and later, and that Josephus, an intimate of the Flavians, may have known him personally.⁵⁶ Eusebius tells us that Josephus was

the most famous Jew of his own time, not only among his fellow countrymen but also among the Romans, so that they erected a statue in Rome and the seriousness of his works deserved the honour of the library;

the remark echoes the technical phrase *in bibliothecas referre*, used by Tacitus to mean “to publish.”⁵⁷ It would not be surprising to find that Josephus addressed Epaphroditus as the curator/publisher of his works, exactly in the same way as Cicero addressed his friend Titus Pomponius Atticus, or Quintilian, in the *praefatio* of his *Institutio oratoria*, dispatched his work to his publisher, the freedman Tryphon.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Cf. Goodman 1999: 57–58.

⁵⁶ Definitions adapted by Garzetti 1950: 98. Protector of philosophers and ideal *princeps*: Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* 8.27, 171 K. *Vit. soph.* 1.10, 217 K; 2.1, 235 K. Passion for Stoic philosophy: Cass. D. *Hist. Rom.* 67.15.5–6. *Frugalissimus princeps*: Plin. *Pan.* 51.2.

⁵⁷ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 3.9.2–3: μάλιστα δὲ τῶν κατέκεινο καιροῦ Ἰουδαίων οὐ παρὰ μόνοις τοῖς ὁμοεθνήσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις γέγονεν ἀνὴρ ἐπιδοξότατος, ὥς αὐτὸν μὲν ἀναθέσει ἀνδριάντος ἐπὶ τῆς Ῥωμαίων τιμηθῆναι πόλεως, τοὺς δὲ σπουδασθέντας αὐτῷ λόγους βιβλιοθήκης ἀξιωθῆναι. On the phrase *in bibliothecas referre* as a technical phrase, probably originating in the 90s CE, used by Tac. *Dial.* 21 to mean “to publish,” see Kleberg 2002: 47–48.

⁵⁸ On Tryphon as the curator and publisher of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*, see Kleberg 2002: 55–56.

5. Conclusion. Strategies of integration and strategies of resistance

The data examined above suggests that the perception of Jews and Egyptians as populations of the same stock was created in the early Hellenistic period, under Ptolemy I and II, to facilitate the integration of Jewish immigrants in Egypt. The fact that Hecataeus and Manetho produced interpretations of the Exodus in which the Jews were a colony of Egypt betrays the colonial motivation of this ethno-graphy. However, this schema cannot be regarded only as a definition superimposed by the Greek or Roman conquerors, as documents show that many Jews of Egypt saw themselves as Egyptians, due to figures like Artapanus and Aristobulus, who extolled Moses as an Egyptian Sage, the Patriarchs as Egyptian-hellenistic heroes, and Jewish Law as the best philosophy for a Jewish aristocratic audience. In the Roman period, the Jewish-Egyptian association certainly helped the Roman conquerors to understand some cultural peculiarities of both populations, such as circumcision. However, after Rome took over both Judea and Egypt, the Hellenistic “kinship theory” was less well received. Philo, writing in the Julio-Claudian period, refutes it vehemently; his position is clearly influenced by the fact that he was working in the context of the Jewish-Alexandrian riots of 38–41 CE which debated whether the Jews of Alexandria should be regarded as “Alexandrians” or downgraded to the rank of “Egyptians.” The fact that Philo denigrates the Egyptians and praises Rome is both sincere and rhetorical because, *de facto*, the real, common enemy of both Jews and Egyptians was Rome.

The cultural separation, then the conflict between Jews and Egyptians became harsher after the imposition of the Roman domination, above all after the disastrous outcome of the Jewish revolt against Rome of 66–70 CE. Simultaneously, the Jews of the Diaspora tended to become more radical and rebuilt their national pride around the Law, the only religious centre left for both philosophical discussion and concrete political action. By the time Josephus wrote the *Contra Apionem*, the separation between the two peoples had degenerated into a violent conflict. The pro-Egyptian policy of the Flavians probably exasperated the frictions between Jews and Egyptians over the problem of payment of the Jewish tax. Echoes of the riots may be found in the literature of the *Acta Alexandrinorum* while several papyri show that the Egyptians sided with Rome against the Jewish Diaspora revolt of 115–117. That revolt, in which the Great Synagogue of Alexandria was destroyed, marked the end of any peaceful cohabitation between Jews and Egyptians.⁵⁹

Josephus’ *Contra Apionem* defended the thesis that the Jews were not Egyptians. By denigrating and condemning extravagant Egyptian cults and extolling sober Jewish piety, Josephus actually depicted the change of regime from the

⁵⁹ I follow the interpretation of the Diaspora Revolt by Pucci Ben Ze’ev 1981 and 2005.

damnatio of Domitian to the rise of Nerva, who embodied the justice-loving religion described by Josephus. The “interlude of tolerance” towards Jews and Judaism in the brief reign of Nerva must be the time when Josephus published the *Contra Apionem* via the agency of Epaphroditus, who possibly acted as publisher of the last works of Josephus. By this time, the cultural distinction between Jews and Egyptians had become an irreversible conflict.⁶⁰

The evidence examined above also shows that the subtle rhetoric of the *Contra Apionem* may be regarded as a “strategy of resistance” of the kind that we find in colonial or postcolonial literature.⁶¹ If, and when, the treatise was interpreted or used by the most radical Jews as a “handbook of military resistance” in the preparation of subsequent revolts against Rome, is a problem that recalls post-colonial situations, both ancient and modern, and deserves a separate discussion.⁶²

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⁶⁰ “Interlude of tolerance.” phrase coined by Goodman 1999.

⁶¹ On the need to adopt a postcolonial perspective to study the *Contra Apionem*, see Berthelot 2000, Barclay 2005. On “strategies of resistance,” see Bhabha 1994.

⁶² As suggested, for instance, by Kashner 1996: 150–157.

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The Nag Hammadi Codices in the Complex World of 4th- and 5th-Cent. Egypt*

Hugo Lundhaug

The world was more complex than we know and, I suspect, more ideologically interwoven than the surviving sources allow us to imagine.¹

This is a sensible starting point for any historical study, yet it is frequently disregarded. James Goehring's statement concerns the world of early Egyptian monasticism, a world that is still commonly described in ways that owe too much to idealised notions, *clichéd* generalisations, and broad categories to do justice to the diversity of our surviving sources.

In studies of the Nag Hammadi Codices one often encounters the claim that they were manufactured and owned by people who were in opposition to, or even outright conflict with, institutional, ecclesiastical Christianity. Sometimes the owners are thought to have been members of a group of "Gnostics," either on their own, or in hiding among the orthodox. Even scholars who would refrain from categorizing the owners as "Gnostics" have tended to hold that they must clearly have been in opposition to the institutional church of Egypt. In this essay I aim to complicate this picture.

1. The Nag Hammadi Codices and monasticism

In the first major study of the Nag Hammadi Codices, Jean Doresse concluded that "whoever may have possessed them, they cannot have been monks."² The

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¹ Goehring 2010: 70.

² Doresse 1960: 135. The study was originally published in French: see Doresse 1958.

contents of the codices were simply not compatible with the kind of literature Doresse imagined that the early monks could have been reading. While not all scholars have agreed with this conclusion, many of whom have argued for a Pachomian provenance,³ a majority of scholars have had trouble reconciling the contents of the Nag Hammadi Codices with their picture of early monasticism. John Barns, for instance, who was convinced that the codices were owned by Pachomian monks,⁴ was less certain regarding what function they would have served within the Pachomian community. Like Doresse, Barns had difficulty understanding why the Pachomians would have read such unorthodox texts. After all, the early Pachomians are traditionally thought to have been well in line with Alexandrian orthodoxy. The problem was to understand why “we find works of extreme and varied heterodoxy in a plainly orthodox context.”⁵

Why would Pachomian monks have had codices like these? To answer this question, we need to address both the assumption that the codices in fact contain “works of extreme and varied heterodoxy” and the assumption that the early Pachomian monasteries in fact constituted such a “plainly orthodox context.” Together, these assumptions constitute the main obstacles to the incorporation of the Nag Hammadi Codices in studies of early monasticism. Not only has overly idealised notions of early Egyptian monasticism made it difficult to understand how the Pachomians could have read heterodox texts, but at the same time the unfortunate classification of the Nag Hammadi texts as “Gnostic,” has contributed to preventing scholars from seeing the less heterodox features of these texts. The combination of these two factors has proved a major hindrance to the understanding of the Nag Hammadi Codices as monastic books. Instead of asking why, and how, monks could have read individual Nag Hammadi texts or codices, scholars have tried to find connections between the broader categories of “Gnosticism” and monasticism. This is reflected in Armand Veilleux’s claim that

One would be on a firmer basis to elaborate theories about the relations between Egyptian monasticism and Gnosticism if real literary contacts between the two could be found, that is, if quotations of Nag Hammadi texts were found in monastic sources or vice versa.⁶

³ E.g., Robinson 1977 and 1990: 1–26; Scholten 1988; Wisse 1978; Goehring 1999: 162–186, 196–218; 2001.

⁴ In his preliminary report on the papyri recovered from the cartonnage of the Nag Hammadi Codices’ covers, Barns argued that when the site of the discovery was taken into consideration, the cartonnage papyri clearly indicated a Pachomian monastic provenance: Barns 1975. Later, after Barns’ death, his conclusions were severely criticised by Shelton 1981. Research conducted by the NEWCONT-project at the University of Oslo, however, supports Barns’ conclusions on this point. See esp. Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 104–145 on the cartonnage evidence.

⁵ Barns 1975: 16.

⁶ Veilleux 1986: 291.

It is clear from this statement that Veilleux regards “Gnosticism” as a category that needs to be accounted for when discussing the users of the Nag Hammadi Codices. In his view, the Nag Hammadi Codices contain “Gnostic” texts, and, as such, are evidence of “Gnosticism,” which he again found difficult to reconcile with monasticism, and hence a monastic context.

Veilleux argues that since there is no overlap between the Nag Hammadi texts and monastic sources, monks are not likely to have copied the Nag Hammadi Codices. “No text of Nag Hammadi uses a source that is monastic in the strict sense, Egyptian or not,” he claims, “and no monastic source quotes a Coptic document from Nag Hammadi.”⁷ Monasticism and Gnosticism, Veilleux argues, thus seems to belong to two separate worlds.⁸ While this argument may sound persuasive, there are several problems with it. Not only does it downplay the fact that, as Veilleux indeed admits,⁹ we do in fact find a clear instance of direct overlap between the Nag Hammadi texts and monastic literature,¹⁰ but it is also also obscures the fact that there is a number of themes in the Nag Hammadi texts that are common in sources that have a secure monastic provenance. Discussions of the ascetic life, repentance, visions, ascents, demons, resurrection, etc. are often so similar that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they reflect at least a similar milieu. The lack of quotations in the Nag Hammadi texts of sources with a secure monastic provenance may simply be due to the chronology of our sources, as the Nag Hammadi Codices significantly predate the majority of monastic sources in terms of their surviving manuscript evidence. The lack of references to the Nag Hammadi texts in other monastic sources could again be because the latter, preserved in significantly later manuscripts, may have been purged of such references at some stage prior to the making of our surviving sources.

It is difficult to over-emphasised the misleading nature of the category of “Gnosticism” when trying to identify and understand the owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices. As Michael Williams’ has forcefully argued, this category, “burdened as it is with misleading stereotype and confusion,” should no longer feature in such analyses.¹¹ As Samuel Rubenson puts it, “earlier debates about the relations of early monasticism to Gnosticism have become outdated.”¹² The implications of following Williams’ advice were quickly realised by Philip Rousseau, who in the preface of the revised paperback edition of his study on Pachomius acknowledged that Williams had managed to

⁷ Veilleux 1986: 291.

⁸ Veilleux 1986: 291.

⁹ Veilleux 1986: 293–299.

¹⁰ A part of the *Teachings of Silvanus* also circulated under the name of St. Antony. See Funk 1976.

¹¹ Williams 2005: 78. See also Williams 1996; 2013; King 2003; Desjardins 2005; Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 56–73.

¹² Rubenson 2004: 523.

unscramble the rigid polarisation that has encouraged scholars to limit to Gnostic circles the attribution of, among other things, certain rigorist tendencies, and to exclude from those same circles, on the other hand, all supposedly orthodox religious beliefs and inclinations.¹³

The result, Rousseau admits, is that “a less interrupted spectrum of opinion and practice” is seen “across all those communities that regarded themselves, in one sense or another, as Christian.”¹⁴ This is an important point, as it implies a significant blurring of the picture and makes the various early Christian communities appear “more ambiguous or eclectic”¹⁵ than commonly realised.

Rousseau has not been alone in pointing out the fact that the late antique religious landscape may have been more complex than one used to think. James Goehring has in many publications painted a compelling picture of early Egyptian monasticism as more doctrinally diverse and complex than scholarly accounts have tended to allow for, and in one of his more recent articles, cited at the beginning of this essay, he calls for scholars to imagine “a more complex world,” with a lesser degree of ideological homogeneity than commonly assumed on the basis of the surviving monastic sources.¹⁶

Why might a community of ostensibly orthodox and highly biblically literate monks have copied and read non-canonical texts like those of the Nag Hammadi codices? And if this was in fact the case, what was the actual relationship between heterodoxy and orthodoxy in the monasteries? Could any monks, not to mention ostensibly “orthodox” monks, have read the Nag Hammadi Codices for purposes other than heresiology?¹⁷ J. Robinson, for instance, while arguing in favor of a connection between the Nag Hammadi Codices and Pachomian monasticism, admitted that it was difficult for him “to imagine just why a Pachomian monastery would manufacture heretical books.”¹⁸

¹³ Rousseau 1999: xxviii–xxix.

¹⁴ Rousseau 1999: xxix.

¹⁵ Rousseau 1999: xxix. Moreover, as Michel Desjardins has pointed out, “Almost all the sources we now call gnostic are in fact Christian, although many interpreters have invested in not recognizing that fact” (Desjardins 2005: 380).

¹⁶ Goehring 2010. See also Goehring 1999: 162–186; 196–218.

¹⁷ That the monks may have copied the Nag Hammadi text for heresiological purposes was famously suggested by Sävje-Söderbergh 1975. While this suggestion preserves the notion of Pachomian monasticism as perfectly orthodox and the Nag Hammadi Codices as well and truly heterodox, it is problematic on at least two grounds. First, the colophons and scribal notes found in the codices indicate that those who made them had a more edifying function in mind, and second, it is difficult to imagine that those in Upper Egypt who would spend major resources manufacturing a significant number of codices like these would not be more interested in their contents than this suggestion implies. As Henry Chadwick puts it, “it is at least fair to conclude that our new documents must have been regarded by their monkish readers as edifying stuff, perhaps too esoteric to be allowed loose among the generality in the monastery, but certainly not obviously abhorrent, and unlikely to encourage abnormal behavior” (Chadwick 1980: 16).

¹⁸ Robinson 1977: 1.

There is no doubt that the production, use, and possession of codices containing texts like those of the Nag Hammadi Codices would become increasingly problematic. Not only do we find reference in the Pachomian literature to the distribution and status of Athanasius' 39th *Epistula festalis* of 367 in the Pachomian monasteries,¹⁹ but we also know that there was a strict system of literary censorship in the White Monastery federation of Shenoute,²⁰ a kind of censorship we also have evidence of in a letter to Shenoute from archbishop Dioscorus.²¹ Nevertheless, these sources strongly suggest that such non-canonical literature *was* in fact in circulation among the monks.²²

2. Enemies of the "Great Church"?

If the Nag Hammadi Codices were in fact in circulation among the monks, what does this tell us about the monks? Were the owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices enemies of the "Great Church"? This has often been stated or implicitly assumed. A close connection has often been presupposed between the contents of the Nag Hammadi texts and the owners and readers of the Nag Hammadi Codices, and it has been assumed that the presence of "Gnostic" books presupposes the presence of "Gnostic" readers. There are two main problems with these assumptions. Firstly, we cannot take for granted that the theological outlook of the readers of the codices matched that of the texts. People do not necessarily believe all that is stated in the books they own or read. Secondly, if we abandon the category and no longer read the Nag Hammadi texts as evidence of "Gnosticism," we need no longer assume that the presence of these codices in a monastery implies that the monks were "Gnostics," or that there were "Gnostics" somehow hiding out among the monks.²³ Indeed, it has been speculated that the codices may have been owned by "Gnostic" monks who may at some point "have been forced to withdraw to the caves at the edge of the desert – where their library was discovered."²⁴ Regrettably such sugges-

¹⁹ SBo 189. On Athanasius' 39th *Epistula festalis*, see Brakke 2010; Camplani 2003. On its application in the Pachomian monasteries, see Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 168–169.

²⁰ See esp. Shenoute, *You, God the Eternal*, XS 385–386 (Leipoldt 1906–1913: 3.72); cf. the discussion in Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 174–175.

²¹ See Thompson 1922; Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 175–176.

²² As Robinson puts it, "[Athanasius'] letter was translated into Coptic in order to be read by the monks in the Pachomian monasteries, which suggests that a house-cleaning was required" (Robinson 1977: 2). On the monastic use of Apocrypha, see Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 146–177.

²³ Robinson, for instance, once suggested that "If there were any Gnostics among the first Pachomian monks, they were gradually weeded out" (Robinson 1977: 1).

²⁴ Robinson 1977: 2.

tions owe more to the common classification of the Nag Hammadi Codices as a “Gnostic” library, than to in-depth comparisons between the Nag Hammadi texts and other sources of early monasticism.

A further problem caused by the assumption that the Nag Hammadi Codices are “Gnostic,” and the use of “Gnosticism” as an analytical category is the fact that each individual Nag Hammadi text has tended to be read in light of that category, with all that entails in terms of expected attitudes and dogmas. As Michael Williams puts it, it is

an analytical framework that too often is a distorting lens, throwing up clichéd expectations that obscure what is actually in a text.²⁵

Since the codices have been taken to be “Gnostic,” their contents have also been interpreted from such a perspective. And since scholars have focused on the hypothetical Greek originals, usually assumed to derive from the 2nd or 3rd cent., rather than on the preserved Coptic texts, the Nag Hammadi texts have been interpreted on the basis of contexts fundamentally different from that of the Coptic milieu in which the extant texts were in fact manufactured and read. This, again, has lead scholars to interpret the Nag Hammadi texts in ways that are very different from the ways we can expect their actual 4th- or 5th-cent. readers in Upper Egypt to have interpreted them.

How, then, can we use the Nag Hammadi texts as evidence of the latter? On the one hand we may catch glimpses of the producers of the codices from analyses of the codices’ scribal, codicological, and paratextual features, as well as from the various papyrus documents reused as cartonnage to stiffen the covers.²⁶ But how, on the other hand, can we do so on the basis of the contents of the texts? To what degree do the Nag Hammadi *texts* reflect the interests and concerns of the owners of the *codices*? As mentioned above, we cannot assume that the readers of the codices would agree with all that is expressed in them. Nevertheless, we should expect to gain a sense of some of their interests from the contents of the codices. After all, they did spend considerable time and resources on the making of these books, so we should expect their contents to have been of some interest to them. How, then, do we get at what exactly may have interested them in these books?

What we can do is to try to read the texts in light of the context of the codices’ production and use, on the basis of what we may surmise about their producers and users from the scribal and codicological features of the codices, their date of production, the cartonnage evidence, and the location of their discovery. Since this evidence clearly indicates that the Nag Hammadi Codices were produced and used by Upper Egyptian monks,²⁷ there is good reason to

²⁵ Williams 2008: 245.

²⁶ See Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 104–145, 178–233.

²⁷ For a thorough discussion of the evidence, see Lundhaug, Jenott 2015.

try to read the Nag Hammadi texts in light of early monastic sources. Some scholars, most notably Stephen Emmel and Tito Orlandi, have indeed called for a reading of the Nag Hammadi texts exactly as they have been preserved in Coptic, from the point of view of the Egyptian context of their production and use.²⁸ When we follow this call, however, it is crucial to take into consideration the textual fluidity inherent in the transmission of texts in a manuscript culture, and not least with regard to texts like those of the Nag Hammadi Codices.²⁹ Indeed, several of the Nag Hammadi texts show signs of having been significantly rewritten, or edited, in light of the kind of concerns that are characteristic of a time much later than the commonly assumed 2nd- to 3rd-cent. dates of the hypothetical originals.³⁰ Some of these concerns, in some of the texts, even seem most at home in a context at least as late as the second half of the 4th cent. This is for instance the case with the *Gospel of Philip*, which takes the Nicene Creed for granted in its important underlying discussions of begetting versus creating, and which shows awareness of the Origenist controversy in its treatment of the resurrection.³¹ Many of these texts are thus likely to have been reworked to make them relevant to the concerns of those who read and transmitted them in the 4th cent., or even later. Sometimes, even the composition of the texts may be late. There is indeed no way of knowing how far back in time we may, in each individual case, date the original compositions. In any case, late revisions and echoes of contemporary concerns can provide us with clues to the interests of the producers and owners of the codices.

3. The *Apocalypse of Peter*

When we shift our perspective from the authorship of the Nag Hammadi texts and their original audiences to that of the scribes and readers of these particular manuscripts, without employing “Gnosticism” as an analytical category, the meaning-potential of the Nag Hammadi texts is significantly changed and other aspects foregrounded. Indeed, the difference between reading the texts from the point of view of the 2nd or 3rd cent. versus that of the 4th or 5th is often profound.

A good example of this can be seen in the case of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, one of the texts that have most frequently been cited as evidence of “Gnostic”

²⁸ Emmel 1997: 34–43; Orlandi 2007.

²⁹ See Lundhaug 2015. On the use of the methodology of New Philology to study such phenomena, see Lundhaug, Lied 2017.

³⁰ See, e.g., Camplani 1995; 1997; Lundhaug, forthcoming (b).

³¹ See esp. Lundhaug 2013. On the *Gospel of Philip*’s treatment of the resurrection, see also Lundhaug forthcoming (a), which also discusses the *Treatise on the Resurrection*’s concept of the resurrection.

polemic against the “Great Church” and institutional Christianity. This text is known from a single manuscript,³² and we know that this manuscript, NHC VII, cannot have been manufactured earlier than the middle of the 4th cent. Yet the *Apocalypse of Peter* has commonly been interpreted from a significantly earlier perspective,³³ and through the lens of “Gnosticism.” Birger Pearson represents the majority view when he states that the text “presents the apostle Peter as the founder of the Gnostic community and the chief protagonist in a struggle against orthodox ecclesiastical Christianity.”³⁴

To Pearson, the text is representative of an embattled “Petrine-Gnostic community, probably located somewhere in Egypt,” whom he thinks is “facing a mounting ecclesiastical opposition.”³⁵ This interpretation, however, depends on a certain perspective of the nature of the hypothetical original text and its context, and it is possible to read the text very differently with a shift in interpretive perspective.

There is one passage in particular that has often been cited by those who have argued that the *Apocalypse of Peter* is engaged in a polemic against institutional Christianity:

But others outside our number shall be named bishop, and deacons too, as if they have received their authority from God, while they bend themselves under the judgment of the leaders. Those are the waterless canals.³⁶

This passage has generally been understood to be polemical against *all* bishops and deacons, and thus against institutionalised ecclesiastical Christianity in general. Wilfred Griggs, for example, claims that the *Apocalypse of Peter* here “identifies the real apostates with those who have ecclesiastical authority.”³⁷ Similarly, Elaine Pagels has argued that the text “ridicules the claims of church officials,” and asserts that it identifies all bishops and deacons as “waterless canals.”³⁸

This interpretation may seem convincing until one realises that this is in fact not the only possible interpretation of the passage. What is actually stat-

³² One significant exception, however, is Molinari 2006. The Coptic *Apocalypse of Peter* preserved in NHC VII.3 is not the same text as the *Apocalypse of Peter* treated by T. Nicklas at pages 27–46 of this volume.

³³ See, e.g., Koschorke 1978: 11–90; Havelaar 1999; Hellholm 1995.

³⁴ Pearson 1990: 89. According to Pearson, “no one can doubt that it is a Gnostic work and therefore, from the standpoint of early catholic orthodoxy, thoroughly ‘heretical’” (Pearson 1990: 89).

³⁵ Pearson 1990: 97.

³⁶ *Apoc. Pet.* NHC VII,3.79.21–31: ⲉϥⲉⲱⲛⲉ ⲁⲉ ⲛⲓⲣⲉⲛⲕⲟⲟϥⲉ ⲛⲧⲉⲛⲛ ⲉⲧⲥⲁⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲛⲛⲉⲧⲉ ⲉϥⲧⲣⲁⲛ ⲉⲣⲟⲟϥ ⲁⲉⲣⲉⲛⲕⲟⲛⲟⲥⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲓ ⲁⲉ ⲣⲉⲛⲁⲓⲁⲕⲱⲛ ⲣⲱⲥ ⲉⲁϣⲓ ⲛⲛⲟϥⲉⲃⲟϥⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲣⲓⲧⲛⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲉϥⲣⲓⲕⲉ ⲛⲛⲟⲟϥ ⲣⲁⲛⲣⲁⲛ ⲛⲧⲉⲛⲓⲱⲣⲧⲓⲛⲁ ⲛⲣⲓⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲛ ⲉⲧⲓⲛⲁϥ ⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲱⲣ ⲛⲁⲧⲛⲟⲟϥ (Coptic text from Brashler 1996: 238).

³⁷ Griggs 2000: 85.

³⁸ Pagels 1979: 25, 40, 106.

ed is that there are also *other* people, *apart from* the community of the implied author (“others outside our number”), who will come to be referred to as bishops and deacons, who are unworthy of such titles and who are therefore properly described as “waterless canals.” This does not imply that *all* bishops and deacons are bad, but simply that there are – or rather, *will be* – bishops and deacons who are bad, *despite* being called bishops and deacons. There is nothing in this passage, or in the rest of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, to suggest that the Christian community of the implied author did not also have bishops and deacons, or that *proper* bishops and deacons did not have their authority from God. I would thus argue that this passage should not be taken as a polemic against bishops and deacons as such.³⁹ It is not true, as has been claimed, that the text simply “identifies the real apostates with those who have ecclesial authority.”⁴⁰ Rather, it states that there will be ecclesiastical authorities who will be apostates.

Who, then, are these bad bishops and deacons? Are they representatives of the “Great Church”? They *might* be, but not necessarily. If we read the *Apocalypse of Peter* from a 4th- or 5th-cent. perspective, that is, from the perspective of the readers of the preserved Coptic manuscript, there is nothing to prevent the reader from understanding the passage to refer just as easily to bad bishops and deacons in general, regardless of theological or ecclesiastical affiliation, or perhaps to clergy from the rival Melitian church, as to orthodox clergy in particular. Indeed, the statement may in fact be read as a prophecy of the coming divisions in the church of Egypt, and as a direct reference to the “illegal” ordinations of the Melitians, referring to the Melitian bishops and deacons as “waterless canals.”⁴¹ The possibility of such an “orthodox” reading of the text should not be lightly dismissed. The *Apocalypse of Peter*’s polemics in other parts of the text, against excessive practices of penance, and against placing too much weight on suffering, could also be read as being directed against the Melitians, who were stricter regarding the penance of the *lapsi* and valued martyrdom highly.⁴²

While there is a fair bit of polemic going on in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the interpretive possibilities are more varied than commonly acknowledged. When the text states that the opponents think

they might perfect the wisdom of the brotherhood that really exists, which is the community of the spirit and those rooted together in a koinonia, from which the wedding of incorruption shall be revealed,

³⁹ Cf. Desjardins 1996: 213, n. 44: “The polemic against the bishops and deacons in 79,24–26 may not be directed at the offices themselves. It is more likely that the author considers the offices false because they do not have the authority of the true Father.”

⁴⁰ Griggs 2000: 85.

⁴¹ On Melitian clergy see, e.g., Camplani 2011; Wipszycka 2006; Van Nuffelen 2012.

⁴² See, e.g., Hauben 1998.

and adds that “The similar race of the sisterhood shall appear as an imitation,”⁴³ it makes a great deal of difference whether we choose to interpret this from a 2nd- or 4th-cent. perspective. When read from the perspective of a 4th- or 5th-cent. monastic context, the terminology used here carries a number of connotations that are significantly different from those that are available when the focus is on a much earlier hypothetical original. To a 4th-cent. Pachomian monk, for instance, such references to a community of people living together in a *koinonia* as a true brotherhood could hardly fail to bring to the reader’s mind his own monastic brotherhood of the Pachomian *koinonia*. Similarly, the fake brotherhood and imitation sisterhood could easily be understood as references to bad monks, or to a rival monastic community or communities.⁴⁴

In short, Nag Hammadi-passages that are often adduced as evidence of polemics against institutional, ecclesiastical Christianity can be understood more generally as references to internal strife and doctrinal controversy within the church that are not so easy to place on the orthodoxy-heresy continuum.

4. Codex VII

The *Apocalypse of Peter* is part of NHC VII, and this codex is again connected to Codices XI and I by overlapping scribes.⁴⁵ How does it affect our understanding of the *Apocalypse of Peter* or its readers if we take this context into consideration? Taking as their starting point Michael Williams’ proposal that there is an intentional structure to the sequence of texts in the Nag Hammadi Codices, Louis Painchaud and Michael Kaler have suggested that these three codices were compiled in order to be read in sequence so as to

progressively introduce the reader to a heterodox and esoteric doctrine of religious conflict and polemic, in which the reader is invited to identify him or herself with an embattled minority group within the larger Christian community.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Apoc. Pet.* NHC VII,3.78.34–79.11: ⲉϥⲛⲁⲕⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲧⲉⲙⲏⲧⲥⲁⲃⲉ ⲛⲧⲉⲙⲏⲧⲥⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲣⲓ ⲟⲩⲧⲱⲥ ⲉⲧⲉⲙⲏⲧⲱⲃⲏⲣ ⲛⲧⲉⲙⲏⲧⲱⲃⲏⲣ ⲛⲏⲟϥⲛⲉ ⲉⲛⲟϥⲕⲟⲓⲛⲱⲛⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲉⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲓⲧⲱⲟⲧⲥ ⲉⲩⲉⲟϥⲱⲛⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲟⲩⲡⲓⲕⲓⲱⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ ⲛⲧⲉⲙⲏⲧⲁⲩⲱⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲩⲛⲁⲟϥⲱⲛⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲟⲩⲡⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲉⲙⲏⲧⲥⲱⲛⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁⲟϥⲁⲛⲧⲓⲛⲓⲟⲛ (Coptic text from Brashler 1996: 236).

⁴⁴ Indeed, there are several features that show this text to be more complex than scholars initially suspected. Birger Pearson has for instance demonstrated how it is completely dependent on canonical *2 Peter*. As Pearson himself pointed out, some previous scholarship had theorised that *2 Peter* polemicises against Gnostic groups, and some have tried to connect the *Apocalypse of Peter* specifically with such groups, but as Pearson discovered to his surprise, the Nag Hammadi *Apocalypse of Peter*, which he too regarded as well and truly Gnostic, takes many of its important points directly from *2 Peter*. See Pearson 1990.

⁴⁵ See Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 208–209.

⁴⁶ Painchaud, Kaler 2007: 445. For a critique of this theory, see Lundhaug 2016.

But were those who copied, read, and maybe edited, these polemical texts necessarily part of an “embattled minority group” themselves?

When trying to understand the community that may have owned the Nag Hammadi Codices, one needs to consider the question of how representative the contents of these codices are of the reading habits and theology of those who read them. These are pertinent questions, for unless there is good reason to suppose that the Nag Hammadi Codices were the only books produced and read by the community that owned them, or that all their books were similar to these in their contents, how – and why – should we then reconstruct the theological outlook or social identity of these people on the basis of these books alone? It is not easy to reconstruct the views of *any* groups or individuals from the contents of the books they read, let alone from a small selection of them.

There is indeed good reason to expect the owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices to have owned other books as well. That they probably also read canonical Scripture is suggested by the many Scriptural citations and allusions we find throughout the Nag Hammadi texts, which would make no sense to readers without a good knowledge of the canonical texts. Moreover, the cartonnage of Codex VII includes fragments of a codex containing the book of *Genesis* in Coptic, that is palaeographically and codicologically so similar to the Nag Hammadi Codices themselves that it may well have been produced by the same community.⁴⁷ It is also possible that the diverse collection of manuscripts known as the Dishna Papers could derive from the same community.⁴⁸ When we take any or all of these factors into consideration it is clear that the literature consumed by those who owned the Nag Hammadi Codices would have been far broader than what these codices represent on their own – despite their obvious diversity. We therefore cannot hope to discover or reconstruct the character of those who owned the Nag Hammadi Codices on the basis of the contents of these codices alone, as some scholars have attempted.⁴⁹ To do that we need additional sources, as well as a realistic concept of how real people in late antiquity interacted with books, texts, and ideas. We should not expect the results of our investigations to produce a neat and tidy picture of Upper Egyptian Christianity and monasticism. As Birger Pearson rightly points out, “study of the real data of Christian history, and history in general, always produces surprises.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Kasser 1972.

⁴⁸ Goehring 1999: 214–215; Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 223–233; Robinson 2011.

⁴⁹ E.g., Logan 2006. As Roger Bagnall notes, “a text, or even a whole library of texts, does not make a sect or a community” (Bagnall 1993: 304).

⁵⁰ Pearson 1990: 97–98.

5. A complex world

First of all, we need to jettison simplistic notions regarding the outlook and thought patterns of those who read books like the Nag Hammadi Codices. Although their actual thoughts and deliberations would of course be different from ours due to different contexts and experiences, their minds would basically work like ours. There are thus some fundamental insights from how people think and behave today that may be applied to our analyses of the people who owned the Nag Hammadi Codices in late antique Egypt. Indeed, as Michel Desjardins rightly points out, we should assume that people in antiquity, were “at least as clever, complex and contradictory as we are.”⁵¹ Real people, in antiquity and today, often entertain conflicting and even contradictory points of view, and do not necessarily conform to any one clearly defined group. And like today, people in antiquity were able to think for themselves, and could hold notions and read literature that were not necessarily in line with their own overall ideological or theological outlook, not to mention the opinion of their community leaders.⁵²

Moreover, people often act or think in ways that may not necessarily seem logical for an outside observer. We should therefore not lightly dismiss James Goehring’s thought-provoking suggestion that in 4th-cent Egyptian monasticism it may not have been impossible for a monk to read the Nag Hammadi codices while at the same time supporting Athanasius,⁵³ for it reminds us that we should not be quick to draw the conclusion from the presence of heretical ideas in the Nag Hammadi texts, that their readers did not have an interest in orthodoxy, or that they cannot have seen themselves as belonging to the “orthodox” camp. Indeed, as mentioned above, upon closer inspection several of the Nag Hammadi texts in fact betray certain “orthodox” tendencies characteristic of the time of the production of the codices, rather than of the time of the hypothetical originals’ authorship. An awareness of post-Nicene theological and Christological concepts and controversies are sometimes detectable, including anti-Arian or anti-Origenist polemics.⁵⁴ So, not only should we try to imagine a more complex world, we should also try to imagine more complex people – real

⁵¹ Desjardins 2005: 380.

⁵² Cf. Rebillard 2012, where the commonsense fact that also people in antiquity were in possession of “multiple identities” is stressed. This general point is also articulated well by Peter Brown in a recent book review, where he points out that “Early Christians did not spend their entire time being early Christians” (Brown 2013).

⁵³ Goehring 1999: 173. This suggestion has not been universally accepted. See, e.g., Bagnall 1993: 304, n. 252.

⁵⁴ While in most cases we may suspect such cases to be redactional, they may sometimes even be authorial, indicating late authorship of some of the texts. The latter may be the case, e.g., with the *Gospel of Philip* (see Lundhaug 2013).

people, not cardboard cut-out caricatures. Moreover, while the literary sources often present us with a high level of both intercommunal and intracommunal intolerance and conflict, and thus rhetorically construct boundaries that are employed in the construction of identity, we should be wary of being taken in by such rhetorical constructs in our analyses of the lives and activities of the Upper Egyptian monks, and try not to attribute more reality to them than they deserve.⁵⁵

How “orthodox” or “heretical” might the owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices have been? There is good evidence indicating that those who produced and read these books were parts of networks of literary exchange,⁵⁶ but was the exchange of this kind of literature an open and sanctioned practice, or an illicit one, at the time these codices were produced? We know that there were quite some disagreement regarding the usefulness or danger of such literature. While some figures of authority were not inclined to trust the individual reader to sort out the grain from the chaff himself, others felt that for a discerning reader the usefulness of apocryphal literature outweighed the dangers.⁵⁷ The literary network evidenced by the Nag Hammadi Codices may thus have been either an open or an underground undertaking. Alternatively it may have been open

⁵⁵ As Thomas Sizgorich points out, “it has become readily apparent that where previous generations of scholars were content to find self-evident and impermeable divisions and implacable hostilities between that which was orthodox Christian and that which was pagan, Jewish, or heretical Christian the social and intellectual lives of individuals and communities on the ground were in fact less segregated, their associations and affinities less determined by confessional identity, than contemporary sources were often willing to let on or than most modern authors had been willing to imagine” (Sizgorich 2009: 21). In his work on ethnicity, nationalism and race, sociologist Rogers Brubaker has argued that the very concept of “groups” should be reassessed. Critiquing what he terms “groupism” in sociological analyses, he questions the “tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed” (Brubaker 2002: 164). Brubaker’s insights can profitably be applied to the study of Christianity in late antiquity. In the study of early Christianity there has indeed been a tendency to treat groups, such as the “Great Church” or “Origenists,” “Gnostics,” “Melitians,” etc., “as if,” to quote Brubaker, “they were internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes” (ibid.). While such groups may serve as convenient short-hands in the analysis of early Christian texts and conflicts, their use may in many instances create more problems in our analyses than they solve. One of the problems addressed by Brubaker that is also pertinent to the study of Early Christianity is the tendency to treat groups as entities and to cast them as actors (cf. Brubaker 2002: 165). In our case, it is important to remember that when the protagonists in conflicts in late antique Egypt invoke heretical groups in their writings, by doing so they also call them into being, for the purposes of their rhetorical goals (cf. Brubaker 2002: 166; Bourdieu 1991: 220). Following Brubaker we will do well to focus on the “relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated” aspects of the late antique people we study, and not treat groups as our basic analytical categories, but rather what he calls “groupness,” which he understands as “a contextually fluctuating conceptual variables” (Brubaker 2002: 167–168).

⁵⁶ Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 197–206.

⁵⁷ Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 146–151.

for a while before having to go underground at a later stage. Even as an underground literary exchange network, the monks participating in it need not have been heretical or an embattled minority, it just means that they, for one reason or another, were interested in reading this kind of literature. The participation in an illicit activity does not necessarily imply anything with regard to the theological leanings of the people taking part in it. As we have seen, they *may* even have regarded themselves as *allies* of Alexandrian orthodoxy in a doctrinal sense (adhering to the Nicene creed etc.), while at the same time finding value in books like the Nag Hammadi Codices, even while editing some of the texts to make them more relevant for their own present situation. Their sensibilities may well have been broadly orthodox, while they were nevertheless interested in reading a variety of texts. Moreover, as Goehring has suggested, “one need not always assume that the less heterodox texts were read in light of the more heterodox texts, and not the other way round.”⁵⁸

There is thus nothing to prevent, let's say, the *Teachings of Silvanus* from being more representative of the theological outlook of the readers of NHC VII than the *Paraphrase of Shem*, or even the *Apocalypse of Peter*, discussed above.

The books may also have been reserved for an elite within the monastery, as some of the colophons may be taken to indicate. The statement in the colophon at the end of Codex VII that “this book belongs to the fatherhood” could, for instance, mean that the book was reserved for the abbot.⁵⁹ Its contents may conceivably have been seen as too advanced or perhaps too dangerous for the common monk. Again, this in itself does not tell us anything about their attitudes to orthodoxy or the “Great Church.”

It has been pervasively argued, by Goehring and others, that the Pachomian literature, and especially the *Lives*, show signs of silencing evidence of early monastic diversity and of painting a deceptively “orthodox” picture of the early Pachomian communities as being defined just as much along doctrinal as ascetic lines. Some scholars have suggested that Pachomius and the early Pachomian monks were not all that interested in theology or doctrine, but were instead united by common ascetic interests. Chadwick has even gone so far as to claim that “it is not inherently *probable* that Pachomios was interested in the niceties of orthodox doctrine as a theological system.”⁶⁰ Wisse, for his part, proposed that the monks may have been more concerned with practice than

⁵⁸ Goehring 2010: 69.

⁵⁹ *Steles Seth* NHC VII,5.127.28: πῆχωνε πατῆρ τεῖων (Coptic text in Robinson, Goehring 1996: 420). See the discussion in Lundhaug, Jenott 2015: 178–183.

⁶⁰ Chadwick 1981: 18 (emphasis added). Chadwick asks the pertinent question “to what extent it is reasonable to think the early Pachomian tradition largely indifferent where dogma is concerned, content to make use of a diversity of gifts so long as they encourage renunciation of the world” (ibid.). Chadwick points out that he is not trying to “‘discover’ Pachomios to have been a heretical ascetic subsequently covered in orthodox plasterwork.”

theology, claiming that “for the monks the main issue was not orthodoxy but orthopraxy.”⁶¹ Robinson has likewise suggested that

the unity holding together the vast diversity of myths and religious backgrounds represented in the library seems to lie in the extreme asceticism that pervades both the library and the Pachomian monastic movement.⁶²

Yet, while Goehring’s similar assertion that “The early Pachomians came together as ascetics, not as theologians,”⁶³ may be true, it is also impossible to verify, and the intensely polemical contents of quite a few of the Nag Hammadi texts, and the late revisions made to several of them, seem rather to imply an awareness of contemporary, post-Nicene, theological and church-political controversies among the transmitters of these texts. Ascetic practice may certainly have been a major interest of the owners of the Nag Hammadi Codices, but it was probably not the only thing that interested them, and likely not the only reason why they copied and read these texts.

6. Conclusion

Armand Veilleux once concluded that

If someday it could be proved that the Nag Hammadi library was assembled by Pachomian monks, I would like to think that we shall find that they assembled it not out of ignorance or because they did not care for orthodoxy.⁶⁴

A Pachomian provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices is highly likely⁶⁵ and Veilleux may well have been right in his assessment of their motivation for producing and reading such books. Exactly how and why Egyptian monks read, copied, and edited the texts of the Nag Hammadi Codices are questions that are in need of much further research. Even then, the only way we can hope to understand these codices in their proper context is by acknowledging a much higher degree of complexity than we may be accustomed to, by ditching all-too-convenient categories that have shown themselves to be unhelpful, and by comparing individual tractates to other sources contemporary with the Nag Hammadi Codices themselves. While doing so, we might do well to remember, as the First Greek *Vita Pachomii* points out, that “in a community [...] there are all kinds of people.”⁶⁶ I see no reason to dismiss the possibility that there

⁶¹ Wisse 1978: 437.

⁶² Robinson 1977: 1.

⁶³ Goehring 1999: 199.

⁶⁴ Veilleux 1986: 306.

⁶⁵ See Lundhaug, Jenott 2015.

⁶⁶ G¹ 121 (trans. Veilleux 1980–1982: 1.384).

were monks in the Pachomian monasteries who were capable of thinking for themselves and reading the Nag Hammadi Codices with a critical mind,⁶⁷ finding inspiration in some of their contents while rejecting others.

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⁶⁷ Goehring notes that while he has "no doubt that various of the monks understood what they read and were capable of using the material discriminately," he believes that "they initially discriminated in how they read a text (and possibly who could read it) and only later in terms of which texts they, as a community, were allowed to possess" (Goehring 1999: 216, n. 66).

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Part Five
The Construction of Authority
in Philosophical and Religious Schools

Moses “Prophet” of God in the Works of Philo

Or How to Use *Otherness* to Construct *Selfness*

Carmine Pisano

1. Philo and the “biography” of Moses

At the beginning of his *De vita Mosis*, written around the first half of the 1st cent. CE, Philo states:

I have decided to write the life of Moses, he who for some is the lawgiver of the Jews, and for others the interpreter of the holy laws, a man of truly great valour and perfect, with the intention of making it known to all those who deserve not to be ignorant of it. Indeed, though the fame of the laws he left has spread to all the inhabited world and has reached the edges of the earth, few know who he really was; the Greek writers, later, disdained from mentioning him, certainly because of envy and not rarely because of the clear conflict between the Mosaic legislation and the norms given by the legislators in the various cities.¹

This large-scale programmatic context accurately delineates the purposes and the intended public of Philo’s “biography.”² The fundamental objective is to “make the life of Moses known to all those who deserve not to be ignorant of it.” The latter, the addressees of Philo’s message, coincide, in part, with the large number of Jews that do not “know who Moses really was,” and, in part, with the Greeks who, both because of envy and because of the irreconcilability between the Mosaic legislation and the Hellenic norms, “disdained from mentioning him” in their writings, preferring to treat licentious themes rather than models of virtue.³ In other words, Philo’s intent is both to establish the “correct” interpretation of the figure of Moses within the Jewish setting⁴ and to assert his importance within the limits of the hitherto “refractory” Greek context with which, and within which, Alexandrian Judaism, and not only, cohabits.⁵ The double destination of

¹ Phil. *Mos.* 1.1–2.

² On characteristics and forms of the ancient biography cf. Momigliano 1971; Edwards, Goodman, Price, Rowland 1999; Mazza 1999; Hägg, Rousseau, Høges 2000; McGing, Mossman 2006. On Philo’s use of the historical-biographical genre in the *De vita Mosis* see Canevet 1986 and McGing 2006.

³ *Mos.* 1.3.

⁴ Cf. Feldman 2007. On the multiple interpretations of the figure of Moses in the ancient world see Borgeaud, Römer, Volokhine 2010.

⁵ On this issue see Gager 1972. The double destination of Philo’s work is rightly stressed

the work, *ad intra* and *ad extra*, clearly emerges from the double image of Moses that Philo provides at the beginning of the work, claiming that “for some Moses is the lawgiver of the Jews, and for others the interpreter of the holy laws.”⁶ To the biblical νομοθέτης, the title with which Moses is generally known to Greek and Roman authors,⁷ Philo adds the ἐρμηνεύς νόμων ἱερῶν of the Judeo-Hellenistic tradition, a syntagm that defines Moses as the “prophet” chosen by God to communicate the Law to Israel.⁸ For Philo no real contrast exists between the two figures of the lawgiver and of the prophet, because both contribute to delineating the image of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ (“divine man”) who unites in his own persona – on the model of the Hellenistic sovereign – the otherwise distinct functions of the king, the lawgiver, the priest and the prophet.⁹ And it is really on the latter Mosaic function, the prophetic function, to which Philo assigns particular importance within the entire *corpus* of his works, that we shall concentrate our attention, in that it presents itself as a symbolic place of intercultural cohabitation, of a real and true *métissage* of Greek and Jewish elements.¹⁰ On this issue, we shall see, above all, what acting as προφήτης means for Philo.

2. The “prophet” Moses between Judaism and Platonism

Philo outlines image and prerogatives of the prophet in numerous places of his wide literary production. In this sense, a particularly eloquent account is a famous passage of the essay *De praemiis et poenis*, in which it is declared that “the προφήτης is ἐρμηνεύς of God, who suggests to him interiorly (ἐνδοθεν ὑπηχοῦντος) what he must say” (*Praem.* 55). In other words, the prophet trans-

by Sfameni Gasparro 2004: 34–35. On problems connected to the horizon of expectation and to the addressees of the Jewish literature in Greek language cf. Denis 2000.

⁶ Cf. also *Praem.* 55.

⁷ Gager 1972: 25–112.

⁸ Cf. also Artap. FGH 726 F 3a, 6 in which Moses is called Hermes by the Egyptian priests διὰ τὴν τῶν ἱερῶν γραμμάτων ἐρμηνείαν. On this passage and its interpretation see Arcari, Pisano 2013: 103–112.

⁹ On the figure of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ cf. Brown 1971; Holladay 1977; Cox 1989; Anderson 1994; Flinterman 1996; Dzielska 1998. On Moses as king and prophet: Meeks 1967 and 1968; Römer 2010; on Moses as lawgiver: Gager 1972: 25–112; Radice 2003. On the structure of the *De vita Mosis*, divided into sections corresponding to the four Mosaic functions (king, lawgiver, priest, prophet), see McGing 2006.

¹⁰ On the category of *métissage* see Gruzinski 2008. An example of the application of such a category to the study of phenomena of intercultural cohabitation in the ancient world is offered by the essays collected in Belayche, Dubois 2011. On the relationships between Judaism and Hellenism cf. Hengel 1973; Tcherikover 1979; Feldman 1993; Barclay 1996; Collins 2005; Gruen 2010 and, with specific reference to Philo, Hadas-Lebel 2003 and some of the essays collected in Kamesar 2009.

mits to the hearer, “communicates” – this is the sense of ἐρμηνεύειν¹¹ – the words suggested to him by God, acting as a communicative channel between the divinity and his people: “through him” it is God himself that speaks “directly” to Israel.¹² The prophet is not an independent speaker, “his” words do not belong to him in any way: the prophet – Philo states in *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*¹³ – “says nothing of his own, but everything he utters is of another, another that inspires him.” This is a second element of great importance. At the time that he pronounces (in the etymological sense of the term) a message of which he is not the source, the prophet speaks “possessed by God” (ἐπιθειάσας),¹⁴ in a state of “divine inspiration (ἐνθεος κατοκωχή) and of μανία.”¹⁵ Philo could not be clearer:

The prophet does not expose anything whatsoever on his own initiative, but he is the interpreter of another that tells him all the words that he pronounces, in the very moment that he comes to find himself in an inspired state of loss of conscience.¹⁶

And again:

In reality the prophet, also when he seems to speak, is actually silent, because another is serving himself of the organs of prophet’s tongue, mouth and voice, to reveal what he wants.¹⁷

The mouth lends itself particularly well to define the function of the prophet as ἐρμηνεύς of God. In the *De vita Mosis*, Aaron addresses Moses so:

If there was need for an ἐρμηνεύς, as your mouth you would have your brother under-servant, so that he would announce your commands to the people, and you the divine commands to him.¹⁸

Aaron undertakes becoming the ἐρμηνεύς of his brother, announcing (ἀπαγγέλλειν) to the people the divine orders that Moses will communicate to him after having heard them from God himself. To express this in the “physical” terms used by Philo, Aaron will be the “mouth” (στόμα) of Moses in the same way that Moses, himself an ἐρμηνεύς, is the “mouth” of God.¹⁹ Just as the

¹¹ Bettini 2012: 124–128.

¹² *Spec.* 1.64–65. A useful term of comparison, also traceable to the genre of “hagiographic” discourse, is provided by Philostratus’ *Vita Apollonii*, in which the divinity performs prodigies through the θεῖος ἀνὴρ (cf. Hanus 1998; Sfameni Gasparro 2007).

¹³ *Her.* 259.

¹⁴ *Mos.* 2.188.259.263 etc.

¹⁵ *Migr.* 84; *Her.* 250.264.

¹⁶ *Spec.* 4.49.

¹⁷ *Her.* 266.

¹⁸ *Mos.* 1.84.

¹⁹ As ἐρμηνεύς of Moses, ἐρμηνεύς in turn of God, Aaron is the ἐρμηνεύς of an ἐρμηνεύς. This chain of ἐρμηνεύται is clearly of Platonic ascendancy. In *Ion* (530c–535a), Socrates states that the rhapsodists are ἐρμηνεῖς of the poets, themselves ἐρμηνεῖς of the gods. Like Aaron, the Platonic rhapsodists are ἐρμηνεῖς of other ἐρμηνεῖς.

mouth does not speak for itself, but articulates into words thoughts and concepts that find their origin in the νοῦς or in the ψυχή and that would otherwise remain unexpressed, Moses as a prophet of God is an “ἑρμηνεύς of another that dictates” (ὑποβάλλοντος ἑτέρου),²⁰ to whom he lends his mouth, tongue and voice.²¹

Philo’s construction of the prophetic figure of Moses incorporates both elements of the biblical tradition and elements taken from Platonic reflection. To limit ourselves to some more important examples, in the Bible Moses speaks with God “mouth to mouth”²² and God himself defines the prophet as “my own mouth,”²³ in the episode of Balaam, to which we shall return shortly, God literally puts the words that he must pronounce into the mouth of the seer.²⁴ On the Platonic side, Philo’s definition of “divine inspiration and of μανία” and the distinction, outlined in *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*,²⁵ of four forms of ecstasy, of which the fourth is of the prophetic type, clearly reveal their own debt to *Phaedrus*, in which Plato distinguishes four forms of μανία, mantic, telestic, poetic and amorous, justifying the priority of the first on the basis of the derivation of μαντική from μανία.²⁶

3. Platonism as an exegetical instrument

The coexistence of Jewish tradition and Platonic philosophy in Philo’s thought is a fact widely recognised in the scientific literature: one may think, for example, of the studies of D. Runia, R. Radice, G. Sterling and T. Tobin.²⁷ Where the positions of the scholars diverge is, instead, in the interpretation of the function and of the weight to assign to the Platonism, or rather to the middle-Platonism, in the works of Philo. There are two predominant positions among the modern scholars. For some, the Platonic philosophy would have offered to

²⁰ *Mos.* 1.277–278.

²¹ On the forms of “delegated word” see the contributions collected in Bettini, Spina 2013–2014.

²² *Num.* 12.8.

²³ *Isa.* 30.2; *Jer.* 15.19.

²⁴ *Num.* 23.5, 11, 16. On biblical prophetism cf. in particular Aune 1991: 81–102 (with a critical discussion in Filoramo, Grottanelli, Norelli, Sfameni Gasparro 1999); Grabbe 1995; Blenkinsopp 1996; Orton 2000; Petersen 2002; Doan, Giles 2005; Heller 2006; Stone 2011. See also some of the contributions collected in Flannery, Shantz, Werline 2008 and Shantz, Werline 2012.

²⁵ *Her.* 249–250.

²⁶ Plat. *Phaedr.* 244b–d; 248d–e; 256b. On the relationships between Philo and Platonism regarding prophetic conceptions cf. Berchman 1988; Winston 1988; Berchman 1989. See also Perrone 2004.

²⁷ Cf. in particular Runia 1986; Radice 1989; Sterling 1993; Tobin 1993.

Philo the linguistic and conceptual instruments for communicating the "correct" exegesis of the Scripture to Hellenised Jews and, to a certain extent, to the wider Greek-speaking audience of the Hellenistic-Roman world. For others, in particular for Sterling, Philo would have recognised a deep unity between Judaism and Platonism, considered as two ways of expressing a single vision of the truth. According to Sterling, the place where such unity would emerge in the clearest way would really be the figure of Moses: a "Platonising Moses," at the same time preeminent incarnation of the Jewish identity and indicator of the deep links that unite Philo to Alexandrian middle-Platonism.²⁸

In recent years, between these two, a third position, connected to the name of Maren Niehoff, has emerged. In an important and really innovative book,²⁹ the scholar claims that, in the Alexandria of the Hellenistic-Roman period, biblical exegesis does not constitute a marginal phenomenon, closed in itself, but is present as an integral part of the vaster surrounding cultural context. Starting from the Hellenistic era, Alexandria, with its schools and institutions (Library and Museum), is the most important centre of the textual criticism. In this open and multicultural context, numerous interpreters of the biblical text adopt hermeneutic strategies matured within the Greek setting. Philo – as Niehoff observes – offers us information about a group of literalist exegetes, labelled as "litigious" by the Alexandrian, who treated the Hebrew Scripture in the same way as Homeric poems, applying to the Bible critical-textual methods taken from the Aristotelian tradition and from the school of Aristarchus.³⁰ The dialectic that opposes Philo to such interpreters suggests that for the Jewish philosopher, whose works consist to a great degree in comments to the Pentateuch (in Greek translation naturally),³¹ Platonism does not represent a system of thought comparable to the Hebrew one, but an exegetical approach contextually effective for the scope of interpretation of the Scripture. The case in examination, that is the construction of the prophetic figure of Moses, offers confirmation of this.

If it is true, as has been observed, that the figure of Moses as ἐρμηνεύς that articulates in human words the dictation of God³² is influenced by the categorisation of the μανία contained in *Phaedrus*, it is necessary to note that it owes more to the theory of divine inspiration of *Ion*, in which Plato proposes to study mantic-poetic knowledge in the light of the relationship that connects

²⁸ Sterling 1993. On the representation of the Jewish identity in Philo see Niehoff 2001.

²⁹ Niehoff 2011.

³⁰ Niehoff 2007. On the relationships between Philo and the Alexandrian exegetical tradition see also Mack 1974–1975; Cazeaux 1984; Mack 1984.

³¹ Cf. Runia 1990 and Rajak 2009. On the translation of the Seventy as a mythically founding event for certain contexts of Alexandrian Judaism see Arcari 2013.

³² On the forms of divine language cf. Chirassi Colombo 1998.

poets and seers to the god under whose patronage their art is practiced.³³ In the dialogue, which opposes Socrates to the young rhapsodist Ion, Plato states that poets and seers are ἐρμηνεῖς of the god, who possesses their νοῦς, speaking to men “through them:” the poet, like the μάντις, is an ἔνθεος functionary, called on to “communicate” (ἐρμηνεύειν) a message, whose source is not identified with the subject of the enunciation but with the divine διάνοια.³⁴ The convergence between the Platonic statements and Philo’s interpretation of the relationship between God and Moses is clear. And, overall, it is precious evidence of the role of Platonism in the work of the Alexandrian.

In *Ion*, the image of the μάντις/ἐρμηνεύς has a clear polemic value, in so far as it aims at devaluing a form of knowledge, the mantic-poetic, linked not to “art” (τέχνη) or to “science” (ἐπιστήμη), but to the “divine δύναμις,” that makes poets and seers the mere interpreters of the god by whom they are inspired.³⁵ On the contrary, in Philo, the element disqualified by Plato, that is the pure and simple repetition of the divine message, appears as the salient feature of the figure of the prophet, guarantee of his authority and genuineness: the words of the prophet are authoritative because they are not “his” words, but those of God.³⁶ The difference between Plato and Philo can be explained with the different status that the revealed word takes on in the Greek and in the Jewish setting.³⁷ While in Hellenic land it represents a form of knowledge among others, that Plato could tranquilly stigmatise to the advantage of philosophy, in Judea the revealed word constitutes the very heart of Scripture: Scripture, Philo states, is made entirely of χρησμοί (“oracles”), whether that they have been communicated by God through his ἐρμηνεύς Moses, or they are replies of God to Moses, or they have been pronounced by Moses “possessed by God” (ἐπιθειάσαντος).³⁸ The different evaluation of the revealed word demonstrates, for the scope of our discussion, that Philo does not share the Platonic perspective nor postulate any sort of Greek–Jewish unity, but that he uses the doctrine of *Ion* as an exegetical instrument functional for interpreting the biblical representation of the relationship between God and Moses.

³³ On *Ion* see Bettini 2012: 128–133.

³⁴ Plat. *Ion* 530c.534c–d.

³⁵ Plat. *Ion* 532c.533d.534c.

³⁶ On the authority of the word of the prophet in as much as “delegated word” see for example Petrarca 2004.

³⁷ The differences between Philo’s theory and the Platonic theory of prophetic inspiration are appropriately stressed by Levison 1995.

³⁸ Phil. *Mos.* 2.188. On Philo’s classification of the different forms of prophetic ecstasy cf. Winston 1988 and Levison 1994.

4. Prophecy and divination, or exegesis and self-definition

The figure of Moses prophet of God offers a second, important, testimony of Philo's use of Platonic thought. In Philo, this figure is outlined in contrast with that of the seer Balaam, whose story is narrated in *Num.* 22–24. Balak, king of Moab, sends messengers to Balaam to convince him, with rich presents, to curse the army of the Israelites that advances with resolution in Palestine. Despite the reluctance of the seer, in the end the messengers manage to take Balaam to Balak: here, however, Balaam cannot but pronounce benedictions for the children of Israel because benedictions are the words that God puts into his mouth. The biblical account is not without significant internal contradictions, due to the use of at least two distinct sources on the part of the compiler,³⁹ and it is really on such contradictions that Philo's interpretation makes leverage. In particular, the text of Numbers first states that God allows Balaam to leave for Moab, so long as he only says what He shall tell him, while soon after it deviates, through the story of the angel and the talking ass, onto the wrath of the Lord at the seer's departure.⁴⁰ It is this wrath of God, which permits suspecting disobedient and avid behaviour on the part of Balaam, which Philo exploits to delineate the portrait of the seer with great narrative and interpretative freedom.

Of Mesopotamian origins, Balaam is described by Philo as a μάντις, a "seer," more precisely an οἰωνοσκόπος and τερατοσκόπος, expert in the "observation of birds and prodigies."⁴¹ Just like a "sophist,"⁴² Balaam aims at taking material advantage of his knowledge and, to this end, he does not hesitate to "give himself airs of an illustrious prophet," pretending to be visited by God in his dreams;⁴³ for this reason, his predictions are nothing but "vain" words, as would be indicated by the Hebrew etymology of the name Balaam ("fool, vainglorious").⁴⁴ To an individual of this type Philo reserves a specific name:

³⁹ Vermes 1955; Greene 1989 and 1990.

⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis of the story of Balaam see Decharneux 1994 and Sfameni Gasparro 2004: 36–40.

⁴¹ *Mos.* 1.264; *Conf.* 159–160.

⁴² *Det.* 71.

⁴³ On Balaam's cupidity cf. *Cher.* 32–33; *Migr.* 113–115; *Mos.* 1.266–268.

⁴⁴ See in particular *Conf.* 159–160: "The Law states that Balaam, the diviner and soothsayer that from vain fantasies makes just as vain predictions – and in fact Balaam means 'vainglorious' – throws maledictions to the seer [Israel], even though he is then forced to transform his invectives into benedictions (*Num.* 22.5–6). With this the Scripture does not look at the words said – since they are transformed by divine providence, so to say from the false coinage they were, into authentic money – but at the soul in which hostile rather than benevolent thoughts moved. There is, in fact, a structural counterpoint between conjecture and truth, between vain prediction and science, and between chaotic orgiastic possession and sober wisdom."

A man who, hiding behind the name and appearance of prophecy, pretends to be possessed by divine inspiration [...] is a charlatan (γόης), not a prophet, since he has invented, lying, predictions and oracles.⁴⁵

Balaam is part, that is of the band of “augurs, ventriloquists and seers” that, in the *De somniis*, are presented as “able tricksters, magicians and enchanters, from whose insidious arts it is difficult to subtract oneself.”⁴⁶

For Philo the divination practiced by Balaam, defined as ἔντεχνος μαντική, “technical divination,”⁴⁷ is a κακοτεχνία without authentic inspiration:⁴⁸ even when he reveals oracles to Balak inspired by God, Balaam does so maintaining hostile intentions against Israel in his soul,⁴⁹ simply forced by the Lord, “without being able to understand” anything of what he says:⁵⁰ “he was animated by a prophetic spirit, that pushed all his mantic art (ἔντεχνος μαντική) beyond the frontiers of his soul, since the artifices of a magician (μαγική σοφιστεία) could not cohabit with the holiest inspiration.”⁵¹ Sophist, impostor and charlatan, in a word γόης, Balaam is nothing but a μάγος and his ἔντεχνος μαντική is nothing but a μαγική σοφιστεία, “vain mass of opposing and conflicting opinions,” that “has no scruples about tricking susceptible characters.”⁵² The divination practiced by Balaam is not therefore a form of “true magic,” like that studied by the heirs to the throne of Persia, but a “counterfeit” of it, cultivated by “mendicant-priests and charlatans, just as by the lowest of women and of slaves.”⁵³

Like the figure of Moses, that of Balaam presents itself as a symbolic place of cultural cohabitation, in which the Deuteronomical prohibitions of every form of mantic⁵⁴ interweave with the Platonic polemic against magicians and sophists, purifiers and itinerant priests,⁵⁵ and with the distinction, gathered from *I Alcibiades*, between the “sapiential” tradition of magic and one of a low and “popular” level.⁵⁶ As in the case of the relationship God/Moses,

⁴⁵ *Spec.* 1.315.

⁴⁶ *Somn.* 1.220. On the issue see Berchman 1987 and Decharneux 1990.

⁴⁷ *Mos.* 1.277.

⁴⁸ *Spec.* 4.48.

⁴⁹ *Mos.* 1.286–287.

⁵⁰ *Mos.* 1.272–274. Cf. also *Migr.* 113–115: “The Holy Scripture says that he, siding with the enemy for money, became an evil prophet of evil things and, though bearing in his soul the most bitter curses against the people loved by God, was compelled to utter with his mouth and tongue the most exquisite prayers.”

⁵¹ *Mos.* 1.277.

⁵² *Det.* 71; *Spec.* 4.48–50. On the relationships between magic and divination cf. Burkert 1983 and Graf 1999.

⁵³ *Spec.* 3.100–101. On the category of “magic” cf. Faraone, Obbink 1991; Graf 1994; Bremmer 1999; Dickie 2001; Sfameni Gasparro 2002b; Carastro 2006.

⁵⁴ *Deut.* 18.10–11.

⁵⁵ *Plat. Resp.* 2.364b–c.

⁵⁶ *Plat. Alc.* 1.122a. Cf. also *Apul. Apol.* 25–26.

once again the Platonic thought represents a sort of exegetical instrument which Philo uses to interpret a difficult passage of the Scripture, in which God, though speaking through the mouth and the voice of Balaam, appears at the same time enraged against the seer's behaviour. As Maren Niehoff says: continuer, when it deals with "fixing" the text, of the literalism of an Aristotelian matrix, "Philo is primarily an allegorical reader of Scripture," who, adopting a Platonic approach, "uses contradictions [in the biblical text] as an instrument to move from the literal to the non-literal level."⁵⁷

In the case of Balaam, the allegorical interpretation of the Scripture makes the seer the symbolic figure of a "technical divination" (ἐντεχνος μαντική), made of tricks and conjectures, attentive to earning more than to truth,⁵⁸ that in Philo's thought is counterposed to "inspired prophecy" (θεοφόρητος προφητεία),⁵⁹ incarnated by Moses, the only one able to conjugate the virtue of the sapient and the authenticity of the divine inspiration: while the avid Balaam firstly pretends to have prophetic visions and then communicates the word of God under force, without understanding the statements that he pronounces, Moses, the prototype of the "just man," prophesies "possessed by God," acting as a meek instrument of the divine word.⁶⁰ The divine inspiration is the element that distinguishes ἐντεχνος μαντική and θεοφόρητος προφητεία, defining the prophetic figure of Moses in opposition to that of the μάντις Balaam, exemplary model of the pseudo-prophet.⁶¹

Philo's complex design demonstrates that ἐντεχνος μαντική is a formula aimed at configuring the divination of the "others" (of the Mesopotamian Balaam) with the scope of self-representation, that is, to build a sort of cultural "niche," in which Philo unites an entire set of magical and divinatory practices,

⁵⁷ Niehoff 2011: 140. Cf. also Radice 2000 and 2004.

⁵⁸ See *Spec.* 1.60–63: "Moses does not authorise the practice of divination in any form whatsoever, and throws out of his Republic all those that cultivate it, sacrificers, purifiers, augers, seers, makers of spells, interpreters of sounds. In fact, all those do nothing but emit their conjectures on what is plausible or credible, and they interpret the same things through representations that are different according to the moment, both because their foundations have no basis, and because intelligence does not have precise criteria that allow proving their authenticity;" 4.48–50: Philo mentions "the interpreters of prodigies, those that observe the birds, sacrificers and all the other experts in divination (μαντική), whose activities consist, frankly speaking, of a cleverly concerted science of misadventure (κακοτεχνία), counterfeit (παράκομμα) of divine possession and prophecy [...]. Concerning the adepts of divination, this science of falsifiers and buffoons, each of them assigns to his own conjectures and to his own inductions an inadequate range, that of the truth, and has no scruples about tricking susceptible characters."

⁵⁹ Cf. *Mut.* 202–204: "Balaam, with his sophistical art of seer (σοφιστεία μαντική), had altered the characters of the prophecy inspired by God (θεοφόρητος προφητεία)." On the opposition between προφητεία and μαντική in Philo's thought see Sfameni Gasparro 2004.

⁶⁰ On Philo's concept of prophetic ecstasy cf. Belletti 1983 and Levison 1995.

⁶¹ On the distinction between true and false prophet see Van Winkle 2000.

condemned by the Scripture and even so rather common in Egyptian Judaism (as numerous Greek magical papyri seem to demonstrate),⁶² that function as a means of contrast for showing the “specificity” of the prophetic function. In other words, the Philo’s distinction between technical divination, in the sense of goetic discipline (μαγικὴ σοφιστεία), and inspired prophecy does not appear a category of analysis, common to other contexts like the Roman or the Greek, where it has recently been put under discussion,⁶³ but a cultural device, ideologically orientated, aimed at making Moses “the most illustrious of the prophets”⁶⁴ in opposition to all those authors, Jews and Greeks, who, ignoring “who Moses really was,” presented him as a γόης.⁶⁵ In this sense, the incorporation of the Platonic polemic against the μαγεία, functional for constructing the distinction, unknown either to the Scripture⁶⁶ or to other Jewish texts,⁶⁷ between the μάντις/γόης Balaam and the προφήτης Moses, reveals itself as a potent instrument of self-definition, that is not limited to the criticism of the “other” but that gathers elements of it, bending them to the representation of the “self.”

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⁶² See Goodenough 1953; Gager 1972: 146–158; Smith 1996; Betz 1997; Sfameni Gasparro 2013. On Jewish literature of a magical character cf. Alexander 1986; Schäfer 1990 and 1997; Schiffman, Swartz 1992; Schäfer, Shaked 1994–1999.

⁶³ Cf. for example Jaillard, Prescendi 2011: 79 (regarding the Pythia) and Pisano 2012: 9–13 (regarding Homeric seers). On divination in the ancient world see Vernant et al. 1974; Sfameni Gasparro 2002; Johnston, Struck 2005 and the contributions collected in *Kernos* 26 (2013).

⁶⁴ *Mos.* 2.187.

⁶⁵ Cf. Gager 1994; Remus 1996.

⁶⁶ Cf. Dijkstra 1995 and Grottanelli 2004: 14–48.

⁶⁷ Cf. for example Jos. *A.J.* 4.104 (where Balaam is defined as “the best seer among those of his time”) and *Liber antiquitatum Biblicarum*, 18.157 (where Balaam limits himself to revealing the word of God).

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Alexandria in the Mirror of Origen's *didaskaleion*: between the Great Church, Heretics and Philosophers

Giulia Sfameni Gasparro

1. Catechesis and philosophy: the two aims of Origen's *didaskaleion*

When I was fully engrossed in the Word, reports spread about my skills, attracting both heretics and those familiar with Greek learning, especially philosophy. So I thought I would probe the opinions of the heretics as well as the philosophers' claim to speak the truth.¹

Outlined in a self-defence letter used to justify his commitment to the study of Greek culture² (as underlined by “biographer” Eusebius), Origen's picture of his own Alexandrian “school” provides useful starting point for the issue I want to explore, that is, the encounter and contrast between different ideological and religious choices in one of the most vibrant metropolises of the Empire between the 2nd and the 3rd cent. CE. This picture becomes even more significant if it is situated in the traditional context of the relationships between the authoritative representatives³ of what Celsus seventy years before defined as “the Great Church”⁴ – the community that Origen defines as the holder of the proper Christian doctrines and customs – and those who were “external” to it. The latter were “heretics,” Christians who deviated from the righteous faith, as well as owners of the traditional Hellenic inheritance, philosophers who claimed to hold the true wisdom. In fact, he turns to Pantaenus, whose memory was a guarantee for orthodoxy in Alexandria (witness Clement of Alexandria) and to Heraclas, then bishop of the city. About the latter, Origen remembers a communal course of studies with “a teacher of philosophy” that he had been attending for five years already “before I started attending his lectures” and for the influence of which Heraclas would wear “a philosopher's cloak.”⁵

¹ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.12. Transl. Maier 2007: 202–203.

² There is a wide consent for Nautin's conclusion (1961) who believes that Origen's letter quoted by Eusebius is addressed to Alexander of Jerusalem. See Perrone 2014: 311–314.

³ According to a date generally accepted by scholars, the *Alethes logos* would have been composed around 180 CE. Rosenbaum (1972) opposed himself to this *communis opinio* and proposed a later date while recently Hargis (1999: 17–61) suggested that the work would be datable at the end of the 2nd cent. or to the beginning of the 3rd cent. (around 200).

⁴ Orig. *Cels.* 5.59.

⁵ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.13. Trans. Maier (2007: 203): “In this regard I followed the example of Pantaenus, an expert in these matters who helped many before me, and also Heraclas, now

This acquaintance with scholars “familiar with Greek learning, especially philosophy” at Origen’s *Didaskaleion* is mentioned several times by Eusebius and it is connected to the very beginnings of Origen’s catechetical activity,⁶ often presented as aimed at the conversion of auditors. This was the case of Heraklas himself as well as that of his brother Plutarch who would later obtained the glory of martyrdom.⁷

Origen’s words show that it is not a rhetorical exaggeration of the biographer, whose apologetic intent⁸ often characterises the narration and undermines its historical objectivity⁹ through the use of silences and praises. The statement¹⁰ of a

a presbyter in Alexandria, who had been with a teacher of philosophy for five years before I started attending his lectures. Because of him, he exchanges normal dress for a philosopher’s cloak, which he maintains to this day, while he dedicates himself to Greek literature.” On this information, see Nautin 1961: 126–134; Nautin 1977: 21–24.

⁶ *Hist. eccl.* 6.3.13: “By demonstrating the philosophic life in this manner, he inspired a large number of his students to similar enthusiasm, so that he even won over some unbelieving pagans, scholars, and philosophers, who believed the divine Word, were conspicuous in the present persecution, and were even arrested and fulfilled in martyrdom.” Trans. Maier 2007: 191.

⁷ *Hist. eccl.* 6.3.1–2: “As he himself says in his works, while he applied himself to teaching, since there were no catechetical instructors at Alexandria – they had all fled the threat of persecution – some of the pagans approached him to hear the Word of God. The first of these was Plutarch, whose noble life was adorned with martyrdom. The second was Heraclas, Plutarch’s brother, a notable example of the disciplined philosophic life, who became Bishop of Alexandria after Demetrius.” Trans. Maier 2007: 189–190.

⁸ As for the apologetic dimension of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, see Droge, 1992.

⁹ If the strong ideological similarities between Origen and Eusebius do not have to be explained (see Kannengiesser, 1992) the biographic and apologetic quality of Eusebius’ information has been clarified by several studies on the issue. Suffice it to remind the reader of Grant’s observations (1975; see also Id. 1970), and Nautin’s close examination (1977), and above all of Cox (1983: 69–101). However, I do not agree with the hyper-critical positions of those who radically “deconstruct” this information by giving scarce consideration to it. At the time of the *Historia ecclesiastica*’s composition, Origen’s memory was still alive within Christian communities, being the object of both heavy criticism and passionate defences to allow a substantial distortion of its historical identity. On the matter, see Monaci Castagno 2004.

¹⁰ I do not understand the reasons that let an attentive scholar like G. Dorival to examine Porphyry’s information as it is transmitted by Eusebius in such a relaxed way (“l’extrait de Porphyre cité en HE VI, XIX, dans lequel le disciple de Plotin parle d’un philosophe appelé Origène”), reducing it to a “tile” of a mosaic built by the bishop of Cesarea in order to “create” the image of an “unreal” Origenian *didaskaleion* (Dorival, 2002: 162). The scholarly appeal to Nautin (1977: 49–53 and 188), concerning the worth of the Eusebian “biography.” However, this scholar does not deny that Porphyry refers to the Christian Origen and, though limiting the worth of his witness, he uses the essential data (197–202). The interpretation which emphasises the historical value of the Porphyrian information is found in Beatrice 1992. See the reconstruction of the *status quaestionis* proposed by Zambon (2011), who acknowledges the impossibility to formulate a defined opinion on the problem concerning the single Christian Origen or the two people with the same name, one being the Christian

rival such as Porphyry, confirms both Origen's attendance to the "teacher of philosophy's school" (now identified as Ammonius, Plotinus' mentor) and his great fame among those who practiced philosophical disciplines. The future author of the accurate rebuttal of Christian doctrine (conducted with all the tools of the philological method assimilated in Longinus' school) declares to have met Origen in his youth, probably in Caesarea (or Tyre?) where he had moved his school due to known contrasts with Demetrius.¹¹ This different localisation of Origen's "school" experienced by Porphyry does not affect its peculiar characteristics, neither concerning the method nor the teaching's subjects or the quality of its regular attendants.¹² As it emerges from Porphyry's statement and the well-known *Oratio panegyrica* written by the disciple who learned both biblical and profane¹³ disciplines from his master, Origen's *didaskaleion* in Caesarea kept all the features of the Alexandrian one, including its openness to those – Christians or not – who wanted to take part in the philosophical quest for the Truth.¹⁴ Despite the necessity

and the other being a pagan Plotinus' co-disciple and Ammonius' disciple at the same time. See also Zambon 2003.

¹¹ See Crouzel 1970 and 1987.

¹² Contrary opinions to this conclusion have been expressed by Nautin 1977, and above all, by Dorival 2004, according to whom Eusebius would have defined Alexandria's situation comparing it with the one in Cesarea and he would have projected Origen's Alexandrian teaching on the latter. In particular, the scholar ironically chooses "Pasolini's temptation" formula to describe the attitude of the scholars who trust Eusebius's information. In fact, he concludes that an Origenian school in Cesarea was not actually created but only some single "episodes" of individual and private training dedicated to the author of the *Oratio panegyrica*, his brother and some other unknown auditors had actually taken place (2004: 21–23). An analogous opinion to that concerning Porphyry's information: a mere confusion between a Christian and a pagan Origen and an attribution to the former of the state of "master" of the latter, that is Ammonios Sakkas (2004: 23–26). In front of this hyper-criticism, we have to ask ourselves if a correct reconstruction of the past is still possible when contemporary sources are not trusted and the words of witnesses (certainly to be critically analysed but not totally demolished) are substituted with the preconceived "truth" held by a modern reader.

¹³ It is not possible to address the question in detail in this paper since it is still being widely debated and it is not entirely solved yet. Some scholars identify this disciple with Gregory Thaumaturgus (see Crouzel quoted above at n. 11 and Crouzel 1964 and 1969) and some others exclude this identification. For a stance on the matter and the related documents see Sfameni Gasparro 2007. Let me recommend the translation (with a wide critical introduction) by Rizzi 2002a and his numerous contributions on the matter (Rizzi 1999, 2002b and 2013).

¹⁴ Without preconceptions on the discussed question of the identification between the author of the *Oratio panegyrica* and the Theodore/Gregory mentioned by Eusebius, his information about Origen's teaching in Caesarea is here significant: "While Origen was teaching at Caesarea, many students, both local and from many foreign countries, studied under him. The most distinguished among these were Theodore – who was none other than the acclaimed bishop of my own day, Gregory – and his brother Athenodore. Both were strongly engrossed in Greek and Roman studies, but Origen instilled in them a love of philosophy and convinced them to exchange their previous passion for theological study. They continued with him for

to distinguish the Alexandrian background from the Palestinian one through the use of a proper historical analysis, what is relevant to this argument is the perception of the common features that Origen's activity maintains in both contexts. This allows us to understand some of the spiritual, ideological and religious not to mention the social, economic and political aspects of a vibrant metropolis such as Alexandria¹⁵ in the last decades of the 2nd cent. to the middle of the 3rd cent. CE in which, to some extent, Caesarea also takes part being a Christian, Jewish and a Hellenic metropolis itself.¹⁶ Moreover, the term *didaskaleion* is here broadly used as a conventional name for the community of auditors, or rather veritable disciples gathering around Origen to receive his *didaskalia*, which included both the opinions of heretics and the doctrines of philosophers.¹⁷ For what concerns the latter, as it emerges from the "disciple of Caesarea's"¹⁸ and Porphyry's words, they consisted of a critical reading of some of the most representative authors of the Hellenic tradition starting from Plato to "Numenius, Cronius, Apollophanes, Longinus, Moderatus, Nicomachus, and the prominent Pythagoreans" not to mention "the books of Chaeremon the Stoic and Cornutus."¹⁹ More broadly speaking, the whole spectrum of the Origenian experience (the didactic component of which is its cornerstone) could be considered as a mirror of an "age" in which the coexistence of different ideologies and religions in a metropolis such as Alexandria did not exclude, rather it intensified debates as well as veritable conflicts.

five years and made such progress in theology that while both were still young they were elected bishops of the churches in Pontus" (*Hist. eccl.* 6.30, transl. Maier 2007: 209).

¹⁵ It would be impossible as well as useless to provide even a minimum analysis of the scientific literature meant to define the social, political and cultural context of the metropolis in which, ever since its foundation, a wide variety of people coexisted and confronted each other: Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Jewish. The definition of a "cultural and religious melting-pot" proposed in the volume by Hinge, Krasilnikoff 2009 fully illustrates this situation.

¹⁶ For a reinterpretation of the city's historical background, see the essays published by Andrei 2013. About the traditional cults in Palestine see Belayche 2001 and about the coexistence of pagans, Christians and Jewish people see Taylor 1993: 48–85. For an up-to-date debate about the presence of pagans and Christians in Caesarea, see Rinaldi 2013.

¹⁷ In this essay, I do not intend to address the long-standing, controversial question of the origins and the nature of the so-called "Alexandrian school," the founder of which would have been Pantaenus and the most authoritative representative of which would have been Clement of Alexandria. As it is well-known, this question involves the difficult issue of the very foundation of Christianity in Egypt. Among the immense bibliography on the matter, I hereby recommend Tuilier 1982; Le Boulluec 1987, 1999 and 2006; van den Broek 1996; Pouderon 1998; and Jakab 1999, 2001 and 2003.

¹⁸ See Gregory Thaumaturgus (?), *In Origenem oratio panegyrica*, 8.109–9.116; 13.150–157. The statements in 13.151–152 are particularly significant: "He believed that it was suitable for us to study philosophy, reading every text written by ancient authors, both philosophers and poets, very carefully [...] but he also believed we had to exclude the works written by atheists." English translation based on Rizzi 2002a: 168–169.

¹⁹ Porphy. *apud* Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.1–9. Transl. Maier 1999: 201–202.

2. Debates, coexistences, conflicts: classificatory categories and historical complexity

It is not necessary to insist on the interpretative formula which privileges the aspects of the coexistence and the mixture of different cultures, rather than the elements of contrasts and of radical opposition. This formula, acknowledged by anthropological and sociological studies, has been accepted in the fields of research about the Ancient world and more precisely, what is commonly defined as the late-Ancient world. Particularly, it is starting from the "Constantinian turning point" (4th and 5th cent. CE) where this formula is applied to the investigation of the complex relationship between the firstly persecuted Christianity, then *religio licita*, and finally the official religion of the Empire and the multi-form context of traditional religions coexisting in the Empire itself (bearing in mind the political relevance of the Roman tradition and the cultural relevance of the Hellenic tradition). The worshippers of those traditional religions will be given the Latin name of *pagani*²⁰ or the Greek name of *Hellenes*, even though the latter kept its original cultural meaning before acquiring a religious one since (in Greek areas) it indicated those of different national identities who remained faithful to their ancestral cults.

The project and the achievement of this scientific encounter are an evident testimony and a confirmation of this interpretative tendency, which is meant to investigate the reasons and the conditions of more or less deep convergences, mutual contributions or really borrowing hidden "behind the conflicts." This tendency undeniably favors the perception and the clarification of different historical contexts defining the developments and the changes in broad cultural as well as the socio-political processes marking the transition from the ancient world to the Middle Ages and subsequently to modernity. However, for this purpose, ignoring the models of debate and conflict may seem useless both for what concerns the period during which the decisive match between the two religious and cultural world-views was enacted (4th and 5th cent.) and already the one during which the apologetic effort of Christians to defend their own existence takes place (2nd and 3rd cent.).

Despite its supranational mode of diffusion and its programmatic penetration through gender, *ethnos* and cultural barriers, Christianity could not ignore its own Jewish roots. These roots were strongly evident before reaching the "parting of the ways," so strongly claimed from the "Great Church" in their biblical dimension as a polemist acute as Celsus had already perceived in the 2nd cent. Apart from being structurally functional to the definition of a Christian identity, these roots soon proved to be an essential support to the identity itself, especially *ad intra*. This was in contrast to those Christians who, separating the holy history of

²⁰ After the still useful essay by Zeiller 1917, see Chuvin 2002.

the Old Testament from the soteriological message of the Gospels, theorised the existence of two regimes and two Gods (a highest one and a cosmic demiurge) ruling the existence of men. Moreover, the reference to roots from an ancient Jewish context was equally important *ad extra*, to those “Nations” for whom the unfamiliarity with an ethnic community – with its heritage of traditional beliefs and customs – seemed to be unacceptable as a social condition, dangerous for the community life itself as well as a clue of “atheism.” As Origen’s accurate rebuttal of Celsus’ collection of criticisms about Christianity during the 2nd cent. points out, the historical and religious connection between Christianity and the Jewish nation allowed the former to be entrenched in the traditions of the Mediterranean people and to repulse the dangerous accusation of being an “innovation” in an ideological context in which only the antiquity of the cultural and religious “discourse” guaranteed its “truthfulness.” It is not possible within the limited space of this paper to illustrate in detail the variety and the density of the issues that make the *Contra Celsum* the mirror of an historical situation. It is full of encounters, debates and irreducible conflicts, just as it was experienced by an intellectual and religious personality of such importance as Origen in a city as Alexandria with its deep mixture of Egyptian ethnic traditions and Hellenic sap, as well as the ancient Jewish community. On such a background was founded a varied type of Christianity open to different and conflicting opinions such as that of Jewish-Christians, Encratites, and Gnostics (especially Marcionites and Valentinians) against which the representatives of the Great Church from Clement to Origen himself argued and polemised. This context does not substantially change, rather it enriches our analysis of Origen’s experience outside the city’s borders. Since it naturally enriches his cultural and religious contact with other metropolises’ cultural backgrounds (Athens, Rome and Antioch) and interconnects his personal relationships with institutional and highly powerful personalities (as in the case of his permanence at the mansion of Giulia Mamea, Severus Alexander’s mother) especially through his “move” to Caesarea (Palestine) due to the conflicts within Alexandria’s ecclesiastical community.

For what concerns Origen’s anti-heretical controversy, I will not illustrate its modalities and purposes in detail in this paper because it has already been the subject of several research studies.²¹ Suffice it to mention that, apart from several references to positions that can be defined as Jewish-Christian (Ebionites and Elkasaites²²), Origen’s production also explicitly or implicitly mentions Gnostic and Marcionite²³ opinions. Without analysing the different doctrines in detail,

²¹ As for the Origenian notion of “heretic and heresy,” see Simonetti 1985.

²² See the complete critical essay by Dorival 2001, which examines in detail also Origen’s information about “Jewish masters” who were his source of particular biblical exegeses. See also Dorival, Naiweld 2013.

²³ Among the several contributions on the matter, I recommend for example those by Le Boulluec 1975, Rius-Camps 1975 and 1992, Norelli 1992, Scott 1992, and Strutwolf 1993.

Origen goes very often to the heart of the dualistic heresy exposing the theological fracture between the God of the Old Testament (identified as an inferior demiurge) and the God of the New Testament, on which Gnostics and Marcionites all agreed; he also reports the docetist Christology and the Valentinian doctrines on the different "natures" of men.

I will remind my readers of how, apart from literary confrontation on the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, Origen also performed the *dialexis*, debates carried out within a circle of auditors in which every interlocutor tried to convince the others of the truth of his statements.²⁴ In the letter *Ad amicos Alexandrinos* related by Rufinus and Jerome when referring to the first controversy about Origen's "orthodoxy," Origen himself reveals all the risks that this technique presents. In fact, on a first occasion *quidam auctor haereseos, cum sub praesentia multorum habita inter nos fuisset disputatio et descripta* manipulated the text of the debate²⁵ while on a second occasion, an heretic in Ephesus backed out of a direct confrontation but then drafted and diffused a text about it, sending it to his disciples in Rome and to other places. Origen unmasked the falsification in Antioch in front of a wide circle of auditors by showing that the draft had not been written in his style.²⁶ According to what some scholars believe, the first of the two texts could be identical to that *Dialogus cum Candido Valentiniano* known by Jerome as a "text owned by the Greeks."²⁷ However, what he says about Origen's doctrine upon the nature of the Devil (not evil by nature but by choice²⁸) exposed in this text makes us think that the text known by Jerome was neither the result of a deep manipulation by the heretic nor an imitation created

Concise but substantial information can be found in Norelli 2000. Up-to-date research about the *Commentarii in evangelium Johannis* in which Origen confronts the exegesis of the Valentinian Heracleon can be found in Prinzivalli 2005. In particular, on the anti-Gnostic polemic concerning Origen's homiletic activity in Caesarea, see Monaci Castagno 1987: 107–115.

²⁴ As it is known, the direct confrontation or the dispute by Origen was also very frequent in the confrontations of the Jewish masters and it is evoked more than once in the *Contra Celsum*. Suffice it to draw the reader's attention to *Cels.* 1.45: "I remember that once in a discussion with some Jews, who were alleged to be wise, when many people were present to judge what was said, I used the following argument;" *Cels.* 1.55: "I remember that once in a discussion with some whom the Jews regard as learned I used these prophecies." See de Lange 1976. About the presence of real anti-Christian accusations coming from a Jewish background in Celsus' work, see Troiani 1998, Norelli 1998 and Blumell 2007.

²⁵ Rufinus, *De adulteratione librorum Origenis*, ed. Simonetti 1999: 38–41.

²⁶ Ruf. *De adult. lib. Or.*, ed. Simonetti 1999: 40–41.

²⁷ Simonetti 1999: 40, n. 16.

²⁸ Jer. *Ruf.* 2.7.19, ed. Lardet 1984: 154–157: *Habetur dialogus apud Graecos Origenis et Candidi, valentinianae haereseos defensoris, in quo duos andabatas digladiantes inter se spectasse me fateor [...]. Adserit Candidus diabolum pessimae esse naturae et quae saluari numquam possit. Contra hoc recte Origine respondit non eum periturae esse substantiae, sed voluntate propria coruisse et posse saluari.*

by a rival;²⁹ rather it was a text mirroring a real argument between its characters. Hence, it seems more appropriate to keep the three cases separated from one another³⁰ considering the frequency of such doctrinal debates. Furthermore, the data briefly illustrated confirms the presence of a common procedure involving a direct confrontation between supporters of different opinions in Christian communities and, as a consequence, coexistence between communities that despite being labelled under the name “Christians” were diametrically different on anthropological and theological grounds thus causing remarkable consequences also in ethical and ecclesiastical domains.

3. The *Contra Celsum*: ideological controversy and socio-political context

For that which concerns Origen’s relationship with pagan philosophers and traditional cultures with polytheist structures, to evaluate the *Contra Celsum* from a religious and historical point of view is essential. We have to consider the period in which it was written and, more precisely, the reasons and the purposes of its draft that can still be interpreted in different ways despite having been the object of a long tradition of studies. Being unable to investigate these reasons in this paper, I can only state that, in my opinion, this text is not the result of an accidental and involuntary task imposed by an exacting “patron” criticised by Origen himself, due to its scarce belief in the power of Christian faith (not in need of any further proof than the life itself of his “founder” and of its worshippers).³¹ Rather, the *Contra Celsum* is the outcome of conscious projects in Christianity’s defence, and at the same time a rebuttal of the dangerous accusations with which it was still experiencing in Origen’s time.

Eusebius’ information,³² as it is known, allows us to place the composition of the treatise during Philip the Arab’s reign (244–249), and more specifically, during a two year period of time that critics have agreed to be probably between 248 and 249. The incidental occasion is Ambrose’s transmission of Celsus’ work and his urgent invitation to its rebuttal: Origen declares not to know its author and he

²⁹ Perrone 2014: 320 believes that Ephesus’s forger was indeed Candidus as “Jerome will clarify.” But the latter does not propose any identification between the two in *Ruf.* 2.6–7; 18–19.

³⁰ This is Crouzel’s conclusion (1973), after having carefully examined Rufinus and Jerome’s information.

³¹ Monaci Castagno 2003. Perrone 2004 substantially opts for this thesis, even though with a certain caution.

³² *Hist. eccl.* 6.34–36: “[...] During this period he wrote eight treatises to refute the attack on us by Celsus the Epicurean, entitled *The True Word* [...]” Transl. Maier 2007: 211.

defines it as "Epicurean,"³³ even though the basic features of its intellectual background are coherent with Platonic thought as it shall emerge from the exposition of his work. Although he shows reluctance in accepting his friend and patron's invitation, in the argument developed in the introduction to the 1st book (discussed again in the 5th book's opening), it is necessary to distinguish between the rhetoric style and Origen's real intentions, after all that is clearly stated in the text itself.³⁴ In the face of the power of silence – following Christ's example – and the witnessing of conduct (exalted as main qualities), Origen actually chooses the words that argue in a meticulous and pertinent way throughout his 8 books so to reject his rival's accusations. If on the one hand he states that these will never upset any Christians,³⁵ on the other hand, he declares that

nevertheless, since among the multitude of people supposed to believe some people of this kind might be found, who may be shaken and disturbed by the writings of Celsus, and who may be restored by the reply to them if what is said is of a character that is destructive of Celsus' arguments and clarifies the truth, we decided to yield to your demand and to compose a treatise in reply to that which you sent us.³⁶

³³ *Cels.* 1.8, where Origen declares that: "But we have heard that there are two Epicureans called Celsus, the earlier one contemporary of Nero, while the other lived in Hadrian's time and later." Against the author of the *Alethes logos* who – declares – "from other writings he is found to be an Epicurean," Origen holds the fact to have stated, against the Epicurean doctrine "that there is something in man superior to the earthly part, which is related to God." Among the vast literature on the work, I recommend – apart from Chadwick's translation 1965 (which translates the title of Celsus' work as "The True Doctrine" and from which I quote the Origenian text), the edition (with commentary) by Borret 1967–1969, 1976, which instead translates the title as "Veritable Discourse," the most recent one by Lona 2005 ("Wahre Lehre") – Andresen 1955, Pichler 1980, Hoffmann 1987 ("On the True Doctrine") and the essays edited by Perrone 1998, in particular by Le Boulluec 1998, which offers a well-structured perspective on the critical literature of the last twenty years. There are strong criticisms about Vermaseren's interpretation, which identifies Celsus' influence in the works of many Christian apologists (1970, 1971, 1972, 1977) in Hauck (1985–1986). According to Goranson's proposal (2007), the location of Celsus' activity would have been the city of Pergamum.

³⁴ Concerning the purpose of Origen's work, see Frede 1999. It is a sort of *sylloge* of all the anti-Christian accusations recorded by Celsus destined to all Christians and perhaps to all those who sympathised with Christianity. Those were probably educated and wealthy people capable of buying a written work of remarkable dimensions such as Origen's one. Moreover, Celsus had probably been an almost unknown philosopher and his work was probably "rather uninformed and unsophisticated," definitely "rather inadequate" (155). We have to ask to ourselves why Ambrose proposed this same text to Origen with such urgency as well as why Origen put so much effort in trying to discredit it. The statement concerning Celsus' ignorance is then totally unfounded if we consider his attentive reference to Gospel's texts and to the current situation of Christianity. See Cook 2000: 17–102. By Frede, also see his more balanced works (1994, 1997). For what concerns anti-Christian critiques, see – after de Labriolle 1934 – Benko 1980 and Wilken 1984 and 2003.

³⁵ *Cels. Praef.* 3, ed. Borret 1967: 68f.; transl. Chadwick 1965: 4.

³⁶ *Praef.* 4, ed. Borret 1967: 72f.; transl. Chadwick 1965: 5.

The “therapeutic” value of the discourse hereby addressed *ad intra* will soon be broadened *ad extra*: the decision to compose the Preface is justified

so that the reader of my replies to Celsus may start with it and see that this book is no written at all for true Christians (*pistoi*), but either for those entirely without experience of faith in Christ, or for those whom the apostle calls “weak in faith.”³⁷

If the objective to protect people “who have not been completely protected by the whole armor of God” from Celsus’ accusations, it is powerfully reaffirmed in the introduction to the 5th book (*Cels.* 5.1), a proposal at involving “external” people who have not experienced the Christian *pistis* yet is not a secondary one. For this purpose, addressing his patron (“Holy Ambrose”), Origen states that his task is

to apply a spiritual medicine which would heal the wound made by Celsus which causes people who pay attention to his arguments to be unhealthy in their faith.

Therefore, he declares that

one of all these tasks seem to me that of demolishing Celsus’ plausible arguments to the best of our ability, and to perform faithfully the work which you have enjoined upon us.

There is no trace of any reluctance or aversion towards his task³⁸ in these words and the final prayer to God to grant him the necessary spiritual strength to fulfill this duty, confirms the importance Origen gives to it, so that “by the word and power of God faith may spring up in those who will read this reply” (*ibid.*). Actually, Origen is fully aware that the philosopher’s work strikes at some of the most delicate tangles of the Christian *facies*, even though he demeans its importance and claims not to know Celsus’ identity, even accusing him of “Epicureism.”³⁹

Although it had probably been composed almost 70 years before, Celsus’ work was still largely circulating at the time. It was to the extent that someone like Ambrose – who had experienced the harshness of persecution⁴⁰ himself – perceived its dangerousness in that specific socio-political context.⁴¹ More than once, Origen defines this timeframe as a period of peace for the Church because

³⁷ *Praef.* 6, ed. Borret 1967: 74–77; transl. Chadwick 1965: 5–6.

³⁸ We do not have to exclude the weight of the rhetoric style of the initial part of the text meant to create a contrast between the meaningful silence of Christian lifestyle and the polemic nonsense of his rival: see Perrone 2009. Concerning the use of rhetoric in Origen’s treatise, see Villani 2011.

³⁹ Concerning the interpretation of this particular identification of this character, see Bergjan 2001.

⁴⁰ Cf. *supra*.

⁴¹ The Celsus’ arguments don’t have lost their efficacy and dangerousness many years later if Eusebius itself refused the basic themes of the *Alethes logos*, particularly in the *Demonstratio evangelica*. See Erhardt 1979 and especially Morlet 2009 and 2011, who however in my opinion minimises the importance of Porphyrius’ anti-christian polemic in Eusebius’ work.

"every human design against the Christians has been frustrated" (*Cels.* 7.26; see 8.44). This was despite the fact that the public power was raging against the Christians, whose number had then increased: "even in the midst of the world that hates us by a miracle we live at peace" (*Cels.* 8.70). However, having experienced a double wave of persecution in Alexandria under Laetus and Aquilas' administrations (201 and 206–210, respectively), and having accompanied some disciples to trial, Leonides' son did not forget the last persecution under Maximinus the Thracian (235–238) when he composed the *De martyrio*.⁴² Thus he perceived the signs of a possible retake of anti-Christian actions. In this sense, a passage from the 3rd book of the *Contra Celsum* is revealing:

It is, however, probable that the freedom of believers from anxiety for their lives will come to an end when again those who attack Christianity in every possible way regard the multitude of believers as responsible for the rebellion which is so strong at this moment, thinking that is because they are not being persecuted by the governors as they used to be (*Cels.* 3.15).⁴³

Scholars suggested that these statements have to be interpreted as the result of internal disorders and of external threats to the Empire connected to the actions of usurpers against Philip the Arab, caused by the hostility of barbarians in 248.⁴⁴ However, Origen was a man capable of perceiving and interpreting the "signs of the times." If the composition of the *Contra Celsum* took place between 248 and 249, we can then consider the ferocious anti-Christian demonstration in Alexandria just one year before the edict of Decius (in 250), as a sign of this "prophetic" ability. This edict imposed the performance of a blood sacrifice to the Gods as a sign of religious and political loyalty to the Empire and it actually emphasised the anomalous and subversive position of Christians, consequently subjecting them to the judgment of authorities. By reading his quote from Dionysius' letter, we learn from Eusebius that in Alexandria

the persecution [...] did not begin with the imperial edict but preceded it by a whole year. Whoever was the prophet and creator of evil for this city stirred up the heathen masses against

⁴² Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.28. After having mentioned Maximinus the Thracian's hostility "to the house of Alexander [Severus], since it consisted for the most part of believers" as well as the beginning of the persecution, he then states: "[...] It was then that Origen wrote his *On Martyrdom*, dedicating the treatise to Ambrose and Protoctetus, a presbyter of Caesarea, both of whom endured extraordinary suffering in the persecution but confessed the faith nobly throughout Maximinus's reign of only three years." Transl. Maier 2007: 208.

⁴³ Without directly addressing the historical issue concerning the topic of persecutions, I will limit myself to recommend the "classical" essay by Frend (1981) and the recent improvement by Baslez 2007.

⁴⁴ See Chadwick 1965: xiv–xv. The scholar reminds his reader of the *topos* well-known to Christian apologetics and of the fact that Pagans attributed every calamity to the presence of Christians and he quotes Tertullian's *Apologeticum* (40.1–2): *quod existiment omnis publicae cladis, omnis popularis incommodi a primordio temporum Christianos esse in causa*. See also Borret 1967: 18–19.

us, fanning the flames of their superstition until were convinced that thirsting for our blood was the only true form of religion.⁴⁵

It is important that in this context the instigator of anti-Christian riots is a *mantis*, that is a character attributing a charismatic authority to himself, the bearer of a divine message who identifies the real form of *eusébeia* in the cult of the traditional Gods (*threskeia*). The actions of Alexandrine people assume the form of a veritable religious conflict.⁴⁶

In addition, we should not forget that one of the fundamental topics in Celsus' critique against Christianity is that of "revelation" and "prophecy." This is also discussed by Origen with all the resources of his dialectical expertise and biblical knowledge. This topic involved the ancient (and yet still up-to-date at the time) experience of communication between men and gods among the peoples belonging to the Mediterranean *oikoumene*. This communication happened in different forms and it was often linked to either "oracular" sanctuaries or to single charismatic personalities and sacred texts, for instance those belonging to the Sibylline literature, very diffused in Greek, Roman, Jewish and later Christian contexts, although with different purposes. The issue of revelation and prophecy also constituted the basis of Old and New Testament texts and, in Origen's words, they represented "the strongest argument" confirming Jesus' authority "that he was prophesied by the prophets of the Jews" (*Cels.* 1.49).⁴⁷

Another essential topic in Celsus' critique is the charge of the practice of magic that probably originated in Jewish backgrounds, being deducible from some Gospels' passages exposing the demonic compromise of the Rabbi of Nazareth. Ever since Justin's *I Apologia*, this topic had also been one of the most frequent accusations to the Christians from popular rumors and from contemporary educated critics.⁴⁸ This topic is also present in some of the most ancient instances of the literature concerning the acts of the martyrs and destined to become pop-

⁴⁵ *Hist. eccl.* 6.41.1–2; transl. Maier 1999: 214. On the matter, see Haas 2004: 221–222.

⁴⁶ An analogous event probably took place in Antioch during Maximinus' persecution. In fact, magistrate Theotecnus probably used magic to foster anti-Christian riots by building a statue of Zeus and proposing oracular revelations to the Emperor (*Hist. eccl.* 9.2–3). After Maximinus' defeat, Licinius punished Theotecnus the "magician" as well as the prophets and the priests connected to the oracular cult with death (*Hist. eccl.* 9.11). Eusebius alludes to the episode also in *Praep. ev.* 4 (2.10–11) where he mentions a character "both a philosopher and an oracular interpreter," who underwent the same punishment in Miletus.

⁴⁷ Let me please draw my reader's attention to the argumentation illustrated in Sfameni Gasparro 1995. More precisely, for concerns the topic of prophecy in the ancient world, see Sfameni Gasparro 2002b as well as its related documentation. For more information and a bibliography on the topic of "communication" with the world of the gods, see Sfameni Gasparro 2005.

⁴⁸ A detailed analysis of the topic can be found in Sfameni Gasparro 2000, 2002a and 2003. See also Choi 1997.

ular within Christian environments.⁴⁹ Suffice it to remind the reader of how in the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (16.2), the harshness of the Roman tribune towards the prisoners is attributed to the “insinuation of superstitious people that the prisoners could have been freed with the help of magic formulas and practices.”⁵⁰ In one of the versions of the *Martyrium Carpi et sociorum*, probably written during Decius' persecution in Pergamum, Jesus is accused of practicing magic by a proconsul.⁵¹ In the *Martyrium Pionii*, probably related to the same persecution, some necromantic practices connected to Christ (labelled as *bio-thanatos*) are mentioned in the context of the Jewish polemics against Christians.⁵² The weight of such accusations should not be underestimated when, according to the provisions of the laws of the Twelve Tables, the Roman legislation will inflict severe punishments (including death) to all those who were found guilty of practicing magic.⁵³ Celsus' statement that “Christians get the power which they seem to possess by pronouncing the names of certain daemons and incantations” by following Jesus' example who “by magic [...] was able to do the miracles which he appeared to have done” (*Cels.* 1.6), is the object of a great argumentation also involving Jewish people. Origen's commitment to discredit these accusations confirms their current character as well as the risk of death that they represented for the survival of Christians in a climate of general hostility that occasionally led to local persecutions such as the one in Alexandria described by Dionysius.

Another dangerous accusation towards Christians, often associated with that of practicing magic, is the one Origen defines as “Celsus' first main point in his desire to attack Christianity.” That is the belief

⁴⁹ For a useful synthesis of the notoriously vast and complicated issue, see Ronkey 1993.

⁵⁰ [...] *quia tribuno castiganti eos et male tractanti – qui ex admonitionibus hominum vanissimorum verebatur ne subtraherentur de carcere incantationibus aliquibus magicis [...]* (ed. Bastiaensen et al. 1987: 136–137).

⁵¹ See Luongo 2011: 606. It offers an excellent discussion of the polemic “between the judge and the indicted.”

⁵² *Martyrium Pionii*, 13 ed. Bastiaensen et al. 1987: 176–177, where the passage is translated in the following words: “they say (the Jews) that Christ, together with the cross, has been resuscitated through necromancy.” According to Robert 1994: 40, it was the Jews themselves who conjured up Christ through necromancy (“Il disent aussi qu'ils ont pratiqué la nécromancie et qu'ils ont évoqué le Christ avec sa croix”). See the comments on pages 83–86. However, it is important to notice that when he rejects the accusations, the martyr uses the topic of miracles and of Christ's ethical teaching, similar to the one Origen puts in practice against Celsus thus confirming its traditional character. Also, we do not have to forget the rhetorical aspects of this kind of literature. See Pernot 1997.

⁵³ The bibliography about this issue is notoriously wide as it is continuously enriched with new contents. Good analyses and valuable information about the notion of magic in Rome can be found in Garosi 1976. See also Phillips III 1991, Kippenberg 1997, Graf 1994, and Rives 2011, with up-to-dated bibliography. Basic information is also provided in my essays cited in footnote 48. As it is impossible to quote these in details, I will limit myself to recommend the outcomes of a recent conference, Suárez de la Torre, Pérez Jiménez 2013.

that Christians secretly make associations with one other contrary to the laws” and therefore, their activity is to be considered as a threat of *stasis*.⁵⁴ With these words Celsus intends “to slander the so-called love (*agape*) which Christians have for one another, he says that it exists because of the common danger and is more powerful than any oath” (*Cels.* 1.1).

From Celsus’ point of view, Christians actually threaten the stability of the Empire by refusing to join the traditional cult.⁵⁵ In fact, he concludes his work by encouraging them to

help the emperor with all [our] power and cooperate with him in what is right, and fight for him, and be fellow-soldiers if he presses for this, and fellow-generals with him (*Cels.* 8.73).

Origen replies to this exhortation by appealing to the “priestly” function of Christians, which required them to stay away from bloodsheds and at the same time contribute to the stability of the political power with their prayers:

Even more do we fight on behalf of the emperor. And though we do not become fellow-soldiers with him, even if he presses for this, yet we are fighting for him and composing a special army of piety through our intercession to God (*Cels.* 8.73).

The great topic of interest concerning the politico-religious ideology professed by Celsus will be dramatically confirmed by the edict of Decius that demands the loyalty of citizens to the Empire and that will lead to the well-known persecutions against Christians who refused to perform sacrifices to the Gods. These persecutions also involved Origen himself, who was probably already aware at the time that his appeal to “spiritual loyalty” could not avoid the imminent danger for the Church. However, his statements confirm that the composition of the *Contra Celsum* has not simply been an operation of “literary archaeology” addressed to “doubtful” and “weak in the faith” Christian backgrounds. Although it reflects the problems of its time, the philosopher’s “True Doctrine” or “True Discourse” still kept its validity around the middle of the 3rd cent. in attacking some of the most sensitive points of the Christian *facies*. Within the context of Origen’s argumentation, Celsus is not a crystallised voice in an intangible written text, rather he is an active interlocutor: in Origen’s view, as a Christian, he can rather converse with him by opposing all the useful counterarguments not only to reject his accusations but also to propose solutions to doubts, to reinforce faith and to attract all those who have not yet been able to experience the true *Logos*, who is the Jesus of the Gospels.

If the existential and the intellectual experience of Origen, a master of scriptural science and a researcher of Hellenic wisdom, can be interpreted as a mirror of a precise historical time and a consistent cultural background (the Alexandrian one and also of Caesarea and other great cities of the Empire where

⁵⁴ About the matter, see Lanfranchi 2014.

⁵⁵ According to Van Nuffelen 2011: 217–230, the identity of Christians was perceived as a dangerous *superstitio* by Celsus. For this matter, also see Martin 2004: 140–186.

Origen's experience developed), then we can legitimately argue that forms of contact, confrontation, and fruitful coexistence were possible and were actually performed at that time. Nonetheless, the reasons and the occasions for a dispute did not grow weaker for Christian communities, as the trial of persecution and martyrdom was still a dramatic reality.

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Cultural and Religious Exchanges in Alexandria

The Transformation of Philosophy and Exegesis in the 3rd Cent. in the Mirror of Origen

Marco Rizzi

1. A historiographical issue

Eusebius¹ and Porphyry² unanimously affirm that Origen had some contacts with Ammonius Sakkas, the shadowy teacher of Plotinus. They both testify that Sakkas was born Christian, even though they disagree in evaluating his attitude towards Christianity in the mature age of his life, when his philosophical teaching shone brightly in Alexandria, attracting not only Origen and Plotinus, but also the future bishop Heraklas, and many others. The treatment of these sources by modern scholars (roughly from the 18th cent. onwards) is indicative of the historiographical approach (and its changes) to the more general issue of cohabitation, conflict, and mutual influence between philosophical and religious cultures and practices in 3rd-cent. Alexandria.

As is well known, the theory that distinguishes two Ammonii (one Christian, and one Pagan) was first advanced by Johann Fabricius in 1723.³ In this way, he doubled the analogue separation maintained by Valesius in 1659⁴ between “Origen the theologian” and “Origen the philosopher,” the former to be identified with the Father of the Church and the latter with Ammonius’ pupil recorded by Porphyry in his *Vita Plotini*.⁵ Fabricius’ claim is founded on ideological grounds: In his opinion, a born Christian could not convert to Paganism, as alleged by Porphyry, while the father of Neoplatonism would have hardly spent eleven years under a Christian teacher. This approach was consecrated in the 20th cent. by scholars like Eduard Zeller⁶ and Heinrich Dörrie⁷, who have deeply influenced contemporary historiography on Ancient and Late Antique philosophy,

¹ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.9–10.

² Porph. in Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.6.

³ Fabricius 1723: c. 36, 172–173.

⁴ Commenting on Eusebius’ *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.6 in his edition of the bishop’s work, Valois 1659: 2.120–121.

⁵ Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 3.14, and especially 20.

⁶ Zeller 1903: 501 n.1.

⁷ Dörrie 1955: 439–477.

until the most recent studies of Richard Goulet⁸, Mark Edwards, and Maria Di Pasquale Barbanti⁹, just to quote a few.

Leaving aside the contradictory details which emerge from both Porphyry's and Eusebius' account, and the problem posed by the attribution of a sensational common mistake to two distinct and independent ancient sources, it is crucial to discuss the presumption of a complete incommunicability between Early Christianity and Ancient philosophy, reflected by the sharp distinction between scholarly fields (History of philosophy and Patristics and/or theology), as mirrored by the structure itself of contemporary Universities. Certainly, it did not imply the denial of the deep and well-known influence of Greek philosophy on the formation of Christian dogma. But this latter has been simply labeled as "the Platonism of the Fathers"¹⁰ (or even as *Proletärplatonismus*),¹¹ indicating a one-direction movement by which ancient Christian thinkers reshaped the biblical message by adopting allegory (on Philo's footsteps) and conceptual tools from the arsenal of the Greek speculative thought.

Recent scholarship, however, has started changing this picture, at least partially. Elizabeth DePalma Digeser's monograph¹² on the conflict among the pupils of the schools of Ammonius and Plotinus, and its political relevance is the best (and most recent) example of this new attitude. She painted Ammonius' teaching as a school where a "philosophy without conflicts" was built up in a climate of free confrontation among people of different cultural, religious and ethnical-geographical provenience. A community without boundaries, either in incoming (Digeser affirms that Ammonius remained always a Christian, even in a way diverging from the mainstream, like the Gnostics did), and in outgoing; she distinguishes four different and competing philosophical schools and communities originated by Ammonius' teaching: those of Plotinus, Origen, Iamblichus and Porphyry. In her reconstruction, Origen would have acquired all his exegetical tools (and not only the philosophical ones) from Ammonius' teaching, within a master-pupil relation, mostly passive on Origen's part, since she locates Origen's attendance at Ammonius' school very early in his life. According to Digeser, the fracture in this quite idyllic picture was caused by Porphyry's pretence to present himself as the one and true heir of Plotinus's teaching and his related project to make his own version of the Neoplatonic doctrine the State ideology under Diocletian and especially Galerius, who started the great persecution as inspired by him.

Even in this new perspective, the philosophical movement seems still too much unidirectional, i.e. from the philosophical dimension of Ammonius'

⁸ Goulet 1977: 471–96.

⁹ Di Pasquale Barbanti 2002: 355–373.

¹⁰ As consecrated by the influential book of von Ivánka 1964.

¹¹ The term was originally referred to Gnosticism by Theiler 1966: 113.

¹² DePalma Digeser 2012: 23–48.

teaching towards reception and appropriation by Origen; the result, however, was quite excessive in the eyes of Ammonius, who harshly polemized with his former student about his excess in allegorical reading of the Bible. Without denying the value of the new perspective sketched by Digeser, it is possible to better qualify the features of the philosophical and religious encounter between Origen and Sakkas, which seems to delineate a more complex connection than a simple teacher-pupil relationship. Firstly, this paper will try to show how and how much Origen's confrontation with Ammonius determined a deep change not only in Origen's intellectual career, but also in his very biography and attitude towards his own Christian identity. Secondly and reversely, how Christianity impacted (along a line which starts from Justin and arrives to Origen through Pantaenus and Clement) on the theoretical organization and actual practice of Greek philosophical teaching, from Ammonius onwards.

2. Origen's twofold biography¹³

Eusebius' biographical report about Origen and the related information offered by Porphyry in the fragments (maybe from his *Contra Christianos*) quoted by Eusebius present several difficult problems concerning chronology. Precisely, these problems facilitated the theory of the duplicate Origen and Ammonius mentioned above. After Crouzel's¹⁴ and Nautin's¹⁵ classical (and in many ways opposite) reconstructions of Origen's life and its chronology, the last significant attempts on this regard have been offered by Enrico Norelli¹⁶ and by the collected studies edited by Adele Monaci Castagno¹⁷ in the first decade of this century. Despite their efforts to harmonize all the discordant data, a certain dose of contradiction seems unavoidable, as in many ancient biographical accounts. In any case, all these scholars do not show any doubt about the substantial continuity of Origen's way of living Christianity and, closely following his portrait as painted in Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*, make him the herald of a "philosophical" view of Christianity from his very first years. On the contrary, it is possible to appreciate in Eusebius' and Porphyry's accounts some elements which could help to individuate fissures within this monolithic image of Origen's life.

On this regard, Eusebius stresses two events in the life of the young Origen, which, for some aspects, seem to be not completely consonant with what Origen affirms in his later works: his strong intellectual and material support to

¹³ This paragraph is a sketch of a larger enquiry on Origen's early biography I am still conducting.

¹⁴ Crouzel 1985.

¹⁵ Nautin 1977.

¹⁶ Norelli 2000: 293–302.

¹⁷ Monaci Castagno 2004.

martyrdom and martyrs,¹⁸ and the astonishing gesture of Origen's self-castration based on a literal reading of *Matt.* 19.12.¹⁹ This latter equally embarrasses both Eusebius and modern scholarship, which, for various reasons, tends to doubt the truthfulness of Eusebius' account and to attribute it to a false charge spread by Demetrius against Origen after his priestly consecration.²⁰ It is difficult, however, to understand why Eusebius reported such an ignominious gossip if it was false and easily eradicable from the debates about Origen and his legacy. A possible key in order to shed some light on this controversial issue is offered by Eusebius' comment, which introduces the narrative of the episode: "He gave an abundant proof of an immature and youthful mind, yet withal of faith and self-control."²¹ Origen himself seems to condemn his own act when, many years later, he emphasizes the legitimacy of only an allegorical interpretation of this Gospel passage.²² Practices of self-castration were not unknown both to the religious culture of the Ancient Mediterranean world, including Hellenistic Egypt, and to early Christianity, insomuch so that the Council of Nicaea had to prohibit them in the first one of its canon.²³ In addition, the possible explanation advanced by Eusebius (i.e. the fact that Origen also admitted female pupils to his catechetical school²⁴) does not lessen the radicalism of Origen's understanding of Jesus' words.

Probably, it can be traced back to a similar context of juvenile enthusiasm also Origen's fostering of martyrdom, evidence of which is offered by Eusebius, yet all placed in the very first part of Origen's life, corresponding to the persecution under Severus and/or Aquila in 202/3 and 206/10 on a general or local level. In the writings of his maturity, however, Origen shows himself far more cautious in dealing with martyrdom and especially with its consequence on a larger scale than only the individual one. Few texts could suffice here. Commenting on *John*, Origen argues that everybody who willingly searches for martyrdom is guilty of compelling prosecutors to kill him: such a fault constitutes a sin, which annihilates any merit acquired by martyr's confession and bravery.²⁵ In *Contra Celsum* he does not hesitate to affirm that Church martyrs are "few and easily numerable,"²⁶ a statement very far from the enthusiastic picture painted by Eusebius with reference to Origen's early years. Generally

¹⁸ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.3.3–4.

¹⁹ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.8.1–2.

²⁰ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.8.4–5; among modern scholars see, for instance, Marksches 2009: 255–271.

²¹ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.8.1.

²² Orig. *Comm. Matt.* 15.1–5.

²³ On this regard, see Hanson 1965: 81–82.

²⁴ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.8.2.

²⁵ Orig. *Comm. Jo.* 28.194.

²⁶ Orig. *Cels.* 3.8.

speaking, the examples of martyrdom adduced by Origen throughout his work are all taken from the Bible, and never from episodes closer to hand. Also is *Exhortatio ad martyrium* intended to strengthen his friends and patrons Ambrose and Protoctetus in facing the concrete risk to be judged and condemned to death or other punishment, not to exalt martyrdom as such.²⁷ No doubt, that something had changed in Origen's perspective.

Both self-castration and support to martyrs and martyrdom are characteristic of Origen while he was teaching in what Eusebius calls "the Alexandrian catechetical school."²⁸ Probably, he started an autonomous initiative when the Church was deserted by bishop Demetrius, who fled during the first persecution (as Clement did) and could not delegitimize it on his return in town.²⁹ One may wonder if it is possible to individuate the features of Origen's teaching at this stage of his career, which lasted roughly until his trip to Rome under pope Zephyrinus, recorded by Eusebius,³⁰ which is to be dated around 213 CE. According to Eusebius, indeed, from his return to Alexandria on, Origen split his classroom between an elementary and an advanced level, retaining the latter for himself and committing the former to his pupil Heraklas, so marking a change in his teaching style and contents. In his early years, Origen received a Christian and Biblical education, but his training in the profane field under his father guidance was limited to preparatory disciplines, and he had to deepen his grammatical studies after his father's execution in order to reach a sufficient competence to teach as a grammarian and to provide for his family.³¹

For these reasons, it is quite unlikely that Origen's "catechetical school" presented a highly philosophical feature since its beginning. Moreover, Eusebius reports a statement of Origen himself, according to which the first pagan audience went to him when he was still practicing as a grammarian.³² The way in which Eusebius quotes Origen, paves the way to understand the evidence as signifying that pagans went precisely to his grammatical school to hear his explanation of the Bible. It is not possible to determine exactly when Origen stopped his profane teaching to dedicate himself only to the study of Scripture; but it is worth noting that Eusebius links this event to Origen's choice for ascetical life, based on a strict literal understanding of some Jesus' sayings:

And above all he considered that those sayings of the Savior in the Gospel ought to be kept which exhort us not to provide two coats, nor to use shoes, nor indeed to be worn about the future.³³

²⁷ On this topic, see Rizzi 2009.

²⁸ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.3.3.

²⁹ As it seems to be indicated by Eusebius's cursory note in *Hist. eccl.* 6.3.8

³⁰ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.10.

³¹ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.2.15.

³² Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.3.1.

³³ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.3.10.

This ascetic behavior made Origen so attractive that many people followed his example and underwent martyrdom, too. Even if Eusebius characterizes them as cultivated people and well versed in philosophy, a lifestyle closer to that of cynics or popular stoicism rather than a speculative attitude in Platonic fashion was shaping the “philosophical” dimension – so to say – of this phase of Origen’s teaching, which probably can be better defined in terms of a biblical “literalism” and “radicalism,” not unknown to Christianity of that time. In the case of Origen, such an attitude could be influenced both by his own grammatical training in reading the texts (an example of which is still evident, for instance, in his meticulous effort to individuate the characters who are speaking at different moments in the *Song of Songs*) and by the Egyptian cultural and religious environment, where contrast and uprisings on ethnic and religious grounds were quite frequent from Claudius to Caracalla and forms of religious excess, including mutilation, were current and accepted.

After the end of the persecutions and other troubles, which affected Alexandrian Christianity, Origen’s initial approach to biblical exegesis had to face new and different problems for solving which literalism and martyrdom spirituality were no longer satisfying. Sometime after his trip to Rome, as above said, he decides to qualify his teaching in front of the challenges posed by new interlocutors, among which must be counted also his future supporter Ambrose. Origen himself shed a light on the reasons of this choice:

But as I was devoted to the word, and the fame of our proficiency was spreading abroad, there approached me sometimes heretics, sometimes those conversant with Greek learning, and especially philosophy, and I thought it right to examine both the opinion of the heretics and also the claim that the philosophers make to speak concerning truth.³⁴

From his own words one can argue that Origen’s interest in philosophy was subsequent to the spreading of his fame, which consequently was based on a different way of reading the Bible from that emerging from his later commentaries and homilies; reading Suetonius’ *De grammaticis et rhetoribus* helps to find examples of such a spreading fame. Moreover, from his refusal to have any contact with the Gnostic Paul, reported by Eusebius at the very beginning of Origen’s teaching career,³⁵ it can be concluded that the confrontation with Gnostic doctrines, which occurs throughout his entire work, was not a feature of his original teaching. Origen’s decision to split his classroom between ἰδιωτικώτεροι and εὐφροί, i.e. those who were less intellectually gifted and those who were more, must be understood as a sharp division between a reading of the Bible by means of grammatical tools and a more philosophical tradition, as openly stated by Eusebius:

³⁴ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.12.

³⁵ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 8.2.14.

For he used to introduce also to the study of philosophy as many as he saw were naturally gifted, imparting geometry and arithmetic and the other preliminary subjects, and then leading them on to the system which are found among philosophers, giving a detailed account of their treatises, commenting upon and examining into each, so that the man was proclaimed as a great philosopher even among the Greek themselves. And many persons also of a more ignorant character he urged to take up the ordinary elementary studies (τὰ ἐγκύκλια γράμματα), declaring that they would derive no small advantages from these when they came to examine and study the divine Scriptures.³⁶

It is worth noting how Eusebius distinguishes τὰ φιλόσοφα μαθήματα, including τὰ προπαιδεύματα as geometry and mathematics, from τὰ ἐγκύκλια γράμματα, and refers explicitly only the latter to the understanding of the Bible. It is intriguing to see in this distinction a reference to the literal and allegorical meaning of the Bible, this latter being fully accessible only through advanced philosophical tools, as later displayed by Origen in his commentaries.

It is not by chance that Eusebius inserts precisely at this point of his narrative the quotation of Porphyry's attack on Origen's allegorical hermeneutics.³⁷ Porphyry's criticism points exactly to Origen's effort to maintain intact the value of the *littera* while promoting its allegorical interpretation. He affirms that Christian interpreters do not want to operate a denial (ἀπόστασις) of the literal meaning, no matter how miserable. At the same time, however, they consider what has been clearly said by Moses as higher mysteries and oracles (αἰνίγματα καὶ θεσπίσματα), to which Christian exegetes want to find a solution in philosophical terms.³⁸ In Porphyry's eyes, the institutor of this trend was Origen, who was the first to apply Greek allegory to foreign myths, thanks to an eclecticism described in the same terms of Eusebius.³⁹ Porphyry was correct in individuating Origen's novelty precisely in his will to manage together the literal and the allegorical meaning of the biblical narratives, at the same time without observing the Mosaic Law. Before him, the most common form of Christian allegorical reading of the Scripture consisted in what modern scholars call "typology;" and even those who practiced a more advanced form of philosophical allegory, like Clement of Alexandria in the footsteps of Philo, showed a limited interest in the literal contents of the Bible, apart from their chronological implication (which, in any case, are not liable to allegorization). Nothing to do with the philological carefulness of Origen, who maintained his original imprinting as a grammarian also after his discovery of philosophy, so to say. At the same time, such an approach distinguishes Origen from the Stoic allegorical tradition, which separates the grammatical and philological evalu-

³⁶ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.18.3–4.

³⁷ Porph. in Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.4–8.

³⁸ Porph. in Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.4. Porphyry uses the technical word λύσις, which in the philosophical vocabulary indicates the result of a specific inquire, ζήτησις.

³⁹ Porph. in Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.7–8: see the above quoted passage of 6.18.3.

ation of the texts from its philosophical use by means of allegory; precisely the denial of the surface value of Greek mythological accounts (especially those morally embarrassing) was the starting point for their philosophical appreciation. For this reason, Porphyry can conclude his attack by contrasting Origen's Christian lifestyle with this latter's use of Greek allegory: in Porphyry's opinion, it is impossible to be at the same time a literalist (which in Origen's case means to observe Jesus's precepts as he did in the most radical form since his young age, as above seen) and an allegorist, i.e. a good Greek philosopher.

Maybe, Eusebius himself seems to hint at this twofold career of Origen as an exegete, when he sketches the highly hagiographical (and likewise improbable) portrait of his childhood. In Eusebius' account, Origen's father Leonidas, shocked by the divine inspired capability of his very young son, recommended to him to abstain from deepening the inner sense of the Bible and limit himself to the simpler one: one may wonder if this is a proof of Eusebius' attempt to explain Origen's juvenile literalism which deeply differs from his mature results and has led him to his youthful radicalism. Moreover, in a fragment of the new discovered homilies on *Psalms* (to be placed towards the end of his career), Origen himself affirms:

In our youth, heresies bloomed intensely and appeared to be many who gathered around them. [...] However, when the grace of God shone forth a more abundant teaching, heresies threw down day after day and those which were introduced as secret teachings were unmasked and proved to be ungodly and atheistic talks.⁴⁰

Apparently, here Origen is distancing himself in some way from his own youthful teaching.

3. Origen, Ammonius and the new shape of philosophical teaching⁴¹

If this interpretation of Origen's career is true, the encounter with Ammonius deeply affected Origen's subsequent career and influenced his way of reading the Bible. The latter does not mention the name of the philosopher whose school he attended, but there is no reason to distrust either his identification with Ammonius by Eusebius and Porphyry or his Christian origin, at least to some extent; such an origin could easily explain why Origen chose precisely him as teacher. At Ammonius' school, also Plotinus found the teaching he was looking for, according to Porphyry.⁴² Normally, scholars attribute to Plotinus (and indirectly to Ammonius himself: so Porphyry) the shift in late antique

⁴⁰ Origen, *Homiliae 1–72 in Ps.* 2.

⁴¹ For a larger discussion of the issues of this paragraph, see Rizzi 2013: 105–119.

⁴² Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 3.

philosophy towards the primacy of theology. One may wonder whether it was in fact the Christian imprinting of Ammonius' school which started such a move, also leaving apart the highly enigmatic reference of Porphyry to an embarrassing encounter between Origen and Plotinus in his *Vita Plotini* (see chapter 14).

The point at issue is the hierarchy of the partitions of philosophy, traditionally identified in logics, (meta)physics and ethics since Senocrates' times, and the exact place and character of theology within this threefold scheme. To examine the possible impact of Christianity on this regard, Justin's *Dialogus cum Tryphone* offers a good starting point. In the opening phrases of the work, Justin recognizes that his contemporary philosophers deal principally with God and his unity and providence, but he criticizes them all, because they

have not taken thought of this, whether there be one or more gods, and whether they have a regard for each one of us or not, as if this knowledge contributed nothing to our happiness (ὥς μηδὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν τῆς γνώσεως ταύτης συντελοῦσης).⁴³

The problem raised by Justin tends to establish a direct connection between the exact knowledge of God and of his acting towards humanity, on the one hand, and ethics, on the other hand, as it is made clear by the use of the term εὐδαιμονία: in the Hellenistic philosophical vocabulary, it indicates the end and the fullness of ethical life. Another criticism made by Justin is reported a few lines below, where he affirms the original unity and oneness of philosophy, broken by the slavish imitation of masters by their pupils:

What philosophy is, however, and the reason why it has been sent down to men, have escaped the observation of most; for there would be neither Platonists, nor Stoics, nor Peripatetics, nor Theoretics, nor Pythagoreans, this knowledge being one. I wish to tell you why it has become many-headed. It has happened that those who first handled it [i.e., philosophy], and who were therefore esteemed illustrious men, were succeeded by those who made no investigations concerning truth, but only admired the perseverance and self-discipline of the former, as well as the novelty of the doctrines; and each thought that to be true which he learned from his teacher: then, moreover, those latter persons handed down to their successors such things, and others similar to them; and this system was called by the name of him who was styled the father of the doctrine.⁴⁴

Justin counters the truth revealed by the prophets and by Christ with the dogmatism of the philosophical schools of his days. Of course, now we are well aware of the deep eclecticism of the 2nd-cent. philosophy, especially in the case of its mainstream trend, the so-called Middle Platonism. But both Justin's assertions sound programmatic if we consider them in the light, for instance, of two handbooks of 2nd-cent. Middle Platonism, Albinus' (or Alcinoos') *Didaskalikos* (or *Epitome doctrinae Platonicae*) and Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*. Albi-

⁴³ Just. *Dial.* 1.4.

⁴⁴ Just. *Dial.* 2.1.

nus and Apuleius organize their exposition according to the traditional threefold order of logics, physics (or physiology) and ethics. As noted by Justin, a large space within the physics is devoted to theological themes, in the context of the discussion on the ἀρχαί (God, the ideas and the matter, or the one and the dyad, or again unity and plurality, according to the different schemes propounded by philosophers). Such a speculative interest reveals the emergence of a more marked metaphysical attitude of the Second century philosophers in comparison with their Hellenistic predecessors. Reconnecting directly to Plato's vocabulary, the *Didaskalikos*, for instance, uses the term θεωρητική, instead of φυσική or φυσιολογία,⁴⁵ to indicate the second part of philosophy, and introduces a threefold distinction within: theology, which concerns the ἀρχαί, physics, which refers to the material world, human beings included, and finally mathematics, which encompasses also geometry, astronomy and music.⁴⁶ Even by affirming the primacy of contemplative life, the *Didaskalikos* firmly locates the aim of human life in the domain of individual ethics: if the greatest good for human beings consists "in the science and the contemplation of the first Good," the τέλος of human life is the assimilation to God, which one can obtain by means of the practice of the virtues: temperance, fortitude, and wisdom; these three virtues correspond with the tricotomic partition of the human soul (concupiscible, irascible, and rational), harmonized by the superior dimension of justice, which represents "the perfection of the three virtues."⁴⁷ In this way, the conception of God remains highly generic and indefinite, as remarked by Justin, and his connection with human life is limited only to the practice of virtues by human beings. Moreover, it must be taken into consideration that, notwithstanding all the metaphysic stress on the second part of philosophical teaching, ethical life and especially the practice of virtue are structurally subsequent to the knowledge of the δόγματα about the first principles, as it was in the previous Hellenistic philosophy: the intellection of the divine – the generic and undetermined God indicated above – precedes and is the condition for ethical praxis. In particular, anthropology is treated by Albinus/Alcinoos within the traditional domain of physics/physiology, which, by illuminating the material and the spiritual structure of the human beings, shows them the manners and conditions for their ethical acting.⁴⁸ To sum up in Albinus' words:

We can attain likeness to God, first of all, if we are endowed with a suitable nature, then if we develop proper habits, way of life, and good practice according to law, and, most importantly, if we use reason, and education, and the correct philosophical tradition in such a way as to distance ourselves from the great majority of human concerns, and always to be in close

⁴⁵ By the way, this passage from *Didaskalikos* could shed some light on Justin's reference to the otherwise unknown philosophical school of the θεωρητικοί quoted above.

⁴⁶ (Albinus), *Epitome doctrinae Platonicae*, 3.1–4.

⁴⁷ (Alb.) *Epit.* 29.3.

⁴⁸ (Alb.) *Epit.* 16–26, which discusses the doctrine of the soul and free will.

contact with the intelligible reality. The introductory ceremonies, so to speak, and preliminary purifications of our innate spirit, if one is to be initiated into the greater sciences, will be constituted by music, arithmetic, astronomy and geometry [...].⁴⁹

It is superfluous to stress the close similarity of this passage with Eusebius' description of Origen's advanced teaching after the splitting of his classroom and especially with the picture of his later teaching in Caesarea painted in the so-called *Oratio panegyrica in Origenem* by an Origen's pupil traditionally (but wrongly) identified with Gregory the Thaumaturgus.⁵⁰ In the Palestinian city, Origen's philosophical teaching begins directly with ethics and its application to concrete life. But differently from the *Didaskalikos* quoted above, according to which ethics gathers the fruits of all the other philosophical disciplines, the *Oratio panegyrica* affirms that the practical and applicative dimension of ethics prevails on the theoretical one: Origen moulds his disciples

to make them [...] not mere masters and apprehenders of the bald doctrines concerning the impulses of the soul, but masters and apprehenders of these impulses themselves.⁵¹

Moreover: against the intellectualism proper to Hellenistic ethics, according to which failure in ethical life results from ignorance of the true good, the *Oratio panegyrica* affirms that a full possession of virtues is made possible only by God's intervention; the same Origen cannot be defined as completely wise on this regard.⁵² In this way, ethics becomes morals, so to speak, and the *Oratio panegyrica* can add other virtues to the canonical four: prudence, patience, and above all εὐσέβεια, "piety," which now is the summit and the fullness of all the virtues: "Men rightly designate it when they call it the mother of the virtues."⁵³ The religious virtue, εὐσέβεια, however, can be attained only thanks to God's intervention and, above all, in a different way from the intellectualistic and deductive one peculiar to the Hellenistic philosophical tradition. Therefore, the practice of εὐσέβεια becomes the necessary condition to gain access to the theological teaching, which changes its location within the system of philosophy, and now constitutes the culminating point of all the philosophical διδασκαλία, not simply a subdivision of the φυσιολογία. So, the author of the *Oratio panegyrica* can affirm that all the philosophers before Christ have been wrong "above all, in what is of greatest and most essential consequence: in the knowledge of God and in piety."⁵⁴ Although the vocabulary used by the author (γνώσις περὶ τὸν θεῖον καὶ εὐσέβεια) seems to be Platonist in tone, the knowledge of God and the piety evoked here have to be discussed in Christian terms, as already Justin

⁴⁹ (Alb.) *Epit.* 28.4.

⁵⁰ About the authorship of this text, see Rizzi 2002: 81–94; Rizzi 2005.

⁵¹ Greg. Thaum.(?) *Orig. orat. paneg.* 11.137.

⁵² Greg. Thaum.(?) *Orig. orat. paneg.* 11.135ff.

⁵³ Greg. Thaum.(?) *Orig. orat. paneg.* 12.149.

⁵⁴ Greg. Thaum.(?) *Orig. orat. paneg.* 14.165.

affirmed; and only the Bible can offer the correct starting point for such an enquiry. In this way, the adhesion to the Christian faith and the consequent practice of εὐσέβεια and other virtues precede and bias theological speculation, which is conditioned not only by the very existential situation of the philosopher and by his ethical habits, but also by the very object of his intellectual investigation. Here resides a decisive difference between Ammonius' two most famous pupils: Plotinus turns philosophy in direction of theology, but remains still inside the traditional Platonist conception of the intelligible world as totally extrinsic to human experience, while Origen considers the Bible (and its commands) as the noetic world to be investigated. There remains an open question about Ammonius' exact place between the diverging positions of his two best pupils.

In an influential paper, Pierre Hadot⁵⁵ maintained the existence of another pattern for teaching philosophy, different from that of the *Didaskalikos* and Apuleius; it consists in the succession of ethics, physics, and "epoptic" ("contemplation"). According to Hadot, such a scheme began to be used in the 1st cent. CE, as witnessed by Plutarch;⁵⁶ but in Plutarch's text, there is only the definition of "epoptic," which Plutarch traces back explicitly to Plato. Probably, Christians thinkers – and Origen in particular – played a decisive role in the rearrangement of philosophical teaching between the 2nd and the 3rd cent., which was underestimated by Hadot and by scholarship in general. Clement had already reversed the position of ethics and physics: at the end of the 7th book of the *Stromata*, he professes to have concluded the ethical discourse and to go on by starting the exposition of the "truly Gnostic physiology," of which metaphysical speculation consists.⁵⁷ Indeed, to confirm the existence of the threefold pedagogical scheme, Hadot has to refer precisely to Origen's introduction to his commentary on *Song of Songs*, where he writes that

The branches of learning by means of which men can gain knowledge are three, which are called by Greeks ethics, physics, enoptics; we can define them moral, natural, contemplative; some among the Greeks add logics as fourth, which we can call rational.⁵⁸

One may wonder if, with the term "Greeks" normally used to indicate Greek philosophers, Origen is here hinting specifically at the fruit of his own cultural and philosophical exchanges at Ammonius' school, since he codifies in Christian and Biblical terms the new organization of philosophical knowledge; few lines after the passage quoted by Hadot, Origen affirms that, before the Greek philosophers, such a scheme was made clear by Solomon, who

first, in *Proverbs* taught the moral science, putting rules for living into the form of short and pithy maxims, as was fitting. Secondly, he covered the science known as natural in the

⁵⁵ Hadot 1979: esp. 213–221.

⁵⁶ Plut. *Is. Os.* 77 (*Mor.* 382d).

⁵⁷ Clem. *Strom.* 7.18.110.4.

⁵⁸ Orig. *Comm. Cant. Prooem.* 3 (75 Baehrens).

Ecclesiastes [...]. Thirdly, the inspective science (i.e. the discipline which leads to the contemplation of intellectual objects and God) likewise he has propounded in this little book, that we have now in hands – that is, the *Song of Songs*. But in laying down these basic principles of true philosophy and establishing the order of the subjects to be learned and thought, it was neither ignorant of the rational science (i.e. logics) nor refused to deal with it.⁵⁹

This quotation stresses a second innovative feature of Origen's school teaching, which regards a methodological aspect of philosophical teaching and links together Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*, Ammonius' teaching (as painted by Porphyry) and that of Origen (as recorded by the *Oratio panegyrica*): a marked eclecticism in commenting texts coming from all the philosophical traditions and schools (only Epicurean authors are excluded as atheist, according to a commonplace in Antiquity). Origen and the other Christian thinkers probably shared such an eclecticism with other philosophers of their day, but Origen drives it to a high degree of technicality, unknown to his contemporaries, as is well shown by his commentaries. Moreover, his eclecticism is different from that which was actually practised by Middle Platonists, because Origen theorises openly the overcoming of any dependence upon traditions and schools, while Porphyry still separates according to school the names of the authors of writings commented on by Plotinus⁶⁰ (but is less attentive in this respect in the case of Origen⁶¹). Contrary to the *Didaskalikos* above quoted (according to which reason, education, and the correct philosophical tradition are the conditions to attain the vision of God), the *Oratio panegyrica* (and Justin before, as we have seen above) considers the dogmatism of the philosophical schools as the main obstacle to theological knowledge, because it prevents from an unprejudiced discussion of hypothesis and interpretations, as previously logics and physics allowed the philosopher to move from the sensible to the intelligible world.⁶² Such an exercise in text-reading trains Christian philosophers to practice the noetic abstraction from the textual sensible to the intelligible, in which consists biblical exegesis at its highest level. In Origen's conception, the textual inquiry on the Scripture absorbs all the disciplines, which were previously encompassed by logics and physics and now are used as tools for the biblical exegesis. Origen's attitude stands on the watershed between tradition and innovation in the story of Ancient philosophy; Clement had already chosen not to include logics and dialectics in the *Stromata*, the work which collects his advanced teaching, but he assigns his logical teaching to the enigmatic fragment of the so called 8th book. It is not an absolute novelty. Apuleius had already left apart the discussion of logics, although he maintained the traditional threefold partition of philosophy; indeed, he affirms that Plato himself was the first to

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 14.

⁶¹ Porph. In Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.8.

⁶² Greg. Thaum.(?) *Orig. orat. paneg.* 14.158–173

join these three parts, which were each other necessary and, far from *pugnare inter se*, are mutually helpful.⁶³ But we have no notice about philosophers who pursued this program with the same radical approach and freedom as Origen did. In his case, eclecticism and disciplinary conflation find their specific space of application in the literary genre of allegorical commentary of the Bible, which so disturbed Porphyry, but seems to have been Origen's decisive gain at Ammonius' school in Alexandria.

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⁶³ Apul. *Dogm. Plat.* 1.3.187.

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