



ARYS

ANTIGÜEDAD: RELIGIONES Y SOCIEDADES

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CHEMICAL ARTS
AND RELIGION
IN ANTIQUITY

EDITED BY NOEMI BORRELLI & MATTEO MARTELLI

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MONOGRÁFICO

CHEMICAL ARTS AND RELIGION IN ANTIQUITY
Edited by Noemi Borrelli & Matteo Martelli

This edited volume is part of the research project *Alchemy in the Making: From Ancient Babylonia via Graeco-Roman Egypt into the Byzantine, Syriac, and Arabic Traditions*, acronym *AlchemEast*. The *AlchemEast* project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (G.A.724914).



CHEMICAL ARTS AND RELIGION IN ANTIQUITY. AN INTRODUCTION

NOEMI BORRELLI

UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA
noemi.borrelli@unibo.it

MATTEO MARTELLI

UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA
matteo.martelli@unibo.it

GODS NO LONGER INHABIT THE NATURAL WORLD that constitutes the object of inquiry for contemporary natural scientists. Their commitment in leaving supernatural entities out of any scientific discourse is often described as methodological naturalism, an expression that was first introduced by the American philosopher and theologian Edgar S. Brightman in 1936.¹ This attitude and methodology seem to inform every branch of contemporary science, from astronomy and physics to biology and chemistry. From a history of science perspective, however, naturalism – being it method-

1. The expression was coined in his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association, which was published the year after in the journal *The Philosophical Review* (Brightman, 1937). See Harrison, 2019, p. 2 and Kim, 2022.

ological or ontological – remains a complex and debated category.² Chemistry is a case in point, since its relationship with religion changed according to the historical context taken into account: as recently pointed out by John H. Brooke, chemistry could either dismantle religious beliefs or be “on the side of angels”³

Alchemy, in particular, shows an intimate combination with religion throughout its history. Medieval and early modern practitioners reflected religious values and beliefs in their writings on alchemy, an “art” that was primarily described as a gift of God (*donum Dei*). Religious writers, on the other hand, often drew on alchemical ideas and practices to explain and adorn theological truths with suggestive metaphors.⁴ This holds true for the earliest phases of alchemy as well, when this discipline took shape by inheriting and repackaging a wide set of chemical arts – e.g., dyeing procedures, metalworking, glassmaking, perfume-making – that were firmly rooted in the technological lore of different Mediterranean civilisations. All these arts were interwoven with and informed by different ways of thinking about gods and supernatural entities, which developed and travelled between Babylonia and Athens, Alexandria and Byzantium. This special issue of ARYS is a collection of articles that investigate the first known steps of chemical arts in antiquity and how such technical traditions were shaped by and bound to the religious contexts in which they flourished and were transmitted.

What the concept of *chymeia* – the ancient term from which modern “chemistry” or “alchemy” derive – stood for in these times is hard to define. According to the very own words of the Graeco-Egyptian alchemist Zosimus of Panopolis (3rd-4th cent. CE), it already begot debates among early philosophers and alchemists. Alchemy, Zosimus explains, must not only deal with how silver can be dyed gold, but it must also include a wider spectrum of practices that could produce a variety of chromatic transformations.⁵ This debate did not take place in a vacuum, but it was firmly rooted in a rich technical and artisanal tradition, let alone in dense ritual and religious settings, which alchemy inherited and reshaped when it made its first steps in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Zosimus, indeed, first introduced the term *chymeia* in the framework of a wider discussion on the revelation and circulation of this art: the first alchemical book, he claims, was revealed by the fallen angels and then commented on by Egyptian priests, who somehow misunderstood its original contents. This

2. See, for instance, Harrison, 2019 and 2020 (with further bibliography).

3. See Brooke, 2019.

4. See Principe, 2013, pp. 190-206; Nummedal, 2013 (introduction to a special issue of the journal *Ambix* fully devoted to alchemy and religion in Christian Europe).

5. See Martelli, 2014, pp. 9-20.

narrative – which combines biblical (although apocryphal) and Hermetic elements – exemplifies the highly syncretic nature of ancient alchemical texts, which often drew on writings belonging to different religions and philosophies. Other narratives stretched the chronological and geographical boundaries of *chymeia* by insisting on its Pharaonic or Persian origins. Its secrets, indeed, had been encoded in Hieroglyphic inscriptions⁶ or in tablets written in “Persian characters”, a detail that might be reminiscent of ancient cuneiform script.⁷ The historical accuracy of these stories remains difficult to assess and requires constant revision in light of the acquisitions of new sources and fresh insights into the available material. In the long run, it appears that inputs coming from different traditions stratified on one another, creating complex narratives on the origin of this ancient knowledge.

This knowledge and its foundational myths were preserved in Byzantine manuscripts transmitting anthologies of texts that rank among the earliest writings on alchemy according to modern scholars, from humanists to contemporary philologists and historians of science. In his *Pandectae*, for instance, Conrad Gessner included these Byzantine collections among the books listed under the rubric (XIII 9): *De chymia, quam aliqui alchemiam, alij chemiam, chymisticam, alchymiam, et arte sacram vel magnam appellant*.⁸ The reference to the “sacred art” (*ars sacra*) is not coincidental. This expression, indeed, occurs far more frequently than the term *chymeia* in late-antique and Byzantine sources. In the *pinax* (roughly a table of contents)⁹ that opens our earliest Byzantine alchemical manuscript, *Marcianus* gr. 299 (10th-11th cent.), most titles refer to the main subject covered by the listed treatises as *hiera kai theia technē* (ἱερά καὶ θεία τέχνη), that is, “sacred and divine art”: from the first work in the *pinax*, namely Stephanus of Alexandria’s first lesson (*praxis*) to Zosimus of Panopolis’s *Chapters to Theosebeia*.¹⁰

As the following articles will highlight, in certain cultic contexts, chemical arts were soon loaded with additional values that transcended their immediate artisanal nature, by virtue of which the allure of “sacred and divine art” was easily bestowed

6. See, for instance, Zosimus of Panopolis’s *Final Account* in Festugière, 1986, pp. 278 (French translation) and 365 (Greek text).

7. See Martelli & Rumor, 2014, pp. 44-45.

8. *Pandectarum sive Partitionum universalium Conradi Gesneri Tigurini, medici & philosophiae professoris, libri xxi* (Zurich: Christophorus Froschoverus, 1538), p. 174. See Matton, 1995, p. 317.

9. The *pinax* records 52 titles, including texts originally transcribed in quires that went lost after a later rebounding of the manuscript. On the relationship between the *pinax* and the actual contents of the manuscript, see Saffrey, 1995.

10. See Roberts, 2022.

upon them. The material transformations achieved with technical dexterity intertwined with concepts of purity and moral rectitude, thoughts on the sublimation of the soul from the matter, and complex cosmological and astral considerations. The theoretical foundation of these arts adjusted concurrently with changes in the systems of beliefs, which were often but not exclusively sponsored by political agendas.

The articles here collected aim at providing a possible picture of what were the mechanisms that justified and, in some cases, regulated the complex relationships between ancient chemical arts and religion in distinct, yet contiguous geographical areas. The project brought together specialists working on diverse textual and technical traditions, who explored the topic from different perspectives and tested their hypothesis during an online workshop sponsored by the ERC project *Alchemy in the Making: From Ancient Babylonia via Graeco-Roman Egypt into the Byzantine, Syriac, and Arabic Traditions* (grant agreement no. 724914) and hosted by the University of Bologna in October 2021. This collection of essays is indeed the result of this choral journey.

The thematic unity of this volume is achieved by analysing the codification of alchemical works *vis-à-vis* their religious and cultic background, and the use of recurrent stock themes, a convenient way that helps at creating bridges across different traditions. The variety of approaches and the integration of diverse data point at challenging the long-held historiographical misconception that wanted to simplistically reduce alchemy to a purely spiritual endeavour or religious exercise.¹¹ The essays rather reason on the different ways in which ancient chemical arts interacted with religion, identifying common narratives, proposing thematic and argumentative parallels, and highlighting adjustments across space and time due to local cultural and religious inputs. To offer a balanced discussion, the special issue evenly covers the main issues of how technologies and rituals influenced one another, and how ancient alchemists encoded religious ideas and beliefs in their technical writings. Furthermore, the case studies here considered equally draw from historical, textual, lexical, iconographic, and technological data, and they offer a wide coverage of the geographic setting that experienced an early interest in chemical arts, embracing Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Greece, and Byzantium, from as early as 1200 BCE to as late as the 8th century CE.

Several themes characterize the volume, though each article may deal with more than a single theme at the same time. Identifying where and how the craftsmanship involved in chemical treatments met religious practices proved to be a very productive research path. Recent studies have stressed the ritual uses of minerals and

11. On the origins and developments of this approach, see Principe, 2013, pp. 83-106.

“chemicals” in the “laboratories” of ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian temples.¹² Here, artisans and cultic personnel routinely interacted with each other in their quest of creating divine hypostases, an endeavour that called upon both technical expertise and ritual exactness. A divine statue needed to be manufactured as well as to be born,¹³ two actions that although intimately connected were substantially different. For both the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian cultic traditions, the juncture between these two complementary foci was the ceremony of the *Opening of the Mouth*. As discussed for both traditions (Escolano-Poveda, Borrelli & Escobar), this complex ritual rested upon an intricate system of beliefs, which connected multiple levels of existence through allegories and analogies, binding together celestial bodies, deities, human beings, and the material world. As it turned out in the essays, these procedures often took place in laboratories or workshops – known as the *House of Life* in Egypt (Blanco Cesteros, Escolano-Poveda) or as the *bīt mummi* or *bīt kūri* in Mesopotamia (Borrelli & Escobar) – annexed to the temple precincts, where craftsmen, scribes, and priests operated simultaneously. These historical encounters provide a first avenue for an intimate combination of religious beliefs with artisanal practices. This bond is further strengthened in Graeco-Egyptian and Byzantine texts, which frame the alchemical art in complex narratives reasoning on its divine origins and nature (Blanco Cesteros, Dufault, Merianos). These narratives also mirror soteriological and eschatological tensions, which could emerge in visions, dreams, and myths packed with vivid metallurgical images (Escolano-Poveda, Dufault, Morrone). Chemical arts, indeed, fired the imagination of ancient thinkers, from early Greek philosophers and physicians to Gnostic, Hermetic and Christian writers.¹⁴ Cosmological accounts often used an (al)chemical vocabulary, which shaped, for instance, both the description of the creation of souls in the Hermetic treatise *Korē Kosmou* and the cosmogony in the Coptic *Paraphrase of Shem*.¹⁵ Likewise, Thespesius’s vision in Plutarch’s theological dialogue *De sera numinis vendicta* makes use of various metallurgical images to depict the punishments of vicious souls in the afterlife (Morrone). Religious texts, on the other hand, often provided key elements for alchemical narratives, which could draw on a variety of sources: from Biblical canonical and apocryphal writings – such as the *Book of Enoch* (Blanco Cesteros) and the Old and New Testament (Merianos) – to

12. See already Aufrère, 1991, and various sections in Beretta, 2022 (*passim*).

13. See Dick, 1999, p. xi, and Hurowitz, 2003.

14. See Aufrère, Cale & Martelli, 2022, pp. 132-134. On the use of alchemical metaphors in the early Christian literature, see also Tommasi Moreschini, 2007.

15. See respectively Festugière, 1967 and Burns, 2015.

Hermetic and Gnostic treatises (Blanco Cesteros, Dufault). Alchemy was conceptualized as a gift granted by supernatural entities, being them biblical angels, demons or the Christian God. The recipients of their revelation varied according to the different religious and cultural ideas embedded in the alchemical sources: from the Egyptian goddess Isis (Blanco Cesteros) to Byzantine alchemists, such as Christianos (Merianos) and Stephanus (Carlotta). According to the latter, a correct understanding of the revealed art and of the earliest sources that explained it could lead to fully appreciate God's power and his creation (Carlotta). In a way, Byzantine texts fully christianized the same preoccupations that already occupied Egyptian and Babylonian artisans, scribes, and priests operating in the same templar environment: manipulating natural substances and reaching the divine.

As it can be appreciated in Noemi Borrelli's and Eduardo Escobar's comparative study on ritual crafting in the cuneiform tradition (*Crafting Purity in Assyro-Babylonian Procedures. Time, Space, and the Material World*), the manufacturing of divine objects required a great deal of expertise, ranging from metalworking to glassmaking and leather dyeing, which often aimed at chromatic transformation. However, handling the divine was a major undertaking, and therefore these artisanal procedures could not be performed on the spur of the moment but had to be carefully planned as both for timing and for the appropriateness of the personnel and the material involved. Crafting divine objects implied crafting their purity. The uncorrupted status was achieved, practically, through elaborate rituals and, theoretically, through analogies and plays on the written word. By comparing cuneiform procedural text traditions, three themes have been identified: the appropriate time for the manufacturing procedure, the purified workspace where it took place, and the pure material that was used. This narrative of purity was created drawing from hemerologies, induction rituals, and theological premises establishing the divine nature of the manipulated elements. Temple ateliers were thus key for priests and artisans to rely on each other and exchange their knowledge at different levels.

The article written by Marina Escolano-Poveda (*Zosimos Aigyptiakos. Identifying the Imagery of the "Visions" and Locating Zosimos of Panopolis in His Egyptian Context*) shows how the allegorical language used by Zosimos of Panopolis in his descriptions of alchemical procedures draws indeed from the Graeco-Egyptian temple practices of which he had first-hand experience. This innovative approach that scrutinizes Zosimos's works through an Egyptological lens allows us to identify the original religious substratum of his "Visions", which goes back to the mysteries of Osiris. Scenes of dismemberments, rebirthing, and burning, allusions to the lunar cycle, ascension paths, and colour-codes, all concur to create Zosimos's narrative of transmutation. Many of these motifs find a tangible

echo in the iconographic apparatus of the Osirian chapels at Dendera and in the very own architectural features of this temple, which likely represent the closest parallel to the temple of Min at Akhmim frequented by Zosimus. Here, Zosimus might have had the chance to observe and learn the rituals enacted by the Egyptian priests, regardless of the fact that he himself was not a priest. The initiated temple personnel were distinguished from the mere artisans, and yet even the uninitiated must have been bound to a cautionary level of secrecy due to their engagement with divine matter. A situation that fits the Mesopotamian temple tradition as well (Borrelli & Escobar). This is indeed the atmosphere that Zosimus came to know, that influenced his own writings, and that he eventually criticized.

In fact, as discussed in Olivier Dufault's article (*Was Zosimus of Panopolis Christian?*), Zosimus did not draw on such motifs without building upon them new meanings deriving from his own faith. Regardless of the original religious connotations of his allegorical discourse, Zosimus used what Dufault labelled as "assimilative interpretation," a process leading to the reshaping of older traditions to fit a new theological scenario. In Zosimus's dreams, the metallurgic allegories, the sword-bearing character that cuts the flesh, and the dismemberment of the body – images that heavily relied on Egyptian antecedents – can be easily read as hints on how to transform matter into pneuma. Zosimus thus might have purposely chosen those elements of the Egyptian religion that bore resemblances to his Christian ideas and acknowledged to them a certain degree of truth, although these beliefs were found wanting once tested against Christian wisdom. Dissecting these allegories, Dufault shows how some of Zosimus's alchemical reasonings were imbued with soteriological messages that betray him as Christian and highlight the influence that classic Gnostic treatises exercised upon him. Zosimus's Christology might have been in dissonance with the main theological interpretation of the time, a possibility that might explain the apparent conundrum on the alleged secrecy of alchemical knowledge found in his works.

Along with Zosimus's alchemical dreams, other ancient "visions" were shaped by metallurgical allegories. In this regard, Daniele Morrone's article (*Quenching Greedy Souls in Metal Lakes. A Metallurgical Image in Thespesius's Vision of the Afterlife*) provides an in-depth analysis of the eschatological myth that concludes Plutarch's theological dialogue *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance* (*De sera numinis vindicta*). The vividness of Plutarch's description of the afterlife and the physical features of the punished souls only outwardly contrast with Plutarch's platonic stance. This vividness rather serves rhetorical purposes and is instrumental in fully displaying the different layers of meaning introduced by the rich metallurgical imaginary. A rigorous hermeneutical approach guides Morrone's close reading of the myth, which is interpreted in the framework of Plutarch's philosophical corpus. This allows the

author to contextualize and explain many artisanal details embedded in Thespesius's visions, from the famous image of the metal lakes to the stains of the greedy souls. Their immersions in the gold, lead, and iron lakes - Morrone argues - do not point to processes of purification or transmutation. Rather than being perfected, the souls are thus exposed with their real vices. This interpretation moves away from earlier alchemical readings of the passage (discussed in the paper). Morrone, on the other hand, does not exclude that Plutarch could have merged Platonic and Aristotelian elements with suggestions derived from the same syncretic Egyptian tradition that inspired Zosimus's *Visions* as well as other early alchemical writings.

One of the most intriguing products of this syncretism is the so-called *Letter of Isis*, the focus of Miriam Blanco Cesteros's essay (*(De)Constructing an Authoritative Narrative. The Case of The Letter of Isis*), which addresses the role of initiations and the call for secrecy found in Graeco-Egyptian alchemy. The literary masterpiece about the origin of alchemical knowledge, the *Letter of Isis*, is investigated by identifying tropes used by the first alchemists to create the narrative of sacred art and to grant authority to their writings. These included the revelation of an esoteric knowledge from a divine source to an initiated acolyte. The *Letter of Isis* taps into images that have clear Greek, Hebrew, and Egyptian backgrounds. Among these, one can recall the oath sworn by Isis to seal her initiation, whose parallels with older and coeval traditions are numerous and fruitfully discussed by the author. Here, the oath imagery builds upon known themes such as the opposition between light and darkness, the four elements, a colour-code system to address the transformation process, the descent from the heights of heaven to the depth of the earth, and the journey to the Netherworld. These themes, that appear in older cultural contexts as well, such as the temple of Dendera (Escolano-Poveda), the Mesopotamian rituals (Borrelli & Escobar), and even the Greek philosophical tradition (Morrone), found their fortune also in the later alchemical lore, where they were reinterpreted in view of new beliefs (Dufault, Merianos).

The divine origin of the alchemical knowledge and the prerequisite of virtue that the philosopher-chemist had to possess to gain access to the divine wisdom are also the focus of Gerasimos Meranios's discussion on Christianos (*The Christianity of the Philosopher Christianos. Ethics and Mathematics in Alchemical Methodology*). The moral rectitude is the compass pointing at the genuine knowledge, separating the true alchemist from the false ones. Yet, entangled with the righteous moral conduct, there is the pursue of an alchemical methodology based on Neoplatonic mathematics. In his discourse, Christianos explains the mathematical principles at the base of the alchemical procedures tapping into well-known tropes, such as the egg as the image of the world and its four elements. On this analogy, he developed a taxonomy

of the alchemical substances and procedures by using an arithmetical and geometrical language. Christianos's interest in mathematics is not detached from his beliefs and his alchemical speculation: this interest points at proving the unity of the divine work as well as at offering a valid path to participate to the divine knowledge.

The gradual Christianization of ancient alchemical ideas and tropes characterized the Byzantine period, as shown in Vincenzo Carlotta's essay on Stephanus (*Introducing Greek Alchemy to Christianity. Inclusion and Exclusion of Religious Elements in Stephanus's Lessons*). In his *Lessons*, the author known as Stephanus explains the theory behind the alchemical practice, whose goal was to transform and purify substances acting upon their elementary components. Opening his discourse with prayers to God, however, Stephanus betrays his interest in reclaiming alchemy as a Christian discipline and its legitimacy as a field of study. In fact, the synthetic procedure at the core of the alchemical practice, *i.e.* creating one substance from many ingredients, mirrors the idea of overcoming the multiplicity of the material world to reach the unity of the divine.

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CRAFTING PURITY IN ASSYRO-BABYLONIAN PROCEDURES. TIME, SPACE, AND THE MATERIAL WORLD*

LA ELABORACIÓN DE LA PUREZA EN LOS PROCEDIMIENTOS
ASIRO-BABILÓNICOS. EL TIEMPO, EL ESPACIO Y EL MUNDO MATERIAL

NOEMI BORRELLI

UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA
noemi.borrelli@unibo.it

EDUARDO A. ESCOBAR

UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA
eduardo.escobar@unibo.it

ABSTRACT

Assyro-Babylonian procedural texts for making cult objects dated to the 1st millennium BCE provide an untapped resource for examining scribal conceptions of craft and purity in the ancient world. Ritual procedures for “opening of the mouth” of a cult statue (*mīs pī*), and for manufacturing a ritual drum called the *lilissu*, constitute the principal focus of this two-part study. This work uses three *themata* – time, space, and

RESUMEN

Los textos procesales asirio-babilónicos para la fabricación de objetos de culto que datan del primer milenio a.C. proporcionan un recurso no explotado para examinar las concepciones de los escribas sobre la artesanía y la pureza en el mundo antiguo. Los procedimientos rituales para “abrir la boca” de una estatua de culto (*mīs pī*) y para fabricar un tambor ritual llamado *lilissu* constituyen el enfoque principal de este estudio de

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the material world – to provide the scaffolding for a comparative analysis that spans various centuries and localities, highlighting the ways in which “purity” was crafted in cuneiform scholarly cultures.

dos partes. Este trabajo utiliza tres *themata* (tiempo, espacio y mundo material) para proporcionar el andamiaje para un análisis comparativo que abarca varios siglos y localidades, destacando las formas en que la “pureza” se forjó en las culturas académicas cuneiformes.

KEYWORDS

Assyriology; Craft Production; Cult Objects; Cuneiform Studies; History of Knowledge; History of Science; History of Technology; History of the Ancient Near East; Procedures; Purity; Recipes; Religion.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Asiriología; Estudios Cuneiformes; Historia de la Ciencia; Historia de la Tecnología; Historia del Cercano Oriente antiguo; Historia del Conocimiento; Objetos de Culto; Procedimientos; Producción Artesanal; Pureza; Recetas; Religión.

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THIS PAPER EXAMINES HOW CONCEPTIONS OF TEMPORAL, spatial, and material purity manifest in Assyro-Babylonian craft procedures for making cult objects. Specifically, we explore the thematic and philological resemblances between two cuneiform procedural text traditions well-attested in both Assyrian and Babylonian scholarly contexts. The first of the texts under consideration are the instructions for making a cult statue known as the *mīs pî* or “washing of the mouth” ritual, preserved in exemplars dating from the mid to late 1st millennium BCE, *i.e.* the Neo-Assyrian to Late Babylonian periods; these texts will be compared to similar instructions for making “pure” objects, notably, Neo-Assyrian glassmaking recipes. The second set of texts are procedures for making a ritual drum called the *lilissu*, attested in the Late Babylonian context of the 3rd cent. BCE. In this work we argue that these two text traditions share key points of intersection that facilitate a cross comparative inquiry on the role of craft and conceptions of purity in cuneiform scholarly cultures. We maintain that the comparative study of the *mīs pî* and *lilissu* drum ritual – a connection which had already been noted by Christopher Walker and Michael Dick in their edition of the mouth washing ritual¹ – provides an opportune moment for reconsidering broader intertextual questions concerning the influence of written ritual craft instructions, and their prescriptive elements, on material and cultic practice, and vice a versa.² In addition, §§ 1-1.3 explore how these three *themata* of time, space, and the material purity manifest in first millennium craft procedures for making glass, extending the

1. Walker & Dick, 2001, pp. 10-11 note the philological points of contact between the *mīs pî* and *lilissu* drum rituals; a comparative focus on these two cultic procedures, however, has not been subject to in-depth analysis.

2. For a recent historical summary of approaches to Akkadian literature, see Pongratz-Leisten, 2020.

proposed hermeneutical framework into the world of chemical procedures that have traditionally been examined for their technological rather than scholarly content.

While scholars have examined conceptions of purity within sacred contexts, purity in craft and procedural contexts, understood through the lens of the scribe, has received far less attention.³ In the ancient Near East, “purity” was a broad, multivalent concept, representing a subject more suitable for a monograph than single co-authored paper. Although conceptions of purity and impurity in religious contexts will invariably enter into the discussions below, the goal of this work is to attempt a thick description of purity as a scholarly *thema* within procedural scholarship, focusing on texts which deal particularly with the making of purified objects (cult images, glass, ritual drums).⁴ By employing a thematic analysis, we seek to highlight “imageries and preferences for or commitments to certain kinds of concepts, certain kinds of methods, certain kinds of evidence, and certain forms of solutions to deep questions and engaging puzzles,”⁵ here, the intellectual and cultural history of how “purity” was understood as a key component of Assyro-Babylonian craft procedures. Moreover, undertaking a thematic approach to cultic procedural texts aids in circumventing what Daniel Schwemer has noted are the intuited and often limited boundaries of our modern categories of magic, religion, and science that have few resonances with the categories of knowledge extant in the cuneiform cultures under discussion, particularly in cultic contexts.⁶

This work is split into two main sections. Sections 1-1.3 (Escobar) dissect how time, space, and materials are made pure within the well-preserved Neo-Assyrian recension of the *mīs pī* ritual. In this first part, an argument is made for interpreting “mouth washing” as an “iterative loop” wherein purity is achieved principally through procedural repetition. Intertextual parallels are drawn with contemporaneous Assyrian recipes for making colored glass, which demonstrate similar procedural rubrics, including parallel linguistic structures and scribal appeals to divine purifying agents called *Kusu* and *Kubu* respectively. These purifying deities, who have been generally understudied in comparative contexts, constitute an important contribution to the

3. There are numerous discussions of purity in religious contexts, particularly as they relate conceptions of sin and transgression. E. Jan Wilson (1994) has discussed concepts of holiness and purity in Mesopotamia.

4. Due to our focus on objects, we will not discuss the important and relevant building rituals from the 1st millennium BCE, examined by Claus Ambos (Ambos, 2010).

5. Merton, 1975, p. 335. Francesca Rochberg has already noted the potential of exploring *themata* (à la Holton) in cuneiform scholarship (Rochberg, 2016, p. 277).

6. Schwemer, 2011, pp. 418-420. See discussion below on the *mīs pī* ritual.

question of divine agency in craft production, and provide a close point of contact between the *mīs pî* and glassmaking procedures.

Sections 2-2.3 (Borrelli) focus on the Late Babylonian ritual for covering the *lilissu* drum, specifically, text TCL 6, 44, which provides a rich case study of the interface between the lore of the lamentation priest (*kalûtu*) and specialist knowledge of craft production (*ummânutu*), highlighting how technical knowledge was embedded and transmitted in a ritual context. Equally, we find in TCL 6, 44 the thematic elements of ritual timing, purifying of the cultic craft space known as the *bît mummi* (a craft space is shared by the *mīs pî* ritual), and finally the process of selecting pure materials for crafting the *lilissu* drum.

1. THE *MĪS PĪ* RITUAL AS AN ITERATIVE LOOP

Since the first editions of cuneiform tablets and fragments preserving the ritual known as *mīs pî*, “washing of the mouth”, or “opening of the mouth” (*pīt pî*) were published at the turn of the 20th century, they have offered a retort to the fundamental Biblical prohibition against creating a divine image or simulacrum of a god.⁷ The “Washing/Opening of the Mouth” ritual may be summarized pithily as an answer to the question: How can a god be made? The answer, as we will find, is a complex and *iterative* process of creation, wherein actors and actants, both human and non-human, animate and inanimate, bring to bear – and quite literally “birth” (in Akkadian, *alādu*) – a divine image. The production of the cult image (or *šalmu*) is carefully guided by an incantation priest, who is tasked with reciting and supervising the proper rites of purification.⁸ By the mid 7th century BCE, knowledge of the *mīs pî* ritual could be counted among the most important representatives of the field of specialized knowledge maintained by the incantation priests and exorcists known by the professional title *āšipu*.⁹

7. Heinrich Zimmern in 1901, and Sydney Smith in 1925, were among the first to advance our knowledge of these texts, see Walker & Dick, 2001, pp. 3-30; Hurowitz, 2003, pp. 147-148.

8. The human exorcist/incantation priest, or *āšipu*, is mirrored in the divine realm by *Kusu* (wr. ⁴KÜ. SÛ), identified as the chief exorcist of Enlil, and discussed further in the section(s) that follow. A classic discussion of the meaning of *šalmu* in ancient Mesopotamia may be found in Winter, 1997; Bahrani, 2003, pp. 123-128, and more recently Berlejung, 2021.

9. A well-known text known as the Exorcist’s Manual catalogues the *mīs pî* ritual as among the primary texts of the exorcist’s lore, alongside incantations to the sun god, and *šūila* prayers, for which, see Schwemer, 2011, p. 421.

Manuscripts of the *mīs pī* ritual can be separated into two complementary text traditions. First, are those tablets that provide ritual procedures for crafting a cult statue, which come principally from the region of Assyria with the exception of a single Babylonian tablet; second, are the eight known incantation tablets, which provide further insight into the nature of the cult procedure. A two-day process is described in the ritual procedure, during which the *āšipu* leads the statue from the cultic workshop (*bīt mummi*) to a reed hut erected by the river. There, the image of the god is cleansed and imbued with the presence of the god before it is transported once again to its permanent resting place in the temple. Collectively, the Assyrian procedures and the accompanying incantation tablets provide a complex picture of how, during the Neo-Assyrian period, the cult image could be “born in heaven and made on earth.”¹⁰ The birth of the divine image is not a single event, but rather an iterative act, such that, throughout the course of this ritual, purity and divine life is attained by “washing the mouth” over a dozen times over the course of two days.¹¹

As Irene Winter has discussed, the transformation of an inanimate material object to an animate one with its own agency is predicated on the cult statue’s ability to speak, “[i]n Mesopotamia, the principal sensory organ addressed in the enlivening process is related to speech, while in Hindu and Buddhist practice it is related to vision.”¹² And indeed, nearly every variation of the “washing/opening of the mouth” ritual in Assyro-Babylonian sources, whether in colophons or catalogs, begins with the sign KA, the Sumerian term for “mouth.”¹³ However, it should be noted that failure to perform the ritual properly results in the statue’s inability to tap into all of its senses, not just the ability to speak. As described in the third incantation tablet of *mīs pī*, “this statue cannot smell incense without the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ ceremony, it cannot eat food nor drink water.”¹⁴

The list of purification rites performed within the 48-hour period of the *mīs pī* are many, but nowhere is the craft philosophy of the *mīs pī* ritual made clearer than in act of craftsmen discarding their tools, and thereby, disavowing the cult image’s terrestrial origins.¹⁵ This act occurs at two points of the ritual. At the end of the

10. Dick, 1999, p. xi. A summary of the ritual may also be found in Schwemer, 2011, pp. 426-427.

11. Hurowitz notes that the statue’s mouth is washed at least 14 times in the known exemplars of both the procedures and incantation tablets (Hurowitz, 2003, p. 150).

12. Winter, 2000, p. 310.

13. Walker & Dick, 2001, catalog discussion.

14. Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 151.

15. Both the *lillisu* (§ 2) and the *mīs pī* rituals aim at the denial of the human intervention in the manufacturing process and stress the divine origin of the image.

first day, when the statue is set to rest within a reed hut under the night sky, we are instructed as follows:

“[You take] the hand of [the god]; and in the orchard in the midst of the reed-huts and reed-standards you seat that god on a reed-mat on a linen cloth. You set his eyes towards sunrise; and alongside that statue in the midst of the reed-huts and reed-standards you lay down the equipment for the god, all of it, and the equipment of the craftsmen; and you withdraw”.¹⁶

During the second day of the ritual, a similar act is detailed, wherein the craftsmen who manufactured the statue are made to stand before the image and swear to the gods, including Ea, the god of craft, that they had no hand in making the statue; at this point, the text – which unfortunately suffers from multiple breaks – switches from the second to the first person:

“(I swear) I did not make (the statue) [...] Ninagal, who is Ea [...]”
 “I did not make (the statue); (I swear) I did not [make (it)]”.

As an agent, the sculptor of the divine image may be characterized as an “invisible technician”, *i.e.* the role of the craftsman is not that of a sculptor in the modern sense, but rather, a lab technician, a facilitator and agent whose *raison d'être* is to aid the *āšipu* in achieving his goal, and whose role is mirrored in the divine world by minor craft deities like *Kusu* and *Kusibanda* (discussed in § 1.2).¹⁷ The *mīs pî* ritual is an unambiguous statement contradicting the charge of idolatry, as the greatest sculptor could not have made a cult statue without the priest-scribe capable of reciting the proper rites. Equally, knowing which Sumerian incantations to recite was not enough to imbue a statue with divine life. Crafting a god required the skills of a trained technician (*ummānu*), capable of sourcing, selecting, and refining the finest and purest materials. These two forms of expertise were co-dependent and co-productive, as explored throughout both parts of this paper.

I have thus far characterized the creation of the cult statue as an iterative process to distinguish the ritual from a linear rite of passage beginning with an inanimate sculpture and terminating with a living god, an idea which has rightly been criti-

16. NR 95-99 (Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 59).

17. The metaphor of the lab technician is taken up further in the section on space below.

cized.¹⁸ Indeed, as Walker, Dick, and Angelika Berlejung have noted, the cult image was always, even at the start of the ritual, a god.¹⁹ Indeed, it is productive to think of the *chaîne opératoire* of making the cult image not as a linear sequence punctuated by a singular moment of divine transformation, but rather – to borrow a term from computer science – as an “iterative loop”:

Iterative loops are procedural, stepwise processes that iteratively elaborate upon an object toward a desired end. Unlike infinite loops or the closed circuit of feedback loops, the object of processing becomes more refined with each iteration.²⁰

Read then as an iterative loop, the *mīs pī* ritual and its associated incantation tablets describe the gradual refinement as well as the physical and ontological advancement of the cult image into the pure, divine realm. Equally, the ritual underscores a gradual and comprehensive distancing from the impure world of human creation. With the physical dilapidation of the cult statue came its distancing from the divine world, and the need to once again renew its connection to divinity through multiple “mouth-washings”. The *mīs pī* loop would begin anew.

18. As Angelika Berlejung (*contra* Peg Boden) has argued, the *mīs pī* ritual is not to be understood as a linear progression wherein an inanimate statue becomes a living god. The statue, she argues, was a god from the start: “Peg Boden is forced to ignore the immanent structure of the ritual in order to delineate the three phases that correspond with the classical structure of a rite of transition. In her efforts to support her hypothesis that the mouth-washing ritual belongs to this type of rite she tries to prove that the linear sequence of separation, transformation and affiliation occurs only once in the whole ritual; the basis of her idea is that the mouth-washing ritual is meant to change the quality of the image which starts as a mere material object and ends as a god. The starting point seems to be questionable since it is not evident that the image assumes a completely different quality by virtue of the ritual itself. It was ‘god’ both before and after the mouth-washing ritual. The difference was that it had shed its terrestrial origin and was only a creation of those gods who already participated in its fabrication in the workshop; after the ritual, the statue disposed of all its perceptive and vital functions, could exercise its divine powers and this be integrated into its divine and earthly social context” (Berlejung, 1997, p. 70).

19. We see this notion reflected as well in the sourcing of the materials themselves, which come from a holy forest, as discussed below in § 1.3.

20. Whereas here, “iterative loop” refers to a procedural process (namely, the *mīs pī* ritual), Vertesi employs the term in the context of scientific collaboration; as noted by Vertesi (2002, p. 246), the term is adapted from computer science.

1.1. TIME. A FAVORABLE DAY FOR CRAFTING A GOD

The introductory section of the *mīs pī* procedure begins with an immediate reference to time: “When you wash the mouth of a god, on a favorable day at dawn you go into the countryside, to an orchard on the bank of a river, and you observe sunrise”.²¹ Against the background of this opening phrase is a scholarly practice known as hemerology that understood the cultic calendar as a collection of days which could be categorized as “favorable” (*magru*), unfavorable (*lā magru*), and evil (*lemnu*). Hemerologies facilitated calendrical adjustments for cultic events, including dress ceremonies and new year festivals. Moreover, hemerological knowledge provided the basis for catalogs that listed auspicious days,²² as in, for example, the identification of lucky days for the birth of a child, a particularly pertinent metaphor in the context of craft production.²³ In short, hemerological knowledge was knowledge of-when.²⁴ Over the centuries this form of expertise gained in both sophistication and precision, such that by the Neo-Babylonian period (6th cent. BCE), a scribe could request that a cultic festival be shifted by a single day in order to clothe the statue of the sun god Šamaš at the most favorable time.²⁵

Within the context of the Neo-Assyrian texts under discussion, craft and technical procedures employed hemerological language regularly. However, in contrast to the textual corpora of hemerologies, neither the *mīs pī* nor glassmaking recipes discussed below make reference to a particular day of the month corresponding to the known hemerologies published by Alisdair Livingstone.²⁶ A side-by-side comparison of the Nineveh instructions for making colored glass alongside the *mīs pī* procedures, sheds light on the clear similarities between the two synchronic text traditions:

21. Translations (unless otherwise noted) after Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 52.

22. Further points of contact may be found in the building rituals discussed by Ambos, which too feature references to making things during an auspicious time and share compelling links with the calendrical omen series *Iqqur īpuš* (see Ambos 2010, pp. 233-234).

23. Stol & Wiggermann, 2000, pp. 91-93.

24. Text editions of Assyro-Babylonian hemerological texts may be consulted in Livingstone, 2013.

25. Robson, 2004, p. 56.

26. Glassmaking recipes do make mention of the month of *Abu* (wr. ^{iti}NE), which refers to the ideal time for cutting poplar wood used to ignite the smokeless fire of the glassmaking kiln. This reference should not be taken literally, however. As discussed elsewhere, the meaning here is tied to a hermeneutical link between the writing of the month name ^{iti}*Abu*, which indexes both the noun for father (*abu*) as well as the cuneiform sign used to in the writing of “fire” (IZI/NE). See further Escobar, 2019, pp. 121-122.

| NEO-ASSYRIAN <i>Mīs Pī</i> | NEO-ASSYRIAN GLASSMAKING RECIPES |
|---|---|
| <p>When you wash the mouth of a god, on a favorable day at dawn you go into the countryside, to an orchard on the bank of a river, and you observe sunrise; you set up a marker stone, You return to the city and inspect the designated materials. At the first half of the double-hour of the day you return to the countryside and you take a load of reeds, tie reed bundles, arrange them up in a circle, and make reed-huts for Ea, Šamaš, and Asalluḫi. You recite [three tim]es the incantations “Pure reed, long reed, pure node of a reed. Marduk saw your pure clay in the Apšû” to the reed huts.¹</p> | <p>When you lay the foundations of a glass-making kiln, you search repeatedly for a suitable day during a favorable month, so that you may lay the foundations of the kiln.²</p> |

The resemblance between the opening lines of these two texts is not merely coincidental. Rather, this ritual rubric points to an epistemological project in ancient Assyria that, by the mid-first millennium, sought to collect and appropriate all types of knowledge, including artisanal craft knowledge, within a scholarly – and in the present case, procedural – context.²⁷ Reading the two introductions in tandem underscores why the three *themata* that frame this paper (*i.e.* “purity” as represented in time, space, and the material world) are critical to our understanding of the interaction between craft and ritual in Assyro-Babylonian scholarship. In both sets of texts, we are continually confronted with the notion that artisanal knowledge, *i.e.* how to make a glass kiln, or how to craft a cult image, is co-dependent on knowledge of the rites and procedures available only to learned scribes. Both the *mīs pī* and the glassmaking procedures are directed towards a generic “you” (the grammatical subject of the texts), making them appear to be practical manuals. At the same time, both texts begin with an immediate appeal to ritual timing, knowledge “of-when”, which was circumscribed to a particular set of experts, here, *āšīpu* and *ummānu*, an epistemological coupling we will see replicated in ritual production of the *lilissu* drum (§ 2.3).²⁸ “When” – *enūma* in Akkadian – marks the beginning of the three texts under discussion:

27. A recent argument for reading the glassmaking recipes as scholarly texts may be found in Escobar, 2019; for valuable resource for understanding the socio-intellectual history and collecting practices of Assyrian, see Robson, 2019.

28. In the case of the *lilissu* ritual, the epistemological pairing is between the *kalū* “lamentation priest” and *ummānu* rather than *āšīpu-ummānu* of the *mīs pī*.

“When you wash the mouth of a god...”
 “When you lay the foundations of glassmaking kiln...”
 “When you want to cover the kettledrum...”²⁹

Against the background of these opening phrases lay the performative and cultural association of cult objects with the new year’s *akītu* festival, which featured, prominently, the most famous “when”-text in Assyro-Babylonian scholarship, the Babylonian creation myth *Enūma Eliš*.³⁰

Timekeeping was also managed in terms of short-time intervals, notably, the *bēru* or “double-hour”. A *bēru* is a fixed-length time unit of 2 hours and represents a subdivision of a full day (sunset to sunset), which consisted of 12 *bēru*. In first-millennium astronomical contexts, *bēru* measurements were employed relative to a reoccurring phenomenon, as in, for example, 4 *bēru* before sunrise or sunset. Just as the *mīs pī* ritual employs the *bēru*, the glassmaking procedures are interjected by a minor ritual that calls for sacrificing sheep and setting up purifying deities called *Kubu* (to be discussed fully in the section that follows). Here, we are given instructions for setting up these *Kubu* deities within a specified time frame of two double-hours:

“In the process, you set up *Kubu* within two double hours (*bēru*). You sacrifice a sheep. You make a funerary offering to experts of yesteryear. You collect the ingredients in a (casting)-mold and set it down into an *utūnu*-kiln (...)”³¹

These units of short time are further strengthened by appeals to astral irradiation, *i.e.* the use of night or astral influence on the production of a cult object or medical remedy. In both the *mīs pī* and glassmaking texts, raw materials are left to sit under the night sky, a *topos* well known from medical recipes. Moreover, knowing when it was appropriate to make things pure was essential to preparing a pure space for craft production, as we shall find in the sections that follow.

29. Linssen, 2004, p. 95. On the topic, see § 2.

30. On the performance of the new year’s festival, see Frahm, 2010.

31. K.4266+.

1.2. A PURE SPACE. ^dKUSU AND ^dKUBU AS AGENTS OF PURIFICATION

Making a creation space pure, as Schwemer explains, entailed the earthly recreation of an uncorrupted space divine within the human world, a commitment achieved through both word and deed:

“The gods were perfect, undisturbed immortal beings, and since the key purpose of the cult was to provide appropriately for the gods (thereby ensuring their contentment and goodwill), anyone and anything that entered this sphere had to conform to their standards. This not only demanded general intactness and the absence of any abnormality but also a clean and neat condition. As in many cultures, these standards converged in a complex concept of purity that stipulated the protection of the gods’ dwellings – the temples with their shrines – from any defilement. Before people and objects were allowed access to this realm, they had to undergo scrutiny and specific purification rites, among them the so-called ‘washing of the mouth’”³²

In addition to protecting against the defilement of a sacred space, it should also be understood that the physical properties of crafting a refined object – be it a cult statue or colored glass (to be discussed in the section that follows) – demanded surgical attention to proper rites.

| <i>Mīs Pī</i> , NR 55-60 | GLASSMAKING RECIPES |
|---|--|
| <p>In the house of the craftsmen (<i>bīt mummi</i>), where the god was created, you sweep the ground; you sprinkle pure water. For Ea, Asalluḫi and that god you set up 3 censers of juniper, you libate the best beer.</p> | <p>As soon as [you complete (the construction of)] the kiln, in the house of the kiln (...) you set down <i>Kubu</i> deities in order that an outsider or stranger cannot enter; one who is impure cannot cross their (<i>Kubus</i>’) presence. You will constantly scatter aromatics offerings in their presence.</p> <p>On the day that you [set down] the glass³ within the kiln, you make [a sheep] sacrifice in the presence of the <i>Kubu</i> deities, (and) you set down a censer (with juniper and pour) honey. You (then) ignite a fire at the base of the kiln. You (may now) set down the glass within the kiln. The persons that you bring close to the kiln must be purified, (only then) can you all them to sit near (and overlook) the kiln.</p> |

32. Schwemer, 2011, p. 426.

Because a full discussion of the *bīt mummi* (and *bīt māre mummi*, translated here as “house of the craftsmen”)³³ is presented in § 2.2, this section will focus instead on the purification rites associated with the divine/demonic agents charged with purifying the spaces of craft production in the *mīs pî* ritual and in the glassmaking recipes: the deities known as *Kusu* and *Kubu*. In determining the function of these deities, we will also expand upon their associative range, including their analogical connection to purity via libation, fire, incense, animal sacrifice, and their role as interlocutors in the invocation of craftsmen from bygone eras.

In both the mouth-washing and glassmaking procedures juxtaposed here, we find that *Kusu* and *Kubu* deities function as ersatz technicians who mediate between human and divine craft production by means of purification. In much the same way as the *āšipu* of is legitimized by the gods (Ea and Asalluḫi in particular), the craftsman’s labor and the technical execution of a divinely sanctioned craft – whether glassmaking or the production of a cult statue – is mediated through the purifying actions of the deities *Kubu* and *Kusu*.

In an incantation to Girra,³⁴ the god of fire, preserved on Incantation Tablet I/II of *mīs pî*, we find an appeal to the deity *Kusu*, described as “the chief exorcist of Enlil”:

“(Incantation:) Girra, superb, august, bearer of the awesome radiance of the gods,
famed warrior, whom Ea has endowed with awe-inspiring splendor,
who grew up in the Apsû a pure place; in Eridu the place of destinies he duly established.
His bright light reaches the sky; the tongue of his light like lightning flashes,
Girra whose light as the day is constantly kindled;
Kusu the chief exorcist of Enlil swung the censor and the torch,
and his bright appearance lights up the darkness.
Asalluḫi/Marduk the son of Eridu laid down a spell;
swung the (censer) over the god; made him clean and bright.
May the god become pure like heaven, clean like the earth,
bright like the center of heaven. May the evil tongue stand aside.
Incantation for Girra for cleansing a god”³⁵

As Piotr Michelowski has argued, in the 3rd and 2nd millennia *Kusu* was a divinity associated with birth and ovens, paired with the fire god Girra in an Old Babylonian

33. Note that the glassmaking recipes refer to a *bīt kūri*, or “house of the kiln” which appears to occupy a similar conceptual and practical space as the *bīt mummi*.

34. Girra is also known as Gibil (Black & Green, 1992, p. 88).

35. Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 110.

incantation (written ^dKÛ.SU₁₃/SÛ).³⁶ In the 1st millennium *Kusu* (written ^dKÛ.SÛ) appeared in ritual procedures including the opening of the mouth ceremony, *mis pî*, and was directly associated with craftsmen and technical purity. In K.4928+ as well, the divine being *Kusu* is referred to as the chief exorcist of Enlil,³⁷ a companion to craftsmen and a being linked to purification by means of washing:

“*Kusu*, the chief purification priest of Enlil, has purified it [the divine statue] with a holy-water-basin, censer, and torch, with his pure hands (...). May this god become pure like heaven, clean like the earth, bright like the center of heaven. May the evil tongue stand aside. Incantation: *suila* prayer for opening the mouth of a god”³⁸

Indeed, while the appearance of *Kusu* is rare, the deity’s presence is not unexpected within a ritual craft context, as the function of the deity is to act as an interlocutor between the pure craft space of the divine realm and the impure human world. Framed within an analogous modern laboratory context, and within the present discussion of spatial purity, we can also think of the *Kusu* (and *Kubu*-deities below) as lab technicians. A key role of lab technicians is to care for and maintain the boundaries between the “clean lab” and “dirty lab”; as Barley describes:

“Routine paperwork, for instance, was performed in the dirty lab as was any aspect of a procedure considered impure, such as the sacrificing of mice. The clean lab was reserved for operations on cells and the integrity of its boundary was carefully observed. The door connecting the two areas was shut at all times and the staff shed lab coats worn in the dirty lab before entering the clean”³⁹

While a direct comparison between the *bīt mummi* or *bīt kūri*⁴⁰ and a modern laboratory would seem scientific at best,⁴¹ one could hardly deny the family resemblances shared by these spaces and the *Kusu* and *Kubu* “technicians” overseeing their use. Replace a lab mouse with the dead sheep of the glassmaking recipes, replace lab protocol with an incantation preventing the entry of impure persons, consider the

36. For earlier attestations of *Kusu*, see Michalowski, 1993.

37. Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 204.

38. *Mis Pi* Incantation Tablet III, 89-97, translation: Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 151.

39. Barley & Bechky, 1994, pp. 108-109.

40. *I.e.* the ritual space wherein the glassmaking kiln is constructed, literally “house of the kiln”.

41. By “scientific” I mean the attempt to validate non-scientific forms of knowledge as ideologically or functionally similar to those used the sciences.

historiographical “invisibility” of laboratory technicians (*Kusu* and *Kubu*) included in our analyses of scientific and ritual procedures, and the analogues between the two traditions become increasingly substantial.⁴²

Indeed, the *Kubu*-deities from the glassmaking recipes have remained largely invisible in A. Leo Oppenheim’s edition of the glassmaking recipes, wherein they amounted to little more than apotropaic beings that did not figure largely in his interpretation of the Nineveh glassmaking recipes:

“The nature of these [*Kubu*] ‘gods’ is, however, quite uncertain, and their function can only be described as vaguely apotropaic. They belong to the popular levels of Mesopotamian religiosity of which little is known. Suffice it to state here that the *Kubu*-deities are in no direct way related to the production of glass though they may in some way relate to the technological use of fire.”⁴³

The classification of *Kubu* as demons and the personification of stillborn children is based the appearance of *Kubu* in medical contexts, but the category of demons is fraught with ambiguity.⁴⁴ As Gina Konstantopoulos has argued, that “the same demonic figure could act benevolently or malevolently suggests that they did not possess fixed natures but should instead be considered and classified by their actions.”⁴⁵ Therefore, in disambiguating the role of these figures we will necessarily turn away from the messy question of theological classification and turn our focus instead towards their functions in the purification contexts. The god/goddess *Kusu* have also been the subject of recent debate concerning the gender and historical association of *Kusu* as a grain goddess.⁴⁶ The arguments below are not concerned with *Kusu*’s gender. Nevertheless, it is important to consider what role *Kusu* played in processes of purification enumerated in the *mīs pī* ritual; this task, in turn necessitates a turn towards philological (specifically, onomastic) disambiguation before returning to the present theme, namely, concepts of spatial purification.

The accompanying table juxtaposes intertextual references to divine purification agents whose initial sign values are DINGIR.KÛ, or more precisely ^dKÛ.X, where

42. “Invisibility” here refers to the classic work of Shapin (1989) on invisible technicians and why they have been written out of the history of science.

43. Oppenheim *et al.*, 1970, p. 33.

44. See Table 1 for details. A recent discussion of *Kubu* as birthing demons may be found in Sibling-Plantholt, 2021, pp. 6-7.

45. Konstantopoulos, 2020, p. 2.

46. Simons, 2018.

X stands as a placeholder for any given cuneiform sign. By cataloging the appearance of cuneiform sign KÛ meaning “pure” preceded (in most cases) by the divine determinative DINGIR, we can begin to map the various iterations of “pure” deities that may have been known to Assyro-Babylonian scholars.⁴⁷

TABLE 1. AGENTS OF PURIFICATION

| TEXT CATEGORY | ORTHOGRAPHY | SOURCE |
|--|--|---|
| “Washing/Opening of the Mouth” Ritual (Mīs Pī) | ᵀKÛ.SÛ; in earlier periods, this deity was written ᵀKÛ.SU ₁₃ (BU), thus historically, <i>Kusu</i> and <i>Kubu</i> are closely related orthographically. | In K.4928+ and elsewhere in <i>Mīs Pī</i> , the divine being <i>Kusu</i> is referred to as the chief exorcist of Enlil, ⁴ a ritual companion to craftsmen and a being closely tied to purification by means of washing: “Kusu, the chief purification priest of Enlil, has purified it [the divine statue] with a holy-water-basin, censer, and torch, with his pure hands...May this god become pure like heaven, clean like the earth, bright like the center of heaven. May the evil tongue stand aside. Incantation: <i>šuilā</i> prayer for opening the mouth of a god”. ⁵ |
| | ᵀkù-si ₂₂ -bà[n-da] | Kusibanda appears in the <i>mīs pī</i> incantation tablets alongside mentions of metalworking. In Incantation Tablet III, we find “the statue is of gold and silver which <i>Kusibanda</i> has made”. ⁶ Elsewhere, on Incantation Tablet V: “Kusibanda, [the great goldsmith] of Anu, has prepared it in due form with red gold”. ⁷ |

47. For further discussion of the sign KÛ and its connection to purity, see Benzel, 2015.

| | | |
|-------------|--|--|
| Medical | ^d KÛ.BI | JoAnn Scurlock and Burton Andersen (2005), just as Thureau-Dangin, understood <i>Kubu</i> as “the demonic personification of stillborn children”. ⁸ They relate a number of medical sources wherein <i>Kubu</i> are associated with childhood afflictions. ⁹ |
| Glassmaking | ^d KÛ.BU-MEŠ, ^d KÛ.BI | What distinguished the orthography of <i>Kubu</i> deities in the glassmaking recipes is that they are represented using the plural marker, written ^d KÛ.BU-MEŠ. Their function is to purify the glassmaking kiln as well as protect against any impurities (material or non-material, human and non-human). They also facilitate in invoking craftsmen (<i>ummânu</i>) of eras past. |
| Lexical | ku-u-bu, ku-bu, ^{uzu} KU.BU | The term <i>Kubu</i> appears in the first millennium lexical commentaries of the sign list Aa and the series Murgud (a lexical commentary on the thematic series Ura). ¹⁰ In these lexical series, <i>Kubu</i> is written syllabically ku-bu (K.10072) ¹¹ or logographically ^{uzu} KÛ.BU (K.4368). ¹² In Murgud, <i>Kubu</i> occurs in the context of with the female reproductive organs, fetuses, and the amniotic fluids: ^{uzu} KÛ.BU = <i>nîd libbi</i> “laying of the womb” (K.4368, obv. i 3’). |
| Literary | <i>Kubu</i> is written ^{uzu} KU.BU in the creation epic <i>Enûma Eliš</i> this may also be read logo graphically UZU KU.SU ₁₃ for <i>šîr Kusu</i> , “skin of the divine creation being”. | Note the sign KÛ for pure is not used in this orthography, as what is being described is not a divine entity per se, but rather the hide (<i>šîru</i>) left over from the cosmological birth of Tiamat. |

An overview of such deities (Table 1) reveals two compelling points. First, we find a clear thematic overlap of ^dKÛ.X deities within craft production and birthing contexts, including the close connection of these deities to production and purification by means of both fire and water. This first point aligns with our understanding of purification ceremonies writ large, including the well-known ritual incantation

series *Šurpu*, a mainstay of the *āšiputu*, *i.e.* the lore of the exorcist. Second, we are confronted with the orthographic – or more precisely, etymographic – possibility that *Kusu* and *Kubu* may have been, at one time, the same deity.

Indeed, the Old Babylonian writing for Kusu, KU-SU₁₃, employs the sign SU₁₃, which may also read BU. An orthographic change occurred in the first millennium wherein SU₁₃ (BU) was replaced by SÛ for the writing ^dKÛ.SÛ. The etymographic relation between the SÛ and BU signs are clear, as the two sign values are historically related.⁴⁸ Thus, an argument can be made that the *Kubu* of the glassmaking recipes and *Kusu* of the *mīs pī* are related, and may likely belong to the same family of deities. It is clear, in any case, that the two text traditions share intellectual contexts, thematic and semantic resemblances, and etymographical (*i.e.* orthographic) links that cannot be overlooked. Moreover, the familiar metaphorical relationship of the kiln as a mother's womb (we still call the womb an "oven") – a metaphor that features this very set of glassmaking recipes in Mircea Eliade's (1971) *The Forge and the Crucible* – further exemplifies the salience of conjuring divine beings associated with fetuses.⁴⁹ A Late Babylonian birth incantation from several centuries later makes this metaphorical association explicit:

SpTU 5, 248 obv. 26-30

She comes out from the watercourse and goes up to a potter's kiln and embraces the kiln and speaks as follows:

"Pure kiln, great daughter of Anu, in whose middle a fire is burning. Abdomen, in whose middle warlike Giru has established his dwelling, you are sound and your equipment is sound. You fill and you empty, but I am pregnant and I cannot deliver soundly what is in my womb".⁵⁰

These literary, and metaphorical readings can be subsumed under the broader cultural associations of birthing, ovens, creation, and infant afflictions with which the

48. Borger, 2004, pp. 158-159, p. 376, sign no. 580.

49. Namely, Mircea Eliade's (1971) *The Forge and the Crucible*. *Kubu*, and Eliade's interpretation of *Kubu*, are also mentioned in Stol & Wiggerman, 2000, within their discussion of complications during pregnancy (p. 32); more recently, for birth metaphors in glassmaking, see Thavapalan, 2021.

50. SpTU 5, 248 (P348835) obv. 26-30, translation Graham Cunningham, for which see: <http://oracc.org/cams/gkab/P348835>. For a recent discussion of this same incantation, see Couto-Ferreira, 2013.

Kubu of the glassmaking recipes were associated, and which are explored fully in § 2.2 in the examination of the procedure for the *lilissu* drum.

1.3. THE MATERIAL WORLD. SOURCING SACRED MATERIALS AND CONCEPTIONS OF “GLASS”

The *mīs pî* ritual, when read alongside the incantation tablets, provides a procedural answer to the question: How can a god be made? Making a god, or indeed, overseeing the production of a divine object entails a deep knowledge of the material world, including sourcing and quality control of raw materials. It also requires knowledge of what materials can be used in place of others. In this section, I focus on two material categories: wood and stones (including glass). Descriptions of wood and precious stones – namely, their value, form, and function within the *mīs pî* and contemporaneous glassmaking procedures – elucidate how the *chaîne opératoire* of cult objects and glass production is predicated on sourcing raw materials from a pure source. We can begin by considering the following passage from Incantation Tablet III, which claims that the wood used to craft the cult image was sourced from a pure cedar forest:

“This statue was made in the entire heavens and earth; this statue grew up in a forest of *ḥašur*-cedar; this statue went out from a mountain, a pure place; the statue is the product of gods and humans”.⁵¹

The notion of a holy source of wood used to craft the statue is again mirrored in STT 199, which preserves an extensive incantation describing the purity of the lumber used to craft the statue; the first part of this incantation reads:

“[Incantation:] as you come out, as you come out in greatness from the forest:
as you come out from the pure forest, wood of the pure forest,
as you come out from the pure mountain, [wood] from the pure mountain,
as you come out from the pure orchard, wood from the pure orchard,
as you come out from the pure high plain, wood of the pure high plain,
as you come from the pure river-bank, wood of the pure river bank”.⁵²

51. IT III 55ab-68ab (Walker & Dick, 2001, pp. 150-151).

52. STT 199 (Walker & Dick, 2001, pp. 119-120).

While the *mīs pī* procedure from Nineveh is pithy with regard to the matter of sourcing materials for making a cult statue, the incantation tablets are by contrast, extensive and detailed. Read in tandem, our understanding of the ritual changes, from a framework wherein materials (here, various types of wood) undergo a mundane to sacred linear transformation, to a model that underscores iterative preservation – *i.e.* where the goal is to maintain the purity of the materials after their removal from a sacred source. A similar approach to material sourcing can be found in the glassmaking recipes which state:

“You burn various wooden logs at the base of the kiln (including): thick logs of poplar that are stripped, and *quru*-wood containing no knots, bound up with *apu*-straps; (these logs are to be) cut during the month of *Abu*; these are the various logs that should go beneath your kiln”.

The passage, which contains a number of hermeneutical associations discussed elsewhere,⁵³ exemplifies the same phenomenon. In the case of the glassmaking recipes, the purity of the poplar wood chosen on a particular month allows for a pure fire in the kiln, one characterized as “smokeless” throughout the recipes. As we will find in § 2.3, a similar appeal is made to the use of pure wood in the making of the *lilissu* drum.

Stones, in contrast to wood, present a separate interpretive challenge, one tethered directly to a problem of classification, ontology, and efficacy. Continuing our analysis of the passage above from Incantation Tablet III, we read:

“The statue (has) eyes which Ninkurra has made; the statue (has)... which Ninagal has made; the statue (has) features which Ninzadim has made; the statue is of gold and silver which Kusibanda has made; [the statue ...] which Ninildu has made; [the statue ...] which Ninzadim has made; this statue of *hulālu*-stone, *hulāl* ini-stone, *muššaru*-stone, *pappardillū*-stone, [*pappardillū*-stone, *dušū*-stone], ‘choice-stone’, *hulālu parrū* [...], *elmešu*, *antasurrū*-stone ... by the skill of the *gurgurru*-craftsman”.⁵⁴

Although many of the individual stones in the passage above remain unidentified (hence the italics), the role of stones as agents of purification is ubiquitous and clear from both ritual and medical scholarly contexts. What is less clear is

53. Escobar, 2019.

54. IT III 55ab-68ab (Walker & Dick, 2001, pp. 150-151).

whether the stones listed in this incantation are, in modern terms “real” or “artificial” stones, *i.e.* glass imitations.

An always compelling debate in matters of materiality is the ontological status of an artificial stone, and whether our intuitive and hierarchical lapidary typologies have any resonance in Assyro-Babylonian scholarship. In short, did cuneiform scholarship distinguish between “real” and “artificial” stones? If we begin with nomenclature, we would be obliged to say that the Akkadian term *abnu* “stone” offers no distinction between stone mined from nature and “stones” (*i.e.* glass) made in a kiln. Indications to the contrary are found not in cuneiform scholarly contexts of the procedures under discussion, but rather, in a late second millennium inventory list (VAT 16462) dating to the reign of the Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207 BCE). Here, on VAT 16462, and, to my knowledge, scarcely elsewhere, do we find a clear delineation between lapis lazuli “from the mountain” (*uqnû šadi*) as opposed to blue glass, or “lapis lazuli from the kiln” (*uqnû kûri*). That a clear distinction between real and artificial stones is so difficult to identify in the first millennium scholarly contexts is both telling and important to the present analysis, as it indicates that the use of glass imitations in cult statues would not have diminished the divine ontological status, nor efficacy of the cult image in a way.

Eleanor Robson, in her analysis of the Neo-Assyrian glassmaking recipes, has noted the degree to which science, magic, and religion are mutually codified in these technological texts and how knowledge of stones (and by extension, glass) was central to explanatory, medical, and craft scholarship at Nineveh.⁵⁵ The many stones enumerated in the passage above find parallels in medical and lexical scholarship, including the explanatory list on the properties of stones *Abnu Šikinšu*. Therein we encounter the “stone” *antasurrû* (written AN.TA.SUR.RA) an unidentified substance which may have been composed of glass or metal, but which, regardless of its material constitution, unequivocally holds the power to create holy water in the *mīs pî* ritual.⁵⁶ Stones whose appearance (*šiknu*) resembles “eyes”, such as *hulal-īni* in *mīs pî* or the “fish eye” (*in nūni*) stone of *Abnu Šikinšu*, creates a similar case classificatory ambiguity. Are these stones made of glass? Is a glass replica as efficacious as a precious stone mined from nature? If the *glassmaking* and *mīs pî* procedures are an indication of Assyro-Babylonian scholarly attitudes, then what we find is that this ontological ambiguity was embraced by the exorcists, craftsman, and cuneiform scholars charged with maintaining these boundaries as fluid and endlessly polyvalent. The first section

55. Robson, 2001, pp. 50-54.

56. Schuster-Brandis, 2008, p. 395.

began with the question: how can a god be made? And as we have found, the answers are as extensive as the *mīs pî* ritual itself. A god is made through repeated searches for favorable days, repeated incantations with appeals to the gods, continual washings, and, thereafter, an iterative process of maintenance to battle the impure decay of time. Purity, against the background of time, space, and the material world was only ever a temporary state, one which we will explore further, as we examine the making of a *lilissu* drum.

2. THE RITUAL FOR THE COVERING OF THE *LILISSU* DRUM

The social environment that came into being during the Hellenistic period was fertile ground for the last vestiges of the Babylonian traditions and the Greek culture to interact with one another and exercise a reciprocal influence.⁵⁷ The scholarly collections retrieved in Seleucid Uruk stand witness to the type of specialist knowledge that circulated among the urban intellectuals of the period.⁵⁸ Among these elite families of scholars, there were the descendants of *Sîn-lēqe-unnîni*, the famous editor of the *Gilgameš* Epic; this family had since the Achaemenid period a monopoly on the *kalûtu*, the profession of the lamentation priests whose duty was to appease the angry heart of the gods through specific rituals.⁵⁹

Appeasing an irate god relied on musical performances, during which the *kalû* played instruments and sang Emesal prayers.⁶⁰ By the 2nd millennium onwards, such performances were accompanied by the *lilissu*, a bronze kettledrum whose rhythmic beating reminded the audience of a god's raging heart. Given the status of *Sîn-lēqe-unnîni*'s family, it is not surprising to find tablets dealing with these prayers and with the ritual for the covering of the *lilissu* drum at Seleucid Uruk, among the records belonging to his descendants.⁶¹

57. For the interaction between Greek and Aramaic in the Babylonian intellectual milieu, see Monerie, 2014. For the mutual influence between the two systems of knowledge, see Beaulieu, 2019.

58. For a discussion on the Seleucid families of scholars, see Wearzeggars, 2003-2004 and Robson, 2017, pp. 463-470.

59. Beaulieu, 2000; Gabbay, 2014, pp. 63-80. Not all the family members were equally involved in the *kalûtu* duty, but even those less connected to cultic performance were highly educated and entertained diversified scientific inquiries. For instance, *Sîn-lēqe-unnîni*'s descendant *Anu-ab-utêr* (112-136 SE) was both a *kalû* and an astronomer/astrologer (*tupšar enûma anu enlil*). On this title, see Rochberg, 2000, p. 372.

60. For a discussion on the evolution of the Emesal prayers, see Gabbay, 2014, pp. 98-102 and 154.

61. Terracotta figurines from Seleucid Babylonia bear witness to the popularity of the musician pairs playing a double-pipe (*aulos*) and a small kettledrum. This cultural hybrid is likely connected to a lam-

The covering ceremony was performed when (1) a new drum was manufactured and dedicated to a god, (2) a worn-out drumhead had to be replaced anew, and (3) during the dedications of temples.⁶² The ritual has largely been reconstructed (Linszen, 2004) thanks to a series of tablets spanning from the Neo-Assyrian (911-612 BCE) to the Seleucid period (312-127 BCE). The textual material is divided between ritual texts and complementary compositions, which include prayers sung during the ritual⁶³ and commentaries about its theological and mythological background.⁶⁴ Among the ritual prescriptions, the longer and more detailed version is the Seleucid tablet TCL 6, 44.⁶⁵

The tablet opens with the explicit reference to the purpose of the ritual: “when you want to cover the *lilissu* drum” (*enūma* LI.LI.ĪZ ZABAR *ana arāmi* IGI-ka). From the very first lines, the scribe used the pronoun “you” to address the reader personally, a fictional device shared with the *mīs pī* and the glassmaking procedures (§ 1.1), which frame the composition in the category of practical manuals; the scribe then arranged the ritual prescriptions in a linear sequence of thematic clusters (Table 2).

entation context (Langin-Hooper, 2020, pp. 136-140).

62. Gabbay, 2014, p. 121.

63. The Neo-Assyrian prayer KAR 50 from Aššur, its partial duplicate K.6060 + K.10820 from Nineveh, and the Late Babylonian duplicate BM 33343. For a detailed edition, see Lenzi, 2018. A second prayer (BaM. Beih. 2) comes from the Rēš temple.

64. See the Seleucid commentary TCL 4, 67 (Linszen, 2004, p. 325; Gabbay, 2014, p. 130, fn. 470, and pp. 138-139) and its partial duplicates BM 54119 (MacGinnis, 1999), BaM. Beih. 2, 8 (Linszen, 2004, pp. 261-262), AO 17626 (Nougayrol, 1947, pp. 30-32, bearing Aramaic characters on the edge).

65. For a recent edition, see Linszen, 2004, pp. 252-262, to be integrated with Gabbay, 2008, pp. 426-427. The tablet in question was kept in Anu’s Rēš temple at Uruk together with other duplicates: BaM. Beih. 2, 5; BaM. Beih. 2, 7 and possibly BaM. Beih. 2, 9 (Linszen, 2004, p. 8).

TABLE 2. STRUCTURE OF TCL 6, 44

| SECTION | LINES | ACTIONS | STEPS | PLACE |
|---------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 1 | col. i 1-6 | selection of the prize bull | | temple courtyard? |
| 2 | col. i 7-II 7 | entering the workshop | hemerology | |
| | col. i 7-9 | | purification of the workshop | workshop |
| | col. i 9-36 | | first round of offerings | |
| | col. ii 1-7 | | second round of offerings | |
| 3 | col. ii 8-14 | purification of the bull | shut the curtains first <i>mīs pī</i> whispering “Oh, prize bull” and “Descendant of Anzu” first consecration singing the <i>eršema</i> “Important one” | |
| 4 | col. ii 15-17 | slaughtering of the bull | singing the <i>šūila</i> “Great gods” slaughtering and burning of the heart | |
| 5 | col. ii 18-32 | procedure for red-dyed leather | flaying removal of the sinew cleaning + unhairing drenching tanning + dyeing covering of the kettledrum disposal of the hide | |
| 6 | col. ii 33- col. iii 28 | purification of the drum | first round of offerings exit of the kettledrum (on the 15 th day) second round of offerings second <i>mīs pī</i> second consecration exit of the kettledrum singing the <i>taqribtu</i> -lamentation | workshop to temple courtyard? |

| | | | | |
|---|----------------|--|--|--|
| 7 | col. iii 29-33 | <i>Geheim-</i> <i>wissen</i> gloss | | |
| 8 | col. iv 1-35 | list of tools and ingredi- ents | | |
| 9 | col. iv 36-37 | final colo- phon | | |

The tablet's colophon indicates that it belonged to the chief lamentation priest (*kalamāhu*) Anu-aḥa-ittannu, son of Riḥat-Anu great grandson of Śin-lēqe-unnīni, whose scribal activity can be dated between years 68 and 73 of the Seleucid era.⁶⁶ As seen above, other Seleucid tablets complete the context of this ritual, however, only TCL 6, 44 was protected with a secrecy formula included in its colophon. The *Geheim-**wissen* colophons, which ward against the damage, theft, and illicit consultation of the text, acted as a protective measure against the misuse of "intellectual property".⁶⁷ So, when tablets moved for consultation, they did so with due caution, pointing to a controlled dissemination of their contents within a narrow scholarly network.⁶⁸

As anticipated above, the ritual prescribed in the tablet was not a Seleucid innovation: it came from a long tradition of manuscripts dating to at least the Neo-Assyrian period. In the colophon of TCL 6, 44, the editor states that the text was copied from an older exemplar.⁶⁹ Likewise, the colophon of the Neo-Assyrian partial duplicate (KAR 60), dated to the 7th century, reports that the tablet was itself a copy of an older *Vorlage*. Such reference to a textual archetype can appear as a

66. The relevance of this ritual within his family profession can be appreciated in the light of the fact that a shorter duplicate (BaM. Beih. 2, 5) dated to the year 150 of the Seleucid era belonged to a distant relative of his, Ana-bēšunu II son of Nidinti-Anu, also a descendent of Śin-lēqe-unnīni (Gabbay, 2014, p. 273).

67. Stevens, 2013; Lenzi, 2018.

68. Tablets, including those with secrecy colophons, could be lent to other scholars, who took care of copying them for their own use (Robson, 2017, p. 469).

69. TCL 6, 44 col. iv 36-37: "Ritual of the lamentation priest. Tablet of Anu-aḥa-ittannu, son of Riḥat-Anu, the chief lamentation priest of Anu and Antu, the Urukian. According to its original copied, checked and made good".

statement of philological purity. Despite this scribal claim, however, we can identify multiple textual traditions at play.⁷⁰

Collectively, there are at least fifteen Neo-Assyrian and Seleucid tablets, from which one can draw information about the drum-covering ritual. These witnesses have many sections in common with TCL 6, 44, including the purification rituals and the mention of the workshop (*bīt mummi*). These shared sections, whose sequence varies among the manuscripts, feature abbreviations, expansions, omissions, or small changes in their wording.⁷¹ However, the most significant variations occur in the section recording the procedure for transforming the bull's hide into the ritually purified, red-dyed cover of the divine kettledrum.⁷² It is precisely this detailed procedural excursus that makes TCL 6, 44 poignant to the present analysis concerning craft and purity in cultic contexts.

Purification rituals that precede encounters with the divine have a long history in Babylonia. Rarely, however, do we find such an elaborate narrative blending of technical prescription and religion achieved through sophisticated hermeneutics and scribal virtuosity. Herein, the transmission of technical knowledge is embedded in a complex ritual setting, which couples ritual purification with material craft.

From a technological perspective, the bull must die so that the drumhead can be obtained from its hide. The procedure for leather crafting required knowledge of the ingredients and of the chemical processes responsible for the transformation of the animal skin into dyed leather. These processes include the cleansing of hair and blood from the bull's hide, the drenching in fat and alkaline baths to stop the natural decay and to soften the hide, and finally, soaking the hide in a mixture of madder and alum in order to dye it.

All of this takes place, however, in a precise ritual space, where the material transformation of the hide into the cover of a divine drum occurs after the ontological dependence between the bull and the *lilissu* is established: only in such a space could the divinity and purity of the chosen bull be transferred to the *lilissu* drum. Purity is ubiquitous throughout the ritual and is echoed metaphorically throughout the text. The purity sought for the ingredients ("fat from a pure cow", "pure grain")

70. A direct transmission of the scholarly material from Assyria to Seleucid Uruk is a quite rare phenomenon, whereas an intermediate passage through other Babylonian cities, especially via Achaemenid Nippur, appears the most plausible scenario for such transfers (Gabbay & Jimenez, 2019, pp. 56-57).

71. Just as example, the incantation to be whispered in the bull's ear is quoted by its incipit in TCL 6, 44 and KAR 60, but it is reported in full length in the Neo-Assyrian tablet KAR 50 (Lenzi, 2018).

72. The Seleucid partial duplicate BaM. Beih. 2, 5 and the Neo-Assyrian KAR 60 have a shorter version of this segment.

recalls the purity of the prize bull chosen for the ritual. The purification of the workshop echoes the double ritual cleansing of the bull and its hide. The pitch-black bull undergoes a process leading it from the darkness of the temple workshop – that represented the primeval subterranean waters, the Apsû – to the bright light of a new day, when the drum finished with its new red cover is brought before the Sun-god as a divine being itself. The divine animal must die to be born again as a divine drum. Crafting is indeed an act of creation.

The Seleucid ritual combines universal themes such as predetermined fate, death as a return to a pristine state, and the achievement of a pure and divine status. Moreover, the text draws on known literary *topoi* like the choice of the right time, the call for secrecy, and deference to ancient authority. It does so through a multilevel narrative disguised in writing, where cuneiform signs open the doors to other meanings. Although many of these themes are developed in a precise textual pattern and with rhetorical devices anticipated already in the Neo-Assyrian period, their appearance in TCL 6, 44 is enriched with elaborate astral frameworks characteristic of the Seleucid era.

2.1. TIME. A FAVORABLE DAY FOR CRAFTING A DIVINE DRUM

Time was a crucial aspect in the performing of rituals. Records show that the *lilissu* drum was played to avert evil during eclipses and adverse events. But did the ritual for the covering of the *lilissu* drum itself need to be performed at a specific time? The Seleucid tablet informs us that the ungelded bull must enter the workshop on a “favorable day” (*ina ūmi magri*), a known formula from “hemerologies”.⁷³ However, hemerological treaties dated to the 1st millennium lack any reference about the time when this ritual should have been performed.

Choosing the right time was a goal achieved through divination. In the 1st millennium, astronomical scholarship was on the rise and astrology progressively replaced extispicy as the preferred divinatory method. The popularity of the astral science can be grasped from the textual output produced by the observation of celestial phenomena, ranging from zodiacs to astronomical diaries.⁷⁴ Astrological compositions made use of other literary genres, including hemerologies, and a broader interest in creating connections between astronomy and other fields of knowledge can be

73. BaM. Beih. 2, 5 records “in a favorable month, on a favorable day” (*arḫi šalme ina ūmi magri*). For hemerologies in the 1st millennium Babylonia, see Jimenez, 2016.

74. Ossendrijver, 2021.

observed in texts from the first millennium, especially commentaries.⁷⁵ The libraries of the lamentation priests thus hosted compendia of celestial observations and divinatory tablets: indeed, these arts were coherent within the *kalû*'s domain of inquiry.⁷⁶

Astronomical diaries provide evidence for two dates on which the *lilissu* drum covering ritual was performed: on the 24th of Arahšamna in year 41 of the Seleucid era (27th November 271 BCE) and, possibly, on the month of Ayyaru in the year 85 of the Seleucid era (May 226 BCE). As one of the Neo-Assyrian tablets concerning the ritual (KAR 50) places the event “in the morning before the sun rises” (*ina šērti lām Šamaš inappaḥu*), Lenzi calculated that on both those dates, at that precise moment, the constellation of the Taurus would have been visible in the sky.⁷⁷ The presence of the Taurus constellation must have been key to the success of the ritual and it likely influenced when the ceremony would have been performed.

Gabbay has indeed examined the links between the ritual prescriptions for the covering of the *lilissu* and the constellations associated with the deities involved in it.⁷⁸ Celestial and chthonic gods are invoked at two points of the ritual, during the purification of the workshop at the start, and after the bull's hide has been transformed into the *lilissu* cover. As noted by Gabbay, the drawing on the reverse of a Seleucid commentary (TCL 6, 47) explicitly associates the bull to the homonymous constellation and also proposes a tripartite layout of the ritual space. This spatial partition may have alluded to the three astronomical paths into which the sky was divided, or perhaps to the three sections of the *exta* identified during the extispicy.⁷⁹

Appropriate moments in the ritual were also framed in terms of directionality. References to spatial orientation are indeed a key feature of 1st millennium cultic literature and the choice to favor celestial reference points (*i.e.* “facing sunrise”) over a simpler cardinal orientation (*i.e.* “facing east”) evokes an astral context. Unsurprisingly, as the ritual started at the first light of dawn, the newly covered drum exited the temple workshop “before Šamaš” (*ana IGI dUTU tušeṣṣi*), the Sun-god. Besides

75. Wee, 2017. For first millennium commentaries, see Gabbay & Jimenez, 2019.

76. The interest in celestial prediction was consistent with the *kalû*'s duties. In fact, they could fail in calculating the exact time of eclipses, as it happened in 532 BCE when the miscalculations resulted in an untimely performance with the *lilissu* drum (Beaulieu & Britton, 1994).

77. Lenzi, 2018, pp. 89-90.

78. The ritual for the covering of the *lilissu* drum also finds analogical parallels in a mythical battle between the god Enmešara, represented by the bull, and Enlil, represented by the newly covered drum (Gabbay, 2018).

79. Gabbay, 2018, pp. 31-33.

indicating the time of the day and the eastern direction, this prescription can also function as an allegory of a new day, and by extension, of the new life of the drum.⁸⁰

In fact, according to the Babylonians, the Sun-god, and more specifically the rising sun, was equated with the birth of a new being and the emergence of a new destiny.⁸¹ As the Sun rose from the Apsû beyond the horizon, so emerged the newborn baby, and in a first millennium bilingual prayer for childbirth both events are expressed with the same verb (Ē, *ašû* “to rise”, “to come out”).⁸² The location on the eastern horizon for both the rising sun and the newborn child, which has also been proposed for the bull in the ritual space of the workshop,⁸³ represents the juncture between the heaven and the netherworld, the liminal space and time of the day *par excellence*, when fate was determined.⁸⁴ Like the Sun and the newborn child, also the drum “is risen” from a place of darkness (the *bīt mummi*).⁸⁵ This analogy, which reminds of the obscurity and the life-bearing properties of the mother’s womb, has also been proposed for the glassmaking kiln (§ 1.2).

Using the “sunrise” as an umbrella term for both time and space, the ritual plays on oppositions, such as east/west or life/death. The text builds a polyvalent reality, where meanings are stratified one upon the other through analogies. As it will be argued below, other passages in the ritual for the *lilissu* covering aim at creating connections between technical instructions and cardinal points.

2.2. A PURE SPACE. THE *BĪT MUMMI*

The entire process leading to the manufacturing of the drumhead took place in a purified temple workshop called the *bīt mummi*. In the 1st millennium tradition, the *bīt mummi* was the space wherein statues of gods and kings, and cultic objects, including musical instruments like the *lilissu*, were manufactured. This workshop

80. Gabbay, 2018, p. 28.

81. On these analogies, see Polonsky, 2006; Woods, 2009.

82. Polonsky, 2006, p. 303. Note that in some Old Babylonian adoption contracts from Sippar (*i.e.* CT 8, 48), the adopted child must face sunrise to formalize the adoption. Likewise, texts dealing with the manumission of slaves prescribed that the latter faced the rising sun (Westbrook, 2003b, p. 384). This symbolic act marks the beginning of a new life for the participants, cleansed by previous natural and legal bonds.

83. Gabbay, 2018, p. 35.

84. Steinkeller, 2005, p. 35; Woods, 2009, p. 199 and 205.

85. The epithet “the secluded place” (*ašru parsu*) used for the *bīt mummi* in the Seleucid texts recalls one of the epithets of the Apsû, “the dark place” (é-ku₁₀-ku₁₀), the mythical location where the primeval creation took place.

was likely an annex located within the temple precinct, possibly separated from the rest of the building by a gate leading to the open courtyard.⁸⁶ Evidence related to the *bīt mummi* comes from two textual clusters separated chronologically by about a thousand years, which highlight functional variations across time. The first group of texts comes from the kingdom of Mari (1830-1759 BCE) and identifies the *mummmum* as an institution for the apprenticeship of musicians, a sort of conservatory sponsored by the royal palace.⁸⁷ This institution also had its own artisanal space, wherein musical instruments were manufactured and repaired.⁸⁸

In the 1st millennium, the *bīt mummi* became a far more complex institutional space, both in terms of its activities as well as the experts and artisans who worked in its environs. Neo-Assyrian records show that, although the space was still subordinate to royal authority, the *bīt mummi* was now attached to the temple institution in the city of Aššur and even its personnel was selected by means of divination. A royal inscription of king Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE) emphasizes how the construction of the workshop and the selection of its craftsmen were divinely ordained:

Esarhaddon 48, 72-76 (RINAP 104: 107)

“I kneeled recently (seeking) the judgment of the gods Šamaš and Adad, and I stationed diviners to (ascertain) their true decisions. I had an extispicy performed concerning the (selection of the) use of the workshop in Baltil (Aššur), Babylon, and Nineveh, and I placed (before the diviners) separate lists of craftsmen who should do the work and be allowed to enter the secret place. The omens were unanimous: they answered me with a firm yes, told me (it should be) in Baltil (Aššur), my dynastic city, the residence of the father of the gods, the god Aššur. They indicated me the workshop to use (and) the craftsmen to perform the work”.

The exclusivity of the *bīt mummi* is evident in Esarhaddon’s own words, which express concern regarding who would have access to this “secret place”. And by no mean was this distress ill-founded.⁸⁹ References to the activities and the personnel of the *bīt mummi* are not always explicit. However, evidence supports that it

86. Gabbay, 2018, p. 23, fn. 100. The existence of a pathway that separated the workshop from the sanctuary is also confirmed in other rituals (Ambos, 2004, p. 19).

87. Ziegler, 2007, pp. 77-79. As Ziegler suggested, despite no plain connection with the *kalû* is found in the Mari letters, an association with the lamenters is not unlikely (cf. FM 9, 51).

88. See FM 9, 23 and 44.

89. Two letters cast some lights on a case of corruption in the temple of Aššur leading to the theft of a gold sheet (SAA 10, 107) and the arrest of the thieves (SAA 13, 26).

was a meeting place for many craftsmen, including goldsmiths, smiths, stonemasons, jewelers, and carpenters. Several letters witness the shipment of lapis lazuli, semi-precious stones, gold, silver, and other metals to finish or repair statues and ornaments.⁹⁰ In addition to metalworking, artisans occupied themselves with experiments to produce artificial surrogates for semi-precious stones using “fast copper” (URUDU *arḫu*), which were no less efficacious than the natural stones (cf. § 1.3).⁹¹ The *bīt mummi* was clearly a crucible of creativity.

As supported by Esarhaddon’s inscription, the specialized knowledge that gave prestige to craftsmen working in the *bīt mummi* was considered a *pirištu*, a type of “secret” belonging to and protected by both scribes and technicians:

Esarhaddon 48, 80-81 (RINAP 4: 108)

“I entered the workshop where the renovations (would be done) and I brought carpenters, jewelers, copper smiths, (and) stone cutters, skilled craftsmen who know the secrets (*mārê ummâni lē’ûti mudê pirišti*).”⁹²

Once manufactured, divine objects were purified from the human hands that touched them.⁹³ Therefore, the personnel gravitating around the *bīt mummi* must have known how to craft objects as well as how to make them pure. In Neo-Assyrian sources, the workshop is in fact associated also with scribal knowledge, as stressed by occasional references to Nabû or Nisaba, the patron deities of the scribal arts, and by the presence of novice scribes called “sons” of this institution.⁹⁴ The overlapping of the artisanal and literate expertise associated with the *bīt mummi* – which embraces music, crafts, and literary production – is reflected in the polysemy of the word *mummu*.

The etymology of *mummu* is complex and has been often object of interest for Assyriologists.⁹⁵ In particular, the connection of *mummu* with noise and creation

90. Menzel, 1981, p. 287.

91. SAA 13, 127, rev. 4-17. For “slow copper” and “fast bronze” (*i.e.* molten and un-melted) and their use as colorants to produce red and blue glasses, see Thavapalan, 2020, p. 206.

92. In the *mīs pî* ritual the *bīt mummi* is indeed called the *bīt mārê ummâni* “the house of the craftsmen” (Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 57, l. 55).

93. The recitation of the craftsman’s denial in the *lilissu* ritual is preserved in the Neo-Assyrian version KAR 60 (rev. 3-4).

94. STT 38 Kolophon, l. 3: ^[lu2]*šamallî šehru mār mummu*.

95. A thorough discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of the present contribution. For an overview, see Frahm, 2013 with previous literature.

has been recently addressed with more emphasis.⁹⁶ The polyvalence of this word can be best appreciated in the *Enūma Eliš*, wherein noise characterizes both divine and human actions, and marks the act of creation itself.⁹⁷ Here, creation occurred in the Apsû, the subterranean life-giving waters where the demiurge god Ea resided with his vizier, called himself Mummu.⁹⁸

The physical space of the *bīt mummi* served as a meeting point of both divine and material creation. Precisely because the divine *lilissu* had to be fashioned materially and “born” cosmologically, the *bīt mummi* served as the ideal venue for craft and creation to syncretize.⁹⁹ As discussed in § 1, cult objects and images were “born in heaven and made on earth”.¹⁰⁰ Such a conceptual framework explains why artisanal expertise in this context was protected as secret knowledge, as well as why the workshop represented, in more than one ontological sense, a “birthing” place. Socially, and in terms of intellectual history, the presence in the same workshop of both artisans and scribes may have fostered the codification of craft knowledge into scholarly texts. An exemplary instance of this interaction of craft and scribal knowledge is the technical excursus found in TCL 6, 44, which explains how to dye leather.

2.3. THE MATERIAL WORLD OF THE *LILISSU* COVERING RITUAL

Rituals and cultic events in Mesopotamia were no trivial matter and textual sources underscore the need to resort to cooperating experts to accomplish them. One such collaboration, between the lamentation priest and his peers, is hinted at in the first lines of TCL 6, 44, where a “knowledgeable expert” (*ummānu mudû*), possibly understood as a diviner, is called upon to choose the perfect bull. This expert is tasked with quality control, inspecting the animal to ensure that its physical integrity and thereby purity – which was predetermined by the gods – fully complies

96. The meanings of the word *mummu* (i.e. “knowledge”, “creation”, “noise”, “craft”) reflect the activities that took place in the *bīt mummi*. Cf. Shehata, 2010, p. 214: “*Das mummu ist der Ort, an dem die ‘Handwerke’ (technae) des Ea versammelt sind: Kunsthandwerk, Dichtung und Musik*”.

97. For an analysis of the word *mummu* and its entanglements in the *Enūma Eliš*, see Michalowski, 1990. On the *topos* of creation, see Frahm who interprets *mummu* as “an abstract notion of creativity and dynamism” (Frahm, 2013, p. 113).

98. Throughout the Mesopotamian literature, Ea/Enki’s material and spiritual creations occurred in the Apsû (Shehata, 2010, pp. 213-214). On the mythology of the vizier Mummu, see Lambert, 2013, pp. 218-221, who highlighted how the word *mummu* combined in time both the nuance of “knowledge” and that of “creative power”.

99. On the manufacturing of the divine images as an act of birthing, see Hurowitz, 2003.

100. Dick, 1999, p. xi.

with the standards of divine design. The instructions advise “you” (*i.e.* the reader), to select a pitch-black bull as follows:

TCL 6, 44 col. i 1-8 (after Linssen, 2004, p. 255)

“When you look for to cover the bronze kettledrum. A knowledgeable expert (*ummânu mudû*) will carefully inspect an ungelded (*šuklulu*) black bull, whose horns and hooves are intact (*šalmu*), from its head to the tip of its tail; if its body is black as pitch (*kîma ittê šalim*), it will be taken for the rites and rituals. If it is spotted with seven white hairs like stars (*kîma kakkabu pešu*), it has been struck with a stick, it has been touched with a whip, it will not be taken for the rites and rituals. When you make the bull enter the temple workshop (*bît mummi*), on a favorable day you will step up to the side of the bull, you will sweep the ground, you will sprinkle pure water (*mê ellûti*), you will conjure the workshop”.

The description of the candidate follows a known *topos* for the “chosen ones” that was rooted in the Assyro-Babylonian tradition of induction rituals. Almost the same wording recurs in other two texts where the physical integrity acts as a mark for the righteousness of the selected individual.¹⁰¹ The first parallel is provided by a passage about the selection of the prospect diviner (*barû*) narrated in the story of Enmeduranki, king of Sippar, who passed on the divinatory arts to humankind in a sort of Promethean revelation.¹⁰² The second parallel is found in the ritual describing the consecration of the priest of Enlil, where the suitable candidate has to prove himself worthy of the priestly office by being whole “from head to toe”, with a body “as pure as a statue made of gold”.¹⁰³ As pointed out by Lambert, the search for perfection alludes to the “man as created” unaltered by human intervention and faithful to the original design.¹⁰⁴ This pristine, immaculate condition, respectful of the divine origin, is also looked for in the prize bull.

101. On the induction of cultic personnel in first millennium, see Waerzeggers & Jursa, 2008; Löhnert, 2007.

102. BBR no. 24 + 25, 28: *ù šu-ú ina gat-ti ù ina ŠID^{mes}-šu šuk-lu-lu*, “if he is perfect in body and limbs” (Lambert, 1967, p. 132). The composite text, preserved in Neo-Assyrian and Late Babylonian manuscripts, combines ritual instructions and a mythological backstory.

103. This bilingual composita, known as “The consecration of an Enlil-Priest”, has been preserved in both Neo-Assyrian and Late Babylonian manuscripts. For the selection of the perfect priest, see Borger, 1973, p. 172, ll. 11-14.

104. Lambert, 1967, p. 133.

After the selection, the bull is led into the temple workshop (*bīt mummi*). Here – after due offerings to the gods and prior to the slaughtering – the ritual instructs the reader to whisper in the bull’s right ear the incantation *Oh great bull, choice bull*.¹⁰⁵ The opening lines of the incantation immediately state the divine origin of the bull, which was created *ab origine* by the gods with the intent to serve as an instrument for the rites.¹⁰⁶ Like for chosen diviners and priests, the absence of physical deformities marks the predetermination of the bull’s fate.¹⁰⁷ This concept of fate is further elaborated in what Lenzi identifies as the *historiola*, a mythological backstory decreeing the nature of the bull through metaphors and persuasive analogies. These associations rely on astral premises that trace a connection between the bull, the constellation of the Taurus, and the divine drum. One of such instances of analogical reasoning can be grasped in the parallel between the “seven white hairs” mentioned in the *lilissu* ritual and the seven stars of the Pleiades located within the Taurus constellation,¹⁰⁸ whereas a more explicit claim is set forth in the Seleucid commentary (TCL 6, 47).¹⁰⁹ As reminded above, the drawing of the bull on the reverse of the tablet bears a legend that matches the animal to the homonymous constellation.¹¹⁰ The statement that the bull was a creation of the heavens is a pivotal premise to support the ontological process of making the divine drum. Using the bull’s hide as a medium, the ritual serves to transfer the divinity of the bull – and all the gods associated with it – to the *lilissu* drum; in sum: a divine being begets a divine object.¹¹¹

The written and spoken words were thus essential to strengthening and substantiating the ontological status of the divine hide; this was done by establishing analogical connections (discussed above), as well as orthographic changes to the semantic

105. The incantation is preserved in full length in the Neo-Assyrian tablet KAR 50 and its duplicates.

106. Lines 1-2 address the bull as “the creation of the great gods” (*binūt ilī rabūti*) (Lenzi, 2018, pp. 68-69).

107. The incantation establishes the validity of the bull by simply stating it and does not mention any physical peculiarities that the animal should or should not possess (Lenzi, 2018, p. 74). Although not derived from physical qualities, the righteousness of the animal was nonetheless verified through them.

108. Lenzi, 2018, p. 78.

109. A reference to the Pleiades may be hidden behind the seven sons of Enmešara listed in the ritual (Gabbay, 2018, p. 21).

110. Such claim is achieved with a simple writing device: the addition of the semantic classifier for stars before the word “bull” (^{mul}gu₄-an-na). For more details about the astral context of the *lilissu* ritual, see Gabbay, 2018, pp. 31-37.

111. Gabbay, 2018, pp. 41-45 claims the divine nature of the bull, whereas Lenzi (2018, p. 87) recognized it as a special creation of the gods but not a divine being *per se*.

classifiers that preceded these materials.¹¹² One such transformation is found at the end of the ritual, where the semantic classifier preceding the term *lilissu* changes from bronze (ZABAR) to divine (DINGIR). Hence, the newly covered *lilissu* drum was understood as “divine” by means of various mutually supporting hermeneutic mechanisms, including analogy, written and ontological transformation, and etiology, *i.e.* the divine source of the hide itself. Celestial bodies, deities, the bull, and the drum were intertwined in a derivational pattern that mirrors the cosmological network found in the creation of the divine statues reported in the *mīs pī* ritual.

Once the bull entered the workshop, the whole space underwent a specific purification process that prescribed, almost verbatim, known conjuring acts known from the anti-witchcraft tradition for averting evil and securing cleanliness. These acts included sweeping of the floor, sprinkling holy water, setting up basins for Kusu and Ningirima, offering loaves of bread and *mirsu*-confection made with honey and ghee, sheep and roast meat offerings, and scattering fine flour.¹¹³ Once it was established that the bull was intact and without imperfections or abnormalities, a second requirement had to be met for gaining access to the divine realm: namely, a pure and immaculate condition. One of the rituals to achieve purity was the “washing of the mouth” (*mīs pī*), which was performed twice during the *lilissu* ritual: before the bull’s slaughtering (col. ii 8-13) and then again, when the drum was finished (col. iii 23-27). In accordance with other induction rituals, after the selection and the purification rites, incantations and prayers were sung to strengthen actions with speech acts, which culminated in the whispering of the bull’s destiny into its ears (col. ii 14-15). Only then was the bull ready to die and be reborn as the beating heart of the god.¹¹⁴

In the midst of this elaborate ritual, we find technical procedures for leather processing. Among the known duplicates,¹¹⁵ the leatherworking instructions preserved on TCL 6, 44 are the most detailed. Due to the relevance of the *lilissu* ritual for

112. The process of rewriting the name is in line with the Mesopotamian thought that establishes the equivalence between the act of name-giving and that of putting into existence. On the topic, see Radner, 2005.

113. On these elements, see Schwemer, 2011, pp. 418-442 with bibliography. On the role of *Kusu*, cf. § 1.2.

114. The *lilissu* ritual prescribes the closing of the curtains of the *bīt mummi* just before the first mouth-washing and their loosening after the flaying of the bull, a timespan corresponding to the death of the godly animal. Note that the dark ambience recalls both the Apsú and the womb (on these latter, see Woods, 2009, p. 204).

115. TCL 6, 44 col. ii 16-32 and col. iv 19-28 for the ingredients and tools using for processing the drumhead; BaM. Beih. 2, 5 rev. 27-30; KAR 60 rev. 5-11.

the cultic history of the Late Babylonian period, this technical excursus has received far less attention than other sections, with the notable exception of Mirelman 2010.

TCL 6, 44 col. ii 18-29 (after Linssen, 2004, p. 257)

“You will remove the sinew from its left thigh, and you will bury the carcass of that bull in a red *kur.ra*-cloth. You will pour ordinary oil on it. You will place its face towards the west (the setting sun). You will take the hide of that bull and soak it in *isqūqu*-flour of pure grain, in water, first-quality beer, wine. You will lay it in the ghee from a pure cow and aromatics from their vegetables, with 4 litres of malt flour, 4 litres of *bitqu*-flour of standard quality. You will steep it with madder, and alum from the land of Ḫatti. Then you will cover the bronze kettledrum (with it). On the kettledrum you will pull taut by means of line rope. You will (wrap) pegs of sissoowood, boxwood, cedar, ebony, and the rest of the pegs, all of ash-wood, for the bronze kettledrum with pure glue”.¹¹⁶

The Seleucid text separates the procedural instructions in the second column from the list of ingredients and tools used during the process, which appear in the fourth column at the end of the tablet, right before the colophon. The list sorts materials and equipment according to the craftsmen who provide them,¹¹⁷ illustrating the workshop’s organization and artisanal collaboration.

The spot where the bull is going to be slaughtered is covered with a reed mat that sits upon and is surrounded by sand (col. i 12-15), which served both an apotropaic and practical function, perhaps to soak blood spilling. Once dead, the heart of the bull was burnt with aromatics in front of the bronze kettledrum, while the carcass, from which hide and tendons were removed, was buried in a red cloth facing west, a clear reminder of the netherworld.¹¹⁸ The bull was then flayed and its hide soaked in a mixture of water, first-quality beer and wine, and a lost quantity of *isqūqu* flour made of “pure grain” (𒀭NISABA KŪ.GA) (col. ii 21-22).¹¹⁹ The drenching of the hide

116. On the basis of the duplicate KAR 60, rev. 10, a possible integration for line 29 could be: *a-na LI.LI.ĪZ ZABAR ina ŠE.GĪN KŪ.GA [tal₂-pap]*. Mirelman, 2010, pp. 50-51 already pointed out that ŠE.GĪN designates more correctly “glue” instead of “paint” (*contra* Linssen, 2004, p. 295, l. 29); however, glue could be occasionally used as binding agent for colorants (Stol, 1980-1983, p. 529).

117. The text is broken in the section where we expect to find the craftsman associated with leather processing (col. iv 19-20).

118. On these ritual acts and their connection with cardinal points (west/east), see Gabbay, 2018.

119. Both Seleucid versions made use of the determinative for divine name (𒀭NISABA KŪ(.GA)), achieving a pun between the “pure grain” and Nisaba, the goddess of grain and scribal arts.

was meant to clean it from any residual flesh and hair (depilation).¹²⁰ In addition, the process cured the hide and stopped its natural decay.

A second bath followed, containing ghee “from a pure cow”, aromatics, four litres of malt and four litres of *bitqu*-flour of standard quality (col. ii 23-24).¹²¹ The use of fat substances points to a preliminary oil tanning, which was usually applied to obtain a softer product (chamois).¹²² Thereafter, an additional tanning process (tawing) is carried out, wherein the softened hide was treated with a mixture of alum from Ḫatti (*gabû*, NA₄.KUR.RA)¹²³ and madder (*hurātu*, GIŠ.ḪAB).¹²⁴ The combination of the two tanning methods would have resulted in a soft, elastic, and resistant leather.¹²⁵ Although the text does not specify the timing of each step, it clarifies that the entire process lasted 15 days.¹²⁶

The instructions provided in the *lilissu* covering ritual mirror what we know of the dyeing procedures from administrative texts. Leather industry is attested in the cuneiform records as far back as the 3rd millennium BCE and even in the earliest known sources the leather components of the *kalû* musical instruments were dyed red.¹²⁷ The use of red colored garments and accessories has a long history in the Near Eastern cultures, and it is often associated to contexts of liminality,¹²⁸ as also suggested by the

120. A warm temperature of the liquid was needed to favor the maceration of the vegetable components (Sigrist, 1981, p. 144). For a discussion on the tanning procedures, see Scurlock, 2008.

121. In the Neo-Assyrian (KAR 60) and the shorter Seleucid (BaM. Beih. 2, 5) versions, ghee is mixed with alum and madder.

122. Tanning with flour was still practiced in 19th century Iran. For each hide an average of 6.1-6.7 kg of flour were required (Potts & Henkelman, 2021, p. 287), a proportion roughly confirmed by the 8 litres of malt and flour prescribed in the *lilissu* ritual.

123. In the Neo-Assyrian sources, the toponym Ḫatti identified the Syro-Levantine area (RGTC 7/1 and 8), a geographical reference closer to the historical provenience of alum. In the Late Bronze Age, alum was indeed brought from Ugarit (Devecchi, 2022, p. 293, fn. 99). I would like to thank Elena Devecchi for these references.

124. For the identification of GIŠ.ḪAB, *hurātu* with madder (*Rubia tinctorum*) and its use for dyeing leather with a red hue (*šarāpu*), see Stol, 1980-1983, pp. 534-535. On madder, see Brøns, 2019 with related bibliography.

125. Mirelman, 2010, p. 50.

126. TCL 6, 44, col. iii 15-16: “On the 15th day you will bring out the bronze kettledrum before Šamaš”.

127. Cf. UTI 4 2849 (obv. 4) and BPOA 7 1559 (rev 3-4), from the Ur III period, and BIN 9, 455 (obv. 1-4) from the early Old Babylonian period. For more details, see Gabbay, 2014, pp. 118-120 and 2018, p. 6; Shehata, 2014, pp. 115-116.

128. Cf. red garment and headdress used during the installation of the high-priestess of Emar (Fleming, 1992, pp. 52-53, ll. 23 and 42), or the ample use of red wool for the fabrication of purifying torches in the Old Babylonian period (Michalowski, 1993; Biga & Roccati, 2012, p. 80), in 1st millennium anti-witchcraft rituals (Abusch & Schwemer, 2016), and for amulets (Simkó & Stadhouders, 2020).

burial of the bull's carcass in a red cloth. Moreover, the association with death is not alien to the *kalû*'s performance, which had a strong connection with funerary rites in 3rd millennium BCE.¹²⁹

Well attested in the administrative records of the 1st millennium is the allocation of materials to leatherworkers; these materials included oil, alum, madder and other dyeing substances, as well as the flour necessary for the pre-tanning stage.¹³⁰ The production of leather, both in terms of ingredients and techniques, shows a long continuity of artisanal know-how in temple institutions.¹³¹

As the leather dried, the cover was secured to the bowl-shaped drum using a linen rope. More than a dozen wooden pegs were inserted into the holes of the frame to adjust the tension of the membrane in order to tune the instrument.¹³² Finally, the opening of the drum was fastened with the sinew from the left thigh of the bull, and the unused remains of the hide were buried (col. ii 26-32). The ritual prescribes that twelve of these pegs, in groups of three, should be made of sissoowood (*musukkannu*, ^{gis}MES.MÁ.GAN.NA),¹³³ boxwood (*taskarinnu*, ^{gis}TASKARIN), cedar (*erēnu*, ^{gis}EREN), and ebony (*ušû*, ^{gis}ESI), whereas the remaining part – whose quantity is unspecified – should be made of ash (*martû*).¹³⁴ TCL 6, 44 is unique in specifying the types of wood listed here, a feature that keeps with the elaborate style used in this text. In fact, the Neo-Assyrian tablet KAR 60 and the shorter Seleucid version BaM. Bah. 2, 5 report only the use of “pegs” (^{gis}GAG.MEŠ) and “pegs (wrapped) in acorn-shape” (^{gis}NAGAR ^{gis}GAG.MEŠ). It is likely that the use of diverse and exotic woods enhanced the aesthetic value of the drum by creating the effect of a multi-colored scheme having diverse shades, densities, and grains of timber.

129. As demonstrated by Gabbay, the connection to the funerary context is however lost after the 3rd millennium (Gabbay, 2014, pp. 18 and 71).

130. For the Neo-Babylonian period, see Joannès, 1984 and Quillien, forthcoming; for the Achaemenid period, see Potts & Henkelmann, 2021.

131. Quillien, forthcoming, p. 15.

132. In KAR 60 and TCL 6, 47 seven (bronze) “hands” are added to the *lilissu*. These hands, named after deities, may have functioned as tensioning rods or bolts to tune the drum (Gabbay, 2014, p. 129). In many cultures, the insertion of small objects, herbs, or liquids, inside the drum acted both as tuning mechanism and as symbols of spiritual forces.

133. For the identification of the *musukkannu*, ^{gis}MES.MÁ.GAN.NA with the sissoowood (*Dalbergia sissoo* Roxb.), see Gershevitch, 1957, p. 16; Tengberg *et al.*, 2008.

134. The writing *maštû*, reported in TCL 6, 44 is only attested in Neo- and Late Babylonian period. For an identification of *martû* with the Syrian ash (*Fraxinus syriaca*), see Jimenez, 2017, pp. 217-218 and related discussion.

However, other considerations may be in order. The wood sequence found in TCL 6, 44 originated from lexical lists, where the same woods were often clustered in a similar order. Comparable sequences are also found in other ceremonial and ritual contexts, as in, for example, a *mīs pī* incantation (discussed in §1.3), where the timber used to create a cult statue derives from a pure or “holy” forest and is thus reflective of the vastness of the divine realm.¹³⁵ The sequence of the woods appearing on TCL 6, 44 may have thus been conceived in this way to recall cosmological connections based on cardinal points. In fact, the origin of the woods refers to two geographical areas: the west from which the cedar,¹³⁶ the Syriac ash,¹³⁷ and the boxwood were drawn, and the east from where ebony and sissoowood came.¹³⁸ The east/west opposition is ubiquitous in the *lilissu* ritual and its commentary, where it serves as the cosmic framework for the death of the bull and the creation of the divine drum.¹³⁹ The use of specific patterns of colors, materials, and drawings, which symbolize through cardinal points the cosmological vision of a given culture, is not uncommon in the tradition of ritual drums.¹⁴⁰ As temples, the drum may have represented a microcosm, uncorrupted, routinely reset to its pure origin, and beyond the limits of time and space.

3. CONCLUSIONS. CRAFTING PURITY

In our comparative examination we have been careful to structure our work employing two related approaches. The first is horizontal, *i.e.* we separately found and examined key terms, passages, and thematic relations within an heterogenous textual tradition, which often combines technical prescriptions and ritual procedures. The second approach, that we can call vertical or diachronic, examines *longue durée* questions that

135. Walker & Dick, 2001, pp. 114-117.

136. In Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, cedar is said to come from Lebanon whereas boxwood from the Mount Amma[nā]na, most likely the Anti-Lebanon (*e.g.* Tiglath-Pileser III, 30: 1-2). However, in earlier sources, cedar apparently comes from the east (Horowitz, 1998, p. 331).

137. The word for the Syriac ash, *martū*, reminds through homophonic value of the Sumerian word *mar-tu* (Akk. *amurru*) “west, westerner”.

138. While in 3rd millennium BCE sources ebony comes from Meluḥḥa (the Indus Valley), in the Neo-Assyrian period this wood is accounted among the tributes brought from foreign lands conquered by Assyria, including Ḫatti (Syria-Palestine), the Aramaeans, the Chaldeans, and the Arabs. These socio-political entities had indeed access to commercial routes branching to Africa and to the eastern countries beyond the Persian Gulf.

139. Gabbay, 2018.

140. See, for instance, the cosmological drawings on the *kultrún*, a ceremonial drum of the Mapuche culture used by the *machi* healers to attract cosmic and earthly forces (Trivero Riviera, 2018, pp. 91-94).

concern common traditions spanning more than one thousand years of intellectual history. Collectively, these two approaches highlight commonalities within and among cultural practices, including scholarly attitudes towards purity, and the overlapping textual traditions within which “purity” – and pure objects – were crafted.

We have argued that within the procedural text traditions discussed above, clear family resemblances may be found in the ritual introductions which call for the identification of pure and favorable days, the purification of production spaces and all entities that enter that space (be they human or non-human), and finally, the purification of raw materials. The linguistic register of the procedural texts themselves, which invariably instruct the generic “you”, frames these two approaches. The pronoun “you”, which lies at the heart of Akkadian procedural texts, creates both a sense of ambiguity regarding the actors that performed such rituals, and, at the same time, a sense of historical dialectic wherein “you” as the subject, become an active agent in interpreting, enacting, and transmitting the knowledge contained in these texts. That these thematic and linguistic elements are shared by the procedural texts in question, however, should not indicate that they come from a single cultural locus.

On the contrary, while couched in an Akkadian procedural format that finds its roots in the early 2nd millennium BCE, the intellectual history of purification rituals is far from static or conservative. Dynamic variations of “mouth washings” are found, as we have seen, in the making of cult statues, the crafting of a *lilissu* drum, and in a wide range of late texts which mention the “mouth washing” of a river, or the “mouth opening” of jewels placed on the king’s chariot. Within the long textual history of the *lilissu* drum ritual alone, we can identify changes in content and context of the procedure. Over the course of a millennium, hemerology – the scholarly practice of choosing a favorable time – saw a gradual preference for astral knowledge. Indeed, by the Seleucid Period, the *lilissu* covering ritual brings forth how astral premises were essential to the success of the performance, both in terms of timing, *i.e.* the visibility of the Taurus constellation in the sky, and cultic efficacy, *i.e.* the role of the god in channelling the divine from the bull to the drum. These astral connections, well-represented in the diagrammatic commentary TCL 6, 47, point to a Seleucid cultural context wherein astronomical expertise is central to scholarly explanation. Furthermore, as Gabbay and others have argued, the rise of Anu as the supreme god of the heavens and the netherworld during the Seleucid era is reflected in the new cultic background for the performance of the *lilissu* drum ritual, distinguishing the late versions of the text from the earlier Neo-Assyrian recension.

Purification has been further examined through the role of human and non-human agents, these include the *Kubu* of the glassmaking recipes, the *Kusu* of the *mīs pî* and *lilissu* drum rituals, the divine bull, and the human experts including

the *barû*, *kalû*, *āšipu*, and *ummânu* experts. Collectively, these agents are responsible for the selection, use, modification, and purification of production spaces such as the *bīt mummi* and the *bīt kûri*. While earlier scholars in the history of religion, such as Mircea Eliade, have argued for the universal nature of birthing metaphors evident in such texts (e.g. the kiln represented as a womb), the specific hermeneutic mechanisms and scholarly contexts of these creation spaces (the *bīt kûri* in particular) have received considerably less attention. By taking a comparative approach, we have found that the *bīt mummi* and the *bīt kûri* occupied a similar cultural locus. Both were physical and ontological workshop, decontaminated and restricted spaces wherein pure material objects could only be manufactured by the selected few, and only by means of divine ordinance.

Moreover, achieving material purity within the procedural texts examined in this work is predicated on knowledge of sourcing and performativity. In the production of cult statues this involves sourcing wood from a holy forest; in glassmaking, kiln wood cut during a propitious month containing no imperfections (i.e. visible knots); in the *lilissu* ritual, the selection of a divine bull unmarred by physical imperfections and using only pure materials for manufacturing the drum. The performative aspect of the texts is exemplified by the rich corpora of incantations accompanying the procedures, particularly in the *mīs pî* and *lilissu* texts. Incantations and ritual invocations interspersed throughout these procedures attest to a common performative framework, wherein materials are at once reconstituted both physically and ontologically through acts of material transformation and oral recitation, thereby reenacting a type of primeval creation, a re-birth of pure materials into pure things.

Faced with the question “what makes a thing pure?” scribes found meaning in plurality and repetition. The *mīs pî* and *lilissu* drum procedures underscore the extent to which achieving purity – whether temporal, spatial, or material – is only ever a temporary state, a process characterized in § 1 as an “iterative loop”, wherein actors and actants invoke a state of purity that lay beyond linear conceptions of time, where purity lay unaltered by the decay of time and the corruption of human agency. Read as “iterative loops”, mouth-washing procedures functioned, equally, as treatises on the *maintenance* of cult objects. Regarding the question “who makes a thing pure?” § 2.3 details the degree to which craft expertise was a matter of co-production between various experts, all of whom participated in the textual, physical, and ontological transformations of a divine object.

These areas of thematic overlap yield a number of significant conclusions. As stated at the outset, the relationship between technology and ritual – and by extension, our understanding of where wisdom, secrecy, and skill reside in scholarly procedures – remain an under-examined and rich topic for future research. Furthermore,

we have emphasized the scholarly dimension of these craft procedures by bringing to light aspects of scribal hermeneutics. The case of *Kusu/Kubu* illustrate the degree to which notions of purity – including pure creation and birthing – are indexed even in the orthography of the deities associated with these procedures. This should not indicate that the texts considered here existed exclusively within the hermetic confines of scribal literature. Rather, the performativity of the texts, as discussed above, points to a living and vibrant co-production of cuneiform scholarship and craft practices. A full understanding of key concepts in Akkadian scholarship, such as “secrecy” *pirištu* and “expertise” *ummanûtu*, must be understood as existing within a dialectical framework wherein scribes and craftsmen enact and co-produce knowledge. Therein, we find an epistemic meeting point wherein conceptions of purity were crafted.

TABLE 1 NOTES

1. The introduction to the Nineveh tablet of *mīs pī* is composed of several tablets and fragments, the section translated here, following Walker and Dick's conventions, is reconstructed from manuscripts A, B, C, D, E, and S, for which see Walker & Dick, 2001, pp. 35-38 and 52-53.

2. Translation of the introductory section of the glassmaking recipes is based on a composite of three duplicate tablets from Nineveh K.2520+, K.203+, and K.6964+, or texts A, B, C in A. Leo Oppenheim's classic edition. Textual variations between these three tablets are few but notable, and may be consulted via open source digital editions published on ORACC using the following links: K.2520+ (Text "A") <http://oracc.org/glass/P394484>; K.203+ ("Text B") <http://oracc.org/glass/P393786>; and K.6964+ ("Text C") <http://oracc.org/glass/P396928>.

3. The Akkadian term *abnu* refers to both stones and kiln-made glass without reference to whether the material is real or artificial, discussed further in the section that follows.

4. Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 204.

5. *Mīs Pī* Tablet III, 89-97, translation: Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 151.

6. This particular passage is discussed in the section that follows; see also Walker & Dick, 2001, p. 150.

7. *Mīs Pī* V 12a-13b; note that "red gold" is written *kù-si₂₂ huš-a*, mirroring the orthography of the god Kusi-banda.

8. Scurlock, 2014, pp. 512-515.

9. Attestations of *Kubu* within medical prognostication texts can be confirmed in both Assyrian and Babylonian (from Uruk) sources. For example, in the following, from Scurlock, 2014, pp. 512-515:

DPS XL A 31-34 = *TDP* 220: 31-34:

31. If an infant is equally hot (all over) and his upper abdomen protrudes, "hand" of *Kubu* [wr. ^aKÜ.BI].

32. If the muscles of an infant's abdomen are unevenly colored with red and yellow, "hand of *Kubu*".

33. If an infant's insides are cramped and he is unevenly colored with yellow, "hand" of *Kubu*.

34. If an infant is continually cold and he gnashes his teeth, his illness will be prolonged: affliction by *Kubu*.

10. See Veldhuis, 2014, 7.2.2.1. For a thorough discussion of lexical commentaries see also Frahm, 2011, p. 242.

11. For an edition of Aa, see <http://oracc.org/dcclt/nineveh/P382578>.

12. An edition of Murgud may be found at <http://oracc.org/dcclt/nineveh/P365317>.

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ZOSIMOS AIGYPTIAKOS. IDENTIFYING THE IMAGERY
OF THE “VISIONS” AND LOCATING ZOSIMOS OF
PANOPOLIS IN HIS EGYPTIAN CONTEXT

ZOSIMOS AIGYPTIAKOS. IDENTIFICANDO LAS IMÁGENES
DE LAS “VISIONES” Y LOCALIZANDO A ZÓSIMO DE
PANÓPOLIS EN SU CONTEXTO EGIPCIO

MARINA ESCOLANO-POVEDA

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

m.escolano-poveda@liverpool.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The first alchemist for whom we have biographical data, Zosimos, lived in the Panopolis (current Akhmim) of the late 3rd – early 4th cent. CE, a region in which evidence of the practice of traditional Egyptian religion is attested well into Late Antiquity. The images that Zosimos employed in his presentation of alchemical procedures and apparatus offer us an insight into his cultural context. This paper will examine a series of passages from the works of Zosi-

RESUMEN

El primer alquimista para quien tenemos datos biográficos, Zósimo, vivió en la Panópolis (actual Akhmim) de finales del siglo III y comienzos del IV d.C., una región en la que se atestiguan evidencias de la práctica de la religión egipcia tradicional bien entrada la Antigüedad Tardía. Las imágenes que Zósimo empleó en su presentación de procedimientos e instrumental alquímicos nos abren una ventana a su contexto cultural. Este artículo examinará una serie de pasajes de las obras de

mos of Panopolis from an Egyptological perspective, contrasting them with textual and iconographic sources from the Egyptian temple milieu of Graeco-Roman Egypt. The results of this inquiry will be used to elaborate a more nuanced presentation of Zosimos' identity.

Zósimo de Panópolis desde una perspectiva egiptológica, contrastándolos con fuentes textuales e iconográficas del entorno de los templos egipcios del Egipto grecorromano. Los resultados de esta indagación serán usados para elaborar una presentación más matizada de la identidad de Zósimo.

KEYWORDS

Dendera; Egyptian Iconography; Graeco-Egyptian alchemy; Hermetica; Khoiak Festival; Lunar Cycle; Mummification; Mysteries of Osiris; Visions; Zosimos of Panopolis.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Alquimia grecoegipcia; Ciclo lunar; Dendera; Festival de Khoiak; Iconografía egipcia; Misterios de Osiris; Momificación; Textos herméticos; Visiones; Zósimo de Panópolis.

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1. SEARCHING FOR THE ORIGINS OF ALCHEMY¹

The student of the origins of alchemy is faced by two main challenges. The first one derives from the nature of the early alchemical sources, and the second one from the modern scholarly tradition that has undertaken their study. The earliest alchemical sources that have come down to us give very few insights about their historical context.² They are collections of recipes written in Greek and preserved on a series of papyri, as well as copies of treatises in later manuscripts.³ These papyri were created in Egypt, and the treatises contain a wealth of references to Egyptian elements. While their Egyptian context was acknowledged by the scholarly community early

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2. The only two alchemical manuscripts that have come down to us from Graeco-Roman Egypt are the so-called Leiden (*P.Leiden I 397*) and Stockholm (*P.Holm*) papyri, which are two codices dating to the 4th cent. CE. For a recent edition, cf. Halleux, 2002. The fact that both these manuscripts and the first 21 pages of *PGM XIII* were written by the same hand shows that the practice of alchemy and that of the procedures recorded in the spells of the Graeco-Egyptian magical formularies took place in the same context and was done by the same people.

3. On the transmission of alchemical treatises in Byzantine manuscripts, cf. Martelli, 2019, pp. 11-43, with references.

on,⁴ these texts have not received much attention from Egyptologists.⁵ They have been studied mainly from a Classics point of view, and thus framed in a Hellenic rather than Egyptian context. In this paper, I examine one of the main works by the first alchemist for whom we have some reliable biographical information: Zosimos of Panopolis.⁶ While we have few details about his life, a close analysis of his works may reveal interesting aspects of his historical and cultural context. One of the difficulties of this task lies in the fact that Zosimos employed an allegorical language to describe his procedures, and delighted in the use of *Decknamen*, secret names, which later would become common in alchemical literature. However, as Lawrence Principe has noted, “Zosimos surely drew upon his own experience and knowledge of contemporaneous religious rites for imagery to use in this allegorical sequence. His language of altars, dismemberment, and sacrifice surely reflects something of late Greco-Egyptian temple practices.”⁷

2. ON ZOSIMOS AND THE “VISIONS”

According to most sources, Zosimos was born in the city of Panopolis, present Akhmim, in Middle Egypt,⁸ and seems to have later lived in Alexandria. He also

4. Festugière already located the early recipes in the context of the Egyptian temples, cf. Festugière, 2014, p. 220.

5. Some attempts have been made at identifying and interpreting the Egyptian elements in alchemical texts, cf. especially Dumas, 1983, and Derchain, 1990, and some sections of Fowden, 1986. Lindsay, 1970 takes a more Classics-focused approach (I discuss this work in more detail in section 2). Quack, 2006a, pp. 280-281 analyzes some of the Egyptian elements and context in Pseudo-Demokritos' *Physika kai mystika* (on which cf. excursus in section 5 in the present paper). For an analysis of Grimes, 2018, and Roberts, 2019, cf. section 2, below.

6. For introductions about Zosimos of Panopolis, cf. Fowden, 1986, pp. 120-126; Mertens, 2002; Principe, 2013, pp. 15-24; Dufault, 2019, pp. 93-117; Martelli, 2019, pp. 73-86. For the latest edition and translation of his *Authentic Memoirs*, cf. Mertens, 1995. Martelli is currently preparing a complete edition of the Syriac Zosimos. For the Arabic Zosimos, cf. Hallum, 2008a.

7. Principe, 2013, p. 19.

8. On the available information about Zosimos' life, cf. Mertens, 1995, pp. xii-xix. Akhmim is located close to Nag Hammadi, where Gnostic and Hermetic treatises were copied and hidden between 340 and 370 CE. The orthography of some Greek words has led Mahé to propose a dating of the second half of the 3rd century or the beginning of the 4th cent. CE for their composition, which would make them contemporary of Zosimos (Mahé, 1978, p. 11). On the context of the Nag Hammadi codices, and potential connections between the circle of Zosimos and those who produced the codices, cf. Bull, 2020, esp. pp. 142-143.

appears to have taken a trip to Memphis in order to inspect a furnace in a temple.⁹ He lived around the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 4th cent. CE, and thus was roughly contemporary with authors such as Iamblichos, and probably part of the same philosophical environment.¹⁰ He appears to have written twenty-eight books about alchemy, some of which he addressed to Theosebeia, who may have been a disciple of his and perhaps his patron;¹¹ this may also be just a literary device common to the dialogical character of these texts.¹² They are preserved in Greek Byzantine copies and one Syriac manuscript.¹³ These works, in contrast to the previous recipe collections, “witness a coherent program of research that draws on both material and intellectual sources”.¹⁴ Zosimos’ works describe diverse instruments and techniques, crediting their origin to their creators, and present the process and results of his experiments incorporating his thoughts and impressions.

The focus of this paper will be the so-called “Visions” of Zosimos, which are contained in a treatise entitled *Περὶ ἀρετῆς. Περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων* (“On Virtue. On the Composition of the Waters”).¹⁵ This treatise presents a series of alchemical procedures in an allegorical way, employing imagery that has been the object of discussion by scholars from many different perspectives. Michèle Mertens, author of the most recent edition and translation of the text, has summarized in her commentary the main two interpretative approaches originally taken on it.¹⁶ One approach was mainly represented by Marcellin Berthelot and Charles-Émile Ruelle, who considered the text purely as a description of various chemical procedures (distillation, sublima-

9. Cf. Fowden, 1986, p. 120. Fowden notes here that a visit to Rome that appears in the so-called *Book of Zosimos* (Zos. Pan., fr. syr. 299-302) is actually a translation of Galen, the identification of which some scholars have failed to make, attributing it to Zosimos.

10. For the Hermetic and Gnostic context of Zosimos, cf. Mertens, 2002, and Fraser, 2007. On the possibility of Zosimos’ being Christian, cf. Dufault in this volume, 135-170. For an Egyptological approach to Iamblichos’ *De mysteriis*, cf. Escolano-Poveda, 2020a, pp. 225-236, and bibliography there, esp. Quack, 2017.

11. Cf. Dufault, 2019, pp. 118-141.

12. Zosimos’ address to Theosebeia is reminiscent of Plutarch’s address to Klea in his *De Iside et Osiride*. On Theosebeia cf. Hallum, 2008b.

13. For the manuscript tradition of Zosimos, cf. Mertens, 1995, pp. xx-lxxxvi.

14. Principe, 2013, p. 15.

15. In this analysis I use Michèle Mertens edition of Zosimos’ *Mémoires authentiques* (Mertens, 1995).

16. Mertens also lists in her commentary to *Mém. auth.*, X a series of editions of the text apart from that of Berthelot and Ruelle (CAAG I, II, III), and discusses its presentation as a series of revelatory dreams in the context of the first centuries of the current era, connecting it with other compositions such as *Corpus Hermeticum* I or Thessalos’ *De virtutibus herbarum*. Cf. Mertens, 1995, pp. 207-211.

tion, cupellation) in mystical terms.¹⁷ The second approach was that of Carl G. Jung, who published several works on the “Visions”, considering them as real dreams, and interpreting their images as archetypes (“mythologemes”).¹⁸ As Mertens has noted, this approach is not tenable for a proper understanding of Zosimos’ treatises, since it draws parallels not only from historical periods much later than Zosimos’ time, but also from many different places and context, with no connection to the Egypt of the end of the 3rd cent. CE.¹⁹ Mertens suggests that a middle point, that considers both the technical character of the texts, but also explores their symbolic elements, is possible. In her commentary, she discusses both aspects, connecting Zosimos’ text to literary parallels.²⁰ These parallels, however, are only derived from sources written in classical languages. Other authors have also approached the “Visions”, analyzing them in the light of the religious and philosophical context of Zosimos’ time. Dufault explores how the procedures described in them may represent Zosimos’ soteriological conceptions, connecting the “Visions” and other works by Zosimos with Gnostic and Christian ideas of transformation and salvation.²¹ Knipe has examined the images of sacrifice and punishment in Zosimos against the historical context of the debate around the legitimacy of sacrifice, which divided Neoplatonists at the time.²²

One area that has been generally neglected in the aforementioned publications is the Egyptian context in which Zosimos lived. Jack Lindsay’s book *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (1970), which from its title and cover illustration would seem to have tackled the Egyptian elements in early alchemical texts, exclusively focuses, with very few exceptions, on classical sources. Lindsay devotes two chapters to Zosimos,²³ in which he considers the “Visions” a text of great importance for alchemy.²⁴ He interprets its contents as descriptions of chemical procedures. He brings into his discussion a reference to the Edwin Smith Papyrus²⁵ and to Chapter 20 of the *Book of the Dead*, although the fragment he quotes actually belongs to

17. Mertens, 1995, p. 209, referring to CAAG III, p. 117, n. 3.

18. Cf. e.g. Jung, 1983. This approach is also discussed in Fowden, 1986, p. 120.

19. Mertens, 1995, p. 210.

20. Mertens, 1995, p. 207-231.

21. Dufault, 2019, pp. 104-115.

22. Knipe, 2011.

23. Lindsay, 1970, pp. 323-357.

24. Lindsay, 1970, p. 343.

25. Lindsay, 1970, p. 347. The Edwin Smith Papyrus is a magico-medical text with a series of treatments for forty-eight different types of wounds, eight magical spells, and five prescriptions for different illnesses. The manuscript in which it has been preserved dates to Dynasties 16-17, ca. 1600 BCE. For a recent translation, and excellent images of the text, cf. Allen, 2005, pp. 70-115.

Chapter 77.²⁶ However, there is no connection between the contents of both texts and Zosimos' "Visions". The illustrations used in both chapters show Egyptian motifs that have no link to Lindsay's discussion, and are not mentioned in the text.

More recently, two monograph-length studies on the Egyptian background of early alchemy have been published. Unfortunately, both present serious problems. The first one is Shannon Grimes' *Becoming Gold. Zosimos of Panopolis and the Alchemical Arts in Roman Egypt* (2018). This book emphasizes the roots of alchemy, and in particular of Zosimos, in Egypt by highlighting his connection with the tradition of statue-making, which goes back to early Pharaonic history. This premise, which is promising, is unfortunately developed by means of a rather misguided examination of a few Egyptological studies, and no direct analysis of any Egyptian primary sources. This is not the place for a thorough review of the book, but the following notes should provide a general idea of the significance of these issues.²⁷ The main thesis of Grimes concerning Zosimos is that he was "a scribal priest who was responsible for preserving and translating ancient Egyptian recipes, and that he was a high-ranking craftsman – a goldsmith – who supervised other temple metallurgists".²⁸ This interpretation is taken even further in the conclusion: "Zosimos identifies himself as a priest of Hermes, and evidence from his writings indicates that he worked as a scribe in a House of Life".²⁹ She derives her notion of "scribal priest" who is also a craftsman from a brief encyclopedia article by Joachim Quack on Egyptian religious personnel.³⁰ Grimes states that "These scribal priests were master craftsmen who, according to Zosimos and other alchemical texts, held the rank of 'prophet'".³¹ While Quack indicates that some senior artisans could also have priestly rank, he does not say that they were prophets, which was the highest priestly rank. Furthermore, as I will discuss later in this paper, the Egyptian texts that detail the types of temple personnel connected with the manufacture of statues distinguish clearly between non-initiated temple personnel, which comprises the artisans who fabricated the statues, and initiated (priestly) personnel, who were in charge of their

26. Lindsay, 1970, p. 354-355. He interprets the text as a "shamanist initiation-ritual of sky-ascent and underworld-descent".

27. Since Grimes has no Egyptological training, the book would have significantly benefitted from having an Egyptologist amongst its peer reviewers, which has clearly not been the case.

28. Grimes, 2018, p. 25.

29. Grimes, 2018, p. 246.

30. Quack, 2004, reference, for instance, on Grimes, 2018, p. 46.

31. Grimes, 2018, p. 46.

consecration.³² There is no evidence in Zosimos' writings that would indicate that he had knowledge of any Egyptian script, which seems to have been a requisite for the access to the priesthood at least in the Roman period,³³ and thus that he was trained as an Egyptian scribe, and while he discusses other individuals who are priests, he never claims to be one himself. There is also no proof that he engaged directly with Egyptian funerary texts in writing, or that he copied them. Therefore, Grimes' identification of Zosimos as a priest, and in particular as a priest of Hermes, has no basis in the actual evidence.

The second book is Alison Roberts' *Hathor's Alchemy. The Ancient Egyptian Roots of the Hermetic Art* (2019).³⁴ In this book, Zosimos' identity is not a topic of analysis. Rather, his works are mentioned as part of an argument that intends to explain Egyptian religious iconography in alchemical terms.³⁵ In this case, Roberts does have an Egyptological training, which is immediately evident in the wealth of references located in the endnotes. However, while the Egyptological bibliography cited is extensive and in most cases of the highest quality, there is also a reliance on more questionable works that verge on the esoteric.³⁶ The discussion, in Jungian

32. See section 7, below, on the texts of the Chamber of Gold. While Grimes refers to Derchain's article on this text (pp. 84-86), she does not seem to have understood its contents.

33. The Greek papyrus *P.Tebtunis* II 291 Fr. b 2.41-43 records the existence of a requirement of knowledge of hieratic and perhaps hieroglyphs for accessing the priestly office, tested by means of an exam: [ἀπ]όδειξιν δούς τοῦ ἐπίστασθαι [ιε]ρατικά [καί] Αἰγύπτια γράμ[ματ]α ἐξ ἧς οἱ ἱερογραμματεῖς προήνεκαν βιβλοῦ ἱερατικῆς "having given proof of knowledge of hieratic and Egyptian writing from a hieratic book presented by the hierogrammateis" (edition in Grenfell, Hunt & Goodspeed, 1907, pp. 57-58). Quack has discussed this document, indicating that the knowledge test of the candidate seems to have been an alternative test for those who could not prove their priestly descent otherwise, cf. Quack 2005, p. 101.

34. This book has been reviewed by Matteo Martelli (Martelli, 2021) and Marco Beretta (Beretta, 2021). Their main critique is the lack of connection of the alchemical imagery discussed by Roberts with chemical practices, as well as lack of citation of authors such as Daumas and Aufrère. I have not been able to find any reviews written by Egyptologists.

35. The main Egyptian monuments analyzed in the book are temple of Nefertari at Abu Simbel, the temple of Hathor at Dendera, and the New Kingdom Netherworld books depicted in the royal tombs of the Ramesside kings.

36. For example, the works of the mystic Schwaller de Lubicz, inspired by esoteric and theosophical ideas, proponent of fanciful interpretations such as the idea of divine geometry, and creator of the so-called "Egyptian Tarot". Another often cited author is Jeremy Naydler (who is prominently thanked in the acknowledgments and was Roberts' PhD student). He follows the tradition of Schwaller de Lubicz, and proposes a non-Egyptological approximation to the Egyptian temples and more recently to the Pyramid Texts as "shamanic wisdom". Cf. Joshua Roberson's review of Naydler's book *Shamanic Wisdom in the Pyramid Texts: The Mystical Tradition of Ancient Egypt* (2005) in the *Journal of the American Research Center Egypt*, 42, 2005-2006, pp. 166-167.

fashion, combines Egyptian evidence from every historical period and context, with evidence from other cultures, time periods, and geographical locations unrelated to ancient Egypt, similarly to what Jung had done earlier. The main thesis of the book revolves around the idea of the divine feminine, a concept Roberts has explored in previous books, represented in the goddess Hathor, and her connection to alchemy through what Roberts calls “Hathor’s copper love”.³⁷ While the book deploys many references to Egyptian sources, both textual and iconographic, these are generally cherry-picked and on many occasions manipulated and inserted into an extremely convoluted argument, in which the clear identification of each reference becomes hard to follow even to the specialist. Some statements are extremely fanciful, or directly have no actual basis on real evidence.³⁸ All the arguments that contradict or somewhat question Roberts’ main thesis are either omitted or relegated without much discussion to the endnotes. Once more, a complete review of the many issues that this book presents is outside of the scope of this paper, but the analysis of the section in which Zosimos’ “Visions” are mentioned will suffice. The main argument of the book revolves around the importance of copper, associated with a feminine divine element, in Graeco-Egyptian alchemy and in the later alchemical tradition. Roberts bases her discussion on the assumption that the Egyptian word *biʿ* means “copper”. Despite indicating that the translation of this word is uncertain and has been the object of inconclusive debate amongst Egyptologists, she disregards any other options, and briefly summarizes them in an endnote. She thus proceeds with the assumption that every instance of *biʿ* should be interpreted as “copper”.³⁹ Most Egyptologists, however, consider that this word should, in most cases, be translated as “iron”.⁴⁰ Roberts also discusses the N41/42 hieroglyphic sign (𓆎, a vessel with water), which appears as part of the word *biʿ*, as a connection of copper with water and with the feminine, since the sign also appears, as the biliteral *hm*, in the word *hmt* “woman/wife”. However, M. Victoria Almansa-Villatoro has argued that all the instances of *biʿ* with

37. Roberts, 2019, p. 158 *inter alia*.

38. Cf. e.g.: “Ramesses needs his sistrum-shaking queen, otherwise he might remain forever caught and crystallized in the youthful zest of dawn leadership, which, powerful though this may be, nevertheless stops short of midday rule and maturity” (Roberts, 2019, p. 39); or the following statement, for which no reference is provided: “It is sometimes claimed that Ramesses was a secret admirer of the radical 18th-Dynasty ruler Akhenaten” (Roberts, 2019, p. 74).

39. Roberts, 2019, 285: endnote 4 to chapter 13. The discussion of *biʿ* as copper starts on p. 149.

40. For a summary of the discussion, including references, cf. Almansa-Villatoro, 2019. Scholars like John R. Harris and Sydney Aufrère, in their respective monographs of the conception of metals in ancient Egypt, consider the Egyptian word for copper to be *hmt.y* not *biʿ*. Cf. Harris, 1961, pp. 61-62; Aufrère, 1991, pp. 449-540.

the N41/42 sign are to be understood as iron, and not copper, since the sign refers to the material of the container of the water of the sky, which would be iron.⁴¹ This alone would undermine the very basis of Roberts' copper argument. In support of the association of copper with water, Roberts does not offer any Egyptian evidence, only references to "Kotoko mythology" and the "Kuba copper myth" (which she never locates geographically or chronologically), and a designation for molten copper by "a Burundi smith", without further context.⁴² Roberts then associates copper with Hathor by means of an image from the *Book of the Earth* in the burial chamber of Ramesses VI, in which a red disk is surmounted by a head of Hathor, from which the head and the tail of a snake emerge as arms, which are held by two human figures identified as Atum and the "Seizer".⁴³ She connects this image with scenes of metal smelting from the tomb of Rekhmire,⁴⁴ with which the resemblance is not evident, and confirms her identification between Hathor and copper stating that the red disk correspond to the womb of a figure in the first hour of the *Book of Day*, depicted on the ceiling of the same chamber, in which there is a small child figure that represents the Sun, which Roberts argues "comes forth in copper", referring the reader back to fig. 8 in the book (the image of the pregnant woman in the first hour of the *Book of Day* on the ceiling of the burial chamber of Ramesses VI). However, the quoted text – "(he) comes forth in copper" –, which seems to identify the disk in which the solar child is with copper, does not exist as part of the first hour of the *Book of Day*, and can be found neither in the image indicated by Roberts, nor in the edition of the *Book of Day*.⁴⁵ It is in this context where Roberts inserts her analysis of Zosimos' "Visions", in which she focuses on the image of the Man of Copper, indicating that the transformations described by Zosimos already appear in the tomb of Ramesses VI. However, we have seen that her argument of the disk surmounted by Hathor as copper is invalid. It would just represent the Sun itself. Her idea of "the copper 'tying' everything together in this (*scil.* the alchemical) animation process"⁴⁶ derives from her interpretation of

41. Almansa-Villatoro, 2019, esp. p. 77, also about N41/42 in connection with words related to women.

42. Roberts, 2019, p. 165. She concludes there that: "In light of these African associations, quite possibly the *bi3* hieroglyph's varied meanings reflect the highly coded metallurgical language surrounding ancient Egyptian copper-working, which was never simply a 'technical' operation". This conclusion is, as we have seen, not based on actual Egyptian evidence.

43. Roberts, 2019, p. 165, fig. 141.

44. Roberts, 2019, p. 146, fig. 128.

45. For the edition of the first hour of the *Book of Day*, cf. Müller-Roth, 2008, pp. 98-107. For the analysis of the pregnant figure, in which no reference to copper can be found, cf. pp. 70-77.

46. Roberts, 2019, p. 165.


bi3 as copper in Utterance 669 of the *Pyramid Texts*, in which the limbs of Horus are joined with *bi3*. Once more, this derives from an assumption, since most translations of the text translate *bi3* as “metal”,⁴⁷ and according to Almansa-Villatoro it may be translated as “iron”, as discussed above. This is the basis for Roberts’ argument that “Hathor’s copper love is the ‘glue’ binding everything together in the heart of the earth, ‘tying together’ this cosmos through the heartbeat of her love”, which apart from sounding quite New Age-y, is not fully supported by the evidence. Surprisingly, most of Roberts’ focus on Zosimos is placed on this “copper” element, and not on his other imagery. In an endnote to her first mention of Zosimos, Roberts briefly refers to the connection between the lunar staircases (“moon steps”) and Zosimos’ “15 steps leading up to the altar”,⁴⁸ first identified by Alexandra von Lieven, and which I discuss in detail in section 3, below. Even though the image of the lunar staircase of the pronaos of the temple of Dendera appears several times illustrated in Roberts’ book, including on the back cover, she dismisses this connection, and does not explore the actual iconography of the temple of Dendera in connection with Zosimos’ “Visions”. Much more could be discussed, but this example encapsulates the general methodology employed in this book, which bends and fabricates evidence in order to support a pre-established thesis around a divine feminine alchemical tradition tied to copper, which Roberts follows towards the end of the book up until the Renaissance, with equally dubious connections.⁴⁹

The previous review confirms that a proper Egyptological analysis of Zosimos’ “Visions” is still necessary. Zosimos lived and worked in Roman Egypt, and so the meaning of his imagery should not be searched in an atemporal and abstract pool of archetypes, but in Zosimos’ own historical and cultural context. A series of caveats need to be acknowledged before this analysis is undertaken:

- The ultimate goal of Zosimos’ “Visions” is the description of alchemical procedures, and thus the images employed in them will primarily serve this purpose.

47. For example, cf. Allen, 2015, p. 262.

48. Roberts, 2019, p. 288, endnote 15 to chapter 15.

49. Another brief example of manipulation of Egyptian evidence appears on p. 152, in which Roberts analyzes the Second Intermediate Period stela of Sobekhotep. She takes the orthography of the verb *h3p* “to be hidden” (*Wb.* III, 30.6-19) and forces it to mean “to adorn, adornment” for the sake of her general argument, because it is written with the sign S28 , a strip of cloth with a fringe used as determinative. However, the presence of this determinative has no connection with the idea of “adornment”, but rather represents the notion of being veiled and thus concealed.

- The treatise has a complicated history of transmission and is almost certainly incomplete. Its original form is lost to us, and centuries of alterations and selection of which sections would be ultimately copied and transmitted may have obscured its original structure and contents.
- Zosimos' perception of the images he employs in the treatise would ultimately have depended on his degree of access to their original meaning, which is directly connected to Zosimos' place in his historical context. As a result of this, a close reading of these images may offer a more nuanced understanding of Zosimos' *Sitz-im-Leben*.

I will articulate my analysis in the following pages around four main thematic areas. Firstly, I will discuss what I identify as the main image of the treatise, the staircases and altars, and will connect them to the lunar staircases of the Egyptian temples dating to the Graeco-Roman Period. Secondly, I will explore the associations between Zosimos' presentation of sacrifices and the Osirian myth. Thirdly, I will examine the description of the *ναός* in Zosimos' allegories of transmutation in the context of the architecture of the Egyptian temples. My fourth point will go back to the introduction of the treatise, in order to identify Zosimos' presentation of his own imagery, and to propose a potential reconstruction of the structure of the treatise. Finally, I will use the clues provided by the "Visions" to present some conclusions concerning Zosimos' identity and cultural context.

3. LUNAR IMAGERY. STAIRCASES AND ALTARS⁵⁰

Of all the imagery in Zosimos' "Visions", the lunar staircases with sacrificing altars are the most memorable. In the first dream, Zosimos sees a *ἱερουργός*, a "sacrificing priest", standing above an altar in the shape of a *φιάλη*, a bowl (*ἐπάνω βωμοῦ φιαλοειδοῦς*, *Mém. auth.*, X 2, l. 18.; also called *φιαλοβωμός*, a word invented by Zosimos).⁵¹ Inside this altar stands a priest.⁵² The altar is located on top of a staircase

50. Part of the discussion in section 3 was first presented in my book (Escolano-Poveda, 2020a). It is included here for the sake of the integrity of the argument, and to make it accessible to a non-Egyptological audience.

51. Mertens, 1995, p. 36.

52. The sacrificial priest and the priest in the bowl-shaped altar could be considered as different figures, or be conflated as one. The text is ambiguous, perhaps on purpose, allowing the interpretation of the scene also as a self-sacrifice by the alchemist who performs the procedure. In fact, later the text says that the man of copper, the first transformation of the priest, is *ὁ ἱερουργῶν καὶ ἱερουργούμενος* "*celui*

of fifteen steps, although some versions indicate seven steps.⁵³ The priest residing inside the bowl-shaped altar talks to Zosimos and tells him that he has descended the fifteen steps of darkness and ascended those of light (Πεπλήρωκα τὸ κατιέναι με ταύτας τὰς δεκαπέντε σκοτοφεγγεῖς κλίμακας καὶ ἀνιέναι με τὰς φωτολαμπεῖς κλίμακας, *Mém. auth.*, X 2, ll. 21-23). This most certainly refers to the complete cycle of the waning and waxing Moon.⁵⁴ The image of the staircase of fifteen steps, with the bowl-shaped altar on top and the priest in it, about to experience a transformation/transmutation, connects Zosimos' description with an important scene found in many Graeco-Roman period Egyptian temples: the lunar staircases.⁵⁵ The most notorious examples are located on the ceiling of the pronaos of the Hathor Temple at Dendera, and on the external south wall of this same pronaos, overlooking the roof of the temple and giving access to the roof of the pronaos. We find them also in the temples of Edfu, Esna, and Philae, either as staircases or as processions of deities.

Taking the representation on the ceiling of the pronaos in Dendera as the most complete and lavish example (Fig. 1), we can enumerate the most distinctive elements of the scene: a staircase of fifteen steps, which on top has a depiction of the *wedjat*-eye inside of a disk with a lunar crescent in its lower part, sometimes standing on a papyriform column, and being revered by Thoth. On each one of the fourteen steps that lead to the top a deity stands. This staircase depicts the cycle from the new to the full Moon, which is represented in the *wedjat*-eye inside the disk. The depiction of the Moon as a disk with a crescent on its lower part is definitely reminiscent of the shape of a bowl,⁵⁶ particularly as it appears in the representations of alchemical

qui sacrifie et celui qui est sacrifié" (*Mém. auth.*, X 3, ll. 71-72). Cf. Lindsay, 1970, pp. 344-345; Fowden, 1986, p. 121; Mertens, 1995, pp. 34-35.

53. Another staircase of seven steps is mentioned later on in the third and fifth dreams. I will discuss it at the end of this section.

54. As Mertens noted in her commentary, cf. Mertens, 1995, p. 216.

55. The lunar staircases have been analyzed in depth in Victoria Altmann-Wendling's recent monograph on lunar concepts in the Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period, cf. Altmann-Wendling, 2018, pp. 85-133. Further on the concept of the lunar staircases, cf. also Altmann-Wendling, 2017a, and Altmann-Wendling, forthcoming. For knowledge of the Moon in Graeco-Roman Egypt, cf. Altmann-Wendling, 2019; and for the connections between lunar concepts and kingship in ancient Egypt, cf. Altmann-Wendling, 2021. For a brief analysis of the lunar staircase in the pronaos of Dendera, cf. Cauville, 2013, pp. 430-432.

56. Egyptian art represented the three-dimensional world in two dimensions without incorporating depth. For the representation of objects on a surface, or of the contents located inside a recipient, the container was represented in lateral view, with its contents placed on top, in their more characteristic and recognizable view. This form of representation is known in art as "aspective", in opposition to "per-

apparatus in the Byzantine manuscripts, such as the representation of a *dibikos* in *Marc. gr.* 299, fol. 188v (Fig. 2).⁵⁷

The procession of deities leading to the *wedjat*-eye, which can be depicted standing on the staircase and also on a horizontal base line without the staircase but with the same meaning, represents the days of the waxing section of the Moon cycle, leading to the full Moon. They are found in different locations of the Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period. In several of these lunar divine processions in Dendera, Edfu, and Philae, the gods appear carrying a series of substances that are used to fill the *wedjat*-eye until it is complete in the full Moon day. These substances are described as plants and minerals. On the northern wall of the First Western Osirian chapel on the roof of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera, the gods are listed carrying a plant and a mineral each.⁵⁸ Both minerals and plants were used in the creation of the Osiris-Khentiamentiu and Sokar figurines fashioned during the mysteries of Osiris (cf. section 4, below). This aspect of the lunar processions brings to mind alchemical procedures and recipes.

The connection between the image of the lunar staircases and Zosimos' description was first identified by von Lieven in her analysis of the ceiling of the pronaos at Esna.⁵⁹ She pointed out that these lunar staircases must have been prominent still in Late Antiquity, in order to be known by someone like Zosimos, and notes that he must have been able to see these representations somewhere, perhaps in the now disappeared temple of Akhmim.⁶⁰ She also connected these representations of the Moon

spective". In the case of the disk with the lunar crescent and the *wedjat*-eye inside, an observer accustomed to these conventions could definitely have interpreted the disk as depicting the contents of the bowl (the *wedjat*-eye) as seen from above. For the principles of Egyptian art, cf. Schäfer, 1974, especially § 4.3.6 and fig. 161.

57. It should be noted that the earliest illustrations of alchemical apparatus that have come down to us appear in Byzantine manuscripts, and thus are removed from Zosimos' time by at least six centuries. The illustrations that may have been included in Zosimos' original manuscripts are thus lost to us. For line drawings of the apparatus in these manuscripts, and a discussion of them, cf. CAAG I, pp. 127-173; Mertens, 2002, cxii-clxix; and Martelli, 2011, who also discusses the relationship between Egyptian workshops with alchemical laboratories.

58. On the filling of the *wedjat*-eye with plants and minerals, cf. Altmann-Wendling, 2018, pp. 158-169 and 733-734, which includes a transliteration, translation, and commentary of the above-mentioned text. For the hieroglyphic text, cf. Cauville, 1997a, pp. 300-302 (= *Dend.* X, 300-302).

59. Lieven, 2000, pp. 131-132. Being unaware that von Lieven had made this connection, I proposed it independently in my 2017 Ph.D. dissertation (published in an expanded and updated version as Escolano-Poveda, 2020a).

60. On the archaeological remains of the ancient Akhmim, cf. Kuhlmann, 1983. A comprehensive volume on Akhmim in the Graeco-Roman and Late Antique periods is Egberts, Muhs & van der Vliet,

and their link with the myth of the death and dismemberment of Osiris with the fate of the priest in the bowl and the description by Plutarch in *De Iside* 41-44, 367d-368e. Her discussion, however, is quite brief and does not go into more detail.

Apart from the staircase and the altar, further elements that connect Zosimos' description and the Egyptian lunar staircases can be highlighted. The priest in the bowl tells Zosimos that the sacrificial priest will make him anew (ὁ ἱερούργῳν καινούργῳν με, *Mém. auth.* X 2, ll. 23-24), separating his body from his soul. Reading these lines in the light of the representations from Dendera allows the identification of Thoth with the ἱερούργός performing the sacrifice. The *wedjat*-eye, labelled in the hieroglyphic text above and around the disk as Osiris in the form of the Moon,⁶¹ would correspond to the priest inside the bowl, who is to be reborn.⁶² The word *wedjat* (*wḏj.t*⁶³) literally means “the one that is complete”, from the verb *wḏj*, “to be complete, to be intact”.⁶⁴ The column on which the disk with the *wedjat*-eye rests can be read as *wḏj*, “to be green, fresh, new”.⁶⁵ Both images convey the notion of regeneration and renewal, and the complete depiction, with the *wedjat*-eye inside the lunar disk, located on the papyriform column, could thus be read as the complete and renewed Moon, which resonates with the words of the priest in the bowl: καινούργῳν με. This also creates a connection between the alchemical process described by Zosimos and the mysteries of Osiris in the month of Khoiak,⁶⁶ which were performed in the Osirian chapels on the roof of the temple in Dendera. In this set of rituals, the death and resurrection of Osiris were ritually reenacted. When Zosimos questions the priest about his identity, the priest says that he is Ἴων, ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων, “*Iôn*,⁶⁷ *le prêtre des endroits inaccessibles*” (*Mém. auth.* X 2, ll. 28-29). This priest is mentioned again in the fifth dream.⁶⁸

2002. For a new accessible review of Akhmim, cf. the catalogue of the exhibition “Akhmim – Egypt’s Forgotten City”: El-Sayed *et al.*, 2021.

61. *Dend.* XV, 30. Translation in Cauville, 2012, pp. 42-43.

62. The word *wḏj.t* (*Wb.* I, 401.12-402.2) literally means “the one that is complete”, from the verb *wḏj* “to be complete, to be intact” (*Wb.* I, 399.14-401.2). The column on which the disk with the *wedjat*-eye rests can be read as *wḏj* “to be green, fresh, new” (*Wb.* I, 263.12-266.9). Both images convey the notion of regeneration and renewal.

63. *Wb.* I, 401.12-402.2.

64. *Wb.* I, 399.14-401.2.

65. *Wb.* I, 264.12-266.9. For a study of this term, cf. Escolano-Poveda, forthcoming.

66. For the mysteries of Osiris cf. Junker, 1910; Chassinat, 1966-1968; Pries, 2011.

67. On the identity of Ion cf. Mertens, 1995, p. 36 note to 14; on Aion in the Hermetic literature, cf. Festugière, 2014, pp. 1602-1625. Altmann-Wendling (2018, p. 125), commenting on von Lieven’s connection between the lunar staircases and Zosimos’ description, suggests that Ion may be identified with Ἰϥῆ or Ἰων(-ῆ^ϥ).

68. I will discuss his possible identity in the following section on the mysteries of Osiris.

The tomb of Osiris was always considered an inaccessible and hidden place that had to be protected, and thus the chapels of the mysteries of Osiris on the roof of Dendera are protected by myriads of deities armed with knives and arrows.⁶⁹ The imagery related to the mysteries of Osiris will be discussed in detail in section 4.

The image of the lunar disk on top of the papyriform column may have had further resonances in another work by Zosimos. This image is also suggestive of the shape of a mirror. One of the words for mirror in Egyptian was *wn.t-ḥr*,⁷⁰ from *wn-ḥr*, “to reveal” (literally “to open the face”).⁷¹ Through the alchemical process performed here, the new nature of the metal/priest/Osiris is revealed. This idea can be found in the Graeco-Egyptian magical formularies as well. PDM XIV 695-700 is a vessel-divination involving the Moon (*r šn wbʒ iḥ*, “to inquire opposite the Moon”: *P.London-Leiden* 23.21).⁷² The incantation is to be done on a full Moon, which was the fifteenth day of the lunar cycle: *i.ḥr=k sdy wbʒ iḥ iwzḥ mh wḏ3.t n 15.nt*, “You should speak to the Moon when it fills the sound-eye on the 15th day” (*P.London-Leiden* 23.22–23). The sound-eye is the *wedjat*-eye (*wḏ3.t*). The words to be pronounced are *wnḥ=k r.rḥi*, “Reveal yourself to me!” (*P.London-Leiden* 23.25). The verb plus its preposition, *wnḥ r*, “reveal to”, would have sounded in a very similar way to the word for mirror, *wn.t-ḥr*. While the ritual in the magical formulary is to be performed with a vessel, which would provide a reflection, it would also be possible to do it by means of a mirror. Connecting all this to Zosimos, the identification of the image of the disk over the column as a mirror by Zosimos may be found in his works preserved in Syriac. In a manuscript now at Cambridge (*Mm.* 6.29),⁷³ Zosimos discusses in several instances the making of mirrors from different metals. In Book 12 of this treatise, he discusses the mirrors of silver and electrum, and describes them as being magical. I quote the relevant text here in Berthelot and Duval’s translation:

“Le miroir fut apporté ensuite chez les prêtres, dans le temple appelé Les sept portes. Ces miroirs étaient fabriqués à la taille des hommes et leur montraient qu’ils devaient se purifier. Tout cela était exposé en forme de mystère, comme je te l’ai fait connaître (à toi, femme !) dans le livre qui est appelé Cercle des prêtres. [...] Ce miroir est placé au-dessus des Sept portes, du côté de l’Occident, de telle sorte que celui qui y regarde voit l’Orient, là où brille

69. Cf. Cauville 1997a, plate X 7.

70. *Wb.* I, 313.7; *PL* 230-231.

71. *Wb.* I, 313.6; *PL* 230. On *wn-ḥr* as part of the daily ritual and as a festival, cf. chapter 2, section 1.2.2. From *wn-ḥr* we find in Demotic the verb *wnḥ*, “to reveal” (Erichsen, 1954, p. 92).

72. For the Demotic text, cf. Griffith & Thompson, 1904-1909, II, pl. 23-24.


73. Translated in Berthelot & Duval, 1893.

la lumière intellectuelle, qui est au-dessus du voile. C'est pourquoi il est placé aussi du côté sud, au-dessus de toutes les portes qui répondent aux Sept cieus, au-dessus de ce monde visible, au-dessus des Douze maisons et des Pléiades, qui sont le monde des treize. Au-dessus d'eux existe cet Œil des sens invisibles, cet Œil de l'esprit, qui est présent là et en tous lieux. On y voit cet esprit parfait, en la puissance duquel tout se trouve, dès maintenant et jusqu'à la mort".⁷⁴

Right before this passage, Zosimos says that Alexander had a mirror in his house that protected him from all evils, which was inherited by his inferior successors. They treated it as a talisman, since when a man looked at himself in it, it suggested that he had to purify himself completely. In the above-cited passage, the mirror is taken to a temple called the "Seven doors". This brings to mind the different gates that lead from the outside of the precinct to the inner sanctuary in an Egyptian temple. The text says that the mirror is of the size of a man, and that it was to be located above the gates. The most interesting part is that over the mirror there is an eye, which is described as the "Eye of the invisible senses" and the "Eye of the spirit". The eye is described as all powerful from the present to the moment of death. This description brings to mind the *wedjat*-eye of the lunar staircases, located inside the mirror-shaped lunar disk over the papyrus column. It is relevant to note that these representations are generally found on ceilings or in higher parts of the walls of the temples. On the southern external wall of the pronaos of the Hathor temple at Dendera it even appears in architectural form, being an actual staircase leading to the roof of the pronaos, and which could be thus used in the performance of rituals (Fig. 3). Therefore, its location above the seven gates in Zosimos' description agrees with the real placement of these images in the Egyptian temples. We do not know which temple Zosimos is referring to. If we consider that this could be a representation located at the temple of Min at Panopolis (modern Akhmim), where Zosimos was from, it may indicate that the image was placed somewhere facing the rising sun (on the west, facing east, perhaps). If this was an actual architectural feature of the temple, we may be able to connect it with representations of the lunar staircase such as the one on the southern external wall of the pronaos at Dendera. The block in which the lunar disk had been represented on top of the staircase in this location has been severely damaged, and only a small portion of the lunar crescent in its lower part is still visible. This disk, which would probably have contained a *wedjat*-eye, may have also been plated with silver or electrum, with the current damage resulting, at least partially, from the removal of

74. Berthelot & Duval, 1893, pp. 262-263.

the metal.⁷⁵ Nothing remains from the temple of Akhmim, but we may hypothesize that a similar image, described by Zosimos, could have given origin to the story that he conveys in the treatise.

In the second dream, Zosimos sees again the same altar in the shape of a bowl, with water boiling in it and an innumerable crowd of people (πολὸν λαὸν εἰς αὐτὸν ἄπειρον ὄντα, *Mém. auth.* X 3, ll. 45-46). On the ceiling of the pronaos of the temple of Hathor at Dendera, another scene, located to the right of the lunar staircase in the same band, may be connected to the imagery described by Zosimos (Fig. 4). In it we see the lunar boat carrying a large white disk, which contains in its center a *wedjat*-eye. In the iris of the eye, where the pupil would be, is a seated child with his index finger touching his mouth . Above and below the eye there are two groups of seven seated figures holding *was*-scepters.

There is no agreement amongst Egyptologists on the meaning of this scene. Altmann-Wendling has collected different interpretations.⁷⁶ In her own view, this is a representation of the full Moon, and is connected to the lunar staircase scene to its left on the same band of the ceiling of the pronaos. She suggests that it could even be the Moon in the morning of the 16th lunar-month day, following the Moon in the shape of a mirror in the previous scene, which represents the 15th lunar-month day. The boat carrying Osiris to the left of the lunar staircase would then represent the new Moon (Fig. 5).

An alternative view is presented by Cauville, who understands this scene as the pregnant Moon (“*Lune en gestation*”), with the fourteen figures depicting fetuses.⁷⁷ The scene would thus represent the new Moon, and the whole band of the ceiling in which it is located would be read from right to left, with the lunar staircase as the waxing part of the cycle, culminating in the boat with Osiris as the full Moon. Both approaches can actually be reconciled. The elements in this scene condense all the phases of the waxing section of the lunar cycle, from the new Moon to the full Moon. The new Moon is presented in an embryonic way, with the child inside the iris as in an egg,⁷⁸ and the fourteen figures depicting the elements to be added for the completion of the lunar disk on each day until the full Moon. This image is present in other temples, such as in the pronaos of Edfu,⁷⁹ in connection to the more widely

75. This damage may also have been the result of the deliberate destruction of the image, as in the case of the face of Hathor on the back wall of the temple.

76. Altmann-Wendling, 2018, pp. 38-39.

77. Cauville, 2013, pp. 508-525.

78. The word for embryo in Egyptian is the same as that for egg: *swḥ.t* (*Wb.* IV, 73.1-74.1).

79. Cf. Altmann-Wendling, 2018, plate 8b.

represented lunar staircases. Since Zosimos appears to have been able to see the lunar staircases, he may have also had access to this scene, using it as inspiration for the image in the beginning of his second dream. His interpretation of the scene further supports this idea. When Zosimos approaches the altar, he sees a homunculus with white hair and a knife,⁸⁰ and asks him about the contents of the altar. He tells Zosimos that what he sees is “the entrance, the exit, and the transformation” (εἴσοδος ἐστὶν καὶ ἔξοδος καὶ μεταβολή, *Mém. auth.* X 3, ll. 52-53). This expression condenses quite nicely the elements present in the scene at Dendera, which shows, in the image of the child, the beginning (or *entrance*) of the lunar cycle with the embryo of the new Moon, the *transformation* with the fourteen figures corresponding to the days of the waxing part of the lunar cycle, and the end (or *exit*) of this part of the cycle, with the *wedjat*-eye, the complete eye that represents the full Moon. The connection with the lunar cycle and the mysteries of Osiris is further strengthened in Zosimos’ text. Zosimos asks for clarification on the meaning of μεταβολή, “transformation”. His interlocutor tells him that the place where this transformation takes place is identified as ταριχεία, “embalming”, which is the process by which the body of Osiris was regenerated during the mysteries.

Apart from the staircase of fifteen steps, another staircase of seven steps is mentioned in the third and fifth dreams. The steps are introduced by a definite article (τὰς ἑπτὰ κλίμακας, *Mém. auth.* XI 1, ll. 1-2), which may indicate that this is the same staircase of the first dream, or that this staircase has been mentioned before in a section of the treatise that has not come down to us. In the third, fourth, and fifth dreams, Zosimos describes his ascent of the seven-step staircase. He first says that one time he had accomplished this ascent in just one day, and that, having undertaken this path several times, he set out again, but this time he got lost. Mertens notes that this may indicate that the alchemical preparation described was meant to be done in seven days, and could not be achieved in a shorter time.⁸¹ Zosimos needs to ask for directions in order to find his way up, which takes place at a slower pace, with stops on each step. In *Mém. auth.* XI 2, l. 26, Zosimos climbs the third step (τὴν τρίτην κλίμακα) of this seven-step staircase, and in *Mém. auth.* XII 2, ll. 9-10, which corresponds to the fifth dream, he climbs the fourth step (τὴν τετάρτην κλίμακα). A series of images are connected to each one of these steps. There are no references to the first and second

80. I discuss these homunculi in the next section.

81. Mertens, 1995, p. 226.

steps, or to further ones after the fourth. Their frame within the seven-step staircase seems to indicate that the treatise is incomplete here.⁸²

Several interpretations have been proposed for this staircase.⁸³ The number seven has been associated with the five planets and the two luminaries.⁸⁴ Mertens relates this staircase to the one in the mysteries of Mithras, which also has seven steps, but notes that this is such a common number that other possibilities are also feasible.⁸⁵ Alternatively, and in connection with the fifteen-step staircase of the first dream, seven could also refer to a quarter of the lunar cycle. In the mysteries of Osiris in the month of Khoiak, part of the ritual is performed on the 12th of Khoiak, which is equated with the feast of the quarter Moon. This corresponded to the seventh lunar-month day, called *dn.t*, “part”.⁸⁶ The 12th of Khoiak was also the festival of *hbs-t*, “Breaking up the earth”,⁸⁷ which symbolized the burial of Osiris. If Zosimos was taking the mysteries of Osiris, and their correlation with the lunar cycle as his reference for the creation of the images in this part of his treatise, the staircase of seven-steps leading to the seventh lunar-month day, and the celebration in it of the burial of Osiris, may have represented the fragmentation and collection of the fragments of the body of Osiris. The elements described in dreams three to five focus especially on the dismemberment and punishment of a series of characters that have in common

82. On the structure of the treatise, cf. section 6.

83. In the Demotic narrative of *Setne II*, the Netherworld is presented as having seven chambers. The section corresponding to the first three chambers is not preserved, but in the fourth and fifth, Setne and his son Si-Osiris encounter different individuals being punished in ways that are reminiscent of those described in Greek literature. The punishments described in the fourth hall remind one of those of Oknos as told by Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10.29.1, and Tantalos in the *Odyssey* XI 582-593. This conception of the Netherworld as a series of seven chambers, in which punishments occur, may have still existed in Zosimos’ time (the conception of punishments in the Netherworld is present in earlier Egyptian funerary literature, cf. Zandee, 1960, esp. pp. 20-24; Zandee also analyzes the representation of the Netherworld in *Setne II*, cf. Zandee, 1960, pp. 297-302). The Setne cycle is part of the Demotic narratives that were being composed by Egyptian priests in the Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period (Escolano-Poveda, 2020a, pp. 48-71), and while their readership would have comprised those literate in Demotic, these narratives may have circulated orally as well (on orality in Demotic literature, cf. Jay, 2016). As I will discuss at the end of this paper, the Egyptian images present in Zosimos’ “Visions” locate him in the temple milieu, but he does not seem to have had access to Egyptian theological treatises. He would have been able to access this iconography, as well as part of its meaning, as a non-initiated member of the temple personnel. This could have also included narratives such as *Setne II*.

84. Fraser, 2007, p. 49.

85. Mertens, 1995, p. 226.

86. Parker, 1950, p. 11; Altmann-Wendling, 2018, p. 822.

87. Mysteries of Osiris, col. 42, cf. Cauville, 1997b, pp. 24-25. On *hbs-t*, PL 717.

the color red. Here we may see a conflation between the dismemberment of Osiris, and the punishment of Seth, as I will discuss presently.

4. MYSTERIES OF OSIRIS AND THE OPENING OF THE MOUTH. MUMMIFICATION AND PUNISHMENT

The connection between Zosimos' images and the death and resurrection of Osiris is made even clearer in the passage from the first dream in which the priest located inside the bowl-shaped altar describes his dismemberment. The priest says that someone has come running at dawn, and has cut him with a knife according to the structure of his joints (κατὰ σύστασιν ἄμυονίας, *Mém. auth.* X 2, l. 31), and has taken the skin from his whole head. One of the most prominent elements of the myth of the death of Osiris was his dismemberment by Seth.⁸⁸ In Zosimos' dream the priest's bones and flesh are then combined and burnt in order to transform his body and become a soul, a detail that is not present in the Osiris myth. While we should not forget that the procedures described here are alchemical, and thus not every detail will fit the original myth, here there may be a conflation between the procedures performed on Osiris during the mysteries, and those inflicted against Seth. In the mysteries of Osiris, part of the ritual consists in the defeat, dismemberment, and sacrificial offering of Seth before Osiris. The representation of this ritual appears in the first Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera. By including the dismemberment of Seth in a ritual space dedicated to Osiris, the death and dismemberment of Osiris was avenged, and the ritual acted as an apotropaic measure against his enemies. A further, less evident role of these scenes can be proposed as well. The representation of the death and dismemberment of Osiris was avoided as taboo and was substituted by the death and dismemberment of Seth as a bull. This is similar to a device found in the Demotic literature of this period. In order to avoid stating that Pharaoh was sick/injured/dead, the texts used the euphemistic expression "the enemy of Pharaoh" as the object of the injury, instead of "Pharaoh".⁸⁹ Interestingly enough, in Zosimos' text there is an intentional conflation between the figures of the sacrificing priest and the one being sacrificed. At the end of the second dream, a character called "master of the house" (οἰκοδεσπότης) tells Zosimos that the man of copper,⁹⁰ which seems

88. This dismemberment ultimately represented the dissociation of the constituent parts of the body at the moment of death of each individual. On death as dismemberment, cf. Assmann, 2005, pp. 23-38.

89. For an analysis of this expression, cf. Quack, 1989; Prada, 2017.

90. On the man of copper, cf. discussion below, in this section.

to be identical to the priest sacrificed in the altar during the first dream, is at the same time “the one who sacrifices and the one being sacrificed” (ὁ ἱερούργων καὶ ἱερούργουμενος, *Mém. auth.* X 3, ll. 71-72).

Going back to the dismemberment in Zosimos’ text and its connection with the punishment of Seth, the concept of dismemberment “according to the structure of the joints” is reminiscent of the way an animal is orderly butchered. On the Eastern wall of the first Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera, where the text of the mysteries of Osiris is located, we also find a depiction of the sacrifice and dismemberment of the red bull, which is a representation of Seth.⁹¹ This is part of the scenes 23-24 and 43-44 of the Opening of the Mouth and the Eyes ceremony, in which a bull is dismembered, and a foreleg and its heart are presented as offerings, in this case before Osiris.⁹² This ceremony ritually infused life into human-form elements such as statues, coffins, mummies of individuals, but was also employed in the consecration of other sacred objects and even complete temples.⁹³ The rest of the Opening of the Mouth ceremony is described in the second Western Osirian chapel at Dendera,⁹⁴ and it was integrated within the rites of the mysteries of Osiris, being read during the night from the 23rd to the 24th of Khoiak. The scenes represented on the first Eastern Osirian chapel show, on the first register starting from the bottom, the bull tied with chains on a sort of butchering block, being held in place by Isis and Nephthys (Fig. 6). To the left, the butcher is dismembering the bull’s parts, which appear piled up. The text that accompanies this section says: “*il est dépecé membre par membre, sa tête est tranchée, ses pattes sont découpées, [son cœur] jeté à terre*” (*Dend.* X, 51-52, cols. 17-18). The second register presents again the dismemberment of the body of the bull, which is here described as a red bull (*ih dšr*, *Dend.* X, 53, col. 10), and the offering of its parts to Osiris (Figs. 7 and 8). Concerning this offering, the text indicates that “*Les acolytes d’Horus se délectent de ses viscères, ses os sont sur l’autel, le fumet de sa graisse atteint le ciel*” (*Dend.* X, 52, col. 20). The dismemberment is thus followed by the burning of the remains on an altar, which parallels the treatment given to the priest in Zosimos’ dream. The bull in the mysteries depicts Seth, identified with the red color of the

91. Cauville, 1997b, plate X, 5. Detail in X, 15.

92. For a commentary of this scene at Dendera, cf. Cauville, 1997c, pp. 20-23.

93. This ceremony, as I will discuss in section 7, was performed in the Chamber of Gold. On the Opening of the Mouth and the Eyes, cf. Otto, 1960. Additional analyses in Assmann, 2005, pp. 310-317; and Quack, 2006b, who rearranges Otto’s episode division and order.

94. *Dend.* X, 339-343. Cf. Cauville, 1997a, plates X 188-191. Translation in Cauville, 1997b, pp. 183-185, and commentary in Cauville, 1997c, pp. 164-165. The scenes in this chapel also include the sacrifice of the bull.

desert. An interesting detail here is the designation of the foreleg of the bull placed before Osiris, labelled as *msh.t* (*Dend.* X, 54, col. 26), instead of the usual *hps*, “foreleg”. This is the designation of the adze used in the ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth and the Eyes. It was also the name of the Big Dipper. This constellation was associated to Seth, which was tied to the north pole in order to avoid its going under the horizon, into the Netherworld, the kingdom of Osiris, represented celestially in the constellation of Orion.⁹⁵

Another connection with the punishment of Seth may be found in the fifth dream. After falling asleep, Zosimos climbs the fourth step of the staircase,⁹⁶ and sees in the east someone approaching him, bringing a knife in his hand. Following this figure there is another one, which is described as having his arms tied in the back,⁹⁷ dressed in white and with graceful appearance, whose name is “culmination of cinnabar” (μεσουράνισμα κινναβάρεως). This figure is to be sacrificed, and the character with the knife tells Zosimos: Περίτεμε αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὰ κρέατα αὐτοῦ θῦσον ἀνὰ μέρος καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ ἀνὰ μέρος ὅπως αἱ σάρκες αὐτοῦ πρῶτον ἐψηθῶσιν ὀργανικῶς καὶ τότε τῇ κολάσει παραπορευθῶσιν (*Mém. auth.* XII 2, ll. 15-18) “*Coupez-lui la tête tout autour; et ses viandes, offrez-les en sacrifice une à une et ses chairs une à une afin que ses chairs soient d’abord cuites par l’appareil et qu’ensuite elles passent par le châtement*”. This text is similar to the one describing the dismemberment of the red bull in the Osirian chapels, quoted in the previous paragraph. Both the bull and the tied-up figure in Zosimos’ dream are described as red, since cinnabar is a red-colored mercury sulfide (HgS) often used as pigment in antiquity.⁹⁸ An interesting connection between Zosimos’ description and the punishment of Seth can also be found in the first Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera. On the northern wall of the chapel, to the right of the door that leads to the second chapel, we find a scene corresponding to the tenth hour of the night in the Hour Vigil of Osiris.⁹⁹ The scene shows the image of Seth as a donkey,¹⁰⁰ tied up to a post in the manner of an Egyptian enemy, with his arms on the back, pierced by knives at different parts of his

95. Lieven, 2000, pp. 24-29. Cf. also Cauville, 1997c, pp. 20-23.

96. On these steps, cf. discussion above, in section 3.

97. I follow Mertens’ interpretation, which emends περιηκονισμένον to περιηγκωνισμένον (perfect participle of περιηγκωνίζω) according to LSF’s correction. She notes that Berthelot and Ruelle kept the reading of the manuscripts and translated it as “a circular object”. Cf. Mertens, 1995, p. 47, note to 10.

98. On the ancient use of cinnabar, cf. Halleux, 1974, pp. 179-188.

99. *Dend.* X, 126-150. Translation in Cauville, 1997b, pp. 69-79; commentary in Cauville, 1997c, pp. 70-72. For a new analysis of the Hour Vigil of Osiris, cf. Pries, 2011.

100. On Seth as a donkey, cf. Altmann, 2010, pp. 58-59 and references there.

body¹⁰¹ (Fig. 9). Facing him is Horus son of Isis and Osiris holding a knife. Behind Seth stands Osiris, wearing a long robe and holding a series of scepters. If we compare this scene with Zosimos' description, both figures, Osiris and Seth, seem to be conflated in the one called "culmination of cinnabar", who is described as a graceful figure dressed in white, like Osiris in the relief, but has his arms on the back and is about to be sacrificed, like Seth. Once again, sacrificial priest and victim appear to be conflated in Zosimos' imagery.

The notion of punishment is quite prevalent in Zosimos' treatise. In the second dream, the altar where the alchemical procedures are taking place is identified in the plural as κολάσεις "punishments", which also appear in the third dream. The seven steps of the staircase mentioned there are correlated to seven punishments. Like the steps, the punishments are also mentioned in a definite way (τὰς ἑπτὰ κολάσεις, *Mém. auth.* XI 1, l. 2). This may indicate that the punishments described in the first two dreams are being included here. Interestingly enough, the place where Seth is being dismembered and burned is called in the mysteries of Osiris *hb.t* (*Wb.* II, 486.10; *PL* 604), "place of punishment/execution".¹⁰²

Apart from the connection with Seth's punishment, Zosimos' treatise has many references to elements that remind one of the mummification of Osiris. After the process of dismemberment in the first dream, the sacrificed priest is described as an ἀνθρωπάριον κολοβόν (*Mém. auth.* X 2, l. 39), a "mutilated homunculus/mannequin". The designation as ἀνθρωπάριον is suggestive of the Osiris-Khentiamentiu and Sokar figurines created during the mysteries of Osiris in the month of Khoiak. This procedure was described in the text of the mysteries that covers the walls of the first Eastern Osirian chapel on the roof of the temple of Dendera. Accompanying the text, which gives detailed instructions on the ingredients, instruments, and times that should be employed at each phase of the creation of the figurine, a representation of the figurine gives its measurements, as well as those of the basin in which it is meant to be placed (Fig. 10). The appearance of the ἀνθρωπάριον concludes the first dream. Another, or perhaps the same ἀνθρωπάριον is mentioned in the second dream, in the boiling altar full of people that I discussed in the previous section. This one is described as white-haired and holding a knife. After describing the contents of the altar, the ἀνθρωπάριον tells Zosimos that the place where they

101. Cauville, 1997b, plate X, 6. Detail in plate X, 51.

102. Attested in the Osirian chapels in *Dend.* X, 102, 297, 298, 314 (cf. Cauville, 1997d, p. 335).

are is called ταριχία, the place for preserving,¹⁰³ this is, the embalming place. In connection to the discussion of the lunar boat on the previous section, it is relevant to emphasize that the reintegration of the dismembered limbs of Osiris and his embalming process are identified with the waxing Moon. Lunar cycle and embalming process always go hand in hand in this imagery.

The text of the mysteries shows that the process of fabrication of the figurines of Osiris-Khentiamentiu and Sokar is called *k3.t* “work” (*Wb.* V, 98.2-101.8), which reminds one of the designation of alchemical procedures as the “Great Work”.¹⁰⁴ This “work” is presented in the second Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera in a form that would be recognizable to an alchemist like Zosimos. On the north-eastern and north-western walls (plates *Dend.* X, 39 and 41, text in *Dend.* X, 81-89), the goddess Shentayt (“the Widow”), represented with the attributes of both Isis and Nephthys, appears seated on a lion-shaped bed, weighing grain on a set of scales, and images of Khnum and Ptah, the main gods of craftsmanship, are located before her (Fig. 11). The texts that accompany the scene say: “*Paroles à dire par Chentayt la vénérable, la souveraine du Sanctuaire-de-Chentayt, qui fait croître l’orge par son travail, qui, du crépuscule jusqu’à l’aube, transmue l’orge–mise à sa place dans le Temple-de-l’or–au pouvoir magique rendu grand par les dieux, qui rend jeune son frère, momifié, dans le Temple-de-l’or*” (*Dend.* X, 71).¹⁰⁵ The word that Cauville translates as “to transmute” is *s3h*, a causative verb that means “to cause to become an *akh*” (*Wb.* IV, 22.11-23.20). An *akh* was a status that was reached after death, when the deceased had successfully passed the judgement of the dead. It is sometimes translated as “glorified spirit”, “trans-

103. The term ταριχία is also discussed in the first paragraphs of Olympiodoros’ commentary on Zosimos’ “On action” (cf. CAAG II, pp. 69-73 [Greek text], CAAG III, pp. 75-79 [French translation]). In the second paragraph, Olympiodoros discusses the following quote from Zosimos: Γίνεται δὲ ἡ ταριχία περὶ τῆς πηλώδους γῆς “*La macération s’effectue au moyen de la terre limoneuse*” (CAAG II, p. 71, and CAAG III, p. 76). Viano, in her discussion of the identity of this Olympiodoros, discusses briefly the term ταριχία in this passage, indicating that, while its primary meaning is to desiccate and preserve by means of salt (which corresponds to one of the stages of the Egyptian mummification process), in this text it appears to describe the operation of levigation of the gold mineral, in which it is ground to dust and separated from other components by means of water. As a second step, Viano notes that the mineral is put in a vase of fired clay and heated up. Thus, she notes: “*Le mot « macération » est bien choisi pour traduire tarikheia parce qu’il signifie à la fois « laver » (séparer par le liquide) et « conserver »*” (Viano, 2021, p. 202 fn. 1). While this explains the alchemical operation, the use of ταριχία is interesting in this context in its sense of embalming in connection with the figurines created during the mysteries of Osiris, which were made of earth and incorporated, in the case of the Sokar figurine, ground minerals.

104. Noted by Cauville, 1981, p. 25.

105. Cauville, 1997b, pp. 39-40.

figured spirit” or even as “ghost”.¹⁰⁶ In this scene, a series of gods bring to Shentayt the different parts of the body of Osiris, as well as materials for his embalming.

A further clear reference to the embalming process is located in the preamble of the fifth dream (*Mém. auth.* XII 1). Here Zosimos appears to be in a state between sleep and vigil, in which he sees again the altar in the shape of a phiale of the first dream. He also sees a man of sacred appearance, dressed in a long white robe up to his feet, performing scary mysteries (φοβερὰ ἐκεῖνα μυστήρια, l. 3). Zosimos asks him about another character that has not been mentioned before, and the man replies that it is the priest of the inaccessible places (ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων, l. 5). The description that he gives of his activities is quite interesting. He indicates that the priest wants three things (ll. 6-7): αἱματώσαι τὰ σώματα, “*il veut ensanglanter les corps*”, ὀμματώσαι τὰ ὀμματα, “*donner des yeux à ce qui n’en a pas*”, and τὰ νενεκρωμένα ἀναστῆσαι, “*ressusciter ce qui est mort*”. These three steps correlate very well with the procedures for the resurrection of Osiris: he needs to receive his fluids back, which had been removed in the mummification process, have his eyes open again, which is part of the ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth and Eyes,¹⁰⁷ and finally, rise again from the dead. This brings us back to the realm of mummification and the mysteries of Osiris. The priest of the inaccessible places could perhaps be equated with the Egyptian *hr.y-sštʿ*, “privy to the secret(s)” (*Wb.* IV, 298.22-299.13). In the inscriptions of the Chamber of Gold at Dendera, one of the locations where the mysteries of Osiris are said to take place, we find a list of the personnel involved in the creation and consecration of divine statues. The *hr.y-sštʿ* appears in charge of all the initiated personnel who are to perform the secret rites on the statues: “*Quand on en vient à L’Œuvre secret en toute chose, c’est l’affaire des officiants initiés auprès du dieu, qui sont membres du clergé, lavés par la purification de la grande ablution, qui agiront sans qu’aucun œil les observe, sous l’autorité du préposé aux rites secrets (𓆎 hr.y-sštʿ)*” (*Dend.* VIII, 131).¹⁰⁸ One of these ceremonies was, as in the case of the mummies, the Opening of the Mouth and Eyes, as we have seen.

The process of transmutation is represented in Zosimos’ treatise in the form of a man of copper. He is mentioned at various points.¹⁰⁹ In the second dream, he appears in

106. Assmann, 2005, p. 15. More specifically on the concept of *akh*, cf. Englund, 1978.

107. Edition and German translation of the text of the ritual in Otto, 1960.

108. Translation from Cauville & Ibrahim Ali, 2015, p. 213. For a discussion of the complete passage, cf. section 7.

109. Apart from the ones discussed here, he is also mentioned in the explanations of the second dream, where Zosimos states: Δίδωσι ὁ χαλκάνθρωπος καὶ λαμβάνει ὁ ὑγρόλιθος, “*L’homme-cuivre donne et la pierre liquide reçoit*” (*Mém. auth.* X 4, ll. 81-82).

the altar-bowl holding a lead tablet and giving commands to everyone in the punishments. He is described as the one who sacrifices and is sacrificed. In the allegories of transmutation between the second and the third dreams, Zosimos explains: “*Car le prêtre, l’homme-cuivre, que vous voyez assis dans la source et rassemblant la chose, celui-là vous ne le voyez (plus) homme-cuivre; car il a quitté sa couleur naturelle et est devenu un homme-argent; après peu de temps, si vous le voulez, vous aurez un homme-or*” (*Mém. auth.* X 5, ll. 113-118). In the fourth dream a man of lead is also mentioned. All these figures have been understood as descriptions of different alchemical processes, most certainly correctly.¹¹⁰ The man of copper is clearly identified as a priest in this passage (Τὸν γὰρ ἱερέα τὸν χαλκάνθρωπον, ll. 113-114), and seems to correspond to the priests in the first dream. The image of this man of copper holding a tablet, who has previously been described as a priest, reminds one of the representations of the chief lector priest on the staircases that lead to the roof at Dendera.¹¹¹ The priest is shown wearing a long robe and holding between his hands a stela-shaped tablet. We may also see reflections of the process of fabrication of statues in these sections, as well as of the figurines of Osiris-Khentiaementiu and Sokar in the mysteries. As I will discuss in more detail in section 7, Zosimos may have been involved in the fabrication of statues in the temple of Min at Akhmim. This process took place in the Chamber of Gold (*hwt-nbw*), which at Dendera was located on the mezzanine of the western staircase. In this chamber, craftsmen and priests performed different roles in the creation and consecration of statues, under the supervision of the gods Khnum and Ptah.¹¹² The walls of this chamber are engraved with a series of inscriptions that were initially identified as belonging to a manual for the fabrication and consecration of statues and cult objects,¹¹³ but may have actually been part of the *Book of the Temple*.¹¹⁴ A section of the texts in this chamber, located in the wall space between the

110. Mertens (1995) discusses different hypotheses in her commentary to each of these instances.


111. Cf. e.g. *Dend.* VIII, 108; XIV; and plates DCCLII and DCCLIII.

112. While the symbolic space for the fabrication of statues is designated as the Chamber of Gold in the texts, the actual manufacturing would have had to take place elsewhere, since the chamber at Dendera is not well suited, in terms of space and ventilation, for this work. This was probably the space in which the last, mainly ritual, parts of the process would have taken place, such as the Opening of the Mouth ceremony.

113. Hieroglyphic text and plates in *Dend.* VIII, 127-145, plates DCCCII-DCCCXIV. Translation and original interpretation in Derchain, 1990, p. 221. The presence of the Chamber of Gold as the place where divine statues and cult objects were produced and consecrated has been identified among the constructions of Thutmose III at Karnak, cf. Traunecker, 1980.

114. The *Book of the Temple* is a priestly manual that describes the ideal Egyptian temple. It is introduced by a fictional historical frame, followed by two parts, one devoted to the architecture of the ideal temple, and a second one that describes the rules for each type of priest, including actions considered

windows that overlook the Court of the New Year, provides the names of a series of materials for the fabrication of statues in a sort of code. Using conditional clauses, it presents the designation that would be used in the texts as the protasis (“if he says..”), and the real equivalent of the material that was meant in the apodosis (“he means..”): “*S’il dit d’un dieu que la matière en est la pierre véritable, il veut dire que c’est la magnétite (bqs-^cnh). S’il dit d’un dieu que la matière en est le cuivre, il veut dire que c’est du bronze noir. S’il dit d’un dieu que la matière en est l’électrum (d^cm), il veut dire que c’est du bois – ce bois, c’est le jujubier – plaqué d’or fin. S’il dit d’un dieu que la matière en est l’or fin, il veut dire que l’intérieur en est d’argent et, pareillement (à la notice précédente), le placage d’or fin*”.¹¹⁵ The man of copper, silver, and gold, may be seen as statues created in the Chamber of Gold. Depictions of these statues appear in the crypts of the temples, which I will discuss in the following section.

Concerning the figurines of Osiris-Khentiamentiu and Sokar, Cauville has noted that the grain that is incorporated to the figurine of Osiris in the mysteries is called *nbw*, which would sound in a very similar way as the word for gold, *nbw*, and was written with the same sign: .¹¹⁶ Osiris’ regeneration in the mysteries could thus be seen as a transmutation of the grain into gold, which may have inspired Zosimos’ idea to use the imagery of the mysteries in his description of alchemical transmutation. The connection between Zosimos’ procedures and the iconography of the Egyptian temples may be further strengthened if we look at the section describing the allegories of transmutation in more detail.

as sins, and the duties of the temple personnel. The interpretation of the texts in the Chamber of Gold as part of the *Book of the Temple* and not as a treatise for the fabrication of statues has been proposed by Alexandra von Lieven, cf. Lieven, 2007, p. 150. This is also Joachim Quack’s view, who is preparing the text of the *Book of the Temple* for publication [personal communication, email of 04/07/2020]. For a summary of the unpublished *Book of the Temple*, cf. Quack, 2000, and for a more up to date bibliography, cf. Quack, 2010, p. 9, fn. 1. Fragments of the text are also attested in Greek, cf. Quack, 1997.

115. The translated text corresponds to *Dend.* VIII, 140-141 (plate DCCCIX). Translation from Derchain, 1990, p. 235. Derchain already noticed that this practice, although it does not concern symbolic designations, is similar to the use of alternative names or *Decknamen* for substances in later alchemy (Derchain, 1990, p. 223). On secrecy in the early alchemical literature, Principe notes that: “The moderate level of secrecy encountered in the earlier recipe literature thus becomes more intense and more self-conscious with Zosimos. Such secrecy would wax and wane in intensity but never disappear for the rest of alchemy’s history” (Principe, 2013, pp. 17-18). The use of alternative names is a traditional feature of Egyptian religious literature, which originated probably in the creative power inherent in words according to Egyptian thought (cf. Baines, 1990, p. 16). Jasnow & Zauzich, 2005, p. 58 remark this feature also for the *Book of Thoth*.

116. Cf. Cauville, 1981, p. 25; *PL* 503-505, s.v. *nbw*.

5. ALLEGORIES OF TRANSMUTATION. THE TEMPLE/BASIN

The space in which Zosimos' dreams take place is not described in detail, beyond a few elements such as the staircases and altars. These, together with the presence of priests, set the scene in a temple context. Some more temple imagery can be found at the end of the second dream, in the description of a series of allegories of transmutation. In this section (*Mém. auth.* X 5), Zosimos addresses an unnamed masculine interlocutor (φιλιτατε, l. 100), giving him instructions. This nicely parallels the format of the text of the mysteries of Osiris, in the sections that describe the instruments and the preparation of the figurines of Osiris-Khentiamentiou and Sokar.¹¹⁷ Zosimos tells his reader to make a ναός out of one single stone (ναὸν μονόλιθον, l. 101). While Mertens has translated the word ναός as “temple”, it could also be understood, since it is made of one block, as a shrine similar to the *naoi* that contain the statues of the deities in the Egyptian temples. In the description given by Zosimos, the ναός is to be made of alabaster with a stream of very pure water and very bright solar light (πηγὴν δὲ ἔσθθεν ἔχοντα ὕδατος καθαρωτάτου καὶ φῶς ἑξαστράπτου ἡλιακόν, ll. 103-104). Mertens has linked the description of this ναός with an egg, noting that this could be the origin of the idea of the philosophical egg.¹¹⁸ The context of the mysteries of Osiris also brings to mind the tub in which the figurines of Osiris-Khentiamentiou and Sokar are placed during the rituals. This tub is called *hsp* in the text of the mysteries of Osiris, a designation attached to the garden where Min grows his lettuces. Min was the main god of Panopolis, Zosimos' hometown. In the text and the illustrations that accompany it on the walls of the first Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera (*Dend.* X, 28, cols. 14-16), this tub is described as being made of *inr n bhn*, “graywacke”, its measurements are given, and it is indicated that there is a basin underneath to collect the water that runs from a hole in its center. This basin is made of *inr n mʒt*, “pink granite”. It is decorated with the representation of the work done in it, presumably the fabrication of the figurine of Osiris, and the protector gods of Osiris. The reference in Zosimos' description to the stream of water and solar light reminds one of the hole and basin for the evacuation of water in the tub from the mysteries of Osiris, and the location of the text in an open-air Osirian chapel, which

117. The text of the mysteries of Osiris at Dendera is divided into seven books, which describe the locations where the rites take place, and the different implements used in them, including their materials and measurements. The creation of the two figurines of Osiris-Khentiamentiou and Sokar is presented in a way similar to the recipes present in the alchemical papyri. For a brief presentation of the titles and contents of each one of the seven books, cf. Chassinat, 1966-1968, pp. 4-7. On the composition and transmission of the text, cf. Quack, 1998.

118. Mertens, 1995, p. 223.

would allow access to direct solar light during the performance of the rituals. While the tub of the mysteries is made of a dark stone, the reference to alabaster in Zosimos also brings to mind the large calcite embalming tables for the Apis bulls found at Memphis.¹¹⁹ These tables have a conduct for the evacuation of fluids, which were collected on a basin on one end.

In order to access the ναός, Zosimos tells his reader to take a sword (ξίφος, l. 105) in his hands, and to search for the entrance with it. He notes that the access is narrow, and it is guarded by a snake (Στενόστομος γάρ ὁ τόπος ὅθεν ἐστὶν ἡ ἄνοιξις τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ δράκων παράκειται τῇ εισόδῳ, φυλάττων τὸν ναόν, ll. 106-108). This snake has to be sacrificed, and with its remains a stool is to be made in order to climb up and observe the man of copper, who will turn into a man of silver, and with time, into a man of gold. While the snake is a clear Egyptian image,¹²⁰ the rest of the description of the access to the ναός is quite enigmatic. The specific reference of the use of a sword to open a ναός made of one single stone, together with the description of its access as narrow, brings to mind, in the context of the Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period, the access to the crypts. These are spaces located within the masonry of the temples, attested from the New Kingdom on.¹²¹ These crypts had different functions, depending on their location.¹²² Some of them were used to store statues and ritual implements used in different ceremonies, and others were connected to the performance of certain rituals, such as the New Year festival and the mysteries of Osiris at Dendera.¹²³ The latter thus fit within the themes used by Zosimos in his treatise. Access to these crypts was located in different chambers of the temples, and at different positions. At Dendera there were eleven crypts, distributed in three levels:¹²⁴ those located underground

119. For a photograph of one of these tables, cf. Ikram, 2005b, p. 19, fig. 2.2.

120. Mertens already noted that snakes had a reputation as guardians both in Egypt and Greece (Mertens, 1995, p. 40, n. 41). We find snakes guarding the access to an object or the entrance to a space, for example, in *Setne I*, where an infinite snake guards the book of Thoth (*hfn d.t.*, *Setne I* 3, 20 and 3, 32), or in the Netherworld books, such as the *Book of the Amduat*, where a snake protects Ra in his boat, or the snakes that guard the doors in the *Book of Gates*. On the Netherworld books, cf. Darnell & Darnell, 2018.

121. For a general introduction to the crypts, cf. Traunecker, 1980 and 1994. The crypts of Dendera are published in Chassinat, 1947 and 1952; Chassinat & Dumas, 1965; translations in Cauville, 2004. Cf. also Waitkus, 1997.

122. Cauville classifies the function of the crypts at Dendera as follows: the subterranean crypts have a ferial role, the intermediate ones a theological role, and the upper ones are conservatories of statue and of the texts of the past (Cauville, 2004, pp. 5-6). The crypts also feature in the *Book of the Temple*, cf. Quack, 2000, p. 4.

123. Traunecker, 1994, pp. 38-39.

124. For a general presentation of the crypts at Dendera, cf. Cauville, 2004, pp. 3-6.

were accessed through openings on the floor; those at floor level of the temple had openings on the lower part of the walls; and the ones located on the upper level had their access higher up on the walls of different chambers. Various systems were used to block these entrances, such as stone slabs or blocks, in some cases placed on some kind of rolling mechanism.¹²⁵ These are described in Dendera in a series of protective formulas, which emphasize their secret character.¹²⁶ At Dendera and Edfu, these entrances were carefully concealed, with the decoration of the walls continuing on the closure blocks seamlessly.¹²⁷ Traunecker notes that in some cases, fake stone joints were carved on the blocks to make them less discoverable.¹²⁸ In these cases, the use of a sharp instrument such as a knife or a sword would help in the identification of these entrances, which would explain why Zosimos advised his reader to use a sword to find the entrance to the *vaóc*. Access to these crypts is narrow,¹²⁹ perhaps determined by the size of the objects that had to be placed in and out of them.¹³⁰ Zosimos indicates that a stool – made out of the remains of the snake – is necessary to access the *vaóc*, which may indicate that the entrance was located higher up, as in the case of the third level crypts at Dendera.¹³¹ Inside the *vaóc*, the reader will be able to see the man of copper. It is interesting to remark that the decoration of the crypts at Dendera shows that statues were kept in them,

125. Traunecker, 1994, p. 40. An example of one such mechanism for Dendera, in which a block slides on two grooves, can be seen in the diagram of the access to the first western crypt, cf. Chassinat & Dumas, 1965, plate DXI. Some more of these mechanisms have been discovered in the crypts of the temple of Repit at Athribis. For an analysis and excellent diagrams and photographic record of them, as well as reconstructions of how they would have worked, cf. Baumann, 2019.

126. For the different designations of the crypts at Dendera, cf. Cauville, 2004, p. 4. Cauville (2004, pp. 68-69) has collected these formulas. The first Eastern crypt contains the following texts: “*Chambre protectrice des puissances du temple-de-Somtous, réparée dans sa construction, solidement fondée dans ses murs ; sa clôture est un bloc de pierre et est construite comme une barrière, d’un travail accompli bien venu et sans défaut*”; “*Chambre dissimulée des dieux du temple-de-Somtous, en une belle réalisation en matière de protection, si bien gardée par sa construction que son existence ne peut être décelée et que ses ennemis sont réduits à néant*” (*Dend.* V, 41 and 45, translation Cauville, 2004, p. 68).

127. On the closure of the crypts, cf. Cauville, 2004, pp. 4-5. For good photographs of the closure of the crypts at Dendera and Edfu, cf. Baumann, 2019, figs. 122-126 in plate 151.

128. Traunecker, 1994, p. 39.

129. See for example Chassinat, 1947, plates CCCXXX, CCCXXXI, for photographs of the staircases of access to the first Eastern crypt at Dendera; and especially plates CCCLIX and CCCLX, which show the entrance to the second eastern crypt, from the outside in room G, and the inside, respectively.

130. Traunecker, 1994, p. 42.

131. The level at which the entrances to the third level crypts are located at Dendera can be seen in fig. 2.24 from Zignani’s architectural analysis of the temple (cf. Zignani, 2008, p. 52). At the end of the temple, on the left in the diagram, the three levels of southern crypts can be seen.

for which their material and size are detailed in the inscriptions that accompany them.¹³² As it will be discussed in the last section of this paper, Zosimos may have been part of the personnel of the temple devoted to the creation of statues, and thus, although access to these crypts was restricted, he would have known of their existence and contents.

EXCURSUS. CRYPTS IN PSEUDO-DEMOKRITOS' *PHYSIKA KAI MYSTICA*

Awareness of the existence of these crypts in alchemical literature may also be found in Pseudo-Demokritos' *Physika kai mystika*. Apart from the recipes, the *Physika kai mystika* also includes a narrative section in the first person in which the author of the treatise, Demokritos, tells how he was initiated into the knowledge presented in the text. This section, *Physika kai mystika* 3, seems to start *in medias res* the way it is preserved, with a reference to things having been learnt from an "abovementioned-master" (προειρημένου διδασκάλου, l. 35). This master is said to have died before completing the writer's and other disciples' initiation (μηδέπω ἡμῶν τελειωθέντων, ll. 37-38).¹³³ In order to complete his education and that of his fellow disciples, the writer performs a necromantic rite by which he conjures his teacher, who after several attempts says that he is not allowed to speak because of his daemon.¹³⁴ The dead master points out that the books that will provide the writer with the culmination of his education are in the temple, without more specification. These books seem to have been a secret during the master's life. However, the text says that: Ἦν δὲ πρὸ τῆς τελευτῆς ἀσφαλισάμενος μόνον τῷ υἱῷ φανήσεσθαι τὰς βίβλους, εἰ τὴν πρώτην ὑπερβῆ ἡλικίαν, "before dying he made sure that the books would have been shown only to his son after he had passed his first age" (*Physika kai mystika* 3, ll. 49-51). The people in charge of this task must have been priests of the temple in question. It is not stated in the text, but the master's son should probably be under-

132. For example, on the north wall of chamber A in the first Southern crypt (*Dend.* V, plate CCCCXIX) we see a statue of Isis in human form, a statue of Isis in falcon form, and a Hathoric column. The inscriptions give their material and size. The statue of Isis in human form is described as follows: "(Ses) os sont en argent, ses chairs en or. Or, une coudéee, c'est sa représentation secrète". The statue of Isis in falcon form just indicates that it is made of gold, of one cubit, but the Hathoric column gives some more detail: "Cuivre noir plaqué d'or, yeux incrustés de lapis-lazuli" (*Dend.* V, 123, translation in Cauville, 2004, p. 217).

133. For a more detailed analysis of these characters, cf. Martelli, 2013, pp. 69-73; Escolano-Poveda, 2020a, pp. 137-140.

134. For the performance of necromantic rituals in Demotic and Graeco-Roman literature, cf. Escolano-Poveda, 2020b.

stood as a member of the group of disciples. During a feast in the temple, in which a banquet takes place in the naos (ἐν τῷ ναῷ, l. 56), a stela (στήλη, l. 56) breaks by itself (ἐξ αὐτομάτου ... διαρρήγνυται, ll. 56-57), revealing, apparently only to the master's son initially, the books preserved inside of it. Although Martelli translates στήλη as "column", it can also be interpreted as a slab of stone that broke on itself. This could then refer to the slab covering access to one of the crypts in the temple, as described above. The third Western crypt at Dendera, known as the "crypt of the archives", seems to have contained documents, perhaps the library of the temple. On its walls, among the texts inscribed, is the history of the temple, mentioning a series of kings, going back to Khufu (*Dend.* VI, 158-159 and 173).¹³⁵ Thus, ritual books and other kinds of manuscripts could also be kept in these spaces.

These narratives, in which manuscripts are found in secret spaces in the temple, are also attested in Egyptian texts, demonstrating the authenticity of their Egyptian character. The introduction to the astrological manual preserved in *P.CtYBR* inv. 422 vo. and *P.Lund* inv. 2058 vo. says that an astrological treatise composed by Imhotep was found in the temple of Heliopolis after "a fragment(?) of stone fell from the wall to the ground" (*hʿy w^c nyq n ʿny (n) pʿ sbty r pʿ itnw*, *P.CtYBR* inv. 422 vo., l. 5).¹³⁶ This event revealed a "shrine of stone" (*tbjyt (n) iny*, *P.CtYBR* inv. 422 vo., l. 5), in which the book is located: "I found that it was a book that was resting within it (lit. inside its middle) with the name of Imhotep the Great, son of Ptah, the great god" (*gmꜣy s r w^c dm^c pʿ nty htp hn tʿyꜣf mtly r rn ʿIy-m-htp wr sʿ Pth pʿ ntr ʿ3*, *P.CtYBR* inv. 422 vo., l. 5). The similarity of this narrative and that in Pseudo-Demokritos, with the events taking place in a temple and the falling of a stone slab to reveal a hidden book written by a revered wise figure, is indeed remarkable.

6. A NEW LOOK AT THE INTRODUCTION AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE TREATISE

In the introduction to Zosimos' treatise we can identify references to the images that he will use in his description of alchemical procedures, and a close reading of it may also reveal clues about the origin of these images. Both the title and introduction to the treatise center its topic around "waters" and their changes, and their separation and union from and to the bodies that contain them. This process is equated in the text to the separation of a spirit from the body that contains it. It is described as

135. On these texts, cf. Cauville, 2004, pp. 64-65, 462-463 and 480-481.

136. Quack & Ryholt, 2019b, pp. 163-164 for this and the following quotations from the text.

happening within the body according to nature, with nothing foreign intervening, and as being the same for metals and plants. The terminology employed is quite reminiscent of the processes that take place during mummification, in which fluids are removed from the body, and returned to it during the performance of the ceremonies for its return to life. As I have discussed above, the word *ταριχεία* is specifically used within the treatise to describe the processes taking place in the bowl-altar in the second dream. The second section of the introduction contains a complicated passage that has come down to us in two versions:¹³⁷ (M', B, A, L) Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μονοειδεῖ τῷ πολυχρώμῳ σχηματίζεται ἡ τοῦ παντός πολυύλεκτος παμποικιλία καὶ ζήτησις. (M) Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μονοειδεῖ καὶ πολυχρώμῳ σχήματι σῶζεται ἡ τῶν πάντων πολυέλεκτος καὶ πανποίκιλος ζήτησις (*Mém. auth.* X 1, ll. 7-16) “*Dans cette unité de formes aux nombreuses couleurs, s’esquisse la bigarrure diversement matérialisée du tout ainsi que la quête*”; “*Et dans cette manière d’être à la forme unique et aux nombreuses couleurs est préservée la quête de toutes choses avec ses nombreuses mentions et sa totale bigarrure*”.¹³⁸ Both versions mention a search (ζήτησις), which Mertens notes that either refers to the effort of Nature herself or to the investigation of the operator who attempts to reproduce Nature’s actions: the alchemist. This search is influenced by the cycle of the Moon: σεληνιαζομένης τῆς φύσεως τῷ μέτρῳ τῷ χρονικῷ (*Mém. auth.* X 1, ll. 12-13). The passage indicates that the search appears represented (σχηματίζεται, “sketched”) or preserved (σῶζεται) with many colors (πολυχρώμῳ) and a variety and intricacy of forms (πολύλεκτος καὶ πανποίκιλος). The concept of variegated multicolor forms reminds the scholar of Graeco-Roman Egypt of the almost overwhelming abundance of figures and texts that cover the walls of the temples of this period, and I would thus like to propose that Zosimos was here identifying the source of his imagery. The mention of the cycle of the Moon indicates the subject matter of this iconography, which I have identified in the previous sections as the representations of the lunar cycle in locations such as the ceiling of the pronaos at the temple of Hathor in Dendera. This interpretation can be further supported by another statement that occurs towards the end of the second dream. There, a character called οἰκοδεσπότης, “master of the house” addresses Zosimos, telling him that he has observed by extending the neck upwards, and has seen what is done: Ἐθεώρησας, ἐξέτεινας τὸν αὐχένα σου ἄνω καὶ εἶδες τὸ πραχθέν (*Mém. auth.* X 3, ll. 68-69). This locates the images that Zosimos is seeing in an upper region, and may identify the location of the iconography from which these images are derived.

137. Discussed in Mertens, 1995, pp. 215-216.

138. Mertens, 1995, p. 35.

As I discussed in section 3, the lunar staircases are always located on ceilings, upper parts of walls, or the roof of the temples. Zosimos, in his introduction to the treatise, would thus have included a vital clue to the identification of his imagery, albeit in the convoluted and rather obscure way that would become one of the characteristics of the presentation of alchemical procedures later on.

The introduction also provides a clue that may help us reconstruct what the complete treatise would have looked like. The text indicates that the cycle of the Moon influences the nature of the “search”, and throughout the treatise we see the staircases as prominent elements in Zosimos’ pursuits. In the first dream the lunar cycle is presented as a descent of fifteen steps in darkness, and an ascent of fifteen illuminated steps. Another staircase of seven steps is mentioned in the third and fifth dreams. However, Zosimos is only explicitly described as climbing the third and fourth of these steps. If we consider these staircases as a representation of the different stages of the alchemical procedures, we may be missing the sections corresponding to steps five to seven in the case of the seven-step staircase, and perhaps an entire section leading to the fifteenth step, which would correspond to the full Moon and the completion of the procedure. The abundance of imagery connected to mummification may also be indicative that this structure reflected not just the lunar cycle, but its representation in the mysteries of Osiris. These, as we have seen, are described in a technical way on the walls of the Osirian chapels of Dendera and are closely associated to the fabrication of figurines and statues in the Chamber of Gold, an activity in which Zosimos may have been involved, as I will discuss in the next and final section of this paper.

7. LOCATING ZOSIMOS IN HIS HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

The identification of Zosimos’ imagery with the iconography connected to the death and resurrection of Osiris in the Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period has interesting consequences for our study of his historical and cultural context. In order to locate Zosimos correctly in this context, it is necessary to examine where the iconography can be found in the temples of the period, who had access to these areas, and the status of Egyptian religion and the native temples in the area of Akhmim at the end of the 3rd century CE.

The lunar staircases are attested in two Egyptian temples from the Graeco-Roman period: Dendera and Edfu. At the temple of Hathor at Dendera, we find them three times: on the ceiling of the pronaos, on the ceiling of one of the Osirian chapels located on the roof of the temple, and on the southern exterior wall of the pronaos

in the form of the architectural staircase. In Edfu there is one lunar staircase, on the frieze of the north wall of the pronaos.¹³⁹ The same concept is represented in other locations within these temples as well as others as a procession of fourteen gods bringing different components for the reconstitution of the body of Osiris, but in our case, the presence of the staircase is key to the imagery of Zosimos.

Who had access to these areas? The issue of the accessibility of each area of the temple, at each particular point, is a complicated one. It is logical to think that the more secluded an area is, the least accessible it would be. The temples of this period include a series of recommendations to the temple personnel on purity requirements, located in access ways to different areas of the temple.¹⁴⁰ These have been dated from the end of the Late Period to the early Ptolemaic period.¹⁴¹ The texts list the different types of priests that could access each area, and in which conditions they could do so. These texts refer specifically to priestly personnel. Another relevant text, which offers a more diverse picture of the kinds of people who could access different areas of the temple, is the aforementioned one found in the Chamber of Gold at Dendera. It presents the different types of personnel related to the manufacture and consecration of the statues of the gods. I provide the complete translation here:¹⁴²

“En ce qui concerne la chambre de l’or où sont parachevées les images divines, liste des artisans : Sculpteurs : deux hommes ; fondeurs : deux hommes ; incrusteurs : deux hommes ; ciseleurs : deux hommes ; maîtres sculpteurs : deux hommes ; orfèvres : deux hommes. En tout, douze hommes de service mensuel, soit quarante-huit qui ne sont pas initiés. Ce sont eux qui fabriquent les idoles mystérieuses, ainsi que les statues de chaque dieu qui est dans le temple, les Hathor-Isis, le roi, l’épouse royale, la mère royale, les enfants royaux, en argent, or, bois et toutes pierres fines. Ce sont eux qui couleront tous les bijoux d’or, d’argent, de pierre véritable qui doivent toucher le corps divin. Quand on en vient à L’Œuvre secret en toute chose, c’est l’affaire des officiants initiés auprès du dieu, qui sont membres du clergé, lavés par la purification de la grande ablution, qui agiront sans qu’aucun œil les observe, sous l’autorité du préposé aux rites secrets, scribe du livre sacré, chancelier, père

139. Type D in Altmann-Wendling’s classification, cf. Altmann-Wendling, 2018, p. 733.

140. Cf. Leroux, 2018.

141. Leroux, 2018, pp. 307-312. The origin of some sections may be older, cf. the discussion on the negative confession of the great pure priest in comparison with Chapter 125 of the *Book of the Dead*, and its connection with the *Book of the Temple*, in Leroux, 2018, pp. 320-324.

142. *Dend.* VIII, 128.15-131.6. For the text, cf. Dumas, 1980, pp. 112-114. This translation is from Cauville & Ibrahim Ali, 2015, p. 213. The italics are mine. On the personnel who worked in the Chamber of Gold, and on secrecy and initiation into the craftsmanship of sacred images, cf. Lieven, 2007.

divin, ritualiste en chef. Ils iront dans chaque chapelle où cela doit être fait, et d' image en image ... selon tout ce qui est écrit dans le livre sacré comme prescription de Thoth".

The text clearly distinguishes two types of temple personnel: first, those artisans who are involved in the actual manufacturing of the statues, who are described as non-initiated; and second, all those involved in the “secret work” (*k3.t št3(.t)*),¹⁴³ who are described as having been initiated, as being members of the prophethood (*wnn m hm.w ntr*), and as being purified. They are placed under the authority of the “privy to the secret(s)” (*hr.y-sšt3*), the scribe of the divine book, the chancellor, the divine father, and the chief lector priest.

From these texts, we see that not only initiated priests had access to internal areas of the temple such as the Chamber of Gold, but also some other members of the temple personnel were allowed into certain areas in particular occasions. Von Lieven has noted that even those who had not been initiated must have been subjected to a level of secrecy due to their being involved with the fabrication of the divine statues.¹⁴⁴ As I have noted above, those in charge of manufacturing the statues may also have been involved in their placement in the crypts of the temple at particular times of the year, and thus would also have access to these spaces. Some of them may also have had access to the roof of the temple, where the Osirian rituals such as the mysteries of Osiris in the month of Khoiak would take place, although this remains hypothetical.

Another important question concerns the actual existence of an organized cult in the temples of the region of Akhmim at the time Zosimos lived in the region. Mark Smith has explored the persistence of the practice of ancient Egyptian religion in

143. While the “work” (*k3.t*) or “secret work” (*k3.t št3(.t)*) is the designation given to the process of creation of the figurines of Osiris-Khentiamenti and Sokar in the mysteries, as seen above, in this text it seems to refer to the consecration of the statues by initiated priests, after they have been manufactured by the non-initiated artisans listed in the first section.

144. Lieven, 2007, pp. 150-151. On the stela Leiden V.1, lines 8-10, belonging to the chief sculptor Hatia, we find the following text, which may indicate a certain degree of initiation for some specific workers of the Chamber of Gold: “...il me promut à la direction des travaux alors que j'étais (encore) simple particulier, parce qu'il m'avait trouvé à son gré, en sorte que je fus introduit au 'Château de l'or pour achever les statues et les images de tous les dieux, sans qu'il en demeurât de cache à mes yeux. Je fus donc un 'préposé au mystère', qui voit Rê dans Ses manifestations et Atoum lors de Son (ré)enfantement” (Kruchten, 1989, pp. 192-193). In this text, a particular (*nmh.w*) becomes a *hr.y sšt3* through initiation into the Chamber of Gold (*bs.kw3 r hw.t nbw*, “I was initiated into the Chamber of Gold”) and is able to see the Sun in all his manifestations.

Panopolis.¹⁴⁵ He concludes that there is evidence for the practice of traditional cults in the region dating to the early 4th cent. CE, but the cult of Osiris seems to have disappeared towards the end of the 3rd cent. CE.¹⁴⁶ This is exactly the time during which Zosimos would have been active.

Considering the evidence provided in Zosimos' works, as well as the information presented in the previous paragraphs on temple personnel and the situation of native cults in the region of Akhmim, is it possible to propose a hypothesis for Zosimos' identity? Different scholars have approached this question with contradictory conclusions. As I discussed in section 2, Shannon Grimes, in a monograph in which she analyzes the identity and historical context of Zosimos,¹⁴⁷ concludes that he was both a "scribal priest" and a supervisor of metalworkers in an Egyptian temple. As I have shown, this interpretation derives from a rather shallow knowledge of the Egyptian priesthood and the Egyptian textual sources of the period. In a recent article, Matteo Martelli has examined different passages from Zosimos' works, showing how he displays a critical attitude towards the priests, whom Martelli assumes to be Egyptian priests from Panopolis, and in particular against the priest Neilos.¹⁴⁸ Zosimos presents these priests as having let *daimones* dominate their art, instead of relying on real expertise, and distinguishes himself from them. He makes the point that reliance on *daimones* had replaced for these priests the consultation of books, and criticizes them for not paying attention to the texts of the ancients.¹⁴⁹ This is an interesting statement, since Egyptian priestly expertise was focused very prominently on books.¹⁵⁰ Christian Bull has engaged with the religious and philosophical context of the Panopolitan region, and in particular with Zosimos' sources and influences, in various recent articles.¹⁵¹ Bull, disagreeing with Grimes' conclusion, considers that it is unlikely that Zosimos would have belonged to the Egyptian priesthood, but had close contact with its members. He proposes different possibilities for Zosimos' identity:¹⁵² a

145. Cf. especially Smith, 2002 and 2017, pp. 423-447. Cf. also Bull 2018a, pp. 216-218 and references there.

146. Smith, 2017, p. 430.

147. Grimes, 2018.

148. Cf. Martelli, 2017. I thank Matteo Martelli for sharing a copy of this article with me.

149. Martelli, 2017, p. 213.

150. Cf. Escolano-Poveda, 2020a, pp. 248-250.

151. Of special interest for my discussion is Bull, 2018a, esp. pp. 218-225. Cf. also Bull, 2018b, where he discusses the works of Zosimos in order to reconstruct the contents of the *Physika* of Hermes; and Bull, 2020, esp. pp. 142-143, in which he considers the potential connections of Zosimos and his disciples, or people from the same milieu, with those who produced the Nag Hammadi codices.

152. Bull, 2018a, pp. 223-225.

low-ranking priest or craftsman connected to the temple “who did not have access to the books of the prophets and eventually became resentful of their reticence”; a former priest who lost his job after the closure of the temples and eventually converted to Christianity; and a member of a Hermetic ritual community. The evidence discussed in this paper can cast some light onto this issue.

A possible explanation for Zosimos’ critique of the priests is that it may reflect a time in which the boundaries between the two types of temple personnel presented in the Chamber of Gold were becoming blurred, and tensions were building up between them. Zosimos clearly had access to specialized treatises from earlier alchemists,¹⁵³ as well as to Hermetic treatises.¹⁵⁴ As Fowden has pointed out, the phenomenon of Hermetism was not known outside of Egypt before the 3rd cent. CE,¹⁵⁵ which reinforces the idea that this was an internal Egyptian phenomenon, and probably one that was created within the native Egyptian temples as a combination of Egyptian theological thought and Greek philosophy.¹⁵⁶ With the decline of the temples in the 3rd cent. CE, this specialized wisdom started to circulate outside of the temples, and to be incorporated to other religious and belief systems in the 4th and 5th cent. CE. It progressively became detached from its sources, and evidence for its origin in the native Egyptian temples was only preserved in the references to priests, temples and rituals within the texts themselves.¹⁵⁷ Zosimos may have lived at this juncture, being one of the figures who participated in the circulation of works initially restricted to the libraries and workshops of the temples, taking them outside of the temple precincts. As the frequent references to secrecy in later alchemy show, this does not mean that they were now made accessible to a wider audience, but to a non-priestly one.

This brings up the question of Zosimos’ place within the temple personnel. Zosimos never describes himself as a priest. However, his awareness of some temple iconography, as well as his specialization as an alchemist, may allow us to place him as part of the non-initiated personnel listed in the texts inscribed on the walls of the Chamber of Gold at Dendera, and thus as a member of a temple workshop. He

153. Mertens, 2002, p. 169.

154. Fowden determined that Zosimos must have read at least the Hermetic treatises *Poimandrês*, *The mixing-bowl*, and *On the inner life* (Fowden, 1986, p. 124). On Zosimos’ access to the *Physika* of Hermes, cf. Bull, 2018b. Bull has also discussed Zosimos’ potential access to some of the treatises present in the Nag Hammadi codices, cf. Bull, 2020, pp. 142-143.

155. Fowden, 1986, p. 198.

156. For my proposal of the *Hermetica* as a native Egyptian phenomenon, cf. Escolano-Poveda, 2020a, pp. 115-158.

157. Fowden notes that “direct contact with the sources of philosophical Hermetism was being lost by the later fifth century” (Fowden, 1986, p. 211).

may have had access to at least part of the books kept in the library of the temple, particularly those related to this area of expertise, but also to Hermetic treatises. The references in his works to the rivalry with certain groups of priests, and in particular with Neilos, may thus indicate some tensions between different types of temple personnel at this point. A further reference to this conflict may be found in Iamblichos' *De mysteriis*.¹⁵⁸ Iamblichos, presenting himself as the Egyptian high priest Abamon, criticizes the image-maker (εἰδωλοποιός, *De mysteriis* III 28) for not using astrology properly, and for only employing technical skills instead of theurgic skills. This is the opposite situation to that presented by Zosimos, who was criticizing the priests for relying on *daimones* rather than on technical skills. In Iamblichos' case, he includes himself in the group of the priests, in opposition to the craftsmen who make the statues of the gods. The rivalry may have originated in the intrusion of this non-initiated personnel in areas previously only restricted to the priests. Zosimos was contemporary or almost contemporary with Iamblichos, as well as with Heliodoros, who also presented in his *Aithiopika* a distinction between two types of Egyptian wisdom based on the requirement of initiation.¹⁵⁹ What has been considered in the case of Zosimos as a dispute between rival schools of practitioners of alchemy, may instead be interpreted as a phenomenon connected to the dissolution of the native Egyptian temple hierarchies, and as a change in the transmission and practice of wisdom that had until that moment been restricted to initiated temple personnel.

Going back to Bull's three proposals, the evidence presented here would identify Zosimos as a high-ranking craftsman belonging to the uninitiated (non-priestly) personnel of a temple, perhaps that of Min at Akhmim. This position would have granted him certain access to some restricted areas of the temple connected to his practice, as well as to some treatises kept in the library. If we consider, as I have proposed,¹⁶⁰ that the so-called Hermetic ritual communities were originally groups of bilingual high-ranking Egyptian priests, who merged traditional Egyptian theology and technical knowledge with Greek philosophy in their treatises, Zosimos would not have been part of these groups, but would, as noted, have had access to these works, and contributed to their distribution outside the temple milieu at a moment in which the native temples of the region may have been dissolving. Within this inter-

158. On Iamblichos' use of an Egyptian priestly identity in the *De mysteriis*, cf. Escolano-Poveda, 2020a, pp. 225-236. For a recent English translation of *De mysteriis*, cf. Clarke, Dillon, & Hershbell, 2003.

159. For an analysis of this aspect of Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*, cf. Escolano-Poveda, 2020b.

160. Cf. n. 156, above.

pretation, it is perfectly plausible that Zosimos could have been a Christian or converted to Christianity at some point in his life.

In conclusion, a closer look at Zosimos' imagery allows us to locate the first alchemist for whom we have biographical information in the midst of a moment of intense intellectual and social transformation at the Panopolis of the end of the 3rd cent. CE. While we do not know to which temple in the area he may have been connected, there is evidence for the survival of the great Temple of Min at Panopolis in awe-inspiring condition until its destruction in the fourteenth century.¹⁶¹ This temple, about which not much is known, contained astronomical representations,¹⁶² and perhaps also lunar staircases, as Min was a lunar god.¹⁶³ On the roof of the temple, Osirian chapels may have existed, although the twelfth-century testimony of Ibn Jubayr does not refer to them. During Zosimos' life, some form of ritual connected to the resurrection of Osiris as described in the mysteries of Osiris in the month of Khoiak may have still been practiced in some form at the temple, and he may have been involved somehow in it as a specialized craftsman. In his practice, as someone deeply interested and well-read in the origins of his discipline, he may have come into conflict with priests in the area. This could have been connected to the transmission of his knowledge to people outside the temple sphere, evidenced in his address of part of his work to Theosebeia, who may have been his patron.¹⁶⁴ All the statements that refer to Zosimos' life have to be carefully framed as conjectures, but I hope that this paper will have provided some firmer ground for our knowledge of the identity of this key figure in the development of early alchemy.

161. Sauneron translates Ibn Jubayr's description of the temple, dating to the 12th cent., in Sauneron, 1951.

162. Sketches of a block from the temple, dating to the 1820s, show the presence of a zodiac (Wilkinson Ms. I, 89; Burton MSS. 25636, 28; and Burton MSS. 25634, 130), collected in Neugebauer & Parker, 1969, pp. 86-89, and plate 45.

163. On Min as lunar god in the temple of Athribis, which is very close to where the great Temple of Min would have stood, cf. Altmann-Wendling, 2017b. For a general introduction to the god Min, cf. Olette-Pelletier, 2021.

164. Cf. Dufault, 2019, and my review in Escolano-Poveda, 2020c.

IMAGES



Fig. 1: Lunar staircase on the ceiling of the *pronaos* of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera (private photo).

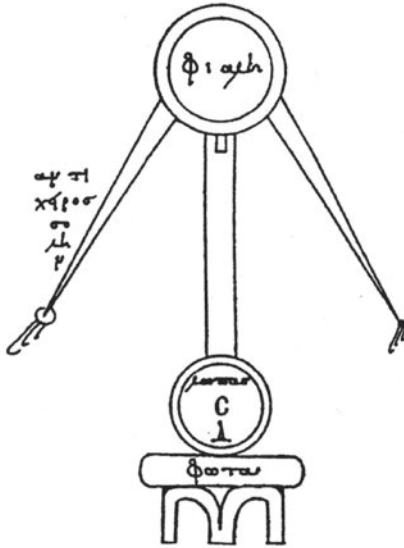


Fig. 2: *Dibikos* in *Marc. gr.* 299, fol. 188v (after CAAG I, p. 132, fig. 11).



Fig. 3: Architectural staircase on the roof of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera (Photo: Francisco Vivas).



Fig. 4: Lunar boat on the ceiling of the pronaos of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera (private photo).



Fig. 5: Complete band showing the Moon cycle on the ceiling of the pronaos of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera (private photo).



Fig. 6: Seth as a bull in chains, held in place by Isis and Nephthys. Eastern wall of the first Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera (private photo).



Fig. 7: Dismemberment of the body of the bull. Eastern wall of the first Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera (private photo).



Fig. 8: Offering of the parts of the bull to Osiris. Eastern wall of the first Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera (private photo).



Fig. 9: Seth as a donkey. Northern wall of the first Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera (Photo: Marina Escolano-Poveda).



Fig. 10: Osiris figurine in the tub. First Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera (private photo).



Fig. 11: Shentayt weighing grain on a set of scales. Second Eastern Osirian chapel at Dendera (private photo).

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WAS ZOSIMUS OF PANOPOLIS CHRISTIAN? ¿ZÓSIMO DE PANÓPOLIS FUE CRISTIANO?

OLIVIER DUFAULT
odufault@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Zosimus of Panopolis, the first identifiable author of Greek alchemy, wrote in late-3rd or 4th-century CE Egypt. For over a century, scholars have pictured him in turn as Christian or as pagan. A reconsideration of Zosimus' *On the Letter Omega* and the treatise known as the *Final Count* or *Final Abstinence* (*teleutaia apochē*) and the *First Lesson on Excellence* demonstrates that he saw Jesus as a savior, that his citations of the *Hermetica* are not in contradiction with basic Christian notions and that he believed that the gods of Egypt were evil divine beings. His Christology and anthropology shares characteristics with "Classic Gnostic" theology and other

RESUMEN

Zósimo de Panópolis, el primer autor identificable de alquimia griega, escribió en Egipto a finales del siglo III o IV E.C. Durante más de un siglo, los eruditos lo han considerado alternativamente como cristiano o como pagano. Una reconsideración de su tratado *Sobre la letra Omega* y el tratado conocido como *La cuenta final* o *La abstinencia final* (*teleutaia apochē*) y la *Primera lección sobre la excelencia* demuestra que percibió a Jesús como un salvador, que sus citas de las *Hermetica* no están en contradicción con nociones cristianas básicas y que creía que los dioses de Egipto eran seres divinos malvados. Su cristología y antropología comparten características con la teología "gnóstica clásica" y otras nociones cristianas

early Christian notions. Also characteristic of the soteriologies presented in some heresiological reports, Zosimus described Jesus as teaching humans to “cut off” their body. This last observation, which is dependent on recognizing Zosimus as a Christian, shed light on the symbolism of the *First Lesson on Excellence*.

primitivas. También es característico de las soteriologías presentadas en algunos informes heresiológicos, en los que Zósimo describió a Jesús enseñando a los humanos a “cortar” su cuerpo. Esta última observación, que depende de que se reconozca a Zósimo como cristiano, arroja luz sobre el simbolismo de la *Primera lección sobre la excelencia*.

KEYWORDS

Alchemy; Apologetics; Classic Gnosticism; Corpus Hermeticum; Early Christianity; Zosimus of Panopolis.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Alquimia; Apologética; Corpus Hermeticum; Gnosticismo Clásico; Cristianismo primitivo; Zósimo de Panópolis.

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ZOSIMUS OF PANOPOLIS (LATE 3RD OR 4TH CENT. CE) is the first identifiable author of a Greek alchemical text.¹ The two treatises discussed here take the form of letters to a certain Theosebeia, who also taught alchemy. Zosimus wrote to her as to a pupil and spent considerable energy trying to discredit other alchemy specialists who interacted with her. I argue in the following that two of his polemical treatises provide enough evidence to conclude that he was Christian and that he espoused anthropological and soteriological views similar to those found in “Classic Gnostic” anthropogonies.

The passage from *On the Letter Omega* describing how Jesus saves humanity is the most obvious allusion to Christian theology found in Zosimus’ work.² It goes at the core of the beliefs that united all early Christians even though Zosimus’ anthropology and soteriology would have certainly conflicted with the views of influential Christian theologians of his time. My purpose is to systematize and add to analyses that have characterized Zosimus as a Christian and Gnostic. I also propose a framework explaining the logic behind Zosimus’ use of mythological or theological material of various provenances. This framework enabled Zosimus to reinterpret and assimilate older traditions to suit his own. I show in part one that there are no compelling reasons to follow Richard Reitzenstein in rejecting the passage from *On the Letter Omega* as a Christian gloss. In part two, I present a systematic survey of references to the *Hermetica* in the work of Zosimus and show that his citations of Hermetic literature could not clash with the Christian theological and soteriological

1. Note that I use the expression “Greek alchemical texts” as a short form for “alchemical texts written in ancient Greek”. The following abbreviations will be used throughout: BG = Berolensis 8502, cited in the edition of Barc & Funk, 2012; CAAG 2 = Berthelot & Ruelle, 1888; CH = Corpus Hermeticum in Festugière & Nock, 1945a and 1946; M = Marcianus Graecus 299; MA = Zosimus, *Mémoires authentiques* in Mertens, 1995; NHC = Nag Hammadi Codices. All translations are mine except otherwise indicated. I would like to thank all participants of the workshop that led to the publication of this issue and the organizers for asking us to send papers in advance.

2. MA I 13, 121-125.

beliefs he expressed. Part three demonstrates that Zosimus' description of the gods of the Egyptian temples as evil divine beings as well as his refusal of sacrificial practice further supports the assumption that he was Christian. Part four summarizes and builds on several recent studies to show that his anthropogony and soteriology include some of the characteristic elements of "Classic Gnostic" treatises and of a theology described by the *Refutation of All Heresies*.

The claim of this paper is not that Zosimus was a member of a gnostic religious community or that he saw alchemy as a strictly religious activity. Both interpretations have been associated with the views of Carl G. Jung, who believed European alchemy took its root in ancient Gnosticism.³ Since Jung's time, text discoveries and critical appraisals of methodologies have led many specialists to abandon the notion of Gnosticism inasmuch as it implies the existence a coherent group of Christians who would be the source of texts recognized as gnostic. All parties would probably agree that the term was not well chosen since the adjective *gnōstikos* was used to describe various early Christian doctrines, even those that were explicitly opposed to those now described as gnostic. It was also applied pejoratively to specific groups or used as a catch-all term for "heretical" groups. For these and other reasons, scholars have argued that "Gnosticism" is a loaded term that oversimplifies the study of early Christianity. Yet, research concentrating on "gnostic texts" continues unabated. Even in the absence of heresiological treatises, the presence of theological notions only found in a limited number of early Christian texts will continue justifying the construction of theological typologies. However, these alone are not sufficient to prove the existence of distinct social groups. Indeed, claims that those who produced and read texts labelled as "Valentinian", "Sethian" or "Classic" Gnosticism were "Gnostics" – *i.e.* members of single organized group – are now mostly abandoned.⁴

The same is true for the study of early Mediterranean alchemy (*ca.* 1st to 4th cent. CE). Former introductions presented ancient Mediterranean alchemy as an ancient school of philosophy with its own specialists and a coherent (or at times conflicting) body of theories. Recent research makes it increasingly difficult to assume that Greek alchemical texts are the products of organized groups.⁵ Starting from these premises,

3. For a concise summary of Jung's approach, see Segal, 2019.

4. For reflections on the historical concept of Gnosticism, see King, 2003 and 2011; Poirier, 2004; Burns, 2019; Williams, 2019; Thomassen, 2020.

5. See Koutalis, Martelli & Merianos, 2018.

the larger purpose of this paper is to contribute to a satisfactory socio-historical contextualization of early Mediterranean alchemy.

The following deals principally with three texts. The first is the treatise *On the Letter Omega* in the edition of Michèle Mertens. It takes the form of a letter from Zosimus to a certain Theosebeia introducing a lost work on alchemical apparatus. Theosebeia is his usual dedicatee and was also probably his patroness at some point in time.⁶ *On the Letter Omega* is a polemical tract on the proper alchemical method that associates a particular type of alchemy with the worship of evil divine beings. Zosimus' polemics are also an occasion to state some of his views concerning the origin and future of humanity. This is the text and context for the reference to Jesus emended by Reitzenstein.

The second principal piece of evidence is called τὸ πρῶτον βιβλίον τῆς τελευταίας ἀποχῆς, that is, *The First Book of the Final Count*, or, *of the Final Account*, or *of the Final Abstinence*.⁷ Like the treatise *On the Letter Omega*, it is a letter introducing a lost work to an anonymous “purple-clad” (πορφυρόστολος) woman.⁸ The first seven pages of text in the edition of Berthelot and Ruelle reads as a short history of the tinctorial arts (βαφαί, *i.e.* ancient alchemy) in Egypt up to Zosimus' days. This narrative is not simply a history of the origins of alchemy in Egypt. It also serves as evidence showing that one should refrain from the practice of sacrifices, and more particularly in the practice of alchemy. After this introduction, Zosimus introduces readers to the interpretation of alchemical texts in the last two pages of the extant treatise (he rehashes there the theme of the apparent disunity of the alchemical arts, discusses the roasting of substances and stresses that he did not hide the real name of substances under code-names). The treatise is usually translated as the *Final Count* even though the extant text does not deal with counting or receipts. Moreover, there is nothing “final” about the text. As many other texts attributed to Zosimus, it is an introductory letter to a lost treatise. In this context, translating ἀποχή by “count” seems unjustified. As I argue below, the aim of the τελευταία ἀποχή is to advocate for the avoidance of sacrifices. I suggested elsewhere that the translation of the treatise's title should be revised in light

6. See the arguments developed in Dufault, 2019. See also Grimes, 2018, who argues that Zosimus was a priest of an Egyptian temple cult, and Escolano-Poveda, 2020, who argues that he was probably working for a temple but not in the capacity of a priest.

7. See CAAG II, pp. 239-247 for a complete edition and 231-237 for the French translation of Berthelot. For a more accurate but incomplete edition, see Festugière, 2006, pp. 362-368 and 275-281 for a French translation.

8. CAAG II 246, 22-23: ἐνθεν ἀπάρξομαι, πορφυρόστολε γύναι.

of its content. For this reason, I propose to translate the full title as the *First Book of the Final Abstinence*.⁹

The last text is the *First Lesson on Excellence* in the edition of Michèle Mertens (1995). It is unique among the treatises attributed to Zosimus in that it describes an allegorical narrative and is addressed to an unknown man.¹⁰ It begins with a preamble on nature and then describes two dreams followed by short interpretations and a longer interpretation that is itself expressed as an allegory. It seems clear enough that Zosimus wanted to compare alchemical and natural processes. Pushing the analysis further is complicated by the allegorical nature of Zosimus' own longer interpretation. Unsurprisingly, several diverging readings of this text have been proposed.¹¹ It is dealt with here because of the similarity of its sword-bearer motif and the figure of Jesus as seen in the treatise *On the Letter Omega*. This similarity also provides more reasons to read the treatise as an alchemical allegory on a particular understanding of Christian salvation.

I should also add a few words concerning texts that have not been brought to bear on the argument. These are the two series of *Summaries* of works of Zosimus (traditionally called the *Chapters to Theodorus* and *Chapters to Eusebeia*), the Syriac translations of Zosimus and the two versions of the *Book of Sophē*, one of which is attributed to Zosimus. The two versions of the *Book of Sophē* and the *Summaries* were edited and translated by Berthelot and Ruelle, but it is generally admitted that their edition should be revised. There are also evidence suggesting that the *Summaries to Eusebeia* were either interpolated or that they were written several centuries after Zosimus by someone who combined materials from different sources.¹² This

9. Advocating for the abstinence from sacrifices does not appear to have been a common topic of philosophical or technical discussion but there is a parallel to Zosimus' work in the late 3rd cent. CE, *On the Abstinence from Ensouled Beings* (περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων) by the philosopher Porphyry of Tyre. One reason to avoid killing and eating animals, Porphyry argues, is that only evil demonic beings passing for gods would request blood sacrifice (see *De abst.* II 36-54 with the introduction in Clark, 2000). The similarity between the anti-sacrificial argument of the τελευταία ἀποχή and one of the arguments from Porphyry's περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων suggests that the ἀποχή in Zosimus' title should also be translated by *Abstinence*. See Dufault, 2019, pp. 127-133.

10. See MA X 5, 100, where Zosimus addresses himself to the reader using a masculine vocative (φιλτατε).

11. See Fowden, 1986, pp. 120-126; Edwards, 1992; Mertens, 1995, pp. 207-211; Fraser, 2007; Knipe, 2011; Grimes, 2018, pp. 127-153; Martelli, 2019, pp. 85-86; Dufault, 2022.

12. The edition of the *Summaries to Eusebeia* cites Stephanus, who wrote two or three centuries after Zosimus (see CAAG II 162, 19 and 173, 1). These are indeed "summaries" of treatises by Zosimus, as the titles in the manuscripts imply (... πρὸς Εὐσέβειαν ... κεφάλαια in the table of contents of M and κατ' ἐπιτομὴν κεφαλαϊώδη in the three other main manuscripts; see Mertens, 1995, pp. lv-lxi).

could also be the case with the *Summaries to Theodorus*. The attribution of the *Book of Sophē* to Zosimus is debatable since only one of its versions attributes the work to Zosimus while both are attributed to Sophē (*i.e.* Cheops). It is not entirely clear how we should understand this double authorship.¹³ We have reliable but incomplete editions and translations of the Syriac manuscript of Zosimus. The complete translation and edition of the manuscript are now more than a century old and need revision. It is also difficult to judge whether the Syriac translations did not include extraneous materials. While Matteo Martelli showed that we can accept several passages or treatises as genuine, evidence suggests that the text was interpolated in different places (see Appendix). I will consequently leave these translations aside. In any case, the Syriac translations suggest that Zosimus was Christian.¹⁴

13. One solution could be that some type of works, especially when they had the status of revealed knowledge, were assigned two names, one for the “author” (*i.e.* the person who originally received the knowledge) and one for the person who transmitted it (I am borrowing here from the work of Crégheur, 2019). This might be the explanation for a passage from the Syriac translation of Zosimus where Zosimus mentioned that recipes were “found” (rather than “created” or “written”; I am dependent here on the French translation in Berthelot & Duval, 1893, p. 226). This is the case of Messos, mentioned by Porphyry as the author of a revelation. His name occurs in the colophon of the *Marsanes* as the person who transmitted this text. The seer Nicotheos mentioned by Zosimus (MA I 1, 10) and Porphyry (*Vita Plot.* 16) might have been the same kind of “transmitters” (Crégheur, 2019). This could also explain why Zosimus appears in the title of the alchemical *Book of Sophē* (See CAAG II, pp. 211-213. For other hypotheses, see Mertens, 1995, pp. lxvii–lxix.

14. See Camplani, 2000, pp. 94-96. A note should be made of a passage from the Syriac translation of Zosimus that has received contradictory interpretations from Martelli, 2017 and Grimes, 2019, pp. 72-73. The passage is as follows (in Martelli’s translation): “These are the images, statues, or idols of snakes and female serpents, of the good Daimon, of the good Fortune, and also other (statues) of Aphrodite, of (the daimons?) of the earth, of Capricorn, or of Nilos – that is Gihon (+, a river flowing from the Eden) – or of fruits, ears of wheat, and of those things that lead upset people to mistakes and illusions. I condemn Neilos’ disciples, who are astonished and admire things that do not deserve admiration. Indeed, they are not expert (?); and he (Neilos) addressed them with the precept that says: ‘know thyself’ (γνώθι σεαυτόν)”. Shannon Grimes argues that Zosimus reacted to the veneration of what he believed to be mere images rather than divine statues: “Zosimos’s complaint is that certain priests admired things about these statues that were not worthy of reverence; they did not ‘know themselves’”. Zosimus, in Grimes’ interpretation, is a pagan priest who disagrees with Neilos on the proper worship of the Egyptian gods. “Knowing oneself” here would refer to the knowledge of one’s divine nature obtained after ethical purification.

1. ZOSIMUS' MENTION OF JESUS AS SAVIOR

The obvious place to start an analysis of Zosimus' religious orientation is with the main portion of the treatise *On the Letter Omega* emended by Reitzenstein and others after him.¹⁵ Here is Mertens' edition with the translation of Howard M. Jackson. Reitzenstein's emendations have been placed inside brackets.

φησὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἡμῶν· ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα δυνάμενος καὶ πάντα γινόμενος, ὅτε θέλει, ὡς θέλει, φαίνει ἐκάστω.

13. [Ἀδὰμ προσῆν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς <ὄς> ἀνήνεγκεν ὅπου καὶ τὸ πρότερον διῆγον φῶτες καλούμενοι. Ἐφάνη δὲ καὶ τοῖς πάνυ ἀδυνάτοις ἀνθρώποις ἄνθρωπος γεγονῶς παθητὸς καὶ ραπιζόμενος, καὶ λάθρα τοὺς ἰδίους φῶτας συλήσας ἅτε μηδὲν παθῶν, τὸν δὲ θάνατον δείξας καταπατεῖσθαι καὶ ἐῶσθαι.] Καὶ ἕως ἄρτι καὶ τοῦ τέλους τοῦ κόσμου, ἔπεισι λάθρα καὶ φανερᾶ συλῶν τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ συμβουλευῶν αὐτοῖς λάθρα καὶ διὰ τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν καταλλαγὴν ἔχειν τοῦ [παρ'] αὐτῶν Ἀδὰμ [κοπτομένου καὶ φονευομένου παρ' αὐτῶν] τυφληγοροῦντος καὶ διαζηλουμένου τῷ πνευματικῷ καὶ φωτεινῷ ἀνθρώπῳ· [τὸν ἑαυτῶν Ἀδὰμ ἀποκτείνουσι].

“For our Mind says: ‘The Son of God, being capable of everything and becoming everything, when he wills, as he wills, appears to each’.

13. [Jesus Christ drew nigh to Adam and bore him up to the place where those named ‘photes’ dwelt before. And he also appeared to very powerless humans by becoming a human being who suffered and was subjected to blows]. And he secretly carried off as his spoil the ‘photes’, who belong to him, because he suffered nothing but instead showed death trampled under foot and thrust aside. And both now and until the end of the world he comes both secretly and openly to seize those who belong to him and communes with them by counseling them secretly and through their minds to get rid of their Adam. [By cutting off and slaying their Adam] whose guidance is blind and who is jealous of the Man of spirit and light [they kill their own Adam]”¹⁶

Removing all references to Jesus in this text, Reitzenstein argued that the treatise *On the Letter Omega* contained the last “pagan formulation of the Poimandres doctrine”¹⁷ and that Zosimus was a follower of the first “Gnostic system” (*i.e.* the

15. Ruska, 1926, p. 27; Tonelli, 1988, pp. 96-98; Festugière, 2006, pp. 270-271.

16. Zosimus, MA I 12, 118 – I 13, 132. For the emendations, see Reitzenstein, 1904, p. 105.

17. Reitzenstein, 1904, p. 102.

“Poimandres doctrine”).¹⁸ Its founder, he argued, was a priest of Ptah from Memphis living around the beginning of the 1st cent. CE, who combined a Hellenized Egyptian cosmogony with a doctrine of Near Eastern origin concerning the liberation of humanity from the influence of the stars.¹⁹ This was the so-called “Anthropos doctrine”, which Wilhelm Bousset and Reitzenstein believed to be of Iranian origin and the source of the “redeemed redeemer” figure of early Christianity (*i.e.* Jesus). Their theory had a lasting influence and was abandoned by most scholars in the second half of the 20th cent.²⁰ Reitzenstein saw the purest manifestation of this doctrine in Manichaeism, in which the creation of the world and of humans is the result of the “fall” of Anthropos (“Human”) into matter. Arguing that the Anthropos doctrine as found in the *Poimandres* was developed independently from its Christian version, Reitzenstein had to find early, non-Christian parallels. The emendation of Zosimus’ treatise *On the Letter Omega* served this purpose.²¹

To justify his emendations, Reitzenstein argued that a book summary from Photius’ *Bibliotheca* showed that Zosimus was already “interpreted in a Christian sense”

18. Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 8 and 114.

19. Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 114, 248-250.

20. Reitzenstein, 1904, p. 109. See Schenke, 1962, pp. 16-31; Gordon, 1999; King, 2003, pp. 137-147.

21. Two other “Hermetic” sources were adduced to support the argument (Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 102-106). One is an heresiological report on the so-called Naassenes (*Ref. V 7, 3 – V 8, 10*). The other concerns the “steles” of Βίτος and the translations of Hermetic texts made by Βίτυς, mentioned by Iamblichus (it is very likely that Βίτος is the Hellenized form of Βίτυς; so Tonelli, 1988, p. 81). The passage from Zosimus’ treatise *On the Letter Omega* (MA I 8, 75-78) quoted by Reitzenstein states that Bitos, Plato and Hermes indicate “that, in the first hieratic language, ‘Thoth’ signifies the first human” (καὶ βλέψαι τὸν πίνακα ὃν καὶ Βίτος γράψας, καὶ ὁ τρίσεμγας Πλάτων καὶ ὁ μυριόμεγας Ἑρμῆς, ὅτι Θῶυθος ἐρμηνεύεται τῇ ἱερατικῇ πρώτῃ φωνῇ ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος). This does not demonstrate Reitzenstein’s hypothesis that Zosimus found the full myth of the Anthropos in the text of Bitos. Reitzenstein also interpreted a quote from Βίτυς found in Iamblichus’ *Response to Porphyry* (*De Myst.*) 8, 4-5 and 10, 7 as a testimony of the same Anthropos doctrine. Yet, passages of the *Response to Porphyry* attributed to Βίτυς do not mention the fall of an Anthropos god, which is characteristic of Reitzenstein’s theory. Iamblichus simply mentions that the “prophet Bitus” showed a “way” (ὁδός) leading to the unification with the divine (cf. 8, 5 and 10, 7) and describes this way as an Egyptian technique: “[the Egyptians] enjoin to use hieratic theurgy to elevate oneself to the highest and most universal [of beings], who are above destiny, up to the Demiurge god, without considering matter nor paying head to anything beside the observation of the [propitious] moment” (8, 4: διὰ τῆς ἱερατικῆς θεωργίας ἀναβαίνειν ἐπὶ τὰ ὑψηλότερα καὶ καθολικότερα καὶ τῆς εἰμαρμένης ὑπερκειμένα παραγγέλλουσι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ δημιουργόν, μῆτε ὕλην προσποιουμένους μῆτε ἄλλο τι προσπαραλαμβάνοντας προσποιουμένους μῆτε ἄλλο τι προσπαραλαμβάνοντας ἢ μόνον καιροῦ παρατήρησιν). The expression καιροῦ παρατήρησιν here refers to the observation of the moment indicated by a certain astral configuration (see Saffrey & Segonds, 2013, p. 198, n. 1).

in the 9th cent. CE.²² A closer look at Photius' text shows that Reitzenstein's argument is difficult to follow. The lost text summarized by Photius defended Christian theology by harmonizing it with the oracular saying of different cultures. The author of the book in question, Photius writes, "not only gathered and composed testimonies from the aforementioned people, but also went as far as making the same conclusions by drawing on the alchemical treatises of Zosimus, a Theban from Panopolis".²³ While the apologetic work summarized by Photius made use of non-Christian oracular traditions, it does not follow that Photius believed that Zosimus belonged to them. The syntax rather makes a special case of Zosimus by separating him from the oracular traditions of non-Christian peoples. Photius also appears to have considered Zosimus as a surprising choice. As can be surmised by the passage emended by Reitzenstein, Zosimus' views on the role and nature of Jesus must have made him somewhat suspect to a bishop from a prominent family in 9th-century Constantinople. The simple fact that Zosimus was an author of alchemical works could have also worked to the same effect.²⁴ In fact, the extant text of Zosimus' treatise *On the Letter Omega* is well suited for the kind of book Photius summarized. Assuming that there are no Christian interpolations, Zosimus did follow the same apologetic technique. Indeed, several passages from the text of Zosimus' *On the Letter Omega* cite diverse non-Christian authorities in support of a theology that is coherent with Christian ideas.²⁵ He associated the body with Adam, Thoth and Epimetheus (MA I 9-12); Hesiod and "the Hebrews" are said to have spoken about the same person, Eva/Pandora, who was sent by "Zeus" to bind the outer human (MA I 12); Hermes and the Hebrews would have spoken of two pairs of Anthropos-like beings and their guides: the "Anthropos of light" and the "son of God" on one side and the "Adam made of earth" and the "counterfeit *daimōn*" on the other (MA I 15). In sum, the author of the book Photius summarized could have simply cited Zosimus for his arguments. It is also clear that Photius' summary does not claim that the author in question cited interpolated versions of Zosimus' work.

Reitzenstein and André-Jean Festugière's suggestion that the treatise *On the Letter Omega* presented a non-Christian, mostly Hermetic, form of Gnosticism cast

22. Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 8 and 105, n. 4: "Wieder paßt die Erwähnung Christi nicht in den Zusammenhang. Daß Werke des Zosimos christlich gedeutet wurden sagt Photios *Bibl. cod. 170*".

23. Photius, *Bibl.* 170 (117a, 26-30): Οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰρημένων ἀγείρει καὶ συντίθησι τὰς μαρτυρίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν χεμευτικῶν Ζωσίμου λόγων (Θηβαῖος δ' ἦν οὗτος Πανοπολίτης) οὐκ ἐφείσατο τὰ αὐτὰ κατασκευάζειν.

24. See Koutalis, Martelli & Merianos, 2018, pp. 31-38.

25. For a list of quotations found in Zosimus' work, see Letrouit, 1995, pp. 38-45.

a long shadow on the study of Zosimus.²⁶ Reitzenstein's emendations also appear to have gained acceptance from the fact that they both supported and were supported by the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* theory on the origins of the Christianity. As interest for this theory waned, so did the implicit justification for Reitzenstein's emendations. Recent editors of the treatise *On the Letter Omega* reject the emendations but a systematic confrontation with the original text has not yet fully materialized.²⁷

2. THE HERMETICA

Zosimus' ethnic self-identification can first help circumscribe his religious orientation. The "first human", Zosimus claimed, *i.e.* the first embodied human, "is called 'Thouth' (Θώθ) by us and Adam by them, who call him using the language of the angels".²⁸ The spellings of the name of Thoth (θώθ and, in its Hellenized form, θώθθος) in the chief manuscript attesting this passage (M) corresponds to the form used by Egyptians according to Philo of Byblos.²⁹ Zosimus also states that the name of "Adam" is used by the Chaldeans, the Parthians, the Medes and the Hebrews and later mentions that "the Greeks call the terrestrial Adam 'Epimetheus'". This further suggests that he did not consider himself Greek.³⁰ If Zosimus did not self-identify as Egyptian, he at least appears to us as one.

26. Ruska, 1926, p. 27; Schenke, 1962, pp. 52-56; Lindsay, 1970, p. 333; Stroumsa, 1984, p. 142; Tonelli, 1988, p. 97, n. 37; Festugière, 2006, p. 270, n. 10.

27. See the editions of Jackson, 1978; Letrouit, 1995, p. 43; Mertens, 1995, p. 6, n. 80. Letrouit, 2002, p. 88 keeps the passage mentioning Jesus in his edition of *On the Letter Omega*. On analyses of religious symbolism in Zosimus' work, see Fowden, 1986, pp. 120-126, 204; Edwards, 1992; Camplani, 2000; de Jong, 2005, p. 1185; Fraser, 2007 and 2018, p. 739; Knipe, 2011. Bull (2018b, pp. 402-403; 2020, p. 142) tends to see Zosimus as a Christian, and so do Jourdan & Edwards, 2021, pp. 274-276. Roelof van den Broek, 2013, pp. 223-224 argues that Zosimus was not a "Christian gnostic" and that it is uncertain if he saw himself as a Christian. Shannon Grimes, 2018, p. 33 argues that Zosimus was an Egyptian artisan-priest. See also the paper by Marina Escolano-Poveda in this issue of ARYS.

28. MA I 9, 87-89: οὕτως οὖν καλεῖται ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος [ὁ] παρ' ἡμῖν Θώθ καὶ παρ' ἐκεῖνους Ἀδάμ, τῇ τῶν ἀγγέλων φωνῇ αὐτὸν καλέσαντες.

29. Cf. MA I 8, 76; 9, 88, 98 with the fragment of the *Phoenician History* in Eusebius, *Praep. evan.* I 9, 24: Τάαυτος ... ὃν Αἰγύπτιοι μὲν ἐκάλεσαν Θώθ, Ἀλεξανδρεῖς δὲ Θώθ, Ἑρμῆν δὲ Ἑλληνας μετέφρασαν. It should be noted that the text of the treatise *On the Letter Omega* does not appear in other textual traditions than that of M (see Mertens, 1995, pp. 51-53).

30. One could object that the *Summaries to Eusebeia* mention that "the Egyptians observed that all base metals are created from lead only" and that this could imply that Zosimus distinguished himself from the Egyptians (CAAG II, p. 168, 2-5: πᾶσαι αἱ οὐσίαι κατεγνώσθησαν παρ' Αἰγυπτίους ἀπὸ μόνου

None of Zosimus' citations of Hermes/Thoth clashes with an early Christian perspective. The *Hermetica* he quoted or paraphrased never present the positive attitude toward traditional cults that can be found in the *Perfect Discourse* (= *Asclepius*).³¹ On the contrary, Zosimus quotes or paraphrases the otherwise unknown treatise *On the Inner Life*³² to develop a soteriological doctrine about a "son of God" that bears similarities with Christian doctrines. I quote here the translation of Howard M. Jackson.

Ὁ μέντοι Ἑρμῆς ἐν τῷ περὶ ἐναυλίας διαβάλλει καὶ τὴν μαγείαν λέγων ὅτι οὐ δεῖ τὸν πνευματικὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν ἐπιγνόντα ἑαυτὸν οὔτε διὰ μαγείας κατορθοῦν τι, ἐὰν καὶ καλὸν νομίζεται, μηδὲ βιάζεσθαι τὴν ἀνάγκην, ἀλλ' ἔαν ὡς ἔχει φύσεως καὶ κρίσεως, πορεύεσθαι δὲ διὰ μόνου τοῦ ζητεῖν ἑαυτόν, καὶ θεὸν ἐπιγνόντα κρατεῖν τὴν ἀκατονόμαστον τριάδα καὶ ἐὰν τὴν εἰμαρμένην ὃ θέλει ποιεῖν τῷ ἑαυτῆς πηλῶ, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῷ σώματι. Καὶ οὕτως, φησί, νοήσας καὶ πολιτευσάμενος θεάσῃ τὸν θεοῦ υἱὸν πάντα γινόμενον τῶν ὁσίων ψυχῶν ἔνεκεν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἐκπάσῃ ἐκ τοῦ χώρου τῆς εἰμαρμένης ἐπὶ τὸν ἀσώματον. Ὅρα αὐτὸν γινόμενον πάντα, θεόν, ἄγγελον, ἄνθρωπον παθητόν· πάντα γὰρ δυνάμενος πάντα ὅσα θέλει γίνεται. Καὶ πατρὶ ὑπακούει· διὰ παντὸς σώματος διήκων, φωτίζων τὸν ἐκάστης νοῦν, εἰς τὸν εὐδαίμονα χώρον ἀνώρμησεν ὅπου περ ἦν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὸ σωματικὸν γενέσθαι, αὐτῷ ἀκολουθοῦντα καὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ὀρεγόμενον καὶ ὀδηγούμενον εἰς ἐκεῖνο τὸ φῶς.

"Hermes, however, in his book *On the Inner Life*, also condemns *mageia*, saying that the spiritual man, one who has come to know himself, need to rectify anything through the use of *mageia*,³³ not even if it is considered a good thing, nor must he use force upon Necessity, but rather allow Necessity to work in accordance with her own nature and decree. He must proceed through that one search to understand himself,

τοῦ μολύβδου πεποιημένοι; οὐ οὐσίαι = the four base metals, see CAAG II, pp. 167, 20 – 168, 1). But, as noted above, this treatise includes later interpolations. This passage could be one of them.

31. *On the Letter Omega*: MA I 4, I 5, I 7; *The Final Abstinence*: see Festugière, 2006, p. 368 for the text and Festugière, 2006, p. 281 for the translation; George Syncellus, *Chron.* 14 and the Cambridge Syriac manuscript Mm. 6.29 (see Martelli, 2014b). See also Festugière, 2006, pp. 243-247 for references to shorter citations from the *Summaries to Eusebeia*. For translations of some of the Greek citations, see Litwa, 2018, pp. 196-201.

32. The title of the work in M is περὶ ἀναυλίας, which modern editions correct to περὶ ἐναυλίας. See Mertens, 1995, p. 3, n. 34; Litwa, 2018, p. 199, n. 11.

33. Zosimus refers here to the ritual discipline attributed to the Persian μάγοι, not to "magic" or "witchcraft", i.e. what is perceived as an alternative or problematic form of religious activity found in many if not all societies. I have modified Jackson's translation by transliterating μαγεία to avoid interpreting the term "magic" in this second sense. Considering that Zosimus always cites Hermes approvingly, I also follow Michèle Mertens in reading the καὶ in διαβάλλει καὶ τὴν μαγείαν by "also" rather than "even" (as Howard M. Jackson does).

and, when he has come to know God, he must hold fast to the ineffable Triad and leave Fate to work what she will upon the clay that belongs to her, that is, the body. And with this way of thinking and regulating one's life, he says, you will see the Son of God become everything for the sake of holy souls, to draw her up out of the realm of Fate into the realm of the incorporeal. See him becoming everything he so wills and obeys the Father by pervading every body. He enlightens the mind of each soul and spurs it on up to the realm of bliss, where it was even before it was born into corporeality, following after him, and filled with yearning by him, and guided by him into that light".³⁴

That a work attributed to Hermes would mention that the "spiritual man" must "hold fast to the ineffable Triad" or that the "son of God ... obeys the Father by pervading every body" led some to argue that the Hermetic text quoted by Zosimus contains Christian interpolations. Not all evidence leads us to this conclusion.³⁵ If many of the authors and readers of these texts believed like Zosimus that the *Hermetica* were the revelations of the first human, we should assume that they could be produced to suit different theological perspectives.

Other quotations of Hermes do not suggest specific religious orientations.³⁶ The most characteristically Hermetic reference is in the *Final Abstinence* where Zosimus exhorts Theosebeia to "run down to Poimenandres, be immersed in the mixing-bowl and run up to [her] kind".³⁷ The reference here is to the protagonist and receiver of the revelation of the *Poimandres* (CH I), and to Hermetic wisdom by extension. Since baptism can appear in the *Hermetica* as a metaphor for embodiment, Zosimus'

34. MA I 7, 57-74.

35. It is well attested that the notion of a divine triad is not particular to Christianity. The notion of a "son of God" is also found in the *Hermetica* in three instances. They refer either to the "logos of the luminous intellect" (CH I 6) or to the cosmos (CH IX 8, 10, 14). In the three cases, the "son of God" appears to be indirectly connected to salvation but it does not appear as an active savior. See Bull, 2018b, pp. 402-403; Mertens, 1995, p. 4, n. 37. Festugière, 2006, p. 267 and Jackson, 1978 understand the "son of God" referred to in this section (MA I 7) as the Hermetic *logos*. Festugière, however, believed that the mention of the son's obedience to the father is a Christian gloss. See MA I 7, 64-66: θεάση τὸν θεοῦ υἱὸν πάντα γινόμενον τῶν ὁσίων ψυχῶν ἔνεκεν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἐκσπάσῃ ἐκ τοῦ χώρου τῆς εἰμαρμένης ἐπὶ τὸν ἀσώματον. It is not clear if the following lines (66-74) continue the citation/paraphrase of the *περὶ ἐναυλίας* or if these are Zosimus' commentary.

36. MA I 4-5; George Syncellus, *Chron.* 14 and the Cambridge Syriac manuscript Mm. VI 29 (see Martelli, 2014b) and Festugière, 2006, pp. 243-247.

37. Festugière, 2006, p. 368, 3-4: καταδραμοῦσα ἐπὶ τὸν Ποιμένανδρα καὶ βαπτισθεῖσα τῷ κρατῆρι ἀνάδραμε ἐπὶ τὸ γένος τὸ σόν.

mixing-bowl could represent the body or the physical world.³⁸ Running down to Poinmenandres, then, would be what the soul goes through when it undergoes embodiment. By going up to its kind – *i.e.* by reverting to its original place – it would leave matter and returns to its immaterial source. As can be seen here, Zosimus and some Hermetic treatises appear to share the notion that salvation is not obtained by avoiding the material world but by experiencing it and, more precisely, by acquiring the knowledge necessary to achieve an ethical disposition in the body.³⁹ A broad understanding of early Christian theology can accommodate such an interpretation of the *Hermetica*. We can conclude that Zosimus' affinity with the *Hermetica* does not preclude the possibility that he was Christian.

3. ZOSIMUS AND EGYPTIAN TEMPLE CULTS

As shown by Marina Escolano-Poveda's contribution to this issue, Zosimus certainly alluded to Egyptian notions regarding Osiris and his cult in his *First Lesson on Excellence*. To name the clearest examples, his mention of fifteen “staircases” of light and darkness in the first vision of the *First Lesson on Excellence* recalls lunar staircases depicted in Egyptian temples.⁴⁰ His description of the dismemberment and renewal of Ion and a snake in the same treatise suggests Egyptian mythology concerning the death and regeneration of Osiris.

Yet, that Zosimus implicitly referred to Egyptian theology and religious symbolism does not necessarily imply that he cared for the traditional cults of Egypt. In fact, the short history of alchemy found in the *Final Abstinence* shows that he was opposed to them. The art of tinctures (*i.e.* alchemy), Zosimus explains, had been the monopoly of the pharaohs and priests until it was seized by “the overseers” (οἱ ἔφοροι), also called “the overseers of the places” (οἱ κατὰ τόπον ἔφοροι).⁴¹ These

38. CH XII 2: σώματος γὰρ συνθέτου ὥσπερ χυμοὶ ζέουσιν ἢ τε λύπη καὶ ἡ ἡδονή, εἰς ἃς ἐμβᾶσα ἡ ψυχὴ βαπτίζεται. See also SH XXV 8 in Festugière & Nock, 1945b.

39. See Dufault, 2022.

40. MA X 2: τὰς δεκαπέντε σκοτοφεγγεῖς κλίμακας ... τὰς φωτολαμπεῖς κλίμακας. The similarity of the image with the lunar staircases, which are made of fifteen *steps*, suggests that Zosimus would have used κλίμακες here and later (MA XI 1, 2) to mean steps rather than “staircases” (Mertens, 1995, p. 35, n. 7; Escolano-Poveda, 2020, p. 142). However, this meaning is not recorded in the dictionaries I consulted. If Zosimus wanted to make an obvious reference to steps, he could have used the term βᾶσις, which he used in the same treatise (MA X 5, 112). He might have used κλίμαξ to refer to a “way of ascent to heaven” (see Lampe, 1961, *s.v.* “κλίμαξ”) as well as to a lunar staircase.

41. Throughout the narrative, the “overseers” are also designated by two koppas (κοπ), which can be used as a symbol for copper and Aphrodite. These appear in different forms: “κοπ of the flesh”, the

beings replaced the ancient “natural” tinctures with “unnatural” ones and provided success in alchemy only to those who would offer them sacrifice. As Festugière noted, a passage of the *Final Abstinence* makes clear that Zosimus meant that the traditional cult of the temples supported the practice of alchemy.⁴² The cult of the overseers continued until a “complete astronomical revolution of the regions” occurred.⁴³ As a result, Egypt was torn by a war and emptied of its population. This led in turn to the desertion of the temples and the neglect of their cults. Despite the destruction of temple cults, the overseers remained in Egypt and started to visit people in their dreams, promising them success with tinctures in exchange for sacrifices. They should be avoided, Zosimus warns Theosebeia, since their flattery hides a darker motive. These demonic beings do not simply crave sacrifices but also hunger for human souls.⁴⁴ Zosimus positioned himself so radically against the ancient gods of Egypt that he did not even name them as such. He might even have refrained from calling them δαίμονες. In most places where one would expect δαίμονες or δαιμόνια, the manuscript shows double koppas. This particularity of the manuscript tradition might go back to Zosimus since he also appears to have refrained from naming the divine beings responsible for the Fall of the original human in his treatise *On the Letter Omega* (see below).

It is striking that Zosimus, who wrote either in the late 3rd or in the 4th cent. CE, implies that Egyptian cults were no longer practiced. Dating the end of Egyptian temple cults to the late 4th cent. CE, we should assume that Zosimus’ activity should be dated at that time rather than in the late 3rd.⁴⁵ It seems likely, as Christian H. Bull argued, that Zosimus’ history of alchemy was an attempt to subvert the prophecy attributed to Hermes Trismegistus in the *Perfect Discourse*. The prophecy glorifies traditional cults and tells that their abandonment will precipitate Egypt into war and moral perdition until God destroys and re-establishes the universe.⁴⁶ As Bull noted,

“seeming ρρ”, the “terrestrial ρρ” or the “ρρ of the places”. The last construction confirms that the koppas stand for the “overseers”.

42. Zosimus, *On the Final Abstinence* (Festugière, 2006, p. 366, 25-26): εἴ τε δημόται ἡμέλων τῶν θυσίων, ἐκόλυον καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀφύσικον φιλοτιμίαν: “and if the peasants neglected the sacrifices, they [*i.e.* the overseers] prevented success even in the unnatural (tinctures)”.

43. Festugière, 2006, p. 366, 29-30: ἐγένετο ἄρα ἀποκατάστασις τῶν κλιμάτων. See Bull, 2018a, p. 220.

44. Festugière, 2006, p. 367, 7-8: κολακεύουσίν σε τὰ κατὰ τόπον <δαιμόνια>, πεινῶντα οὐ μόνον θυσίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν σὴν ψυχὴν.

45. Others would argue that a late third-century date is also possible. See the summary of the debate and a defense of the late-fourth century dating in Medini, 2015.

46. *Asclepius*, 23-26. See NHC VI 68, 20 – VI 74, 11 for the corresponding section in the Coptic *Perfect Discourse*.

all aspects of Hermes' prediction – that foreigners would invade Egypt, that Egyptians would disappear and that temples would be deserted – have already happened in Zosimus' account. The fact that the overseers remained in Egypt also find its pendant in the “evil angels” of the *Perfect Discourse*, who are said to stay after the gods will have departed.⁴⁷ The *Perfect Discourse* also explains that these evil divine beings would mingle with humans and teach them “what is contrary to nature”.⁴⁸ This could again be seen as a parallel to Zosimus' interpretation of the *Book of the Watchers*, which ascribe the origin of certain techniques to the teachings of angels.⁴⁹

It is highly unlikely that the *Final Abstinence* was written by someone who was a priest of the traditional cults of Egypt. This is coherent with Zosimus' citations and references to the *Hermetica*, which in no way imply that he supported the cults of the Egyptian gods. On the contrary, that Zosimus was a staunch critic of these cults and of sacrifices in general rather suggests that he changed the prophecy found in the *Perfect Discourse* so as to entirely reverse its message. This would also be coherent with the description of Jesus in the treatise *On the Letter Omega* and the fact that he leveled criticism at some alchemy specialists for their use of sacrifices.⁵⁰

4. CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IN *ON THE LETTER OMEGA* AND THE *FIRST LESSON ON EXCELLENCE*

Zosimus described Christian beliefs on the origin and nature of humanity partly through references to theological traditions that are not Christian. This “assimilative” form of textual exegesis is common to 2nd- and 3rd-cent. CE apologists but it can also

47. There is no extant Greek text of this passage. The Latin version has *angeli nocentes* (*Asclepius* 25). Jean-Pierre Mahé (1982, p. 183) reads the corresponding line in the Coptic manuscript of the *Perfect Discourse* ⲛⲁ[ⲓⲣⲉ]ⲗⲟ[ϥ ⲁⲉ Ⲡ]ⲡⲞⲒⲎⲢⲠⲟⲥ (NCH VI 8, 73, 5-6).

48. Translating NHC VI 73: εϣⲓ ⲥⲃⲱ ⲛⲁϣ εἰ̅Ⲡⲡⲁ[ⲣ]ⲁϥϣⲓⲥ. The *Asclepius* 25 translates the corresponding passage by *compellent ... in omnia quae sunt animarum naturae contraria*.

49. There is a chronological problem, however, since alchemy is said by Zosimus (in the Syriac manuscript and the quotation by Syncellus) to have been originally transmitted by demonic beings in the past, not that demonic beings took hold of it. This foundational act of alchemy should logically take place before the history of alchemy presented in the *Final Abstinence*. See Bull, 2018a, p. 222. On Zosimus' description of this myth, see Syncellus, *Chron.* 14 and the corresponding passage of the Cambridge manuscript Mm. 6, 29 edited and translated in Martelli, 2014b.

50. In his polemics, Zosimus also attacked a certain Taphnoutiē, described as a παρθένος and Neilos, described as Theosebeia's ἱερέυς (ὁ σὸς ἱερέυς). They could have been part of the same group of specialists against whom he directed the treatise *On the Letter Omega* (Martelli, 2017, pp. 210-217; Bull, 2018a, pp. 218-225). Considering the polysemy of the term ἱερέυς, it is not entirely clear what Zosimus meant by referring to Neilos as Theosebeia's “priest”. See Dufault, 2019, pp. 126-137.

be found in non-Christian works as well. George Boys-Stones traced its origin among Christians to their confrontation with Platonism. Many philosophers starting with Aristotle assumed that humanity used to be in possession of a better form of wisdom. What defines Platonists in Boys-Stones formulation is precisely the belief that Plato's writings contain all that is necessary to grasp the "primitive wisdom" enjoyed in humanity's infancy. Apologists similarly argued for the superior authority of Hebrew scriptures by asserting their high antiquity. Doing so, they also reversed the critiques of their opponents: in reaching theological truth, Greek poets and philosophers had ultimately depended upon Moses and the Hebrew prophets.⁵¹ Rather than ignoring or refuting non-Christian theological systems, some apologists chose to assimilate them to their own beliefs.⁵² Clement of Alexandria, for example, assumed that the myth of Plato's *Republic* did not picture the vision of Er but of Zoroaster. The same Zoroaster, Clement believed, had learned about a judgement in Hell from the Hebrew prophets.⁵³ A non-Christian type of assimilative interpretation can be found in the *Phoenician History* of Philo of Byblos. His euhemeristic history presents divinities from Greek and Egyptian myths as ancient Phoenician mortals. He credits the invention of writing to the Phoenician Taautos, whom, he claims, was called Thoth by the Egyptians and Hermes by the Greeks.⁵⁴

The same type of assimilative interpretation explains Zosimus' use of revelations attributed to Hermes/Thoth, understood euhemeristically as the first living man. It is the narrative of the first embodiment of the "inner human", called Phōs, which shows characteristics common to the Classic Gnostic creation narrative.

4.1. ANTHROPOGONY

More specifically, the myth of the fall as found in treatises such as the *Secret Revelation of John* can be found in a condensed form in a passage of Zosimus' *On the Letter Omega*:

Ὅτε ἦν Φως ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ διαπνεόμενος ὑπὸ τῆς εἰμαρμένης, ἔπεισαν αὐτὸν ὡς ἄκακον καὶ ἀνενέργητον ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν παρ' αὐτοῦ Ἄδάμ, τὸν ἐκ τῆς εἰμαρμένης, τὸν

51. See Boys-Stones, 2001, esp. ch. 8-9.

52. This is what Mark Edwards (2018) calls the "constructive" form of apologetics.

53. See Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* V 14, 90 – V 14, 91, 1, citing Plato, *Resp.* 615e-616a.

54. See the fragment in Eusebius, *Praep. evan.* I 10, 14. For other examples, see, e.g. Justin, *Apol.* I 44, 12; Lactantius, *Inst. div.* VII 18; Augustine, *De civ. D.* X 27.

ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων στοιχείων. Ὁ δὲ διὰ τὸ ἄκακον οὐκ ἀπεστράφη· οἱ δὲ ἐκαυχῶντο ὡς δεδουλαγωγημένου αὐτοῦ.

“When Phōs was in paradise and was blown through by fate, they convinced him, as he was without malice or (material) powers,⁵⁵ to put on his Adam, he who comes from fate, he who comes from the four elements. He did not turn back, as he was without malice, and they boasted that he had been made a slave.”⁵⁶

The name of Phōs (Φως) can be read either as “light” (φῶς) or as “man/mortal” (φώς), depending on the accentuation. Phōs, Zosimus writes, is the archetypal human and represents the “inner human”. He is identified with the soul, the intellect (νοῦς) and Prometheus. This “inner human” is opposed to the “body” (σῶμα), also called “the external human”, “Adam” or the “fleshly/earthly Adam” (σάρκικος/γήϊνος Ἀδάμ), “Thoth” and “Epimetheus.”⁵⁷ In this sense, Phōs is comparable to the figure of the “first” or “perfect” or “luminous human” of some Classic Gnostic theologies.⁵⁸

For instance, a similar play on the words φῶς and φώς is found in the anthropogony of the *Secret Revelation of John*, often perceived as the most typical example of

55. Translating ἀνεέργητος by “ineffective” or “unactivated” does not automatically convey the theological concept that the term implies. In *Enn.* V 6, 6, Plotinus uses this term to describe the absence of activity of God. This use relates to that made in CH I 25-26 to describe the vices that the soul leaves behind as it ascends to heaven (see Jackson, 1978, p. 31, n. 54), *i.e.* the soul becomes ἀνεέργητος, “without activity”, as it loses its potential for evil deeds. Zosimus could have said that Phōs in Paradise was “unactivated” in the sense that it was not possible for him to fulfill any potentialities, as he was not yet incarnated.

56. MA I 11, 104-109. I follow Mertens in writing Φως unaccentuated to distinguish the name of the archetypal human from φῶς, “light”, and φῶς, “man/mortal”. I chose not to follow Reitzenstein and most editors in correcting παρ’ αὐτοῦ Ἀδάμ in M for παρ’ αὐτῶν Ἀδάμ even though Adam is qualified a few lines further as παρ’ αὐτῶν (MA I 13, 129). The alternation between the third person singular and the third person plural is also found in texts from Nag Hammadi describing the creation of the first human. The *Secret Revelation of John* describes the participation of the authorities in the creation of the body of the first human but uses a third person masculine singular form when summarizing the anthropogony. Cf. NHC II 1, 15, 1-14 with lines 10-11: ἀγαμιῶ νοῦαγποστασις κατα πινε ἴπρωρη ἴπρωμε ἴτελειος, “he created a being according to the likeness of the first and perfect human”. See also the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, NHC II 4, 87-88 and *On the Origin of the World*, NHC II 5, 114-115. Zosimus could have been following this pattern.

57. See Mertens, 1995, p. 8, n. 96.

58. *Secret Revelation of John*, BG XXXIV 19-35, 20 and NHC II 1, 8, 29 – 9, 11, *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 24, *On the Origin of the World*, NHC II 5, 103, 19 and 107, 25 – 108, 20, *Eugnostos*, NHC III 3, 81, 10-14, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, NHC II 4, 88.

the Classic (or Sethian) Gnostic theological system.⁵⁹ The creation of the first human is described in this text as the result of actions and responses between the higher divine world and Yaldabaoth (or Saklas), the chief “archon” (ἄρχων, *i.e.* “ruler”), and creation of Sophia, an entity part of the higher divine world. Boasting that there is no other god beside him, Yaldabaoth attracted the attention of the upmost god (the μόνας, “Monad” and μοναρχία, “supreme ruler”). The “Monad”, described as filled with light, responded by showing an image of itself in the form of a self-directed and luminous “Thought” manifesting itself in a human form as seen reflected in a watery surface. The reflection was accompanied with a voice from above that said: “the human and the human’s child exist”.⁶⁰ This image served as template for the first human, created by Yaldabaoth and the other lesser divine beings. The statement “the human and the human’s child exist” appears as an implicit allegorical reading of *Genesis* 1.3: “And God said: ‘Let there be light (φῶς)’. And there was light (φῶς)”, which, in Greek, could be read as “And God said: ‘Let there be a human. And there was a human’”.⁶¹ That Zosimus calls the “inner human” Φῶς implies the same play on the words φῶς (light) and φῶς (man, mortal). In both cases, *On the Letter Omega* and the *Secret Revelation of John* to reinforce the semantic association between the first human and the divine light associated with God.⁶²

The anthropogony of the *Secret Revelation of John* involves the creation of two bodies, one made of soul (ψυχή) and one made of matter. Both were created by Yaldabaoth with the help of other divine entities called “authorities” (ἐξουσίαι) and “angels” (ἄγγελοι). The creation took place in three steps. After seeing the image of the first human, the text in BG says that the angels “created a substantial soul out of the things which had first been prepared by the authorities, the harmony of the joined parts”⁶³ (as shown below, the description of this blueprint of the body as a “harmony of the joined parts” also mirrors Zosimus’ description of the body). However, this first creative act was not enough to give life to Adam. Since Sophia was searching for a way to take back the pneuma she gave to Yaldabaoth when she created him, she managed to have him blow this pneuma into Adam to bring him

59. On Classic Gnosticism in modern scholarship, see Turner, 2019, pp. 142-145. There are two version of this treatise, one short (represented here by BG) and one long (represented by NHC II).

60. *Secret Revelation of John*, BG 44, 9 – 48, 10 and NHC II 1, 8, 13, 5 – 14, 34.

61. See King, 2006, pp. 98-99.

62. The embodiment motif of the *Secret Revelation of John* also shares similarities with that of the Hermetic *Poimandres* (CH I 14), where the god Anthropos is incorporated into the world after looking down to nature and falling in love with his own image, imperfectly reflected in the waters down below.

63. BG 50, 8-11. Translation from King, 2006, p. 53.

to life, thus transferring the pneuma to his creation. Realizing that his new creation now had powers and intelligence superior to his, Yaldabaoth and the authorities decided to trap Adam in a second body:

“They took some fire, earth, and water. They mixed them together with each other and the four fiery winds. And they brought them together and made a great disturbance. And they enclosed him in the shadow of death in order that they might yet again form from earth, water, fire, and spirit a thing from matter, which is the ignorance of the darkness, desire, and their counterfeit spirit.⁶⁴ This is the tomb of the molding of the body with which the robbers clothed the human, the chain of forgetfulness. And he came to be a mortal human.”⁶⁵

The authorities then put Adam in Paradise so that he would delight in its pleasure and be further entrapped into matter.⁶⁶ In its broad lines, this anthropogony has a family resemblance with that of Zosimus. In both cases, the archetypal human is described as an incorporeal being compared with “light”. Like the *Secret Revelation of John*, Zosimus also implicitly comments on the first chapters of *Genesis* by describing the creation of the body of the first human as a trap: Zosimus writes that Prometheus/Phōs, *i.e.* the intellect, was bound to Epimetheus/Thoth/Adam, “the external human”, by “Zeus” (MA I 12). As in the Classic Gnostic anthropogony, the incarnation of the first human occurs at the instigation of certain divine beings. In contrast with both versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*, where the names of the “authorities” are listed, Zosimus never names those who convinced Phōs to take a material form.⁶⁷

A further connection between early Christianity and Zosimus’ anthropogony is supported by the fact that Zosimus mentions a certain Nicotheos as the only one knowing the real name of Phōs. This Nicotheos was probably the one known as the author of a revelation (ἀποκαλύψις) read by Christians who attended Plotinus’ lectures in Rome.⁶⁸

64. πεπ̄ν̄ᾱ ν̄αν̄τικ̄εῑμε̄νον = ἀν̄τικ̄εῑμε̄νον πνεῦ̄μα.

65. NHC II 1, 8, 20, 35 – 21, 13. Translation from King, 2006, p. 61.

66. For the complete anthropogonic narrative, see BG XXXIV 19 – LXII 3 and NHC II 1, 8, 29 – 24, 8.

67. Compare MA I 11, 104-109 quoted above with NHC II 1, 20-21, 6 and BG LII 12 – LV 18. See Mertens, 1995, p. 6, n. 68.

68. See Porphyry, *Vita Plot.* 16. On Nicotheos, see Crégheur, 2019; Jackson, 1990.

4.2 THE SWORD-BEARER MOTIF

Similarities between Zosimus' interpretation of the salvific activity of Jesus and that found in a theology attributed to "Sethians" in the *Refutation of All Heresies* suggests a closer connection between Zosimus and some early Christian theologians.⁶⁹ Bringing Zosimus in conversation with the "Sethian" document is also justified by the fact that they are two of four extant texts from antiquity justifying belief in the transformation of the self after death by making explicit reference to alchemical processes.⁷⁰ As seen in the passage emended by Reitzenstein, Zosimus writes that Jesus came to counsel his people "openly and through their mind to get rid of their Adam". This activity proceeds among humans in an odd way: "By cutting off and slaying their Adam ... they kill their Adam".⁷¹ Most modern interpreters have doubted that this passage goes back to Zosimus.⁷² Yet, Zosimus' violent imagery echoes a motif repeated in his *First Lesson on Excellence*. It can also be read as an implicit allegorical reading of a saying attributed to Jesus found in the gospels of Thomas and Matthew: "I came not to bring peace but a sword (*machaira*)".⁷³ Some early Christians did read this *logion* as a reference to salvation. The most explicit reading is found in a "Sethian" document mentioned in the *Refutation of All Heresies*:

καὶ δὴ ἀπὸ τῶν ζῶων, φησί, <τοῦτο> καταμάνθανε· τελευτήσαντος γὰρ τοῦ ζῶου ἕκαστα διακρίνεται καὶ λυθὲν οὕτω τὸ ζῶον ἀφανίζεται. τοῦτό ἐστί, φησί, τὸ εἰρημένον· «οὐκ ἦλθον εἰρήνην βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν», τουτέστι [τὸ] διχάσαι καὶ χωρίσαι τὰ συγκεκραμένα.

"Learn this also, he (*i.e.* the 'Sethian' author) says, from animals: for when the animal dies, each of its parts is separated and dissolved. Thus the animal decays. This, he claims, is what the scriptural verse means: 'I came not to set peace on earth but a *machaira*'. That is, Jesus comes to separate and distinguish the blended elements".⁷⁴

69. These Sethians are not the same as those conjectured by modern scholarship around the Classic or "Sethian" typology. For the authorship and the dating of the *Refutation of all Heresies* (ca. 220 CE), see Litwa, 2016, pp. xxxii-xl.

70. See also Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus*, LXII 26-29 with Dufault, 2019, pp. 102-103 and the *Gospel of Philip*, NHC II 3, 61 with Charron & Painchaud, 2001. On the similarities between the "Sethian" source, the *Paraphrase of Shem* and alchemy, see Burns, 2015.

71. For the text, see note 7 above.

72. See Tonelli, 1988, p. 99, n. 38; Mertens, 1995, p. 7, n. 88; Festugière, 2006, p. 271. The passage is kept by Jackson, 1978.

73. *Matt.* 10.34: οὐκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν. See also the *Gospel of Thomas*, 16.

74. *Ref.* V 21, 4 (text and translation from Litwa, 2016).

For the author of the document, there are three elements, light, pneuma and darkness. Jesus thus appears primarily as the separator of the blended elements and implicitly as the savior (that is, as the one who saves pneuma from matter). That Zosimus intended something similar is first suggested by the use of cutting imagery. It can also be read further in the use of the term *machaira* (a sacrificial knife or a small bladed weapon) and its association in Hebrew with the power of words. Some early Christian texts associated the words of Jesus/God to a sword, probably as a reference to passages from Hebrew scripture where the “sharpness” of words is compared to that of swords.⁷⁵ *Ephesians* interprets the expression “*machaira* of the pneuma” derived from a version of *Wisdom* (5.17-20) as referring to the word of God.⁷⁶ According to Irenaeus, Valentinians understood the sword and the cross as symbols of the “Limiter” (Ὀρος), that which “consumes all material things, as fire consume hay, but that purifies those who are saved as the winnow purifies wheat”.⁷⁷ Zosimus’ soteriology implies a similar interpretation of the Matthean *logion*. Jesus, he writes, comes to humans to “cut off” their body through the “illumination of the intellect” (MA I 7, 70-71).

This reading can find support in the role played by some knife- or sword-bearing figures in the *First Lesson on Excellence*. In the first dream, Zosimus explains how a priest called Ion described a process in which he claimed to have “learned to become pneuma”.

Ἦλθε γάρ τις περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον δρομαίως καὶ ἐχειρώσατό με μαχαίρα διελών με, διασπάσας κατὰ σύστασιν ἀρμονίας καὶ ἀποδερματώσας πᾶσαν τὴν κεφαλὴν μου τῷ ξίφει τῷ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ κρατουμένῳ. Τὰ ὁστέα ταῖς σαρχὶν συνέπλεξεν, καὶ τῷ πυρὶ τῷ διὰ χειρὸς κατέκαιεν ἕως ἂν ἔμαθον μετασωματούμενος πνεῦμα γενέσθαι.

“At sunrise, someone came running and mastered me, dividing me with a *machaira*, pulling me apart according to the structure of the assemblage and skinning my head with the sword he possessed. He intertwined the bones with the flesh and burned them with the fire from his hand until I learned to become pneuma by changing my body. This is the intolerable violence I endure.”⁷⁸

75. See Sim, 2000, p. 94.

76. *Eph.* 6.17: καὶ τὴν περικεφαλαίαν τοῦ σωτηρίου δέξασθε, καὶ τὴν μάχαιραν τοῦ πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ῥῆμα θεοῦ. See also *Rev.* 1.16.

77. Irenaeus, *Haer.* I 3, 5: *et per hoc operationem Hori significasse: ventilabrum enim illud Crucem interpretantur esse, quae scilicet consumit materialia omnia, quaeamodum paleas ignis, emundat autem eos qui salvantur, sicut ventilabrum triticum.*

78. MA X 2, 29-36.

This first vision ends with the disappearance of Ion, the protagonist. As he finished to describe his suffering, blood raised to his eyes, he regurgitated “all his flesh” and ate himself back before “falling onto himself” (συμπιπτοντα). The dissection and reconstruction of Ion described in the passage above suggests the dismemberment and reassembling of the body of Osiris.⁷⁹ This suggests that some form of regeneration is alluded to here. Why the added precision that the body needs to be separated κατὰ σύστασιν ἄρμονίας? Perhaps to recall the way the soul-body is believed to have been originally assembled, as can be read in the anthropogonies of all versions of the *Secret Revelation of John*.⁸⁰ However, Ion’s gruesome disappearing act is more difficult to interpret. The first ordeal at the hands of the unnamed *machaira*-wielder was a lesson since Ion explicitly claims that it taught him to become pneuma. His self-disappearance must then be the proof that he had effectively learned how to transform himself into immaterial pneuma. And indeed, Zosimus’ second dream explicitly mentions the transformation of human bodies into pneuma.⁸¹

In the second dream, Zosimus comes across a large “bowl-altar” with a “a small, grey-haired human wielding a razor” (πεπολιωμένον ξυρουργὸν ἀνθρωπάριον) and a multitude of people inside. Interrogated by the dreamer as to what the scene might be, the small human responds that it is the “entrance, the exit and the transformation (μεταβολή)”. This transformation is further defined as “the place of the exercise called ‘embalming’” where those who wish to reach excellence “leave the body and become spirits”.⁸² The connection between Egyptian funerary traditions and Zosimus’ dream is clear. This process is also described as reaching excellence (ἀρετή), which suggests that transforming humans into spirits (or, more generally, matter into pneuma) is the entire purpose of the *Lessons on Excellence* (ἀρετή). It is not entirely clear what the “razor-wielding” spirit might refer to as he is not directly involved in the transformation. Shannon Grimes suggests a possible allusion to knife-wielding

79. See Mertens, 1995, p. 36, n. 16 and the paper by Marina Escolano-Poveda in this issue.

80. The version in BG glosses the soul-body as “the harmony of the joined parts” (BG L 10-11: μπρωρβ ν̄μ̄μελος ν̄αρμος). In NHC II, the angels create “the harmony of the parts and the harmony of the limbs and the proper combination of each of the parts” (NHC II 1, 8, 15, 27-29: π̄ π̄χωνη̄ ν̄μ̄μελος μ̄ν̄ π̄χωνη̄ ν̄ν̄ψαγ̄ μ̄ν̄ τ̄γ̄νη̄ε̄σις μ̄π̄τ̄σανο μ̄πογα πογα ν̄μ̄μελος; trans. King, 2006, p. 53).

81. MA X 3, 54-57.

82. MA X 3, 54-57: τόπος ἀσκέσεως τῆς λεγομένης ταριχείας· οἱ γὰρ θέλοντες ἀνθρωποὶ ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν ὧδε εἰσέρχονται καὶ γίνονται πνεύματα φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα. I leave aside the following ten lines (MA X 3, 59-69) as their purpose in the narrative is unclear to me. Shannon Grimes (2018, p. 138) suggests a connection between the grapes mentioned by Zosimus and those mentioned in a description of the ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth.

demons seen in Egyptian depictions of the underworld and a reference to embalmers or barbers.⁸³ It is, in Zosimus own words, “a spirit and a guardian of spirits.”⁸⁴

The third appearance of a character with a cutting tool occurs in Zosimus’ final analysis of the dreams (MA X 5). This time, this character is the reader, whom Zosimus enjoins to build a shrine and to search for its entrance, sword (ξίφος) in hand. There, he says, a snake must be mastered, sacrificed and cut into parts. Its flesh and bones must be put back together and shaped as a step leading inside the shrine.⁸⁵ The image and vocabulary is strikingly similar to the dissection and reassembling of Ion. In this case, the act of dismembering and reassembling leads not to the disappearance of the victim. The reassembled snake is rather used as a step leading into the shrine. There Zosimus says that one will find “the thing sought for”. Zosimus addresses readers directly saying that the “human being of copper” seen inside the shrine will transform itself into silver and finally into gold. The link with Ion is clear since another character from the dream told Zosimus earlier that Ion is the human being of copper.⁸⁶

It is not clear whether the three scenes rehash the same idea in different ways or if they point to different processes. However, it seems clear enough that dismembering and reassembling is a motif Zosimus used to indicate a process leading to “excellence” (ἀρετή), either mineral, human or both. Like Jesus in the treatise *On the Letter Omega*, the first *machaira*-wielder of the *Lesson* shows Ion how to “cut” the body away. Read through the symbolism of the treatise *On the Letter Omega*, Ion’s teacher would stand for Jesus/God, and his carving knife for “our Intellect” (which, Zosimus claims, enjoins us to perceive the son of God in all things).⁸⁷ In the second vision, the dismembering and reassembling is not mentioned, although the “pneuma” guarding individuals transforming themselves into pneuma is described as holding a small blade. Zosimus’ final interpretation, which is itself allegorical, involves a process of human self-perfection (the transformation of a copper-human into a gold-human) enacted thanks to the dissection and restructuration of the bones and flesh of a snake.

83. Grimes, 2018, pp. 134-140.

84. MA I 10, 3, 57-59: πνεῦμα καὶ φύλαξ πνευμάτων.

85. A Christian parallel to this image can be found in the ascent narrative of the ca. 3rd-cent. CE *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (4, 7), where Perpetua tamed a dragon guarding the *scala*/κλίμαξ leading to heaven and used its head to climb “as if it were the first step” (*et quasi primum gradum*)/ὡς εἰς τὸν πρῶτον βαθμόν; text from Heffernan, 2012).

86. MA X 3, 69-73.

87. MA I 12, 118-119: φησὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἡμῶν· ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα δυνάμενος καὶ πάντα γινόμενος, ὅτε θέλει, ὡς θέλει, φαίνει ἐκάστω. The notion that the “son of God” is the cosmos is also found in the *Hermetica* (CH IX 8, 10, 14).

Since a character in the dream mentions that Ion and the copper-human are the same, we are led to the conclusion that the snake stands for the body, or perhaps, for matter more generally.⁸⁸ Read as tools used to bring about the transformation of the body into pneuma, the first and last use of the sword/knife in Zosimus' dreams is similar to the reading of the *logion* of Jesus found in the "Sethian" document of the *Refutation of All Heresies*. Brought back to bear on the interpretation of the image of Jesus teaching how to "cut off" the body, Zosimus' dreams suggest an interpretation of the Matthean *logion* similar to that found in the "Sethian" document of the *Refutation of All Heresies*. Conversely, the salvific action of Jesus can help interpret the role played by blade-wielding characters in Zosimus' dreams. References to Osirian mythology and cult can be read as attempts to assimilate those elements of Egyptian religion that coincided with Christian ideas. Following the explicit goals of "assimilative theology" and the belief in a "primitive wisdom", Zosimus' visionary narrative would have hinted at the notion that Osirian cult and mythology included part of the original truth, albeit in a perverted form.

4.3 CHRISTOLOGY

Jesus, according to Zosimus, "suffered nothing but instead showed death trampled under foot and thrust aside" (see MA I 13 above). Similar "docetic" views are described by heresiological reports and can be found in early Christian treatises as well.⁸⁹ Zosimus' Christology is also characterized by the assumption that Jesus can take any shape. In his interpretation or paraphrase of the treatise *On the Inner Life*, Zosimus writes: "See [the son of God] become everything: god, angel, a person subject to suffering. Being all-powerful, he becomes what he wants. And yet he obeys the

88. This, at least, is what can be assumed from two diagrams found in M (f. 188^v; for a reproduction, see Mertens, 1995, p. 241). One of these is a circle shaped in the form of a serpent that implicitly equates the snake with the universe. It is attributed to Zosimus by Michèle Mertens (see MA VI). Olympiodorus also stated that Egyptian sacred scribes used the ouroboros to represent the cosmos (CAAG II 80, 9-11).

89. Irenaeus, *Haer.* I 6, 1 and I 24, 2; Epiphanius, *Pan.* XXVI 10, 5 and XL 8, 2. See also the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, NHC VII 2, 55, 9 – 56, 20 and the *Revelation of Peter*, NHC VII 3, 81, 3 – 83, 8.

father”.⁹⁰ This notion appears in the *Gospel of Philip* (which also uses an alchemical metaphor to describe salvation) and in Valentinian theology.⁹¹

The “son of God”, Zosimus also writes, strives to bring “each intellect” back “where it was before corporeality came to be”.⁹² It is the Intellect that provides counsel about everything “to those who have intelligent ears” (MA I 16: ἀκοὰς νοεράς). This expression is also characteristic of early Christian writings.⁹³

CONCLUSION

There are no good reasons why we should accept the emendations proposed by Reitzenstein and no evidence showing that Zosimus’ use of Hermetic treatises entailed beliefs and practices that would have excluded those of Christians in general. The fact that Zosimus opposed sacrifices to the traditional gods of Egypt implies that his references to Greek and Egyptian mythology cannot be read as to suggest that he participated in Greek and Egyptian cults. They rather take part in what I referred above as the “assimilative” type of theological interpretation. This was a widespread theological approach that consisted in assimilating rather than refuting or ignoring other traditions. We can also observe that Zosimus’ anthropogony shares similarities with Classic Gnostic treatises as well as with notions found in some heresiological reports – although no text from these two groups corresponds perfectly with Zosimus’ views.

90. MA I 7, 67-70: ὄρα αὐτὸν γινόμενον πάντα, θεόν, ἄγγελον, ἄνθρωπον παθητόν· πάντα γὰρ δυνάμενος πάντα ὅσα θέλει γίνεται. Καὶ πατρὶ ὑπακούει (on translating καί as “yet”, see LSJ, s.v. “καί”, A.II.3). Zosimus attributes the same notion to “his/our Intellect” in MA I 12, 118-120, just before the section describing how Jesus provides salvation: Φησὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἡμῶν· ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα δυνάμενος καὶ πάντα γινόμενος, ὅτε θέλει, ὡς θέλει, φαίνει ἑκάστῳ: “For our Intellect says: ‘the son of God is all-powerful and, becoming everything, he manifests himself to each and everybody when and how he wishes to’”.

91. See *Gospel of Philip*, NHC II 3, 57, 29 – 58, 10; Irenaeus, *Haer.* I 3, 4: *Quod autem Salvatorem ex omnibus existentem Omne esse per hoc responsum: “Omne masculinum aperiens vulvam” ... Et a Paulo autem manifeste propter hoc dictum dicunt: “Et ipse est omnia”, “That the Savior, who proceed from all things, is everything is indicated by this: ‘every male opening the womb [i.e. who is born]’ ... And they say that it was clear to Paul that the following was said for this reason: ‘And he is everything’”; The *Refutation of All Heresies* (V 7, 25) mentions that the “Naassenes” justify the notion that the “substance of the seed” is the cause of all generated things with “I become what I want, and I am who I am” (γίνομαι ὁ θέλω καὶ εἰμι ὁ εἰμί).*

92. MA I 7, 70-72: διὰ παντὸς σώματος διήκων (i.e., ὁ υἱὸς θεοῦ), φωτίζων τὸν ἐκάστης νοῦν, εἰς τὸν εὐδαίμονα χώρον ἀνώρμησεν ὅπουπερ ἦν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὸ σωματικὸν γενέσθαι.

93. See Mertens, 1995, p. 8, n. 97 and Puech, 1978, pp. 183-187 who cite relevant passages from the gospels, NHC treatises and other documents, arguing that the expression is typically gnostic.

That Zosimus also claimed that Jesus teaches humans to “cut off” their bodies shows striking similarity with the “Sethian” interpretation of the Matthean *logion* presenting Jesus as *machaira*-bearer. The actions of the first blade-wielding character from the *First Lesson on Excellence* also probably refers to the teaching activity of Jesus as conceived by Zosimus. Zosimus’ final interpretation of his dreams appears to put this lesson in practice: take the sword, dissect and reassemble the snake (matter?) and find “what is sought for”, *i.e.* the transformation of matter into pneuma.

That Zosimus and the author of the “Sethian” theology found inspiration in the same source appears likely considering that they count among only four extant texts referring to alchemy or metallurgical parting to justify Christian beliefs in the transformation of the self after death. That his Christian beliefs were marginalized in his days could also explain why he chose to write the allegories of the *Lessons on Excellence* even if he said elsewhere that he did not think much about keeping alchemical writings secret.⁹⁴ It would indeed be strange that he described technical processes in coded words when he tried to clear older alchemical texts from their confused language. The fact that Zosimus’ Christology and soteriology would have been peculiar (if not problematic) in post-Nicene times might explain the need he felt to express his ideas through allegorical writing. That is not to suggest that Christian theology is the “key” to all of his allegories. His visionary narratives refer to several domains of experience. We should expect that, like actual dreams, they can combine several ideas in a single image.

94. See CAAG II 246, 14-16: ἐὰν γὰρ ἀκούσης ὄχραν ξανθὴν, μὴ ἀπλῶς ὑπολάβῃς, καὶ μεταπαρασκευάσαντα μυστικῶς πρὸς μόνον τοὺς κωλύτας ἔχειν (“if you hear ‘yellow ocre’, do not simply assume that this is an initiatory contrivance (directed only) against those who impede”); MA I 13, 1, which starts by δῆλα ὑμῖν ποιοῦμαι, “I will make (things) clear to you”, followed by an explanation of the meaning of the expression ὁ λίθος ἐγκέφαλος; Martelli’s translation of the Syriac Cambridge Manuscript Mm. 6, 29, fols. 49^r-50^r: “But you (my lady [*i.e.*, Theosebeia]) moved away from the various topics (of this book); you presented them in a shorter form and you taught them openly. But you claim that this book cannot be possessed unless in secret. Now, even though secrets are necessary, it is quite fair that anyone has a book of alchemy, since it is not kept secret for them” (translation from Martelli, 2014a).

APPENDIX

(Three notes on the treatises attributed to Zosimus in the Cambridge Manuscript Mm. 6, 29 in M. Berthelot and R. Duval's *La chimie au Moyen Âge*, Vol. 2).

In his study of the sections of the Cambridge Syriac manuscript Mm. 6, 29, Matteo Martelli adduced the following arguments in favor of the attribution of parts of Mm. 6, 29 to Zosimus:

- 1) The headings name books according to letters.
- 2) The addressee is a woman.
- 3) Alchemy is described as the practice of Egyptian priests.
- 4) Part of the manuscript was also transmitted by George Syncellus in a passage of his *Chronicle* explicitly attributed to Zosimus.
- 5) Tinctures are separated in three types, as found in the commentary of Olympiodorus on Zosimus' treatise *On Action*.
- 6) The Syriac word PYNW ("superficial tincture") transliterate the Greek πίνωξ ("patina, coating"), a term found in the commentary of Olympiodorus and which could derive from Zosimus.

Against this evidence, Martelli also showed that passages attributed to Zosimus by Berthelot and Duval belonged in fact to Galen's *On the Properties of Simple Drugs*. Syriac alchemical compilations, Martelli concludes, have a composite character. I add here three elements in support of this conclusion:

- 1) The use of italics by Berthelot and Duval is meant to convey rubricated passages.⁹⁵ However, italics also appear to have been used to indicate glosses.⁹⁶ They appear in a confusing passage that could be key in determining Zosimus' cultural and religious orientation:

"Chez les Égyptiens, il y a un livre appelé les Sept cieux, attribué à Salomon, contre les démons; mais il n'est pas exact qu'il soit de Salomon, parce que ces talismans ont été apportés autrefois à nos prêtres; [f. 88r] c'est ce que la langue employée pour les désigner fait déjà supposer; car le mot talismans de Salomon est une expression hébraïque. En tout temps, les grands prêtres de Jérusalem les tiraient, suivant le sens simple, du gouffre inférieur de Jérusalem.

95. Berthelot & Duval, 1893, p. xlv.

96. See f. 39^r in Berthelot & Duval, 1893, p. 228.

Après que ces écrits eurent été répandus partout, étant encore inachevés, ils furent corrompus.

C'est lui qui les avait inventés, comme je l'ai dit plus haut. Mais Salomon n'écrivit qu'un seul ouvrage sur les sept talismans, tandis qu'on imagina des commentaires, à différentes époques, pour expliquer les choses que cet ouvrage renfermait; or dans ces commentaires il y avait de la fraude. Tous, ou à peu près, sont d'accord sur le travail des talismans dirigés contre les démons. Ces talismans agissent comme la prière et les neuf lettres écrites par Salomon; les démons ne peuvent y résister.

Mais revenons plus en détail au sujet que nous avons en vue. Les sept bouteilles (talismans), dans lesquelles Salomon renferma les démons, étaient en électrum. Il convient d'ajouter foi à cet égard aux écrits juifs sur les démons. Le livre altéré, que nous possédons et qui est intitulé les Sept cieux, renferme, en résumé, ce qui suit. L'ange ordonna à Salomon de faire ces talismans (bouteilles)".⁹⁷

Christian M. Bull argues that “*nos prêtres*” in this passage refer to the Egyptian priests.⁹⁸ This would explain why the author claim that the *Sept cieux* was misattributed to Salomon. This would be coherent with the evidence adduced above. But why would the fact that “*talismans de Salomon*” is a Hebrew expression be a proof that the *Sept cieux* should be attributed to Egyptian priests? The italics at the beginning of the citation might indicate a gloss. If that is the case, Zosimus would have called the priests of Jerusalem “*nos prêtres*”.

2) Only one of the alchemical books attributed to Zosimus by Berthelot and Duval is attributed to Zosimus in the manuscript. Martelli translates the heading as follows: “Eighth Treatise on the Working of Tin; letter Ḥēt^h. The Book tells us about tin and Zosimus gives his best greetings to the queen Theosebeia”.⁹⁹ The fact that a passage from this book corresponds to a citation attributed to Zosimus by George Syncellus supports the authenticity of the text (*Chronography*, 14). The passage discusses how divine beings recorded alchemy and the “arts of nature” into a book called the Χημεῦ. The citation of Syncellus stops shortly after these words but the corresponding passage in the Syriac manuscript goes on to explain how the Χημεῦ is separated in twenty-four sections called after the letters of the alphabet. The description of these books is as follows (in the translation of Martelli):

97. See f. f. 87^v–88^r in Berthelot & Duval, 1893, pp. 264-265.

98. Bull, 2018a, p. 225.

99. Martelli, 2014b.

“They [*i.e.* the books] are explained by the words of priests. One of these is entitled ‘Imus’, another ‘Imuth’, another ‘Face’ – so it was interpreted (or translated). One of these is entitled ‘Key’, another ‘Seal’ or ‘Signet’, another ‘Handbook’ (see gr. ἐγχειρίδιον), another ‘Position’ (of the stars? see gr. ἐποχή).”¹⁰⁰

The names of the alleged books from the Χημεῦ are problematic. Syncellus writes that the text he cited comes from the “ninth book of the *Imouth*” (ἐν τῷ ἐνάτῳ τῆς Ἰμουθ βιβλῳ), not from the “eighth Treatise *On the Working of Tin*”. The Syriac translation gives the name of Imouth to a part of the Χημεῦ, not to a book attributed to Zosimus. Similarly, the names of ‘Seal’ or ‘Signet’ are given to a section of the Χημεῦ but are also found as names of a section of the Syriac manuscript attributed to Zosimus by Duval and Berthelot.¹⁰¹

It might seem strange that Zosimus named his books after older alchemical treatises. One possible solution, as noted above, is that ancient books of revealed wisdom were sometimes attributed to their source as well as the person associated with their transmission. This is the case of Messos, who was known by Porphyry as the author of a revelation and whose name occurs in the colophon of the *Marsanes* as the person who transmitted this text. The seer Nicotheos mentioned by Zosimus and Porphyry could also have been the same kind of “transmitter”.¹⁰² Was Zosimus’ name perhaps associated with the Χημεῦ in the same way? This could also explain why his name appears in the title of the alchemical *Book of Sophē*.¹⁰³

3) The *Ninth Book on the Letter Tet* tells a story concerning the “capture” of mercury. “In a far-away place in the West” where tin is found, locals attract mercury from sources by bringing a beautiful virgin to a place lower than the source. As if enamored by the virgin, the mercury rushes out and is hacked by young people with axes (f. 58^{r-v}).¹⁰⁴ A similar story is found in a Chinese text of the 14th cent. CE where it is told to the narrator by two men, one of which appears to have a Hebrew name. As in the Syriac manuscript, the “hunt” for mercury also takes place “in the West”. The story also appears in several Indian texts, all of which are dated no earlier than the 10th cent. CE.¹⁰⁵ Berthelot and Duval date the Syriac text of the Cambridge ms. Mm.

100. Martelli, 2014b, p. 12.

101. See Berthelot & Duval, 1893, p. 232. The book is also called “Houphestion”.

102. Crégheur, 2019.

103. See CAAG II 211-213. For other hypotheses, see Mertens, 1995, pp. lxxvii-lxix.

104. Trans. Berthelot & Duval, 1893, pp. 244-245.

105. Needham *et al.*, 1980, p. 337; White, 1996, pp. 203-204.

6, 29 to the 10th or 11th cent. CE and the codex itself to the 15th.¹⁰⁶ It is not clear where the story of the capture of mercury originated but it could have come to Syria from China or India in the 10th cent. CE at the earliest. This suggests that other sections attributed to Zosimus could include documents much removed in time and space from 3rd-4th-cent. Egypt.

106. Berthelot & Duval, 1893, pp. xlv, xlviii.

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QUENCHING GREEDY SOULS IN METAL LAKES.
A METALLURGIC IMAGE IN THESPESIUS' S VISION OF THE
AFTERLIFE (PLUTARCH, *DE SERA NUM.* 30, 567C-D)

TEMPLANDO ALMAS CODICIOSAS EN LAGOS DE METAL.
UNA IMAGEN METALÚRGICA EN LA VISIÓN DEL MÁS ALLÁ DE TESPESIO
(PLUTARCO, *DE SERA NUM.* 30, 567C-D)

DANIELE MORRONE
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA
daniele.morrone2@unibo.it

ABSTRACT

Plutarch's theological dialogue *De sera numinis vindicta* ends with an eschatological myth narrating the afterlife vision of Thespesius (22-33, 563b-568a), centred on the souls' "purification" from their earthly vices – obtained by means of punishments – and on the process of their reincarnation. This myth includes symbolic images of metallurgic interest. The most elaborate of these corresponds to the description of the chastisement of the "insatiable" and "greedy" souls, which are cyclically immersed into lakes of gold, lead, and iron, enduring painful transformations in each lake (30, 567c-d). This article focuses on the analysis of the implications and literary genesis of this scene, in the frame of the rest of the myth and of the dialogic part of *De sera num.*, of Plutarch's ethical and scientific ideas, of his culture, and of the tendencies of his metaphorical and analogical prose (as evidenced by his other works). It begins with an introduction to Plutarch's religious thought and use of Platonic myths, defending the assumption that these should be treated as

RIASSUNTO

El diálogo teológico de Plutarco *De sera numinis vindicta* termina con un mito escatológico que narra la visión del más allá de Tespesio (22-33, 563b-568a), centrada en la "purificación" de las almas de sus vicios terrenales – obtenido mediante castigos – y en el proceso de su reencarnación. Este mito incluye imágenes simbólicas de interés metalúrgico. La más elaborada de ellas corresponde a la descripción del castigo de las almas "insaciables" y "codiciosas", que se sumergen cíclicamente en lagos de oro, plomo y hierro, sufriendo dolorosas transformaciones en cada lago (30, 567c-d). Este artículo se centra en el análisis de las implicaciones y génesis literaria de esta escena, en el marco del resto del mito y de la parte dialógica de *De sera num.*, de las ideas éticas y científicas de Plutarco, de su cultura y de las tendencias de su prosa metafórica y analógica. Comienza con una introducción al pensamiento religioso de Plutarco y al uso de los mitos platónicos, defendiendo la suposición de que estos deben ser tratados como cuentos "enigmáticos" no literales y, por lo tanto, inter-

non-literal “enigmatic” tales and thus interpreted symbolically. A section is then dedicated to the narrative frame of Thespesius’s vision – the story of the moral conversion of an unscrupulously hedonist and greedy man – and to Plutarch’s symbolic presentation of the stains of vice (26, 565b-d), each associated with a colour, focusing on the stain of “miserliness and greed”. After an overview of the other punishments witnessed by Thespesius, mainly to be interpreted as forms of contrapasso and exhibitions of the souls’ hidden, wicked selves, the analysis of Plutarch’s treatment of greed is completed with an extensive discussion of the scene of the metallic lakes. Previous scholarly treatments of the scene are also discussed, with a focus on those which connected it with alchemy. Considering a recently proposed comparison between Plutarch’s scene and some of the images used by the alchemist Zosimus in his allegorical dreams (*MA X, XI, XII Mertens*), the hypothesis of their affinity is explored with mainly negative results. However, a further hypothesis is suggested without full endorsement: namely, that the symbols used by Plutarch, like those used by Zosimus, were influenced by the aesthetics of Egyptian and/or Jewish religion in the syncretising environment of 1st-cent. CE Alexandria.

pretados simbólicamente. Luego se dedica una sección al marco narrativo de la visión de Tespesio – la historia de la conversión moral de un hombre hedonista y codicioso sin escrúpulos – y a la presentación simbólica de Plutarco de las manchas del vicio (26, 565b-d), cada una asociada a un color, centrándose en la mancha de “la avaricia y la codicia”. Después de una descripción general de los otros castigos presenciados por Tespesio, principalmente interpretables como formas de contrapaso y exhibiciones del yo oculto y malvado de las almas, el análisis del tratamiento de Plutarco de la codicia se completa con una discusión extensa de la escena de los lagos metálicos. También se discuten los tratamientos académicos previos de la escena, con un enfoque en aquellos que la conectaron con la alquimia. A partir de una comparación propuesta recientemente entre la escena de Plutarco y algunas de las imágenes utilizadas por el alquimista Zósimo en sus sueños alegóricos (*MA X, XI, XII Mertens*), se explora la hipótesis de su afinidad con resultados mayoritariamente negativos. Sin embargo, se sugiere otra hipótesis sin respaldo total: a saber, que los símbolos utilizados por Plutarco, como los utilizados por Zósimo, fueron influenciados por la estética de la religión egipcia y/o judía en el entorno sincretizante de la Alejandría del I siglo d.C.

KEYWORDS

Afterlife; Alchemy; Alexandria; Colours; Contrapasso; Delphi; Eschatology; Ethics; Gold; Iron; Iron quenching; Lead; Metallurgy; Metaphors; Platonic myth; Plutarch of Chaeronea; Punishments; *Septuaginta*; Souls; Symbols; Theology; Vices; Zosimus of Panopolis.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Alejandría; Almas; Alquimia; Castigos; Colores; Contrapaso; Delfos; Escatología; Ética; Guiar; Hierro; Metáforas; Metalurgia; Mito platónico; Oro; Plutarco de Queronea; *Septuaginta*; Símbolos; Temple de hierro; Teología; Vicios; Vida futura; Zósimo de Panópolis.

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1. THE DELPHIC PRIEST AND HIS PHILOSOPHICAL MYTH

1.1. PYTHIAN PROPAGANDA AND MYTHIC SYMBOLISM

The whole literary production of Plutarch of Chaeronea (1st-2nd cent. CE) – author of the *Vitae parallelae* and of the variegated body of philosophical works passed down to us under the title *Ēthiká* or *Moralia* (“Ethical Works”) – is scattered throughout with religious themes. Much material of interest to the historian of religions or theology may not only be found in those of his *Moralia* that have been dubbed (somewhat reductively) as “religious writings proper”¹ – a category which broadly corresponds to what Konrat Ziegler influentially defined as “*theologischen Schriften*” in 1951² –, but also in his other philosophical and historical works: both in the form of ethnographic or antiquarian reports on religious practices and myths,³ and embedded as assumptions, fundamental concepts, and motivations in many of his philosophical enquiries or discussions.⁴ The theological and “rationally” pious (*i.e.*, simultaneously anti-mechanistic and anti-superstitious)⁵ approach characterizing his “Middle” Pla-

1. Hirsch-Luipold, 2014, p. 163, who lists *De E apud Delphos*, *De Pythiae oraculis*, *De defectu oraculorum*, *De sera numinis vindicta*, *De genio Socratis*, *De Iside et Osiride*, and *De superstitione*.

2. Ziegler, 1951, sec. III,7, coll. 825-851.

3. See Hirsch-Luipold, 2021, pp. 16-17.

4. Cf. Hirsch-Luipold & Roig Lanzillotta, 2021, “Introduction”, p. 1, who label Plutarch’s intellectual endeavour as a “religious philosophy or philosophical religion”.

5. In *De facie*, the idea of a teleological arrangement of the cosmos is defended against the reductive Stoic and Aristotelian physics (see, *e.g.*, 13, 927a), but Plutarch’s model of causality is “double”, as it allows for the co-existence of higher, teleological motives subject to divine rationality with natural, contingent causes (a development of Plato, *Tim.* 46d-48a): see especially Plutarch, *Per.* 6,4-5 and *De def. or.* 48, 436d-e, with Meeusen, 2021. Plutarch’s sharpest attacks on “superstition” (δεισιδαιμονία) are found in his treatise *De superstitione*: on the features of δεισιδαιμονία, as presented in this work, see most recently Kuin, 2021.

tonism⁶ – which he may have well inherited from his master M. Annius Ammonius⁷ – can hardly surprise us, if we consider that he spent the last part of his life (probably multiple decades) as a priest of the Delphic oracle.⁸

Whether Plutarch's priestly office significantly influenced his late philosophical activity or not (or rather, whether the features and assumptions of the two were closely correlated or not) can be the object of debate, but there are many clues suggesting a positive answer,⁹ some of which – and not the least important – are included in *De sera numinis vindicta* (“On the Slowness of the Divinity to Punish”), the theological dialogue ending in the ‘Platonic’ myth which is the object of the present article.¹⁰ The opening of the dialogue, set in Delphi (see *De sera num.* 12, 556f and 17, 560c), unambiguously frames the discussion on the workings and reasons of the divine punishments as a theodicy, which is prompted by the “strange” and “false” arguments made by a certain Epicurus – representing the Epicurean school – against “providence” (πρόνοια) before leaving the scene; his attack, assimilated to a “spear” (1, 548b-c), upsets the characters Patrocleas, Timon, and Olympichos, who, unsure on how to deflect it, seek argumentative support in the person of Plutarch, who will speak for the great part of the dialogue with the tone of a theological authority, and then follow his reasoning with an eschatological myth, centred on the description of the souls’ “purification” from their earthly faults by means of afterlife punishments, as well as on the process of their reincarnation (22-33, 563b-568a). In the first, argumentative part of the work, religious beliefs such as that of a punishing god and of his goodness and care for human souls are manifestly embedded as axioms in what is characterized as a dialectical investigation: as written by Herwig Görgemanns, the “‘Glaube’ an eine gerechte Vorsehung liegt also dem Logos axiomatisch zugrunde”, without being proven, and this definitely informs the *lógos*'s outcomes.¹¹

These beliefs, in addition to shaping the philosophical profile of the dialogue, are also positively promoted by its means, so that we seem to have some reason to

6. On this label, see Boys-Stones, 2018, pp. 1-23 (with discussion of the earlier bibliography).

7. On this Platonist philosopher, who clearly had “a strong interest in theology and religion, including divination”, see Opsomer, 2009 (my quotation is from p. 175). See also below, n. 187.

8. See Ziegler, 1951, sec. I,6, coll. 659-662 and Roskam 2021, p. 14, with recent bibliography.

9. See Hirsch-Luipold, 2021, pp. 13-15.

10. On the clues suggesting that the dialogue was composed very late in Plutarch's life, perhaps later than his other dialogues containing eschatological myths (*De genio Socr.* and *Fac.*), and most probably at an advanced stage of his priestly office, see especially Vernière in Klaerr & Vernière, 1974, pp. 93-96; see also De Lacy & Einarson, 1959, p. 173, n. a, and Görgemanns, 2009 (2003), pp. 327-328.

11. Görgemanns, 2009 (2003), p. 326. Such analysis in terms of logical assumptions and premises is further developed in Opsomer, 2016, pp. 37-41.

consider it a work of propaganda. If it is such, the religion it promotes is undoubtedly Delphic. This ideological affiliation is not only suggested by the setting of the dialogue. Françoise Frazier has rightfully insisted on the Delphic character of the work by illustrating its “*arrière-plan religieux et delphique*”,¹² suggesting that it could be put side by side with *De E apud Delphos*, *De defectu oraculorum*, and *De Pythiae oraculis* under Plutarch’s own label “Pythian discourses” (Πυθικοί λόγοι, in *De E* 1, 384e).¹³ Although the importance of the “Apollonian” proof of the immortality of the soul presented by Plutarch in *De sera num.* 17 (560c-d) is arguably overstressed in Frazier’s analysis, the ending myth does include a prominent oracular-themed scene which seems to be only functional to promote the sanctuary’s religion against its “lower” alternatives, taking advantage of the opportunity given by the otherworldly setting of the myth to make a metaphysical statement (28-29, 566b-d).¹⁴ This partisan “*propagande delphique*”,¹⁵ in any case, cannot be abstracted from a coherent philosophical agenda, most clearly stated in Ammonius’s symbolic interpretation of the Apollonian cult in *De E* 20-21 (in which ontological plenitude is contrasted with the multiplicity of earthly life, senses, and opinion, 393c-394c), and it is uncontroversial to claim that Plutarch’s “Delphic theology”¹⁶ develops tendencies that were already present in Plato’s thought.¹⁷

The Platonic inspiration is also evident in the formal composition of *De sera num.* As has been unanimously recognized for a long time, the myth of Thespesius

12. Frazier, 2010a, p. 73; her arguments are at pp. 83-87.

13. This expression is used by Plutarch as part of the book’s inscription to Sarapio (one of the interlocutors in *De Pyth. or.*) and referred to the bundle of books among which he sent to him *De E apud Delphos*. The inscription of *De sera num.*, instead, is to (Avidius) Quietus.

14. See especially Méautis, 1935a; Vernière, 1977, pp. 218-219, 243-247; Taufer, 2010, n. to 566b-c. Cf. the oracular insertions in the myth of *De facie* (26, 942a and 30, 944c): note that oracles and divination are never thematized in the argumentative part of this work.

15. Vernière, 1977, pp. 218-219.

16. Brenk, 1977, p. 138.

17. Vernière, 1977, pp. 243-247 stresses the coherency with Plato’s earlier promotion of the cult of Apollo and Helios as the optimal state cult in *Leges* V, 738b-d; VI, 754c; VIII, 828a. The preference for Apollo, as noted by Alesse, 2001, pp. 49-50 (with n. 23), was after all a “fundamental element” of the Socratic tradition. *Contra* Roskam 2021, pp. 162-166, who downplays the clear centrality of Apollo in Plutarch’s hermeneutics and religious thinking, apparently assuming that the only place in Plutarch’s *corpus* where Delphic religion is promoted is Ammonius’s speech in *De E* (“it would be rash to conclude on the basis of this speech that Apollo has, for Plutarch, taken the place of Zeus”, p. 164). I do not mean to claim that “Apollo, rather than Zeus, occupies the highest position in Plutarch’s pantheon” (*ibidem*) – such ranking would probably be of no interest to Plutarch –, but only that Plutarch engaged in the promotion of the Apollonian cult specifically (in its Platonically elaborated form), coherently with his own activity as a Delphic priest.

is modelled on the myth of Er at the end of Plato's *Respublica* (X, 614b-621b): not only do the two share the eschatological themes of afterlife punishments and reincarnations, as well as the visions' framing in a state of temporary "death" (note that Er came back to life on the tenth day, see 614b), but also a multitude of minor details, all already collected by Matteo Tauffer.¹⁸ It is notable that the "earlier" name of the protagonist himself, *i.e.* Aridaeus, renamed during his afterlife experience as Thespesius (*i.e.* "divinely inspired", *De sera num.* 24, 564c),¹⁹ might itself be an allusion to the name of Ardiaeus, a vicious tyrant whose chastisement was presented emblematically in Plato's myth (*Resp.* X, 615c-616a).²⁰ Plutarch also took clear inspirations from the mythic sections of Plato's *Phaedo* (108b-115a) and of the *Gorgias* (522e-527a) – some of which I will mention below –, and many connections can be found with other Platonic dialogues;²¹ in all these cases of imitation, he always made sure to add some original details and developments.²² Another possible model, sometimes credited with the innovation of an afterworld placed in the sky – like the one in Plutarch's myth –, rather than in the underworld is the eschatological myth of Cleonymus told by Aristotle's disciple Clearchus of Soli,²³ and it has been suggested that this author's city of origin might have itself inspired Plutarch's attribution of his protagonist to Soli.²⁴ Considering all these models, we should be aware that behind every symbol in the myth of Thespesius might always hide an imitation of an earlier image, and thus a second-hand use by Plutarch of its earlier meanings, connotations, or allusions.

Remarkably, this consideration does not seem to apply to the imagery which I examine in this article. In correspondence with the theme of the present volume, I have searched the myth of Thespesius for all the images of a possible "metallurgic" interest and found no fewer than three: the "smoothing away" of moral stains in chapter 26 and the colour of the stain of greed (565b-d); the immersions of the

18. See Tauffer, 2010, pp. 22-34, based on Tauffer, 1999.

19. On the name Thespesius and its etymology see Brenk, 1994, p. 11 with n. 21 and Tauffer, 2010, n. to 563b, spec. p. 81, n. 9.

20. See Tauffer, 2010, p. 27 and n. to 564c (or Tauffer, 1999, pp. 309-310).

21. See Tauffer, 2010, pp. 34-35; Frazier, 2019a, p. 211.

22. Plutarch's originality in *De sera num.* is stressed by, *e.g.*, Soury, 1942, p. 227; Görgemanns, 2009 (2003), pp. 325-327; Tauffer, 2010, p. 56; Frazier, 2019a, p. 192; Bremmer, 2021, p. 288.

23. On this author and on his myth see Tsitsiridis, 2013, pp. 3-4 and his commentary to Fr. 8 (= Proclus, *in Rp.* II 113,19-115,7 Kroll), spec. pp. 71-72. The idea that Clearchus's celestial afterlife was his original innovation has been problematized by Culianu, 1983, pp. 40-43 and Pérez-Jiménez, 2001, pp. 202-203, 205, who both argued that it was already present in Plato.

24. It was Tauffer, 1999, p. 318 n. 41 to call attention onto the 1901 suggestion by E. Rohde. See also Vernière, 1977, pp. 290-291; Santamaría Álvarez, 2007, p. 884; the preceding footnote.

greedy souls in metallic lakes in chapter 30 (567c-d); and the forceful reshaping of souls in chapter 32 to adapt them for their reincarnations (567e-568a). For none of these images is it possible to find any antecedent, neither in the Platonic models nor in Clearchus's; for what it seems, they were all produced by Plutarch's own imagination. Of the three, the previous interpreters have offered varying interpretations, all with different shortcomings and showing a general disregard for the evidence of textual parallels in Plutarch's *corpus* (privileging external connections, often with chronologically distant texts, or sometimes not giving any proof as a complement to personal intuition), which might be the main reason why an adequate agreement has not yet been reached on the matter. Given the limited space of this article, I will analyse only the image of the metallic lakes in chapter 30, after a cursory introduction to the stain of greed as presented in chapter 26: these two passages can form a unit as they concern the same moral fault (*i.e.* greed), whose symbolic treatment, both in its direct representation as a stain and in the representation of its chastisement, might be interpreted to be cohesive in theme and inspiration. Such unifying position underlies two 'alchemical' interpretations of the two images proposed independently by Jacques Boulogne in 1994 and Aurelio Pérez-Jiménez in 1996, which connect them in a process of metal purification and transmutation.²⁵ Since I intend to reject both proposals for the scene of the three lakes – in favour of a simpler explanation centred on the properties of metals and on ordinary artisanal treatments – they are the only interpretations I will discuss with regard to the stain of greed, reserving all the others for future treatment. In fact, I plan to provide a fully detailed account of the chromatic symbolism in the myth of Thespesius and of its earlier scholarly discussions in a follow-up article, to appear soon. For the moment, I will be exhaustive only about the metallurgic image in chapter 30, which has also been compared very recently, by Olivier Dufault, with some of the details of the 'alchemical' visions told by Zosimus of Panopolis in his three *Práxeis*.²⁶ I will show that the similarities, although present, are quite loose, but I will take inspiration from this parallelism to suggest – as a mere possibility – that the Greek use of metallurgic imagery in eschatological contexts (apparently not predating Plutarch's *De sera num.*) might have developed from the religious aesthetics of the Judaic and Egyptian traditions, perhaps in the syncretistic climate of Alexandria.

As is probably already clear, my approach to the interpretation of Plutarch's fictional myth is thoroughly anti-literalist. Despite the presence in the dialogue of

25. Boulogne, 1994; Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, pp. 301 and 305-306.

26. Dufault, 2019, pp. 109-110.

a single indication, possibly tongue-in-cheek, that the *mūthos* should be taken as a necessary complement to the “demonstration” (ἀπόδειξις) hitherto conducted by means of *lógos* (22, 563b),²⁷ the correspondence between Plutarch’s explicit hesitation to tell the myth as something possibly incompatible with “likelihood” (τὸ εἰκός, 18, 561b) and the formulas used by the narrators of the eschatological myths in *De genio Socr.* and *De facie* to frame them – interpreted by Pierluigi Donini as compositional devices to invite the reader to careful interpretation –²⁸ is arguably a sign that the myth of Thespesius should not be taken at face value.²⁹ This, therefore, should not be understood as a revelatory depiction of the afterlife teaching dogmatically about the sphere of the divine and its relationship to human beings,³⁰ but most probably as an “enigmatic” tale, *i.e.* as an oblique discourse “alluding” to some truthful discernments on the divine – and possibly on other subjects – rather than merely stating them,³¹ coherently with the symbolic approach to the exegesis of mythology and religion exhibited by Plutarch in *De Is. et Os.* and *De E.*³² In this approach, the interpretation of the myth in *De sera num.* can only be developed along two lines: on the one hand, all the possible connections between the scenes in the mythic tale and the argumentative part of the dialogue must be investigated in the search for unitary interpretations, to be surely preferred on the central themes;³³ on the other hand, a fine-grained literary analysis of the individual images in the myth cannot be prescindend.³⁴ In fact, a correct collocation of the mythic scenes into the macrotects of their dialogues must necessar-

27. This indication is taken seriously by Görgemanns, 2009 (2003), pp. 325-327, and given central relevance in his account of the myth.

28. On *De facie* 30, 945d, see Donini, 2011b, n. 439. On *De genio Socr.* 21, 589f, see Donini, 2017, p. 13 with n. 9 at p. 68 (in which he claims to agree with Deuse, 2010, pp. 169-197), and pp. 40-41.

29. See Deuse, 2010, pp. 169-173 and 197.

30. For such literal readings cf. Méautis, 1935a; Cumont, 1942, pp. 195-200; Soury, 1942, pp. 211-228 (but he considers the possibility of a symbolic interpretation, on a single detail, at p. 222; another opening to a non-literalist interpretation might be found at p. 159); especially Torraca, 1991, pp. 104-106; Helmig, 2005, p. 324.

31. Cf. Vernière, 1977, pp. 311-314; Dörrie, 1981, pp. 103-104; Frazier, 2019b, pp. 319-327.

32. On which see Hardie, 1992, pp. 4744-4745, 4746-4761, 4781-4783 (who however does not comment on Plutarch’s fictional myths).

33. This approach was firstly advocated for by Donini, 1996 (1988) for the analysis of the myth in *De facie* (he coherently maintained it in Donini, 2011b), and was endorsed as a general method by Hirsch-Luipold, 2002, pp. 139, 142-143; 2014, pp. 171-175. It was applied to *De sera num.* by Frazier, 2019c (2010b), who reiterated it programmatically in Frazier, 2019b, pp. 325-326.

34. This is the main approach of, *e.g.*, Tauffer, 2010, and is criticized for its partiality by Frazier, 2019b, pp. 324-326; her analyses of the myth in Frazier, 2019a and 2019c (2010b) are arguably guilty of the opposite excess. Both approaches are well-represented in Gagné, 2015, but I disagree with his conclusions centred on intertextuality.

ily be coupled with an appropriate understanding of their microtextual meanings and implications, such as cultural connotations and intertextual allusions, and it is the bottom-up analysis of these that may allow us to reach the best, and optimally comprehensive, interpretations. This is the approach on which I have focused in my analysis of the image in chapter 30 – whose connection with the argumentative part of the dialogue is quite faint – led by the assumption that an effort to understand the meaning of small details cannot be overruled by broader interpretations calibrated on larger details: when an image seems superfluous or unrelated to the central meanings of the myth, it might always carry secondary meanings or connotations, which should not be ignored.

A corollary of this anti-literalist stance is that not only does it forbid taking at face value the “religious” content of the myth, but its “philosophical” implications too: if we must not consider a dogmatic truth that souls are, e.g., punished by being tortured in a pit,³⁵ we will surely not infer from the descriptions of their qualities and alterations that Plutarch genuinely regarded disembodied souls to be “concrete”, which would probably be in contradiction with his Platonist assumptions.³⁶ Indeed, multiple scholars have pointed out how much Plutarch exaggerates the souls’ corporeality in the myth of Thespesius,³⁷ especially in the presentation of their punishments, so materially grotesque as to easily suggest comparisons with those in Dante’s *Comedia*.³⁸ This concreteness, probably, should never have been taken seriously, but

35. As in *De sera num.* 30, 566e-567a, discussed below, sec. 3,1. Plutarch explains in *De aud. poet.* 2, 16e-f and 17b-c that the traditional depictions, in poetry, of the underworld as a frightening place are fictional (none of the poets have ever believed in them), and in 17d-f invites the reader to remember that even philosophers (including Socrates in Plato, *Phd.* 69d) are in extreme difficulty about these matters, which entails that poets certainly have no knowledge of them. On this “Sceptic pose”, related to Plutarch’s pious εὐλάβεια (“caution”) on religious matter, see Hardie, 1992, p. 4754; see also p. 4775-4777 on Plutarch’s disposition towards traditional accounts of the afterworld. Cf. also *Amatorius* 17, 762a; *De prim. frig.* 9, 948f, and the ending eschatology in *De lat. viv.* 6-7, 1129f-1130e, on which see Hilton, 2019; unconvincingly, he interprets it as a rhetorical move modelled on the Epicurean rationalization of traditional myth (see spec. pp. 134-138). Note that his article lacks references to important Plutarchan texts such as *De aud. poet.*

36. In *De an. procr.*, coherently with Plato’s *Timaeus* (41d), Plutarch presents the individual souls to be composed out of the same constituents of the cosmic soul (26-27, 1205c-1026d). This is unambiguously immaterial, albeit eternally associated with the body of the world. On this subject, I mostly agree with Deuse, 2010, pp. 188-189 (but see below), and disagree with, e.g., Alt, 2005, p. 38, who infers a materialist psychology from *De sera num.* 26, 565c.

37. See Latzarus, 1920, pp. 132-133; Soury, 1942, p. 223; Taufer, 2010, p. 17.

38. For comparisons with Dante – and his probable lack of knowledge of Plutarch’s works – see Méautis, 1935b, pp. 58 and 69; Soury, 1942, p. 227; Ziegler, 1951, sec. III,7,g, col. 850; Torraca, 1991, pp. 109-112; Taufer 2010, pp. 17-18, n. 15.

Werner Deuse's claim that Plutarch "simply delights in graphically displaying punishment after death and thus permitting his imagination to present the doctrine (established by argument) of the chastisement and purification of immortal souls as a vivid tale"³⁹ appears to be somewhat reductive and dismissive. Rather, we should consider the souls' corporeality to be firstly coherent with, and subordinated to, Plutarch's choices of symbols, because once he had found a "decodable" image to insert in his myth (be it more or less "concrete"), he could not do otherwise than accept the necessary assumptions which made it intelligible to the reader. Of course, there might have also been aesthetic or rhetorical purposes influencing Plutarch's choices: scary as his chastisements are, it is not far-fetched to suppose he may have also intended them to trigger in his audience some emotional response⁴⁰. Two further "compositional" preoccupations – possibly able to restrain the choice of some of Plutarch's imagery – were to make sure that the narration sufficiently paralleled and improved on its models, *i.e.*, centrally, Plato's eschatological myths, and the intention to visualize as mythic scenes the religious truths touched upon in the argumentative section of the dialogue which were deemed to be indemonstrable by simple reasoning.⁴¹ This latter intention does not seem to concern the details of the punishments in chapters 30-31: these are indeed visualizations of the claim that souls are punished after death, and their variety a visualization of the specificity of the chastisements, but all their minute details, with respect to these "truths", do appear to be gratuitous.

Now, since none of the images in a cohesive myth such as Thespesius's can be interpreted in isolation from their contexts, it is necessary, before coming to the analysis of the scene of the three lakes, to have a clear idea of its narrative setting and of the relevant information which surrounds it. For this reason, it is important to first look at the beginning of the myth.

39. Deuse, 2010, p. 188. Cf. Frazier, 2019a, p. 216: "*dans ces visions saisissantes, [...] il n'y a pas qu' imagination poétique: l' image du mythe manifeste le rapport étroit qui unit attitude sur terre et rétribution céleste et donne à voir ce qui échappe à notre sensibilité terrestre*" (her emphasis).

40. See Boulet, 2010, pp. 61-64. For other comments on the "emotional" or "irrational" functions of the myth, cf. Vernière, 1977, pp. 304-305, 326; Taufer, 2010, pp. 14-18 (anticipated in Taufer, 1999, p. 316).

41. On Plutarch's εὐλάβεια on religious matters see above, n. 35. In elaborating these "truths" in mythic form he was of course inspired by Plato's approach to the philosophical myth as an εἰκῶς ("likely" and "representative") exposition (see his citation of the master in *Glor. Ath.* 4, 348a-b). The link has been most recently discussed in De Simone, 2016, pp. 63-66.

1.2. THESPESIUS' S APPARENT DEATH AND THE COLOURED STAINS OF VICE

When Plutarch begins narrating his myth (*De sera num.* 22, 563b-e), he introduces its protagonist as a man from Soli and friend of Plutarch's own acquaintance Protopogenes, who is implied to have reported the tale along with other "equally worthy friends".⁴² This man, named Aridaeus (see 24, 564c), is presented as a degenerate who, spending his early life in excessive "licentiousness" (ἀκολασία), quickly lost most of his "property" (οὐσία), thereby turning into a "wicked" (πονηρός) person. In fact, his regret made him pursue his vanished "riches" (πλοῦτος) in such a way that he would not refrain from any "shameful" (ἀισχρός) action serving a "fruition" (ἀπόλαυσις) or a "gain" (κέρδος); this behaviour, in addition to procuring him a "not abundant property", brought him a much greater fame of "wickedness". The moral profile of this character, clearly a hedonist and unscrupulous lover of money, may be understood as a prefiguration of the souls' vicissitudes later described in the myth, most of which are somehow connected with his vices; most importantly, it might explain Plutarch's noticeable insistence in the myth on the harsh consequences of greed and unrestraint in pleasures, on whose depiction he focuses much more than on the penalties for, e.g., violence and rage. The focus on the greed of Aridaeus may also be taken to represent the claim in chapter 19 that vices are sometimes inherited by people from their parents, generally in a latent form (561c-562a), because Aridaeus's attachment to money, as will be clear below, was clearly passed over to him from his father (30, 566f).⁴³ Comforted by this connection with the argumentative part of *De sera num.*, we may already assume that the myth should be taken as a symbolic tale on moral turpitude – mainly on that concerned with earthly pleasures and possessions –,⁴⁴ and

42. On Plutarch's usual "corroboration" of the truthfulness of his myths, applied to his fictional informants, see Deuse, 2010, pp. 172-173.

43. See the reason why he poisoned his guests, below, sec. 3,1. On the hereditary nature of this vice cf. *De cup. div.* 7, 526d.

44. Cf. Muñoz Gallarte, 2019, p. 188: "On the one hand, the Quaeronean [*sic*] sketches a framework that, if it cannot be considered historical, at least seems logical in the context of the tractate. On the other hand, the story is used to offer a practical example of Plutarch's ethical or moral rules of conduct". In the debate on whether the myth of Thespesius should be taken as a faithful report of a Near-Death Experience (NDE) or as a literary fiction, Muñoz Gallarte, like me, opts for the latter option: "[...] the [ancient] authors [of accounts of Near-Death Experiences] consider these stories as myths and not testimonies with evident moral purposes to the reader [...]" (p. 192). To his bibliography add Hani 1975, who anticipated the more recent debate by interpreting both the myth of Thespesius and the myth of Timarchus (in *Gen. Socr.*) as reports of shamanic ecstasies, and Culianu 1980, who revised this position in the framework of the phenomenology of religion, rejecting the hypothesis of a historical dependency (spec. p. 171).

therefore expect its messages to go beyond a simple declaration of the existence of afterlife torments (more specifically, of the wicked whose chastisement has continued onto their descendants, as teased by Plutarch in 18, 561b); perhaps, it may also contain some insight on the nature of greed and of the other vices.

As Plutarch continues (22, 563d-e), Aridaeus, worried for the remainder of his life, received a response from the oracle of Amphilocus informing him that he “would do better” (and “feel better”, *πράξει βέλτιον*) only after dying. This, “in a certain way”, is what happened to him not long after the response: he fell from a height and “died” right away due to a blow to the neck, and when he “resurged” on the third day he changed completely.⁴⁵ He became the most “rightful” person his contemporary Cilicians had ever known with respect to contracts and engagements, but also the most “pious” towards the divinity, the most “painful” to enemies, and the most “constant” with friends. What caused this thorough transformation is the vision he received during his “death”, which made him experience how souls are treated after their departure from the body. In this journey through the afterworld, he was guided by the soul of a kinsman, who, explaining to him the meaning and reasons behind most of the sights, concentrated his visit on the process of each soul’s purification from the stains of earthly vice, carried out by means of painful punishments.

The idea that souls retain visible traces of their faults, which in their nakedness they cannot hide as was possible during their life (26, 565a-b), is clearly modelled on the myth in Plato’s *Gorgias* and on Socrates’s reflections on its content,⁴⁶ but Plutarch is original in presenting the souls’ visible turpitude as a crucial part of their chastisement: in his myth, in fact, the wicked cannot avoid being observed in all their baseness by their parents and ancestors, both good and bad, and this entails that the former are made to see how unworthy their descendants proved to be of their name, and the latter watch their punishments while they are themselves being punished, with obvious effects of shame and remorse.⁴⁷ The distinction between latent, deliberately hidden and exposed vices, as will be clear below, is a prominent theme in Plutarch’s

45. Thespesius was not completely dead: his “thinking [part]” (*τὸ φρονοῦν*) had ejected from the body (23, 563e) while “the rest of the soul” (*ἡ ἄλλη ψυχή*) remained in it “like an anchor” (24, 564c). The context of this vision is similar to that of Timarchus’s in *De genio Socr.* 21, 590a-b: on the correspondences see Taufer, 2010, pp. 19-21 and 42-48 (with discussion of the earlier literature).

46. See Plato, *Gorgias* 523d-e and 524c-525a. The connection was already made by Latzarus, 1920, pp. 130-131. Following De Lacy & Einarson, 1959, n. e to *De sera num.* 565b, cf. also Arrian, *Epict.* II 18,11. Vernière, in Klaerr & Vernière, 1974, n. 2 to 565b, also points to Plato, *Crat.* 403b; Taufer, 1999, p. 307, n. 11 also references Plato, *Resp.* IX, 577b.

47. See Taufer, 2010, n. to 565b.

gallery of punishments in chapters 30-31 (566e-567e), and was already anticipated by his own character in chapter 20, in the argumentative part of the dialogue (562b-d). This argumentative passage, in addition, already included a metaphorical reference to the “stain of badness” (κηλὶς τῆς κακίας) and to its “erasing” (see ἐξαλείψαι), which may be interpreted to prefigure the second of Plutarch’s innovations on the Platonic model, *i.e.* the presentation of the souls’ chastisement in terms of a “smoothing away” (see ἐκλεανθέντων, but also ἐκτέτριπται, used for the vice of “incontinence”) which can only end when the souls have reconquered their pristine “luminous and monochrome” condition (26, 565b-d).⁴⁸ Plutarch’s distinctly optical visualization of the souls’ wickedness and purity (introduced in 24, 565d) is closely related to his third, and most original, development of his model: the idea that the moral stains manifest their relationship with the vice that caused them by each providing a different colour to the souls’ continuous beaming (26, 565b-d).⁴⁹ Of these colours he lists four, which are associated with the vices of “miserliness and greed” (ἀνελευθερία and πλεονεξία), of “cruelty and bitter viciousness” (ὠμότης and πικρία), of “some incontinence in pleasures” (ἄκρασία τις περὶ ἡδονάς), and of “ill-will [...] with envy” (κακόνοια... μετὰ φθόνου). The list of stains, whose varying translations reflect the high degree of ambiguity in its terminology, has been the object of variegated scholarly discussions, only partly represented in the 2010 commentary to the myth written by Taufer.⁵⁰ In my interpretation – which, as I have anticipated, I will defend in a future article –,⁵¹ the colours of the stains should be identified as the following: the “dusky and filthy” (ὄρφνιος and ῥυπαρός) of avariciousness as dark red or brown; the “bloodshot

48. Wyttenbach, 1772, “*Animadversiones* [...]”, p. 112 pointed for comparison to Virgil, *Aen.* VI 735-751.

49. On the absolute originality of this image – “*per quanto ne sappiamo*” – see Taufer, 2010, p. 30, with n. 47 (or Taufer, 1999, p. 313, with n. 28). Frazier, 2019c (2010b), p. 357 interprets it as a development of Plato’s “*éventail des vices*” in *Phd.* 81e-82a.

50. Taufer, 2010, pp. 151-161.

51. Where I will also tackle all the existing scholarly treatments of the list of stains, including Muñoz Gallarte, 2012. I thank both the anonymous reviewers of the present article for recommending me to cite this work, but the reader should be aware that Muñoz Gallarte – albeit providing a helpful concise bibliography on the ancient symbolic meanings of the colours red, blue, green, and brown (for which he thanks Delfim F. Leão) – does not acknowledge any of the previous works specifically addressing Plutarch’s chromatic choices (see p. 240, n. 25). Furthermore, as I plan to show in the follow-up article, the parallelism he proposes between Plutarch’s image of the coloured stains and the pictorial metaphor used in the apocryphal *Acts of John* (28,6-29,12) is unwarranted: since Plutarch never makes mention of paintings or painters in *Vind.* 20, 24 and 26, it is certainly a stretch to claim that “both texts similarly conceive of the soul like a canvas on which its owner paints colors derived either from virtues or from passions” (p. 241).

and incandescent” (αίματωπός and διάπυρος) of frenzy as bright red; the *gláúkinon* (related to γλαυκός, “glaucous”) of hedonism as light blue or gray; and the “rusty and suppurated” (ιώδες και ὑπουλον) of vengeful spitefulness, assimilated with cuttlefish ink (ὡσπερ αἰ σηπίαι τὸ μέλαν), as dark verdigris.

My analysis of the list led me to the conclusion that the symbolism of the four colours cannot be decoded by reference to a single interpretative key: it is likely that there is no structure of meaning justifying their presentation in succession, and that each colour has been chosen – quite artfully – for its own peculiar connotations. We may finally begin, then, with Plutarch’s description of the afterlife of greedy souls, starting with some considerations on their “dusky” stain.

2. THE STAIN OF MISERLINESS AND GREED

The list in chapter 26 (565b-d), as we have seen, is opened by ἀνελευθερία (“miserliness”, the condition of not acting as would be appropriate to an ἐλεύθερος, *i.e.* a “free” citizen; the adjective’s meaning overlaps with that of our “illiberality”)⁵² and πλεονεξία (“greed”, the relentless desire to have πλεόν, *i.e.* “more”). This vice is clearly related to people’s misuse of money and inappropriate attachment to it – *i.e.* φιλοπλουτία, φιλοχρηματία or φιλαργυρία, the specific subject of Plutarch’s *De cupiditate divitiarum* – both in the sense of economic greed and in the sense of stinginess, and may also encompass, perhaps, the unchecked strife for power, honours and fame – *i.e.* φιλοτιμία – which may in turn be correlated with a tendency to accumulate and exhibit riches.⁵³ As I will show, it is likely that this second nuance participates in the symbolic outline of the chastisement for πλεονεξία in chapter 30 (567c-d), where the term is coupled with ἀπληστία (“insatiability”).

Concerning the stain, while the adjective ῥυπαρός (“filthy”), as noted by Taufer, does not refer to a colour, but complements its description with a “negative trait”,⁵⁴ the term ὄρφνι(ν)ος is unambiguously chromatic. It may be translated as “dusky” as it is a derivative of the noun ὄρφνη (“darkness”, “night”),⁵⁵ but it does not simply refer to a low level of brightness like its cognates ὄρφναῖος, ὄρφνός and ὄρφνήεις (“dark”), but to a specific colour whose genesis is also accounted for in Plato’s *Timaeus*: “and then red (ἐρυθρόν), mixed with black (μέλαν) and white, [becomes] purple (άλουργόν);

52. See also below, n. 98.

53. Cf., *e.g.*, *De se ipsum laud.* 13, 544b-c. See also my comment on *Mar.* 34,6 below, sec. 3,2.

54. Taufer, 2010, n. to 565c.

55. The term ὄρφνη is used by Plutarch, with this meaning, in *De prim. frig.* 17, 953a and *De fort. Rom.* 12, 325e.

but [becomes] ὄρφνιον in the case more black, after these have been mixed and burned, becomes mixed in” (68b-c). It is clear that the colour should be identified with a particularly dark hue of red or brown (perhaps, originally, that of a dusky sky, namely in the horizontal strip above the horizon), which entails that renditions of the word that only convey its “dark” semantic core should be considered reductive and misleading.⁵⁶

This point, already, can undermine the unitary “alchemical” interpretations offered by Boulogne and Pérez-Jiménez, as they both assume the adjective ὄρφνιος to allude, coherently with their reading of chapter 30 (567c-d), to the colour of lead, evoked as a base metal which the alchemist would want to transmute into a nobler. Boulogne presents the greedy souls as the ones “*auxquelles l’hypertrophie du désir pour les plaisirs les plus matériels a donné la couleur du plomb*”,⁵⁷ but this metal, which we would rather claim, intuitively, have a gray or black colour without any shade of red,⁵⁸ is specifically described by an almost-contemporary of Plutarch, namely Galen, as φαιός (“gray”),⁵⁹ and in none of the extant Greek texts as ὄρφνι(ν)ος. According to Boulogne, these altered souls need a “*changement d’aspect*” (see τὰ εἶδη μετέβαλλον in 30, 567d) to reconquer their pristine moonshine (see ὡσπερ ἡ καθαρωτάτη πανσέληνος in 24, 565d), and because the superficial “blot” can be removed only

56. This was already stressed by Taufer, 2010, n. to 565c. According to one of the anonymous reviewers of the present article, the identification of ὄρφνιος as a dark shade of red or brown is less likely than the grey, especially considering the testimony in Pseudo-Aristotle, *Col.* 2, 792a27, where we read ἐλάττονος δὲ τοῦ φωτὸς προσβάλλοντος ζοφερόν, ὃ καλοῦσιν ὄρφνιον. However, the context of the quoted sentence (which is quite reminiscent of Plato, *Tim.* 68b-c) concerns different degrees of lighting, heating and burning of black-coloured objects, presented to consistently acquire different shades of red as a result (starting from 792a10, see the terms φοινικοῦν, ἀλουργές, πορφυροειδής); after the example of the sea appearing purple when its waves are hit by the light at a certain angle, Pseudo-Aristotle mentions the case of bird plumage, “for when exposed to the light it has a purple tint (ἀλουργές). When less light strikes it (ἐλάττονος δὲ τοῦ φωτὸς προσβάλλοντος), it is of that dark tint (ζοφερόν) which men call grey-brown (ὃ καλοῦσιν ὄρφνιον); when however the light is strong and mixed with primary black it becomes red (φοινικοῦν). But when it is light and shining as well it changes to flame colour (φλογοειδές)” (792a25-29, transl. Hett, 1936). It is hard to suppose that such a garish red plumage would be thought to manifest as purely grey when dimly lit. Pseudo-Aristotle also mentions the colour ὄρφνιος in 4, 794a32-794b10, while discussing the “chemical” optics of wool pre-dyed in black: τὸ καλούμενον ὄρφνιον εὐανθέστερον γίνεται τῶν μελάνων ἢ τῶν λευκῶν· οὕτω γὰρ ἀκρατέστερον αὐτῶν φαίνεται τὸ ἄνθος, κεραννύμενον ταῖς τοῦ μέλανος ἀγχαῖς. I will comment further on this passage in my follow-up article, also considering the testimony in Xenophon, *Cyr.* VIII 3,3 (where ὄρφνιοι garments are mentioned as part of a succession only including red-dyed textiles, *i.e.* πορφυρίδες, φοινικίδες, and καρύκιναι).

57. Boulogne, 1994, parr. 16-19 (digital edition).

58. Cf. Görgemanns, 2009 (2003), who translates the ὄρφνιος in our passage as “*Grau*”.

59. See *Loc. aff.* V 8, VIII 356 Kuhn.

by scraping (the reference is to the verb ἐκτριβεσθαι, used for the stain of “incontinence” in 26, 565b-d, and not to the general ἐκλεαίνειν), the chromatic transformation is obtained by means of a peculiar “*technique de décapage*”. This is illustrated by Plutarch in chapter 30 and “*consiste à provoquer le craquèlement <periklân> de la couche adventice, qui enrobe les âmes, puis à frotter ces dernières les unes contre les autres <suntribein>, afin de décoller les écailles qui se sont formées*”.⁶⁰ In this frame, the change in the moral quality of the souls runs parallel to a chromatic change induced by metallurgic means, and Boulogne can therefore note, in explaining Plutarch’s choice of the “alchemical” imagery, that “*l’idée de ce genre de solidarité entre la couleur et la substance constitue un des postulats de l’alchimie*”. Thus, once Plutarch has assimilated souls to rays of light, he “*est conduit à attribuer au chromatisme une signification essentielle, ce qui, par contre-coup, l’amène à imaginer une partie du châtement infernal des impurs sur le modèle de la transmutation des métaux*”. Boulogne’s explanation, although fascinating, has several issues, which add to his questionable connection of the colour ὄρφνιος with lead. For instance, he shows a certain disregard for chronology, not referring anywhere to specific texts of the alchemical *corpus*, but only substantiating his claims on “*l’alchimie*” – treated as a single and homogenous doctrine – by referring to classic scholarly expositions of the subject. The greatest problem, however, is that this interpretation might only apply to the stain of greed, leaving the three others unexplained: if the alchemical imagery results from Plutarch’s attribution of a “*signification essentielle*” to the souls’ chromatism, one may wonder why he has not imagined the colours of the other stains – *i.e.* the ones that are not “*leaden*” – so that they may have a role in in the same metallurgic procedure; after all, they all have to be “*smoothed away*” (26, 565c) from their associated souls in the same way, in order for these latter to reconquer their original, “*smooth and continuous*” moonshine (24, 565d).

Pérez-Jiménez, in fact, tackles the question in another way, and prefers to ask – reversely – why is it that the only souls subjected to metallic bathing are the ones of the “*ambiziosi*” and “*incontinenti*”?⁶¹ In answering the question, he notes that these sinners are precisely the ones whose colour had been described in chapter 26 to be the “*scuro*” (ὄρφνιος), and that the first lake in which they are immersed in chapter 30, appropriately, is that of lead. The latter detail appears to be a mistake (as we will see, the souls are plunged into the leaden lake only after having been immersed in

60. On such unlikely interpretation of the verbs see below, sec. 3.2.

61. Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, pp. 305-306.

the golden),⁶² and the former translation simplistic, but the alchemical interpretation then proposed is not without merits, as it is grounded in almost-contemporary works of alchemy: Plutarch might have used the term λίμνη (“lake”) in the “mystic” sense given to it by the alchemists (now unknown to us),⁶³ and the first “leaden” step might have been linked somehow to the operation of μελάνωσις (“blackening”), already considered by early Greco-Roman alchemists as a preliminary phase for transmutation into noble metals.⁶⁴ Pérez-Jiménez, in any case, also suggests alternative interpretations, equally hypothetical and therefore just partly developed.⁶⁵

The two “alchemical” interpretations have their evident shortcomings, which make them hardly viable to account for Plutarch’s choice of the couple “dusky and filthy” as a qualifier of the stain of greed. My tentative suggestion, which I will better substantiate in the follow-up article, is that its colour may allude to a patch of iron rust.⁶⁶ In this connection I was inspired by Ovid’s use of the term *ater* (“sable” or “lustreless-black”, as opposed to *niger*, *i.e.* “glossy black”) to refer to the colour of *ferrugo*, *i.e.* “iron rust”, in *Met.* (XV 789, in a metaphorical context). This adjective, together with *pullus*, appears to be the closest Latin equivalent one can find of the Greek ὄρφνι(ν)ος, and this comparative evidence, especially if Plutarch’s partial knowledge

62. In a personal communication, Aurelio Pérez-Jiménez defended his subversion of the lakes’ succession with a sophisticated and seductive textual argument: according to him, the scene opens with the souls already inside the golden lake (ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῷ χρυσοῦ διαπύρους καὶ διαφανεῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ φλέγεσθαι γενομένας, 30, 567c), and it is only with the leaden that they begin to be explicitly, actively “immersed” by the demons (ἐνέβαλλον εἰς τὴν τοῦ μολίβδου βάπτοντες, my emphasis); after this, the souls continue to be cyclically plunged into the iron, gold, and again into the lead. In this scheme, the initial submersion in gold represents the souls’ condition preceding the chastisement (*i.e.*, their earthly possession of external riches, power, prestige, etc.), while the following immersion in lead, first step of the punishment, overturns this splendour by plunging the souls into obscurity (and is metaphorically linked to the alchemical operation of μελάνωσις, see below). I still prefer to interpret the golden lake as the first in the cyclical immersions: since it is unbearably hot – burning the souls to the point of making them διάπυροι καὶ διαφανεῖς –, it surely is an integral part of the chastisement, rather than being merely used to represent the souls’ earthly splendour. In any case, Pérez-Jiménez’s current interpretation of the passage fully recognizes the chastisement as a form of *contrapasso*, also including visual representations of the souls’ conditions (prestige, obscurity). This is perfectly in line with the position I defend below, sec. 3.

63. See Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, p. 306, n. 49 for the references.

64. See Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, pp. 306-307, n. 51 for the references.

65. Namely, an astrological and a physiognomic interpretation, both unconvincing: see Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, pp. 307-308. He also considers an ethical interpretation inspired by a Plutarchan *locus* (*Non posse* 14, 1096c): see below, n. 144.

66. Note that I interpret the ἰῶδες (“rusty”) of the stain of envy to allude to *verdigris*, *i.e.* copper rust, as in Theophrastus, *Lap.* 37 with Richards & Caley, 1956, n. *ad loc.*

of Latin and many relationships with Roman contemporaries are kept in mind,⁶⁷ may be safely considered not irrelevant. Plutarch's character had already introduced an analogy with iron in chapter 11: the "hardness of badness" (τὸ σκληρὸν ἐν κακίᾳ) was there likened to "bad iron" (φαῦλος σίδηρος) as they are both "defective" (σαθρός) and their "impact resistance easily broken" (τὸ ἀντίτυπον εὐθραστον), because the evildoers are often taken over by regret and unsettlement about their acts – it is probably their confidence to be imagined to "break" – and those who are never found out may live the rest of their lives in constant fear and superstition (555f-556d). Although a certain "economical" focus can be noticed in the terminology of this passage (see ὀνησίφορος, ἀνελεύθερος, ἀχάριστος), as well as in its reference to Simonides – named as a paradigm of old-age φιλαργυρία in a very similar passage in *An seni* (5, 786b) –, it does not concern "greed for riches" (χρημάτων πλεονεξία) specifically, as Plutarch mentions this vice together with other possible drives towards an evil deed (e.g. ἡδονή τις συνουσίας). In fact, the imagery of *De sera num.* 11 might be linked with his general decision to visualize all the souls as metallic bodies in chapter 26, which may underlie the reference to the "smoothing away" (ἐκλεαίνειν) of encrustations resulting in a purer luminosity. After all, in Plutarch's prose, as was already pointed out by F. Fuhrmann, souls and characters occur very frequently in analogies with metallurgic treatments and with properties of iron⁶⁸ – perhaps under the influence of the Stoic metaphor of *stómōsis* ("steel quenching") for the formation of the soul from *pneūma*, well present to Plutarch's mind⁶⁹, and in this intuitive frame of reference, arguably, not a great leap of imagination would have been required to conceive the very first stain of the list as a sombre spot of rust.

This identification proves to be especially appropriate if a passage in *Praec. ger. reip.* 26 is considered, in which φιλοπλουτία and φιλοχρηματία figure in an analogy with a piece of "iron full of rust (σίδηρος μεστός ἰοῦ) and a disease of the soul (καὶ νόσημα τῆς ψυχῆς)" (819e). Perhaps, in our passage, Plutarch used this symbol to allude to the baseness of stingy and greedy souls, whose degraded value he wanted to contrast implicitly with that of the metals they felt jealously attached to. In this sense, the economic and aesthetic value of ἀνελευθερία and πλεονεξία appears to be diametrically opposite to that of their shiny objects of desire, and their stain is probably meant to represent the ignobility, "lack of freedom", and low social status of the greedy.

67. On Plutarch's knowledge of Latin see Ziegler, 1951, sec. V, coll. 926-928; Brenk, 1977, p. 32, n. 5.

68. Fuhrmann, 1964, pp. 86-88, n. 1. Among the many, see the ones quoted below, nn. 113 and 140.

69. See *De prim. frig.* 2, 946c; *De Stoic. rep.* 41, 1052f-1053d; *De comm. not.* 46, 1084d-e.

3. QUENCH DEBASEMENT AS A *CONTRAPASSO* AND EXHIBITION

3.1. THE DESIGN OF THE CHASTISEMENTS AND THE THREE METALLIC LAKES

During his journey, Thespesius is made to witness a variety of spectacles, until his attention, following the “Pythian” insertion of chapters 28-29, is finally turned to the souls’ chastisements.⁷⁰ While he witnesses in shock the tortures that his wicked friends and relatives have to endure, he is suddenly left alone by his “gentle and familiar guide” (30, 566e-567a); instinctively, he tries to run away from the sight of his father’s suffering soul, but is stopped in his attempt by “frightening” beings and forced to go through an entire gallery of grotesque, atrocious punishments, on whose depiction Plutarch’s pen lingers in merciless detail (30-31, 566e-567e).⁷¹ The rationale behind the choices of punishments appears to oscillate between the idea of the souls’ actual self being brought to view in all of its unmitigated wickedness and the ironic enforcement of a *contrapasso*.⁷² The punishment inflicted on Thespesius’s father, who became “defiled” (μιαρὸς) for poisoning his guests for gold, seems to be rather uncharacteristic, in comparison with those that follow: he is presented as “emerging from a pit (βάραθρον), covered with brands (στίγματα) and scars (οὐλαί), [...] and not allowed by those in charge of the punishments to keep silent, but compelled to confess”⁷³ his vice to the guests he killed, as he had managed to evade detection during his life; his enforced confession already fits the model of the public exhibition of wickedness, but the form of torture is still quite tame, and is in fact specified to be only a part of the full punishment: “convicted here, he has already suffered some [of the penalties], and he is [now] brought to suffer the others” (566e-567a).

In his forced tour, Thespesius witnesses that people whose badness had already become well-known in life receive a weaker torment – it was explained in chapters 25-26 that they are under *Poinē*’s jurisdiction, not as harsh a punisher as *Dikē*

70. For speculation on the celestial region where the punishments may be implied to take place see Pérez-Jiménez, 2001, pp. 207-208; Deuse, 2010, pp. 177-181.

71. Latzarus, 1920, pp. 131-133 manifested disdain at Plutarch’s “*veritable galerie d’horreurs*”, which he connected with the cultural decadence of the Imperial Age, when “*la fièvre orientale avait fini par tourner toutes les têtes*”. Tafer, 2010, n. to 567b correctly remarked against Latzarus (as already done in Tafer, 1999, p. 315, n. 34), that Plato’s depiction of the punishment of Ardiaeus in *Resp. X*, 615e-616a was already impressive in its violence.

72. On the rationale of public “exhibition”, albeit unclearly, appears to insist Frazier, 2019c (2010b), pp. 355-358 and 2019a, pp. 214-216 (quoted above, n. 39 and below in this section, with n. 93); she also suggests, implicitly, a partial interpretation in terms of *contrapasso*. On this latter model see below.

73. Transl. De Lacy & Einarson, 1959. On the connotations of στίγματα, in this and in other passages, see Harker, 2020, pp. 556-562.

(564e-565b) –, since their vice only affects their “irrational and passionate part” (30, 567a). In this, they differ greatly from those who managed to keep their wickedness hidden during life, “cloaked with (περιβαλόμενοι) a screen (πρόσχημα) and repute of virtue”.⁷⁴ Since their depravity concerns their “reasoning and authoritative part”, some must endure the terrible pain of having their inward parts turned outwards “as the sea-scolopendras turn themselves inside out (ἐκτρέπουσιν ἑαυτάς) when they have swallowed the hook”⁷⁵ – an image whose original source appears to be Aristotelian⁷⁶ –, and others of being skinned and unfolded until their insides are revealed to the public to be “suppurated (or treacherous, ὕπουλοι) and dappled (ποικίλοι)” (30, 567b). This punishment adheres explicitly to the model of the exposition of the actual self, and already includes a shade of *contrapasso* for the way it forces the souls to get the reverse of what they sinfully obtained during their life (*i.e.*, their vices being now fully exhibited rather than hidden).⁷⁷ The zoological imagery, in this setting firstly appearing in the analogy with sea-scolopendras,⁷⁸ continues in the description of the following punishment. This is reserved to souls who have harmed someone else, and who may correspond, arguably, to both the “cruel and vicious” and the “ill-disposed and envious” mentioned in the list of stains: “he told of seeing other souls coiled like vipers (ἔχιδναι) around each other in twos and threes and yet greater number, devouring one another in resentment (μνησικακία) and malevolence (κακοθυμία) for what they had endured or done in life” (567b).⁷⁹ The transfiguration into frenzied vipers manifests the vicious and spiteful essence of these evildoers, and their close proximity allows for the occurrence of a *contrapasso*: as in life they “bit” other people in their vengeful and treacherous acts (which always followed some resentment), they are now “bitten” by rancorous souls sharing with them their bitter spite.

For the next *tableau*, Plutarch leaves aside the animal symbolism and presents us with the elaborate description of the metallurgic process we are interested in, which is forced onto the souls of the “insatiable and greedy” (30, 567c-d). This punishment, in my interpretation, is the last in the succession of penalties to adhere

74. This important theme is introduced in *De sera num.* 20, 562b-d (already commented on above, sec. 1,2), along with metaphors of “sheathing”. Cf. Fr. 120 Sandbach.

75. Transl. De Lacy & Einarson, 1959.

76. See Aristotle, *HA IX* 37, 621a6-9.

77. Cf. Santaniello, 2000, p. 410, who after using the word “*contrapasso*” states that the punishment is part of a “*schema di rovesciamento del mondo dei vivi coerentemente perseguito in tutta la descrizione dell’Ade*”. This interpretation appears to be quite forced for the myth of Thespesius and is better suited to the myth in *De genio Socr.* (*i.e.*, the main object of Santaniello’s paper).

78. The first zoological analogy in the myth (with birds) appears in 27, 565e.

79. Transl. based on De Lacy & Einarson, 1959, modified.

to the model of the exhibition of the actual self and imposition of a *contrapasso*, which is arguably the only model that can make it understandable in a coherent way with its preceding siblings. After this description, in fact, Thespesius moves to the treatment of the souls “whose punishment had passed over to descendants or children” (31, 567d-e):⁸⁰ if these “thought that they were already released from their sentence” it is probably because they had already received chastisements akin to the forementioned, and through these subjected to both public exposition and *contrapasso*. Their further punishment follows another model: since they have caused suffering in their offspring, it is not sufficient to purge them of their vice, but they must also endure the “most piteous” penalties of all: being tormented by their rancorous descendants angrily rebuking them for what they have made them suffer, thus coming face to face with the effects of their behaviour, without being allowed to run away (the zoological imagery returns here in the description of great progenies, clinging to their guilty ancestor “like veritable swarms of bees or bats”). When the greedy souls receive their metallurgic treatment, it is clear, they are still being punished for their individual vices, just like the spiteful “vipers” devouring each other; for them, as for these latter, an earlier part of the chastisement may have implied a generic torture and confession in a pit for criminals – as for Thespesius’s father, surely not long dead – and a later part, following specific transfigurations and *contrapasso*, their exposition to sinful descendants (if applicable). We may now examine the metallurgic process in full detail (30, 567c-d):

εἶναι δὲ καὶ λίμνας παρ’ ἀλλήλας, τὴν μὲν χρυσοῦ περιζέουσιν⁸¹ τὴν δὲ μολίβδου ψυχροτάτην ἄλλην δὲ τραχείαν σιδήρου· καὶ τινὰς ἐφεστάναι δαίμονας ὡς περ οἱ χαλκεῖς ὄργανοις ἀναλαμβάνοντας καὶ καθιέντας ἐν μέρει τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν δι’ ἀπληστίαν καὶ πλεονεξίαν πονηρῶν. ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῷ χρυσῷ διαπύρους καὶ διαφανεῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ φλέγεσθαι γενομένας ἐνέβαλλον εἰς τὴν τοῦ μολίβδου βάπτοντες· ἐκπαγεῖσας δ’ αὐτοῖσι καὶ γενομένας σκληρὰς ὡς περ αἱ χάλαι, πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ σιδήρου μεθίστασαν· ἐνταῦθα δὲ μέλαιναί τε δεινῶς ἐγίνοντο, καὶ περικλόμεναι διὰ σκληρότητα καὶ συντριβόμεναι τὰ εἶδη μετέβαλλον· εἴθ’ οὕτω πάλιν εἰς τὸν χρυσὸν ἐκομίζοντο, δεινάς, ὡς ἔλεγεν, ἐν ταῖς μεταβολαῖς ἀληθδόνως ὑπομένουσαι.

80. Transl. De Lacy & Einarson, 1959, as for the one which follows. A description of the specific suffering of these souls had been teased by Plutarch’s character in 18, 561b, presented as the subject of the myth.

81. Like all the recent editors, including Ingenkamp & Bernardakis, 2010, I accept Johan J. Reiske’s emendation of the manuscripts’ περιζέοντος (referred to χρυσοῦ) with περιζέουσιν, more coherent with the syntax of the following ψυχροτάτην and τραχείαν.

“And [he said] there were lakes (or ponds) lying side by side: one seething all around, of gold, another extremely cold, of lead, and the other rough in iron; and some demons stood in charge [of them], like blacksmiths raising and sinking partially, with instruments, the souls of those who were bad due to insatiability and greed. Indeed, after [these] became incandescent and shiny in the gold as a result of the burning, they threw them into the [lake] of lead, quenching them; there congealed, and become hard as hailstone, they transferred them again to the [lake] of iron; and there not only they became terribly black, but also, breaking and shattering due to hardness, they changed their shapes: thus they were again taken into the gold, enduring, as he said, terrible agonies in their transformations”.

As in the myth in Plato’s *Phaedo*, in which the evildoers are punished by being repeatedly plunged back (see αὔθις, πάλιν)⁸² into Tartarus and then into either the river Cocytus or Pyriphlegethon, until their pleas, shouted from the Acherusian lake (λίμνη!), finally meet the grace of their own victims (114a-b), Plutarch probably implies his immersions of the greedy to go on cyclically until the punishment is deemed complete. If we are correct in identifying the “dusky and filthy” blot of ἀνελευθερία and πλεονεξία in chapter 26 (565c) as a patch of iron rust, it should be only coherent that souls affected by ἀπληστία and πλεονεξία, in their chastisement, are treated like metal objects. Their “partial” (ἐν μέρει) immersions in lakes of different qualities, with the associated alterations and the explicit simile with “blacksmiths”, certainly evoke the image of a process of iron quenching or tempering.⁸³

These operations, when associated with iron steeling in the notion of *stómōsis*, were probably understood by Plutarch – like Aristotle – to be related to a removal of non-ferrous impurities or rust,⁸⁴ and this scene has indeed been read as a further visualization of the souls’ purification from their moral stains – adding on the earlier concrete image of the “smoothing” (in ἐκλεανθέντων) of chapter 26 (565c-d) –, giving us the details of a more elaborate cleansing procedure. We have already seen that Boulogne referred to it as a “*technique de décapage*”, but Yvonne Vernière already in 1977 implied an interpretation of the described treatment as a cleansing process, by comparing it with the fire purification mentioned by Virgil in *Aen.* VI (739-742,

82. The correspondence was already pointed out by Tauber, 2010, n. to 567d, who also referred to Pseudo-Plato, *Ax.* 371e-372a.

83. On these techniques see especially Congdon, 1971; on quenching I return below, sec. 3,2.

84. See *De gar.* 17, 510f with the parallel in Diodorus Siculus, *BH* V 33,4; Aristotle, *Meteor.* IV 6, 383a29-b5. This may be important in the analogy with quenching in *De facie* 28, 943d-e, referred to the souls’ “strengthening” when they finally manage to reach the moon.

“Plutarque remplace les flammes purificatrices par trois étangs de metal en fusion”),⁸⁵ and by presenting as a possible parallel the Zoroastrian belief in an ordeal at the end of time, requiring all souls to wade in a river formed by the melting of all metals on earth.⁸⁶ Boulogne, discarding the hypothesis of an Eastern influence, preferred to see in this “*châtiment purificateur*” his alchemical dynamic beginning with the souls’ “degeneration” through “*décoloration*”, “*marquée par l’apparition de la couleur noir*”, and ending with their full “regeneration” in a fourth golden bath, in which they reacquire the lost “*diaphanéité*”.⁸⁷ Pérez-Jiménez too, who in 1996 merely pointed out the curious correspondences between the image of the lakes and the alchemical procedures,⁸⁸ succinctly referred to these same lakes in 2001 as places in which “*los demonas castigan las almas de los malvados y las purifican y transforman*”,⁸⁹ unambiguously implying an interpretation of them as instruments of cleansing.⁹⁰

Such interpretations, on closer inspection, are undermined by a crucial problem: namely, that the punishment for the greedy, if interpreted as a purification process, would be unjustifiably incoherent with all the others witnessed by Thespesius. If neither his father’s pit and forced confessions, nor the turning inside-out and skinning of the undetected wicked, nor the grouping together of rancorous evildoers, nor the exposition of evil patriarchs to their offspring’s reprimands can be “materially” functional to purifying the souls, one may wonder why Plutarch would choose to visualize only the penalty for greed as a concrete purification. Unless one posits a specific link with iron rust, and that the souls’ cyclical immersions serve the end of expelling it

85. Vernière, 1977, pp. 202-203; see also above, n. 48.

86. Vernière, 1977, p. 203; this eschatology is described in the late texts *Bundahišn* 30,17 and *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 31,10, but was already alluded to in *Yasna* 30,7, 32,7 and 51,9. Vernière’s connection has been rightfully criticized by Culianu, 1980, p. 170 and by Sfameni Gasparro, 2014, n. 5 (see also Taufer, 2010, pp. 51-54 for his analysis of the inconclusive parallels between Plutarch’s myth and the otherworldly journey in *Ardā Wirāz*, which he develops in response to another of Vernière’s suggestions, in Klaerr & Vernière, 1974, p. 110); it should be also noted that an ordeal is not identical with a purification. A comparison between the two images, stressing their difference (“between Greek wit and Persian seriousness”), was also drawn by Brenk, 1977, pp. 129-130, as part of a sequence of considerations on the influence of Zoroastrianism upon Plutarch (“very small indeed”). On Plutarch’s knowledge of this religion – clear from his remarks in *De Is. et Os.* 46, 369d-370c – see also Hirsch-Luipold, 2021, p. 20. Note that Plutarch refers to Persian culture in *De sera num.* 25, 565a, in an analogy with their customs in punishing (a passage reminiscent of *De aud. poet.* 13, 35e): see Taufer, 2010, n. to 565a.

87. Boulogne, 1994, parr. 19-22 (digital edition). His interpretation clearly requires the fourth bath to be the last, and the chastisement to not go on cyclically: see below, sec. 3,3.

88. See Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, pp. 305-306.

89. See Pérez-Jiménez, 2001, p. 209.

90. However, see above, n. 62 for his most recent clarifications on his position.

completely (which is unlikely), it is more probable that this punishment is modelled in the same way as the ones preceding it. At least three scholars, in fact, have already shown how to interpret the chastisement as a form of *contrapasso*. The first appears to have been David A. Wyttenbach in 1772, who in his note to the passage followed his tentative explanation of the image – on which I will return below – with the intuitive remark that “*commode ceteroquin avaros in metalla immergi iisque cruciari fingit, quia horum ipsis in vita inexplebile fuit desiderium*”.⁹¹ This acknowledgement, unfortunately, can apply only to gold, which is also what limits the interpretation in terms of *contrapasso* proposed in 2014 by Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, as part of an article on the symbolism of gold in eschatological contexts.⁹² In addition to underlining that gold, acquiring the “negative valence” of an object of “*bramosia e avidità*”, is used in the myth as an instrument for the punishment of these specific vices, she correctly remarked that it is also presented in connection with “*i caratteri del calore e della luminosità, in opposizione all’oscurità e al freddo del ferro e del piombo*”, a detail of which she did not provide an interpretation. On the opposition between these metals, although only in the form of passing comments, much greater emphasis was put by Frazier in her 2010 and 2019 analyses of the myth.⁹³ Despite never using the specific expression *contrapasso*, she surely implied a reference to the model; in fact, in both texts, just after mentioning the “*plomb glacé*” (*sic!*) of the souls’ second immersion, she asked in a parenthesis: “[*est-ce*] *le total opposé du métal pour lequel ils brûlaient du désir?*”, citing in a footnote some poetic instances of the antithesis between the two, unfortunately all external to Plutarch’s *corpus*. This opposition does not seem to extend to iron, since after mentioning that the souls are “*enfin trempés (sic!) dans un étang de fer*”, in her 2010 analysis she asked: “[*est-ce*] *pour pouvoir être ‘travaillés’?*”, without clarifying the underlying metallurgical rationale; there are reasons to believe that she wrongly understood this treatment to be connected with the souls’ reshaping in chapter 32 (567e-568a). Independently of these earlier interpretations,⁹⁴ we may ourselves verify whether the metallurgic treatment can be also interpreted, like the preceding punishments, to achieve the exposition of the greedy souls’ actual self, and in this specific sense transform them visibly and concretely into “*ce qu’elles étaient*”.⁹⁵

91. Wyttenbach, 1772, “*Animadversiones [...]*”, p. 124.

92. See Sfameni Gasparro, 2014, pp. 199-200.

93. Frazier, 2019c (2010b), pp. 357-358; 2019a, pp. 215-216.

94. It is unclear whether the reference to “Greek wit” in Brenk, 1977, p. 130 n. 22 (quoted above, n. 86) implied an understanding of the punishment of the “avaricious” as a *contrapasso* or not. This does not seem to be true for his more recent remarks in Brenk, 1996, pp. 255, 257.

95. An unclear remark in Frazier, 2019c (2010b), p. 358.

3.2. THE CHEMISTRY OF THE SOULS' IMMERSIONS

That the punishment is modeled as a *contrapasso* is already clear, but the opposition in value between precious gold and lead and iron is best demonstrated by referring to Plutarchan *loci*. On lead, we may consider the verse from Simonides quoted in *De ad. et am.* 24 (65b-c) to describe the difference between flatterers and a true friend, feared by the former for they are evidently inferior: “against pure, refined (ἐφθός) gold, not even having lead” (Fr. 592 Page); a metaphor which immediately follows an analogy with counterfeit metals, reinforcing its semantic link with riches and commerce: “whenever, then, the flatterer, who is but a light and deceptive plated-ware (ἐπίτηκτος), is examined and closely compared (ἀντεξετάζεται) with heavy and solid-wrought (σφυρήλατος) friendship, he does not stand the test, but, being exposed [...]”⁹⁶ Plutarch had already introduced this metaphorical frame a few lines above (*De ad. et am.* 23, 64e) to describe the flatterer’s indisposition towards demanding favours, differing from the readiness of true friends: “flattery, on the contrary, in arduous and dangerous ministrations fails you, and if you test it by sounding, it rings a defective (σαθρόν) and ignoble (ἀγεννής) tone due to some excuse”;⁹⁷ it is in this acoustic specification that we may see a hint of the material constitution of the fake, “plated-ware” metal imagined by Plutarch, “ignoble” (compare with the ἀνελευθερία of the list of stains)⁹⁸ and even less worthy than lead. In fact, not only is the adjective σαθρός referred to “bad iron” in *De sera num.* 11 (555f-556d), as we have seen earlier in the comparison with the “hardness of badness”,⁹⁹ but it is also never coupled with any other metal in the extant Plutarchan *corpus*, and used by Plutarch’s character himself in *Quaest. conv.* VIII 3 to describe the texture of iron during a discussion on acoustic matters: “but if we must judge by appearances, it is rather iron that seems to have something defective (σαθρόν), porous (πολύκενον) and honeycomb-like (τενθρηνώδες); and it is very cacophonous (κακόφωνος) and the least vocal (κωφότατος) of metals” (3, 721e-f).¹⁰⁰ When writing of counterfeit metals, then,

96. Transl. Babbitt, 1927, slightly modified. Cf. *Adv. Col.* 32, 1126d. A similar image was already in Plato, *Resp.* VI, 503a, which itself echoed earlier poetic *loci*.

97. Transl. based on Babbitt, 1927, modified.

98. Cf. *De lat. viv.* 4, 1129d, where bronze is εὐγενής (“well-born”, thus “noble”) in a quotation from Sophocles (Fr. 864 Radt), which also appears in *An seni* 8, 788b and 15, 792a with the variant εὐπρεπής (“well-suited”, thus “decent”). Note that the Greek antonym for εὐγενής is ἀγεννής, which is used in pair with ἀνελεύθερος in *An seni* 5, 786b and *Alc.* 2,5, and already in Plato, *Gorg.* 465b.

99. See above, sec. 2.

100. Transl. based on Minar in Minar *et al.*, 1961, modified. In this context, iron is opposed to copper. Cf. *Quaest. Plat.* 7, 1005d.

it is not unlikely that Plutarch tended to visualize them as having an iron core, and he could compare the distance in value between this core and the exteriorly faked material to that between the gold and lead in the Simonidean quotation.¹⁰¹ Iron is somewhat contrasted with gold in *Praec. ger. reip.* 26 (819e), in Plutarch's mention of the interdiction of bringing gold into some sanctuaries and of introducing iron in all,¹⁰² but it is likely that this opposition, rather than concerning value, only depended on a metonymic association of gold with material riches and of iron with violence, as in Camillus's undiplomatic answer to Brennus's ambassadors in *Cam.* 29 (2).¹⁰³ It is here more appropriate to refer to Plutarch's repeated accounts of Lycurgus's monetary reform in archaic Sparta, which to eliminate all inequality and luxury in the Laconian population, among the other decisions, imposed a definitive substitution of gold and silver coins with iron money – of much inferior value – even treated with vinegar (allegedly) so that it would be useless for reforging (*Lyc.* 9);¹⁰⁴ an avid lover of riches, we may note, would not get many opportunities to accumulate them in Lycurgus's Sparta, only being allowed to exchange worthless iron on the legal market. An opposition between iron and nobler metals is also found in *Tim.* 29 (1), where the iron and bronze available in some spoils of war is made comparably worthless by the associated copiousness of silver and gold. After looking at these passages, we can finally claim with some foundation that Plutarch thought of lead and iron as metals of lowest value in a specifically economic sense; it is for this reason that he may have chosen them to inflict *contrapasso* on the “insatiable and greedy”: by being initially immersed in the boiling lake of gold – culturally, the most valuable metal of all –¹⁰⁵ these are firstly given, ironically, what they have always strived to accumulate during their lives, and then, by being plunged into the leaden and iron lakes, they are surrounded in worthless possessions, diametrically opposite to their earthly object of desire; the process is repeated until the punishment is deemed complete.

101. The metal which is faked is most probably implied to be gold: cf. *De ad. et am.* 2, 50a and *Cons. ad Apoll.* 4, 102f. For lead, cf. also *Ad princ. iner.* 2, 779f-780a, where the material is mentioned with earth and stone as a ballast for the stabilization of colossi and implicitly contrasted with the colossi's “heroic and godlike” looks.

102. This *exemplum* is used by Plutarch to introduce the metaphor of φιλοπλουτία and φιλοχρηματία as a piece of “iron full of rust”, quoted above, sec. 2.

103. Cf. also *Arist.* 21,4.

104. See also 19,2; *Lys.* 17,2-5; *Comp. Arist. et Ca. Ma.* 3,1.

105. Among the passages proving that gold is associated with the highest value, abundant in Plutarch's *corpus*, one may refer to its paradigmatic use in the hyperbolic comparisons in *De cap. ex inim.* 11, 92e and *Adv. Col.* 30, 1124e, quoting Plato, *Leges* V, 728a.

Similarly, because the souls are described to “transform” during the process, we may also suppose that the alterations are meant to correspond to different phases of a revealing of the souls’ actual self, especially considering that the final bath, of the three, is that of iron, and that the baseness of ἀνελευθερία and πλεονεξία – if my interpretation is correct – has already been symbolized by Plutarch as iron rust. This supposition can be sustainable only if the souls, in a certain way, are described to become akin to the metals they are plunged in, always finishing the cycle with the properties of (bad) iron, representing their ignobility: we will verify this by analyzing closely the ‘chemical’ details in the scene.¹⁰⁶ Before doing this, we may briefly note that the souls’ “transformations” are also described to be excruciatingly painful, which of course is necessary for the treatment to function as a punishment. It is easy to imagine how an immersion into a hot lake, “seething all around” (περιζέουσα), can induce pain – this is key to understanding the ironic use of gold as *contrapasso* – and it is equally easy to imagine it for an “extremely cold” (ψυχροτάτη) bath; Plutarch does report similar forms of thermic chastisement to have been inflicted on debtors in Asian cities before the liberation brought by Lucullus in *Luc.* 20 (2). These hot and cold immersions can achieve a further level of pain by being effected in quick succession, exploiting the sudden transition from one extreme temperature to the opposite, and there are signs in Plutarch’s *corpus* that the subject of temperature swings was among his preoccupations in contexts of medical reflection, and analogically associated with iron quenching: “not weaker than anything in [causing] transformation (μεταβολή) and in producing the birth of new diseases”, claims Plutarch’s character in *Quaest. conv.* VIII 9, “is the multiplicity of affections (πολυπάθεια) of the flesh [occurring] in the baths, like iron softened (μαλασσομένη) and made to flow (ρέουση) through fire, and then receiving quench hardening (βαφή) and steeling (stómōsis) through cold; – here flow in Acheron and Pyriphlegethon! This, I believe, is what a member of the generation just before ours would say, if he could look into the door of our bath-chamber” (3, 734a-b).¹⁰⁷ The common mention of the Pyriphlegethon in this passage – in close connection with an analogy between disruptive physiological alterations and iron quenching – and in Plato’s presentation of afterlife torments in *Phaedo* (114a-b) is noteworthy: given this further correspondence, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Plato’s passage might

106. On the centrality of chemical details to the interpretation of metallurgic symbols cf. the dubious Fr. *29 Sandbach.

107. In the final part of the quotation, transl. Minar in Minar *et al.*, 1961. The sentence in quotes is altered from Homer, *Od.* X 513. The reference in this passage is rather to πολυπάθεια, but in the following lines the focus is switched to excessive heat. Cf. *De tuenda* 17, 131b-c and 25, 136a-b (with a parallel analogy with quenching).

have indeed inspired the minimal structure of Plutarch's punishment,¹⁰⁸ which he might have developed as a metallurgic process following the lines of the same chain of associations as the one behind the passage in *Quaest. conv.* VIII 9. After the first two baths, the temperature of the medium – namely, that of the iron lake – does not seem to be relevant anymore, but the souls suffer in an equally intuitive way, as a result of their “breaking and shattering” (περικλώμεναι... καὶ συντριβόμεναι).

What might be unintuitive is the reason why the “hardened” souls (see διὰ σκληρότητα) should start to break only when they are immersed into the lake of iron. In fact, if hardness is interpreted to be the immediate cause of their fracturing, the effect should at least manifest at the same moment they acquire the property in the leaden lake, in which case their fractured shards could correspond to the films of iron oxides normally flaking off the surface of an incandescent piece of iron when quenched.¹⁰⁹ Boulogne circumvents this difficulty by interpreting the relevant verbs in a peculiar way, explaining, as we have seen, that the “scraping” technique requires the souls' superficial layers to “crackle” (περικλᾶν) before the souls can be usefully “smashed together” (συντρίβειν) for those layers to come off. If the flaking-off of the exterior films is mechanically induced by such “smashing together”, the image might have been inspired by the blacksmiths' use of hammering a piece of iron after heating it, which in addition to always thrusting away the superficial oxide films could be also instrumental to removing “slag” incursions (*i.e.* internal impurities) in the production of “wrought iron”.¹¹⁰ Boulogne's translation, however, is hardly defensible if Plutarch's use of the two verbs is verified in other passages, because in these, as it seems, περικλᾶν never refers to a superficial crackling, nor συντρίβειν to a reciprocated (συν-) pounding (τρίβειν), but both, when used in their concrete sense, always refer to deep fractures, collapses, and comprehensive or centripetal (συν-) fragmentations.¹¹¹ If we discard this possibility, then, but assume that the increase in the souls' hardness in the leaden lake should be directly responsible for the fracturing (rather

108. Brenk, 1996, p. 255 also mentions the Christian parallels in *Apoc.* 21,8 (with its λίμνη of burning fire and sulfur) and in the *Coptic Apocalypse of Paul* (2nd cent. CE), namely in 31,3 (with fire pits and rivers) and 38,2 (with a place of ice and snow).

109. See, *e.g.*, Congdon, 1971, p. 23, with n. 39. I could personally observe this phenomenon by heating and quenching an iron bar repeatedly, as part of an experiment for which I thank especially Marianna Marchini, Lucia Maini, and Ivan Aliprandi. Each immersion was indeed associated with a detachment of black oxidized flakes, which sank to the bottom of the container.

110. See Craddock, 1995, pp. 241-250.

111. See, *e.g.*, *De comm. not.* 40, 1081b (συντριβῆναι), *De Al. Magn. fort.* 13, 343f (κλάσασα καὶ συντριψασα), *Tim.* 7,1 (κατέκλασε καὶ συνέτριψεν, metaphorical), *De prim. frig.* 18, 953c (συντριβεσθαι, quoted below).

than any of the associated circumstances), a problem will yet remain, as we can find no Plutarchan passages associating iron quenching with this specific risk, but one connecting an excessive fall of temperature with the somewhat opposite result of undesired bending.¹¹² There is no way, therefore, to interpret the souls' hardness to be the immediate cause of the fracturing: it can only be the condition allowing for the effect to occur during the immersion in the iron lake; the direct cause remains this way indeterminate. Since it is true that quenching a piece of iron, in addition to making it harder, can dramatically increase its brittleness,¹¹³ we may suppose that the leaden bath has made the souls more prone to fracturing on possible impact with solid objects; such objects, then, might perhaps be identified as shards of iron filling up, floating on, or constituting the third "lake" in the sequence, whose described "roughness" (see *τραχεῖα*) – a possible yet unusual attribute for a fluid – might allude at its complete or partial solidity.¹¹⁴ In this regard, it might be not a coincidence that cast iron tends to actually form a thin grey scale of silicon dioxide (SiO₂) on its surface when it is molten at high temperatures,¹¹⁵ and it is not impossible to suppose

112. *De prim. frig.* 13, 950c.

113. See below in this section, with nn. 139 and 140.

114. Cf. the paraphrases by Latzarus, 1920, p. 131 ("*fer rigid* [?]"), Torraca, 1991, p. 119 ("*il terzo, di ferro acuminato e lacerante*"), and Boulogne, 1994, par. 22 (digital edition) ("*au sein d'un milieu dur* [?] *et raboteux*"). The "roughness" of iron appears to be paradigmatic: see *Quaest. conv.* VIII 3, 721e-f (already quoted above) and *Quaest. Plat.* 7, 1005d, with ἀνωμαλία ("irregularity") used to describe its surface; in *De comm. not.* 38, 1078f-1079a, the property of τραχύτης is defined as "irregularity with hardness" (ἀνωμαλία μετὰ σκληρότητος [!]). Note that in *Quaest. conv.* VI 9,2, 696a the surface of milk – as opposed to that of oil – is implied to have something τραχύ and said to contain a great share of "earthy" matter (reappearing after one sentence in the couple τὰ σκληρὰ [!] καὶ γεώδη μέρη), which is the reason why milk is the only liquid that does not reflect images. Similar optics are presented in *De facie* 17, 930c-d, with the ἀνωμαλία and τραχύτης of the moon mentioned in a quasi-synonymous pair (re-used in 23, 937a); cf. *Quaest. nat.* 12, 915a-b, in which the air mixed in the surface of the sea is supposed to become obscure when ἀνώμαλος and to return transparent when "smoothened". See also 20, 917a, where Plutarch describes boar blood as "rough and black" (τραχύ καὶ μέλαν[!]) and opposes it to deer blood, which is "thin and watery". Given all this evidence, we can assume that Plutarch could indeed visualize the lake of iron in a molten state, but that he would probably understand the τραχύτης of its surface to depend on the presence inside it of some solid parts, possibly "earthy", "hard", and "black". See the following footnote.

115. When a piece of iron contains around 2-5% of carbon molecules in solid solution, it is technically referred to as "cast iron": this has a much lower melting point than that of wrought iron (1150-1200 °C against over 1500 °C) but is too brittle to endure hammering or shaping – see Craddock, 2003. According to Campbell, 2015, pp. 277-279, when cast iron is heated at high temperature "in a furnace or ladle lined with a traditional refractory material" its surface is "continuously punctuated by the [...] arrival of bright circular patches"; these are "droplets of liquid refractory, melted from the walls and bottom of the vessel". In the frame of this phenomenon, and due to the interaction between the suspended droplets

that Plutarch had in mind such scale; however, there are strong uncertainties on whether cast iron was actually employed in Greek and Roman metallurgy – it seems that it was only considered a scrap product in the Imperial Age –¹¹⁶ which lowers the chances that Plutarch or any of his acquaintances were ever able to witness its chemical behaviour in person. Whatever the details of the iron lake’s solidity, multiple interpreters, comparably, seem to have imagined the leaden lake to be frozen and thus solid,¹¹⁷ probably to justify its “extremely cold” property, assumed to be incompatible with the metal’s molten state. Now, since Plutarch, in other works, refers two times to the strange phenomenon of “lead whetstones” (ἀκόνοι μολίβδου) allegedly liquefying in extreme cold, proving that “cooling not only condenses bodies, but liquefies them too” (*Quaest. conv.* VI 8,6, 695d),¹¹⁸ I argue that it is not necessary to posit that the leaden lake is solid: this can as well be liquid and function exactly like a quenching bath. In contrast, the ultimate effect of the “lake” of iron, whose temperature is functionally unnecessary,¹¹⁹ seems to require it to be partly solid: only in

and the underlying molten metal, “below approximately 1400 °C [...] SiO₂ appears on the surface as a dry, solid film, rather grey in colour. This film cannot be removed by wiping the surface because it constantly reforms”. Campbell connects these considerations with “his observations in an iron foundry where he once worked”: “for a common grade of grey iron, the surface of the iron was seen to be clear at 1420 °C. As the temperature fell, patches of solid grey film were first observed at about 1390 °C. These grew to cover the surface completely at 1350 °C. The grey film remained in place until about 1230 °C, at which temperature it started to break up by melting [cf. περικλώμεναι... και συντριβόμεναι!], finally becoming completely liquid at 1150 °C. As shown by Craddock, 2003, cast iron was certainly used in the West in the late Middle Ages for the procedure of “fining”, *i.e.* conversion into quenchable steel or wrought iron by controlled lowering of the iron’s carbon content (see below, n. 140), which was obtained by stirring the cast iron in a molten state in an open vessel or hearth. Craddock claims that in this procedure “[...] some of the iron oxides would have reacted with the silica in the clays of the crucible or hearth lining to produce a slag. In postmedieval Europe, it was common practice to encourage this by sprinkling clean sand onto the iron to remove the iron oxide scale as a liquid slag [...], some of which became incorporated in the pasty iron during the working” (p. 236).

116. See Craddock, 2003.

117. See Vernière in Klaerr & Vernière, 1974 (“*un autre de plomb, tout glacé*”); Torraca, 1991, p. 119 (“*il secondo, di piombo ghiacciato*”); Frazier, 2019c (2010b), p. 358 (“*plomb glacé*”); Gagné, 2015, p. 319 (“*des lacs bouillants et glacés*”). The translation by Taufer, 2010 is ambiguous (“*gelido*”), but in his n. to 567b, p. 203, n. 485, he refers to the constitution of the lake as an argument against the alleged realism of the myth (“*se il piombo è gelido, come vi possono affondare anime ben poco eteree come queste?*”).

118. The other passage is *De prim. frig.* 11, 949b-c; see also *Quaest. conv.* VI 5, 690f-691b. I have analyzed these passages and their sources in Morrone, 2020. Normally, molten lead is of course assumed to be hot: this is explicit in *De Is. et Os.* 13, 356c.

119. If the iron is molten, it should be implied to be extremely hot: that its melting point (over 1500 °C or 1150-1200 °C; see above, n. 115) is much higher than that of gold (1064 °C) and lead (327,5 °C) was of course well known in the ancient world: cf. Aristotle, *Meteor.* IV 6, 383a27-33.

this way can it oppose the souls' "immersion" by making them get stuck on its jagged parts, then fracturing and crashing them for the unrelenting pressure exercised by the demonic blacksmiths; if it were not for the souls' acquired hardness, maybe, they would rather deform and bend against the iron obstacles, and thus remain intact.¹²⁰

In any case, whatever the kind of obstacle the souls find in the third lake, their fracturing can be in a way mechanically understandable, while their becoming "terribly black" (μέλαιναί [...] δεινῶς), arguably, cannot. This point may be used to support the hypothesis that the chastisement consists in part in a revealing of the souls' actual self. Black, in fact, is a colour traditionally associated with iron, as is shown in the Pindaric lines "from adamant / or iron was your black heart forged" (*Enc.* 123, 5-6 Snell) which Plutarch quotes in no less than three of his philosophical works, including the very same *De sera num.* (13, 558a).¹²¹ Since the souls acquire this colour only when they are immersed in iron, their blackening can perhaps be understood as a sort of 'contagious' transferal of property: when the souls come into contact with the lake, they become black just like iron, and thus, at least in their colour, similar to it. The fact that the transferal is not chemically grounded may be itself a sign of the factitious character of the alteration, as this would only be justified by Plutarch's intention of making the souls becoming iron-black at the end of the process. To me, this seems to be the only way to explain it. Naturally, the final "dark" colour, as pointed out by Sfameni Gasperro, is also opposite to the "luminosity" associated with the golden lake, so that, even if the assimilation between the souls and iron were not true, they would still begin the process in connection with a certain "splendour", and end it with its complete removal and substitution with "obscurity": this may be interpreted both as a regression from preciousness to baseness – exhibiting the true nature of the greedy souls¹²² – and as a fall from fame and prideful grandiosity to a shrunken state of regret and dissatisfaction. The latter hypothesis is especially suited to the more general interpretation of the terms ἀπληστία and πλεονεξία, as referred to the insatiable desire for power, honours and fame (φιλοτιμία). Since optical met-

120. In *Quaest. conv.* VII 8,3, 712b-c, Menander's maxims are described to "bend" (κάμπτουσι) the drinkers' "characters" as they "soften" (μαλάττουσι) their σκληρότης by the help of wine, likened to fire. For an analogical "bending" of a soul – characterized as "supple and soft" – see *Cons. ad ux.* 10, 611f. Cf. however *Cam.* 41,5, where weak swords break against strong armours due to being "soft" and "forged thin".

121. In the quotation in *De sera num.*, the fragment is abridged and its reference to iron removed, but it is quoted fully in *De cap. ex inim.* 9, 90f and *Stoic. absurd. poet.* 1, 1057d. The attribute μέλας ("black") was already used for iron by Hesiod, *Op.* 151. For "brighter" presentations of iron, *i.e.* steel, cf. below, n. 148.

122. Cf. *De Pyth. or.* 15, 401d.

aphors of “luminosity” (λαμπρότης) are very common in Greek and in Plutarch’s prose to refer to fame and notability,¹²³ and even acquire central relevance in the eschatological conclusion of *De lat. viv.* 6-7 (1129f-1130e),¹²⁴ it may seem an especially appropriate *contrapasso* for the souls of the ambitious to become, painfully, as splendid as they wanted to be – and likely had been – and then be plunged into “black” oblivion and disgrace.¹²⁵ For what regards their true self, in golden splendour they exhibit the celebrity one can obtain by earthly deeds and riches,¹²⁶ but they are then shown, in blackness and beyond external appearances, to be base, insatiable, and sad. Plutarch, indeed, had already stated clearly in *De sera num.* 7 (554b-c) that it is childish to infer the happiness of a person from the magnificence of their garments – a motif which he also develops in *Gryllus* 6 (989d-e) –,¹²⁷ and a prominent theme in his biography of Marius is the latter’s constant dissatisfaction with his fortune, whose prestige and riches growing to exorbitant proportions would never be enough to fulfil his *πλεονεξία* and *φιλοδοξία* (*Mar.* 34, 6), until he ended his life lamenting his ill-luck (45,11-46, 5, with Plato mentioned as counter-example).¹²⁸

Naturally, this interpretation is more defensible if the couple *διαπύρους και διαφανείς*, describing the first properties acquired by the souls in the golden “flaming” bath (see *ὑπὸ τοῦ φλέγεσθαι*), is translated as “incandescent and shiny”. The translation of *διαφανής* as “shiny” is not trivial, as the term is often rather used for “transparency”, and various interpreters have in fact assigned to it this meaning.¹²⁹ However, considering that the adjective is used by Plutarch, differently from *διαυγής*,¹³⁰

123. See, e.g., *Arist.* 1,5 (in connection with both *φιλοτιμία* and *πλεονεξία*); *Ca. Ma.* 3,3; *Pomp.* 24,3; *Ca. Mi.* 25,3 (quoted below).

124. The idea of a chastisement by enforced oblivion, in this work, is a development of the Epicureans’ choice of “living unnoticed”: see Hilton, 2019, pp. 139-140, 148-157 (whom I have already criticized above, n. 35) and compare with the punishment by *Eriny’s* in *De sera num.* 25, 564f.

125. Cf. *TG et CG* 33,8. Also note that Plutarch concludes *De cup. div.* with considerations on the need of the wealthy to exhibit their riches to other people, without which they do not feel joy (10, 527f-528b).

126. Plutarch shows disregard towards such external possessions in, e.g., *Pel.* 34,1 and *Praec. ger. reip.* 27, 820a-f. In the latter – where we find gold associated with *φιλοτιμία* – Plutarch proposes an “enigmatic” (see *αἰνιττόμενος*) interpretation of Plato’s metaphor of gold (and silver) in *Resp.* III, 416e-417a; at the end of the chapter, he also warns about the very short life of excessive “honours” (*τιμαί*).

127. On the specific sorrows of the greedy see *De cup. div.* 5, 525b-c and Fr. 150 Sandbach; on the sadness of the rich Fr. 170 Sandbach.

128. Cf. also *Aem.* 12,12.

129. E.g., Vernière in Klaerr & Vernière, 1974 and Görgemanns, 2009 (2003). Cf. Boulogne, 1994 (quoted below, sec. 3,3) and Taufer, 2010: “*diafane*”.

130. Cf. however *Quaest. conv.* VI 7,2, 692f (*διαυγή και λαμπρόν*) with *Lys.* 28,4. See also *De facie* 28, 943e, where *διαυγής* is used for souls. It is also used in the mythic section of *De genio Socr.* (22, 590b in

also with the meanings of “shining through” (of something visible through an obstacle),¹³¹ of “translucent” (*i.e.* receiving light inside or being internally visible),¹³² and of “thoroughly shiny” (*i.e.* completely polished and clean),¹³³ it is not unreasonable to understand it in this last sense, which better fits the context. In fact, while the acquisition of transparency could neither be explained as a chemical consequence of burning nor as a transferal of a property of gold, a diffused brilliancy – as given by the polish – could instead be both assimilated to incandescence and, most surely, with the look of a bright metal such as gold.¹³⁴ It may not be a coincidence, then, that we can also find one Plutarchan passage in which διαφανής is used as a metaphor for “illustriousness” in the same way as λαμπρός, perhaps due to a stylistic need for *variatio*: “among the many lovers and admirers of Cato there were some who were more conspicuous (ἐκδηλοί) and illustrious (lit. shining-through, διαφανείς) than others. One of these was Quintus Hortensius, a man of splendid reputation (ἀξιωματός... λαμπροῦ) and excellent character” (*Ca. Mi.* 25,3).¹³⁵

We may thus conclude that in the first lake the insatiable souls are made διαφανείς like both the gold they wanted to possess and the celebrated people they wanted to be; in becoming so, they are also made incandescent by the lake’s extreme heat, so that their texture, just like that of a piece of iron – as Plutarch would explain – is softened and dilated in preparation for the cold immersion, which will harden it by contracting it again.¹³⁶ Here, we might also advance as a hypothesis that the first dilation of the souls, surely not explicit but implied by the chemistry behind the metallurgic treatment, is meant to represent the futile pride exhibited by the rich and

couple with καθαρός, *i.e.* “pure”), for the air with which Timarchus’s soul is said to mingle.

131. See *Amatorius* 21, 766e-f.

132. See, *e.g.*, *De prim. frig.* 13, 950b and 17, 953b (in both, the property is made to depend on the internal presence of air), *De Is. et Os.* 75, 381b. It is probably in this sense that souls are presented as διαφανείς ἐντός in *De sera num.* 24, 564d.

133. In this sense it is used in *De def. or.* 43, 434b for asbestos textiles, which become λαμπρά (!) and διαφανή when cleansed by “flames” (φλογά, detail already present in Strabo, *Geogr.* X 1,6, without use of διαφανής) – cf. the φλέγεσθαι in our passage.

134. Cf. *LSJ*, *s.v.* “διαφανής”, I,2 (“red-hot”). Gold “sparkles through” the earth which covers it in *De am. prol.* 5, 497e. For possible associations of gold with fire see *Aqua an ignis* 1, 955d (ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς αἰθόμενον πῦρ, quoted from Pindar, *O.* 1,1); *De Pyth. or.* 16, 402a-b (with ἡλίου φάος, quoted from Scythinus, = Fr. 1 West); *Amatorius* 25, 711b (χρυσοειδῆ καὶ πυρράν). Cf. *Syll.* 16,4, where fire is associated with bronze and steel (λάμποντι πυρροειδῆ).

135. Transl. Perrin, 1919.

136. On Plutarch’s understanding of quench hardening – among the other details – as a contraction following a distension see *Quaest. conv.* VIII 9,3, 734a-b (partly quoted above); *De tuenda* 25, 136b; *De ad. et am.* 36, 73d; and *De def. or.* 47, 436c.

illustrious, since a common Greek metaphor for haughty behaviours, also used by Plutarch, was that of “swelling” or “puffing up” (φυσᾶσθαι).¹³⁷ A similar idea, indeed, appears in *Alc.* 6 (5) in connection with an analogy with iron quenching, to describe Socrates’s timely philosophical interventions on Alcibiades whenever he found him “full of delicacy (θρύψις, lit. softness by internal fragmentation) and vanity (χαυνότης, lit. sponginess),”¹³⁸ likened to the iron’s softening in fire and re-condensation caused by cold. In the scene of the three lakes, however, Plutarch seems to attribute no relevance to the implied changes in density.

In contrast, the implied softness of the incandescent souls, just like their heat, is surely overturned in the leaden bath, which confers to them an extreme level of hardness. This is the expected effect of quenching, *i.e.* of quickly immersing an incandescent piece of iron – after its temperature has been brought above the “eutectoid” point – into a much cooler medium (generally water at room temperature or oil).¹³⁹ The more the metal is hardened by the immersion, the lower its tensile strength becomes – resulting in higher brittleness –, and today we know that the intensity of these changes, as induced by the cooling, is directly proportional to the iron’s carbon content; in fact, when this is too low the quenching is ineffective, and when this is too high the iron becomes too brittle.¹⁴⁰ Since, as we have seen, the souls are described to shatter “due to hardness” during their third immersion, we may be justified in supposing that their carbon content was too high for their quenching to produce a beneficial result: perhaps, they were “bad” iron to begin with, and since their fracturing brings to light their σαθρός state, the treatment in the lakes may turn out, in this way, to have the same effect of an assaying procedure (to be compared with the acoustic test of *De ad. et am.* 23, 64e, quoted above).¹⁴¹

Such low quality, however, is not pointed out in the presentation of the scene, and the souls’ extraordinary hardness, rather than being linked with their material constitution, seems to depend solely on the lake’s extreme coldness. Plutarch does closely associate hardness with low temperatures in *De prim. frig.* 18, which shows that for him they would suffice to make an object too hard and brittle: “cold,

137. See, *e.g.*, *De ad. et am.* 28, 68f; *Comp. Dem. et Cic.* 2; Pseudo-Plato, *Alc.* 2, 145e.

138. Cf. *Sert.* 17,10-11 for a literal use of χαύνωμα (*hapax*), shortly followed by the verb θρύπτεσθαι.

139. See Congdon, 1971, pp. 19-23.

140. See, *e.g.*, Jernberg, 1918, p. 94, who considers 0.90-1.20% to be the best range of carbon content for a successful quenching, and claims that the increase in brittleness only starts to occur above 0.90% (while that in hardness is also noticeable below this point).

141. See also above, n. 101. Cf. Plato, *Soph.* 267e for the metaphor of assaying iron to check whether it is ὑγίης (“sound”, the opposite of σαθρός) or having a διπλόη, *i.e.* a “seam” or “fold”.

indeed, is perceptibly one of the hardest of things and it makes things hard and unyielding”, after which he mentions Theophrastus’s report of frozen fish “breaking” (κατάγνυσθαι) and “shattering” (συντρίβεσθαι!) when dropped “in the same way as glass or earthenware bodies”, and a case of mantles becoming “so hard and woody, due to the freezing cold, that when they were opened out they broke (θραύεσθαι) and split apart (ρήγνυσθαι)” (953c-d = Fr. 184 Wimmer).¹⁴² The fact that the souls become this hard, therefore, is probably only implied to depend on the excessive coldness of the quenching medium, and the link between hardening and freezing is made explicit in our scene by the occurrence of the verb ἐκπαγήναι (both “become congealed” and “freeze”) in combination with the analogy with “hailstone”. Now, if lead can achieve this effect it is because, as Plutarch’s character explains in *Quaest. conv.* VI 5, it is “among the naturally cold [substances]”, so much that this metal, “when rubbed with vinegar, sends forth the most cooling (ψυκτικώτατον) of deadly poisons: the *psimúthion*” (691b); this excellence, which is also recalled in *De facie* 5 by Lamprias, who speaks of “cold lead” (922c), is solidly reflected in contemporary medical literature.¹⁴³ Since coldness, as an intuitive attribute, is never associated by Plutarch with any other metal, lead should have seemed to him especially appropriate for the aim of an immoderate, destructive quenching. Considering all of this, his focusing, in the scene, on the souls’ “freezing” may finally acquire a deeper meaning: when the souls are quenched in lead, inasmuch as they become extremely cold, they become similar to this paradigmatically cold metal: if the golden bath, in part, is meant to assimilate the souls to gold by making them shiny and fiery, in the lake of lead they may be assimilated to this latter by acquisition of its cold property.¹⁴⁴ The analogy with “hailstone” in σκληρὰς ὥσπερ

142. Transl. based on Helmbold in Cherniss & Helmbold, 1957, modified. See also *Quaest. nat.* 13, 915b-c.

143. See Dioscorides, *MM* V 81,3 and Galen, *Simpl. med.* IX 23, XII 230-233 Kühn. The latter is also referenced by Boulogne, 1994, n. 85, who seems to ignore the Plutarchan *loci*. Lead was already regarded as cold in Theophrastus, *Od.* 41.

144. A more intuitive attribute would have been heaviness: see *Ad princ. iner.* 2, 779f-780a (mentioned above, n. 101), and *De prof. in virt.* 1, 75b with *Non posse* 14, 1096c (both using the image of the “leaden-sink”, μολυβδίς). In the latter passage, echoing Plato, *Resp.* VII 519a-b, bodily pleasures are assimilated to a leaden-sink drawing down the intellectual faculty of the soul and weakening it: despite this image being completely unrelated to greed or even metallurgy, this is the only Plutarchan parallel mentioned by Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, p. 306, n. 50 for the scene of the three lakes. His connection has been strangely endorsed by Taufer, 2010, n. to 567b-c, but the passage may be better linked with the image in *De seranum.* 27, 566a.

αί χάλαζαι, which for “hardness” is both unprecedented¹⁴⁵ and not appearing in other Plutarchan *loci*,¹⁴⁶ may perhaps be best explained, in this context, exactly as a way to stress the symbolic relevancy of coldness to this phase of the treatment; if the reader did not grasp it (which is indeed possible, considering the ambiguity of ἐκπαγείσας), the assimilation with “cold lead” would not be evoked.

The “golden”, splendid souls of the “insatiable and greedy” are this way forced to reveal their cold, “leaden” self. This manifest debasement is consolidated when their extreme hardness – used by Plutarch, elsewhere, in analogies with iron softening to describe a miser losing his rigidity of character¹⁴⁷ – is tested in the lake of iron; here, they become “iron” inasmuch as black, and the adverb “terribly” (δεινῶς) removes any possible doubt on the distance between this final shade and the souls’ initial, “gleaming” incandescence. This black iron can hardly be compared with the shining steel which in the *Vitae*, sometimes, characterizes the equipment of glorious armies and commanders;¹⁴⁸ nothing in these souls can be considered glorious, so much that in the end they are swathed in obscurity. In shattering, which obviously changes their shape (see τὰ εἶδη μετέβαλλον),¹⁴⁹ they may become smaller and smaller and so reduce their visible grandeur, or, if there is any coherence with the metaphor in *De sera num.* 11 (555f-556d), they may be revealed to be at the mercy of uncontrollable

145. Except in *Septuaginta*, *Is.* 28,2, where the focus is rather on the strong impact of hailstone against the objects it falls on; cf. 30,3.

146. But hailstone is curiously mentioned in *De prim. frig.* 13, 950c-d just after a remark on iron quenching, without direct relationship with it. In this passage, hailstone, ice and snow are presented to be “brightest” (λαμπρότατα) and “coldest” (ψυχρότατα). The stress on these two trivial and observable qualities is strictly functional to the refutation of the idea that the darkest element is the coldest (949f-950a). Arguably, this passage cannot be used as proof that Plutarch would conceive hailstone as a paradigmatically “bright” substance, and thus mention it in the scene of the three lakes to evoke such property: the three substances are selected by Plutarch in reason of their trivial coldness (the theme), while their brightness is pointed out (as rheme) to clarify their pertinence to the refutation; in this example, therefore, the property of coldness is the one figuring as paradigmatic – not brightness (albeit this being evident and trivial in the same degree). Also, the immersion in the second lake does not seem to be associated with any optical or chromatic change.

147. See *Quaest. conv.* I 5,1, 622d and *Amatorius* 17, 762c.

148. See, e.g., *Syll.* 16,4 (quoted above, n. 134); *Aem.* 18,8 and 32,5 (in both mentioned with bronze); and *Alex.* 32,9, for a steel helmet that “glittered like pure silver”. See also Hesiod’s formulaic αἴθωνι σιδήρω (*Op.* 743), quoted by Plutarch in *De Is. et Os.* 4, 352e.

149. Cf. Boulogne, 1994, par. 16 (digital edition), whose “chromatic” interpretation of the term εἶδη, quoted above, sec. 2, cannot be ruled out on merely semantic grounds (for an alchemical use of εἶδος in his sense coupled with μεταβάλλεσθαι, albeit later, see Synesius, *pròs Diòskoron eis tèn biblon Dēmokrítou*, 12, 197 Martelli = CAAG II 64,14). The “mechanical” interpretation is more likely because the change of εἶδος is caused by the souls’ περικλᾶν and συνβτρίβεσθαι.

regret.¹⁵⁰ Whatever the significance of their change of shape towards the revealing of their actual self, their fracturing provides in any case an efficient *contrapasso*, as the “hardness” of their behaviour is finally used to make them suffer. After this, they are brought back to the first lake for a new cycle of the metallurgic torments.

3.3. THE EARLIER INTERPRETATIONS

Looking back at the results of this discussion, we may claim to have found some possible explanations for the image, all cumulative, but each with a different degree of likelihood. The safest interpretation is that the “greedy” souls are inflicted *contrapasso* by being first sunk in precious gold and then in worthless lead and iron; the *contrapasso* is also applicable to the “ambitious”, as they are made to regress from golden splendour to iron-black obscurity. In the subsequent immersions, the souls undergo some chemical alterations, modelled on iron quenching: these, in addition to causing suffering and physiological disruption, may be meant to symbolize different phases of a revealing of the souls’ main vice. There are details suggesting that in each immersion the souls become assimilated to the metals receiving them: if this is true, the character of the greedy is progressively revealed to be not precious as their golden riches, but base as lead and as bad iron (which may also be the meaning behind the “dusky and filthy” stain). Regardless of these assimilations, the souls’ acquisition – in lead – of extreme hardness might hint at the penuriousness of a certain kind of greedy people, too rigid in their behaviours to be able to enjoy their riches; their breaking and fracturing – in iron – might hint at their character’s fragility, when it is finally taken over by regret and sadness; and their implied dilating – in burning gold – might hint at the swelling pride induced by their initial gain and growing celebrity. The last two hypotheses are the least likely, but the preceding appear to be sufficiently corroborated by parallel passages, and most fit with the other chastisements presented in chapter 30.

This interpretation, in its whole, is evidently incompatible with those assuming that the metallurgic treatment is identifiable with a cleansing procedure. Vernière’s references to Virgil’s “*flammas purificatrices*” and to the Zoroastrian image of an ordeal by molten metals are hardly relevant,¹⁵¹ if the transformations induced by the three lakes, rather than promoting cleaner and brighter looks (or discriminating the pure souls from the impure), always begin with extreme brilliancy to overturn it into δεινός black. Surely, the purer state is symbolically associated with the immersion

150. See above, sec. 2.

151. See above, sec. 3,1 with n. 86.

in the golden lake, and it cannot be a coincidence that Boulogne, in order to make his interpretation stand, had to posit that the treatment ends exactly when the souls are “again taken into the gold”, rather than continuing cyclically.¹⁵² In Boulogne’s account, the chemical reason of the fourth immersion, different from the first as not anymore functional to the “*jaunissement* [?] *de la chrysopée*” (ξάνθωσις), is arguably unclear. He claims, from what it seems, that the souls’ regeneration “*qui commence par un blanchiment*” (λεύκωσις) should happen in the lake of iron, thanks to their “*craquage*”, and that this, in turn, follows “*la dégénération, marquée par l’apparition de la couleur noire*” (μελάνωσις), obtained (apparently) in the same lake before the souls are smashed together; if the souls, after this, are plunged a second and last time into the boiling gold, it is just “*afin que la calcination de l’incandescence lui restitue définitivement sa diaphanéité*”. The obvious problem with this interpretation is that the souls, according to Plutarch’s description, already become διαφανείς in their first bath, while the reference to the fourth is not associated with chemical details, nor explicitly distinguished from the first. This problem, in combination with Boulogne’s questionable translations and with his disregard for textual parallels, makes his interpretation particularly unlikely. I have shown that in Pérez-Jiménez’s proposal, in contrast, we do find supportive references to *loci* in early alchemical literature, but relevant Plutarchan parallels, unfortunately, are lacking there in the same way as in all the other treatments of the image.¹⁵³

In fact, the attitude of searching for explanations outside of Plutarch’s corpus without first ruling out all of the internal possibilities was already evident in Wyttenbach’s 1772 commentary, which, in addition to suggesting, very soberly, the earliest explanation in terms of *contrapasso*, also provided the first interpretation of a rather ‘exotic’ or ‘occult’ character.¹⁵⁴ Wyttenbach, careful in presenting his proposal as a mere hypothesis, writes that either Plutarch chose exactly those three metals “*pro lubitu*”, *i.e.*, freely and without specific meaning, or he let his imagination be somewhat inspired by the Persian magi. The reference is to an image, proper to the Mithraic mysteries, described by Celsus in a quotation reported in Origen’s *Contra Celsum* (VI 22), of a ladder that the souls of the initiated must ascend, going through seven doors each of a different metal associated with a different planet, including lead (the first, symbolizing the slowness of Saturn), iron (the fourth, symbolizing

152. See Boulogne, 1994, par. 22 (digital edition); above, sec. 2 and 3.1.

153. See Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, pp. 305-306; above, sec. 2 with nn. 60 and 61.

154. Wyttenbach, 1772, “*Animadversiones* [...]”, p. 124, partly quoted above, sec. 3.1.

the steadfast laboriousness towards gain of Mercury),¹⁵⁵ and gold (the seventh, sharing the colour of the Sun).¹⁵⁶ Wyttenbach supposes that Plutarch, in composing his scene, might have drawn some colour (“*colorem*”) from this image or from a similar one (“*ex hoc aut simili figmento*”); in concluding his note, however, after his remark on the appropriateness of the *contrapasso*, he decides to end with a skeptical invitation to avoid over-interpreting the passage: “*sed praestat in his non plura argutari*”. These last statements have been quoted by the “anti-exotic” Taufer as “*il giudizio più equilibrato sul nostro passo*”,¹⁵⁷ but others have dedicated more attention to the first, Mithraic part of the note. Vernière, in particular, reported Wyttenbach’s proposal with caution in 1974, explicitly taking distance from it (“*le rapprochement est-il possible?*”),¹⁵⁸ but then abandoned the caution in 1977, when she used this association, together with her mention of the ordeal by molten metals, to substantiate her claim that “*Plutarque sait donc à l’occasion se démarquer de ses sources grecques et enrichir sa pensée mythique par un appel discret à l’Orient*”.¹⁵⁹ For this, Vernière was sharply criticized in 1980 by Ioan P. Culianu, who rejected the Mithraic parallelism without offering any counter-argument (“*la ‘scala mitriaca’ di Celso non ha niente a che fare con la visione di Tespesio!*”), and, avoiding to provide personal comments on the chastisements, simply referred to Albrecht Dieterich’s 1893 monograph *Nekyia* as an antidote against “Orientalizing” explanations.¹⁶⁰

Now, in Dieterich’s treatment of the image, in addition to some unsubstantiated conclusions on its Orphic-Pythagorean origin,¹⁶¹ we find a perfect representation of another recurrent problem in the literature concerning the three lakes: the tendency to mistranslate or misinterpret the most important phrases in Plutarch’s passage. It is unclear whether this problem also involves Pérez-Jiménez’s subversion of the order

155. The term for “laborious” is πολύκμητος, lit. “wrought with much toil”, a Homeric epithet of iron, e.g., in *Il.* VI 48.

156. Notice that two steps separate lead from iron and iron from gold: the succession, if cyclical, would indeed broadly correspond to Plutarch’s (except for the fact that there would not be two steps separating gold and lead).

157. Taufer, 2010, n. to 567b-c.

158. In Klaerr & Vernière, 1974, n. 1 to 567d. On Plutarch’s scant references to Mithraism see Campos Méndez, 2013 (appropriately, with no mention of this *locus* in *De sera num.*).

159. Vernière, 1977, p. 203.

160. See Culianu, 1980, p. 170, with nn. 92 and 94. His interpretation was severely misrepresented by Pérez-Jiménez, 1996, p. 301.

161. See Dieterich, 1893, pp. 146-147; he rules out the possibility of a Xenocritean or Stoic origin of the idea and assumes as self-explanatory that Plutarch could not conceive it on his own.

of the lakes, according to which the leaden was the first,¹⁶² but Dieterich's error is such that in his account the lake of iron ("rough in iron", τραχεῖαν σιδήρου) becomes a lake of silver ("harten Silbers"); a mistake repeated in 2004 by Claudia Wiener, in an article specifically dedicated to the myth of Thespesius ("*Thespesius sieht auch die Seelenschmiede am Gold-, Silber- und Bleisee*", also notice the subverted order).¹⁶³ The presence of a misinterpretation might also be supposed for Georges Méautis's short remark, in his 1935 introduction to the text, that Plutarch "*décrit les lacs d'or, de plomb et de fer où sont plongés les coupables*",¹⁶⁴ in which the specific category of the "insatiable and greedy" – probably crucial to an adequate understanding of the symbolism – disappears in the broader, generic class of the "*coupables*"; whether Méautis actually misunderstood the passage or not (it is true that in his translation the syntagm "*par la cupidité et l'ambition*" does appear for δι' ἀπληστίαν καὶ πλεονεξίαν), Culianu, who probably depended on his introduction, clearly did ("*i colpevoli di crimini non specificati, ma senz'altro gravi [...]*").¹⁶⁵ Finally, as it seems likely that Frazier considered the souls' reshaping described in chapter 32 (567e-568a) to be connected with the three-lakes treatment of chapter 30,¹⁶⁶ we can claim with confidence that this also applies to the deforming synthesis given by Rainer Hirsch-Luipold in 2014 of the sequence of punishments: "souls that are reworked, filed, hammered, and bent, thrown into fire [?] and finally into tempering water [?]"

3.4. THE PARALLEL WITH ZOSIMUS

I have shown that this "metallurgic" scene in Thespesius's vision, rather, seems to be adequately explained in the frame of an eschatology of *contrapasso*, as the souls are ironically transformed by the demons into what they really are, while also provided with the object of their main earthly desire and then its opposite. It is now useful to finally take into account the latest of the "alchemical" perspectives on the three immersions of chapter 30. Olivier Dufault, in 2019, examining the dreams narrated and commented on by Zosimus of Panopolis in his three allegorical *Práxeis* ("Lessons", MA X, XI, XII Mertens = CAAG II 107-113, 115-117, 117-118), offered a novel interpretation of their meaning, centred on Christian soteriology rather than

162. See above, sec. 2 with n. 62.

163. Wiener, 2004, p. 53.

164. Méautis, 1935b, p. 69.

165. Culianu, 1980, p. 170.

166. See above, sec. 3,1.

on technical procedures.¹⁶⁷ In these highly visionary accounts, we see men of various metallic constitutions undergoing painful treatments such as burnings, dismemberments, and embalmings in a temple-like environment partly evoking the image of an alchemist's apparatus, e.g. in the presence of a "bowl-altar" containing bubbling water (φιαλοβωμός; *MA* X 2, 26; 3, 44-45; 4, 89-90). Since these processes are repeatedly referred to, by the speaking characters of the visions, as "punishments" (κολάσεις, firstly appearing in *MA* X 3, 63; see also τιμωρουμένων in 3, 73 and διεκδικήσασα in 6, 130), Dufault seems to be justified in drawing a comparison between these and some of the chastisements described mythically by Plutarch, who appears this way to have somewhat anticipated Zosimus by a couple of centuries, in using "alchemical" imagery for the aims of eschatological symbolism. Dufault points out that our passage in *De sera num.* 30 shares striking similarities with Zosimus's accounts, even on a terminological level, as they both depict "color-changes and metallurgical processes (immersion or 'tinctures' – *baphai* [see βάπτοντες in 567c]) representing punishments (one consisting in a 'reversion/transformation' – *ekstrephai*, *ektrepousin* [see ἐκτρέπουσιν in 567b]) and taking place in an imaginary space". It may be fruitful to investigate further into their parallels, to verify whether we can conclude or not that there is a significant cultural or literary affinity between the two; given the limited space of this article, I will only comment on the correspondences with the image of the three lakes.

The inspirations behind Zosimus's imagery, partly analyzed in the authoritative 1995 commentary by Michèle Mertens "*par le recours à des parallèles littéraires*",¹⁶⁸ have been most recently investigated by Marina Escolano-Poveda with reference to the necessary complement of Egyptian iconography,¹⁶⁹ suggesting convincingly that Zosimus's fictional dreams may have had a rather religious and cultic inspiration. Notwithstanding the centrality of such Egyptian influences, Zosimus's writing, being that of a Greek author, was surely also informed by existing Greek literary models, perhaps with the inclusion of Hermetic and Gnostic apocalypses,¹⁷⁰ and even of Platonic philosophical myths.¹⁷¹ Dufault, in fact, connects the dreams' alchemical imag-

167. See Dufault, 2019, pp. 104-117. Idem, in this issue.

168. Mertens, 1995, pp. 210-211.

169. See Escolano-Poveda, in this issue.

170. See Mertens, 1995, p. 208.

171. Zosimus, in addition to mentioning Plato in *MA* I 8, 76 Mertens (= *CAAG* II 230,18-19) with the epithet τρισμέγας ("thrice-great"), presents gold in *MA* X 8, 144-148 as τὸ μονοείδον τὸ ἐκ πολλῶν εἰδῶν ("the [substance] of a single species, that [brought about] from multiple species"; i.e. transmuted from multiple materials), probably echoing the syntagm μονοειδὲς γένος ("genus of a single species", i.e.

ery with the Christian-inspired anthropogony illustrated by Zosimus in the treatise *Perì toũ õ stoikheíou* (“On the letter Omega”, *MA I* Mertens = *CAAG II* 228-234) and with the moral teachings addressed to Theosebeia in the *Teleutaía apokhḗ* (“Final count”, *CH I* 363-365 Festugière = *CAAG II* 239-246): if the *Práxeis* were indeed symbolic soteriological narrations, not only would they have certainly received some influence from earlier and contemporary apocalyptic literature,¹⁷² but they would also belong to a very similar genre to that of Thespesius’s vision in *De sera num.* If this were the case, it would be possible to suggest that somehow, during the Imperial period, Plato’s literary invention of the symbolic eschatological vision – as best exemplified in the myth of Er – started to incorporate metallurgic themes: these, which for the first time in the extant Graeco-Latin literature were featured prominently in Plutarch’s *De sera num.*, came to acquire absolute centrality in Zosimus’s accounts.

Before we offer a hypothesis on the cause of this development, it is appropriate to first return to the correspondences between Zosimus’s visions and Plutarch’s myth in *De sera num.*, which seem to be limited to their imagery (as there appears to be no significant similarity between the main tenets of Plutarch’s and Zosimus’s eschatology). Limiting our discussion to the chastisement in the three lakes, it is indeed impressive to read in *De sera num.* of souls enduring metallic alterations, both in constitution and in colour, in a progression – although not paralleled in Zosimus’s texts – which surely associates gold with the highest value while contrasting it with that of lead: we can indeed find correspondences of this idea in Zosimus’s visions, in which both metals are personified in the characters of a “man of gold” (χρυσάνθρωπος; *MA X* 5, 117-118) representing the final stage of a progress towards perfection (see also the τέλειος χρυσός in 7, 139-140, and 8, 146-148), and of a “man of lead” (μολυβδάνθρωπος) claiming to be the object of an “unendurable violence” (ἀφόρητος βία; *MA XI* 2, 43-49, cf. *MA X* 2, 28-29 – compare with the ἀληδόνες δεινά in *De sera num.* 30, 567d). However, the differences are at least as important as the similarities, and the iron lake, which is prominent in Plutarch’s *tableau* as the place of culmination into the souls’ shattering and change of εἶδος, has no correspondence in any mention of iron in Zosimus’s dreams; in fact, while boilings and burnings, in these, are certainly represented (see, e.g., *MA X* 3, 49-51), heat treatments aimed at hardening or softening a metal, which I have shown to be at the core

purely watery and not associated with the other elements) in Plato’s *Timaeus* (59b); see Viano, 2005b, pp. 100-101. Zosimus allegedly composed a biography of Plato, as attested in the *Lexicon Sud.*, Z 168 Adler; on this voice see Mertens, 1995, pp. XCVII-CI.

172. See Dufault, 2019, pp. 110-111 for some specific parallels.

of Plutarch's scene, make no appearance (also notice that the verb βάπτειν, in *De sera num.* 30, is used for the only immersion that is not followed by a change of colour; its unambiguous denotation of an act of "quenching" makes it impossible to connect it semantically with the chromatic changes described by Zosimus, who does not even use the term βαφή in the *Práxeis*). Furthermore, although it is true that Zosimus personifies both lead and gold, he assigns much more "stage time" to another metallic actor: the "man of copper" (ἄνθρωπος χαλκοῦς or χαλκάνθρωπος; *MA X 3*, 61; 3, 70; 4, 81; 5, 113-117; *XI 1*, 19-24), who is the one who ends up transformed into the "man of gold" through an intermediary phase as "man of silver" (*MA X 5*, 113-117). Neither copper nor silver play any role in Plutarch's myth, and this can be also said for tin, which Zosimus mentions as part of his list of the "four transformations of metals" – *i.e.* the ones "of lead, of copper, of silver, of tin" – from which the τέλειος χρυσός can be obtained (*MA X 7*, 137-140); it seems that the low prominence of lead, in Zosimus's visions (see also *MA X 4*, 61-65; 10, 138; *XII 2*, 22-24), is not really comparable with that assigned to it by Plutarch in the scene of the three lakes.

Of all the correspondences noted by Dufault, the one that might appear as the most solid is the one involving Plutarch's analogy with sea-scolopendras "turning themselves inside out" (567b),¹⁷³ since Zosimus's first *Práxis* contains a repeated image of self-regurgitation (see *MA X 2*, 36-38 with *XI 2*, 41-42, and *X 3*, 69-71), but this parallel too is likely to be only coincidental: while Plutarch's image comes from the domain of bizarre zoology, and is only used by Plutarch to visualize a thorough "unveiling of the hidden", Zosimus's symbol, which ends in a transformation (see *X 2*, 33-35 and 39, and 3, 55-57), is rather probably evocative, in the context of the dreamt "shrine" (*e.g.* 5, 104-108), of a mummification (see the ταριχεία, *i.e.* "embalming", in 3, 54-55). If the new suggestions by Marina Escolano-Poveda are correct, the allusion might have been to the ritual embalming of Osiris performed as part of the mysteries at Dendera, an environment to which it is also possible to trace back the images of the "man of gold" and those of other metallic constitutions.¹⁷⁴ Since all the clues appear to draw Zosimus away from Plutarch's original inspirations and deep into the ritual symbolism of Egyptian cults, it seems highly unlikely that the images used by the two authors share any concrete affinity.

173. See above, sec. 3,1.

174. See Escolano-Poveda, in this issue, section 4.

4. PLUTARCH'S ORIGINALITY AND THE ALEXANDRIAN MILIEU

Still, the metallurgic theme of the two texts remains impressive: although it is hardly surprising to find it in Zosimus's *Práxeis* – either considered as symbolic figurations of alchemical procedures or as texts of soteriology sprung from the imagination of an alchemist –, it is true that we cannot detect any Greek author, prior to Plutarch, who represented afterlife vicissitudes in metallurgic terms. It is always possible to suppose that this development in imagery was due to Plutarch's independent creativity,¹⁷⁵ perhaps inspired by the already existing metaphors of “softened” characters and emotions, and thus of souls, or more specifically by the Stoic *stómōsis* of souls from *pneūma*,¹⁷⁶ by developing these images repeatedly into full-fledged rhetorical analogies, Plutarch's imagination might have become accustomed, in the act of ornate writing, to visualizing souls as metallic bodies subject to physical alterations: in this intuitive metaphorical matrix, built over years of literary activity,¹⁷⁷ he might have found a partial basis for his new eschatological symbolism.

This seems to be a safe conclusion, but after our close look at Zosimus's imagery and at its inspirations, we may be justified in suggesting another, cumulative hypothesis. Since we have been able, with Escolano-Poveda, to connect his main symbols with the religious setting of Egyptian temples, and it is likely that the rituals and representations that inspired him had already existed for quite some time before he learned about them (or witnessed them),¹⁷⁸ we may suggest the possibility that Plutarch's eschatological imagination was partly influenced by the aesthetics of Egyptian religion.¹⁷⁹ This hypothesis is not far-fetched, if we consider that Plutarch's most developed considerations on theological and mythological hermeneutics are framed in *De Iside et Osiride*, a relatively long treatise devoted entirely to Egyptian religious discourse and practice, and addressed to none other than a priestess of Osiris (Klea, on whom see 1, 351c and 35, 364d-e). It seems unreasonable to suppose that after Plutarch's thinking focussed with such interpretative care on abundant Egyptian material his imagination came out of it unchanged: in some areas,

175. This is the opinion of Sfameni Gasparro, 2014, p. 200.

176. See above, sec. 2 with n. 69.

177. Note that *De sera num.* is supposed to be a late dialogue: see above, n. 10.

178. See Escolano-Poveda, in this issue, section 7.

179. Brenk, 1992, pp. 40-41, 53-54 suggests that there might be a much deeper Egyptian influence, even inspiring the philosophical concept of *epopteia* (“highest grade of initiation”) among “Alexandrian” Middle Platonists up to Plutarch (see *De Is. et Os.* 77, 382c-d); see also below, n. 187. In Brenk, 1999, pp. 234-235, he stresses Plutarch's “Egyptomania” as the sentiment which drove him to Platonize Egyptian religion in *De Is. et Os.*, which is arguably a stretch.

it must have been inspired by the Egyptian imagery at least to a minimal degree. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to assume this for the scene of the three lakes, as *De Is. et Os.* contains no metallurgic symbols which could corroborate our claim.¹⁸⁰ However, if Zosimus's alchemical imagery was truly dependent on Egyptian material, it is likely that such material already existed in Plutarch's time and had had its influence on Egyptian culture and literature: for this reason, it is not impossible that Plutarch came into contact with such imagery, and that this inspired his eschatological use of metallurgic themes. This hypothesis will have to be suspended until specific literary or iconographical evidence is adduced, but some parallels reported by Dufault may provide some help, while also adding a layer of complexity. After examining Zosimus's soteriology, he writes that the alchemist was not original "in using gold transmutation to discuss eschatological self-transformation";¹⁸¹ in fact, it is possible to find "much older images representing or equating ethical and metallic purification", referred to corrupt peoples, in Biblical texts such as *Ieremias* (6,27-30), *Iezechiel* (22,16-22), *Zacharias* (13,9), and *Malachias* (3,3). In all these passages, except the last, metal smelting is associated with images of counterfeits and assaying procedures,¹⁸² either assimilated to an ordeal (*Ier.*, *Zach.*), or underlying a divine punishment by ways of melting (*Iez.*).¹⁸³ Now, although Plutarch did mention Jews in his writings and showed curiosity about their puzzling religious views and practices,¹⁸⁴ we have no reason to suppose he had any first-hand knowledge of the *Septuaginta*.¹⁸⁵ This is not a problem, because we know from *Quaest. conv.* V 5 (1, 678c) that he visited the Egyptian centre which at the time had the most influential and intellectually active Jewish community of the Hellenized world: Alexandria, the city itself in which

180. Plutarch's report citing Manetho (Fr. 77 Müller) that the Egyptians call the lodestone "bone of Horus" and iron "[bone] of Typhon" (*De Is. et Os.* 62, 376b-c), along with its symbolic interpretation, can hardly count as such.

181. Dufault, 2019, pp. 115-116, with n. 89.

182. In the *Septuaginta* version of all three, we find multiple occurrences of the adjective δόκιμος and of its derivative δοκιμάζειν. Cf. my references to assaying procedures above, sec. 3.2.

183. To these passages we may add *Septuaginta*, *Prov.* 27,21, in which we read that "assay (δοκίμιον) to silver and gold is burning, but man is assayed (δοκιμάζεται) through the mouth of those who praise him". I thank Gerasimos Merianos for this reference. Compare with the Zoroastrian ordeal by molten metals mentioned above, n. 86.

184. See especially *Quaest. conv.* IV 5, 669e-671c and 6, 671c-672c. For other passages and a minimal bibliography on the subject see Hirsch-Luipold, 2021, p. 21. For an extensive presentation of all the references to Jews in both the *Vitae* and the *Moralia*, see Muñoz Gallarte, 2008.

185. So Hirsch-Luipold, 2021, p. 21. See his n. 51 for an introduction to the debate on Plutarch's source(s) on Judaism, and below, n. 187.

the *Septuaginta* were translated,¹⁸⁶ and in which Judaism and (Middle) Platonism were first married in the thought of Philo, the first Greek biblical allegorist.¹⁸⁷ From the cultural *milieu* of this city – both directly and indirectly – Plutarch must have brought to Chaeronea some aesthetic suggestions of an originally Egyptian or Jewish character, and perhaps already syncretized.¹⁸⁸ It is such an intellectual context that favoured in the same period the birth and spread of Hermeticism and Gnosticism,¹⁸⁹ and Israel Muñoz Gallarte has recently suggested, based on a comparison in soteriological imagery similar to mine (but centred on the idea of souls “marrying” with the divine), that Gnostic texts and Plutarch’s works had to be connected in some “cultural intertextuality”.¹⁹⁰ Hermetic and Gnostic apocalypses, in turn, are likely to have influenced the *Práxeis* written by Zosimus,¹⁹¹ who, uncoincidentally, is thought to have lived in Alexandria.¹⁹² If we really want to connect the metallurgic products of

186. See Fraser, 1972, pp. 689-690.

187. Hirsch-Luipold, 2021, p. 21, after remarking that “Plutarch obviously lacks first-hand-information” on Judaism, supposes that he was taught about it “by Egyptian priests while spending some time in Alexandria”. On Plutarch’s relationship with Judaism, in addition to Muñoz Gallarte, 2008, see Brenk, 1996, with specific considerations on *De sera num.* and comparisons between the myth of Thespesius and Imperial-Age Jewish apocalypses. Some scholars have suggested that the (alleged) Pythagorean character of Plutarch’s Platonism might have depended on the philosophical profile of his master Ammonius, who is supposed to have brought Neopythagoreanism to Athens from Alexandria [see Brenk, 2017b (1987), pp. 18-19], but the connection of Ammonius with Alexandria is merely inferred from the similarities between his philosophy (what we can reconstruct of it) and that of thinkers such as Eudorus and Philo of Alexandria, who are assumed to have influenced the philosophical climate of the city. For a complete overview see Opsomer, 2009.

188. The syncretism is acknowledged by Plutarch himself: see *De Is. et Os.* 31, 363d.

189. On Hermeticism and Alexandria see Fowden, 1993, pp. 161-165; on the incorporation of Jewish ideas pp. 36-37. According to Scopello, 2008, p. 1773, the widespread notion that Alexandria was the main “lieu de composition des écrits gnostiques” is not grounded in factual evidence (p. 1773), but this does not disprove that Gnosticism arose from the interaction of Graeco-Egyptian paganism with Judaism and Christianity, nor that important parts of their systems were modeled on (Middle) Platonist tenets; Alexandria was a perfect *milieu* for these encounters.

190. See Muñoz Gallarte, 2021, pp. 163-171, with bibliography on the cultural relationship between Plutarch and the Gnostics. For further references see Roig Lanzillotta 2021, who, in comparing Plutarch’s take on how to reach Platonic *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ* with the Gnostics’ views on the same matter found in the *Nag Hammadi* writings, proposes that they tapped into a common “philosophical-religious continuum”, without positing any direct historical derivation. Plutarch’s theology was already compared with the Gnostics’ by Dörrie, 1981, who, after discussing some similarities, rejected the conclusion of a dependency in favour of “*Affinität*”. For comparisons between the myth in *De sera num.* and Christian apocalypses see Brenk, 1996, pp. 251-252, 255-256 (and for a Gnostic parallel see above, n. 108).

191. See above, n. 170.

192. See Mertens, 1995, pp. XIII-XIV.

Plutarch's eschatological creativity with an external source of influence, it seems that the best candidate, based on the available evidence, is neither the "esoteric" Mithraism nor the "Eastern" Zoroastrianism, but the syncretistic, and already Platonizing, religious environment of Alexandria.

In any case, this connection might be destined to remain speculative, and it is after all unnecessary. As I have observed, Plutarch might have well been inspired by metaphorical associations embedded in his use of the Greek language, and the inspiration might have also come from any image, of whatever origin, which had left a mark on him: we have indeed seen that he modelled one of his chastisements on the (originally) Aristotelian report of sea-scolopendras turning their insides out, which we have no reason to imagine having any religious significance prior to Plutarch's mythical use. It is true, however, that while the vipers and sea-scolopendras of *De sera num.* 30 (567b) are only mentioned in analogies, the immersions in the three lakes (567c-d), as well as the "smoothing away" of stains (26, 565c-d) and even the forceful reshaping of chapter 32 (567e-f), are presented in literal terms. This might be a signal that Plutarch regarded these images to be sufficiently visualizable and understandable with direct reference to the souls – *i.e.* without additional analogical specification – and therefore that his readers could intuitively imagine souls as metals. This expectation might have relied both on commonplace Greek metaphors and on existing tendencies in the Egyptian or Jewish religious symbolism: with further textual and iconographical parallels we may be able to better substantiate this hypothesis; until then, supposing polygenesis appears to be the safer choice.

5. CONCLUSION

As a concluding remark, we may reaffirm that neither the "dusky" colour of the stain of "miserliness and greed" in chapter 26 (565b-d) nor the specific punishment for "insatiability and greed" in chapter 30 (567c-d) – on close inspection – can be taken to symbolize any of the central preoccupations of the theology of *De sera num.*, centred on the benevolent care of the god for the moral perfecting of human souls. Rather, they must probably be interpreted as clever representations of their corresponding vice, of its nature, and of the character, worth, and unhappiness of those who are affected by it in life. That Plutarch had a specific interest in such ethical teaching is evident from his *De cupiditate divitiarum* and by the surviving fragments of his treatise *Peri* or *Katà plóutou* ("On" or "Against wealth", Fr. 149-152 Sandbach). In the myth of Thespesius, he probably seized the opportunity given by the subject of afterlife torments also to suggest some lesser "truths" concerning greed and the other vices, which the reader could decode by aptly interpreting the punishments as forms

of *contrapasso*. After all, a symbolic interpretation of myth along the lines of minor ethics, contrasted with Stoicising physical allegoreses, was explicitly endorsed by Plutarch in *De aud. poet.* 4 (19f) for the Homeric presentation of the enchanted girdle of Aphrodite in *Ilias* XIV (214-223): as we read in this passage, Homer's symbol "teaches those who will pay attention that vulgar music, coarse songs, and stories treating of vile themes, create licentious characters, unmanly lives, and men that love luxury, soft living, intimacy with women [...]"¹⁹³ Similar explanations, perhaps, should be also given for some of the smaller details in Plutarch's eschatological myths.

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193. Transl. Babbitt, 1927.

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(DE)CONSTRUCTING AN AUTHORITATIVE NARRATIVE. THE CASE OF *THE LETTER OF ISIS**

LA (DE)CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UN RELATO DE LEGITIMACIÓN:
EL CASO DE LA *CARTA DE ISIS*

MIRIAM BLANCO CESTEROS

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID
miblan02@ucm.es

ABSTRACT

The Letter of Isis to Horus is a brief (and precious) piece of Greco-Egyptian alchemy. Beyond the technical interest of the processes it describes, its prologue is noteworthy for its intricate and surprising mixture of Greek, Hebrew, and Egyptian elements. In it, alchemy is presented as a secret knowledge of divine origin, which the goddess Isis received from an angel who fell in love with her. This preface is, therefore, a key element in the study of the discursive mech-

RESUMEN

La así denominada *Carta de Isis a Horus* es una breve (y preciosa) pieza de la alquimia greco-egipcia. Más allá del interés técnico de los procesos alquímicos que describe, su importancia radica en el prólogo que introduce la parte técnica de este pequeño tratado, que sorprende por la intrincada mezcla de elementos griegos, hebreos y egipcios. Este prefacio es, por tanto, una pieza clave para el estudio de los argumentos y mecanismos discursivos

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anisms and arguments through which early alchemical tradition attempted to bestow authority on its writings and to justify the “Holy Art” label that is often conferred on this discipline. This article analyses these mechanisms and arguments according to the patterns around which this narrative was articulated.

empleados por la temprana tradición alquímica para dotar de autoridad a sus escritos y tratar de justificar su denominación de “Arte Sagrado”. Este artículo analiza dichos mecanismos y argumentos siguiendo los patrones narrativos en torno a los cuales se articuló este relato.

KEYWORDS

Alchemy; Demotic Literature; Greco-Roman Egypt; Greco-Egyptian Magic; Greek Literature; Hermeticism; Rhetoric.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Alquimia; Egipto grecorromano; Hermetismo; Literatura demótica; Literatura griega; Magia greco-egipcia; Retórica.

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IN SPITE OF THE APPARENT REVIVAL OF INTEREST IN ALCHEMY in recent decades, to date, scholars have paid scant attention to one of the most ancient extant texts related to this discipline: *The Letter of Isis to Horus*. In fact, the most relevant study on this short treatise, a revised edition and commentary by Michèle Mertens (1983-1984), was never published (although it has recently been made public).¹ Some of Mertens' later articles,² however, exploit this study and its conclusions to analyse the *Letter* in a broader context of ritual and philosophical texts, such as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the Greek magical papyri, and Gnostic texts. Mertens' research showed that *The Letter of Isis to Horus* shares the same characteristic mixture of Greek, Jewish, and Egyptian ideas as these texts, and that this alchemical treatise is a key element in the analysis of the early interactions between alchemy and magico-religious beliefs. Nonetheless, our understanding of alchemy and, more specifically, of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy, has improved since the period in which Mertens' studies were conducted. Similarly, our knowledge of the Graeco-Egyptian ritual world has also experienced a quantitative and qualitative change. For this reason, a re-examination of *The Letter of Isis to Horus* is well worthwhile, as the recent work by Fabiana Lopes da Silveira has demonstrated.³

1. All Greek quotations from *The Letter of Isis* in this article are taken from Mertens' edition, which I also follow for the numbering of the text. Since September 2020, this edition has been freely available on the University of Liège website, see https://explore.lib.uliege.be/permalink/32ULG_INST/1iujq0/alma990002612980502321.

2. Mertens, 1988, 1989a, and 1989b.

3. Lopes da Silveira, 2022. This paper is a revised version of a chapter of her PhD dissertation: see Lopes da Silveira, 2020, pp. 33-90.

In keeping with the nature of the present volume, this analysis focuses on the narrative that frames this treatise and that justifies the divine origin of the alchemical knowledge contained within it. In order to avoid turning this article into a mere list of motifs and parallels, I propose to examine these elements in light of the chains of interconnections that they establish with each other. In this way, the parallels take on a meaning that goes beyond merely providing a textual precedent for the motifs present in the introduction to *The Letter*, helping us to establish the narrative patterns that structured the initial account of this alchemical treatise.

1. INTRODUCING THE TEXT

The Letter of Isis to Horus is the name by which modern scholars know a brief treatise originally entitled Ἴσις προφήτις τῷ υἱῷ αὐτῆς / τῷ υἱῷ Ὁρῶ, “Isis the *prophētis* to her son / to her son Horus”. The treatise is credited to the goddess Isis, which means that the actual author of the text is unknown to us. This places *The Letter* in the genre of *pseudepigrapha*. Two copies of the text with variants (hence the variation in title) have survived, compiled in the Byzantine manuscripts of the so-called *Greek Alchemical Corpus*.⁴ In its current form, therefore, this text dates from the Byzantine period.⁵ However, most scholars believe the composition date of the treatise, including its introductory narrative, is much earlier. The *terminus post quem* is determined by the paraphrase of Pseudo-Democritus’s aphorism in the text of the treatise (ll. 54-55). According to studies conducted by Matteo Martelli on the alchemical work credited to this author, it was not produced before the 1st cent. CE.⁶ In turn, the quo-

4. Ms. Paris. B.N. Gr. 2327, fol. 256r-258r (henceforth “version A”) and Ms. Paris. B.N. Gr. 2250, fol. 217r-223r (version B), see CAAG I, pp. 28-35 (I.XIII = version A; XIII^{bis} = Version B).

5. Mertens (1988, pp. 9-10) points to the oath formula as an aspect of the text through which the Byzantine tradition would have left its mark. The reason was that the testimonies known at that time for ὀρκίζω σε εἰς + accusative dated from the 7th cent. onwards. However, its attestation in a formula almost identical to that contained in the first line of *The Letter*’s oath within the *Cyranides* (III 1, 22), which is roughly contemporary to *The Letter*, could suggest that it was extant, albeit rare, in early Imperial Roman time. I do not consider this fact to be indicative of an engagement between both texts, as suggested by Lopes da Silveira (2020, pp. 51-52), but rather proof of the diffusion and circulation of this adjuration/oath formula between contemporary Hermetic and magical circles (see below).

6. See Martelli, 2011, pp. 90-94. Martelli’s dating is based on both internal evidence, drawn from the four alchemical books of Pseudo-Democritus, and external data, provided by other ancient works. That said, the dating of the work of the alchemist Pseudo-Democritus is directly connected with the problematic identification of this author with Bolus of Mendes, a Hellenistic intellectual considered to be the author of part of the pseudepigraphic tradition attributed to Democritus of Abdera. However, despite the different dating of Bolus offered by modern scholars, they agree that he cannot be later than the 2nd

tation of some extracts from *The Letter* by Zosimos of Panopolis, who must have lived between the late 3rd and the early 4th cent. CE, could provide the *terminus ante quem*.⁷ This leads Mertens to locate the composition of this treatise at some point between the 2nd and 4th cent. CE.⁸ The profusion of parallels between *The Letter of Isis* and hermetic and magical texts dated within this same time frame reaffirms this dating and the Egyptian provenance of the text.⁹

In the treatise, written in epistolary form, the Egyptian goddess Isis addresses her son, the god Horus, to instruct him on ἡ ἱερὰ τέχνη τῆς Αἰγύπτου, “the Holy Art of Egypt”, which is identified as “the preparation of gold and silver – τὴν τοῦ χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου κατασκευήν” (*i.e.* alchemy). The link between alchemy and Egypt has historical foundations: although some of the methods and technical expertise associated with alchemy can be traced back to Mesopotamia,¹⁰ the multicultural crucible of Roman Egypt was likely the place where alchemy originated as an art distinct from craftwork. In fact, the earliest surviving texts and known authors of the alchemical tradition come from this milieu: Pseudo-Democritus (1st cent. CE) claims to have studied in Egypt (*Physika kai Mystika*, 1, 65 Martelli), and some later sources place him in Memphis (see n. 98, below); the tradition links Zosimos (late 3rd – early 4th cent. CE) to Panopolis,¹¹ an important cultural centre in the Thebaid, in Upper Egypt. In any case, he visited Memphis (*MA VII 8* Mertens) and stayed at Alexandria (*MA I 84* Mertens). His work also records that there were other alchemical circles active in his time, such as that of the Egyptian priest Neilos.¹² The names of other alchemists, such as Pibêchis, Pausiris, Pammenes, or Petasius, whose work has not been preserved, also indicate an Egyptian origin. Moreover, a number of papyri provide direct

cent. BCE. This rules out his being the author of the alchemical work transmitted under the name of Pseudo-Democritus, which, as mentioned above, is dated from the 1st cent. CE, and not before. On this topic, see Gaillard-Seux, 2009; Martelli, 2011, pp. 99-114.

7. Mertens, 1983-1984, pp. 68-69 and 112.

8. Mertens, 1983-1984, p. 126. In later studies, Mertens (1988, p. 260; 1989a, p. 4) narrows down the dating to the late 2nd and the early 3rd cent. CE. Letrouit (1995, pp. 82 and 88), on the contrary, dates it to the 7th-8th cent. CE. However, Mertens (2006, p. 223, n. 54) refutes this dating, which does not consider version A of our text.

9. See the bibliography quoted in the previous note and, in general, the following discussion.

10. Oppenheim, 1966; Martelli & Rumor, 2014.

11. See Mertens, 1995, pp. xiii-xv. On the Egyptian background of Zosimos, see also the contributions of Marina Escolano-Poveda and Olivier Dufault in this volume.

12. As direct competitors of Zosimos, Neilos and his circle appeared repeatedly in his works, see, *e.g.* *On the Treatment of the Body of Magnēsia* (CAAG II 188-191, in *Chapters to Eusebeia*) and the Syriac version of Zosimos' seventh book *On the Letter Waw* (ed. and transl. in Martelli, 2017, p. 214). On the polemic between Zosimos and Neilos, see also Escolano-Poveda in this volume.

evidence of the practice of alchemy in Roman Egypt.¹³ Notable among this direct evidence are the so-called Leiden and Stockholm alchemical papyri, two anonymous alchemical recipe collections dating from the early 4th cent. CE.¹⁴

Furthermore, due to the profusion of sources linking the first stages of alchemy to Egypt, and because we are not aware of alchemical authors or works produced in places other than Egypt during this period or earlier, scholars locate the origin of alchemy in Roman Egypt and refer to this phase of this discipline's history as "Graeco-Egyptian alchemy". As will be shown, the textual parallels and the motifs of the initial narrative of *The Letter of Isis* support the idea that this treatise originates from this milieu.

It should be noted, however, that *The Letter of Isis* stands out among all the above-mentioned works for a particular idiosyncrasy. This relates less to the technical aspect of the described processes, which are very similar to those found in contemporary alchemical works, and more to its reference to alchemical activity as an art focused solely on "the preparation of gold and silver". This notion became predominant from the Byzantine period onwards, but a passage by Zosimos preserved in Syriac suggests that, even before the Byzantine period, the activity of some alchemical circles was focused on noble metals.¹⁵ Graeco-Egyptian alchemy, by contrast, was characterised by a multidisciplinary interest that included, in addition to the treatment of metals, processes such as the production of textile dyes and the imitation of gemstones.¹⁶ What interests me most at this point, however, is the peculiar narrative that frames the alchemical processes. This constitutes the introduction to the treatise, which is followed by a compilation of several recipes.

13. *P.Laur.* inv. 22011 and *P.Gen.* inv. 127 (unknown provenance; 2nd cent. CE) reveal the multidisciplinary interest in dyeing methods characteristic of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy. However, given the complexity of making a clear distinction between alchemy and artisanal techniques in the case of fragmentary testimonies, the following papyri may also be added to this list, with all due reservations: *P.Oxy.* 467 (metallurgical recipes; Oxyrhynchus, late 1st-early 2nd cent. CE); *P.Iand.* 85 (textile dyeing; unknown provenance, 1st-2nd cent. CE); and the Demotic papyrus *P.Wien.* D 6321+6687 (textile dyeing; mid- or second half of the 2nd cent. CE, see Quack, 2021). The dating of all these papyri is based on palaeographical criteria.

14. Dating based on palaeographical criteria. For the edition of the Greek text, with (French) translation and commentary, see Halleux, 1981. Blanco Cesteros (forthcoming) provides an exhaustive analysis of the reasons for its alchemical classification.

15. Syriac text edited and translated in Martelli, 2014, p. 12 and pp. 18-20 respectively.

16. On Graeco-Egyptian alchemy, see e.g. Martelli, 2014 and 2016.

“Isis the *Prophētis* to her son Horus.

O son, as you were about to leave and fight a battle against the unfaithful Typhon for the kingdom of your father, I went to Hormanouthis <...> (city, sanctuary?) of the Holy Art of Egypt – ἱερᾶς τέχνης Αἰγύπτου – where I spent a long time.

According to the succession of the convenient times – κατὰ δὲ τὴν τῶν καιρῶν παραχώρησιν – and to the necessary course of the spherical movement, one of those living in the first firmament, one of the angels – ἓνα τῶν ἀγγέλων – after looking at me from above, came with the desire to have sexual intercourse with me. When he arrived and started to approach, I did not give in, because I wanted to learn the preparation of gold and silver – τὴν τοῦ χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου κατασκευήν. After I asked him this question, he told me that he was not allowed to reveal this – οὐκ ἔφη ὁ αὐτὸς ἐφίεσθαι περὶ τούτου ἐξειπεῖ – because of the paramountcy of these secrets – διὰ τὴν τῶν μυστηρίων ὑπερβολήν – but (he told me) that the next day his superior, the angel *Amnaēl*, would come, and that he would be able to provide a response to (my) enquiry into these secrets. He told me about the sign that he (*i.e.* *Amnaēl*) had on his head, and that he would show (me?) an unpitched, ceramic vessel filled with clear water. He wanted to tell the truth.

The next day, his superior *Amnaēl* appeared, when the sun was in the middle of its course, and came down. Taken by the same desire for me, he did not await, but he hastened to get what he came for; but I was not less focused on what I was searching for. He longed for it, but I did not give myself and I was able to curb his desire until he showed me the sign on his head – τὸ σημεῖον τὸ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς – and conveyed to me the mysteries I was looking for without malevolence and faithfully – τὴν τῶν ζητουμένων μυστηρίων παράδοσιν ἀφθόνως¹⁷ καὶ ἀληθῶς.

So, finally, (he) showed me the sign and began to reveal the mysteries, giving me the instructions and the concession oaths – ἐπὶ παραγγελίας καὶ ὄρκους ἐκχωρήσας:

I make you swear by the heaven and the earth, the light and the darkness.

I make you swear by the fire, the water, the air and the soil.

I make you swear by the height of heaven, the earth and the depth of the Tartarus.

I make you swear by Hermes and Anubis, the barking of Cerberus and the Guardian-Snake.

17. This adverb literally means “without envy, free from envy”; see *LSJ*, s.v. “ἄφθονος”. However, in this context, as will be shown in Section 5, n. 133, below, it refers rather to the divine being acting without malevolence.

I make you swear by that passage-boat and the sailor of the Acheron.
I make you swear by the Three Necessities, (their) whips and swords.

After administering this oath to me, he ordered me not to pass (this knowledge) on to anyone except my son and legitimate offspring – παρήγγειλεν μηδενὶ μεταδιδόναι εἰ μὴ μόνον τέκνω καὶ φίλῳ γνησίῳ –, so that I may be you and you may be me¹⁸

A perceptive reader will quickly identify many elements in this narrative that act as rhetorical devices designed to imbue the technical knowledge of this treatise with authority and prestige.¹⁹ Firstly, the revelation of the alchemical art is set in a mythical time (when Horus was fighting against his uncle Typhon, after the death of Osiris). The angelic origin of this knowledge and the figure of Isis legitimise the content of this treatise (*i.e.* alchemy) and elevate it to the “divine” or “sacred” (it comes from the angels and is transmitted to a goddess). In accordance with this motif, alchemical knowledge is also given the status of *mystērion* (μυστήριον), a knowledge restricted to the initiates. To reaffirm it, its revelation is preceded by an oath of secrecy. The epistolary form chosen was also a common rhetorical device in Hellenistic and Roman pseudepigrapha.²⁰

18. Mertens, 1983-1984, pp. 128-129 = CAAG II, pp. 28-29. Up to the oath, the translation of the Greek text mainly follows Martelli (2014, p. 8), except where the translation required some refining to better reflect the Greek or the sense of the text. The translation of the oath and subsequent lines is mine.

19. Compare, for instance, with those identified by Jacco Dieleman (2005, pp. 254-276) in connection with Greek magical papyri.

20. The use of the epistolary form with a didactic aim – *Lehrbriefen* – is widely attested in Antiquity, not only to develop narratives (*e.g.* the *Letter of Pseudo-Aristeas*) and to discuss philosophical or ethical issues (as Cicero’s *Letters*), but also to expose technical matters (see Langslow, 2007). To take a case in point, some of the alchemist Zosimos’ production is constituted by letters to his disciple Theosebeia, in which the alchemist discusses different aspects of the alchemical art supposedly in response to questions from his addressee. There is also a very popular variant of the treatise in epistolary form that employs a prefatory letter to introduce a technical exposition of knowledge or even recipes (Types A and B of the classification established by Langslow [2007, p. 216], both with several subtypes depending on the epistolary formal markers used). Famous scientific examples can be found from Hellenistic times onwards (see Langslow, 2007, pp. 218-219). The *Letter of Isis* belongs to this stylistic trend, since, in terms of content, it is actually a recipe collection not dissimilar to those in the anonymous alchemical papyri of Leiden and Stockholm. Other examples of recipes introduced by pseudepigraphic letters are found in Graeco-Egyptian magical handbooks: *The Letter of the Sacred Scribe Pnouthis to Keryx* (PGM I 42-194, 2nd cent. CE); *The Letter of Nephotes to the Pharaoh Psammetichos* (PGM IV 154-286, 4th cent. CE); and *The Letter of Pitys to King Ostanos* (PGM IV 2006-2125, 4th cent. CE). The use of imperatives and second-person verb forms in recipes and magical formularies is consistent with the epistolary second-person address, thus it was very easy to combine the recipe literature with a prefatory letter to give a didactic flavour to the whole. Through this “packaging” a collection of anonymous recipes not only acquired the status of a treatise, but, crucially, an aura of prestige, see Dieleman, 2005, p. 270. However,

This literary format became very popular in Antiquity because of its suitability for examining specific issues, and its ability to disseminate new texts under the name of a certain authority, thus ensuring their survival.²¹ To further our research, we must ask ourselves what guided the choices of the *Letter's* author in terms of characters and narrative motifs – taking into account the great variety of those existing in the contemporary tradition – and what they tell us about the text.

The way in which individual motifs are combined allows us to establish three structural narrative patterns: (i) that of the angelic revelation of celestial wisdom, which serves as the fundamental framework of the narrative; (ii) the stock-theme of the goddess Isis as the receptacle of secret knowledge, which she passes on to her son Horus; and (iii) that of the initiation into esoteric knowledge through a revelation. I will discuss each in turn in order to structure the following discussion and to avoid becoming lost in the plethora of elements of this story.

2. THE ANGELIC ORIGIN OF THE ALCHEMICAL ART

The first element of this narrative that catches the reader's attention is, undoubtedly, the mixture of figures from different cultures: Isis, an Egyptian divinity, interacts with certain beings referred to in our text as "angels" (ἄγγελοι, *angeloi*). *The Letter* describes these beings as corporeal entities subject to passions, organized in hierarchies and inhabiting heavenly spheres. This image, although far removed from the one proposed by Christian theology, corresponds to some of the ways in which Hebrew angels were conceptualised in Antiquity, above all in the Old Testament pseudepigrapha, an important stream of Second Temple Jewish literature, and Gnosticism.²² In fact, the name *Amnaēl*, attested only once in a late magical text,²³ clearly features the semitic term 'Ēl ("god, divinity"), which was often used for the composition of angelic names (e.g., *Gabrī' ēl* [Gabriel], *Mīkā' ēl* [Michael], *Rēpā' ēl* [Raphael], etc.).²⁴ Despite the outstanding scarcity of parallels, *Amnaēl* could be related to the name

within these conventions, *The Letter* also leaves room for originality (e.g. in the use of a divine sender and recipient), as Lopez da Silveira (2020, pp. 36-41) rightly points out.

21. These reasons were pointed out by Sykutris (1931, col. 205), and remain valid among modern scholars, who continue to regard Sykutris' work as a seminal text on the epistolary genre.

22. See Scopello, 2018 and Ratzon, 2021.

23. The name occurs in a 19th-cent. Ethiopic manuscript containing magical prayers (*P.Abbad.* 107, fol. 8b). See Mertens, 1989b, p. 389 and n. 33.

24. In her study, Mertens (1983-1984, p. 77) reviews the different etymologies that have been proposed for *Amnaēl*, concluding that Hebrew etymology does not satisfactorily explain the first element of this name.

Anaēl, attested in various angelic lists from magical texts.²⁵ Due to the fluidity of words and names in the magical tradition, one wonders whether *Amnaēl* and *Anaēl* are not simply transcript variants (or variants caused by error) of another angelic name: *Ananēl* or *Ananiel* (עננאל), the 14th Watcher of the twenty leaders of the 200 Fallen Angels, mentioned in the Ethiopian version of an Old Testament apocryphal known as the *Book of Enoch* (6.7 Knibb, 1978).²⁶ The link between our alchemical treatise and the *Book of Enoch* is not without foundation; the introduction of *The Letter* develops the germ of a narrative found in the initial part of this text, precisely in the section known as the *Book of Watchers* (= *1Enoch* 1-36). The Greek version that is most faithful to the original Aramaic text is preserved by the Greek author Syncellos.²⁷ It narrates how some heavenly angels descended, seduced by the beauty of mortal women, whom they took as wives and to whom they passed on certain celestial knowledge:

“These (*i.e.* the leaders of the heavenly angels) and all the rest (of the Watchers) took for themselves wives in AM 1170, and they began to defile themselves with them up to the Flood. And they bore for them three races. First, the great giants. Then the giants begot the *Napheleim*, and to the *Napheleim* were born *Elioud* and they were increasing in accordance with their greatness. And they taught themselves and their wives the uses of potions and spells. First, *Azaēl*, the tenth of the leaders, taught them to make swords and armours and every instrument of war and how to work the metals of the earth and gold, how to make them into adornments for their wives, and silver. He showed them also the use of cosmetics and beautifying the face, the precious stones²⁸ and the colouring tinctures. And the sons of men did this for themselves and their daughters and they transgressed and led astray the righteous. And there was great impiety on the earth. And they made their ways corrupt. And their chief *Semiazas* taught them [to be

25. See Mertens 1989b, pp. 388-389.

26. For a detailed discussion on the canonical status (and history) of this text among different religions and churches, see Lopes da Silveira, 2020, pp. 132-33. As for its dating, since the text is specifically known in the Hellenistic period, but not before, scholars date its composition to c. the early Hellenistic period. The text was originally composed in Aramaic and then translated into Greek. The Greek version preceded and served as the basis for the later Ethiopic version. For a general discussion on the different versions, their dating and how they relate to each other, see Knibb, 2009, pp. 17-35 and 36-55.

27. See Knibb, 2009, p. 39.

28. Regarding τούς ἐκλέκτους λίθους, I gave myself permission to adjust Adler and Tuffin’s version, which translates this as “the choice stones”. Λίθοι ἐκλεκτοί is an Old Testament fixed formula for referring to precious stones (*2Esd* 5:8; *Is* 28:16 and 54:12). It is logical, therefore, to assume that, here, the Greek translation of the *Book of Watchers* is trying to emulate the style of the Old Testament and that λίθοι ἐκλεκτοί simply means “precious stones” and not “the chosen stones” or “the special stones”.

objects of wrath against reason]] [enchantments], and the roots of plants of the earth. The eleventh, *Pharmaros*, taught them the uses of potions, spells, lore, and the remedies for spells. The ninth taught them the study of the stars. The fourth taught astrology. The eighth taught divination (...).²⁹

This account is actually based on *Gen* 6:1-2, according to which there was a time when angels, seduced by the beauty of mortal women, descended from heaven to take them as wives and cohabit with mortals on Earth.³⁰ Because God could not allow the heavenly essence to mix with the mortal, and because of the wickedness of men, God decided to send the Flood (*Gen* 6:7). *Genesis* does not mention any exchange of knowledge between angels and mortals; this motif, as far as we know, appears for the first time in the Enochian account, which points to this interchange as the reason for the disgrace of these angels and mankind.

As for the revealed wisdom, the Enochian account identifies it as very specific knowledge. This includes potions and spells (*i.e.* magic), metalworking, the preparation and use of cosmetics, and the use of tinctures, herbalist knowledge, the study of the stars, astronomy, astrology, and so on. Although the different versions of the *Book of Watchers* vary slightly in the arts included in this list and their number, they all comprise a range of technical expertise included in the ancient category of *ars*. At the same time, their negative connotations implied in the text (as a cause of moral corruption and sin) relate to the link between some of these *artes* and physical adornment, lust, and superfluous ostentation; others undoubtedly belong – or were related – to the field of magic and divination. The set of knowledge attributed to *Azaël* is of particular interest. This angel is credited with the metalworking – and the Enochian account specifically highlights silver and gold in this regard – (the use of?) precious stones, tinctures, and the use of cosmetics. As Martelli has stressed,³¹ the similarity between the crafts taught by *Azaël* and the fields of interest of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy is striking; even the use of cosmetics is not at odds with the Graeco-Egyptian notion of alchemy.³² In addition, these crafts were grouped together, linked to a single

29. *1Enoch* 6-8, *apud* Sync. P.12, ll. 8-17 Mosshammer, transl. from Adler & Tuffin, 2002, pp. 16-17.

30. *Gen* 6:1-2 (English standard version): “When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose”.

31. Martelli, 2014, p. 10. I agree with this author that the Graeco-Egyptian alchemist would have identified with the entire body of knowledge transmitted by *Azaël*. In contrast, Fraser (2004, p. 127) and Bull (2018b, p. 17) consider that the link with alchemy comprised only τὰ βαφικά.

32. Cosmetics means nothing more than the use of pigments for personal adornment, so alchemy and cosmetics made use of the same mineral and plant substances.

angel, as if they were somehow related. That said, there is neither textual nor material evidence to interpret *Azaēl*'s teachings as an early allusion to the notion of alchemy found in Graeco-Roman Egypt. What is more certain, however, is the fact that the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists took advantage of this similarity to appropriate the Enochian account.³³ They set aside the obvious criticism contained within this story and use it to justify the sacred character of the “Holy Art” (ἱερὰ τέχνη).³⁴

In addition to *The Letter*, this type of reuse is well documented, thanks to Zosimos of Panopolis. In fact, Syncellos records in his work the specific passage in which Zosimos refers to this tradition somewhat after narrating the Enochian account:³⁵

“But it is also fitting to cite a passage regarding them (*i.e.* the divine scriptures) from Zosimos, the philosopher of Panopolis, from his writings to Theosebeia in the ninth book of *Imouth*, which read as follows: ‘The Holy Scriptures – αἱ ἱερὰ γραφαί –, that is, the books – βίβλοι –, say, my lady (*i.e.* Theosebeia), that there is a race of demons who avail themselves of women. Hermes also mentioned this in his *Physika*, and nearly every treatise, both public and esoteric, made mention of this. Thus the ancient and divine scriptures – αἱ ἀρχαῖαι καὶ θεῖαι γραφαί – said this, that certain angels lusted after women, and having descended taught them all the works of nature – πάντα τὰ τῆς φύσεως ἔργα –. For this reason, they fell into disgrace, he (Hermes?) says, and remained outside heaven, because they taught mankind everything wicked and nothing benefiting the soul. The same scriptures say that from them the giants were born. So theirs is the first teaching concerning these arts – ἡ πρώτη παράδοσις {Χημεῦ}³⁶ περὶ τούτων τῶν τεχνῶν –. They called this book *Chēmeu* – Χημεῦ – whence also the art is called *chēmeia* – χημεία (*i.e.* alchemy) –’ and so forth.”³⁷

The interpretation of Zosimos’ words in this passage is not always crystal clear and remains the object of scholarly discussion,³⁸ but “the ancient and divine scriptures” to which he refers in connection with this narrative are most likely the aforementioned *Book of Enoch*.³⁹ It is also worth noting that, according to Zosimos, the

33. In this vein, Mertens (1989b, p. 185) correctly points out that “*un lecteur alchimiste n’avait guère besoin de forcer le texte*”.

34. See Martelli, 2014, p. 14.

35. In addition to Syncellus’ quotation, a Syriac version of Zosimos’ work is preserved in Cambridge Ms. 6.29, fols. 49^r-50^r. The Syriac text is edited and translated in Martelli, 2014.

36. Editors generally expunge this first Χημεῦ because it is agrammatical. It is likely a gloss of ἡ πρώτη παράδοσις περὶ τούτων τῶν τεχνῶν.

37. Sync., p. 14, 2-14 Mosshammer (Greek transl. from Martelli, 2014, pp. 10-11).

38. See Idel, 1986; Fraser, 2004; Martelli, 2014; Bull, 2018b.

39. Fraser, 2004, p. 125; Bull, 2018b, p. 7.

account of angelic revelation was widely attested in Hermetic writings “both public and esoteric”. In fact, the existence of such a tradition is attested to by the first book of the *Cyranides*,⁴⁰ which is usually included within the so-called technical Hermetica. According to its prologue, “the god Hermes Trismegistus, after receiving from angels a greatest gift of God, shared this book with all the men fit for receiving the mysteries”.⁴¹ It follows, then, that the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists were not the only ones to profit from the Enochian narrative. However, as can be seen, the account about the angelic revelation alone does not contain all the narrative elements that we find in the introduction of *The Letter of Isis*. The reason for this, as I will show below, is that it was combined with other structural narrative patterns.

3. ISIS: RECEPTACLE AND TRANSMITTER OF SECRET KNOWLEDGE (TO HER SON, HORUS)

The Letter is credited to the goddess Isis, and the main voice in this treatise is hers. This begs the question as to why a collection of alchemical recipes would be credited to this goddess. Why not attribute this treatise, like the *Cyranides*, to Hermes-Toth, who was thought to be the inventor of different types of knowledge and was thus credited with a long sapiential tradition?⁴² Once more, the Enochian account provides us with the first clue regarding the choice of Isis. According to this account, the first recipient of angelic knowledge was a woman,⁴³ so a female character was

40. See Festugière, 2014, pp. 219-220 [203-204].

41. *Cyran.* 1, pro. 7-8 Kaimakis, 1976: Θεοῦ δῶρον μέγιστον <ἀπ’> ἀγγέλων λαβῶν Ἑρμῆς ὁ τρισμέγιστος θεὸς ἀνθρώποις πᾶσιν μετέδωκεν δεκτικοῖς μυστικῶν βιβλίων τόδε. This parallel was already noted in Mertens, 1989b, p. 388; see also Lopes da Silveira, 2020, p. 58.

42. This tradition goes back to Ancient Egypt (Fowden, 1986, pp. 57-67) and, in addition to literature of a philosophical-theological nature, it also included technical treatises and magic. See Fowden, 1986, pp. 79-86; Bull, 2018a, pp. 398-426.

43. According to Rebecca Lesses (2006 and 2014), the reason for the gendering of this recipient as feminine and its connection with sin and ruin must be sought in a motif of Old Testament denunciations against the enemies of the Israelite nation, such as Canaan, Babylon, and Nineveh. In the Old Testament discourse, these places were condemned for the immorality of their people, their opulence, and the perversion of their practices, which included different forms of divination and magic. The danger that such places embodied the corruption of Israelite values is often personified in the image of a temptress woman or harlot. For this same reason, non-Israelite women, such as Jezebel, were also imbued with these same characteristics: they are dangerous, even evil, seductive, and practice magic. It is nevertheless remarkable that the technical expertise comprised in Graeco-Egyptian alchemy originates in Near East civilisations and can be traced back to Babylonian cuneiform texts. See Oppenheim, 1966; Martelli & Rumor, 2014.

required for this role. And, as the examination of Isis will reveal, had the potential to develop this personage.

In Egyptian tradition, Isis is the protagonist of mythological episodes in which she succeeded in obtaining secret knowledge. In the narrative of *The Secret Name of Ra*,⁴⁴ Isis wants to obtain the only thing she has not been allowed to know: the true name of her father, the supreme god Ra. Thus, the goddess, who is said to be “cleverer than millions of gods”, devises a stratagem. She creates a snake that bites and poisons Ra, and then she offers to heal him, arguing that she needs to know his true name to do so. Ra falls for his daughter’s deception and reveals the secret to Isis, ordering her to not divulge it to anyone, with the exception of her son, Horus. In this way, Isis acquires power over Ra himself and, simultaneously, manages to make her son the future ruler of Egypt, but not before remaining impassive and obstinate in her objective in the face of her father’s pain. This myth, which is an aetiological explanation of Isis as embodiment of the ruling power,⁴⁵ obviously differs in many respects from the narrative we find in *The Letter*. However, its general narrative pattern also offers an ancient precedent for one of the structural themes that we find in our treatise: Isis, portrayed as a cunning goddess, tenacious in her quest for wisdom, obtains secret knowledge that she passes on to her son. It is worth remembering that *The Letter* also characterises her with a particular determination (“I was not less focused on what I was searching for. He longed for it, but I did not give myself and I was able to curb his desire until he showed me his sign”). This is not the only episode in Egyptian mythical lore in which she is depicted in this way. According to some versions of the myth *The Contendings of Horus and Seth*,⁴⁶ which describes the struggles between these two gods for supreme power, Isis defies the Ennead – the divine tribunal that judges the dispute – and uses several tricks to help her son and overcome the obstacles that appear in her way. She transforms herself into an old woman to deceive the divine boatman guarding access to the place of judgement, and into a young temptress girl – thus adding an element of seduction to her deception – who tricks Seth into admitting his guilt in the struggle. These narratives, however, belong to the tradition of Isis as “Great of Magic”, but which have little or nothing to do with alchemical knowl-

44. This narrative is found in several sources from the Ramesside period (19th and 20th dynasties). See Nagel, 2019, p. 776, n. 1682 for a detailed list with specific bibliography.

45. The name Isis means “throne” and, originally, this goddess embodied ruling power. See Griffiths, 2001, p. 188. The recent study by Nagel (2019) is an essential work on Isis in Graeco-Roman Egypt.

46. The papyrus in which this tale is preserved (*P.Chester Beatty I*) dates from the reign of Ramses V (1147-1143 CE, 20th dynasty). See Lichtheim, 1976, pp. 214-223 for an English translation of the text.

edge. One might therefore wonder on what foundations the link between Isis and alchemy is based.

Firstly, it should be noted that, in Antiquity, Isis appears to have developed a facet as a divinity discoverer or transmitter of technical knowledge. Both aspects appear, for instance, in an Egyptian tradition referred to by Diodorus of Sicily (1st cent. BCE), according to which Isis was considered the initiator of medical knowledge:

“She (Isis) was the discoverer of many health-giving drugs – φαρμάκων τε πολλῶν – and was greatly versed in the science of healing – ἰατρικῆς ἐπιστήμης. (...) Furthermore, she discovered also the drug which gives immortality – τὸ τῆς ἀθανασίας φάρμακον –, by means of which she not only raised from the dead her son Horus, who had been the object of plots on the part of the Titans and had been found dead under the water, giving him his soul again, but also made him immortal. (...) Moreover, they say that the name Horus, when translated, is Apollo, and that, having been instructed by his mother Isis in both medicine and divination – τὴν τε ἰατρικὴν καὶ τὴν μαντικὴν ὑπὸ τῆς μητρὸς Ἰσιδος διδαχθέντα – he is now a benefactor of the race of men through his oracular responses and his healings”.⁴⁷

In fact, Isis had a long tradition as a healer in Egypt, appearing not only in the myth of *The Secret Name of Ra* healing her father, but also in numerous medical-magical narratives in which her son Horus suffers for various reasons (an illness, injury, scorpion or snake bite).⁴⁸ And we must not forget that, in the main myth of the Osiris cult, Isis revived the corpse of her husband.⁴⁹ This tradition probably gave rise to that referred to by Diodorus, as an explanation or development of Isis’ healing power. In addition, and as in *The Secret Name of Ra*, in this tradition the goddess transmitted her knowledge to her son.

The image of Isis as instructor of technical knowledges is also found in Hermeticism. At the end of the treatise known as *Korē Kosmou* (SH XXIII; 3rd-4th cent. CE),⁵⁰ Hermes (as Hermetic demiurge and supreme god) give Isis, and her brother

47. D.S., I 25, 2-7 (transl. by Oldfather, 1933, p. 81).

48. The presence of these narratives, known as Isis-Horus *historiolae*, is attested from the ancient Egyptian *cippi* to Christian-Coptic magic, see Frankfurter, 2009.

49. This is the main myth of the Osiris cult, according to which Seth killed his brother to assume supreme power, dismembered his body, and scattered it all over Egypt. Isis then began a pilgrimage to retrieve it and reconstituted Osiris’ body, revivifying him, see Smith, 2017, p. 6 for a general summary with specific bibliography.

50. For the dating of this Hermetic treatise, see Litwa, 2018, p. 13; on the passage discussed here, see Nagel, 2019, pp. 797-800.

and husband Osiris, permission to pass on some civilizing knowledge to humankind. The treatise then lists the teachings of the divine pair:

“They (*i.e.* Isis and Osiris) alone, after learning from Hermes the secrets of divine legislation – τὰς κρυπτὰς νομοθεσίας τοῦ θεοῦ – taught arts, sciences, and all occupations, became initiators of the humankind and legislators – μαθόντες τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστημῶν καὶ ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἀπάντων εἰσηγηταὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐγένοντο καὶ νομοθέται”.⁵¹

Although in this text the goddess (along with Osiris) directly instructs humankind, she is most often the medium through which the secret teachings of a divine authority reach her son, Horus.⁵² The proper *Korē Kosmou* belonged to a collection of Hermetic philosophical treatises, which Isis addresses to her son,⁵³ as is also the case with *The Letter of Isis*.

A passage from the *Korē Kosmou* (SH XXIII) that touches on this very image of Isis can help us to clarify the remaining question, that is, the link between Isis and alchemy. The text reads as follows:

“Pay attention, my son Horus, for you listen to a hidden teaching – κρυπτῆς θεωρίας – which my ancestor *Kamephis* chanced to hear from Hermes the recorder of all deeds. <I, in turn,> received the tradition from *Kamephis*, ancestor of all, when he honored me with the perfect black – ὁπότε ἔμὲ καὶ τῷ τελείῳ μέλανι ἐτίμησε –. Now you hear it from me”.⁵⁴

The interpretative possibilities regarding what exactly it is that Isis receives from *Kamephis* – *i.e.* the τέλειος μέλας – illustrate the complex series of reciprocities and identifications that could have been set in motion to connect Isis and alchemy.

A few parallels have been identified for the passage from the *Korē Kosmou*, which show that we are dealing with a formulaic expression of praise.⁵⁵ The oldest of

51. SH XXIII § 68 (my translation).

52. Litwa, 2018, p. 100.

53. Some of them (SH XXXIII-XXVII) have survived and are compiled and excerpted in Stobaeus' *Anthology* (5th cent. CE), see Litwa, 2018, p. 100. Some ancient authors also speak about the existence of “the books of Isis”, such as Lucian (*Gall.* 18, 5-6; this passage is quoted below).

54. SH XXIII § 32 (transl. by Litwa, 2018, pp. 115-116).

55. In addition to the Demotic parallel quoted in the main text, this formula appears in two magical texts. The first one, PGM VII, is contemporary to the *Korē Kosmou*: “I call on you, Lady Isis, whom *Agathos Daimon* permitted to rule in the complete black – ἢ συνεχώρησεν ὁ Ἄγαθος Δαίμων βασιλεύειν ἐν τῷ τελείῳ μέλανι” (l. 427). An additional witness from the 4th cent. CE has recently been provided in

these, a Demotic letter to the gods (1st cent. BCE), contains what could be the Egyptian version of this formula: “Isis, the great goddess to whom the Black (?) Land – *km* – was given” (*P.Berlin* 15660, l. 2).⁵⁶ The Demotic term *km* or *kemet* means “black”, but it was used also to refer to Egypt.⁵⁷ The blackness of the soil of the Nile’s valley was already perceived in Egyptian culture as the most representative characteristic of this land in opposition to the desert and its sands (*deshret*, the “Red One”). There is no doubt that this perception was inherited by Greek and Roman sources, which referred to the Egyptian country with various designations that underline this characteristic (μελλάγγειον, μέλαινα γῆ, μελανίτις γῆ, etc.).⁵⁸ It is possible, then, that many of these expressions, including that of τέλειος μέλας, were renderings of the Egyptian term *kemet*.⁵⁹ One of these passages deserves special attention. In it, Plutarch (*ca.* 40/50-120 CE) does not translate the term *kemet*, but transcribes it as χημία, *chēmia*:

“Egypt, moreover, which has the blackest of soils – ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα μελλάγγειον οὔσαν – they (*i.e.* Egyptians) call by the same name as the black portion of the eye,⁶⁰ “*chēmia*” – ὥσπερ τὸ μέλαν τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ, χημίαν καλοῦσι.”⁶¹

It should be noted that the term χημία reappears in later Greek sources to refer to the alchemical art.⁶² In fact, the modern word “alchemy” comes from the Arabic *al-kīmiyā*, which was composed by adding the Arabic article *al-* to the Greek

Zellmann-Rohrer & Love, 2022, pp. 172-176. It is in a bilingual Greek-Coptic iatromagical invocation from the Michigan Ms. 136 (fol. 2,17 – 3,15; the Isis passage is in Coptic). On the divinity who instructs Isis, whose name varies from one testimony to another, see Nagel, 2019, pp. 818-821.

56. This parallel is noted in Nagel, 2019, p. 819.

57. *P.Berlin* 15660 confirms what has so far been the prevailing interpretation, that τέλειος μέλας refers to Egypt, see Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 139-142 (however, this author also points to alchemy as a possible alternative, see below); Festugière, 2014, III, p. clxviii; Robert K. Ritner in Betz, 1986, p. 131, n. 70; Jackson, 1986, pp. 117-118. For alternative interpretations proposed by other scholars (the night sky, black ink, or female genitalia), see Zellmann-Rohrer & Love, 2022, p. 173.

58. See a detailed elenchus of sources in Bain, 1995, pp. 191-196.

59. If we are talking about a land or region, τέλειος is better translated as “complete” rather than “perfect” (see *LSJ*, s.v. “τέλειος”). The latter, however, is the conventional way of translating this term in the expression τέλειος μέλας. The ambiguity between “complete” and “perfect”, however, may not be accidental.

60. The reasons why Plutarch associates the term *chēmia*/χημία with the eye pupil are unclear, beyond the obvious colour link. Nor does Hopfner (1941, p. 18) shed any light on this connection of ideas.

61. Plu., *De Is. et Os.* 33 [*Moralia* 364c] (transl. by Cole, 1936, p. 83).

62. The first attestation of this term with this specific meaning is in the passage from Zosimos quoted in the previous section of this study.

term χημία.⁶³ However, scholars agree that it does not seem to be Greek, since the alchemists themselves were not sure how to interpret it and its spelling fluctuates between χημία (*chēmia*) and χυμία (*chymia*). Precisely on the basis of Plutarch's passage, this word has been etymologically linked to the Egyptian term *kemet* and given the meaning of "blackness".⁶⁴ In support of this interpretation, scholars often point to the special link of early alchemy with Egypt (remember that even *The Letter* refers to it as "the Holy Art of Egypt") and the importance of the blackening of metals in alchemical practice.⁶⁵ It is worth noting in this regard that there is a passage by Zosimos of Panopolis, quoted by Olympiodorus (6th cent. CE),⁶⁶ in which the alchemists play with the same images used by Plutarch (including that of the pupil – τὸ μέλαν τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ) to talk about the blackening of metals.

If we return to the *Korē Kosmou*, the general context and the wording of the passage obscure the interpretation of τέλειος μέλας, which lends itself to being interpreted as the κρυπτή θεωρία that Isis received from *Kampehis* and that she will expose later in the treatise. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to think that this image of Isis as holder of the Black Land/*kemet*/χημία could have been confused with the alchemical meaning of χημία, or re-read in alchemical circles as a link between Isis and alchemical knowledge. This is a mere hypothesis and thus any assumption must be tentative; however, the fact is that τέλειος μέλας is polysemic⁶⁷ and therefore its identification with alchemy is plausible.⁶⁸

Through the testimonies discussed in this section, I have sought to show that the image of Isis as the transmitter of divine knowledge to her son was well known in Antiquity, and how, over the centuries, the nature of this knowledge transformed from being knowledge linked to sovereign power to technical knowledge. In this respect, it has been suggested that the image of the goddess as the first receptacle of alchemical wisdom may have benefited from the "alchemical" interpretation of a praise formula that presents Isis as ruler or holder of *kemet*. It is now better understood why, given the need for a female recipient of the angelic revelation in the Enochian narrative, the author chose not just any woman or goddess, but Isis, who, as her tradition shows, had

63. See e.g. Martelli, 2016, p. 217.

64. On this and other etymological proposals, see a detailed discussion in Martelli, 2019, pp. 17-21.

65. See e.g. Bain, 1995, pp. 207-208. This process, named in alchemy *nigredo* or μελάνωσις, was in fact the first chromatic phase of the alchemical transformation.

66. CAAG II, pp. 92, ll. 6-7 [§ 38].

67. See Oréal, 1998; Bain, 1999; Bull, 2018a, pp. 172-173; Zellmann-Rohrer & Love, 2022, p. 173.

68. Proof of this interpretative potential is its modern reading as alchemy by some scholars, e.g. Reitzenstein, 1904, pp. 139-142; Zielinski, 1905, pp. 356-358; Festugière, 1939a, p. 116.

the potential to develop this role. The author then modelled the Enochian account to suit the characteristics of the goddess in the Egyptian tradition. To do so, he used a third stock-theme that was very popular in contemporary literature: that of the initiation of a wise man and/or priest into esoteric knowledge through a revelation.

4. EXPLAINING ISIS' PRIESTLY STATUS AND THE THIRD NARRATIVE PATTERN

In 1989, Mertens devoted an entire article to pointing out that the title held by the goddess Isis in the title of this treatise, *prophētis* (προφήτις, the feminine of *prophētēs* [προφήτης]), should be interpreted from an Egyptian perspective. The relevance of this clarification lies in the fact that, in a Greek cultural milieu, the term *prophētēs/prophētis* designated a specific type of person linked with divinity, but it was also used to translate a very concrete Egyptian priestly title: *ḥm-ntr* ("god's servant") into Greek.⁶⁹ Consequently, when dealing with Egyptian figures or, as in this case, Graeco-Egyptian texts, this term can have a specific value different from what it would have in a purely Greek cultural milieu. With this in mind, a couple of further remarks on the use of the term *prophētis* can still be made.

Firstly, if we focus on the use of this term as a divine epithet, *prophētis* is not only a *unicum* in relation to Isis,⁷⁰ but it is also unusual as a divine epithet in both the feminine and masculine forms.⁷¹ In this respect, the witness of magical papyri – roughly contemporary to *The Letter* – is revelatory. Although in magical practices the divinities receive a plethora of epithets and titles, this title is restricted to (mortal) ritual practitioners.⁷² This suggests that, in the Egyptian milieu, there was a terminological specification, and that the term *prophētēs/prophētis* was not considered appropriate as a divine epithet.

69. Graeco-Egyptian inscriptions and papyri show that the Egyptian priesthood was divided into six classes, from the high priests at the top to the *wab* priests at the bottom, under which there were a multiplicity of minor, low-ranking priestly positions. See Vandorpe & Clarysse, 2019, pp. 416-418. The *ḥm-ntr* ("god's servant"), which was among the highest positions, developed administrative and ritual duties, including maintenance of the temple complex, conducting and performing the main rituals, and being among the few people who had access to the innermost part of the temple, where the cult images – the tangible manifestations of the gods – were located. See Doxey, 2001a, p. 69.

70. A fact already pointed out by Mertens (1989, p. 260) and still applicable today.

71. As far as I know, there is only one parallel for the use of this title (either masculine or feminine) to refer to a god. It is found in the Treatise XVII of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, in which the god Toth is interpellated as *prophētēs* (l. 13) by his addressee, an innominate king.

72. This is the conclusion reached by García Molinos (2006) after the analysis of all the occurrences of this term in the Greek magical papyri.

Secondly, the use of this term in our text is even more striking if we examine the different evolution of its feminine and masculine forms in the preserved documentation, in both Demotic and Greek. It demonstrates that the use of the masculine *ḥm-ntr/prophētēs* continued during Roman times, as a designation for priests with similar functions and prerogatives over time,⁷³ but this was not the case for the feminine form. Although attestation of women holding the title of “god’s servant” (*ḥmt-ntr*) is well-documented in Pharaonic Egypt,⁷⁴ in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods the title appears only in Demotic documentation, while the Greek *prophētis* is not confirmed.⁷⁵ Equally significant is the fact that the concordances of the Demotic form are limited to some papyri linked to religious feminine associations;⁷⁶ none are linked to temple priesthood.⁷⁷

Taking this into account, the utilisation of *prophētis* to refer to Isis in our text is striking and requires further explanation.

There are several arguments to suggest that Isis was bestowed with this title as a result of a confluence of commonplaces and stock-themes. Firstly, *The Letter* is part of a current that tends to associate those who had privileged knowledge, be it alchemy or magic or otherwise, with Egyptian ritual practitioners, and vice versa, and which represents Egyptian priests as experts in magic and other esoteric arts. To mention a couple of the best-known Graeco-Roman literary examples, the Egyptian priest Pankrates, in Lucian’s *Philopseudes* (§ 34; 2nd cent. CE), is able to animate objects, and Apuleius’ Zatchlas (*Met.* II 27-31; 2nd cent. CE), who is bestowed with the priestly title of *propheta primaries* (“prophet of the first rank”, II 28), performs a necromantic rite.⁷⁸ The fact is that this same association is also found in magical sources: the authors of the practices collected in the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri used the term *prophētēs* as a self-designation (e.g. *PGM* III 256; V 109; VII 323 and XII 229) as well as to refer to their authorities (e.g. Pacrates, *prophētēs* of Heliopolis *PGM* IV 2447 and 2454). However, the identification of magical practitioners with Egyptian priests

73. See Dieleman, 2005, p. 208.

74. Onstine, 2016, p. 619

75. The only attestation of this term related to Egyptian priestesses is in *P.Tebt.* II 292, l.5 (a letter sent by Isidora, daughter of Pakebkis, priestess at Tebtunis; 189-190 CE). However, it is an editorial reconstruction in lacuna. The term that is actually found on the papyrus is *hiereia* (ἱέρεια, “priestess”, l. 4).

76. Colin, 2002, pp. 111-113.

77. Colin, 2002, *passim*; Schentuleit, 2019, p. 353-354.

78. I mention here only two examples of the many that could be provided; for a detailed overview, accompanied by a thorough analysis, the interested reader may consult Escolano-Poveda, 2020. This conceptualisation of the Egyptian priest as a character able to perform prodigious or magical deeds is ancient, and has its origin, as Marina Escolano-Poveda has shown, in Egyptian literature.

goes beyond a mere quest for authority and prestige. It is now generally assumed that many of these practices, as well as their ritual practitioners, emanated from the Egyptian priestly milieu.⁷⁹ Therefore, without denying the existence of a rhetorical motif in some of these identifications, this collective was thus composed of ritual practitioners who are not easily, or necessarily, distinguishable from the Egyptian clergy.

A similar phenomenon can be noted in connection with alchemical figures. Chronologically, the first to be ascribed to the Egyptian priesthood within the alchemical tradition is Pseudo-Democritus (see below). Some centuries later, Dioscoros, the addressee of Synesius' commentary to Pseudo-Democritus, is identified as an Egyptian priest.⁸⁰ Other authorities of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy, such as the enigmatic *Chymes/Chimes*⁸¹ in a passage by Zosimos (CAAG II, p. 183, ll. 22), the alchemical Moses⁸² (CAAG II, p. 353, ll. 19), and Maria the Jewess (CAAG II, p. 404, ll.16-17) in Byzantine tradition, were also said to be *prophētai*. The latter three examples demonstrate that any ascription of Graeco-Egyptian alchemists to the Egyptian priesthood should be approached with great caution and not simply accepted at face value: the existence of an author named *Chymes/Chimes* is doubtful; that of Moses is a pseudographic tradition; and Maria the Jewess was definitely not Egyptian. However, the fact remains that there were also actual Egyptian ritual practitioners involved in the practice of alchemy. Proof of this is found in several passages by Zosimos of Panopolis, in which he mentions a contemporary Egyptian priestly circle interested in the practice of alchemy: that of the priest Neilos and his disciples.⁸³ A second piece of evidence comes from the alchemical papyri of Leiden and Stockholm. These recipe books, roughly contemporary to Zosimos, were found along with an important set of Graeco-Egyptian magical handbooks, so they likely belonged to the library⁸⁴ of a circle of Graeco-Egyptian ritual practitioners. This fact provides a direct witness to these ritualists' interest in alchemical matters. In this regard, the presence of several

79. Dickie, 1999; Dieleman, 2005; Escolano-Poveda, 2020, pp. 281-327.

80. Specifically, as "priests – ἱερεῦς – of Sarapis at Alexandria" (Syn. Alch. ll. 1-2 = Martelli, 2011, p. 224). This placed Dioscoros in a period before the destruction of the Alexandrian *Serapeion* in 391 CE. See Martelli, 2011, pp. 114-117.

81. This alchemical character seems a personification of alchemy, or a reinterpretation to explain the term *χημία/χυμία*, see Letrouit, 1995, pp. 72-74.

82. The first attestation of Moses as an alchemical author comes from Zosimos (late 3rd cent. – early 4th cent. CE), who also mentions several methods credited to this author (see Martelli, 2011, pp. 373-374).

83. See n. 12, above. In this same volume, Escolano-Poveda and Dufault discuss Zosimos' links with Egyptian religion and his attitude towards Egyptian priests.

84. This collection is known as the Theban Magical Library, see Dosoo, 2016.

recipes of alchemical nature within these same manuals reasserts such an interest.⁸⁵ It is likely, therefore, that, as in the case of magic, the interest of actual Egyptian priestly figures in alchemy was intertwined with the authoritative use of the ascription to Egyptian tradition, and that both drove each other in the creation of the stereotyped image of the alchemist-priest.

This phenomenon alone may have been reason enough for Isis to be given the title of *prophētis* in this treatise. In my view, however, the characterisation of Isis as a priestess in *The Letter* is reinforced by the presence of a particular stock-theme.

In the introduction, Isis relates that she went to Hormanouthis, a place whose toponym, although unknown,⁸⁶ has clear Egyptian resonances and that – in the narrative – seems to be relevant to the Holy Art of Egypt (*i.e.* alchemy). There, she was initiated into this discipline by a divine being. The narrative pattern of a stock-theme with parallels in both Egyptian and Greek tradition can be easily identified in the general lines of this account: that of the character who obtains a certain knowledge in an Egyptian sanctuary or temple through a divine revelation.

In fact, there was a relative early and widely developed Greek tradition⁸⁷ according to which it was believed that many Greek intellectual authorities travelled to Egypt as part of their training and that there they accessed the knowledge kept by priests in the Egyptian temples. The underlying reason for the development of such narratives was the great admiration that ancient Greeks had for the antiquity and wisdom of Egyptian culture. As a result, these narratives become a commonplace linked with many figures, from mythical heroes (*e.g.* Orpheus and Daedalus), to poets such as Homer and intellectuals such as Pythagoras, Thales of Miletus, Democritus of Abdera, and Plato, among others.⁸⁸

“I was a sophist, for I must tell the truth, I suppose. However, I was not uneducated or unacquainted with the noblest sciences. I even went to Egypt to study with the *prophētai*

85. See Blanco Cesteros, 2020.

86. The identification – or even exact nature – of this place is so far unknown. The two versions of the text are unanimous in recording ορμανουθι, but there is no recorded place in Egypt with such a name or even a similar one. If it is a Graecised rendering of an Egyptian toponym, it is unknown; if Greek, the term might be corrupted. See Mertens, 1983-1984, pp. 56-59. According to Lopes da Silveira (2020, p. 43), the possibility that this name is fictitious should not be ruled out. However, its resemblance to the toponym Hermonthis, a city with which Isis was closely linked (see Nagel, 2019, pp. 422-431), is suspicious.

87. Moyer, 2011, p. 58.

88. For a detailed catalogue of figures and sources, see Moyer, 2011, pp. 58-63.

– συγγενοίμην τοῖς προφήταις – penetrated into their sanctuaries – τὰ ἄδύτα – and learned the books of Horus and Isis by heart – τὰς βίβλους τὰς Ὁρου καὶ Ἴσιδος.⁸⁹

Without detracting from the value of the image of Egyptian temples as places of esoteric knowledge, there is another Egyptian institution governed by priests that may have contributed to this idea: the House of Life (*pr-ʿnh*).⁹⁰

“The House of Life appears to have functioned as a *scriptorium*, a place where Egyptian scribes and priests copied primarily religious compositions, but perhaps also literary texts and scientific treaties; this presupposes access to, and probably institutional storage of, collections of manuscripts that would correspond to most definitions of a library.”⁹¹

This work must certainly have been accompanied by intellectual activity,⁹² although the functioning of this institution as a school is also a matter of debate.⁹³ In whatever case, as pointed out by Escolano-Poveda (2020, p. 250):

“Knowledge of writing was already a barrier for the access and understanding of Egyptian religious and magical texts,⁹⁴ but within the (Egyptian) priestly class there were also different degrees of training and initiation that marked different levels of access to particular types of knowledge”.

Therefore, those educated in the temples, and above all those belonging to the high priestly classes, not only mastered the scribal profession, but also received a

89. Luc., *Gall.* 18, 1-6 (transl. by Harmon, 1915, pp. 207-208). The character speaking is Pythagoras, reincarnated as a rooster. This passage can be related to the previous section of this study, which discusses the sapiential tradition linked to the goddess Isis.

90. The generally assumed fact that this institution was attached to temples or palaces, as would be expected, seems to lack solid evidence, see Hagen, 2019, pp. 255-256.

91. Hagen, 2019, p. 259.

92. “It (*i.e.* the House of Life) may be supposed to be the institution of Egyptian temple in which the priests formed, transformed and transmitted the religious traditions of their country. Consequently, it must have been much more than just a place where books were stored. It was rather the place where scholars, *i.e.* priestly scribes, worked with the texts” (Stadler, 2015, p. 190).

93. Hagen, 2019, p. 258.

94. This barrier intensified over time, as Egyptian culture changed its writing system over the centuries (hieratic writing was replaced by demotic and, after several centuries of coexistence with Greek, Coptic emerged). Accessing hieratic texts housed in the temple libraries or understanding hieroglyphic texts written on the walls of temples implied an extra level of education to which only priestly castes would have had access. On this topic, see Escolano-Poveda, 2020, p. 245.

thorough education in multiple disciplines. This explains the Hellenistic and Roman image of Egyptian priests and their association with privileged or esoteric knowledge. For the same reason, the reader will understand that individuals educated in this intellectual environment were interested in subjects such as alchemy. But, even in Egyptian literature, stories were told of priests who had gained access to even more secret knowledge. This is the case with Horus, son of Paneshe, a character of the Demotic narrative known as *Setne II* (*P.BM* EA 10822; 1st cent. CE).⁹⁵ Horus is presented as a high-ranking priest and a powerful magician, whose deeds include saving Pharaoh's life. To this end, Horus travelled to Hermopolis to consult the god Toth through an incubation ritual in Toth's temple. The god, appearing to Horus in a dream, directs him to the library. There, Horus finds a locked "chamber" (or "shrine") where there is a chest with a book inside (*Setne II* 5, 4-15). This story presents several commonplaces⁹⁶ that are also found in the introduction of a Demotic astrological treatise preserved in two papyri from the Tebtunis temple library (*P.CtYBR* 422v and *P.Lund* 2058v; 1st-2nd cent. CE).⁹⁷ This is said to be derived from an original by the wise Imhotep and to have been discovered when a fragment of stone from a wall in the temple of Heliopolis fell. The "god's servant" Peteisis (*hm-ntr*, *P.CtYBR* 422v, l. 7) deciphers the treatise and offers it to the pharaoh Nechepsos. This stock-theme transcended the boundaries of Demotic literature, since it can also be found in contemporary Graeco-Egyptian writings, such as the narrative that frames the work of the alchemists Pseudo-Democritus (Ps.-Dem. Alch., *Physika* ll. 35-66 [§§ 3-4] Martelli). In this case, however, it is also combined with the *topos* of the Greek intellectual who travels to Egypt. Thus, Ps.-Democritus explains in the first person that he travelled to Egypt to learn about τὰ φυσικά ("the natural substances", ll. 65-66 [§ 4]) and that this training took place in a temple.⁹⁸ In fact, the alchemist refers to his audience as συμπροφῆται ("you who are *prophētai* with me", Ps.-Dem. Alch., *Physika* l. 155 [§ 15] Martelli), implying that he himself belongs to this category of ritual practitioners. In this setting, the author relates that the master died before completing his disciples' instruction, so he decides to perform a ritual to invoke his master's ghost and thus

95. See a detailed analysis of this narrative in Escolano-Poveda, 2020, pp. 68-69 with specific bibliography.

96. For the "find-*topos*", see Hagen, 2019, 256-257.

97. Edited and commented in Quack & Ryholt, 2019b. On this narrative, see also Escolano-Poveda, Section 5, in this volume.

98. Ps.-Dem. Alch., *Physika*, § 3, 35-64 (Martelli, 2011, pp. 183-187, with commentary at pp. 280-290). Although the exact place is not stated by the author, later commentators identified it with Memphis (Syn. Alch. § 1, ll. 9-11 Martelli; Sync., pp. 297, 24-28 Mosshammer).

complete his education. However, although he manages to contact the ghost, the spirit is silent about the knowledge that Democritus craves, since “he was not allowed to do so by his daemon” (ll. 42-43 [§ 3] Martelli). Nonetheless, Ps.-Democritus’ perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge will be rewarded and the master’s final teachings are revealed during a banquet in the temple, when a στήλη breaks by itself, revealing the master’s writings (as in Peteisis’ narrative).⁹⁹ Similarly, both themes come together again in the prologue to the astrobotanical treatise *De virtutibus herbarum* (whose composition is placed between the late 1st to the late 2nd cent. CE).¹⁰⁰ Here, a first-person narrative by the author – a certain Thessalos –¹⁰¹ introduces and contextualises the technical material of the treatise, reporting how this knowledge came into his hands.¹⁰² According to the account, Thessalos travelled to Alexandria to increase his knowledge and there he came upon a pharmacological book written by the Egyptian king Nechepso.¹⁰³ However, none of the remedies work. To find the reasons for this, Thessalos embarks on a quest and travels through Egypt until he reaches Thebes. There, after spending time befriending the priests, one agrees to conduct a ritual for Thessalos to communicate with the divine sphere and to ask about Nechepso’s book (Thessalos I prooem. 14 Friedrich). It is significant that, before beginning the ritual, the priest asks Thessalos whether he wants to invoke a god or the spirit of a dead person (perhaps Nechepso himself?, cf. Thessalos I prooem. 16 Friedrich). Thessalos chooses to communicate with the god Asclepios and, as in the case of Peteisis’ story, the result of the revelation is the treatise that follows the narrative. As can be seen, the parallel between these texts and *The Letter* goes beyond the simple motif of revelation pointed out by Festugière.¹⁰⁴ The introduction of *The Letter* presents the same narrative pattern as these stories and the same function, serving as a prologue to a technical treatise.

In addition, all the characters of these stories share a common priestly status: Horus and Peteisis are already priests when they acquire the special knowledge; for Pseudo-Democritus, it is precisely its acquisition that ends the period of apprentice-

99. This narrative is also discussed in Escolano-Poveda in this volume.

100. Moyer, 2011, pp. 296-297.

101. Moyer (2011, pp. 212-216) argues that it is unlikely that this Thessalos is the physician Thessalos of Tralles.

102. Thessalos I prooem. 1-33 (Friedrich, 1968, pp. 45-61). For a detailed analysis, see Moyer, 2011, pp. 208-264; Piperakis, 2016, pp. 15-19 and Escolano-Poveda, 2020, pp. 204-211.

103. This narrative is connected to the tradition of technical writings to which the demotic astrological treatise in the library of the temple of Tebtunis also belongs, see Piperakis, 2016, pp. 18-19.

104. Festugière, 1939b, pp. 48-49.

ship and makes him *prophētēs*. Thessalos' travel and stay at Thebes, and his preparation before the ritual culminating in a direct communication with the god under the guidance of a senior priest, have also been interpreted as a religious journey with a final *rite de passage*.¹⁰⁵ It should not be forgotten that all of them have access to knowledge that is sacred in nature. Thus, this priestly status is required. This could reassert Mertens' thesis that the introduction of *The Letter* also describes a scene of initiation into a mystery knowledge (Mertens, 1988).¹⁰⁶ If so, implicit to this access to a restricted Egyptian "holy art", Isis would have been endowed with a priestly status, although this does not prevent such an identification from also benefiting from the *topos* discussed at the beginning of this section. Mertens' suggestion is further strengthened by a more detailed analysis of the ritual elements in this scene.

5. LOOKING FOR RITUAL TRACES IN THE INITIATION SCENE

One of the most striking elements of the initial account of Isis, to which we have not yet paid attention, is the oath of secrecy that the angel *Amnaël* administers to the priestess-goddess before giving her access to alchemical knowledge (ll. 33-40):

(i) Ὀρκίζω σε εἰς οὐρανὸν, γῆν, φῶς καὶ σκότος. Ὀρκίζω σε εἰς πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ ἀέρα καὶ γῆν. Ὀρκίζω σε εἰς ὕψος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς καὶ Ταρτάρου βάθος. (ii) Ὀρκίζω σε εἰς Ἑρμῆν, καὶ Ἄνουβιν, ὕλαγμα τοῦ Κερβέρου, δράκοντα τὸν φύλακα. Ὀρκίζω σε εἰς τὸ πορθμεῖον ἐκεῖνο, καὶ Ἀχέρωντος ναυτίλον. Ὀρκίζω σε εἰς τὰς τρεῖς ἀνάγκας καὶ μάλιστα καὶ ξίφος.

(i) "I make you swear by the heaven and the earth, the light and the darkness. I make you swear by the fire, the water, the air and the soil. I make you swear by the height of heaven, the earth and the depth of the Tartarus. (ii) I make you swear by Hermes and Anubis, the barking of Cerberus and the Guardian-Snake.

I make you swear by that passage-boat and the sailor of the Acheron. I make you swear by the Three Necessities, (their) whips and swords".

105. Moyer, 2011, p. 249.

106. Interestingly, in the second version of this work, Isis is said to have received the revelation while in a retreat, and the text also seems to hesitate between whether the figure approaching Isis for the first time is an angel or a *prophētēs*: Ἐνταῦθα δὲ, ἰκανὸν χρόνον διατρίψασα, ἐβουλόμην παραχωρῆσαι. Ἐν δὲ τῷ ἀναχωρεῖν με ἐπιτεθεώρηκέ μέ τις τῶν προφητῶν ἢ τῶν ἀγγέλων ὃς διέτριβεν ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ στερεώματι, ὃς προσελθὼν ἐμοί, "There, having spent the appointed time, I wanted to retire. While I was in the retreat, one of the *prophētai* or the angels living in the first firmament, after observing me, approached me" (ll. 11-15, Greek text from CAAG I, p. 33; my translation).

The sources and parallels of this oath have already been analysed in depth by Mertens (1988), so I will not repeat such an analysis. However, I will offer a number of new parallels and discuss the function of this oath in the light of its content.

As Mertens (1988) pointed out, the closest parallel for this oath, in terms of form and function, can be found in Vettius Valens' *Anthologiae* (around the mid-2nd cent. CE).¹⁰⁷ In the introduction to some of his books, this astrologer demanded that his disciples conceal his teachings "from the unworthy or uninitiated" with the following oath, which appears three times in Valens' work and was clearly formulaic in nature:

"Concerning this book, then, I must before all prescribe an oath for those who happen to encounter it, that they may keep watch over what is written and withhold it in a manner appropriate to the mysteries [...] I make you swear – ὀρκίζω σε – by the sacred circle of the Sun and the irregular courses of the Moon, and by the powers of the remaining stars and the circle of the twelve zodiacal signs, to keep these things secret, and not to impart them to the unlearned or the uninitiated, and to give a portion of honor and remembrance to him who introduced them [to this discipline]. May it go well for those who keep this oath, and may the afore-mentioned gods be in accord with their wishes, but may the opposite be the case for those who forswear this oath"¹⁰⁸

The hypothesis of a Hermetic origin for Valens' oath, initially advanced by Joanna Komorowska (2004), can be corroborated on the basis of two testimonies. The first comes from a Nag Hammadi Hermetic treatise of the 2nd cent. CE:¹⁰⁹

"I administer an oath to you, who will read this holy book, by heaven and earth and fire and water, and seven rulers of substance and the creative spirit in them, and the <un>begotten God and the self-begotten and the begotten, that you guard what Hermes has communicated. God will be at one with those who keep the oath and everyone we have named, but the wrath of each of them will come upon those who violate the oath"¹¹⁰

107. According the *Anthologiae*, Valens born in 120 CE. For the dating of this author and his work, see Riley, 1996. Likely inspired in Valens' work, later astrologers such as Firmicus Maternus (*Mathesis*, 7, 1: 2-3 and 8, 33: 2; 4th cent. CE) also included similar oaths in their astrological treatises.

108. Valens, *Anthology VII proem.*, 1-4 = 251, 1-3 and 18-23 Pingree; transl. by Brennan, 2017, p. 47. In order to be consistent with the translation of ὀρκίζω throughout the paper, I have slightly modified Brennan's original translation of this formula.

109. This parallel is pointed out by Chris Brennan (2017, p. 48). The oath is in the sixth tractate of Nag Hammadi Codex VI, entitled *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. For a translation with comments, see Mahé & Meyer, 2009, pp. 409-419.

110. *NHC VI [Discourse on the Eight and Nine]*, 6, 63 (English transl. from the Coptic original by Meyer in Mahé & Meyer, 2009, p. 418).

The second is in the *Cyranides* (1st-2nd cent. CE).¹¹¹ As explained in Section 1, above, this treatise is usually included among the “technical Hermetica”. This second example does not function as secrecy oath, but equally serves to illustrate the circulation of this formula in hermetic circles. Properly speaking, it is an adjuration, as it is within a spell, so ὀρκίζω should not be translated in this case as “to make someone swear/ to administer an oath to someone”, but as “to conjure”:

“I conjure you by the god of the heaven and the earth, and by the four elements – ὀρκίζω σε εἰς τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, καὶ εἰς τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα.”¹¹²

Without forgetting that claiming that certain knowledge is of a secret nature was also used as a rhetorical device to encourage readers’ interest in the content of a text,¹¹³ the fact remains that such mystery circles did exist. Their existence in Hermeticism is recorded in the passage by Zosimos discussed in Section 1, in connection with the Enochian tradition,¹¹⁴ while Valens’ oaths suggest the existence of such groups among astrologers. These circles would have kept their doctrines secret, passing them from master to the initiated disciple in private.¹¹⁵ In this respect, another passage from Zosimos attests to a similar practice among Graeco-Egyptian alchemists:

“I know, this is not beyond your understanding (my lady), but you know it well, since you are one of those who would have liked to hide the art, if it had not been put in writing. For this reason you formed an assembly and administered the oath to each other. But you (my lady) moved away from the various topics (of this book); you presented them in a shorter form, and you taught them openly. But you claim that this book cannot be possessed unless in secret.”¹¹⁶

Here, Zosimos criticises the way in which his disciple Theosebeia (the addressee of this work) teaches the alchemical art. The text suggests that she was always in favour of restricting access to alchemical knowledge and, in Zosimos’ opinion, this showed

111. On the complex tradition of this treatise and the discussion about its dating, see Bain, 1995, pp. 281-86.

112. *Cyran.* III 1, 22 Kaimakis, 1976 (my translation).

113. See Dieleman, 2005, pp. 254-276.

114. *I.e.* “Hermes also mentioned this in his *Physika*, and nearly every treatise, both public and esoteric – ἅπας λόγος φανερός καὶ ἀπόκρυφος – made mention of this” (Sync. p. 14, l. 6 Mosshammer)

115. Brennan, 2017, p. 47.

116. English transl. from the Syriac original by Martelli, 2014, p. 12. For a preliminary edition of the Syriac text, see Martelli, 2014, pp. 17-20.

disdain for the work of previous alchemists, such as Ps.-Democritus, who strove to unveil this art. It seems that when Theosebeia formed her own intellectual circle, she constituted a closed group, imposing an oath of secrecy on her followers. Zosimos' words also suggest that she based her teachings on her own treatise or compilation of alchemical knowledge ("you presented them in a shorter form"), which, like Valens' astrological books, was accessible only to those who were part of her circle.¹¹⁷

The testimonies mentioned up to this point combine to suggest that the oath in *The Letter* may be more than a mere literary motif; it may be inspired by – or have originated from – actual practices in esoteric intellectual circles, as attested to in contemporary astrology and 3rd-4th cent. alchemy. That said, Vettius Valens' work and the Nag Hammadi treatise not only demonstrate the existence of this practice, but also reveal the similarities and, above all, the differences between our text and this type of oath.

Mertens (1988, p. 18) already pointed out the presence of two sections in the oath of *The Letter of Isis* that are distinct both in terms of subject and textual parallels. In the first section (i), the oath comprises the entirety of the cosmos through three resources: a geographical course from the top of the sky to the depth of Tartarus; a play on contrasts (matter-space, light-darkness) with parallels in the initiatory oath of Osiris' mysteries;¹¹⁸ and finally, the enumeration of the four elements, found also in the Hermetic parallels examined above and alluded to in one of the three versions of Valens' oath (ὀρκίζω σε ... καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα, *Anthology* VII, 6, 231 = 281. 6 Pingree). The second section (ii), by contrast, focuses on chthonic powers, while the parallels identified by Mertens situate the sources for these lines "essentiellement dans les pratiques magiques".¹¹⁹ However, the magical nature of this second part goes beyond the textual sources.

If we concentrate on the divine figures mentioned in our text and their function, they all play the role of gatekeepers between the world of the living and the world of the dead: Hermes (in his chthonic facet) and the Egyptian Anubis guided the souls of the dead to the Underworld, a role that Anubis complemented with that of divine embalmer, protector of graves and cemeteries, and participant in the Judgement of the Afterlife, weighing the heart of the deceased against Ma'at.¹²⁰ Charon, as the Greek ferryman of Underworld, was another psychopomp divinity, while Cerberus was a mythological dog that guarded the gates of the Greek Underworld to prevent

117. Martelli, 2014, p. 14.

118. See a list of sources in Mertens, 1988, pp. 10-11.

119. For a detailed analysis of these parallels, the interested reader is referred to Mertens, 1988, pp. 12-17.

120. Doxey, 2001b.

the dead from leaving. Similar functions are attributed to the Guardian-Snake, which can be identified with various Greek and Egyptian divinities.¹²¹ The Three Necessities, as characterized in our text (with whips and swords), comes from the chthonic imaginary of Graeco-Egyptian magic, where these divinities are part of the Underworld cohort, assistants of Selene-Hecate-Persephone or a manifestation of the triple goddess herself.¹²² They are also invoked together with – or identified with – the Erinyes (divinities in charge of punishing those who break divine laws – parricides, perjurers, etc.) and the Moirai (divinities of Destiny and Fate). Their function in magical practices was to bring *daemons* (the spirits of death) to the ritual practitioner,¹²³ whom they whip up to accomplish the magician's will.¹²⁴ With the sole exception of Hermes, all these divine figures, individually but mostly as a group, only appear in magical practices that require the participation of a *daemon* either to perform some task for the magician or to imbue the magician with knowledge about the present or the future (practice for *gnosis* and *prognosis*).¹²⁵ As psychopomps and the ones in charge of controlling who passes from one side to the other, these divinities were essential in these practices as guarantors that the *daemons* reached the human sphere and arrived at the ritual. A case in point highlighting their configuration as a *topos* of magical ritual is the necromantic scene of Lucan's *Pharsalia* (61-65 CE). In it, the witch Erichtho forces a spirit to attend his necromantic rite by means of Pluto, Hecate, and the Erinyes, to which Erichtho, visibly irritated by the ritual's non-immediate efficacy, asks "will you not drive with your cruel scourges that wretched soul through the waste of Erebus?" (B.C. VI 722-23, transl. by Duff, 1928, p. 359). That said, the ancient category of *daemon* was very fluid. Although in Graeco-Egyptian magical texts this term mainly refers to the spirit of a deceased person, it can also be applied to intermediate divinities, intersecting with the categories of *theoi* (θεοί, "gods") and, above all, with that of *angeloi*, because of their role as mediators and messengers.¹²⁶

121. Mertens, 1988, pp. 13-15.

122. See e.g. PGM IV 2855-57.

123. See e.g. PGM IV 1399, 1455; SM 45, 1.

124. E.g. PGM IV 1420-22 or SM 42, 3-4 and 65. In PGM XIX 11, the names Βία, Μάστιγξ, Ἀνάγκη, "Force, Whip, Necessity", are invoked to conjure up a spirit.

125. E.g. in SM 42, *passim*, the *defigens* invoke Cerberus and the Erinyes (on Cerberus developing this same role, see also PGM IV 1906); a formula that repeats in several curse tablets (SM 46-49) invokes the chthonic Hermes and Anubis, together with Pluto and Persephone. The most complete elenchus is in PGM IV 1443, where, among others, Hermes, the Moirai, Charon, and Anubis are mentioned.

126. On the fluidity of these categories in Graeco-Roman magic, see Ciruolo, 2001; Pachoumi, 2017, pp. 35-62; Canzobre Martínez, 2020, pp. 309-400. On the concept of *angelos* in Late Antiquity, see Cline, 2011.

Hence, the set of chthonic divinities listed above appears also in practices in which *angeli* were summoned.¹²⁷ It is unlikely that, in the context of the production of *The Letter of Isis*, contemporary to the parallels examined in this section, its author and its readers did not identify this group of divinities with this very specific magical ritual context.

It is worth remembering at this point that several of the initiation narratives discussed in Section 4, above, involve the invocation of a *daemon* or god by magical means: Ps.-Democritus invokes the spirit of his master and Thessalos communicates with Asklepios by means of a (magical) ritual of lecanomancy. Yet, the possibility of invoking a *daemon* is also offered to him. Peteisis, the *prophētēs* of the astrological treatise of Tebtunis temple library, also starred in a story in which consulting a ghost for some restricted knowledge (perhaps about the future, since the answer he finally gets concerns his death) played a key role in triggering the action: the so-called *Story of Peteisis*.¹²⁸ Some of these narratives also share another motif: the *daemon's* reluctance to respond to the ritual practitioner.¹²⁹ Pseudo-Democritus fails to make the ghost of his master speak openly, and Peteisis, in the story to which I have just referred, only obtains his revelation after doing something that frightens the spirit,¹³⁰ which initially does not satisfy the priest's demands. The *daemon's* refusal to answer the ritual practitioner's questions also appears in Graeco-Roman literature: Erichtho, like Peteisis, must constrain the ghost she invokes (B.C. VI 720-750) and, in the *Aithiopika* by Heliodoros of Emesa (3rd-4th cent. CE), the spirit summoned by the ancient Egyptian woman of Besa not only fails to respond to her, but even rebukes her for her audacity (*Aeth.* 6, 15). This motif is also found within *The Letter*, albeit adapted to the angelic narrative, since the first angel refuses to reveal the alchemical knowledge to Isis and, even when *Amnaēl* arrives, the goddess does not immediately get her answer. The practices described in the magical papyri show that this was not merely a literary motif, but a ritual reality. When this occurred, as in the case of Peteisis and Erichtho, the ritual practitioner resorted to coercive means (ἐπάναγκος) such as threats and, above all, conjuration formulas (ὄρκισμός, ἔξορκισμός) in which

127. E.g. PGM VII 862-919. In PGM I 1-163, Hermes and Hecate send a spirit referred to as both *daemon* and *angelos*. Because of this web of identifications, Hebrew angels can also act as *daemons* in erotic practices (PGM XXXVI 295-310) and curses (PGM XXXVI 231-251).

128. See Escolano-Poveda, 2020, pp. 28-39. The Demotic manuscripts that preserve this narrative date from the Ptolemaic period to the 2nd cent. CE (Escolano-Poveda, 2020, p. 27, n. 94).

129. This motif can be added to those listed by Daniel Odgen (2001, pp. 27-30) in relation to the way *daemons* communicate with mortals in literary necromantic scenes.

130. P.Petese Tebtunis A 2, l. 11. See Escolano-Poveda, 2020, p. 30.

the divinities listed above were usually named.¹³¹ In this respect, we should note that the conjuration formula employed in magic was the same as that used to swear the oath in *The Letter* and Valens (ὀρκίζω σε).¹³² The *Cyranides* passage quoted above proves, once again, its ambivalence with respect to functioning with an adjuration value. These points reinforce the impression that the second part of the oath originally belongs to a summoning spell.

In the search for points of contact with a possible magical ritual for communicating with a divine power, I would like to point out three additional aspects, with which I will conclude this study.

First, Isis' caution in gaining the knowledge she craves from the angel "without malevolence and faithfully – ἀφθόνως καὶ ἀληθῶς" leads us to the formulaic language of magic. In fact, the need for divine beings to communicate with the practitioner without falsehood, deceit, or malevolence is a common concern of magical practices of communication with a divinity, which is expressed by using precisely these two adverbs.¹³³ Apparently, the divine powers did not like to be invoked in non-normative ritual contexts, and so, in addition to disobeying the ritual practitioner, they could convey untruthful information or even appear in a hostile mood.¹³⁴

Secondly, but in line with this idea, it is also common in magical practices of communication with the divine for the ritual practitioner to have indications of how the divinity will appear, what he or she will look like, and what objects he or she will

131. By way of example, the complete chthonic court (including Hermes, Anubis, Charon, and the Erinyes-Necessities) is invoked in the erotic practice described in *PGM IV* 1390-1494, to compel a *daemon* if the first ritual fails to summon it. The ritual for a *paredros* of *PGM I* 79-81 prescribes "adjure him (*i.e.* the *paredros*) with this [oath] in order that he, after meeting you, remain inseparable from you and that he neither [keep silent] nor disobey in any way" (transl. by C. Faraone, A. Nodar and S. Torallas Tovar in *GEMF*, 2022, pp. 391).

132. See Zografou, 2015.

133. See *e.g.* "What is your inspired name? Reveal (it) to me without malevolence – μὴνυσόν μοι ἀφθόνως" (*PGM I* 161); in *PGM XII* 377, the offering of a rooster is prescribed for the god to act "without malevolence – ἀφθόνως"; "accomplish without falsehood – ἀψευδῶς – lord, the vision of every practice" (*PGM III* 289); "appear and prophesy to me without falsehood – ἀψευδῶς –" (*PGM V* 420); "prophesy to me with truthfulness, without falsehood, in an understandable way – ἐπ' ἀληθείας, ἀληθῶς, ἀψευδῶς, ἀναμφιλόγως – about this matter" (*PGM XIV* 6).

134. *E.g.* in *PGM IV* 450-52 = *IV* 1966-70 = *I* 319-22 this idea appears combined with the petition of truthfulness: "Let him (*i.e.* the *daemon*) tell me by speaking the truth – ἀληθείην καταλέξας – however many things I am wishing in my thoughts, gentle, gracious and harboring no hostile thoughts towards me – πραῦν, μελίχιον μηδ' ἀντία μοι φρονέοντα. And you yourself do not be angry – μηδὲ σὺ μηνίσης – at my incantations" (transl. by C. Faraone, A. Nodar and S. Torallas Tovar in *GEMF*, 2022, pp. 409). See a study of this aspect of the magical practice in Chronopoulou, 2015.

carry. Some of these theophanies include vessels, as in *PGM VII 735*, in which the god Apollo presents with a cup of libations (σπονδεῖον) from which he will permit the magician to drink if he asks him to do so; or *PGM IV 1109-1110*, where the god appears seated on a goblet (κιβώριον). Such signals send us back to the passage in *The Letter* in which the first angel indicates to Isis how to recognize *Amnaēl* (ll. 19-21):

ἔλεγεν δὲ περὶ σημείων αὐτοῦ ἔχειν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς, καὶ ἐπιδείκνυσθαι κεράμιον ἀπίσσωτον ὕδατος διαυγοῦς πλήρες. “He told me about the sign that he (*i.e. Amnaēl*) had on his head, and that he would show (me?) an unpitched, ceramic vessel filled with clear water”.¹³⁵

However, according to the development of our narrative, *Amnaēl* does not immediately show these signs to Isis. On the contrary, the goddess must resist *Amnaēl* and impose herself on the angel (the Greek text literally says “I prevail over his desire – ἐπεκράτουν τῆς τούτου ἐπιθυμίας”) until receiving the signs, just before obtaining the longed-for revelation of the alchemical knowledge (ll. 27-31):

οὐκ ἐπεδίδουν ἑαυτήν, ἀλλ’ ἐπεκράτουν τῆς τούτου ἐπιθυμίας ἄχρις ἂν τὸ σημεῖον τὸ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐπιδεικνύηται καὶ τὴν τῶν ζητουμένων μυστηρίων παράδοσιν ἀφθόνως καὶ ἀληθῶς ποιήσῃται, “I did not give myself and I was able to curb his desire until he showed me his sign on the head and carried out the transmission of the mysteries I was looking for without malevolence and faithfully”.

135. The symbolic meaning of the two *Amnaēl* symbols is difficult to decode. The image of the vessel is so widespread in myth, religion(s), and philosophy, and its symbolism varies so much from one religious and cultural context to another, that it is impossible to conjecture any concrete interpretation. However, that the vessel is unpitched is a requirement of ritual purity, so one might wonder whether this is not part of the initiation ritual. As for the sign on *Amnaēl*'s head, Mertens' suggestion that it could be related to the hieroglyphs that Egyptian divinities sometimes wear on their heads when represented in paintings or reliefs (Mertens, 1983-1984, p. 83) is tempting. These hieroglyphs indicate the name of the god. That *Amnaēl* reveals his name to Isis makes perfect sense in the story. The myth of *The Secret Name of Ra* exemplifies a long and widespread Egyptian tradition that continues into Imperial Roman times (as the practices of the magical papyri show) that the name is closely linked to the essence of beings (in fact, it is an essential part). Therefore, to know the name of someone or something is to have power over that being. That is, by making *Amnaēl* show her the symbols above his head (*i.e.* his name), Isis subjugates him to her will, as is indeed the case. If so, this would imply that the author of *The Letter*'s introduction had the representations of Egyptian divinities in mind when he described the (Hebrew) angels in this narrative. Escolano-Poveda, in this volume discusses how Egyptian temple imagery influenced the way in which the alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis conceptualised his alchemical allegories. For an alternative interpretation, see Lopes da Silveira, 2020, pp. 46-47.

Similarly, in some magical practices of communication with the divine, the magician gets a signal when the divinity is favourable to such a practice, as an indicator that the consultation can begin and the god will speak truthfully.¹³⁶

The fact that the advent of the angels might not be accidental, but rather motivated by ritual action, is also suggested by a third aspect: the reference to the reach of “the succession of the convenient times – τῶν καιρῶν – and to the necessary course of the spherical movement” that precedes the arrival of the first angel. In this passage, the author explicitly evokes the astrological concept of *kairós* (καιρός), the astrological moment propitious for doing something. Just as astrobotanical treatises (such as that by Thessalos) believed that the curative properties of plants depended on the astrological moment when they were harvested and prepared, Zosimos’ treatise *On the Letter Omega* informs us about an alchemical current that disregarded technical knowledge on substances and apparatus and instead based its practices on astrological premises (*MA* I 30-37 Mertens).¹³⁷ However, in *The Letter*, the reach of the *kairós* does not precede any alchemical operation, but rather an encounter with a divine being. This circumscribes this astrological moment to communication with the angels. In this respect, the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri show that certain magical practices also rely on the *kairós*¹³⁸ and, in fact, two astrological calendars for the practice of magic are extant (*PGM* III 276-284 and VII 272-299).

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding discussion, I have attempted to demonstrate that *The Letter of Isis* is a unique text in terms of its richness and its many and varied aspects. Nowhere is this more evident than in the narrative that serves as the introduction to this alchemical treatise. It fuses (apocryphal) Old Testament and Graeco-Egyptian literary traditions with a complex web of ritual elements. This demonstrates some-

136. In *PGM* III 271-273, a falcon will perch on a tree if the god is favourable to communication; in *PGM* IV 3225-3228, the goddess Aphrodite will extend her hand to the ritual practitioner as a sign of assent of the magical consultation. For an exhaustive list of passages, see García Molinos, 2015, pp. 38-41.

137. This alchemical practice is called by Zosimos καιρικά καταβαφαί, “the well-timed tinctures” (*MA* I 11-12 Mertens).

138. The astronomical timing is especially relevant in connection with the practices of communication with the divinity collected in *GEMF* 30 (addressed to Apollo and Daphne with oracular aims) and *PGM* V (e.g., ll. 47-52, 242-245 and 378-379). However, and contrary to what one might think, not all magical practices were subject to this ritual precept. In fact, the vast majority do not contain astronomical indications and some even stress the advantage of working “at any time” (e.g. *PGM* IV 162 and 1099).

thing that has been repeatedly emphasised in this study: that *The Letter of Isis* participated in – and thus it originated from – the same intellectual milieu as Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri, Hermetic philosophical treatises, and other works emanating from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt.

The introduction of *The Letter* is the result of a careful combination of three contemporary stock-themes with their corresponding network of *loci communes*. In Section 2, I analysed the most recognisable of these: the narrative about the angelic revelation of secret knowledge to a feminine recipient in exchange for sexual favours. This, as already said, stems from the reinterpretation of an account from the *Book of Enoch* within alchemical circles. The witness of Zosimos of Panopolis confirms it, while also bearing witness to its dissemination in other fields, such as Hermeticism (in turn, confirmed by the *Cyranides*). In fact, *The Letter of Isis* is not alien to the Hermetic tradition, with which the introduction to this alchemical treatise has many points of contact, even at the textual level. Although this might give it a Hermetic flavour – especially to modern eyes – the fact is that most of these links come from the pool of stock-motifs shared by the Graeco-Egyptian authors and do not necessarily imply that our treatise was produced in a Hermetic environment. In this respect, although this possibility cannot be ruled out either, it should be noted that, unlike the Hermetic works, our text does not establish any link between the goddess (or alchemical knowledge) and Hermes, who is not mentioned or even alluded to. Rather, the goddess' quest for secret wisdom, her image in *The Letter*, as well as the transmission of this knowledge to her son Horus could come from the Egyptian mythological tradition of Isis, as I have shown in Section 3. They were used in her sapiential tradition, to which many Hermetic opuscles were also linked. To merge these two narrative patterns, the author of this literary fiction used a third stock-theme. As analysed in Section 4, this describes how a character, driven by intellectual curiosity, acquires a certain knowledge in an Egyptian sacred place using supernatural means. This stock-theme can be noted in both Greek and Egyptian literature, merging in Graeco-Roman narratives or Roman imperial period. As is often the case with the protagonists of these narratives, Isis could have been imagined as an initiated priestess, which would justify the designation as *prophētis* attributed to her in the title of this treatise. This does not exclude other arguments, however, such as the stock identification of alchemists as *prophētai* within alchemical tradition. In fact, both motifs could converge, as the case of Pseudo-Democritus demonstrates. Finally, the thorough analysis of the initiatory scene developed in Section 5 has revealed a complicated frame of ritual motifs pertaining to magical practices of communication with the supra-human sphere. These would be in keeping with the narrative pattern of the initiation theme, which, in most of the surviving versions, incorporates a ritual intended to bring

the protagonist into contact with non-human powers. However, just as the Enochian narrative endows women with a passive role (as opposed to the active role of angels), so, too, has the female protagonist in our narrative been deprived of ritual agency. As in the *Book of Enoch*, in *The Letter of Isis* the angels descend of their own free will, but this does not seem to have entirely eliminated the ritual packaging that accompanied the initiation scene. As a result, the remaining ritual elements appear poorly merged with the Enochian account about the angelic revelation. That said, an alternative explanation cannot be excluded: that, during the process of transmission of *The Letter*, our text would have been progressively (re)influenced by the stock-theme of the initiation theme, favouring the introduction of additional ritual details.

Finally, I cannot conclude without drawing attention to the choice of Isis as protagonist. In Graeco-Egyptian technical traditions, this goddess usually appears portrayed as the instructor of Horus, which was not only in line with the general rhetoric of this work, but also offered a narrative framework for the closed transmission of alchemical knowledge. Dieleman's analysis of exhortations and narratives about the secret transmission of magical knowledge shows that they do not necessarily imply that it is esoteric.¹³⁹ In fact, in many cases, they function as a rhetorical strategy to enhance the prestige of a practice or text. However, the initial narrative of *The Letter of Isis* would not only have served as a rhetorical framework for making alchemical knowledge reliable and attractive in the eyes of its audience. New alchemical texts, such as the Syriac Zosimos, in which this author confirms the actual practice of administering secrecy oaths within certain alchemical circles, offer us a new perspective for re-reading this narrative. Moreover, if we take into account that the first section of the oath has parallels in actual oaths of secrecy preserved in roughly contemporary sources, the hypothesis that this narrative could have also offered a mythical frame for such a ritual practice is a reasonable conjecture.

139. See n. 113, above.

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THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE PHILOSOPHER CHRISTIANOS. ETHICS AND MATHEMATICS IN ALCHEMICAL METHODOLOGY*

EL CRISTIANISMO DEL FILÓSOFO CHRISTIANOS.
ÉTICA Y MATEMÁTICAS EN LA METODOLOGÍA ALQUÍMICA

GERASIMOS MERIANOS

NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION, ATHENS
gmerianos@eie.gr

ABSTRACT

The alchemical philosopher “Christianos” (late 6th [?] – 8th cent. CE) demonstrates that alchemical knowledge is a gift of God and describes the virtues that a philosopher-chemist must possess to receive it. These and other Christian elements should not be considered as a Christian gloss on alchemical ideas. As a result of his exposure to the Neoplatonic mathematization of philosophical ideas, Christianos develops a precise method for defining and classifying alchemical productions on a mathematical basis. This math-

RESUMEN

El filósofo alquímico “Christianos” (finales del siglo VI [?] – VIII d.C.) demuestra que el conocimiento alquímico es un don de Dios y describe las virtudes que un filósofo-alquimista debe poseer para recibirlo. Estos y otros elementos cristianos no deberían considerarse como una glosa cristiana sobre las ideas alquímicas. Como resultado de su exposición a la matematización neoplatónica de las ideas filosóficas, Christianos desarrolla un método preciso para definir y clasificar los elementos alquímicos sobre una base

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ematization intends to legitimize alchemy as a licit philosophical field, by presenting it as sharing similar traits with the sciences of the quadrivium. Christianos appears to have regarded this mathematical approach as a path illuminated by God through which a worthy philosopher-chemist could partake in divine knowledge. The virtuous conduct and the mathematical method serve as two intertwined prerequisites in the pursuit of alchemical knowledge, facilitating at the same time the demarcation between true and false pursuers of knowledge.

matemática. Esta matematización pretende legitimar la alquimia como un campo filosófico lícito, presentándola con rasgos similares a las ciencias del cuadrivium. Christianos parece haber considerado este enfoque matemático como un camino iluminado por Dios a través del cual un digno filósofo-alquimista podría participar en el conocimiento divino. La conducta virtuosa y el método matemático sirven como dos prerequisites entrelazados en la búsqueda del conocimiento alquímico, facilitando al mismo tiempo la demarcación entre verdaderos y falsos seguidores del conocimiento.

KEYWORDS

Alchemical Methodology; Alchemical Oath; Alchemy; Byzantium; Christianity; Christianos the Philosopher; *Donum dei*; Egg in Alchemy; Ethics; Mathematics; Maximus the Confessor; Neoplatonism; Pappos the Alchemist; Participation in Divine Knowledge; Philosopher; Philosophy; Proclus; Quadrivium; Religion

PALABRAS CLAVE

Alquimia; Bizancio; Cristiandad; Christianos el filósofo; Cuadrivio; *Donum dei*; Ética; Filosofía; Filósofo; Huevo en alquimia; Juramento alquímico; Matemáticas; Máximo el Confesor; Metodología alquímica; Neoplatonismo; Pappos el alquimista; Participación en el conocimiento divino; Proclo; Religión

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1. THE NAME “CHRISTIANOS”

One of the most significant but less-studied authors for understanding the evolution of Byzantine alchemical thinking is the obscure philosopher and commentator called Christianos (Χριστιανός), that is, “Christian”, in the Greek alchemical corpus.¹ Our knowledge concerning this author remains particularly limited and even his very name raises questions. At first glance, it would be plausible to assume that “Christianos” is a proper name after the homonymous saint.² Nevertheless, the evident scarcity of references to persons of this name supports its oddity and rarity in the Middle Byzantine period.³ Furthermore, in the table of contents of **M** (second half of the 10th cent.),⁴ the oldest known codex of the Greek alchemical corpus, as well as inside the manuscript itself, his name is accompanied by the article τοῦ (τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ), which is typically rendered as “the”.⁵ This means that the form τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ is used as an epithet. These remarks, along with the fact that no other author’s name in the table of contents is preceded by an article when it is mentioned for the first time, in all likelihood, confirm that he was an anonymous philosopher, designated as “the Christian”, rather than named “Christian”. Accordingly, in modern English literature,

1. For the three manuscripts that appear often in this paper, the following established sigla are used: Marc. gr. 299 = **M**; Par. gr. 2325 = **B**; Par. gr. 2327 = **A**.

2. *AASS Maii V*, May 24, pp. 446-449.

3. See, for example, the sole entry in the *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* on a person ambiguously named Christianos: Lilie *et al.*, 2013. It is also notable that in the brief vita of saint Christianos in the 10th-cent. *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, May 24 (ed. Delehay, 1902, col. 706), the unknown author finds the saint’s name unusual: [...] καὶ Χριστιανὸς οὕτω καλούμενος [...].

4. For the dating of **M**, see Roberts, 2020, pp. 11-25, 35; cf. Pérez Martín, 2017, p. 45, n. 36. See also Saffrey, 1981, p. xiv; Mavroudi, 2002, p. 107 and n. 50.

5. **M**, ff. 2^r, 110^r, 121^r; cf. 101^r.

the name is often rendered with a multiplicity of forms, such as “the Christian” or “the Christian Philosopher”;⁶ which closely correspond to the form of his name as it appears in manuscripts. However, there is seldom an explicit explanation, like the one given above, as to why such forms are preferred to render this author’s name in certain modern languages. Having exposed, and being aware of, the issues arising from the author’s name, I will refer to him conventionally as Christianos, due to the conciseness of this form and its close resemblance to the original Greek word.

The vague naming of an author as “Christianos” is not unprecedented in Byzantine literature. For example, the authorship of the mid-6th-cent. *Christian Topography* is traditionally attributed to Kosmas Indikopleustes, that is, “Kosmas, who sailed to India”. However, the name of the author is not mentioned in the treatise; he is only designated as “a Christian” (Χριστιανός).⁷ It is noteworthy that patriarch Photios (858-867, 877-886) still considered him anonymous in the 9th cent., describing *Christian Topography* in his *Bibliotheke* (or *Myriobiblos*) as “a book of a Christian, a commentary on the Octateuch”.⁸ It was not until the 11th cent. that the name “Kosmas” began to appear: in codex Laur. Plut. IX 28, f. 20^v, as well as in commentaries on the Gospels and the Psalms that quote the treatise.⁹ Nevertheless, the author’s designation as “a Christian” is consistent with the title of the work, characterized as *Christian* too. As the treatise is deemed a true Christian topography that opposes pagan or “pseudo-Christian” treatises, so too its author is presented primarily as a (true) Christian, opposing those (false) Christians that adhere to classical theories on the universe and accept a spherical cosmology.¹⁰

The case of the anonymous author of the *Christian Topography* raises interesting parallels with the designation of the alchemical writer Christianos. Regardless

6. E.g. “the Christian” in Mertens, 2006 and Roberts, 2019; “the Christian Philosopher” in Viano, 2018.

7. Kosmas Indikopleustes, *Christian Topography*, Pinax 3, ed. Wolska-Conus, 1968-1973, I, p. 261; V 257, vol. II, p. 373; VII 1, vol. III, p. 57; VII 96-97, vol. III, pp. 165-167; VIII 31, vol. III, p. 201. For the identification of “Kosmas” with Constantine of Antioch, see the discussion in Kominko, 2013, pp. 11-12.

8. Photios, *Bibliotheke*, cod. 36, ed. Henry, 1959, p. 21, 7-8: Ἀνεγνώσθη βιβλίον, οὗ ἡ ἐπιγραφή Χριστιανοῦ βιβλος ἐρμηνεία εἰς τὴν ὀκτάτευχον. See also Schamp, 1987, pp. 229-230.

9. Wolska-Conus, 1968-1973, I, pp. 15-16, 59-61, 109-115; Kominko, 2013, p. 10.

10. Wolska-Conus, 1968-1973, I, pp. 16, 37; Kominko, 2013, p. 23. The *Christian Topography*, having adopted a literal interpretation of the Bible, proposes that the world has the form of Moses’ Tabernacle (a vaulted chest). This was not the standard Christian understanding of the world in this period. John Philoponos (ca. 495-568) disputed such views and provided a Christian model of an Aristotelian conception of the universe, supporting a spherical cosmology. For a concise exposition of this conflict, see Tihon, 2017, pp. 184-185.

of whether Christianos chose or not to be anonymous, whoever (probably a copyist or a compiler) first gave him the epithet “Christianos” was most likely prompted by the distinct and extensive Christian traits in this author’s treatises. Does this suffice to interpret his naming? As mentioned above, the *Christian Topography* aimed to present a “truly” Christian worldview, as opposed to pagan or “false” Christian ones. Similarly, perhaps the anonymous alchemical philosopher was named Christianos since his work was considered to present a truly Christian view of alchemy compared to other treatises in the alchemical corpus, which were pagan or dubiously Christian.¹¹ Additionally, we may take into account the possibility that this author could have been labeled “Christian” in contrast to alchemical authors that were Muslims,¹² a hypothesis based on the evidence of Byzantine engagement with early Arabic alchemy.¹³ Yet, the crucial factor for assessing such an assumption is the dating of the author, which will be discussed below.

2. DATING CHRISTIANOS

Christianos is broadly dated from the 6th to the 8th cent.¹⁴ So far, the allusions that one can draw from his work are inconclusive and do not allow us to situate him within a specific chronological period. For example, Christianos addresses a certain Sergios in his work,¹⁵ whom Marcellin Berthelot identified as Sergios of Reš‘aynā (d. 536),¹⁶ the renowned translator of Greek medical, philosophical, and theological texts into

11. To convincingly claim that some texts could have given the impression of being “dubiously Christian”, one would have to study the Christian ideas expressed in several works of the Greek alchemical corpus that predate or are nearly contemporary to the ones by Christianos. However, it would still be hard to discern with certainty which texts might have appeared as “dubiously Christian” to someone who would have compared them with Christianos’ “true” Christian ones. In effect, one should be able in theory not only to examine the type of “Christianity” of such texts but also that of whoever labeled our author as “Christianos”. Nevertheless, though it seems difficult to prove the above through particular texts, it is not implausible; yet, this would be the subject of a different study.

12. I acknowledge Olivier Dufault for this suggestion.

13. On Arabic influence on Byzantine alchemy, see Colinet, 2000; Mavroudi, 2002, pp. 400-403; Roberts, 2022.

14. E.g. von Lippmann (1919, p. 102) dates him to the 6th cent. or later; Festugière (1944, p. 240) to the 7th; Halleux (1979, p. 62) to the 6th (provided that Christianos indeed refers to Sergios of Reš‘aynā; see below, nn. 15-16); Letrouit (1995, p. 62) and Mertens (2006, p. 209) to the 7th-8th cent.; while Viano (2018, p. 945) between the 6th-8th cent.

15. CAAG II, p. 399, 16: Ὁ περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ὕδατος λόγος, βέλτιστε Σέργιε [...].

16. Berthelot, 1885, p. 205.

Syriac. On the other hand, Henri Dominique Saffrey deemed that the said Sergios could probably be identified as Sergios I, patriarch of Constantinople (610-638).¹⁷

Additionally, Jean Letrouit's attention was drawn by a reference made by Christianos to the dyestuff called λαχὰς ("lac dye"),¹⁸ extracted from the secretions produced by the scale insect *Kerria lacca* Kerr, which is native to India and Southeast Asia. Letrouit built on this reference to date Christianos' work to the 7th-8th cent., since, according to Rodolphe Pfister,¹⁹ this dye had not been attested in Egypt before the Arab conquest; therefore, Christianos' knowledge concerning the treatment of the insect's secretions could not have been from an earlier time. Letrouit further employed this argument to refute the identification of the aforementioned Sergios with either Sergios of Reš'aynā or the patriarch Sergios I.²⁰ Yet, things are not so straightforward: pseudo-Demokritos already mentions the ingredient λακχὰς in the 1st cent. CE.²¹ Furthermore, a recent paper describes the investigation of a purple pigment on a 3rd-cent. BCE *oinochoē* from Canosa di Puglia (now in the British Museum), during which, an example of a mixture of red colorants from plants and insects was discovered. The examined samples also contained markers for insect-derived colorants from lac (*Kerria lacca* Kerr), making this the first recognized evidence for the use of lac dye on an object from Classical Antiquity.²²

Moreover, Berthelot reluctantly mentioned that Christianos, in a text attributed to him, has referred to Stephanos of Alexandria (7th cent.), information repeated by Saffrey,²³ which could have been a piece of crucial evidence for dating Christianos. However, Letrouit observed that the text containing the reference to Stephanos was not written by Christianos.²⁴ Indeed, this text comprises one of the *Chapters to Eusebeia*, attributed to Zosimos of Panopolis (late 3rd or 4th cent.), which Michèle Mertens

17. Saffrey, 1995, p. 6.

18. CAAG II, p. 418, 21-22: ὡσπερ δὲ χροοποιηθεὶς ὁ ἐστὶν λάχιον ὁ καλοῦσιν λαχὰν οἱ λαχωταί, τουτέστιν οἱ ἰνδικοβάφοι.

19. Pfister, 1936.

20. Letrouit, 1995, p. 62.

21. Pseudo-Demokritos, *On the Making of Purple and Gold: Natural and Secret Questions* 1, 16 – 2, 29, ed. Martelli, 2013, pp. 78-80; see the commentary on the term λακχὰς that also includes reference to Christianos at pp. 205-206, n. 3. Cf. Dyer, Tamburini & Sotiropoulou, 2018, p. 130.

22. Dyer, Tamburini & Sotiropoulou, 2018. According to Gulmini *et al.* (2017, p. 495), Indian lac dye was also detected in certain textiles from the Coptic textile collection of the Museo Egizio (Turin), which are attributed to the "Roman-Byzantine or Byzantine periods". This suggests that Indian lac was possibly already in use in Egypt during the late Roman and the Byzantine periods.

23. CAAG III, p. 379; Saffrey, 1981, p. xiv.

24. Letrouit, 1995, p. 62.

has described as a collection of excerpts on various subjects from Zosimean works. That this was the work of a compiler is also attested by the fact that these chapters contain scattered quotations and references to authors post Zosimos, such as Stephanos of Alexandria.²⁵

Berthelot observed that the compilation method of Christianos' work follows the general system adopted by the Byzantines "from the 8th to the 10th centuries", consisting in drawing extracts and summaries from ancient authors. Berthelot mentioned indicatively the works of patriarch Photios and emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (945-959).²⁶ Obviously, Berthelot alluded to the phenomenon still widely known as "encyclopedism", a term first applied in the Byzantine literary culture of the 10th cent. by Paul Lemerle in 1971.²⁷ However, Berthelot's argument suggests that the period from the 8th to the 10th cent. shares the same features. His remarks are consistent with the late-19th-cent. state of knowledge about a phenomenon that was not understood then as much as it is today. Even Lemerle's notion of Byzantine "encyclopedism" has been challenged by Paolo Odorico, who proposed instead the term "cultura della συλλογή",²⁸ which could be rendered as the "florilegic habit"²⁹ or "florilegic culture".³⁰ Nonetheless, Berthelot's comment helps us realize that, although the concentration of collecting and compiling projects reached an unparalleled pinnacle in the 9th and 10th cent.,³¹ the "Byzantine culture was permanently encyclopaedic in the sense that it was continually collecting, summarising, excerpting and synthesising earlier texts".³²

Overall, the fact remains: Christianos cannot be assigned to a certain century. Yet, in Section 5, I illustrate how some of the Christian phrases in his work could be used to refine the dating of this author.

25. Mertens, 1995, p. lx and n. 168; cf. Roberts, 2019, p. 90, n. 139. The argument that Christianos could not have been the author of this text is also confirmed by Saffrey's (1995) reconstruction of the original order of *M*'s quires. For a visualization of *M*'s present status and Saffrey's reconstruction, see Mertens, 1995, pp. xxiii-xxviii. See also Roberts, 2019, pp. 88-90.

26. CAAG III, p. 381; cited also by Viano, 2008, p. 88; 2018, p. 953.

27. Lemerle, 1971, ch. X.

28. Odorico, 1990; also 2011; 2017. From the vast bibliography on Byzantine compilation literature, see also Van Deun & Macé, 2011; Magdalino, 2013; 2017b; Németh, 2018.

29. Magdalino, 2011, p. 143.

30. Roberts, 2019, p. 86 and n. 114.

31. Magdalino, 2013, p. 225.

32. Magdalino, 2013, p. 219; cf. Odorico, 2011, p. 92.

3. THE CHRISTIAN FRAMEWORK OF CHRISTIANOS' WRITINGS

Two works are handed down under the name of Christianos, titled *Περὶ εὐσταθείας τοῦ χρυσοῦ* (*On the Consistency of Gold*)³³ and *Περὶ χρυσοποιίας κεφάλαια λ'* (*On Making Gold, Thirty Chapters*).³⁴ The latter has been characterized as “a collection of ‘chapters’ or excerpts”, which helps better understand the present structure and content of Christianos’ work.³⁵ His texts, along with that attributed to Stephanos of Alexandria, the alchemical author whose identity remains a topic of debate,³⁶ are among those containing the most extensive Christian traits in the Greek alchemical corpus. Apart from the notable allusions discussed in this section, it should be stressed that there are also scattered religious references in his work, such as the typical expressions starting with the valediction “farewell” (ἔρρωσο/ἔρρωσθε) – “Farewell in Lord” or “Farewell, friends and servants of Christ our God” – often used to designate the end of a text (or a collection of texts).³⁷

Interestingly, Christianos does not refer to alchemy as the “sacred and divine art”, a description used by other alchemical authors.³⁸ However, he once uses the term *θεία ἐπιστήμη*,³⁹ being the only case, to the best of my knowledge, that appears in the Greek alchemical corpus. *Θεία ἐπιστήμη* is also employed by Plato⁴⁰ and later Platonic philosophers, such as Iamblichus (*ca.* 242 – *ca.* 325)⁴¹ and Proclus (412-485),⁴² but also by Christian Neoplatonizing authors, such as pseudo-Dionysios the Are-

33. CAAG II, pp. 395, 1 – 399, 11.

34. The texts comprising this work have been dispersed throughout the edition of Berthelot and Ruelle (CAAG II). According to Letrouit (1995, p. 62), the correct order is: CAAG II, pp. 272, 1 – 285, 4 + 399, 12 – 421, 5 + 373, 21 – 375, 8 + 35, 8-16 + 27, 4-17. Cf. Saffrey, 1995, pp. 6-7; Roberts, 2019, pp. 89 (n. 132), 93-94, 99.

35. Roberts, 2019, p. 94.

36. On the religious elements of Stephanos of Alexandria’s work, see Carlotta, this issue. For the *status quaestionis* on Stephanos, see Koutalis, Martelli & Merianos, 2018, pp. 23-31.

37. CAAG II, p. 278, 22: “Ἐρρωσο ἐν Κυρίῳ; p. 285, 3-4: “Ἐρρωσθε, φίλοι καὶ δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν (cf. Mertens, 1995, p. 189, n. 10). See also CAAG II, p. 403, 16-19: Οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ὁ θεῖος ἔφησε χρησμός: “Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ ὁμοίωσιν”. Προσεπάγει ὁ συγγραφεύς: “Ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς” (cf. Gen. 1:26-27).

38. See e.g. Merianos, 2017, p. 238 and n. 40.

39. CAAG II, p. 409, 4.

40. Plato, *Sophist* 265c.

41. E.g. Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* XXI, ed. Pistelli, 1888, pp. 108, 20 and 109, 4.

42. E.g. Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* IV 923, 28-29, ed. Steel, 2007-2009, II, pp. 114-115: [...] ἡ μὲν παρ’ ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη τῶν παρ’ ἡμῖν ἐπιστητῶν, ἡ δὲ θεία τῶν θείων. [...].

opagite (late 5th or early 6th cent.)⁴³ and Maximos the Confessor (580-662),⁴⁴ bearing the meaning of “divine knowledge”. Indeed, it will be demonstrated that, for Christianos, true engagement with alchemy denotes participation in divine knowledge.

3.1. THE GIFT OF GOD AND THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION

On the Consistency of Gold is set by Christianos within the pseudo-Demokritean alchemical tradition. The author comments on pseudo-Demokritos’ phrase “Take mercury and make it solid with the body of *magnēsia*”⁴⁵ and its interpretation by Zosimos of Panopolis. Within this analysis, a lengthy passage is introduced that is associated not only with his religious beliefs but also with the Christianized framework of alchemy as he conceives it.⁴⁶

Τί δὴ ποτε οὖν τοσαῦται βίβλοι καὶ δημονοκλησίαι (δαίμονοκλησίαι M, f. 111^r), καὶ καμίνων καὶ ὀργάνων κατασκευαὶ τοῖς παλαιοῖς ἀνεγράφησαν, πάντων τῶν, ὡς σὺ φῆς, ὄντων ῥαδίῳ τε καὶ συντόμῳ; Πολλάκις, εἶπεν, ὦ φοιτητὰ τῶν Δημοκριτεῶν λόγων, τάχα ἵνα ὑμῶν γυμνάσῃ τὰς φρένας.⁴⁷ Ὁ νοῦς γὰρ ἐὰν εὕρῃ ὁδόν,⁴⁸ ἑαυτὸν φάναί,⁴⁹ πάντα γινώσκει κατὰ μετοχήν, οὐκ ἐκ φύσεως. Οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος φύσει θεός, ἀλλὰ εἰκὼν τοῦ εἰπόντος θεοῦ πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον· “Ποιήσωμεν

43. Pseudo-Dionysios, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1, 1, ed. Heil & Ritter, 2012, p. 63, 1-2: [...] τῆς ἐνθέου καὶ θείας ἐστὶ καὶ θεουργικῆς ἐπιστήμης [...]; 6, *Theoria*, 1, p. 117, 21: [...] τὴν θείαν τῶν κατ’ αὐτὴν ἱερῶν ἐπιστήμην [...]; 7, 2, p. 121, 13: [...] οὐδὲ ἱκανῶς ἐν ἐπιστήμῃ θείᾳ μνηθέντες [...].

44. E.g. Maximos the Confessor, *Mystagogy* 5, 442, ed. Boudignon, 2011, p. 28.

45. CAAG II, p. 397, 2-3, 13. Cf. Pseudo-Demokritos, *On the Making of Purple and Gold: Natural and Secret Questions* 5, 67, ed. and transl. Martelli, 2013, pp. 86-87: Λαβὼν ὑδράργυρον, πῆξον τῷ τῆς μαγνησίας σώματι, [...] (see commentary at pp. 215-216, n. 23).

46. CAAG II, pp. 397, 15 – 398, 18.

47. Cf. Synesios the alchemist, who notes that, according to pseudo-Demokritos, the obscurity of the alchemical language aims at training the minds of the adepts (*To Dioskoros: Notes on Demokritos’ Book 8*, 119-121, ed. Martelli, 2013, p. 132: [...] διὰ τὸ γυμνάσαι ἡμῶν τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὰς φρένας, οὕτω συνετάγησαν. Ἄκουσον αὐτοῦ λέγοντος· ὡς νοήμοσιν ὑμῖν ὀμιλῶ, γυμνάζων ὑμῶν τὸν νοῦν; also *ibidem*, 5, 54-56, p. 126; 17, 285-290, p. 146). Cf. also the similar sayings attributed to pseudo-Demokritos by Olympiodoros the alchemist (CAAG II, pp. 97, 5-7; 103, 9-10). Cf. further, e.g. Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 5, 18-20, ed. Papathanassiou, 2017, p. 181; 7, 118-122, p. 203; pseudo-Hierotheos, *On the Divine and Sacred Art, in <Iambic>Verse*, vv. 7-11, ed. Goldschmidt, 1923, p. 43; pseudo-Archelaos, *On the Same Divine Art, in Iambic Verse*, vv. 21-23, ed. Goldschmidt, 1923, p. 50; vv. 301-303, pp. 58-59 (for an English translation of this poem, see Browne, 1946; for a commentary, see Browne, 1948).

48. Cf. Olympiodoros, CAAG II, p. 86, 1-2: καὶ ἡ ὁδὸς οὐχ εὕρισκεται· [...]. See below, n. 53.

49. Cf. Zosimos of Panopolis, *Authentic Memoirs* I 12, 118, ed. Mertens, 1995, p. 6: Φησὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἡμῶν· [...].

ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν”. – “Τί γὰρ ἔχεις ὃ οὐκ ἔλαβες; φησὶν ὁ τῆς εὐσεβείας κήρυξ, ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. Εἰ δὲ καὶ ἔλαβες, τί καυχᾶσαι, ὡς μὴ λαβών;” Οἶόν τι συνόδω φράζων, καὶ ὁ Ἰάκωβος ὁ θεόπνευστος ἔλεγεν· “Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθῆ, καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθέν ἐστιν, καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων”, καθὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ τῶν ὄλων θεὸς καὶ κύριος ἡμῶν καὶ διδάσκαλος Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς διδάσκων ἡμᾶς λέγει· “Οὐδὲν δύνασθε ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν λαβεῖν ἐὰν μὴ ἢ δεδομένον ὑμῖν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς. Δεῖ τοίνυν ἡμᾶς αἰτεῖν παρὰ θεοῦ καὶ ζητεῖν καὶ κρούειν, ἵνα λάβωμεν”. “Αἰτεῖτε γάρ, φησὶν ὁ θεῖος χρησμός, καὶ λαμβάνετε, ζητεῖτε καὶ εὐρήσετε, κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν. Πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει, καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὐρήσει, καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται”. Ὅραν δὲ χρῆ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ πολιτείας ἅμα καὶ προθέσεως ἕκαστος τὸ ἀκηρότατόν τε καὶ τῆς αἰτήσεως ἄξιον πρόδρομον, ἵνα πεπαρρησιασμένως αἰτῶν μὴ ἀστοχήσῃ, ὅπως μὴ μάτην παρακαλῆ. Ἐρεῖ γὰρ τὸ θεῖον λόγιον· “Ἐὰν μὴ ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν καταγινώσκῃ ἡμῶν, παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν”. Καὶ πάλιν· “Αἰτεῖτε, καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε, διότι κακῶς αἰτεῖσθε, ἵνα ἐν ταῖς ἡδοναῖς δαπανήσῃτε αὐτά, μοιχαλίδες”. Δεῖ οὖν ἡμᾶς ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει καὶ πράξει καὶ τρόπῳ τὸν θεὸν ἰκετεύειν.

“Why then were so many books and invocations of daemons and constructions of furnaces and instruments recorded by the ancients, since everything, as you say, is easy and concise? Many times, he [pseudo-Demokritos] said, O disciple of the Demokritean words, [that this aims] to train your mind. The intellect, if it finds a way [*i.e.* a method], says to itself that it knows everything by participation, not by nature. Because man is not God by nature but rather an image of God, Who said to the Son and the Holy Spirit: ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ (Gen. 1:26).⁵⁰ ‘What do you have that you did not receive?’ – says the herald of piety, Paul the Apostle – ‘Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?’ (1 Cor. 4:7). Showing a certain concurrence, James the divinely inspired said: ‘Every good gift (δόσις) and every perfect gift (δῶρημα) is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights’ (James 1:17). Likewise, the God of the universe Himself and our Lord and Teacher Jesus Christ says instructing us: ‘You cannot receive anything from yourselves, unless it has been given to you by the Father in heaven (cf. John 3:27)’. Therefore, we must ask from God and seek and knock so that we receive. Indeed, ‘ask’, the divine oracle says, ‘and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened’ (cf. Matt. 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10). Each must pay attention to the purity of both his way of life and purpose, as well as the worthiness of his request in advance, in order that he will not fail if he asks boldly, so that he will not plead in vain. And shall thus say the divine saying: ‘If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God’ (1

50. The New King James Version (hereafter: NKJV) has been used for the English translations of biblical quotations unless otherwise cited.

John 3:21). And again: ‘You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulteresses!’ (James 4:3-4).⁵¹ Therefore, we must supplicate God with pure conscience and practice and manner”.

Christianos, before turning again to the topic of mercury and the body of *magnēsia*, concludes by stating that it is Zosimos who said these things and rightly gave such advice.⁵² Evidently, the above passage is not a collection of Zosimean phrases but is mainly formed by putting together recognizable scriptural quotations. Yet, these most likely serve to frame and religiously reinforce a specific phrase or concept in the passage that evokes Zosimos’ thought. It is particularly hard to identify if there is an exact Zosimean saying that Christianos had in mind. However, Berthelot has pointed to this passage’s similarities with Zosimos’ *First Book of the Final Abstinence* (also known as the *Final Count*),⁵³ specifically the part where Theosebeia is urged by Zosimos to subdue her passions, avert the daemons, concentrate on acquiring divine knowledge on the “genuine and natural” tinctures, and achieve the perfection of her soul.⁵⁴ These counsels must have sounded familiar to later Christian audiences, and indeed, as will be shown below, ideas such as the necessity for an alchemist to master his passions were accommodated quite well in similar views of Byzantine alchemical

51. The text of James 4:4 both in the Greek New Testament (NA28) and here reads μοιχαλίδες. The NKJV translates this word as “adulterers and adulteresses”, but I prefer to stay close to the original term and meaning. Lockett (2008b, p. 131) provides an explanation as to why the feminine plural form “adulteresses” is used in James: “The label ‘adulteresses’ (μοιχαλίδες) symbolically refers to the covenant relationship between God (as a groom) and Israel (as his bride) found in the Torah. This relationship is likened to a marriage [...] where God is spurned by unfaithful Israel, where the unfaithfulness of Israel is often metaphorically spoken of as adultery [...]”. Cf. *LSJ*, s.v. “μοιχαλίδες”, which notes (citing James 4:4) that this word, when used in a religious sense, means “unfaithful to God”.

52. *CAAG II*, p. 398, 19-21: Ταῦτα τοῦ φιλοσόφου Ζωσίμου λέγοντος, καὶ καλῶς ἡμᾶς νοθετήσαντος, τῆς ζητήσεως ἀνεξέομεθα, τί ἐστὶν ὑδράργυρος καὶ τί τὸ σῶμα τῆς μαγνησίας: [...].

53. *CAAG III*, p. 385, n. 7. Berthelot also points to a similar reference to Zosimos made by the alchemical commentator Olympiodoros. According to Olympiodoros, Zosimos says that one should pray to learn from God on how to prepare everything precisely. Olympiodoros then enumerates the insurmountable difficulties faced by an adept in the study of alchemy. He mentions, among other things, that men do not instruct, and that the way (*i.e.* the method) cannot be found (*CAAG II*, pp. 85, 22 – 86, 2: Ὅπως δὲ ἡ ἀκριβεία τοῦ παντός σκευάζεται, εὗξασθε παρὰ Θεοῦ μαθεῖν, φησὶν ὁ Ζώσιμος· οἱ ἄνθρωποι γὰρ οὐ παραδίδουσι, [...]· καὶ ἡ ὁδὸς οὐχ εὕρισκεται· [...]; cf. Festugière, 1944, p. 280, n. 3). The difficulty of finding the “way” recalls Christianos’ phrase “if it [the intellect] finds a way” (*CAAG II*, p. 397, 19), mentioned above. On Olympiodoros, see Viano, 2021 (where previous bibliography on this author is cited).

54. Zosimos of Panopolis, *Final Abstinence 8*, ed. Festugière, 1944, pp. 367-368. See *ibidem*, pp. 280-281; Fowden, 1993, pp. 122-123; Fraser, 2004, pp. 142-145; Dufault, 2019, pp. 105-106, 129-130.

authors. What is of paramount importance in Zosimos' treatise is that true (alchemical) knowledge is considered to be attained through God, which is the meaning of Christians' text too.

Christianos builds on the Scriptures to make explicit that alchemical knowledge is bestowed by God upon a worthy pursuer of wisdom, devoted to a righteous purpose. Judging from the citation of James 4:3-4 ("You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulteresses!"), Christianos seems to underscore that those who seek riches to live lavishly will fail in this quest.

The quotation of James 1:17 ("Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights!")⁵⁵ showcases the idea of alchemy as a gift (δῶρημα) of God. This concept is also expressed by Stephanos of Alexandria, who, as Christianos, cites James 1:17 verbatim.⁵⁶ Further references to the Father of lights can also be found in Stephanos' work ("I confess the grace of the illumination from above, which is given to us by the Father of lights"; and "O rich gifts by the Father of lights!"), while in one instance the alchemical opus is characterized as "God-given".⁵⁷ Moreover, the four alchemical poems attributed to Heliodoros, Theophrastos, Hierotheos, and Archelaos,⁵⁸ respectively, include references to the concept of God-given alchemical knowledge. For example, in the poem under the name of Theophrastos, the "gift" that is "divinely given" is mentioned.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the notion of alchemy as a divine gift (*donum dei*) also appears in texts from different

55. On this biblical quotation, see also below, n. 101. James' description of God as the "Father of lights" most likely refers to Gen. 1:14-19, which narrates the creation of the luminaries by God. This characterization portrays God as the creator of all; see Lockett, 2008a, pp. 152-153. See also the expression "gift of God" in John 4:10; cf. Eph. 3:7.

56. Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 4, 1-2, ed. Papathanassiou, 2017, p. 173: Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον, ἀνωθεν ἔστι καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων. Cf. Papathanassiou, 2018, pp. 75, 81.

57. See, respectively, Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 1, 47-48, ed. Papathanassiou, 2017, p. 158: Ὁμολογῶ τῆς ἀνωθεν φωτοδοσίας τὴν χάριν, ἢ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων ἡμῖν δεδωρηται; 7, 188-189, p. 205: Ὡ πλούσιαι δωρεαὶ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων; and 2, 66, p. 163: [...] ἢ θεοδώρητος ἐργασία, [...]. Cf. Papathanassiou, 2005, p. 117; 2018, pp. 74, 79, 84. With regard to the word θεοδώρητος, in a text attributed to Zosimos, the agent of transmutation is characterized as "ungiven and God-given" (ἀδωρητον καὶ θεοδώρητον) (*Authentic Memoirs* XIII 1, 15-22, ed. Mertens, 1995, p. 49; commentary on p. 234, nn. 8-10).

58. These poems are considered to be the work of a single author and are dated to the 7th-8th cent.; see Letrouit, 1995, pp. 82-83, 88. However, Marc Lauxtermann (2019, pp. 205-207) recently redated them to the 5th or early 6th cent., based on their metrical analysis.

59. Pseudo-Theophrastos, *On the Same Divine Art, in Iambic Verse*, vv. 210-211, ed. Goldschmidt, 1923, p. 41: [...] εὐφραντικῶς τὸ δῶρον ἀξιουμένων / τὸ θεοδώρητόν τε τοῦτο πάντμιον [...]. For an English translation of the poem, see Browne, 1920.

cultural contexts and is particularly persistent in medieval and early modern alchemical writings.⁶⁰ The current consensus is that the idea of alchemy as a *donum dei* in medieval Latin authors derives from the Arabic alchemical tradition, which in turn had inherited the concept from the Hellenistic world.⁶¹ Therefore, it is noteworthy that the same notion of *donum dei* is expressed by Christianos and other Byzantine authors, but significantly earlier than medieval Latin writers.⁶²

Yet, the core concept that explains why alchemical knowledge is understood as a divine gift appears at the beginning of Christianos' passage. Commenting on the vagueness and obscurity of the alchemical writings of the ancient philosophers, he refers to the way one must find in order to interpret them. He centers this pursuit around the idea that the human intellect has access to knowledge not by nature but by participation (κατὰ μετοχήν). The concept of "participation" (μέθεξις, μετοχή, μετέχειν, μετουσία) is of paramount importance in the Greek patristic tradition, overlapping with concepts such as "deification" (θέωσις) and "likeness" (ὁμοίωσις).⁶³ 2 Peter 1:4 is often cited to provide the theological views on this idea with support from the New Testament.⁶⁴ The notion of participation, but also the definition of likeness to God as the goal of the spiritual and moral life, bears an undisputed Platonic origin.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Christianity pioneered the development of the idea of deification and its terminology so much that, "by the time Porphyry first wrote of the philosopher deifying himself, Christians had already been speaking of deification for more than a century".⁶⁶

60. For an overview of the enduring idea of alchemy as a *donum dei*, see Karpenko, 1998. See also Newman, 1994, pp. 3, 8-10, 12, 66, 181; 2019, pp. 20, 44, 107, 496; Nummedal, 2007, pp. 27-30; Principe, 2013, pp. 192-195, 199-200.

61. Newman, 1994, pp. 98, 114; 2004, p. 84; Karpenko, 1998, pp. 67-68. For a significant reference to *donum dei*, see the 13th-cent. *Summa perfectionis* by pseudo-Geber (ch. 93, ed. Newman, 1991, p. 632, 40-41, transl. p. 785): "Therefore let the artificer of good intellect exercise himself through those things which we have passed down, and he will be happy to have arrived at the highest gift of God (*donum dei altissimum*)"; cf. Newman, 1985, p. 290.

62. It should be stressed that Karpenko (1998, pp. 65-66, 68) refers to the presence of this idea in Byzantine alchemy. Yet, he mentions only Stephanos of Alexandria and refers vaguely to this concept in his work.

63. Russell, 2004, p. 2.

64. 2 Peter 1:4 (transl. NKJV): "[...] by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust".

65. See e.g. Niarchos, 1985; Siorvanes, 1996, pp. 71-86.

66. Russell, 2004, p. 52.

The fundamental difference between Creator and creature is considered to be the possession of existence by nature or by participation. The created-from-nothing creatures do not possess life in themselves but must acquire it by participating in the source of life, that is, God. Since existence is inherent to God's nature, and the Son is consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father, existence, as well as *wisdom*, goodness, and power, are befitting to His nature. Humanity becomes divine and achieves eternal life by participating in the divine nature through the Holy Spirit.⁶⁷ Gregory of Nyssa seems to employ the language of participation to a much larger extent than that of deification.⁶⁸ For him – and in this, he coincides with the Platonic tradition (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176a-b) – human life should aim at the imitation of God; and, given that God is infinite, Christian perfection can meet no limit in spiritual life (*epektasis*).⁶⁹

Since the alchemical study is set within the broad context of philosophy, it is not surprising that Stephanos of Alexandria, who has projected the Christianization of alchemy on such a scale, repeats a traditional definition of philosophy: “[...] likeness to God as far as humanly possible.”⁷⁰ What is striking is that Stephanos’ definition of philosophy appears in his sixth Lecture, within the context of the geometrization of physical bodies and the discussion of the numerical qualities of substances. Comparably, Christianos also partakes in this tradition of mathematized philosophical inquiry, as will be shown below.

For Christianos, approaching divine knowledge of nature presupposes a moral conduct that promotes the figure of the virtuous alchemist, or *philosopher*,⁷¹ and, ultimately, the beneficial character of alchemy itself. The need for setting a kind of “moral code” must not be irrelevant to the effort made in alchemical texts for distinguishing the true philosopher from the false one.

67. Smith, 2011, p. 119.

68. Russell, 2004, p. 233.

69. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Life of Moses* I, ed. Musurillo, 1964, p. 4, 5-15. Cf. Meredith, 1999, p. 22. On the concept of *epektasis*, or perpetual spiritual progress, in Gregory of Nyssa and Maximos the Confessor, see Blowers, 1992.

70. Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 6, 34-35, ed. Papathanasiou, 2017, p. 188: Τί γάρ ἐστι φιλοσοφία, ἀλλ’ ἡ ὁμοίωσις Θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἀνθρώπων; See Merianos, 2017, p. 243 and n. 76.

71. For the characterization of alchemical authors as “philosophers”, see Koutalis, Martelli & Merianos, 2018, pp. 31-37; Dufault, 2019, pp. 95-100.

3.2. THE MORAL CODE AND THE CHRISTIAN OATH

Christianos' other work, *On Making Gold, Thirty Chapters*, closes with two small texts: (i) a description of the virtues that a true pursuer of knowledge should hold, followed by (ii) an oath.

(i) The first text can also be interpreted as a warning to those who do not strive to live up to these ideals, and, consequently, an explanation of why an aspiring alchemist might fail in his endeavors.

Ποῖον εἶναι χρή τοῖς ἤθεσι τὸν μετιόντα τὴν ἐπιστήμην⁷²

Χρεῶν εἶναι τὸν μετιόντα τὴν ἐπιστήμην πρῶτον μὲν φιλόθεον καὶ φιλάνθρωπον, σῶφρονα, ἀφιλάργυρον, ψεῦδος ἀποστρεφόμενον, καὶ πάντα δόλον, καὶ κακουργίαν, καὶ φθόνον, εἶναι δὲ ἀληθῆ καὶ πιστὸν παῖδα τῆς ἀγίας καὶ ὁμοουσίου καὶ συναϊδίου Τριάδος.⁷³ Ὁ μὴ τοιαῦτα κάλλιστα καὶ θεάρεστα ἤθη κτησάμενος ἢ κτήσασθαι σπουδάσας, ἑαυτὸν ἀπατήσει, τοῖς ἀνεφίκτοις ἐπιτηδῶν, καὶ βλαβήσεται μᾶλλον.

72. CAAG II, p. 35, 8-16. For Berthelot, “[c]e morceau est attribué à Démocrite par Cedrenus. Il se retrouve avec développement dans Geber et les alchimistes arabes” (see CAAG III, p. 36, n. 7, citing Berthelot, 1885, pp. 119, 160, 206). George Kedrenos notes: Τότε καὶ Δημόκριτος ἐγνωρίζετο φιλόσοφος, ὃς ἐδίδασκε πρὸς τοῖς ἄλλοις, ὅτι δεῖ τὸν φιλοσοφεῖν ἐθέλοντα πάντων ἀπέχεσθαι κακῶν, σωφροσύνην ἀσκεῖν καὶ πάντα ὀρθῶς νοεῖν καὶ πράττειν, καὶ οὕτως ἔστι τὸ ἐννεαγράμματον μαθεῖν· καὶ οὕτως, φησί, ὄψει τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ λόγον, τὸν ἀπαθῆ, παθητὸν νεοφανῆ (*Summary Historical Compilation* 138, 1, ed. Tartaglia, 2016, I, p. 252; cf. John Malalas, *Chronicle* 4, 15, ed. Thurn, 2000, p. 61, 32-37). From the term ἐννεαγράμματον (“word of nine letters”: *LSJ*), one can infer that the text most likely refers to alchemical writings attributed to (pseudo) Demokritos. Indeed, the ἐννεαγράμματον alludes to the “riddle of the philosophers”, concerning the secret name of the philosophers’ stone that consists of nine letters and four syllables. The riddle is found as an independent text under the names of Hermes and Agathodaimon (CAAG II, pp. 267, 16 – 268, 2), it is also mentioned by Olympiodoros (CAAG II, p. 71, 10-11: τὸ τετρασύλλαβον καὶ τὸ ἐννεάγραμμον), and commented by Stephanos of Alexandria (*On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 6, 47-183, ed. Papatthanassiou, 2017, pp. 188-194; see Papatthanassiou, 2005, pp. 130-132). Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* I 141-146, ed. Geffcken, 1902, pp. 12-13. However, while Kedrenos refers to the morals that philosophers should possess according to Demokritos, he does not attribute Christianos’ text to him, as Berthelot claims.

73. Cf. Eustratios the Presbyter’s late-6th-cent. *Life of the Patriarch Eutychios*, ed. Laga, 1992, I. 2822: [...] τῆς ἀγίας καὶ ὁμοουσίου καὶ συναϊδίου Τριάδος, [...]. According to Laga’s *app. fontium* (*ibidem*, p. 90), lines 2816-2823 paraphrase Gregory of Nazianzos’ *Funeral Oration for Basil the Great* (Or. 43) 82, 6-15, ed. Bernardi, 1992, pp. 304-306, which mentions τὴν ἀγίαν καὶ μακαρίαν Τριάδα. For the dating of the *Life*, see Cameron, 1988, pp. 244-245 (= Cameron, 1996, no. I); Cameron, 1990, p. 208 (= Cameron, 1996, no. II).

What Moral Qualities One Who Pursues Science Should Have

“One who pursues science must first love God and man, be prudent, not love money, despise lies and everything deceitful and wicked and envious; he must be a true and faithful disciple of the Holy and Consubstantial and Coeternal Trinity. Whoever has not acquired such excellent and God-pleasing morals or was not eager to acquire them will deceive himself, rushing into unattainable goals, and will be rather harmed”.

At first sight, this text seems to present a vague and rather banal Christian moral view. Yet, this assessment cannot be accurate for two reasons. First, and according to the approach of the Cappadocian Fathers, man is deified through baptism and the Eucharist, but also by the practice of virtue.⁷⁴ Maximos the Confessor shares the latter idea, presenting the moral life as a pathway to God, as a compass toward deification.⁷⁵ Consequently, likeness to God cannot be construed separately from the pursuit of the moral life. Maximos also accentuates the role of grace; deification is granted to those who are worthy, it is beyond nature, and makes, by grace, gods out of human beings those who participate in His attributes.⁷⁶ Second, a closer look at certain established Christian virtues, such as aversion to avarice or deception, brings also to mind the ever-timely debate since Zosimos of Panopolis’ times on the proper alchemical conduct, methodology, and goals. False alchemists care only for gold and the lucrative aspect of alchemy.⁷⁷ They avoid the painstaking pursuit of a rigid methodology and technique that is, on the one hand, grounded on the conceptual understanding of the natural principles of substances via the study of the Greek alchemical and philosophical tradition and, on the other hand, on the empirical understanding of matter, which is achieved in the laboratory.⁷⁸

Christianos shares the view, which pervades his whole work, that the study of the masters of the past is essential for meaningful engagement with alchemy. But this

74. The two understandings are not at all irreconcilable. Accordingly, pseudo-Dionysios (*On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1, 3, ed. Heil & Ritter, 2012, p. 66, 12-19) defines deification as [...] ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις (“assimilation to and union with God as far as possible”) and bridges the concepts of likeness/virtue with participation/union. On the passage, see Golitzin, 2013, pp. 250-252; Costache, 2017, pp. 69-70. On pseudo-Dionysios’ concept of deification, see also Russell, 2004, pp. 248-262.

75. Russell, 2004, pp. 233, 270.

76. Maximos the Confessor, *Questions and Doubts* 61, ed. Declerck, 1982, p. 48; cf. Russell, 2004, pp. 265-266. On Maximos’ doctrine of participation, see also Portaru, 2015, pp. 136-138.

77. See e.g. Zosimos of Panopolis, *On the Treatment of the Body of Magnēsia*, CAAG II, p. 190, 19-21: Καὶ διδασκόμενοι βαθμοὺς ἀληθείας, τὴν τέχνην οὐκ ἀνέχονται, οὐδὲ πέπτουσι, χρυσοῦ μᾶλλον ἢ λόγων ἐπιθυμοῦντες; [...]. On this work of Zosimos, see Dufault, 2019, pp. 122-127, 137.

78. Merianos, 2021, pp. 76-79.

is not the only requirement. The codification of certain moral qualities, identifiable (though not exclusively) with traditional Christian virtues, emphatically shows that the conduct of the true philosopher coincides with that of the true Christian. And, since alchemical knowledge is dependent on divine illumination, those who do not possess these virtues simply fail in their pursuits.

(ii) The *Thirty Chapters* closes with a text bearing a manifest Christian character: an oath before the Holy Trinity. Before turning to the text itself, it will be helpful to cite Moshe Blidstein's description of the function of the oath in Antiquity, which generally applies to our case study as well:

“An oath is composed of two parts: a statement clause, and a verifying or empowering clause. The empowering clause may consist only of an invocation of a god as witness to the statement or include also a self-curse in case the statement is false. An oath is therefore a way of empowering a statement, empowerment that can be useful for various personal and social endeavors. The invocation of the deity as guarantor is the main instrument of empowerment in the oath [...]”⁷⁹

An oath verifies the truth of a statement, or at least the sincerity of an intention,⁸⁰ and as soon as it is given, one may break it but cannot ignore it.⁸¹ A Christianized continuation of the Roman practice, oaths were customary in the Byzantine state, attested from the mid-5th cent. Imperial officials not only swore an oath of loyalty upon taking office but also with the advent of a new emperor. It is noteworthy that Constantine V (741-775), a fervent iconoclast, innovated in a two-fold way by utilizing the oath as a valuable tool: he is said to have imposed a universal oath not to venerate icons, but also to have made the representatives of the constituted bodies swear not to harm his children after his death.⁸² Oaths were also established in law courts and the conclusion of diplomatic treaties; and they had a ubiquitous presence in social relations, economic transactions, and everyday life. Even the New Testament prohibition against oaths (Matt. 5:33-37; also, James 5:12), being the topic of theolog-

79. Blidstein, 2017, p. 55.

80. Rapp, 2016, p. 27.

81. Blidstein, 2017, p. 55.

82. Nichanian, 2008. On Byzantine Iconoclasm, see Humphreys, 2021.

ical discussions, did not manage to curb the practice; and the Church developed from being once the enemy of oaths to their ultimate guarantor.⁸³

To return to Christianos, in his *Oath*, which is guaranteed by the Trinity, he addresses the student of alchemy who reads his work:

“Ὁρκος⁸⁴

Ὅμνυμί σοι, καλὲ παῖ, τὴν μακαρίαν καὶ σεβασμίαν Τριάδα ὡς οὐδὲν ἀπέκρυψα τῶν ἔμοι παρ’ αὐτῆς δεδομένων ἐν ταμείοις ψυχῆς⁸⁵ μυστηρίων τῆς ἐπιστήμης· ἀλλὰ πάντα τὰ γνωσθέντα μοι θεόθεν περὶ τῆς τέχνης ἀφθόνως⁸⁶ ἐνέθηκα ταῖς ἡμετέραις γραφαῖς, ἀναπτύξας καὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων τὸν νοῦν, ὡς λογίζομαι. Σὺ οὖν εὐσεβῶς αὐταῖς ἐντυγχάνων ἀπάσαις καὶ νουνεχῶς, εἴ τι μὴ καλῶς ἡμῖν εἴρηται ἀγνοήσασιν οὐ πανουργευσάμενοις, διόρθου τὰ ἡμέτερα παισίματα, σεαυτὸν ὠφελῶν, καὶ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας πιστοὺς ὄντας Θεῶ καὶ ἀκακοήθεις καὶ ἀγαθοὺς, ὅπερ ἐστὶ χαλεπὸν εὐρίσκειν ὡς ἀληθῶς. Ἐρρωσο ὁ ἐν ἀγία καὶ ὁμοουσίῳ Τριάδι, πατρὶ, φημί, καὶ υἱῷ καὶ ἀγίῳ πνεύματι. Τριάς ἢ μονάς⁸⁷ ὁ υἱὸς ἀτρέπτως ἐνανθρωπήσας καυχῆσει τῆς δυνάδος οἰκιοῦθῆν (οἰκειωθῆν **M**, f. 128^v) ὀνόματι τὴν ἄμωμον ἔπλασεν ἀνθρώπου φύσιν ὀλισθήσασαν (ὀλισθεῖσαν **M**, f. 128^v) ἰδῶν διωρθώσατο.

Oath

“I swear to you, good disciple, by the blessed and venerable Trinity, that I have concealed nothing of the mysteries of the science that were granted to me by It [the Trinity] in the inner chambers of the soul. But everything concerning the art that was made known to me by God I put ungrudgingly in our writings, having also developed the thought of the ancients according to my reflections. You have to read them all with piety and wisdom, and if we have said something wrong due to ignorance, not wickedness, correct our faults to benefit yourself and those readers who are faithful to God and guileless and good, qualities which are, indeed, difficult to find. Farewell, you who live by the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity, I say the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Monad is a Trinity; the Son, who without change became man for the glorying of the duality [of

83. Delouis, 2008, p. 232. On oaths and oath-taking in Byzantium, see also Koukoules, 1949, pp. 346-375; Svoronos, 1951; Auzépy & Saint-Guillain, 2008.

84. CAAG II, p. 27, 4-17. The Greek alchemical corpus contains a second oath that bears a (presumably) Christian character and is attributed to Pappos the philosopher; see Appendix.

85. Cf. e.g. Plutarch, *Table Talks* 672e: [...] ἴδιόν τι τοῦτο τῇ ψυχῇ ταμείων εὐπαθειῶν ἀποκεισθαι [...]; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* VII 7, 49, 7, ed. Le Boulluc, 1997, p. 168: κἀν ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ταμείῳ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐννοηθῆ μόνον [...]. Concerning the term ταμείον/ταμείον, see the reference in Matt. 6:6; cf. Isaiah 26:20. See also below, nn. 100-101.

86. See below, nn. 102 and 104.

87. Cf. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to Thomas* 1, 3, ed. and transl. Constatas, 2014, I, pp. 10-11: [...] Τριάς ἀληθῶς ἢ μονάς, [...] (“the Monad is truly a Trinity”).

natures], which is kindred with His name, has formed the unblemished nature of man; seeing it to fail, He corrected it”.

Before commenting on the content of the *Oath*, it must be taken into consideration that the text in **M** (second half of the 10th cent.) incorporates a part that is not included in **B** (13th cent.) and **A** (1478),⁸⁸ which are the oldest manuscripts after **M**. Berthelot has explicitly stated that he deems the extra text in **M** an addition.⁸⁹ It should be noted that the entire *Oath* in **M**, which includes the extra part, is written by the same hand. We cannot rule out the possibility that the extra text is indeed an addition to the manuscript tradition, perhaps by a compiler, who could have inserted it at the end of an earlier collection. On the other hand, the missing part in **B** and **A** could have been considered as a standardized ending (Ἐρρωσο ὁ ἐν ἀγία καὶ ὁμοουσίῳ Τριάδι...), such as those found in many Byzantine works, and therefore could have easily been omitted by other scribes.

Be that as it may, the *Oath*, and in particular the extra text in **M**, is imbued with notable elements of Christian theology. After certain references to the Holy Trinity, the Son is described as ἀτρέπτως ἐνανθρωπήσας (“who without change became man”), a phrase which, in this exact form, can already be found in the *troparion* “Ὁ Μονογενῆς Υἱὸς” (“The Only-begotten Son”).⁹⁰ According to Theophanes the Confessor, the emperor Justinian I (527-565) introduced the hymn into the Divine Liturgy of Constantinople in 535/536.⁹¹ While the Byzantine tradition attributes the *troparion* to Justinian himself, the non-Chalcedonian Churches, which also adopted it, ascribe it to Severos of Antioch (d. 538). Venance Grumel leaned toward attributing the composition of, or at least the inspiration for, it to Justinian; yet, he stressed that this is not certain.⁹² In any case, the paternity of the text is beyond the scope of this paper. What matters more for our analysis is that (a) the term Μονογενῆς (“Only-begotten”) excludes the possibility of a Nestorian origin, and (b) the adverb ἀτρέπτως (“without change”), in particular, is accepted both by Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians.⁹³ It has been shown that the author of the *troparion* elaborately

88. The *Oath* appears fully in **M**, f. 128^v. Codex **B**, f. 116^v, in its present state at least, lacks the text from ὡς ἀληθῶς to διωρθώσατο, while **A**, ff. 109^v-110^r, from Ἐρρωσο to διωρθώσατο. Furthermore, **A**, f. 298^r (written by a later hand) lacks the text from Τριάς to διωρθώσατο.

89. CAAG III, p. 29, n. 2.

90. Brightman, 1896, p. 366, 5.

91. Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 1883, p. 216, 23-24.

92. Grumel, 1923.

93. Janeras, 2013, p. 220.

combined words and phrases, mainly from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) and the Chalcedonian Definition of Faith (451), to produce it.⁹⁴ Concerning the phrase under discussion, the word ἐνανθρωπήσας originates in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.⁹⁵ As for the term ἀτρέπτως, it is one of the four so-called “Chalcedonian adverbs” included in the Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon – the other three are ἀσυγχύτως, ἀδιαίρετως, and ἀχωρίστως (“without confusion, division, separation”).⁹⁶ These adverbs in their original Greek form underline the union of Christ’s two complete and distinct natures, the divine and the human, in one person (*hypostasis*). It is notable that the same adverbs already appear in the influential work of Cyril of Alexandria (412-444).⁹⁷ From the above, it is clear that the phrase ἀτρέπτως ἐνανθρωπήσας alone cannot indicate the type of the author’s Christianity.

It is with the next phrase (καυχῆσαι τῆς δυνάδος οἰκειωθὲν ὀνόματι) that the author most probably accentuates his Chalcedonian faith by referring to the significance of Christ’s duality of natures, which is kindred with his very name.⁹⁸ This wording evokes the crucial Chalcedonian formula ἐν δύο φύσεσιν, meaning that Christ is to be acknowledged in two natures – without confusion, change, division, or separation.⁹⁹ From this reference, it can be deduced that Christianos (or whoever the author of the *Oath*’s last sentence was) most likely was an adherent of Chalcedonian Christianity.

The aim of Christianos’ *Oath* is clearly expressed; by swearing by the Holy Trinity, he most solemnly and emphatically certifies that he divulged all (alchemical) knowledge that was granted to him divinely “in the inner chambers of the soul”. Interestingly, this last phrase has a prior parallel in the *Thirty Chapters*: “the innermost sanctuaries or holy inner chambers of the souls” (ἀδύτοις ἢ ταμείοις ἱεροῖς τῶν ψυχῶν).¹⁰⁰ This intra-textual connection also corroborates that the *Oath* was an integral part of the *Thirty Chapters*. Intriguingly, the idea that knowledge is revealed by God in the human souls

94. Barkhuizen, 1984. On the hymn, see also Galadza, 2018, pp. 165-166; Giannouli, 2019, p. 491.

95. *Symbolum Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, ed. Dossetti, 1967, p. 246, 8.

96. *Concilium Oecumenicum Chalcedonense, Definitio fidei*, ACO II.1.2, p. 129, 31.

97. See, for instance, McGuckin, 1994, p. 239; Riches, 2016, pp. 60-61 and n. 19.

98. Cf. Patriarch Nikephoros, *First Antirrhetic* 45, PG 100, col. 313; transl. Mondzain, 2005, p. 239: “[...] the name of Christ designates the duality of [his] natures [...]”.

99. *Concilium Oecumenicum Chalcedonense, Definitio fidei*, ACO II.1.2, p. 129, 30-31: “[...] ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ἀσυγχύτως ἀτρέπτως ἀδιαίρετως ἀχωρίστως γνωριζόμενον, [...]”.

100. CAAG II, p. 418, 11-13: “[...] τὸ ἀκριβὲς ὑμῖν καὶ τοῖς νοήμοσιν ἐκατέρωθεν παραστήσομεν, τὴν ἐν ἀδύτοις ἢ ταμείοις ἱεροῖς τῶν ψυχῶν ἐμφανίζοντες ποιήσιν. Cf. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (fragmenta), ed. Baehrens, 1925, p. 108, 28-30: “Εἰσήγαγέ με ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰς τὸ ταμειὸν αὐτοῦ”. Ἦγουν “ἄδυτον” τὴν ἀξιέραστον λέγει ψυχὴν ἢ ἐκκλησίαν ἢ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, [...]”.

can already be traced to the Neoplatonic schools of Late Antiquity.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Christianos makes explicit that he has also developed the thought of the ancient masters according to his reflections. In this manner, he implies that both divine grace and the exegetical analysis of the ancient texts are necessary conditions for one to partake in the study of matter. Of course, his wish to share this kind of knowledge does not concern any reader, but only those who uphold the virtues he already presented in the moral code and summarizes in the *Oath*, that is, the true philosophers.

Two different traditions, the biblical and the alchemical, appear to converge in the affirmation that he concealed nothing, putting everything down ungrudgingly (ἀφθόνως). A similar stance can be traced in the Book of Wisdom (7:13): “I learned without guile and I impart without grudging; I do not hide her [wisdom’s] wealth”.¹⁰² Likewise, the general notion of the evangelical precept, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8),¹⁰³ could well be applied in this case.

Christianos’ statement also echoes pseudo-Demokritos, the great master of the past, who, at the closing of the book *On the Making of Silver*, asserts: “You have received everything useful for gold and silver. Nothing has been left out; nothing is missing, except how to sublime volatile substances and to distil waters”. These parts were excluded, according to pseudo-Demokritos, because they were extensively (ἀφθόνως) covered in his other writings.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the alchemical commentator Olympiodoros (6th cent.) notes that the masters of the past were philosophers in the proper sense, speaking among philosophers. They concealed nothing, openly writing about everything, being true to their oath.¹⁰⁵ Although Olympiodoros

101. O’Meara encapsulates this Neoplatonic concept as follows: “Knowledge in the strong sense, ‘science’, is the infallible grasp of these [transcendent eternal immaterial] realities. This knowledge cannot be derived from sense-experience; the possibility of access to it was explained by its being already present, innate in soul, requiring articulation according to rigorous logical method”. He further notes that some Christian thinkers could also accept that God revealed knowledge to humans, not only through the Bible, but also in the human souls and in the world, albeit to a lesser and imperfect level. This explains why pagan philosophers were thought that they could have discovered some truths, although in an imperfect way. James 1:17 was an appropriate quotation in this context. See O’Meara, 2017, p. 171; also 2012.

102. Wisdom 7:13: ἀδόλως τε ἔμαθον ἀφθόνως τε μεταδίδωμι, τὸν πλοῦτον αὐτῆς οὐκ ἀποκρύπτομαι [...] (transl. New Revised Standard Version).

103. Matt. 10:8: δωρεὰν ἐλάβετε, δωρεὰν δότε (transl. NKJV).

104. Pseudo-Demokritos, *On the Making of Silver* 10, 85-88, ed. and transl. Martelli, 2013, pp. 114-115. Cf. Zosimos of Panopolis, *Authentic Memoirs* IV (M’) 1, 1-30 = (M) 1, 1-9 and 21-30, ed. Mertens, 1995, pp. 16-17; see commentary at pp. 140-141, nn. 5-6.

105. CAAG II, p. 79, 16-20: Θέλω γάρ σοι παραστήσαι τὸν νοῦν τῶν ἀρχαίων, ὅτι κυρίως φιλόσοφοι ὄντες ἐν φιλοσόφοις λελαλήκασι καὶ παρεισῆνεγκαν τῇ τέχνῃ διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὴν φιλοσοφίαν, μηδὲν

stresses that nothing had been hidden by the ancient masters, his reference to philosophers implies that only a philosophically trained mind was deemed capable of approaching ancient alchemical literature. We can assume that Christianos' openness toward his readers implies this prerequisite. It is worth noting that, in a similar manner, pseudo-Archelaos declares in his poem that he had not concealed knowledge from anyone who sought it.¹⁰⁶

These elucidations are essential for understanding Christianos' text, given that alchemical oaths are traditionally regarded as promoting and securing secrecy. This is the case with the renowned oath of secrecy included in the Greek alchemical corpus by which the angel Amnaël grants Isis access to alchemical knowledge. The oath is found within the late-2nd- or early-3rd-cent. text known as *The Letter of Isis to Horus*.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Synesios the alchemist (first half of the 4th cent.), responding to Dioskoros' (his interlocutor) remark that Ostanes (?) made pseudo-Demokritos swear not to make any clear disclosures to anybody, states: "[...] 'to nobody' is not asserted with a general meaning. He was speaking about those who have <not> been initiated and who do <not> have a well-trained mind".¹⁰⁸ From what has been examined, it can be inferred that alchemical oaths, dating from different periods, do not serve a sole purpose: they are either employed to exclude the uninitiated and the untrained from alchemical knowledge or to affirm the disclosure of it to "philosophers". However, these two distinct objectives constitute, in essence, two sides of the same coin: the exclusion of the first group implies the inclusion of the second and vice versa. The shift of focus from the apophatic (exclusion) to the cataphatic (inclusion) could also be associated with the cultural milieu in which each text was written. Thus, a further explanation as to why Christianos does not safeguard the knowledge he transmits could be that, within the Christian context of alchemy, knowledge in the wrong hands is meaningless since an unworthy alchemist will not be illuminated by God's grace to understand it.

ἀποκρύψαντες, ἀλλὰ πάντα φανερώς γράψαντες· καὶ ἐν τούτοις εὐδοκοῦσιν; cf. pp. 70, 4-20; 85, 19-20. See also Viano, 2018, p. 955.

106. Pseudo-Archelaos, *On the Same Divine Art, in Iambic Verse*, vv. 296-297, ed. Goldschmidt, 1923, p. 58.

107. CAAG II, pp. 28, 20 – 33, 3 at 29, 24 – 30, 9. See Mertens, 1988 (cf. a revised edition of the oath at pp. 6-7); Lopes da Silveira, 2022; Blanco Cesteros, this issue (where additional bibliography on *The Letter of Isis* is cited). Gruner (1807) has studied the three alchemical oaths of Isis, Christianos, and Pappos.

108. Synesios, *To Dioskoros: Notes on Demokritos' Book 4*, 38-42, ed. and transl. Martelli, 2013, pp. 124-125 (see commentary on p. 241, n. 7).

The necessity for a true alchemist to be virtuous and pious is exemplified in both Christianos' moral code and *Oath*. Yet, parallel views are also traceable in other alchemical texts, such as Stephanos of Alexandria's work and the four alchemical poems.¹⁰⁹ This fact constitutes evidence that in the process of the Christianization of alchemy in Byzantium, moral excellence, as a prerequisite for true engagement with alchemy, was further emphasized – in the sense that it shaped the philosopher-chemist's intellect and soul into a proper receptacle of divine grace, through which he could be enlightened. In this context, for Stephanos, the visitation of grace requires the renunciation of the world, the mortification of the body, and the praise of God, among other things.¹¹⁰ Pseudo-Archelaos describes a similar preparation of the alchemist's body and soul to receive the knowledge granted by grace in a manner that strongly resembles a way of life befitting to an ascetic.¹¹¹ Such views, besides being reminiscent of the aforementioned counsels to Theosebeia by Zosimos, seem also to converge with the Christian understanding of the terms “philosopher” and “philosophy”, according to which, the Christian way of life, aiming at moral perfection, was considered “true philosophy” and was paradigmatically identified with the monastic ideal.¹¹²

As shown in the above passages, Christianos upholds that all knowledge, including the “alchemical”, is participation in divine knowledge. Access to it is granted, as a gift, by God's grace but only to a philosopher-chemist who holds certain virtues and serves a God-pleasing purpose. The pursuit of knowledge is linked to the pursuit of moral life, a traditional philosophical quest. Christianos' moral code serves to identify an alchemist as “worthy” or “unworthy” by virtue of his conduct and consequently delineates the moral boundaries of the field. True knowledge cannot be achieved outside of them. In this way, Christianos contributes to the construction of the identity of the philosopher-chemist in Byzantium.

But could a path to participate in divine knowledge be paved with mathematics?

109. See e.g. Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 1, 42-43, ed. Papatthanassiou, 2017, p. 158; 4, 29-34, p. 174; 6, 240-244, p. 197; pseudo-Theophrastos, *On the Same Divine Art, in Iambic Verse*, vv. 247-265, ed. Goldschmidt, 1923, p. 42; pseudo-Hierotheos, *On the Divine and Sacred Art, in <Iambic> Verse*, vv. 196-199, ed. Goldschmidt, 1923, p. 48.

110. Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 8, 125-145, ed. Papatthanassiou, 2017, pp. 211-212 (see commentary on p. 142). See also Papatthanassiou, 2020, p. 492.

111. Pseudo-Archelaos, *On the Same Divine Art, in Iambic Verse*, vv. 37-48, ed. Goldschmidt, 1923, p. 51; vv. 288-295, p. 58; vv. 314-326, p. 59.

112. On this understanding of philosophy, see Malingrey, 1961. For a synopsis, see O'Meara, 1991; also 2017, p. 171.

4. DIVINE MATHEMATICS

In the texts handed down under his name, Christianos attempts to provide a description of the alchemical art and to interpret ancient authorities on key topics (e.g. the notion of “divine water”).¹¹³ At the same time, he seeks to harmonize seemingly diverse views, interpreting the vagueness of the language of the ancient masters in a two-fold way: first, as a precaution, aiming to deceive those who, out of grudge, would destroy alchemical books;¹¹⁴ second, as a means of exercising the minds of those interested in alchemy,¹¹⁵ a method associated with pseudo-Demokritos and often cited by Synesios and Olympiodoros.¹¹⁶ Christianos strives to demonstrate, as he says, a well-known fact to all who engage in the study of these subjects: that the material of science is one and only in terms of species (μία καὶ μὴν τῶ εἴδει).¹¹⁷

Christianos is preoccupied with the development of a rigorous alchemical method which could further serve as a means to demarcate true alchemical pursuits. His work *On Making Gold, Thirty Chapters* contains a chapter titled Πόσαι εἰσὶν αἱ κατ’ εἶδος καὶ γένος διαφοραὶ τῶν ποιήσεων (“How Many Are the Differences [Differentiae] of Productions by Species and Genus”).¹¹⁸ Within this chapter, he exposes in detail the combinations of certain substances and the various methods of their treatment that yield compounds of different states, by applying, as he states in another chapter, the Platonic dialectical method of division by genera and species.¹¹⁹ The general idea of Christianos’ text is explained below in *simple* terms.

The main concept is that the matter is quadripartite and corresponds to the four parts of an egg (shell, membrane, white, yolk).¹²⁰ In fact, Christianos’ text is one

113. He mentions mainly pseudo-Demokritos, Zosimos of Panopolis, and Hermes, but he also refers to Apollo (CAAG II, p. 276, 3, 15; Letrouit, 1995, p. 81), Agathodaimon (CAAG II, p. 280, 5), Isis (CAAG II, p. 375, 2; Letrouit, 1995, p. 82), Ostanos (CAAG II, p. 396, 2), Mary the Jewess (CAAG II, pp. 273, 3; 277, 19; 282, 5); Synesios (CAAG II, p. 416, 15), and Petasios (CAAG II, pp. 278, 17; 282, 9; 416, 15; Letrouit, 1995, p. 48).

114. CAAG II, pp. 400, 10-12; 416, 3-5. One cannot but think here of the burning of the alchemical books in Egypt by Diocletian. For a recent discussion of this story and its possible monetary aspects, see Merianos, 2017, pp. 238, 248.

115. CAAG II, pp. 397, 15-18; 414, 2-4; 416, 5-10.

116. See above, n. 47.

117. CAAG II, p. 414, 1-2.

118. CAAG II, pp. 410, 16 – 414, 10; see also his remarks at pp. 409, 1 – 410, 15.

119. CAAG II, p. 418, 3-7. See Viano, 2005b, p. 94; 2018, p. 953.

120. It should be noted that Paul Kraus (1942, p. 37) argued that Christianos’ consideration of the matter as quadripartite (symbolized with the egg), his classification of different processes after “certains principes arithmologiques”, as well as his comparison of treatments with geometrical figures, evoke the semi-legendary Muslim alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. However, as already said, Christianos himself refers

of several in the Greek alchemical corpus referring to the processing of eggs for the preparation of a substance intended for the “dyeing” of base metals into silver or gold. Since ancient times, the egg was considered an image of the world; its four parts correspond to the four elements.¹²¹ Christianos identifies four classes (τάξεις), arranged according to the number of egg parts included in each one (combinations or single components). There are three ways of preparing compounds (συνθέματα) – which Christianos alternately calls “drugs” (φάρμακα)¹²² – made of either the whole egg or combinations of its parts or components: with fire; without fire; or with a mixed method. The compounds are in one of the following three states: dry, liquid, or a middle state.¹²³ Thus, the generic classes of productions are formed as follows:

I. Four parts of the egg: 1 combination (shell-membrane-white-yolk) × 3 methods of processing × 3 states of the compounds = 9 generic classes.

to the Platonic dialectical method of division by genera and species concerning his method of classification, while, as will be shown below, the matching of treatments to geometrical shapes is rather reminiscent of Proclus’ comments on certain figures.

121. For other Greek alchemical texts on egg distillation, see Colinet, 2000, p. 171; Dufault, 2017. Olivier Dufault (2017) argues that the majority of the Greek alchemical texts including an egg-distillation recipe must have been written after the 6th cent. and appeared at the end or after the composition of the Greek alchemical corpus. Andrée Colinet (2000) proved that the so-called “Work of the Four Elements” (CAAG II, pp. 337, 13 – 342, 18), in particular, is closely related to a text attributed to Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. Colinet showed that the Greek text is an adaptation of the Jabirian work with insertions, omissions, and other changes. She deemed that the Greek adaptation probably depended on the Latin translation of the Jabirian treatise, without excluding the possibility that the Greek text derived directly from the Arabic original. However, the most significant difference is that the “stone”, which is mentioned both in the Arabic original and the Latin translation, has been replaced by eggs in the Greek text, a choice following the Graeco-Roman tradition of egg symbolism (Colinet, 2000, pp. 174, 179, 188).

122. On the term *pharmakon* in pseudo-Demokritos, see Martelli, 2009, p. 13. On the same term in Stephanos of Alexandria, see Papatthanassiou, 1990, pp. 121-122, 124; 2017, pp. 110-111, 132, 134-135.

123. Christianos seems to echo Galen with regard to the three states of the compounds. See e.g. Galen, *Mixtures* I 9, ed. Helmreich, 1904, pp. 32, 24 – 33, 16; transl. Singer, van der Eijk & Tassinari, 2018, p. 88: “Now, since the middle in any genus, and most obviously within the totality of existent objects, arises from a combining together of the extremes, our conception and distinguishing of it must also be composed on the basis of those. [...] Furthermore, if you add dry earth, ash, or some other such thing that is completely dried-out, to an equal volume of water, you will produce a body that is in the middle (τὸ μέσον) with regard to the opposition of dry and wet (κατὰ τὸ ξηρόν τε καὶ ὑγρόν)”. Christianos uses mainly the adjective μέσος, -η, -ον to denote the middle state, and alternatively the adjective οὐδέτερος, -α, -ον (neutral). It should be noted that Viano (2008, p. 88; 2018, p. 953) argues that Christianos was affected by the descriptions of states of physical bodies (liquids, solids, composite nature) and the processes (cooking, melting, decomposition by fire or liquid) in Book 4 of Aristotle’s *Meteorology*.

II. Three parts of the egg: 4 combinations (shell-membrane-white; shell-membrane-yolk; shell-white-yolk; membrane-white-yolk) \times 3 methods of processing \times 3 states of the compounds = 36 generic classes.

III. Two parts of the egg: 6 combinations (shell-membrane; white-yolk; shell-white; membrane-yolk; shell-yolk; membrane-white) \times 3 methods of processing \times 3 states of the compounds = 54 generic classes.

IV. One part of the egg: 4 components (shell; or membrane; or white; or yolk) \times 3 methods of processing \times 3 states of the compounds = 36 generic classes.

Additionally, a combination or a component treated with a specific method and yielding a compound in one of the three states constitutes a specific class under a generic class of productions (e.g. egg whites and yolks processed with fire and yielding a liquid compound constitute a specific class, under the 54 generic classes of treatments that use two parts of the egg). The sum of every single production results in the entirety of the classes of alchemical productions (τάξεις τῶν ποιήσεων), which amount to 135 (9+36+54+36).¹²⁴ This represents the sum of all feasible productions.¹²⁵ Next, Christianos describes how to use the produced “drug”, but we will not touch upon this here. It is worth mentioning that the Anonymous (Ἄνεπιγραφος) Philosopher (8th-9th cent.), in his treatise on alchemy and music,¹²⁶ takes for granted that there exist only 135 kinds of alchemical productions.¹²⁷ Thus, he seems to rely on Christianos’ exposition and deems this knowledge fundamental.¹²⁸

As already noted, Christianos attributes his method to Plato, but by the time he adopted it, it had already been developed by later philosophical schools. Lucas Sior-

124. For the method of calculation, cf. CAAG III, p. 396, n. 1; Stephanides, 1927, pp. 43-44.

125. CAAG II, p. 413, 10-13: Μόνοι τοίνυν αἱ εἰρημέναι τάξεις τῶν ποιήσεων ρε’ ἀναδειχθεῖσαι εἰς ἑαυτῶν μεθόδους γεννώσας προεστήσαντο, τὴν τε διὰ μόνου πυρός, καὶ τὴν ἄνευ τελείως πυρός, καὶ τὴν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων ξηρῶν, ἢ ὑγρῶν, ἢ μέσων ἀποκυῖσκουσαι φάρμακον. The text further mentions that if the productions in which the whole egg is used are excluded, then 129 specific classes are left, and it is impossible to find more (p. 413, 14-15). Actually, the number should read 126 (36+54+36), as is corrected in the French translation in CAAG III, p. 396. See also the *app. crit.* in CAAG II, p. 413.

126. As Letrouit (1995, p. 63) noticed, the correct order of the text in CAAG II should be: pp. 433, 11 – 436, 18 + 219, 13 – 220, 10 + 436, 20 – 441, 25. For this work, see Stephanides, 1927; Wellesz, 1951, pp. 154-158.

127. CAAG II, p. 433, 13-14.

128. This is not the only instance that the Anonymous Philosopher echoes Christianos. Letrouit (1995, p. 63) shows two other cases where the Anonymous Philosopher (CAAG II, pp. 437, 13-14; 439, 1-3) draws on Christianos (cf. CAAG II, p. 409, 8-10). It should be noted that, according to Letrouit (1995, pp. 63-65), the name “Anonymous Philosopher” applies to two different authors, dating to the 8th-9th cent.

vanes, commenting on the concept of “participation” in Proclus, helps us understand the reason why Christianos took over the task of precisely defining the kinds (and the number) of alchemical productions:

“Definition shows the essence of a thing’s substance. In a manner well liked by Neo-Platonists from Porphyry onwards, Aristotle accepted that ‘participation’ relates genus and species asymmetrically. The species partakes of the genus and is essentially defined by it, but the genus does not partake of the species. But, for Aristotle, there are no general properties transcending their particulars, so the genus is not more than the collection of its disjointed species. According to Aristotle, ‘definition’ consists of distinguishing attributes, the ‘differentia’, applied to a ‘genus’. The ‘differences’ distinguish specific forms out of the genus: so Aristotle spoke rather rashly of the genus as matter (*Metaph.* 1038a7-8).”¹²⁹

From what has been discussed above, it could be suggested that Christianos seems to also regard the genus as the assembly of its severed species.

His chapter examining the 135 kinds of alchemical productions is immediately followed by another, titled Πώς δεῖ νοεῖν αὐτὰς καὶ σχήμασι γεωμετρικοῖς (“How One Should Apprehend Them with Geometrical Figures Too”).¹³⁰ The word αὐτὰς (“Them”) corresponds to the διαφοραὶ τῶν ποιήσεων (“Differences [Differentiae] of Productions”) in the title of the previous chapter. Christianos refers once again to the four parts of the egg. He associates four geometrical figures to the number of components of the egg used in treatments: the processes with all four parts of the egg are represented by the square; with three parts by the triangle; with two parts by the semicircle; and with one part (presumably) by the circle.¹³¹ Christianos then links the

129. Siorvanes, 1996, p. 74.

130. CAAG II, pp. 414, 11 – 415, 9. Cf. CAAG III, p. 398, n. 3; Berthelot, 1885, pp. 264-265.

131. Concerning the circle, it should be stressed that the text in CAAG II, p. 415, 4-5 (transcribed from **M**, f. 124^{r-v}) does not explicitly refer to such a figure: ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἀπὸ μέρους ἑνὸς γινομένων τάξεων, κυρίως ἔστιν ὁ διαγραφόμενος μόνος, ἢ γραμμοειδὲς (γαμμοειδὲς **M**, f. 124^r). However, the French translation of the text (CAAG III, p. 398) mentions it: “Quant aux classes formées avec une seule partie, c’est à proprement parler le (cercle) seul, décrit en tant que résultant d’une ligne unique”. The justification of the reference to the circle in the translation is provided by the *app. crit.* of the edition (CAAG II, p. 415), which refers to two 17th-cent. manuscripts that present a differentiated text. In particular, Par. gr. 2251, p. 99, reads: τῶν δὲ ἀπὸ μέρους ἑνός, γινομένων τάξεων, κυρίως ἔστιν ὁ διαγραφόμενος μόνος κύκλος, τῇ γραμμοειδεῖ καταθέσει. The text of Par. gr. 2329, f. 29^v, is similar; however, it seems that the scribe has erased and rewritten many of its parts. It should be further noted that **B** and Par. gr. 2275 – a copy of **B**, dated from 1465 (for this manuscript, see Martelli, 2011, pp. 13-14 and n. 44) – also present a different version of the text. In **B**, f. 111^v, the word μόνος is followed by a lacuna (a blank space in the

ways of processing the parts of the egg with geometrical solids. Processing with fire is traditionally associated with the pyramid. Treatment without fire is linked to the octahedron, the solid denoting the element of air, which is considered to have a middle nature and position between water and air. Christianos' exposition is pervaded by Neoplatonic ideas echoing, *inter alia*: long-standing Pythagorean beliefs;¹³² the Platonic solids from *Timaeus* (particularly the tetrahedron and the octahedron);¹³³ and the comments of Proclus on the First Book of Euclid's *Elements* concerning the circle, the semicircle, the triangle, and the square.

manuscript) and then by the word μοειδέξ (*sic*), which in Par. gr. 2275, f. 79^v, becomes μονοειδέξ, with the addition of the letters νο in the interlinear space, probably by a later hand. Presumably, the unintelligible word μοειδέξ in **B** corresponds to part of the word γ<ρ>αμμοειδέξ, mentioned previously. The scribe of Par. gr. 2275 faithfully copied the text from **B**, but it seems that a later reader turned μοειδέξ into μονοειδέξ, in an attempt to make the word intelligible. Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that Proclus in the *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* describes the circle in a way that coincides with the term γραμμοειδέξ (linear): "[...] every circle is only a line" (Def. I, ed. Friedlein, 1873, p. 92, 7-8; transl. Morrow, 1970, p. 75).

132. The Pythagoreans construed reality as being numerical in nature, according to Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 986a1-3; 1083b11-13, 17; 1090a20-25; see Riedweg, 2005, p. 80). A key position in Pythagorean arithmology is reserved for the τετρακτῦς (*tetraktys*), a term that can be translated as "Fourness" and denotes the decad, which is considered as the sum of the first four numbers (the addition of 1+2+3+4 amounts to 10, the "perfect" number). The *tetraktys*, visualized with the aid of pebbles that are arrayed in four rows, forms an equilateral triangle (cf. Riedweg, 2013, pp. 53-54).

133. In *Timaeus*, Plato deems the cosmos to be the creation of a Demiurge, a divine craftsman, a description which would greatly affect alchemical authors. This craftsman is benevolent, rational, but not omnipotent, and works with pre-existing materials available to him. He is also a mathematician because he fashioned the cosmos following geometrical principles. An important aspect of Plato's theory concerns the five regular geometrical solids: the tetrahedron (or pyramid), the hexahedron (or cube), the octahedron, the dodecahedron, and the icosahedron. He associated each of the four traditional elements with one of the solids: fire-tetrahedron; air-octahedron; water-icosahedron; and earth-cube. As for the dodecahedron (the regular solid closest to the sphere), it was assigned to the entire cosmos. The variety in the material world is produced by the mixing of the elements in various proportions. The rectilinear plane surfaces of the so-called "Platonic solids" are dividable into triangles and these are in turn dividable into right-angled triangles (that is, with a 90-degree angle), either isosceles or scalene. Scalene triangles are what Plato considers to be truly elemental units, the *stoicheia*. In particular, three of the four solids, the tetrahedron, the octahedron, and the icosahedron (fire, air, and water, respectively), are made of equilateral triangles (reminding of the Pythagorean *tetraktys*). These equilateral triangles in turn are formed by assembling six right-angled scalene triangles with angles of 30, 60, and 90 degrees. The fourth solid, the cube, associated with the element of earth, can be assembled only by right-angled isosceles triangles forming squares. Thus, only the elements of fire, air, and water can be transmuted into one another, being composed of the same *stoicheia*, the right-angled scalene triangles. The element of earth cannot participate in the process of elemental transformation, as its *stoicheia* are isosceles, not scalene triangles; this means that when the faces of the cube are broken, they can reassemble only into another cube. See Mueller, 2005, pp. 107-111; Lindberg, 2007, pp. 38-41; Lloyd, 2007, pp. 99-101.

To better understand the association between treatments with a specific number of egg parts and specific geometrical shapes, it will be useful to present nuggets of Proclus' commentary on these four figures, which are employed in his geometrical thinking as a way to express metaphysical principles.¹³⁴ According to Christianos, treatments with all four parts of the egg correspond to the square; Proclus states that “[t]he Pythagoreans thought that this more than any other four-sided figure carries the image of the divine nature”.¹³⁵ Processes with three parts of the egg correspond to the triangle; for Proclus, “[...] the triangle is the premier of all rectilinear figures, [...] because it is determined by the number three and formed by it”.¹³⁶ Treatments with two parts of the egg correspond to the semicircle; Proclus observes that “[...] all figures of this sort are dyadic, [...] and are composed of unlike elements”.¹³⁷ Finally, processes with one part of the egg correspond to the circle; Proclus comments that “[t]he first and simplest and most perfect of the figures is the circle. [...] It corresponds to the Limit, the number one, [...]”.¹³⁸ Thus, numbers (four, three, two, and one) are the agents that create the relationship between alchemical treatments and geometrical figures.

Geometry, for Proclus, is more suitable than arithmetic to represent the mediational role of the mathematical sciences, because it is mediational itself, able to extend metaphysical truths into imaginative space.¹³⁹ To offer an example, the progression from unity to multiplicity (and from multiplicity to unity) is fundamental for Christianos, who applies it, for instance, in his argument on the unity of the “divine water”, the agent of transmutation.¹⁴⁰ Proclus helps us conceive the role geometry can play in understanding this progression when he says: “[...] if he (the student) wonders how the many could be in the One, and all in the indivisible, let him think of the monad and how it is shown that all forms of odd and even are (pre-contained) in it, the circle [κύβος Steel] and sphere, and the other forms of numbers”.¹⁴¹ Christianos' use of

134. O' Meara, 2005, pp. 139-141. It is interesting to note that Proclus himself is critical of those who claim to produce gold (*Commentary on Plato's Republic*, ed. Kroll, 1899-1901, II, p. 234, 14-25); see Viano, 1996, pp. 202-203; also Dufault, 2019, pp. 101-102.

135. Proclus, *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, Def. XXX-XXXIV, ed. Friedlein, 1873, p. 173, 2-4; transl. Morrow, 1970, p. 136.

136. Def. V, ed. Friedlein, 1873, p. 115, 5-8; transl. Morrow, 1970, p. 93.

137. Def. XVIII, XIX, ed. Friedlein, 1873, p. 159, 12-13; transl. Morrow, 1970, p. 126.

138. Def. XV, XVI, ed. Friedlein, 1873, pp. 146, 24 – 147, 4; transl. Morrow, 1970, p. 117.

139. O' Meara, 2005, pp. 138-139.

140. See e.g. CAAG II, pp. 404, 18 – 405, 5. On the “divine water”, see Martelli, 2009.

141. Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* IV 926, 20-23, ed. Steel, 2007-2009, II, p. 118; transl. O' Meara, 1989, p. 200.

geometrical figures and solids no longer seems bizarre but is (without a doubt) well embedded in the Neoplatonic tradition.

Christianos' short chapter concludes with the statement that the diagrams of the relevant figures are depicted.¹⁴² It is notable that from the three main witnesses of the Greek alchemical corpus, the text is accompanied by four freehand sketches of geometrical shapes only in codices **B** and **A**, in the margin of their respective pages.¹⁴³ The text in **M** does not include any corresponding figures.

It is obvious from the two aforementioned chapters that Christianos expresses his method concerning the classification of alchemical productions with an arithmetical and geometrical language. The "mathematization" of the classes of substances and the feasible productions suggests that, in all likelihood, he considered alchemy as sharing similar traits with the sciences of the quadrivium. The Anonymous Philosopher will later attempt to prove the same, stressing the similarities between alchemy and music through analogical reasoning.¹⁴⁴ The affinity of alchemy to the sciences of the quadrivium accentuates the idea that alchemical practice should be conceived in, and grounded on, concrete (mathematical) principles and rigorous, logical procedures that constitute a precise methodology.

In a Neoplatonic manner, the number 135 does not denote only the feasible productions but symbolizes the totality of the "art" itself. I think that this kind of mathematical exactness probably accommodates an essential request: the formation of a strict methodology serving true alchemical pursuits. As Christianos reveals in another chapter – and this rationale permeates all of his work – he is urged by the need to show that the "art" is not unlimited and incomprehensible in every way.

142. CAAG II, p. 415, 9: ἔστωσαν δὲ τὰ διαγράμματα οὕτως.

143. **B**, f. 111^r; **A**, f. 106^r. In both manuscripts the following geometrical figures and solids are depicted (from top to bottom): a square, a triangle, a semicircle, and (possibly) a pyramid. The last figure was presumably meant to depict an open pyramid consisting of four triangular lateral surfaces and a four-sided surface at its base. It is striking, though, that a square-based pyramid is depicted, rather than a triangular-based one, or else, a regular tetrahedron, the solid associated with the element of fire in the Platonic *Timaeus* (56a-b; see above, n. 133; cf. Plutarch, *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 428d). If this figure portrays a pyramid indeed, this could mean that whoever originally sketched these figures, as well as the copyists that reproduced them, probably did not understand the type of pyramid Christianos was referring to. Another interesting fact is that in **A** the figures are placed in the right margin of f. 106^r, in correspondence with the closing sentence of the chapter (ἔστωσαν δὲ τὰ διαγράμματα οὕτως), whereas in **B** they are depicted in the left corner of the lower margin of f. 111^r, even though the chapter finishes on the next page (where the phrase ἔστωσαν δὲ τὰ διαγράμματα οὕτως appears). These shapes are also included in Par. gr. 2275, f. 78^v, as well as in Par. gr. 2251, p. 99, and Par. gr. 2329, f. 29^v. Note that the four figures in question have been erroneously reproduced upside down in CAAG I, p. 160, fig. 36.

144. On analogy and analogical reasoning, see Bartha, 2022.

He aims, on the one hand, to remove the obscurity of the various descriptions and writings, revealing that the method is only one; on the other hand, he tries to avoid attracting the usual criticism of presenting an unlimited number of productions.¹⁴⁵ The Anonymous Philosopher becomes more clear about the pitfalls of not following this methodology: “[...] one must beware of disorder (ἀταξίαν) in all that has been said. [...] the work of willfulness (αὐθαδείας) will be harmful and worthy of laughter.”¹⁴⁶ This is reminiscent of Zosimos of Panopolis’ similar aphorism in *On the Treatment of the Body of Magnēsia*, where he reproaches the ridiculous deeds of those alchemists who do not have patience for lessons and always lack a solid foundation (κενεμβατοῦσιν).¹⁴⁷ An aspiring practitioner should follow principles and procedures that safeguard the result of the attempt. Overlooking the teachings of the masters of the past, along with ignorance, improvisation, and lack of patience would inevitably result in a mocking failure.

Christianos was not the only Byzantine alchemical author pointing out alchemy’s relation with the mathematical sciences. As already seen, Stephanos of Alexandria and the Anonymous Philosopher expressed similar ideas. The former, exposing his model of matter,¹⁴⁸ explicitly states that the physical bodies, that is, the four elements, need to be in congruence (ὁμολογίας) with mathematical theory.¹⁴⁹ Thus, he echoes the thesis that acquaintance with mathematics is indispensable for the conception of the structure of matter (cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 53b-c). It has been noticed that, for Stephanos, “[g]eometry offers its immaterial figures as a static model for the description of the structure of atoms or indivisible bodies in the material world”.¹⁵⁰ It seems that he was most likely influenced by the systematic mathematization of the later Greek philosophy, an effect of Iamblichus’ program to Pythagoreanize Neoplatonic philosophy.¹⁵¹

145. CAAG II, pp. 417, 14 – 418, 4.

146. CAAG II, p. 436, 8-18.

147. CAAG II, p. 191, 6-7.

148. On Stephanos’ conception of matter and its philosophical background, see Papathanassiou, 1990, p. 126; 2005, pp. 117-120; 2017, p. 93; Viano, 2005b, p. 102; 2018, p. 952.

149. Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 6, 77-78, ed. Papathanassiou, 2017, p. 189: Τὰ δὲ φυσικὰ σώματα, οἷον τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα, ἔχει τὴν ἀνάγκην τῆς ὁμολογίας διὰ τῆς μαθηματικῆς θεωρίας. See Papathanassiou, 1990, p. 126; 2005, p. 119. On alchemy and the mathematical sciences in the work of Stephanos, see Papathanassiou, 1990, pp. 126-127; for astronomy, in particular, see Papathanassiou, 1996, pp. 260-264; for music, see Wellesz, 1951, pp. 153-154.

150. Papathanassiou, 1990, p. 126.

151. O’Meara, 1989, pp. 104-105, 212.

As previously pointed out, Stephanos' definition of philosophy as "likeness to God as far as humanly possible" appears within this context of mathematization. Therefore, the philosophy which shows the path of assimilation to God is Neoplatonic in nature and highly mathematized. This is consistent with the Neoplatonic belief that one's progress to metaphysics passes through mathematical sciences,¹⁵² but it also suggests that the effort to approach the universe, which proclaims the glory of God, requires a firm grasp of the universal mathematical language. For Proclus, who particularly exalts the role of geometry as a mediational science,

"[m]athematics [...] promotes perfection in the life of discursive reasoning, but it also prepares the soul for a higher level of reasoning, that of theology or metaphysics, the practice of which prepares the soul in turn for access to yet a higher level of divine life, that of non-discursive, perfect, complete knowledge, *i.e.* the life of divine Intellect".¹⁵³

In the context of Neoplatonism, and within the period spanning roughly from around the 7th to the 9th cent., it seems that certain alchemical authors, such as Christianos, attempted, in different degrees, to establish an alchemical theory and/or methodology on a concrete foundation with mathematical characteristics. In doing so, they tried to draw legitimacy for the field of alchemy by projecting its relation or analogy with arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music. This suggested affinity implies that they considered alchemy to be mathematical in nature and eligible for a rigorous methodology. Thus, if the "art" could be lifted to a level close to the sciences of the quadrivium, its consideration as a legitimate subject of philosophical inquiry could be enhanced. It is plausible to assume that these attempts could have also furnished alchemical philosophers with a valuable means for the demarcation of the field. Amateurs and charlatans, motivated mainly by the desire to acquire wealth or easy profit, degraded the "art", reducing it to either a nonsensical or a defrauding practice. A precise methodology could guarantee the alchemical outcome and, at the same time, exclude those who were devoid of profound knowledge.¹⁵⁴ Combined with the proper moral conduct, discussed in the previous section, this methodology constituted a safe way of identifying a true philosopher.

152. O' Meara, 2005, p. 137.

153. O' Meara, 2005, p. 138.

154. See Merianos, 2021, pp. 70-72.

5. THE CONTEXT. A CHRISTIAN CULTURE OPEN TO THE LESSONS OF THE UNIVERSE

Any attempt to contextualize Christianos' views faces the problem of his dating. Nonetheless, his religious vocabulary could provide some hints in our attempt to chronologically situate him. Based on what has been previously examined in Section 2, it would seem the only conclusion is that Letrouit's evidence on the dating of Christianos (deriving from the assumption that the dyestuff λαχά[ς] was attested in Egypt after the Arab conquest) is most probably not valid anymore. Could Christianos, thus, be dated earlier? There are certain Christian phrases in his work that could suggest this. For example, the earliest datable mention of the exact phrase τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ὁμοουσίου καὶ συναϊδίου Τριάδος ("of the Holy and Consubstantial and Coeternal Trinity"), appearing in the moral code, is found in Eustratios the Presbyter's late-6th-cent. *Life of the Patriarch Eutychios*.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the phrase ἀτρέπτως ἐνανθρωπήσας ("who without change became man") in Christianos' *Oath* evokes, as shown above, the *troparion* "Ὁ Μονογενῆς Υἱὸς" ("The Only-begotten Son"), which is nearly contemporary with the *Life of Eutychios*. However, one should be cautious, as it could have been part of a later addition. These phrases could serve as *termini post quos* for the composition of Christianos' work, and along with other potential evidence – such as the fact that he does not refer to Stephanos of Alexandria – perhaps point more to the late 6th or 7th cent. rather than the 8th. Although this meager evidence cannot decisively tilt the scales in favor of the earlier dating, Christianos' religious vocabulary is nonetheless worth studying further.

Christianos' correlation between Christianity and mathematics is not surprising for the presumed period of his dating. Perhaps one of the most graphic ways to demonstrate this link around the mid-6th cent. is to refer to the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. It was built between 532 and 537 by the emperor Justinian, and its architects were Anthemios of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus. The core of the building exemplifies, according to Dominic O' Meara, "the geometry of the divine as interpreted by Proclus in his commentary on Euclid":

"From the centre of the church, the lofty point from which radiates a dome, the church expands to the circular base of the dome, itself resting on four semi-circular arches. The circular base and semi-circular arches create four triangular spaces, the pendentives. Arches and triangles lead down in turn to the square composed by four massive

155. See above, n. 73. This conclusion was reached after a search was conducted in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (stephanus.tlg.uci.edu), accessed on November 25, 2021.

piers. Expressed in solids, the sequence centre, circle, semi-circle, triangle and square manifests a perfectly controlled progression from unity to developing levels of perfectly unified multiplicity, ideal limitations of multiplicity which bring it back in stages to ever greater unity, back to the centre, transcendent source of all. The church thus corresponds, in visual space, to the metaphysical dynamics of unity and multiplicity, the progression of reality from, and reversion to, the Ultimate, as formulated by Proclus.”¹⁵⁶

O’Meara traces the links between the architects of Hagia Sophia, the School of Proclus in Athens, and the Neoplatonic School in Alexandria, suggesting that Anthemios and Isidore, mathematicians themselves, were acquainted with Proclus’ ideas on the higher significance of geometry. As a result, any visitor to Hagia Sophia, provided they were well-versed in philosophy and mathematics, would have recognized the geometry of the divine, expressed in three-dimensional space.¹⁵⁷

Evidence for the appeal of certain mathematical sciences during the 7th and 8th cent. is paradigmatically exposed by Paul Magdalino in his study of astrology in Byzantium.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it must be stressed that interest, particularly, in astronomy and astrology does not seem to be continuous during this period (at least with our current knowledge); there is a gap between Herakleios’ reign (610-641) and the late 8th cent.¹⁵⁹

Magdalino shows that the political and cultural developments during Herakleios’ reign led to a vivid interest in studying the “secular” sciences. The study of astronomy served the official need to establish, with perfect accuracy, the calendar of the Paschal cycle and the chronology of world history. With regard to the calendar, the official project aimed at introducing an improved system; it would come to replace the diverse practices in different congregations, thus making it part of the policy of religious conciliation which promoted Monoenergetic and Monotheistic doctrines. But the adepts of astronomy were also prepared for the study of a Christianized astrology, which would examine the design of Providence in the celestial movements.¹⁶⁰ So, it is not peculiar that official interest in astrology manifested during the most unpromising period of Herakleios’ reign, when the Persians were dominant on the battlefield (until the Byzantine counter-offensive that began in 622) and fear for the future of the empire was widespread.

156. O’Meara, 2005, pp. 143-144.

157. O’Meara, 2005, pp. 144-145.

158. Magdalino, 2006, ch. II.

159. Magdalino, 2017a, pp. 202-203, 214; cf. Caudano, 2020, p. 210.

160. Magdalino, 2006, p. 37.

A parallel need must have urged the Byzantines to further study an already known “art”. From what can be inferred, strong engagement with alchemy, probably with imperial encouragement, must have been related to the state economy and monetary affairs, since the “divine art” could have appeared as a way to replenish the depleted treasury. Suffice it to give two known examples to depict the dire economic situation. In 615, according to the *Chronicon Paschale*, Herakleios introduced the new silver *hexagram* coin, “[...] and imperial payments were made with it, and at half their old rate”. In 622, according to Theophanes the Confessor, Herakleios “[b]eing short of funds he took on loan the moneys of religious establishments and he also took the candelabra and other vessels of the holy ministry from the Great Church, which he minted into a great quantity of gold and silver coin”.¹⁶¹ The Byzantine state was in desperate need of money, and a remedy to the crisis could utilize alchemical knowledge. In this context, the figure of Stephanos of Alexandria became the model of the polymath savant of the period, exemplifying the Christian philosopher who puts his diverse knowledge, stemming from the intellectual tradition of Alexandria, in the service of the state and closely collaborates with an emperor (Herakleios) for the common good.¹⁶² Therefore, it is hardly a coincidence that an association between Herakleios and alchemy is discernible in the Greek alchemical corpus: (a) the last Lecture of Stephanos’ work is addressed to Herakleios, and (b) in the table of contents of *M*, three, now lost, alchemical texts are attributed to the same emperor.¹⁶³

At the same time, theological thought was characterized by the evocation of the entirety and unity of the divine work, a trend which, although based on the authority of the New Testament, also admitted the existence of other means of accessing knowledge of the providential design.¹⁶⁴ The most striking example is that of the prominent theologian Maximos the Confessor, who went so far as to state that:

“[...] whoever wishes blamelessly to walk the straight road to God, stands in need of both the inherent spiritual knowledge of Scripture, and the natural contemplation of beings according to the spirit. In this way, anyone who desires to become a perfect lover

161. *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. Dindorf, 1832, p. 706, 9-11; transl. Whitby & Whitby, 1989, p. 158. Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 1883, pp. 302, 34 – 303, 3; transl. Mango & Scott, 1997, p. 435. Cf. Hendy, 1985, pp. 494-495.

162. Cf. Magdalino, 2006, p. 51; 2017a, pp. 206-207, 214.

163. (a) Stephanos of Alexandria, *On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 9 (Title), ed. Papaathanassiou, 2017, p. 213; (b) *M*, f. 2^r. See Letrouit, 1995, p. 58; Saffrey, 1995, pp. 4-5; Mertens, 2006, pp. 218, 221-222; Merianos, 2017, pp. 236-237; Roberts, 2019, pp. 80, 88, 96, 98.

164. Magdalino, 2006, p. 40.

of perfect wisdom will be able to show what is only reasonable, namely, that the two laws – the natural and the written – are of equal value and equal dignity, that both of them reciprocally teach the same things, and that neither is superior or inferior to the other”.¹⁶⁵

It is notable that earlier in the same text, Maximos characterizes God as “the creator (κτίστης), fashioner (ποιητής), and artisan (τεχνίτης)” of creation.¹⁶⁶ The representation of God as a craftsman originates in the Platonic *Timaeus* (41d), in a description that has profoundly affected alchemical ideas and imagery.¹⁶⁷ In another instance, Maximos reproduces the idea that the four Gospels correspond to the four elements of which the world consists.¹⁶⁸

Nicholas Conostas notes, with regard to Maximos’ speculation on the meaning of several numbers,¹⁶⁹ that, for him, they are “a positive expression of the created order, an affirmation of the ontological value of difference, particularity, and multiplicity”.¹⁷⁰ Maximos demonstrates elsewhere that “[...] it is not possible for anything whose existence is determined by numerical quantity to be infinite or, consequently, without beginning”.¹⁷¹ This concurs with Christianos’ concern to prove that the alchemical productions could not be infinite in number.

The Neoplatonism of Maximos, who was influenced in his Christian cosmology by pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite, leads to the conception of the universe in a hierarchical and harmonized way, in which all of its parts are linked.¹⁷² The description of this chain of interdependent beings evokes the image of Homer’s golden chain (*Iliad* VIII 18-27), a long-standing and influential allegory and sym-

165. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to John* 10, 17, 30, ed. and transl. Conostas, 2014, I, pp. 192-195. Doru Costache, commenting on Maximos’ *Ambigua to John* 41, points out that his “[...] representation of reality bridges scriptural wisdom, Platonic philosophy, and the Aristotelian science”. Furthermore, Maximos seems to advocate that “[...] science, technology, theology, and spirituality can peacefully and creatively coexist and interact [...]”. See Costache, 2020, pp. 18 and 19, respectively; also 2015, pp. 380-381.

166. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to John* 10, 17, 30, ed. and transl. Conostas, 2014, I, pp. 192-193.

167. Viano, 2005b, pp. 103-104.

168. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to John* 21, 5, ed. Conostas, 2014, I, p. 424. Cf. Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* I 21, ed. Blanc, 1966, p. 68.

169. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to John* 65-67, ed. Conostas, 2014, II, pp. 274-302.

170. Conostas, 2014, II, p. 369 (*Ambigua to John* 65, n. 1).

171. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to John* 10, 39 (Title), ed. and transl. Conostas, 2014, I, pp. 294-295.

172. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to John* 10, 37, 89, ed. Conostas, 2014, I, p. 288; see Magdalino, 2006, p. 42.

bol, which in Neoplatonic texts was conceived as the chain of spiritual powers that bind the universe together with an indissoluble friendship and extend from the highest god to the material universe.¹⁷³

In Byzantine theological thought, the relation between nature and divine causes was shaped by the Christian concept of Divine Providence.¹⁷⁴ Yet, the way Maximos conceives it is remarkable. He ascribes to it the meaning of the “[...] power which holds the universe together, keeping it aligned with the inner principles according to which it was originally created”.¹⁷⁵ Such a concept of Providence could even strengthen the notion of universal sympathy uniting all created beings, from the highest to the lowest.¹⁷⁶ This example suggests that certain traditional alchemical ideas could be accommodated quite well in the advanced theological thought of the era, facilitating the ongoing Christianization of alchemy.

To return to the political level, Herakleios’ successors, such as Constantine V, also faced a state in crisis, especially after the revival of the Caliphate under the Abbasids. Consequently, it is not surprising that there are clues for a renewed interest in astronomy, astrology, and alchemy.¹⁷⁷ Indications are not limited to Byzantine sources, as the following (well-known) example shows. ‘Umāra ibn Ḥamza, ambassador of the caliph al-Manṣūr (754-775), is said to have reported after a stay in Constantinople how the emperor Constantine V demonstrated in his presence a transmutation of lead into silver and copper into gold with the aid of a white and a red powder, respectively. This instigated, according to ‘Umāra, al-Manṣūr’s interest in alchemy.¹⁷⁸ Albeit in a different and non-alchemical context, relating to the monetization of the state economy, the fact that Constantine has been characterized as φιλόχρυσος (“lover of gold”) and νέος Μίδαξ (“new Midas”), because of his effort to build up a massive reserve of gold,¹⁷⁹ could be further suggestive of the creation of an image of his as an emperor associated with precious metals.

173. Lévêque, 1959, pp. 45-46, 56; Lambertson, 1986, pp. 271-272.

174. Nicolaidis *et al.*, 2016, p. 550.

175. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to John* 10, 19, 37, ed. and transl. Constanas, 2014, I, pp. 206-207.

176. Magdalino, 2006, p. 43.

177. Magdalino, 2006, p. 50.

178. See Strohmaier, 1991; Rochow, 1994, pp. 85-87; Gutas 1998, pp. 115-116.

179. According to the iconophile sources that attribute these labels to Constantine V, he pressed the taxpayers in the collection of taxes to achieve this goal. In order to pay their taxes, payable in gold coinage, the farmers were forced to sell off their products cheaply. This resulted in a significant decrease in the price of goods; see Patriarch Nikephoros, *Short History* 85, 12-21, ed. Mango, 1990, p. 160; Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 1883, p. 443, 19-22. Cf. Hendy, 1985, pp. 226, 298-299; Oikonomides, 2002, p. 981.

As emerges from the above sketchy discussion, during the period that Christianos' work could be dated (late 6th [?] – 8th cent.), the study of alchemy appears to coincide with an interest in the mathematical sciences, prompted also by the openness to learn what lessons the universe can teach about the divine design. Within the aforementioned period, Christianos' Christianized alchemy fitted in the broader Byzantine intellectual culture.

6. CONCLUSION

The circulation of Graeco-Egyptian alchemical texts in the once pagan, now largely Christianized Eastern Roman Empire, led inevitably to a gradual Christianization of alchemical concepts. Certain Byzantine works in the Greek alchemical corpus, such as those of the anonymous author designated as "Christianos", portray a close connection of alchemy with Christianity. These religious elements, which could also provide us with some chronological hints, should not be regarded as a Christian gloss on alchemical ideas. Christianos shows that true alchemical knowledge is participation in divine knowledge and defines the virtues that a philosopher-chemist must possess to be granted access to it.

Christianos was influenced by the Neoplatonic mathematization of philosophical ideas and introduced a precise method, consisting of sequential and interdependent steps, to define and classify alchemical treatments on a basis with mathematical attributes. It seems that he considered this very method as a path enlightened by God, a gift to participate in divine knowledge. This gift could only be bestowed upon a pious and worthy alchemist in the inner chambers of his soul. The worthiness of the true alchemical philosopher was shaped by a set of (Christian) virtues and the painstaking study of the ancient alchemical literature. Thus, Christian ethics and mathematics, the conduct and the method, coincided in Christianos' thought as a way to elevate and at the same time demarcate true alchemy. It is plausible to conclude that the religious aspects of Christianos' work form an indispensable part of his alchemical methodology.

APPENDIX. PAPPUS' OATH

Apart from Christianos' oath, another one encompassing (presumably) Christian traits appears in the Greek alchemical corpus. It is found at the beginning of a text attributed to Pappos the philosopher, who is dated to the 7th or 8th cent., that is, around the time of Christianos. In the technical part of the text following the oath, Pappos refers to Stephanos of Alexandria (as well as pseudo-Moses), which permits us to set a *terminus post quem* for the dating of Pappos.¹⁸⁰

In **M**, Pappos' work is simply titled Πάππου φιλοσόφου (*By Pappos the Philosopher*).¹⁸¹ However, in the manuscript's table of contents, a more complete title corresponding to this treatise can be read: Πάππου φιλοσόφου περὶ τῆς θείας τέχνης (*On the Divine Art by Pappos the Philosopher*).¹⁸² As previously stated, the text begins with the following oath:

Πάππου φιλοσόφου¹⁸³

Ὅρκω οὖν ὄμνυμί σοι τὸν μέγαν ὄρκον, ὅστις ἄν συ ἦ, θεὸν φημι τὸν ἓνα, τὸν εἶδει καὶ οὐ τῷ ἀριθμῷ, τὸν ποιήσαντα τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν,¹⁸⁴ τῶν τε στοιχείων τὴν τετρακτὺν¹⁸⁵ καὶ τὰ ἐξ αὐτῶν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὰς ἡμετέρας ψυχὰς λογικὰς τε καὶ νοεράς,¹⁸⁶

180. CAAG II, p. 28, 12-14. See CAAG III, p. 30, n. 4; von Lippmann, 1919, p. 107; Letrouit, 1995, pp. 61, 86-87.

181. **M**, f. 184^v.

182. **M**, f. 2^r. See Letrouit, 1995, p. 61; Roberts, 2019, p. 89.

183. CAAG II, pp. 27, 18 – 28, 4.

184. Cf. Psalms (LXX) 113:23, 120:2, 123:8, 133:3, 145:6; also Acts 4:24; Revelation 14:7.

185. Cf. e.g. Eusebios of Caesarea, *In Praise of Constantine* 6, 5, ed. Heikel, 1902, p. 207, 12-13: [...] τὴν τῶν στοιχείων τετρακτὺν ἐπινοήσας, [...]; Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* III, ed. Diehl, 1903-1906, II, p. 50, 1-2: [...] τὴν τῶν στοιχείων εἰσάγει τετρακτὺν [...]; IV, vol. III, p. 67, 29: [...] κάτωθεν μὲν σελήνην καὶ τὴν τῶν στοιχείων τετρακτὺν, [...]. Stephanos of Alexandria, whom Pappos mentions, also refers to God as the maker of the four elements (*On the Great and Sacred Art of Making Gold* 5, 23-25, ed. Papatthanassiou, 2017, p. 181).

186. Cf. e.g. Olympiodoros, *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias* 4, 3, ed. Westerink, 1970, p. 32, 13-14: [...] θέλων ψυχὴν λογικὴν καὶ νοεράν χαρίζεσθαι, [...]; John Philoponos, *On the Creation of the World* VI 11, ed. Reichardt, 1897, p. 252, 16-17: [...] μόνος τῶν ἐγκοσμίων ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς λογικῆς καὶ νοεράς ἠξίωται ψυχῆς: [...] (also VI 2, p. 233.10-12); Maximos the Confessor, *Ambigua to John* 42, 24, ed. Constatas, 2014, II, p. 168: [...] μὴ ἔχειν τὸ τικτόμενον τὴν λογικὴν τε καὶ νοεράν ψυχὴν [...].

ἀρμόσαντα σώματι,¹⁸⁷ τὸν ἐπὶ ἀρμάτων χερουβικῶν ἐποχούμενον,¹⁸⁸ καὶ ὑπὸ ταγμάτων ἀγγελικῶν ἀνυμνούμενον.¹⁸⁹

By Pappos the Philosopher¹⁹⁰

“I swear to you by the great oath, whoever you are; I say of God who is One, in form and not in number, the Maker of heaven and earth, the fourness (τετρακτὸν) of the elements and everything that originates from them, and also our rational and intellectual souls, having joined them with the body; He who is carried by the chariots of the cherubim and praised by the orders of angels”.

Compared to Christianos’ oath, this one presents two main differences. First, it appears at the beginning of the text and not at the end. Second, it does not state the reason behind its composition (*e.g.* to affirm full disclosure of knowledge, as Christianos does), at least in its extant form. The phrase θεὸν φημι τὸν ἕνα, τὸν εἶδει καὶ οὐ τῷ ἀριθμῷ could be read as a periphrastic invocation of the Trinitarian God,¹⁹¹ intended to guarantee the oath, legitimize the content of the text that follows, and portray the author as a true Christian. The rest of the oath gives the impression of a compilation of stock terms and phrases found in texts of various genres (theological, hymnographic, philosophical, etc.), indicative examples of which are noted in their respective footnotes. Particularly, the phrases θεὸν φημι τὸν ἕνα, [...], τὸν ποιήσαντα τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν could be seen as paraphrasing the corresponding ones from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα θεὸν [...], ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, [...] (“We believe in One God [...], Maker of heaven and earth, [...]”).¹⁹²

On the other hand, the terminology in what could be construed as a periphrastic reference to the Trinity (but also other phrases) might denote Neoplatonic

187. Cf. *e.g.* Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* I 5, 3, ed. Marcovich, 1995, p. 8, 16-17: [...] τὸν μικρὸν κόσμον, τὸν ἄνθρωπον (ψυχὴν τε καὶ σῶμα αὐτοῦ), ἀγίῳ πνεύματι ἀρμολάμενος, [...]; Nemesios of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man* 2, 120, ed. Morani, 1987, p. 36, 6-7: μένει γὰρ ἔτι τὸ αὐτὸ ἄτοπον, ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ μὴ πρόσοφρον ψυχὴν ἐναρμόσαντος τῷ σώματι, [...].

188. Cf. *e.g.* John of Damascus, *Homily on the Withered Fig-Tree and the Parable of the Vineyard* 1, 4-5, ed. Kotter, 1988, p. 102: [...] ὁ ἐπὶ χερουβικῶν ἀρμάτων ἐποχούμενος [...]. Cf. Sirach 49:8.

189. Cf. Romanos the Melode, *Hymns* 50, 16, 2-3, ed. Grosdidier de Matons, 1981, p. 256: [...] ἀγγέλων πάντα τὰ τάγματα / καὶ τῶν ἀρχαγγέλων ἀνυμνοῦντα προτρέχουσι [...].

190. For other English translations, see Bulmer-Thomas, 1974, p. 301; Jones, 1986, p. 14.

191. See also Tannery, 1896, p. 32; Ver Eecke, 1933, p. xii; Bulmer-Thomas, 1974, p. 301; Letrouit, 1995, p. 61; Cuomo, 2000, p. 6, n. 9.

192. *Symbolum Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, ed. Dossetti, 1967, p. 244, 1-2. I acknowledge this observation to an anonymous reviewer.

origin, reminiscent of Proclus,¹⁹³ for instance. In this respect, since the name of Pappos the alchemist brings to mind the homonymous mathematician, Pappos of Alexandria (*ca.* early 4th cent.), it has been proposed by Paul Tannery that this oath may well be attributed to the latter. Tannery further concluded from the seemingly syncretistic content of the text that this was the work of a Gnostic (and consequently that this could be evidence for Pappos the mathematician being Gnostic, a hard-to-prove assumption).¹⁹⁴ Alexander Jones found Tannery's arguments regarding the attribution of the oath to Pappos of Alexandria plausible enough, but he added that the oath in its present form could not be entirely genuine, since he considered the references to heaven and earth, the cherubic chariots, and the angelic orders to be later additions. Furthermore, he noted the absence of any reference to alchemy,¹⁹⁵ which could support the argument that this oath is an adaptation of an earlier text (yet, it should be stressed that Christianos' oath does not refer explicitly to "alchemy" either). If this oath is indeed an adaptation – not necessarily, I would add, of a text by Pappos of Alexandria – then it follows that it was added to the technical text of the treatise. Be that as it may, the Byzantine reader of Pappos the alchemist must have had the impression that the oath was an integral part of his work and that its author was Christian.

The fact that the only two extant alchemical oaths bearing a (more or less profound) Christian character coincide in the period from the late 6th (?) to the 8th cent. raises interesting issues relating to the deeper understanding of their function. Why do we have a limited number of alchemical oaths? Why do the two Christian oaths date from roughly the same period? Also, what does their composition reveal about contemporary Byzantine society and culture? These questions are hard to answer, at least with our current state of knowledge. Nonetheless, it is most likely that a correlation exists between the function of the Christian oaths, their formulation, and the period they were written; in other words, they must be products of their age, associated with the evolving Christianization of alchemy. But this is a topic for another paper.

193. See *e.g.* Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* VII 1207, 4-6, ed. Steel, 2007-2009, III, p. 227; transl. Morrow & Dillon, 1987, p. 552: "for it is possible for things to be the same as each other both in measure and in time and in form [τῶ εἶδει] and in number [τῶ ἀριθμῶ] and in many other respects, through all of which the power of sameness extends". For the Neoplatonic character of the oath, see Jones, 1986, p. 14.

194. Tannery, 1896, pp. 31-33; cf. Gruner, 1807, p. 83. Interestingly, Tannery (1896, p. 32) notes: "*Le serment de Pappus me paraît particulièrement remarquable en ce qu'il est combiné de façon à pouvoir être prêté également par un chrétien et par un païen*"; see also Ver Eecke, 1933, pp. xii-xiii; Bulmer-Thomas, 1974, p. 301.

195. Jones, 1986, pp. 13-14.

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INTRODUCING GREEK ALCHEMY TO CHRISTIANITY.
INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION OF RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS IN
STEPHANUS' S *LESSONS*

LA INTRODUCCIÓN DE LA ALQUIMIA GRIEGA EN EL CRISTIANISMO.
INCLUSIÓN Y EXCLUSIÓN DE ELEMENTOS RELIGIOSOS
EN LAS *LECCIONES* DE STEPHANUS

VINCENZO CARLOTTA
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA
vincenzo.carlotta@unibo.it

ABSTRACT

One of the most noticeable features distinguishing Byzantine works on alchemy from the earlier Greco-Egyptian alchemical tradition is the widespread presence of Christian prayers and direct references to specifically Christian ideas and beliefs. By focusing on Stephanus's *Lessons* (7th cent.),

RESUMEN

Una de las características más notables que distinguen las obras bizantinas sobre alquimia de la anterior tradición alquímica greco-egipcia es la presencia generalizada de oraciones cristianas y referencias directas a ideas y creencias específicamente cristianas. Centrándose en las *Lecciones* de Stephanus

the first alchemical work including extensive references to Christianity, the paper will explore how alchemy was Christianised in the early Byzantine period. The first part of this study will analyse the strategies adopted by the author of the *Lessons* to frame alchemy as a Christianised discipline aiming at discovering the divine principle hidden in the natural world. In the second part, the limitations of this process of Christianisation of alchemy will be pointed out by examining if and to what extent specifically Christian ideas were included in Stephanus' treatment of alchemy and its operations, and if the introduction of a Christianised framework into an alchemical work entailed the exclusion of previous non-Christian alchemical ideas. The results of this twofold analysis will show the complexity and inextricable tensions of the process of Christianisation undergone by the alchemical discipline when it started to be practiced in the socio-cultural context of the Byzantine world.

(siglo VII d.C.), la primera obra alquímica que incluye amplias referencias al cristianismo, el artículo explorará cómo se cristianizó la alquimia a principios del período bizantino. La primera parte de este estudio analizará las estrategias adoptadas por el autor de las *Lecciones* para enmarcar la alquimia como una disciplina cristianizada destinada a descubrir el principio divino oculto en el mundo natural. En la segunda parte, se señalarán las limitaciones de este proceso de cristianización de la alquimia examinando si y en qué medida se incluyeron ideas específicamente cristianas en el tratamiento de la alquimia de Stephanus y sus operaciones, y si la introducción de un marco cristianizado en un trabajo alquímico implicó la exclusión de las ideas alquímicas no cristianas anteriores. Los resultados de este doble análisis mostrarán la complejidad y las inextricables tensiones del proceso de cristianización que experimentó la disciplina alquímica cuando comenzó a practicarse en el contexto socio-cultural del mundo bizantino.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Byzantine alchemy, Christianisation, Neoplatonism, pagan wisdom, Stephanus.

KEYWORDS

Alquimia bizantina, cristianización, Neoplatonismo, sabiduría pagana, Stephanus.

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GREEK ALCHEMY WAS A DISCIPLINE AIMING at achieving a complete transformation of various metallic substances into silver and gold by means of practical operations. The theoretical justification of the alchemical practice was influenced considerably by the contemporary speculative framework of natural philosophy. Greek alchemists always referred to themselves as “philosophers” (φιλόσοφοι) and some of them expanded on philosophical ideas in explaining their own discipline. Moreover, religious ideas and motives were thoroughly intermingled with both practical and philosophical aspects of alchemy across the entire Greek tradition. Zosimus of Panopolis (*ca.* 300 CE) placed alchemical knowledge within a Gnostic and Hermetic framework which was enriched by many substantive influences from Judaism. From the seventh century onwards, Byzantine alchemists presented alchemical studies as an effective way to pursue a Christian form of knowledge of God. Comprising practical, philosophical, and religious elements, Greek alchemy was consistently called by its practitioners the “divine art” (ἡ θεῖα τέχνη) or the “sacred art” (ἡ ἱερὰ τέχνη).¹

In the present article I will problematise and discuss how Byzantine alchemists started to present themselves as followers of a Christian form of the study of nature, to what extent their discussion of alchemy reflects an effort to harmonise alchemical notions with Christian ideas, or, on the contrary, if the introduction of references to Christianity was determined primarily by the socio-religious context of the early Byzantine world and remained marginal to the alchemical contents of their works. I will focus on Stephanus, the first alchemist who included extensive and direct ref-

1. On the general characteristics of Byzantine alchemy and the production and circulation of anthologies of alchemical texts in Byzantium, see Mertens, 2006 and Viano, 2018a. For the analysis of the influence of Christian ideas on another Byzantine alchemical work, I am happy to refer the interested reader to Gerasimos Merianos’ article appearing in this same volume, pp. 271-321.

erences to Christianity in his alchemical work, and a few authors whose works are closely connected to Stephanus's writings.

1. FRAMING ALCHEMY AS A CHRISTIANISED DISCIPLINE

One of the earliest and most influential alchemical works of the Byzantine period is *On the Sacred and Divine Art of Gold Making* (Περὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς καὶ θείας τέχνης τῆς τοῦ χρυσοῦ ποιήσεως), which is commonly known as *Lessons* (Πράξεις) since in the manuscript tradition it is divided into nine textual units called "lessons". In the manuscripts the work is attributed to Stephanus of Alexandria, the last exponent of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria, who was active between the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th cent. As the *Lessons* were written in Constantinople during the first half of the 7th cent., many scholars have accepted the traditional attribution to Stephanus of Alexandria as authentic. However, there are solid arguments to consider the *Lessons* as one of the many instances of pseudo-epigraphic attribution in the history of alchemy. For this reason, I will henceforth refer to the author of this work as pseudo-Stephanus of Alexandria, or simply Stephanus.²

The *Lessons* are structured as a commentary on quotations from authoritative alchemists of the past, especially ps.-Democritus and Zosimus of Panopolis. Stephanus's work thus follows the model already established by *On Zosimus's According to the Operation*, an alchemical work ascribed to Olympiodorus of Alexandria (6th cent.), another member of the philosophical school of Alexandria.³ The *Lessons* focus primarily on the theoretical foundation of the alchemical practice as a procedure able to transform and purify the material substrate of physical substances at the level of their elementary composition. The arguments to justify this claim are grounded on an original combination of Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines, and on Late ancient theories of natural philosophy. Stephanus also draws special attention to the rela-

2. The complete critical edition of the *Lessons* has been published in Papathanassiou, 2017. For a partial edition of the first three *Lessons* with English translation and introduction, see Taylor, 1937-1938. For the arguments in favour of an authentic attribution of the alchemical works to Stephanus of Alexandria, see Papathanassiou, 2006. Some crucial criticisms against the authenticity of this attribution are presented in Roueché, 2016.

3. The commentary on Zosimus's treatise *According to the Operation* shows a complex case of composition and textual transmission. A core commentary written by Olympiodorus of Alexandria was substantively expanded and modified by an anonymous compiler active in the early Byzantine period. See Viano, 2018b, pp. 59-61.

tionship between the movements of the celestial bodies and the transformations of sublunary substances, thus emphasising the link between alchemy and astrology.⁴

The *Lessons* are immediately connoted as a Christian work by the presence of prayers to God at the beginning and/or at the end of most of the nine treatises; a convention which was widespread in Byzantine literature. In a recent contribution, Maria Papatthanassiou has analysed in detail these prayers and pointed out the religious sources used by Stephanus.⁵ Papatthanassiou's study demonstrates that Stephanus relies extensively on religious literature contemporary to the composition of the *Lessons* and on earlier authoritative works of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and the patristic tradition. The prayers focus on the exaltation of God's all-encompassing and ineffable wisdom and on His love for humankind. In this way, alchemy is repeatedly presented to the readers of the *Lessons* as a form of knowledge that finds its ultimate origin in God's wisdom and, as any other form of human knowledge, should be regarded as a gift from God's grace. Alchemy, therefore, is characterised in the prayers as a suitable branch of study for a Christian audience.

Stephanus's prayers contrast God's ineffable wisdom with the limited knowledge of the natural and material world acquired through alchemy. In two cases (*Lessons* I, ll. 98-103 and II, ll. 171-174), the extraordinary results of the alchemical practice are described as unworthy of wonder by contrast to God's works. Two further passages (*Lessons* V, ll. 117-122 and VIII, ll. 117-124) refer to the substances transmuted by the alchemists as intermediate results within an investigation aiming at the knowledge of the celestial substances, which are presented as the most perfect product of God's creation and ordering of the universe. These passages are the only direct references to alchemy in the prayers, which are otherwise devoid of any mention of the specific goals and operations of this art. While Stephanus's prayers normalise alchemy by presenting it as one of the many instantiations of human knowledge illuminated by God, they do not provide any information about what alchemy is and how it works. Also, the position of the prayers within the

4. On the alchemical commentaries and the influence of the philosophical tradition, see Viano, 2000. On the influence of the philosophical tradition on the *Lessons*, see Papatthanassiou, 2000-2003.

5. See Papatthanassiou, 2018. This study includes the Greek text with French translation of 25 texts defined as prayers. The various texts included in this selection do not all play the same role in the structure of the *Lessons* and, in my opinion, their general qualification as prayers can result sometimes confusing. In my study I label as prayers only those texts which include a clear invocation to the Trinitarian persons of God (*Lessons* I, ll. 1-7, 88-103; II, ll. 169-177; IV, ll. 1-16, 188-198; V, ll. 1-17, 117-129; VI, ll. 236-244; VII, ll. 1-6, 187-209; VIII, ll. 1-9, 125-154). The remaining passages compiled by Papatthanassiou are here treated as sections showing strong religious connotations and they are presented according to their specific contents and place in the structure of the work.

structure of the *Lessons* – that is, at the beginning or the end of a textual unit – confirms that these sections play a role in providing a literary and religious framework for the work without relating directly to its specific contents.⁶

Another section framing the *Lessons* as Christian literature is the dedication of the work to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610-641). At the beginning of the ninth book (*Lessons* IX, ll. 1-34), Stephanus praises God as the all-powerful ruler of the universe and the emperor as His counterpart on Earth. This long section dwells on the idea that everything attainable by humans is first and foremost accessible to their supreme ruler, who is – for the author of the *Lessons* – Heraclius. Every form of knowledge is also intended primarily for the emperor, and, on this premise, Stephanus declares that:

(Text 1) “Once again, I will go back to what I have already said and fulfil your desire, excellent emperor. I will make my words entirely clear, so that you might deem worthy such desire to express in hymns God’s goodness beyond goodness, as you have rejected the multiplicity of material (substances) and are urged by the firmness of (your) passion.”⁷

Alchemy, which teaches how to produce a unique operative substance from various and diverse ingredients, is here presented as a form of rejection of the multiplicity inherent in the material world and opposed to the simplicity of the divine. Accordingly, the study of alchemy and the praise of God’s goodness and wisdom are linked together, following a model of justification of alchemy already established in the prayers included in the *Lessons*. Moreover, as the emperor is praised as God’s closest image on Earth, his claimed desire to learn about alchemy demonstrates the utmost importance of this discipline for Christian intellectual circles. In this context, alchemy is presented as an essentially Christian form of knowledge in order to receive imperial patronage, and in turn the emperor’s alleged interest in the discipline corroborates the Christian character of the alchemical studies.⁸

6. See Papathanassiou, 1996, especially p. 253.

7. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* IX, ll. 30-34 (Papathanassiou, 2017): πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ προκείμενον ἐπανελεύσομαι καὶ τὸν πόθον σου, ὦ πανάριστε βασιλεῦ, ἀναπληρώσω· καὶ ἐπιφανῶς τὰς ῥήσεις ποιήσομαι, ἵνα τοσοῦτον ἐρᾶν ἀξιωθῆς μεθ’ ὑμνωδίας θεολογεῖν τὴν ὑπεράγαθον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀγαθότητα, τὴν πολυπληθείαν τῶν ἐνύλων ἀπωσάμενος καὶ ὑπὸ τῆς εὐσπλαχνίας τοῦ πάθους ἐπιγόμενος.

8. Scholars have interpreted the dedication of the *Lessons* to Heraclius as proof of the authenticity of its attribution to Stephanus of Alexandria; see at least Papathanassiou, 2006, pp. 163-165. However, Roueché has shown that there is no substantial evidence that Stephanus of Alexandria was ever at the imperial court in Constantinople or even active during Heraclius’s reign; see Roueché, 2016, pp. 541-556. Moreover, many alchemical works were attributed or dedicated to rulers in order to legitimise their

Biblical references and terminology are also incorporated in the discussion of alchemical problems and operations throughout the *Lessons*. In all these cases, though, terminology directly related to the Christian faith is used almost exclusively to praise the achievements of the ancient alchemists and the value of the challenges faced by their interpreters. An exemplary case is provided by the beginning of the first treatise of the *Lessons*: an opening invocation to God's guidance in writing the book (I, ll. 1-7) is followed by the enunciation of ps.-Democritus's famous saying about nature⁹ and a long series of rhetorical exclamations introducing the main alchemical notions that the author will discuss in the *Lessons* (I, ll. 8-40). Then, Stephanus introduces a loose quotation from ps.-Democritus's *Natural and Secret Questions* and addresses his readers as follows:

(Text 2) "To you who think wisely, I dedicate this great gift, to you who dress yourselves in virtue, adorned with the theoretical practice and established in the practical theory. [...] I am grateful for the grace of the illumination from above, which is bestowed to us by the Father of lights. Hear you, intellects equal to the angels! Set aside the material theory so that you might be deemed worthy to see the hidden secret with your intellectual eyes".¹⁰

Stephanus's audience is praised for their moral qualities and for their expertise in both practical and theoretical aspects of alchemy. The moral requirements set for the practitioners of alchemy imply that alchemy should be attainable only by people whose life is guided by virtue (ἀρετή). This moral qualification of the alchemists, though, do not replace the intellectual conditions attached to the theoretical study of the natural world and the expertise in the practice of alchemical operations. Moreover, as this passage follows immediately a quotation from ps.-Democritus, its

contents. In particular, three lost alchemical treatises were attributed to Heraclius himself; see CMAG, vol. 2, p. 20. The importance of the link between alchemy and ruling power in Byzantine culture is still evident in the 15th-cent. praise of alchemy written by John Kanaboutzes, see Sakorrafou & Merianos, 2014.

9. Ps.-Democritus, *Natural and Secret Questions*, ll. 61-63 (Martelli, 2014): ἡ φύσις τῆ φύσει τέρπεται, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν νικᾷ, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν κρατεῖ ("nature delights in nature, nature conquers nature, nature masters nature").

10. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* I, ll. 42-50 Parathanassiou: ὑμῖν τοῖς εὖ φρονοῦσιν ἀνατίθημι τὸ μέγα τοῦτο δῶρον, τοῖς τὴν ἀρετὴν ἠμφιεσμένοις, τοῖς θεωρητικῆ πράξει κεκοσμημένοις καὶ πρακτικὴν θεωρίαν ἐνιδρυμένοις. [...] ὁμολογῶ τῆς ἀνωθεν φωτοδοσίας τὴν χάριν, ἢ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων ἡμῖν δεδωρῆται. ἀκούσατε ὡς ἰσάγγελοι νόες. ἀπόθεσθε τὴν ὑλῶδη θεωρίαν, ὅπως τοῖς νοεροῖς ὑμῶν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδεῖν ἀξιοθῆτε τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον μυστήριον. The passage quoted before this text is based on ps.-Democritus, *Natural and Secret Questions*, ll. 223-229 (Martelli, 2014).

religious connotations justify implicitly why a Christian readership should continue to take into consideration the pagan alchemists who are commented by Stephanus as authoritative sources for the study of this discipline.

Another example of the same strategy can be pointed out at the beginning of the fourth book of the *Lessons*. The opening prayer (IV, ll. 1-16) is followed by a reference to the alchemical knowledge handed down by the ancient authors:

(Text 3) “Thus, we must break down the (arguments) entangled in various metaphors by ancient and virtuous men, and unveil the sparks (of knowledge) in their writings. Thanks to the love for us (coming) from above, (we must) examine, uncover, and bring to light such concealed secret”.¹¹

After further exhortations to study ps.-Democritus’s works (IV, ll. 22-28) and before presenting and commenting on a quotation that Stephanus ascribes to him (IV, ll. 35 ff.),¹² the audience of the *Lessons* is addressed directly:

(Text 4) “Yet, o sacred flock and lovers of wisdom, may those who desire to find this (knowledge) struggle for the intellectual contemplation of God through the adornment of virtues in themselves. And may they irrigate themselves with a great river of tears, as they are set firmly in faith, humility, and love of God, so that nothing of the material (world) might surprise or marvel you, except for God who loves us”.¹³

The alchemists of the past and, also in this case, ps.-Democritus are described as “ancient and virtuous men” who transmitted their knowledge of alchemy in a secretive way. The possibility to gain access to this secret knowledge is subordinated to God’s grace illuminating the understanding and interpretation of the works of

11. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* IV, ll. 17-21 (Papathanassiou, 2017): δέον οὖν ἡμῖν ἐστί, τὰ παρὰ τῶν ἀρχαίων καὶ ἐναρέτων ἀνδρῶν ἀλληγορικῶς καὶ ποικίλως ἐμπελεγμένα ἀνασκεύασαι, καὶ τοὺς αὐτῶν σπινθήρα ἐν τοῖς τούτων συγγράμμασιν ἀναγυμνῶσαι· διὰ τῆς ἄνωθεν ἡμῖν χάριτος ζητῆσαι τε καὶ ἀνακαλύψαι καὶ ἀναφάναι τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀποκεκρυμμένον μυστήριον.

12. Stephanus here ascribes to ps.-Democritus the famous alchemical saying “the All is One, through which All is” (*Lessons* IV, l. 36: “Ἐν τὸ πᾶν, δι’ οὗ τὸ πᾶν”). This passage cannot be found in ps.-Democritus’s works, but the same quotation is ascribed by Greek alchemists to various ancient authors, such as Chymes or Hermes. See Mertens, 1995, pp. 180-183, n. 1.

13. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* IV, ll. 29-34 (Papathanassiou, 2017): ἀλλ’ ὃ ἱερά ποιμνη καὶ σοφίας ἐρασταί, οἱ τοῦτο εὐρεῖν βουλόμενοι τῇ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐννοήσει διὰ τῆς τῶν ἀρετῶν ἐπικοσμήσεως ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀγωνιζέσθωσαν, καὶ τῇ πολλῇ ῥοῇ τῶν δακρῶν ἑαυτοὺς ἀρδευέτωσαν, ἐν πίστει καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ ἀγάπῃ θεοῦ στηριζόμενοι, ἵνα μηδὲν τῶν ἐνύλων ὑμᾶς ξενίσῃ καὶ θαυμάσῃ, πλὴν τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος ἡμᾶς θεοῦ.

ancient alchemists. As at the beginning of the first treatise of the *Lessons* (text 2), the author recommends the pursuit of virtue as a condition to obtain alchemical knowledge, but in this case (text 4) he specifies this moral requirement as a well-established practice of “faith” (πίστις), “humility” (ταπεινοφροσύνη), and “love of God” (ἀγάπη Θεοῦ). Stephanus does not address his work to alchemists who are generically virtuous, but to people embracing specifically Christian virtues. As in text 3, the pagan alchemists of the past are also presented as “virtuous” (ἐνάρετοι), their moral characterization results inevitably influenced by Stephanus’s praise of the Christian virtues of his audience. Ps.-Democritus, in particular, is described also in the second treatise of the *Lessons* as a guide for all practitioners of alchemy because he was “the most outstanding (person) and advisor of all virtue”.¹⁴ Stephanus never portrays as Christian either ps.-Democritus or any other pagan alchemists he quotes and comments on, such as Hermes or Agathodaemon. Nonetheless, the inclusion of sections praising the Christian virtues of Stephanus’s audience in close connection to quotations from his pagan sources, who are also describes as eminently “virtuous”, produces a conflation of these two sets of virtues and Christianises these pagan authors inasmuch as their works guide the study of alchemy carried out by Stephanus and the Christian readers of his work.

2. RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS IN PS.-STEPHANUS OF ALEXANDRIA’S DISCUSSION OF ALCHEMY

Stephanus’s prayers and exhortations to the practice of alchemy clearly frame the *Lessons* as a Christian work addressed to a Christian readership. However, it remains unclear from the passages discussed above if the specific contents of alchemy could acquire a religious value to their readership and whether Stephanus incorporates Christian elements in his discussion of alchemical problems and operations. These questions are crucial to assess whether Stephanus construed alchemy as a specifically Christian discipline carrying intrinsic religious connotations, although it was based on mostly pagan sources, or whether the *Lessons* simply provided a Christian framework to a discipline which was originally alien to Christianity and did not incorporate any distinctively Christian idea into its core contents.

References to God and the divine connotation of the alchemical practice are found in many passages serving a programmatic function in the structure of the *Les-*

14. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* II, l. 115 (Papathanassiou, 2017): ὁ ἐξοχώτατος καὶ πάσης ἀρετῆς σύμβουλος.

sons. These passages deal with the general characteristics of alchemy and clarify the divine features of the “divine and sacred art”, as alchemy was called by Stephanus. At the beginning of the third treatise, the so-called *Letter to Theodorus*, Stephanus expands on a distinction between legendary (μυθική) and secret (μυστική) alchemy which was briefly introduced by ps.-Democritus. He defines these two kinds of alchemy as follows:

(Text 5) “The legendary alchemy is engulfed by a multitude of words, but the secret alchemy is operated in accordance with the word [*logos*] of the creation [*dēmiourgia*] of the world. Hence, the man who is holy [*theophrōn*] and born of God [*theogenēs*] may learn about the enmattered world by direct operation and by theological and secret words”¹⁵

While “legendary alchemy” remains unintelligible as it is expressed by obscure terms unrelated to the natural world, “secret alchemy” can be understood because of its consistency with the *logos* of the divine creation and ordering of the universe. Since alchemy cannot be studied only through “direct operation”, but also requires a correct understanding of the divine order of the world, Stephanus affirms that the alchemist must be a person who is “holy”, or more precisely “godly-minded”, and “born of God”. These two terms, despite not being very common in Byzantine sources, seem to offer a characterisation of the ideal alchemist as a devout Christian. The expression “the word of the creation of the world”, however, includes terms such as *logos* and *dēmiourgia* that can certainly be found in Christian literature of the Byzantine period, but are also distinctively Platonic within the philosophical tradition.

In another famous passage from the sixth treatise of the *Lessons* which discusses how alchemy is related to the study of nature, Stephanus claims:

(Text 6) “There is a close affinity among theoretical principles, especially between God and the philosophic soul. What is, indeed, philosophy if not the assimilation to God according to our potential as humans? [...] For such a man [*i.e.*, having a philosophic soul] – as he can observe and recognize the works of nature – questions the theories on all of them by scrutinising every nature and the proportional blending of the substances blended together. When he analyses intellectually the entangled substances and their countless compositions, he establishes the abovementioned entanglement according to

15. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* III, ll. 22-24 (Papathanassiou, 2017): ἡ μὲν μυθικὴ πολυπληθὴς λόγων συγχέεται, ἡ δὲ μυστικὴ λόγῳ δημιουργίας κόσμου μεθοδεύεται, ἵνα ὁ θεόφρων καὶ ὁ θεογενὴς ἄνθρωπος διὰ τῆς εὐθείας ἐργασίας καὶ θεολογιῶν καὶ μυστικῶν λόγων μάθῃ. The distinction is first introduced in ps.-Democritus, *Natural and Secret Questions*, ll. 168-169 (Martelli, 2014).

the art (*i.e.*, alchemy), and he brings this relation to a unity which is the image of the One [*eis henoeidē monada*]. In this respect, he will clearly ensure theoretical and diagnostic exactness. For the many-coloured blossoming of the bodies [*i.e.*, the alchemical transmutation] marks the fulfilment of what has been described well and in depth”.¹⁶

The “philosophic soul” is here presented as the main quality characterizing the alchemist. Stephanus explains the relationship between God and the “philosophic soul” by referring to the famous definition of philosophy as “assimilation to God”, as it was formulated in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (172c-177c). The highest understanding of natural substances required to the alchemist in order to transmute them successfully is described as an understanding of nature like “a unity which is image of the One”, and also as a “theoretical and diagnostic exactness”. While the former expression is connoted by a distinctively Platonic terminology, the latter is grounded on the Late ancient commentary tradition on Aristotle.¹⁷ Thus, Stephanus’s most detailed treatment of the fundamental characteristics of the alchemical study of nature can be fully grasped only within the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophical tradition of Late antiquity. By the seventh century, the Platonic idea of assimilation to God, as well as most of the philosophical vocabulary about “unity” and the “One”, had already been adapted and fully incorporated in the Christian theological literature. While the passage remains grounded on the philosophical debate of Stephanus’s time, its language also reflects the high degree of harmonisation between philosophical speculation and Christian thought achieved by the Christian philosophers of the 6th and 7th centuries.¹⁸

The final sentence of text 6 presents the practice of alchemical transmutation as a form of certification of a correct theoretical understanding of the natural world. Like in the *Letter to Theodorus* (text 5), Stephanus emphasises that the study of nature entails a form of communion of the alchemist with God as the divine principle governing the world. At the same time, though, the alchemist must complement this theoretical study with operations capable of bringing about specific transformations

16. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons VI*, ll. 33-45 (Papathanassiou, 2017): πολλήν οὖν συγγένειαν ἔχει τῶν θεωρημάτων, μάλιστα τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς φιλόσοφον ψυχὴν. τί γάρ ἐστι φιλοσοφία, ἀλλ’ ἢ ὁμοίως Θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἀνθρώπου; [...] τότε γὰρ ὁ τοιοῦτος θεωρητικὸς ὦν καὶ καταληπτικὸς τῶν τῆς φύσεως πραγμάτων, ἀνακρίνει πάντων τὰς θεωρίας, πᾶσαν μὲν ἐξετάζων φύσιν καὶ ἀναλόγως αὐτῶν συγκρινῶν τὴν σύγκρασιν· τὰς τε ἐμπλοκάς καὶ μυρίας αὐτῶν συνθέσεις νοητικῶς ἀναλύων, καὶ τὴν εἰρημένην ἐντέχνως κατασκευάζει περιπλοκὴν, καὶ εἰς ἔνοειδῆ μονάδα περισυνάγει τὴν σύναψιν. εἴσεται δὲ σαφῶς ἐν αὐταῖς τὴν θεωρητικὴν καὶ διαγνωστικὴν ἀκρίβειαν. αἱ γὰρ τῶν σωμάτων ποικιλόχροοι ἐξανθήσεις σημαίνουσι τὰς τῶν ἐν βάθει καλῶς διηγουμένων πληρώσεις.

17. See especially Viano, 1996.

18. See Papathanassiou, 2000-2003.

of the natural substances. While Stephanus claims that both theory and practice of alchemy depend ultimately on the divine illumination of the alchemist's intellect, text 6 defines the theoretical study of nature as a philosophical endeavour based on the analysis of the various natural substances and their reciprocal interactions. As for the practice of alchemy, the specific operations are discussed throughout the *Lessons* in the form of a commentary on authoritative alchemical sources. The exegesis of each text is based primarily on quotations from other passages by the same author who is commented on, or from other Greek alchemists. Alternatively, Stephanus offers interpretations of alchemical operations based on his original treatment of philosophical theories about natural substances, or on other disciplines conceived of as similar to alchemy, such as medicine and pharmacology.¹⁹

Although the study of alchemy is ultimately directed to the knowledge of God through nature, the theoretical issues of alchemy remain firmly grounded on the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian tradition of natural philosophy, while its practical operations are discussed within the context of the earlier alchemical tradition. The principles enunciated by Stephanus in these programmatic sections (texts 5 and 6) are followed in the argumentative structure of the *Lessons* and do not imply any direct influence of religious, or specifically Christian, ideas on the theoretical and practical contents of alchemy. There are, however, two topics discussed in the *Lessons* which could show some influence of Christian ideas on the alchemical contents of Stephanus's work: 1) the commentary on the riddle of the word having nine letters and four syllables, and 2) the treatment of the separation of the soul of the natural substances from their body. These two cases will be analysed closely to evaluate the validity of the model established above and its possible limitations.

2.1. FIRST CASE-STUDY

Stephanus devotes much of the sixth treatise of the *Lessons* to the commentary on the riddle of the word having nine letters and four syllables (*Lessons* VI, ll. 56-235). The riddle is also attested in the first book of the *Sibylline Oracles*; this book is a Late Antique account of the history of the world compiled by a Christian author who harmonised elements of Greek mythology with the Biblical account.²⁰ The riddle, whose solution

19. See Papathanassiou, 1990.

20. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* VI, 50-55 (Papathanassiou, 2017): ἐννέα γράμματα ἔχω, τετρασύλλαβός εἰμι, νόμι με· αἱ πρῶται δύο γράμματα ἔχουσιν ἑκάστη, ἡ λοιπὴ δὲ τὰ λοιπά, καὶ εἰσὶν ἄφωνα τὰ πέντε. τοῦ παντὸς δὲ ἀριθμοῦ ἑκατοντάδες εἰσὶ δις ὀκτώ καὶ τρεῖς τρισκαιδεκάδες καὶ τέσσαρες. γνοῦς δὲ τίς εἰμι, οὐκ ἀμήτορος ἔση τῆς παρ' ἐμοῦ ὠφελείας ("I have nine letters, I am four-

remains unclear, is supposed to reveal God's name and is spoken directly by God to Noah. However, an almost identical version of the riddle can also be read in the monumental funerary inscription of a certain Diliporis (Διλίπορις) from Bithynia (2nd-3rd cent. CE), where it refers to the name of the deceased.²¹ In the alchemical tradition, the riddle of the word having nine letters is first mentioned by Zosimus of Panopolis to signify the name of the herald of the "deceiving daemon" (ὁ ἀντίμιμος δαίμων). In an account of salvation showing significant Gnostic and Judeo-Christian influences, Zosimus claims that the herald of the Antichrist will fascinate humankind with tales about Destiny, and indeed the solution to the riddle proposed by Zosimus seems to be the word "destiny" (εἰμαρμένη).²² The riddle is also briefly mentioned by Olympiodorus, who claims that the washing of a certain muddy earth produces a mineral substance which was called by the ancient alchemists "litharge" (λιθάργυρος) and the consideration of this substance should lead to the solution of the riddle.²³ The Byzantine anthologies of alchemical works also preserve a work entitled *Riddle of the Philosophers' Stone by Hermes and Agathodaemon*, but it is an excerpt from Stephanus's sixth book of the *Lessons*.²⁴ It is clear that the riddle of the word having nine letters and four syllables exerted a great fascination on the Greek alchemists, but it conveyed varying religious connotations. In Zosimus's case, the riddle receives a Gnostic interpretation. Olympiodorus's mention of it is too scanty to draw any precise conclusion, but it is clear that he linked the interpretation of the riddle to the wisdom of ancient alchemists, especially of Zosimus

syllabled: understand me! The first (three) syllables have two letters each, while the remaining (syllable) has the remaining (letters), and five (letters) are consonants. In their total number, the hundreds are twice eight, and (there are) three times thirteen, and four. Know who I am! You shall not be uninitiated anymore thanks to my help!"). See also *Sibylline Oracles*, p. 12, l.141 – p. 13, l. 146 (Geffcken, 1902). The two texts are almost identical with minor differences due primarily to the hexametric prosody of the *Sibylline Oracles*, which is not present in the prose of the *Lessons*. The dating of the *Sibylline Oracles* is extremely uncertain. Most scholars place its last revision around the 6th cent. CE, but it compiles earlier Jewish and Christian sources. The first book was certainly revised after 70 CE, as it correctly dates to that year the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem; see Lightfoot, 2007.

21. See IK 9 / 10.1232 from Akçakaya / Geyve. The possible relationship between this inscription and the Judeo-Christian tradition of the *Sibylline Oracles* remains unclear. See Graef, 1892; see also Corsten, 2006.

22. See Zosimus of Panopolis, *Authentic Memoires* I, ll. 133-145 (Mertens, 1995), especially ll. 143-145. See also Mertens, 1995, pp. 106-109, n. 93.

23. See Olympiodorus alch., *On Zosimus's According to the Operation*, in CAAG, p. 71 ll. 1-11, especially ll. 10-11.

24. See CAAG, vol. 3, p. 267, l. 16 – p. 268, l. 2. Berthelot and Ruelle published just the title and the beginning of the work, but in codex *Parisinus graecus* 2327 the full text starts at fol. 234r and ends at fol. 237r.

and Maria. The treatise *Riddle of the Philosophers' Stone*, despite being an excerpt from Stephanus's work, shows that during the Byzantine period the riddle was also attributed to Hermes and Agathodaemon, two pagan authors of the alchemical tradition.

In the sixth treatise of the *Lessons*, the riddle is introduced as “the problem of the wisest intellect”²⁵ and, after its enunciation, the commentary begins as follows:

(Text 7) “The abyss [*abyssos*] is beyond measure! The word surpasses any calculation! The question is profound! So, you will show the merits of your crown. So, you will show the works of nature. You will show, o wisest person, how we can examine the precise sight of the depth, so that we can reach the maximum depth of such great measure; how the four-syllabled (word) with nine letters puts forward this knowledge”.²⁶

Later on, Stephanus adds:

(Text 8) “O question (object) of the teaching, which bears the signs of the whole wisdom! You want that we live – by means of our intellect and knowledge – a higher (kind of) life and theory, and you give more and more evidence of (our) intimacy with God”.²⁷

Stephanus's entire commentary on the riddle is a complex intertwining of arithmetical considerations on the numerical values mentioned in the riddle, philosophical discussion of the relationship between these numbers and the principles of natural philosophy, and, in the last part of the book, comparisons with other processes taking place in the natural world, such as the generation of a human child, the digestion and excretion of food, the formation of stones and fruits, and the produc-

25. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* VI, l. 50 (Papathanassiou, 2017): τῆς σοφωτάτης ἐννοίας τὸ πρόβλημα.

26. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* VI, ll. 56-60 (Papathanassiou, 2017): ἀμέτρητος ἡ ἄβυσσος· τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπερβαίνει λογισμόν· βαθὺ τὸ ἐρώτημα. ὦδε δεῖξον τοῦ σοῦ στεφάνου τὸν ἔπαινον. ὦδε δεῖξον τὰ τῆς φύσεως ἔργα. δεῖξον, ὦ σοφώτατε, πῶς τὴν τοῦ βᾶθους σκοπήσωμεν διοπτίαν, ἵνα τοῦ τοιοῦτου μέτρον τὸ βαθύτατον καταφθάσωμεν; πῶς τοῖς ἐννέα γράμμασι προβάλλει τὸ τετρασύλλαβον τοῦτο νόημα; It can be noted that the Greek word for “crown” is “*stephanos*”, therefore the praise of the crown is a word-play about the merits of Stephanus's own work. Also, Papathanassiou renders the punctuation of a series of direct interrogative clauses, but I think that the Greek pronoun denoting direct questions (“*pōs*”, that is “how?”) is here used in a series of indirect interrogative clauses to emphasise Stephanus's exhortation to his audience. The English translation follows my reading of the grammatical structure of the text.

27. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* VI, ll. 83-85 (Papathanassiou, 2017): ὃ διδασκαλίας ἐρώτημα, πάσης σοφίας ἔχον τὰ σύμβολα! νοερώς ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπιστημονικῶς θέλει ζῆν ὑπερτέραν ζωὴν καὶ θεωρίαν, καὶ οἰκειότητα πρὸς Θεὸν μᾶλλον μαρτυρεῖ.

tion of bread and bricks. While the two former topics are mostly based on Neoplatonic sources, the latter depends primarily on Aristotelian natural philosophy. This concluding section is introduced as follows:

(Text 9) “As I have explained the whole power of the secret, I shall cover the rest by bringing forward also the most natural theory [*i.e.* the theories more immediately linked to the natural world]. In this way, when also (our) young sons have tasted the sweets of this (theory), have sucked milk from the breast of wisdom, and have been reared up well, they may advance to the higher [notions], can penetrate through the entrance of the vestibule, and see the secrets emerging from the sanctuary. As they figure out the great works of the Almighty and (His) so-vast glory, may they celebrate God’s wisdom beyond the abyss [*hyperabysson*].”²⁸

Stephanus declares that, by commenting on the riddle, his teachings can introduce to a higher knowledge of God (text 8) and show to beginner alchemists (“(our) young sons”) how the study of nature leads to the veneration of God’s works (text 9). The commentary on the riddle, therefore, is closely linked to the religious implications of the study of alchemy. The beginning of the commentary (text 7) presents the riddle as “the abyss beyond measure” (ἀμέτρητος ἡ ἄβυσσος), while in text 9 God’s wisdom is qualified as “beyond the abyss” (ὑπεράβυσσος). As Maria Papathanassiou pointed out, Stephanus takes the image of the abyss to describe God’s ineffable wisdom from Paul (*Epistle to the Romans* 11,33) and the patristic tradition.²⁹ Mentions of the abyss are present in some of Stephanus prayers (*Lessons* I, l. 96; V, l. 2; VII, ll. 15-16) and in the dedication to Heraclius (*Lessons* IX, l. 24). Accordingly, the riddle of the word having nine letters and four syllables is directly linked by Stephanus to the abyss of God’s wisdom. Among the possible sources of the riddle, Stephanus seems to depend primarily on the *Sibylline Oracles*, where the riddle is spoken by God to signify His name. The commentary of the sixth book of the *Lessons*, therefore, is the only case in which Stephanus exposes his alchemical teachings by commenting on a passage which is not taken from the earlier alchemical works, but from a Christianised account of the history of the world.

28. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* VI, ll. 176-183 (Papathanassiou, 2017): ὅλην οὖν τοῦ μυστηρίου περιφράσας τὴν δύναμιν, μετελεύσομαι λοιπὸν καὶ φυσικωτάτην φέρων θεωρίαν, ἵνα καὶ νεαροὶ παῖδες γευσάμενοι τῆς αὐτῆς γλυκασίας καὶ τῶν τῆς σοφίας μαζῶν γάλα ἐκθηλάσαντες καὶ καλῶς ἐτραφέντες ἐπὶ τὰ κρείττω προβῶσι καὶ εἰσελθεῖν δυνέσωνται εἰς τὰ τῶν προαυλίων προπύλαια καὶ τῶν ἀδύτων προανακύψαντες τὰ μυστήρια ἰδεῖν δυνηθῶσι, τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ παντοκράτορος καὶ τὴν τοσαύτην δόξαν ἐκπλαγέντες, ὑμνήσωσι τὴν ὑπεράβυσσος τοῦ Θεοῦ σοφίαν.

29. See Papathanassiou, 2018, p. 75.

The commentary on the riddle could suggest, at first glance, that Stephanus not only used religious sources to present alchemy as a fully Christianised discipline, but he also incorporated religious elements in his discussion of alchemy. However, there are a few considerations that advise caution in drawing this conclusion. First, the *Sibylline Oracles*, despite being a largely Christianised work, are the alleged account of the prophecies spoken by the pagan Sibyls, whose authority is invoked to establish the value of the work. When Stephanus quotes from the *Sibylline Oracles*, he introduces a Judeo-Christian text whose contents were presented as originating from pagan wisdom. Second, Stephanus's commentary on the riddle consists of arithmological and philosophical notions deeply grounded in the Aristotelian and, especially, Neoplatonic philosophical tradition. The riddle itself is used by the author of the *Lessons* as a source of inspiration for alchemical knowledge, but the contents of this knowledge are primarily provided by Stephanus's philosophical sources. Third, earlier authoritative alchemists, such as Zosimus and Olympiodorus, previously referred to the riddle of the word having nine letters. In the case of Zosimus, in particular, the riddle is discussed within a religious context, but shows clearly Gnostic connotation. In the *Lessons*, the interpretation of the riddle is framed within a clearly Christian context, but the riddle itself was already relevant for the alchemical tradition besides its specific religious significance. This is confirmed by the treatise *Riddle of the Philosophers' Stone by Hermes and Agathodaemon*: in that case, a Byzantine compiler extrapolated sections of Stephanus's commentary and presented them as an interpretation of a riddle attributed to two pagan alchemists.

At the beginning of the seventh book of the *Lessons*, the opening prayer (*Lessons* VII, ll. 1-6) is followed by an introduction about the centrality of God's wisdom and illumination for the study of alchemy (*Lessons* VII, ll. 7-24). Then, Stephanus states:

(Text 10) "May we have come to what I have already said. May we have learnt the riddles of the philosopher, so that we can have intellection of how deep the abyss of wisdom is. Why are there people who pretend to do philosophy, but do not possess the works of philosophy, people who also seek the virtue of this one configuration while their god is their belly, who also look to the transient opinion, who are unready and careless, who do not wholly desire to walk in the trace of virtue? People of this sort are blind and uneducated: for they say that making gold is an operation hard to manage, because they operate without reason. How can they say that making gold is hard to manage? Learn and know that there is nothing hard to manage for wisdom: indeed, wisdom can everything. For the same (wisdom) looks clearly at invisible things and it can do impossible things. And how can those who (only) imagine gold say that making gold is an operation hard

to manage? Haven't you listened to the philosopher himself [*i.e.* ps.-Democritus] saying that it is indeed easy to manage?"³⁰

In this passage, the image of the abyss of God's wisdom is directly linked to "the riddles of the philosopher". Since the entire treatise focusses primarily on the interpretation of quotations from ps.-Democritus,³¹ and Stephanus usually refers to him as the philosopher *par excellence* (one of many examples appears also at the end of this passage), the expression "riddles of the philosophers" alludes here to ps.-Democritus's alchemical teachings. The unworthy alchemists are those who carry out alchemical operations without the necessary theoretical foundations and lack the virtues required to the ideal alchemists. In response to this position, Stephanus reiterates the utmost importance of wisdom as guidance in the study and practice of alchemy, but in this case any allusion to God's wisdom is undistinguishable from the reference to the wisdom of ancient alchemists. The closing quotation from ps.-Democritus's *Natural and Secret Questions* marks the beginning of the commentary on passages from the same work. The resulting structure of the introduction to the seventh book suggests that the same kind of divine wisdom is conveyed by the most authoritative works of the alchemical tradition and by the riddle commented in the sixth book of the *Lessons*. Although the quotation from the *Sibylline Oracles* comes from a Christianised source, it does not receive any special treatment in comparison to ps.-Democritus's pagan works. Clearly, the importance ascribed by Stephanus to a specific source of alchemical knowledge does not depend on its religious contents, but on Stephanus's ability to frame that source as a work leading to a better understanding of the agency of God's wisdom in the natural world.

30. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* VII, 25-38 (Papathanassiou, 2017): ἔλθωμεν ἐπὶ τὸ προκειμένον. μάθωμεν τοῦ φιλοσόφου τὰ αἰνίγματα, ἵνα δυναθῶμεν νοῆσαι πηλίκη ἐστὶν ἡ τῆς σοφίας ἄβυσσος. τί δὲ οἱ δοκοῦντες φιλοσοφεῖν, ἔργα δὲ φιλοσοφίας μὴ ἔχοντες, οἱ καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν τοῦ σχήματος ἐνὸς τούτου μετερχόμενοι, ὧν ὁ θεὸς μὲν αὐτῶν ἡ κοιλία, οἱ καὶ τὴν πρόσκαιρος ἀποσκοποῦντες δόξαν, οἱ ὀκνηροὶ καὶ ῥάθυμοι, οἱ μὴ τε ὄλωσ κατ' ἴχνος ἀρετῆς βαδίσαι ἐθέλοντες; ἀνόμματοι οἱ τοιοῦτοι καὶ ἀπαιδεῦτοι· λέγουσι γάρ, ὅτι δυσχερὲς πρᾶγμα ποιῆσαι χρυσόν, οἱ ἀλόγως ποιοῦντες. πῶς λέγουσι, ὅτι δυσχερὲς ἐστὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι χρυσόν; μάθετε καὶ γνῶτε, ὅτι οὐδὲν τῇ σοφίᾳ δυσχερὲς· πάντα γὰρ ἡ σοφία δύναται. αὐτὴ γὰρ τὰ ἀθεώρητα προφανῶς βλέπει καὶ ἀδύνατα δύναται. καὶ πῶς οἱ τὸν χρυσὸν φανταζόμενοι λέγουσι, ὅτι δυσχερὲς πρᾶγμα ποιῆσαι χρυσόν; ἄρα οὐκ ἤκουσας αὐτοῦ τοῦ φιλοσόφου λέγοντος, ὅτι πᾶρ ἐστὶν εὐχερὲς;

31. For example, the quotation at the end of text 10, which describes alchemy as an operation "easy to manage" ("εὐχερὲς"), is followed by a reference to *molybdochalkon* losing its liquidity (see *Lessons*, VII, ll. 50-51). Both passages are taken from ps.-Democritus, *Natural and Secret Questions*, ll. 117-131 (Martelli, 2014).

2.2. SECOND CASE-STUDY

A second topic showing the possible influence of Christian ideas on the *Lessons* is Stephanus's treatment of the separation of the "spirit" (πνεῦμα) or "soul" (ψυχή) of a natural substance from its "body" (σῶμα). The idea that natural substances have a soul and a body, and the former can be separated from the latter and combined with another body is present in many Greek alchemical works. One of its earliest and most detailed formulations can be traced back to Zosimus of Panopolis, who employs this image to explain various alchemical processes of distillation or sublimation. According to Zosimus, the soul of a substance has a colouring power and can retain it after the destruction of its body. When this soul is combined to a different body, it produces a change in colour, which leads to the complete transmutation of a substance into another. Commenting on Zosimus and other authors of the alchemical tradition, Stephanus seeks to explain the characteristics of this fundamental step in the alchemical practice in various sections of the *Lessons*.³²

In the third treatise, Stephanus describes the separation of the soul from the body by comparison with the reduction of plants into ashes, which preserve the original properties of the vegetal substances and can act on different kinds of bodies. Stephanus relates this process to pharmacology and the production of drugs from plants and refers to it as the "re-birth" (παλιγγενεσία) of the substance burnt away. Through an alchemical quotation ascribed to Hermes, Stephanus generalises the process of re-birth also to metals and other mineral substances, claiming that they can all be reduced into ashes while retaining their own qualities.³³ While there are no occurrences of the term "re-birth" in the alchemical works attributed to Hermes, the same word is attested extensively in the Hermetic treatise entitled *Secret Revelation on the Mountain of Hermes Trismegistus to His Son Tat on Re-Birth and the Promise of Secrecy* (CH 13). Stephanus's use of this specific source is also suggested by the fact that, in the same book of the *Lessons*, he offers various examples of re-birth which can be found in CH 13 too. As Hermes Trismegistus was regarded by many Greek alchemists as the founder of their discipline, and there were alchemical works circulating under his name, a treatise from the *Corpus Hermeticum* could easily have been considered as an authoritative source for the interpretation of an alchemical procedure. Nonetheless, it should be noted that CH 13 describes the process of re-birth primarily as the new birth of the human soul in an incorruptible body. This process

32. See at least Festugière, 1944, pp. 309-354 and Halleux, 1985.

33. See Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* III, ll. 41-155. For the relation between "re-birth" and separation of the soul from the body, see especially *Lessons* III, ll. 53-71.

presents strong similarities with the Christian idea of a general resurrection of the dead, although Hermes claims that the re-birth can take place during the earthly life of person if she is initiated to the Hermetic teachings. Christian authors also used the term “re-birth” with reference to resurrection (see esp. Matthew, 19.28), so that the religious connotation of this word was not limited to the Hermetic tradition and was certainly not exclusive to Christian literature.³⁴

The separation of the soul from the body is also discussed by Stephanus in the ninth and last treatise of the *Lessons* in order to explain a quotation ascribed to Agathodaemon: “take from the substance drawn from the highest, so that its power – having become divine and full of spirit – will complete the divine operation”.³⁵ First, Stephanus discusses in details the physical characteristics of this “divine” substance in consideration of his own philosophical account of the natural world. Then, he concludes that this substance can be accounted for as the unified soul of the substances combined by the alchemists in order to produce an agent capable of transmuting silver into gold. In describing the separation of this soul from the ingredients mixed together and its subsequent union with the body of silver, Stephanus invokes Plato’s authority by citing him by name.³⁶ Even though Stephanus’s reference to the Platonic works is very short, this is the only case in which an author other than an alchemist is mentioned by name to clarify a step of the alchemical practice. This exceptional mention of Plato confirms that in the *Lessons* the exegesis of passages concerning alchemical operations and procedure is carried out by taking into account only (1.) texts accepted by the author as part of the alchemical tradition and (2.) philosophical sources contributing to the theoretical foundation of alchemy.

34. Although Stephanus’s use of the term “re-birth” appears to be linked to the Hermetic tradition and certainly does not refer to a specifically Christian concept, the semantic complexity of this term requires further studies. A more detailed analysis of this fascinating term exceeds the limitations of the present paper, as it should also focus on the precise meaning of “re-birth” in the medical tradition and its use in the transmission of philosophical ideas, especially those linked to Stoicism and its Late ancient reinterpretation.

35. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* IX, ll. 42-44: βάλε ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τῆς ἀρυθείσης ἀπὸ τοῦ ὑψίστου, ἵνα θεωθεῖσα ἢ δύναμις καὶ ἐμπνευματωθεῖσα θεῖον ἔργον ἀποτελέσῃ.

36. See Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria, *Lessons* IX, ll. 42-95. At ll. 85-88 there is the passage attributed directly to Plato; the quotation is loosely based on *Phaedo*, 64c ff., and especially 70d.

3. CONCLUSIONS. PLACING THE *LESSONS* WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF BYZANTINE ALCHEMY

The author of the *Lessons* grounded the exegesis of alchemical sources on the works of previous alchemists and the philosophical speculation about the natural world. This position is consistent with the general principle for the study of alchemy enunciated in the *Lessons* (text 6) and with the false attribution of this work to Stephanus of Alexandria. The same author also included many prayers to the Holy Trinity, while the introductions and conclusions of many treatises of the *Lessons* are marked by exhortations to the audience teeming with invocations to God's guidance and praises of alchemy as a path leading to a form of knowledge of God. However, the study of nature undertaken by the alchemist is directed to God only inasmuch as it achieves a deeper understanding of the natural world through the study of physical substances. In this respect, the depiction of the alchemist as a godly person is no different from the image of the Late Antique philosopher grasping a form of knowledge of the divine essences through the study of nature. The interpretation of alchemical operations is also devoid of any specific reference to Christian beliefs and practices. In commenting on the practical aspects of alchemy, Stephanus relies on alchemical sources which originate for the most part from the pagan tradition, and he does not temper with the terminology or contents of these sources in order to harmonise them to the Christian framework of the *Lessons*. The only partial exception to this model is represented by the commentary on the riddle of the word having nine letters. The riddle is quoted from an already Christianised account of pagan traditional knowledge, that is, the *Sibylline Oracles*, and presented as an expression of God's ineffable wisdom. As I have pointed out, though, Stephanus's commentary on the riddle does not introduce any Christian notion in his discussion of the alchemical practice, but rather depends on the philosophical sources used throughout the *Lessons*. Moreover, the riddle circulated in the alchemical tradition – both before and after the composition of the *Lessons* – with varying religious connotations. Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria certainly provided a Christian framework for the commentary on this text, but the strategy employed to this end is not different from his treatment of ps.-Democritus or any other authoritative source of alchemical knowledge.

Stephanus's inclusion and exclusion of religious elements can be better appreciated by taking into account another Byzantine work which is deeply indebted to the *Lessons* in its treatment of alchemy: the *Dialogue of the Philosophers and Cleopatra*. The *Dialogue* was probably written during the 7th cent. and conveys the alchemical teachings ascribed to Cleopatra VII. Cleopatra discusses at length the problem of the separations of the soul of a substance from its original body and its subsequent

union with a new body. In the *Dialogue* there are no explicit references to Christianity, probably because it is framed as a fictional dialogue between the queen of Egypt and a group of alchemists among which stands out the Persian magus Ostanes. Nonetheless, the author of the *Dialogue* was almost certainly Christian since the work contains several references to Paul's epistles, especially in the section about the separation of the soul from the body. Moreover, the process is denoted as "resurrection" (ἀνάστασις) of the body: a terminology which can be found primarily in Christian sources.³⁷ In comparison to the *Lessons*, the *Dialogue* does not include any Christian prayer or explicit profession of faith. Nonetheless, Cleopatra's teachings about the practice of alchemy are defined by the use of Christian terminology and quotations, while Stephanus never incorporates Christian notions in his commentary on passages directly related to the alchemical operations. While religious motives and exhortations provide the *Lessons* with a comprehensive Christian framework, encompassing the discussion of pagan authors of the ancient alchemical tradition, the *Dialogue* highlights by contrast the marginality of precise references to Christian notions and ideas in Stephanus's discussion of alchemical practices.

Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria's presentation of alchemy as a Christianised discipline had a profound influence on later Byzantine alchemists. As an example, the manuscript anthologies of Greek alchemical works preserve four poems in iambic verse attributed falsely to Theophrastus, Hierotheus, Archelaus, and Heliodorus. These poems were written by a single author, possibly at the beginning of the eighth century, and put into verse previous alchemical works, and especially the contents of the *Lessons*.³⁸ As in their model, the alchemical poems praise the ideal alchemist for her moral qualities, while the acquisition of alchemical knowledge is linked to the alchemist's connection with God. The religious connotations of these works are even stronger than the *Lessons*'. The clearest example is offered by a passage at the beginning of ps.-Archelaus's work:

(Text 11) "Train your intellect in contemplation of the entire notion of the ancient wise men – a sophistic notion entangled in riddles –; (train) your knowledge of the technical experience of the practical operation; (train) wise experience and judgement to learn the mixture, the composition, and the quality of the elements, to mix one of them with

37. See *Dialogue of the Philosophers and Cleopatra*, ll. 107-124 (Carlotta, forthcoming). See also Reitzenstein, 1919. On the resurrection of the dead as discussed in the *Dialogue* and the identification of most Biblical references in this treatise, see Festugière, 1939. For the semantics of "resurrection" in the Christian tradition, see Cook, 2017.

38. See Goldschmidt, 1923 and Browne, 1946-1948.

another, to twine and bind them together, to bring something into unity, which is the end of the discipline and is useful to earn profit. [...] Finding inspiration in the light coming from above, you will not fail in practice what you strive for, and the operation will be easy for you, just as expected. It will surely bring a handsome profit to you, once you have wisely brought order in your soul and body by means of chastity, fast and purification of the mind, by escaping from the turmoil of life and staying alone, by devoting your time to prayers and placing yourself at God's service as a prayer, by asking to obtain from the Almighty the knowledge of the manual operations, in order that you, being initiated, may know this practice which is quickly completed through a single form".³⁹

The text follows closely Stephanus's *Lessons* in presenting alchemy as study of the mixture of natural substances which are brought to a form of unity; a study that must be complemented by alchemical operations. Ps.-Archelaus, however, offers a significantly stronger depiction of alchemy as a Christian discipline not only by invoking God's guidance at every step of the process, but also, and more importantly, by defining the lifestyle required to the alchemist in terms of chastity, fast, and solitary life devoted to prayers. The practice of alchemy, in this case, is subordinated to the adoption of the same form of life followed by a Christian monk, if not to becoming a monk. The poem, however, is falsely attributed to Archelaus, Socrates's teacher. In this respect, this work seems to adopt and reinforce Stephanus's idea that the study of alchemy requires the adherence to a practice of virtue which is characterised primarily as Christian but is also shared to some degree by the pagan authors of the past.

Ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria's work maintained a central role in the Byzantine alchemical tradition, where it was quoted and discussed extensively. The *Lessons* was the first work on alchemy to be firmly established in the framework of Christian literature by incorporating numerous prayers and invocations to God, and by presenting alchemy as a legitimate path to the knowledge of God's wisdom through nature. The

39. Ps.-Archelaus, *On the Same Divine Art in Iambic Verse*, vv. 21-58 (Goldschmidt, 1923): τὸν νοῦν προγύμνασον γὰρ εἰς θεωρίαν / πάσης σοφιστικῆς τε τῶν εἰνιγμάτων / καὶ συμπλοκῆς ἐννοίας ἀρχαίων σοφῶν / γνῶσιν τε πείρας πράξεως τεχνουργικῆς / ἐμπειρίαν σοφῆν τε καὶ διάκρισιν, / τῶν στοιχείων τὸ κράμα καὶ τὴν σύνθεσιν / καὶ ποιότητα μαθάνειν καὶ πανσόφως / συγκρινᾶν εἰς ἄλληλα καὶ ὁμοῦ πλέκειν / συνδεῖν τε καὶ πρὸς ἓν τι τῆς τέχνης τέλος / εὐχρηστον ὠφελείας εἰς κέρδος φέρειν. [...] ἔχων ἄνωθεν ἔμπνευσιν φάους / οὐκ ἄστοχῆσεις πείρα τοῦ ποθουμένου / καὶ εὐχερώς σοι ἔργον, ὡς περ προσδοκᾶς, / ἔσται φέρον σοι κέρδος ὄλβιον πάνυ, / ψυχὴν ὅταν καὶ σῶμα κοσμήσης σοφῶς / ἀγνεία καὶ νηστεία καὶ ῥύψει φρενῶν, / τύρβας βίου φεύγων τε καὶ μένων μόνος, / εὐχαῖς σχολάζων καὶ θεῶ δὲ προσφέρων / λατρείαν ὡς δέησιν, ἐξαιτούμενος / τῷ ἐν χεροῖν τὴν γνῶσιν ἐξ ὕψους χάριν / δοῦναι, ὅπως γνῶς, μύστα, θάττον ἐξ ἐνός / εἶδους τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο ἐκπληροῦμενον.

contents of the *Lessons* and the selection of sources operated by Stephanus remained largely unaffected by the Christian connotations of the work. However, the author of the *Lessons* linked directly the pagan sources of the alchemical tradition with a form of Christian wisdom and moral virtue. By doing so, Stephanus provided his Christian audience with a justification for the study of the pagan authors of the alchemical tradition without embedding new Christian notions into their works or excluding any element bearing strong connections to the pagan origin of these sources.

Greek alchemy was a discipline characterised by a mixture of operative practices and philosophical reflections on nature that resonated and interacted with the varying mosaic of Late ancient religious ideas aiming at discovering the divine principle hidden in the natural world. When alchemy started to be practiced in the socio-cultural context of the Byzantine world, this discipline, like many other ancient disciplines that were originally non-Christian, was progressively Christianised and, eventually, Christian ideas and notions started to be adapted and included in the alchemical works. Within this long and complex process of assimilation and transformation of the discipline, ps.-Stephanus of Alexandria's *Lessons* played a crucial role in presenting, for the first time, alchemy as a Christian form of knowledge of the natural world, while framing the continuing importance of its authoritative sources within a new religious context. The *Lessons*, thus, offered a long and sophisticated treatment of alchemy as a Christianised discipline whose contents were not yet truly harmonised with Christian beliefs and practices, but remained established in a technical and philosophical tradition strongly grounded in the Greco-Roman religious landscape.

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VARIA

LA VIDA COTIDIANA DE LOS TERAPEUTAS
DEL LAGO MAREOTIS*
THE DAILY LIFE OF LAKE MAREOTIS THERAPEUTAE

DIEGO ANDRÉS CARDOSO BUENO
UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID
diegoandrescardoso@ucm.es

ABSTRACT

Therapeutae constitute a Jewish ascetic community, made up of men and women, and established by Lake Mareotis on the outskirts of Alexandria. As Philo states in his treatise *De vita contemplativa*, its existence was centered on study, exegesis of sacred texts, and meditation and reflection.

RESUMEN

Los terapeutas constituyen una comunidad ascética judía, integrada por hombres y mujeres, y establecida junto al lago Mareotis a las afueras de Alejandría. Según afirma Filón en su tratado *De vita contemplativa*, su existencia estaba centrada en el estudio, la exégesis de textos sagrados y en la medi-

* Las abreviaturas de los textos filónicos citados en este artículo obedecen a las establecidas a partir de los títulos en latín por Runia, 1998. En la actualidad son aceptadas universalmente. El DGE del CSIC no recoge la mayor parte de las abreviaturas de las obras de Filón.

They also dedicate part of their time to the preparation of texts, hymns and diverse compositions dedicated to the Being. Retired from the world in their humble town leading a simple and secluded daily life, they compose a model of congregation consecrated to the contemplative life and to the service of God.

tación y reflexión. También dedican una parte de su tiempo a la confección de textos, himnos y composiciones diversas dedicadas al Ser. Retirados del mundo en su humilde poblado llevando una cotidianidad sencilla y recoleta, componen un modelo de congregación consagrada a la vida contemplativa y al servicio de Dios.

KEYWORDS

Alexandria; Contemplation; Exegesis; Mareotis lake; Sacred Texts; Therapeutae.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Alejandría; Contemplación; Exégesis; Lago Mareotis; Terapeuta; Textos sagrados.

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LA COTIDIANIDAD Y EL DEVENIR DE LOS TERAPEUTAS ALEJANDRINOS, según relata Filón en *De vita contemplativa*, transcurren, en el poblado del lago Mareotis, monótona pero felizmente entre el orto y el ocaso diario, marcados por el astro rey: “El sol, en efecto, nunca cambia sino siempre es el mismo, marchando ora por encima ora por debajo de la tierra, y él es el que da la pauta del día y la noche, medidas del curso sin fin de las edades”.¹ El tratado resume la vida cotidiana de los terapeutas de este modo: “El intervalo entre el amanecer y el anochecer lo dedican enteramente al ejercicio espiritual”.² Por tanto, y como compendio, diremos, siguiendo las palabras de Filón, que la vida cotidiana de los terapeutas era un constante ejercicio espiritual que se va a reflejar en una serie de conductas y acciones virtuosas.³

El día para los terapeutas acontece entre las plegarias realizadas al amanecer y las del anochecer, que constituyen una costumbre extendida en el judaísmo piadoso, como nos recuerda Josefo al referirse a los esenios, que mantenían la misma práctica.⁴ Estas dos oraciones son muy significativas, ya que la matutina se centra

1. *Fug.* 57 (traducción Triviño, 1975-1976). Aparece el astro rey como el inexorable reloj universal: imagen simbólica del Existente, auténtico señor del cosmos.

2. *Contempl.* 28 (traducción Vidal, 2005).

3. Filón, como analizaremos más adelante, detalla, a continuación, en qué consiste ese ejercicio espiritual (*Contempl.* 28-29).

4. *Contempl.* 27; I., *B.J.*, II 128-133. Cf. también *Carta de Aristeas* 160 y Roitman, 2006, pp. 182 y 223. Sin embargo, Filón, al hablar de los esenios, omite este lapso dedicado a la plegaria, y simplemente dice: “Antes de salir el sol se aplican a sus habituales tareas, y solamente al ocultarse aquel les ponen término, pues se complacen en las mismas” (*Hyphot.* 11, 6). De todas formas, puede entenderse que una de sus primeras tareas, junto con el lavado purificadorio, como recuerda Josefo, era la oración. La indagación matinal y vespertina era una práctica habitual entre los pitagóricos. Consistía en una especie de examen de conciencia, uno antes de afrontar el día con el fin de estar preparado para los avatares de la jornada y otro al terminarlo para hacer un balance de los hechos de la jornada. Cf. Foucault, 2010, pp. 59 y 71. Véase también D.L., VIII 1 y Porph., *V.P.* 40.

en el sol naciente⁵ implorando un día feliz donde la luz celestial llene sus inteligencias, διανοίαι. En ese momento, los mareóticos, como suplicantes que son,⁶ ruegan la iluminación, la visión pura que consideran la máxima felicidad.⁷ Es la ocasión de maravillarse ante el espectáculo renovado de la Creación, que da lugar al ἔκστασις, el entusiasmo, de raíz platónica, cuando el sujeto queda pasmado ante la naturaleza que, ofrecida cotidianamente por el Creador, aparece deslumbrante ante la criatura. La vespertina, en el crepúsculo, representa el trance donde se va a liberar al alma (ψυχή) de las sensaciones habidas durante el día, para recogerse en su interior, comparecer ante el συνέδριον o *sanedrín* de su propio consejo (ἐν τῷ ἑαυτῆς συνεδρίῳ καὶ βουλευτηρίῳ)⁸ y seguir “las huellas de la verdad”.⁹

“Adelante, pues, hacia la asamblea del alma, como si acudierais a la sala del concejo, vosotros, todos los discernimientos que habéis ocupado una plaza en la formación encaminada a destruir la justicia y toda virtud; examinemos con todo cuidado el modo de atacar con éxito”.¹⁰

Este es el examen de conciencia que proporciona el ἔνστασις, que avanza tras “las huellas de la verdad”, y que podemos identificar como el estado de meditación

5. El sol no se adora como en las religiones orientales o en la egipcia, no es un dios, sino uno de los hitos de la Creación, ya que nos ilumina, da calor, hace brotar las cosechas, etc., en fin, constituye un don de vida, y en ese sentido es símbolo del Creador. La oración matinal dirigida al sol como símbolo del Uno aparece también en Plotino. Cf. Wakoff, 2016.

6. *Contempl.* 27. Aquí Filón utiliza el participio αἰτούμενοι, el que suplica o ruega, suplicante, por tanto, del verbo αἰτέω, suplicar, rogar, en lugar del adjetivo-sustantivo ἰκέται, suplicante, orante, relacionado con el verbo ἰκνέομαι, suplicar, que es el figura en el título de la obra.

7. Jonas, 2000, p. 143: “El ser humano sólo alcanza a comprender que en su ser en sí Dios (ὁ κατὰ τὸ εἶναι θεός) es incomprendible, así como a ver que es invisible”. Pero, aunque la esencia de Dios sea incomprendible, podemos saber algo de Dios, puesto que Él se revela por medio de su acción en el mundo, que según Filón es de dos tipos: externa, a través de la Creación, e interna, en el alma, por la profecía, que deriva de la iluminación. Esta no es necesaria, sino gratuita, es decir, concedida por la gracia a aquellos que actúan en consecuencia: los que ejercitan el camino espiritual. Cf. Daniélou, 1962, p. 176.

8. *Contempl.* 27. Emplea un motivo característico de su repertorio, τὸ συνέδριον, para expresar el recogimiento del alma en su fuero interno. Sobre el tema del tribunal interno en Filón, cf. Wolfson, 1946, pp. 303-306.

9. *Contempl.* 27 (traducción Vidal, 2005). Séneca (Sen., *Ir.* 3, 36) recomienda la reflexión vespertina para conciliar un tranquilo sueño. Cf. Foucault, 2010, p. 71.

10. *Confus.* 86 (traducción Triviño, 1975-1976). Filón está describiendo un examen de conciencia, donde se analizan los sutiles modos que tiene el mal de envolver a su presa.

más profundo, que conduce a la desmaterialización, a la disolución de la identidad y a la fusión con el cosmos.¹¹

En realidad, son dos momentos contemplativos de acción de gracias y oración de profundo alcance espiritual; el primero, acaece por la llegada de un nuevo día, es efusivo y se abre aguardando esperanzado y jubiloso lo que viene; el segundo, se produce por haber finalizado una jornada beneficiosa y enriquecedora, es más íntimo y reservado. Los dos suceden como si constituyeran la apertura y el cierre de un ciclo santo.

1. LA *θεορία* COMO OCUPACIÓN DIARIA

El quehacer diario de los terapeutas del lago Mareotis es la *θεορία*,¹² que consiste en la inactividad manual, y en la tarea intelectual y espiritual. Conviene recordar las menciones que se hacen en el tratado *De vita contemplativa* al estudio de la ciencia y la observación de la naturaleza, como elementos sustentantes de la contemplación¹³ (“esos filósofos... que por la naturaleza y las Leyes Santas han sido educados para servir al Ser”¹⁴ y “que han dedicado su vida y sus personas a la ciencia y a la contemplación de las realidades de la naturaleza, siguiendo las santísimas instrucciones del profeta Moisés”),¹⁵ ya que todas las leyes que rigen en la naturaleza, al igual que todas las creadas por el hombre, se nutren de una única Ley divina:¹⁶

“todas las ciencias son deseables en sí mismas, pero son más venerables cuando son practicadas con vistas a la gloria y al servicio de Dios”.¹⁷

“en procura del tiempo para consagrarse libres de preocupaciones a la contemplación de las cosas de la naturaleza”.¹⁸

11. Significa la interiorización máxima en la mismidad de uno mismo, por el propio esfuerzo en la supresión de las imágenes sensoriales. Supone un estado de vaciamiento y serenidad absolutos similar al que se alcanza en el *samadhi* de las corrientes místicas orientales, como el budismo o el hinduismo. En el éntasis la mente se aquieta alcanzando una conciencia pura, sin representaciones. Sobre el tema del *ἐκστασις* y el *ἔνστασις* como fenómenos espirituales, véase Friesen, 2011.

12. Paul, 2005, p. 2. El propio título de la obra lo pregona: *Peri biou theoritikou*, *Sobre la vida teórica* o *Sobre la vida contemplativa*, que son equivalentes.

13. *Contempl.* 2, 18, 23, 25-26, 28-31, 35, 63-65, 75-78, 88-90. Cf. Daniélou, 1962, p. 143: “Toda la cultura profana tiene por objeto preparar los caminos de la contemplación”.

14. *Contempl.* 2 (traducción Vidal, 2005).

15. *Contempl.* 64 (traducción Vidal, 2005).

16. Ya Heráclito había hecho una afirmación similar. Cf. Pohlenz, 2022, p. 132.

17. *Congr.* 17 (traducción Triviño, 1975-1976).

18. *Prob.* 63 (traducción Triviño, 1975-1976).

El estudio y la contemplación llenan su jornada en la que se precisa un tipo de tiempo etéreo o, dicho de otro modo, paradójicamente “intemporal”, porque ellos viven en la ucronía, podríamos decir. Sólo atentos a su formación y aprendizaje diario, en su solitario aislamiento semanal, las jornadas son todas iguales, con monótona dedicación, estableciendo un devenir personal sin hitos. Sus jalones cronométricos son los de la comunidad, superando lo propio y personal individual, el tiempo que disponen es el común. Sus únicas referencias a la sucesión de los días no son particulares sino colectivas, y las marcan la reunión sabática y la celebración pentecostal.¹⁹ En definitiva, se trata de una vida fuera de los parámetros cronológicos habituales, ya que lo que precisan es estar libres de la cuantificación periódica, para poder dedicar su acontecer a lo espiritual trascendente, sin las ataduras del cómputo momentáneo. Los terapeutas superan la línea del tiempo mediante la reiteración de lo permanente, de lo igual y de lo continuo. El discurrir de los días está marcado por la intensidad de la contemplación y por la reflexión filosófica. Así el devenir se mide en saber, porque la cronología no les interesa. Precisamente por ello no se tendrán presentes los años de edad, sino el grado de virtud, equivalente al periodo transcurrido en la congregación, que representa la auténtica vida,²⁰ la del alma, por contraste a la del cuerpo que es medible mediante instrumentos.²¹ En esta situación de ausencia temporal, muchas veces algunos de ellos se encuentran tan ensimismados, “disfrutando y deleitándose tanto en el banquete de la doctrina que la sabiduría les proporciona abundante y generosamente” que, perdiendo la noción del tiempo físico, “sólo se acuerdan de comer en tres o en seis días” o “llegan incluso a aguantar el doble de tiempo”.²² Y parece, como las cigarras, que se alimentaran del aire.²³ Por tanto, los ayunos de los mareóticos no constituían una norma ascética de la comunidad, ni estaban regulados, ni siquiera

19. En el presente artículo nos centramos exclusivamente en la vida cotidiana de los terapeutas, descartando las jornadas dedicadas a la convivencia dentro de la congregación, es decir, la celebración del *Sabbat* y la fiesta extraordinaria pentecostal, en la que se efectuaba el ritual banquete terapéutico. A estas les dedicaremos otros estudios, por considerar que tienen suficiente entidad en sí mismas como para ser tratadas por separado.

20. *Contempl.* 67.

21. *Mos.* 29.

22. *Contempl.* 35 (traducción Vidal, 2005).

23. Esta comparación con las cigarras no es original de Filón, ya la había utilizado Platón en *Phdr.* 259b-d. Filón la repite en *Prob.* 8, y en *Q.G.* III 3. Se basa en una fábula que afirma que estos insectos proceden de unos hombres que se olvidaron de comer y de beber por su deseo de cantar, hasta que experimentaron una metamorfosis transformándose en cigarras. Cf. Daumas y Miquel, 1963, p. 47 y Vidal, 2005, pp. 70-71, n. 59. Hesíodo también había plasmado esta analogía en *El escudo de Heracles*, 395. Cf. Triviño, 1975-1976, V, p. 69, n. 12 y Martín, 2009b, p. 165, n. 43.

eran rituales, como en otros grupos religiosos o filosóficos, sino que se producían por un ensimismamiento en la contemplación y en la meditación de los protagonistas.²⁴

La descripción que hace Filón nos lleva a pensar en un colectivo que vive en la eternidad, entendido este vocablo no como tiempo inacabable, sino en su genuina acepción de ausencia de temporalidad, de presente continuo o constante donde, en consecuencia, no se puede percibir el deslizamiento gradual cronológico porque sólo existe el hoy/ahora, es decir, el instante eterno,²⁵ que es en el que viven los mareóticos, pues han tomado conciencia del valor infinito de cada momento, de manera que hagan lo que hagan, siempre aparezca lo realizado como una novedad, como un asombroso y original descubrimiento.²⁶ Esta idea la plasma el filósofo judío admirablemente en otro texto suyo:

“‘Hoy’ es la eternidad sin límite ni término; porque los períodos de meses, años y de todo tiempo en general son meras nociones de los hombres, los que han atribuido excesiva importancia al número. Pero el verdadero nombre de la eternidad es ‘hoy’”.²⁷

La jornada de los mareóticos sucede en absoluta soledad,²⁸ esta atmósfera recoleta e incomunicada constituye el marco ideal para que cada uno de ellos se entregue al soliloquio espiritualmente enriquecedor.²⁹ El soliloquio consiste en la transformación del interior de la conciencia en un punto donde se produce un profundo diálogo consigo mismo. Fue empleado en ciertos pasajes de carácter ascético por Filón dentro de algunas de sus obras y, en estas ocasiones, suele comenzar con un tipo de

24. Quizás Filón muestre en este pasaje una idealización excesiva de los terapeutas. Cf. Vidal, 2005, p. 70, n. 59.

25. Se trata de la valoración del presente cómo único elemento donde se desarrolla la vida, el único que es realmente real, pues es en el que siempre vivimos. Cf. Hadot, 2006, pp. 28 y 232. “Nuestro cuerpo contiene todo el universo del mismo modo en que cada instante contiene la inmensidad del tiempo” (Hadot, 2006, p. 295). Por ello, al descubrir esto, los ascetas alejandrinos toman conciencia de su correlato con la totalidad (*Contempl.* 12-13 y 77-78).

26. Es el instante presente lo que nos pone en contacto con el cosmos entero, afirmaba Marco Aurelio. Cf. Hadot, 2009, p. 245.

27. *Fug.* 57 (traducción Triviño, 1975-1976).

28. Véase Daumas, 1967, pp. 347-358. El concepto de soledad que viven los mareóticos es relativo, corresponde a un estado existencial en el que uno se hace compañía a sí mismo. Obedece a la condición que Hannah Arendt llama de “solitud”, *solitude*, para distinguirlo de la soledad, *loneliness*, donde uno se encuentra solo, pero privado de la compañía humana y de la propia compañía. Cf. Arendt, 2002, p. 96.

29. El género del soliloquio, cultivado ampliamente por Filón, otorga una mayor expresividad y emoción a las autoconversaciones con el alma. Cf. Hadot, 2004, pp. 90-91; Martín, 2009a, p. 40 y n. 81. El soliloquio fue muy desarrollado por el estoicismo. Cf. Jaffro, 2004, p. 45.

expresión formal prácticamente desconocido antes de él: ¡Oh, alma!, ¡Oh, mente!, o locuciones similares.³⁰ Es un recurso retórico-poético de altísima calidad expresiva, que tendrá una trascendencia enorme en la literatura mística posterior.³¹

Plutarco realiza una alabanza de la tranquilidad (ἡσυχία) y de la soledad (ἡπεμία) opuestas a la ajetreada vida en la ciudad, en la misma línea de otros tantos autores, como Séneca, Epícteto o Musonio Rufo, que entonan un elogio de la vida contemplativa y sabia, semejante a la que disfrutaban los terapeutas: “Las almas que llevan una vida en el aire puro y la mayor parte de las veces alejadas de los hombres, avanzan rectas y vuelan con las alas desplegadas transidas de la transparentísima y suavísima corriente de la tranquilidad, en la cual los conocimientos de la razón son más divinos”.³² Los habitantes del poblado mareótico recludos cada uno en su μοναστήριος,³³ “sin traspasar la puerta exterior, ni siquiera echar una mirada a lo lejos”,³⁴ componen la imagen perfecta de esas almas recoletas de las que habla Plutarco. Y Filón plasma en estas palabras lo que conforma la actitud ideal de recogimiento del sabio:³⁵ “enciérrase de ordinario en su casa y rara vez atraviesa sus puertas, o más frecuentemente aún, para evitar visitas, se va fuera de la ciudad y en un solitario rincón campestre transcurren sus días”.³⁶

30. *Gig.* 44; *Poster.* 135; *Deter.* 13; *Cher.* 29 y 52; *Sacrif.* 64 y 101; *Deus*, 4 y 114.

31. Terian, 1995, pp. 56-84.

32. Fragmentos de Plutarco recogidos por Stob. IV 16, 18. El vuelo del alma es una idea inspirada en la imagen platónica del alma alada en *Fedro* 251b. En cierta manera, el filósofo con estas afirmaciones tan proclives al retiro y a la contemplación se contradice respecto a lo expresado en otras obras en las que declara su inclinación por la vida activa y la participación en los asuntos públicos (Plut., *Mor.* 13, 143, 348-350). Un interesante comentario sobre el fragmento 143 de Plutarco puede verse en Morales Ortiz, 2016. Como ya sabemos, esta situación paradójica es similar en Filón.

33. Los terapeutas vivían aislados cada uno en su propia casa, una sencilla construcción en donde disponían de un pequeño recinto santo destinado exclusivamente a pasar sus jornadas de estudio y reflexión, denominado μοναστήριος: “No introducen nada dentro de él, ni bebida ni comida, ni ninguna de las otras cosas necesarias para el cuidado del cuerpo, a no ser las leyes... y otros escritos que sirven para... el conocimiento y la piedad” (*Contempl.* 25, traducción Vidal, 2005).

34. *Contempl.* 30 (traducción Vidal, 2005).

35. Vidal, 2005, p. 66, n. 48.

36. *Abr.* 23. (traducción Triviño, 1975-1976).

2. SUS TAREAS CONCRETAS: LA LECTURA ATENTA, LA EXÉGESIS Y LA COMPOSICIÓN DE TEXTOS Y CÁNTICOS

El alejandrino prosigue, asegurando que la jornada “la dedican enteramente a la ἄσκησις,³⁷ robusteciéndose filosóficamente mediante la lectura y el estudio de las “escrituras sagradas y... la ancestral filosofía”,³⁸ buscando las verdades ocultas tras la simbolología de los escritos e interpretando alegóricamente los textos, “ya que piensan que los signos del sentido literal son símbolos de una realidad oculta expresada veladamente”.³⁹

El colectivo mareótico jugó un papel destacado como foco de exégesis filosófica, especialmente alegórica,⁴⁰ mediante un método que, aun siguiendo “las instrucciones del profeta Moisés”,⁴¹ que son referencia imprescindible, incorpora elementos de interpretación helenísticos y autóctonos,⁴² al igual que hacía el propio Filón en muchas ocasiones, aunque el alejandrino prefirió mantener un equilibrio entre estos

37. *Contempl.* 28. En el mundo grecorromano contemporáneo, bajo la influencia de los estoicos, hubo una tendencia ética en determinados grupos sociales a la vida recoleta, de soledad y meditación. Esta actitud no era nueva en Egipto, donde se remonta a épocas muy anteriores. Estaba relacionada con la enseñanza de los sabios que dedicaban una verdadera adoración al silencio. Y los terapeutas recogen este ideal propuesto por antiguos maestros egipcios, pero también presente de alguna manera en la cultura helenístico-romana, y lo viven en plenitud. Cf. Paul, 2005, p. 4 y Uusimäki, 2018, pp. 1 y 29.

38. *Contempl.* 28. Hay que tener en cuenta que el canon hebreo no está aún definido. Filón hace una distinción entre las *Escrituras Sagradas*, como acreditados textos religiosos antiguos, entre los que estarían además de los libros contenidos en la *Septuaginta*, incluyendo no sólo el *Pentateuco*, sino también algunas obras de profetas, históricas o salmos, y los escritos referidos a la “ancestral filosofía”, que podían estar relacionados con comentarios, glosas, exégesis y otros no incluidos en la *Torá*, pero sí relacionados con ella, considerados admisibles y respetables, y que desde luego constituían materia de estudio, además de tener una larga trayectoria dentro del judaísmo. En este sentido hay que tener presente la tradición oral de comentarios de la Ley, *Halajá*, que luego codificada constituye la base de *Mishná*, y la recopilación de tradiciones, historias y narraciones, *Hagadá*. Cf. Daniélou, 1962, p. 142.

39. *Contempl.* 28 (traducción Vidal, 2005). Aquí se expresa claramente el sentido de la alegoría y de la exégesis filoniana.

40. Filón deja abiertos muchos interrogantes respecto a las ideas de los terapeutas. Pero una de las informaciones que Filón transmite con más claridad, respecto a la actividad teórica de los mareóticos es que en sus horas de estudio, interpretan los textos según el sentido oculto, es decir, que practican la exégesis alegórica (*Contempl.* 78). Cf. Hay, 1992, pp. 673-683.

41. *Contempl.* 64.

42. *Contempl.* 29. El método alegórico no fue una invención de los terapeutas, sino que ya estaba presente en el judaísmo alejandrino desde hacía tiempo, siendo utilizado en la interpretación de las *Sagradas Escrituras*. A su vez, los hebreos lo podían haber adoptado de la tradición egipcia sacerdotal y de la cultura griega helenística, que lo empleaba en la exégesis de los textos antiguos y clásicos. Tenemos un precedente de la exégesis místico-alegórica en el filósofo judío alejandrino del siglo II a.C. Aristóbulo. Cf. Bréhier, 1950, pp. 237-239; Daniélou, 1962, p. 139; Dumas y Miquel, 1963, pp. 52-55; Treballe, 1993, pp. 151-156; Vidal, 2005, p. 35, n. 58; Peláez, 2007, p. 120; Martín, 2009a, pp. 28-36.

componentes y la exégesis tradicional hebrea.⁴³ En general, este es el método que sigue en gran medida la escuela judía helenística que, sin abandonar lo propio, también se inspiraba en el modo interpretativo utilizado por los griegos en la exégesis de textos clásicos, especialmente la usada por los filósofos estoicos.⁴⁴

Pero los mareóticos también se consagraban a la elaboración de melodías destinadas al canto de pasajes de la *Torá* especialmente significativos para ellos, y otras que se reservaban para los textos propios, compuestos con la finalidad de que se convirtieran en cánticos encomiásticos dedicados al Ser. Algunas de estas composiciones se escribían y otras se memorizaban, para luego recitarlas en las reuniones o fiestas de la comunidad.⁴⁵ Y de este modo, se iban transmitiendo entre los componentes del grupo, desde los autores más antiguos, los fundadores de la escuela,⁴⁶ a los que la formaban en ese momento, algo muy propio y adecuado a una cultura fundamentalmente oral. De hecho, más adelante, al describir la fiesta extraordinaria terapéutica, el tratado nos indica que en ella se pueden interpretar “himnos antiguos de poetas anteriores”, que han ido legando a la congregación y que están realizados en composiciones y formas muy variadas, “hexámetros, trímeros yámbicos, himnos... στάσιμα (‘estanzas’)... con bonitos metros”.⁴⁷ Se compusieron “para las procesiones,⁴⁸ para las libaciones, para (ser interpretadas ante) el altar”.⁴⁹ Filón presenta los ejercicios poéticos y literarios de los terapeutas del lago Mareotis como creaciones que obedecen a la

43. Daniélou, 1962, p. 139. A Filón no le agradaba la corriente exegética judía excesivamente alegórica. Cf. Bréhier, 1950, p. 324.

44. Runia, 1990, pp. 8 y 14; Fernández Marcos, 1993, pp. 277-288; Vidal, 2005, p. 35 y n. 58. Respecto a la exégesis estoica, véase Pohlenz, 2022, p. 183 *et passim*.

45. Vidal, 2005, p. 65, n. 45.

46. *Contempl.* 29.

47. *Contempl.* 80 (traducción Vidal, 2005). El término στάσιμος, que Vidal traduce como *estanza*, se refiere a un tipo de estrofa poética cantada por el coro danzante entre dos episodios de la tragedia griega. Otros autores prefieren traslitterar el vocablo, *estásimos*: Triviño, 1975-1976, 5, p. 107; Martín, 2009b, p. 174.

48. No nos parece correcta la interpretación de προσοδίων ὕμνος como canción de “entrada del coro”, que mantiene Klinghardt, confundiendo, creemos, προσόδιος, “procesión”, con πρόσοδος, “entrada”. Cf. Klinghardt, 2014, p. 157, n. 22. Como él mismo afirma, la entrada del coro usualmente se denomina πάροδος.

49. *Contempl.* 80 (traducción Vidal, 2005). El himno que se interpretaba en las libaciones en honor de la divinidad solía ser un *peán*. Vidal y Triviño traducen Παπαβωμιών ὕμνος como himno para el altar; sin embargo, para Martín, tiene el significado de “canto de súplica” (Παρασπονδείων ὕμνος). Cf. Martín, 2009b, p. 174. Sin embargo los tres lo interpretan como “canto” o “himno de libación”. Tanto παραβώμιος y παρασπόνδειος son términos que el filósofo sólo utiliza en esta ocasión. Cf. Borgen, Fuglseth y Skarsten, 2000, pp. 268 y 271.

preceptiva retórica helenística.⁵⁰ Para David Hay, todas estas creaciones intelectuales y filosóficas de los terapeutas eran como los hijos inmateriales con los que contribuían al desarrollo, en este caso espiritual, de la humanidad.⁵¹

Esta pluralidad de textos elaborados en el poblado mareótico nos hace pensar en que debía de haber distintos talleres de escritura, y probablemente en cada habitáculo sagrado o *μοναστήριος*, dispusiesen de elementos para llevar a cabo esta actividad, ya que vivían aislados unos de otros, y que los ejemplares realizados se guardarían en depósitos comunes de escritos piadosos y filosóficos. Es deducible que poseerían, pues, un destacado archivo o biblioteca filosófica y poético-musical, que tenía como propósito el acopio de textos devotos de diferente tipo (psalterios, colecciones de odas, libros exegéticos, etc.)⁵² que luego usarían en los sermones y disertaciones semanales, en las homilias simposiáticas y en las ceremonias litúrgicas procesionales, libatorias o suplicatorias.⁵³ Filón, estas últimas, solo las menciona de pasada, pero debieron constituir unos rituales que tenían lugar en el poblado, dentro de sus celebraciones habituales conocidas, y revestir cierta importancia, dado el material literario y melódico que a ellas se destinaba.⁵⁴

Por otro lado, si Filón conoció y leyó las obras compuestas por los terapeutas, como es muy probable, ya que da cuenta de ellas, es curioso que en ninguna parte las comente más extensamente, y que sólo las cite genéricamente. Y más sorprendente aún que sea más proclive a mencionar en el tratado lugares, obras, personajes y autores paganos que judíos;⁵⁵ Filón nada más que manifiesta que se dedican también a la composición de

50. Colson, 1985b, p. 524.

51. Hay, 1998, p. 180.

52. Hay, 2003, p. 339.

53. Filón habla de ceremonias *πατασπονδείων*, “de los altares”, en genitivo plural. *Πατασπόνδειος* significa junto o cerca del altar. Sin embargo, Filón no menciona ningún altar en el poblado mareótico. Realmente el altar, que tenía como finalidad la realización de sacrificios, en súplica o en retribución a Dios, no tenía sentido en el poblado mareótico, donde no se celebraban estos rituales, porque los terapeutas habían renunciado a ellos y, además, este cometido era propio del Templo. Así pues, hemos de entender que altar aquí, ya que en las sinagogas tampoco había altares, se refiere a algún tipo de mesa doméstica que en el judaísmo puede ser su símbolo. En el cristianismo, la mesa del primitivo ágape comunitario es la que va a dar lugar al altar eucarístico posterior. Sobre la paulatina desaparición de las ceremonias sacrificiales en la antigüedad, véase Stroumsa, 2006, especialmente pp. 60-87.

54. Las creaciones filosóficas de la escuela no estaban destinadas a un público general, sino a un auditorio restringido y cercano generalmente. Cf. Hadot, 2006, p. 225 y 2009, p. 90.

55. Hay, 2003, p. 339. Así tenemos a Grecia, Hera, Hefesto, Poseidón, Démeter, Demócrito, Anaxágoras, Homero, la *Illiada*, los Mysios, los Hipomolgos, los Thersitas, Hipócrates, Ulises, el Cíclope (Polifemo), Calias, Agatón, Sócrates, Jenofonte, Platón, Eros, Afrodita, las sacerdotisas griegas, más el “poeta cómico anónimo” (*Contempl.* 3, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 40, 43, 57, 58, 59, 68). Frente a ello nombra tres veces a Moisés, dos las *Escrituras Sagradas*, una a Miriam, otra al Templo y otra al mar Rojo (*Contempl.*

cantos e himnos a Dios en todo tipo de metros y melodías, que, si es necesario, escriben con ritmos muy solemnes.⁵⁶ Pero, además de estas composiciones, ellos también realizaban escritos exegéticos del género alegórico, siguiendo a los autores antiguos, de los que poseían muchas obras, y a los que tomaban como modelos.⁵⁷ Aunque en Alejandría la afición bibliográfica estaba acreditada casi desde su fundación, gracias al impulso que los Ptolomeos dieron a esta rama de la cultura con la creación del *Museo* y su *Biblioteca*, llama la atención, según se puede colegir de las palabras de Filón, la gran compilación literaria que atesoraban los ascetas mareóticos, que debía ser muy cuantiosa y también variada.⁵⁸ Esta colección tuvo que estar incrementándose constantemente a tenor de la actividad que los terapeutas practicaban en este sentido, constituyendo probablemente un exponente nada despreciable de biblioteca filosófica de la Antigüedad.⁵⁹

Habría que mencionar también ahora, en relación a los terapeutas, en general, y a esta dedicación suya, en particular, la tradición en el país del Nilo de las llamadas Casas de Vida, o de la Vida, ligadas a los templos egipcios, donde los sacerdotes y escribas componían los libros sagrados desde tiempo inmemorial.⁶⁰ La Casa de Vida, *Per Ankh*, era una institución que se dedicaba a la enseñanza a varios niveles, y que funcionaba como escuela, biblioteca, archivo y taller de copia de papiros. Su objetivo principal era la creación y conservación del pensamiento y conocimiento egipcios, tanto el religioso como el científico. También se ha considerado que estos lugares serían como sanatorios o centros terapéuticos. Los sacerdotes y escribas que trabajaban

2, 11, 28, 29, 63, 64, 78, 87). Yahvé no aparece nunca ya que la Divinidad se expresa como el Ser, Dios o Padre (*Contempl.* 2, 11, 26, 68, 80, 83, 85, 86, 87, 90). Y finalmente, los términos *judío*, *hebreo*, *Torá* o *Israel* están ausentes del tratado.

56. *Contempl.* 29 (traducción Vidal, 2005): ἀλλὰ καὶ ποιῶσιν ᾄσματα καὶ ὕμνους εἰς τὸν θεὸν διὰ παντοίων μέτρων καὶ μελῶν, ἃ ῥυθμοῖς σεμοντέροις ἀναγκαίως χαράττουσι.

57. *Contempl.* 29.

58. Eusebio de Cesarea da a entender que en la comunidad de los terapeutas, y especialmente en su actividad intelectual y espiritual, se encuentra uno de los orígenes de la escuela catequístico-filosófica de Alejandría (*H.E.* II 16, 2).

59. Las escuelas filosóficas antiguas era habitual que contaran con nutridas bibliotecas. Uno de los casos más sobresalientes al respecto fue el de Aristóteles, que además utilizó un novedoso sistema de clasificación documental, luego imitado en la Biblioteca de Alejandría. Fue uno de los primeros en darse cuenta de la necesidad para un estudioso de tener a su disposición un fondo documental, es decir, una biblioteca. Respecto al tema de las bibliotecas en el mundo antiguo, cf. Casson, 2003 y Riaño Alonso, 2005. Kenneth Silver también llama la atención sobre la importancia de las bibliotecas de Qumrán y de los terapeutas de Alejandría, y la influencia que pudo tener la Gran Biblioteca de los Ptolomeos, sobre ellas. Cf. Silver, 2017, pp. 42, 493 y 494.

60. De hecho, se encontraban dentro del área del templo, del que dependían. Cf. Husson y Valbelle, 1998, p. 332.

en las Casas de Vida tomaban títulos como Servidores de Ra, el dios solar, y los que acudían a recibir sus enseñanzas eran conocidos como Discípulos de la Sabiduría.⁶¹ Las funciones desempeñadas en estos centros, como escritorio, biblioteca, escuela y núcleo terapéutico, más los nombres que se les otorgaban a los que allí se encontraban, alusivos a la Divinidad o a la Sabiduría, nos hacen pensar en unas entidades que guardaban un cierto parecido en su modo de hacer y en algunas de sus actividades con el poblado del lago Mareotis.⁶² Además, a esto hay que unir la praxis ascética sacerdotal egipcia, desarrollada también en los templos, que nos transmite Queremón a través de las palabras del libro *De Abstinencia* de Porfirio, que los relaciona también con los terapeutas en cuanto al tipo de vida, al decir que los sacerdotes egipcios consideraban los templos como unos lugares dedicados a filosofía, a la contemplación y al contacto con la sabiduría divina, además de ser recintos donde se practicaba una vida austera y sobria.⁶³ Por todo ello, observamos concomitancias entre ambos modos de proceder, pero lo que no sabemos es hasta qué punto esta tradición ancestral autóctona influyó de alguna manera en la identidad de la comunidad ascética judeo-alejandrina, en todo caso el parentesco entre los dos es innegable.

Por otro lado, es conveniente tener en cuenta que en estos momentos todavía se seguían elaborando los libros sagrados hebreos, ya que el canon de esta religión, el *Tanaj*, no estaba consagrado, y obviamente el cristiano no existía. Naturalmente, no nos referimos a la *Torá*, o *Pentateuco*, que ya tenía un largo recorrido, sino al resto de escritos más tardíos que junto a la *Torá* dieron lugar al corpus bíblico judío, pues de todos los materiales escriturísticos que se compusieron y se reelaboraron y que estaban circulando por las escuelas, sólo se transformaron en preceptivos una parte de ellos, con lo que la riqueza y abundancia de textos debió ser notable, aunque muchos, al ser excluidos del registro oficial definitivo, quedaron como obras para-

61. La jerarquía dentro de estos *colegios* sacros era compleja, pues abarcaba desde los maestros y los escribas, encargados de la enseñanza hasta los discípulos aventajados, y los aprendices neófitos, además de los grandes sacerdotes, ligados al ceremonial solemne templario y guardianes de los secretos ancestrales de las *Escrituras Sagradas*. Al margen del ritual, funcionaban como unos *scriptoria*, en los que además de temas religiosos se abordaban otros como los astronómicos o los médicos y científicos. Cf. Husson y Valbelle, 1998, pp. 126, 198-199 y 332-333. Para una idea general de las Casas de Vida, cf. Gardiner, 1938.

62. Wilkinson, 2002, p. 74.

63. Uno de los rasgos que caracterizaba a los sacerdotes egipcios era la frugalidad alimentaria y, curiosamente, en coincidencia con los terapeutas (*Contempl.* 37 y 74), su alimento básico, el pan, lo comían con hisopo. Cf. Van der Horst, 1987, pp. 17-22; Hay, 2003, p. 341; Taylor, 2004, p. 91.

escriturales, pseudoepigráficas o apócrifas.⁶⁴ Con esto, queremos decir que en los terapeutas mareóticos puede verse también uno de los grupos o escuelas precanónicas o premasoréticas donde se seguían investigando y creando obras relacionadas con las Sagradas Escrituras, como comentarios, florilegios, explicaciones de la Ley, reelaboraciones sagradas, paráfrasis, exégesis, himnos y salmos que luego pudieron haber pasado al corpus escriturístico judío, en este caso alejandrino,⁶⁵ que no va a cristalizar hasta la época postemplaria, aunque será fundamentalmente en Palestina, tras la decantación rabínico-farisea.⁶⁶ Los escritos mareóticos, según la descripción de Filón, sugieren por su desarrollo oral, como ha observado la investigadora Judith Newman, más flexibilidad que fijeza en su composición y una capacidad de adaptación respecto a las tradiciones judías más remotas, e incluso es posible que algunos de los recitativos, de los cantos, de las salmodias y de otras composiciones que se elaboraron en este centro religioso se encontraran como parte de la urdimbre y de la trama de lo que será más tarde la Biblia hebrea.⁶⁷

64. Todo este material “desechado”, tanto del canon judío como de los distintos cánones cristianos, al margen de lo que pudo perderse, es lo que compone en la actualidad el *corpus* de los escritos apócrifos, pseudoepigráficos y parabíblicos. Estos textos, que hoy quedan un tanto como marginales o no consagrados, en los días de su creación no tuvieron esa consideración, ya que el referente canónico no existía aún, y por tanto eran obras válidas en aquellos círculos donde se habían originado. Cf. Mroczek, 2015, pp. 31-34. Sobre literatura bíblica y parabíblica, véase Treballe, 2003.

65. La escuela filológica de Alejandría, ligada a la institución del *Museo*, tuvo una enorme importancia, y aunque era fundamentalmente helenística, influyó en todas las comunidades presentes en la ciudad, y especialmente en la judía. El resultado fue el desarrollo, en griego, de la exegética, la literatura y la filosofía hebreas, que puede estar reflejado en la composición de relevantes obras, como la *Carta de Aristeas*, la *Septuaginta*, las obras de Aristóbulo, Eupólemo, y especialmente las de Filón, entre otras. Cf. Treballe, 1993, pp. 151-155 y 315-318. Véanse sobre este tema en general, Fernández Marcos, 2010 y Piñero, 2010.

66. Laham Cohen, 2018, pp. 11-26. Sobre la elaboración y fijación de los textos sagrados judíos y cristianos, véase Treballe, 1993.

67. Newman, 2008, pp. 466-468: “De hecho, un contexto similar de recitación ritual de culto por autores inspirados bien puede haber proporcionado un *sitz-im-leben* continuo que arroja luz sobre la composición de la *Tanaj*” (p. 467).

3. LA IMPORTANCIA DE LA MÚSICA Y DE LA EDUCACIÓN TERAPÉUTICA

Respecto a los cánticos y demás obras literarias y musicales mareóticas no nos ha llegado nada,⁶⁸ sin embargo, los descubrimientos de mil novecientos cuarenta y siete en el yacimiento de Qumrán han permitido conocer algunas muestras de piezas hímnicas realizadas por la comunidad esenia con destino a las principales fiestas del grupo, con las que podían guardar alguna relación.⁶⁹ Por tanto, para saber cómo eran aproximadamente las obras de este tipo que compusieron los mareóticos, la referencia que tenemos son estas creaciones, ciertamente muy abundantes, de los qumranitas.⁷⁰

Es notable destacar que la elaboración de salmodias e himnos y su ejecución en las ceremonias comunales era algo habitual, pero de enorme importancia y trascendencia para la congregación alejandrina, al igual que sucedía en la esenia de Qumrán, pues estas composiciones otorgaban un profundo significado y una especial solemnidad a los acontecimientos litúrgicos desarrollados por ellos.⁷¹ Las intervenciones melodiosas es algo que siempre ha tenido una enorme relevancia y quedado patente en todas las culturas, pues en cualquier celebración litúrgica han estado presentes desde tiempos inmemoriales hasta nuestros días.

La expresión musical se ha hallado vinculada a la filosofía desde sus inicios, ya que se trata de una técnica que el hombre asoció con el origen del Universo, siendo Pitágoras quien elaboró una concepción de la música que le llevó a entender la escala melódica como un elemento estructural del Cosmos dándole a este arte una categoría a la vez científica y metafísica.⁷² La música ha sido una constante aliada de las manifestaciones más excelsas del espíritu humano, constituyendo una especie de efluvio místico del alma, que da lugar a un τόπος del pensamiento heleno.⁷³ Y conforme a

68. Bréhier primero y Geoltrain después citan un himno proveniente de un medio judeoalejandrino, encontrado en un papiro a fines del siglo XIX, en el que Albrecht Dietrich creyó ver una creación de los terapeutas. Posteriormente, Paul Wendland desautorizó esta atribución, afirmando que tenía características comunes a otros escritos judíos del momento, pero que no había datos suficientes para adjudicárselo a los terapeutas (citados por Bréhier, 1950, p. 322, y Geoltrain, 1960, p. 27).

69. Cf. Vermes, 1996, pp. 56-59 y 149-150; García Martínez y Treballe, 1993, p. 67.

70. Respecto al resto de obras, es más difícil pronunciarse, aunque es posible que las literarias de tradición bíblica qumránicas también tuviesen correspondencia en la producción terapéutica. Véase Vermes, 1996, pp. 45-91; Newman, 2008, pp. 457-459.

71. Especialmente se puede apreciar al final del tratado en la fiesta pentecostal (*Contempl.* 83-88).

72. Sabemos que se compusieron en la Antigüedad muchos tratados sobre música y, aunque la mayoría de ellos se han perdido, han llegado hasta nosotros algunas de las obras dedicadas a este tema de autores como Plutarco, Nicómaco, Gaudencio, Aristides Quintiliano o Alipio. Cf. Sachs, 1981, p. 112.

73. Feldman 1996, pp. 510-511; Ferguson, 2003, pp. 392-393.

esto Platón afirma que “la música alcanza su coronación (fin) en el amor de lo bello”.⁷⁴ El hombre que cultiva cuidadosamente su cuerpo y su mente debe también conceder al alma los movimientos compensadores; por ello “debe darse juntamente a la música y a la filosofía si quiere que se le pueda llamar, con justicia, a la vez bueno y bello”.⁷⁵ De hecho, entre los filósofos morales estará considerada como un auxilio del espíritu.⁷⁶ Y esto en la comunidad del lago Mareotis ya se vivía así.⁷⁷

Los terapeutas tienen una tarea exotérica que cumplir: la elaboración de distintos tipos de escritos sagrados, himnos y melodías para las jornadas de encuentro, donde las intervenciones cadenciosas eran fundamentales.⁷⁸ Hemos de presuponer a los congregados, por tanto, unas facultades y conocimientos suficientes para la ejecución armónica, ya que parte de su ocupación radicaba en la elaboración de piezas sonoras. Hay que tener presente que la música estaba considerada como una medicina del alma, y ligada por tanto al perfeccionamiento espiritual.⁷⁹ Por otra parte, deberían dominar el acervo literario cultural y religioso judío en mayor medida, y el helenístico como complemento del anterior, para la creación de los contenidos adecuados a estas composiciones que, como sabemos, eran imprescindibles en el ritual mareótico, pues, al tratarse de melodías himnicas y celebrativas, la letra era esencial en su interpretación.⁸⁰

En consecuencia, los miembros de la congregación que se consagraron a estos menesteres, al margen de otras disciplinas, debían haber aprendido la técnica musical, que era una especialidad muy importante en la *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία* helena, estrechamente relacionada con las matemáticas, que igualmente suponemos que dominarían.⁸¹

74. *R.* 3, 403c.

75. *Pl.*, *Ti.* 88b. El empleo de música y de himnos también lo podemos encontrar en *Pl.*, *R.* 10, 607a y *Lg.* 812a-813a.

76. Ferguson, 2003, p. 391.

77. *Contempl.* 29, 80-88. La música se inscribe en la tradición del banquete filosófico. Cf. Marculescu-Badilita, 2003, p. 76.

78. Vermes, 1996, p. 58.

79. La presencia de la música en las ceremonias litúrgicas y su relación con la espiritualidad es algo que se ha venido manteniendo a lo largo de la historia, y que en la Antigüedad, dentro de filosofía moral, constituye un *locus communis* de la vida virtuosa, y es valorada como un auxilio interior. Cf. Feldman, 1996, pp. 510-511; Ferguson, 2003, pp. 392-393. La música es también ahuyentadora del mal y puede personificarse en la figura del David tocando el arpa. Cf. Roitman, 2011.

80. *Contempl.* 80.

81. La *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία* griega, educación circular o completa, consistía en el aprendizaje de la gramática, retórica, dialéctica, aritmética, geometría, música y astronomía. Cf. López Férrez, 2009, p. 76. Como el propio Filón recuerda constituía un tipo de estudio superior: “Viene a ser, pues, la filosofía la sierva de la sabiduría, así como la cultura general (*ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία*) lo es de la filosofía”

La música componía el acompañamiento ritual de cualquier ceremonia, y era más relevante cuanto más significativa fuera la misma, por lo que el repertorio melódico siempre fue muy cuidado en la liturgia.⁸² Por ello, cuando llega el momento fundamental de la fiesta principal terapéutica, nos dice Filón que “cada uno elige como guía y maestro de coro a la persona más apreciada y mejor dotada musicalmente”.⁸³

Por último, los terapeutas también debían escribir esos cantos y poemas que nos transmite el alejandrino, lo que presupone conocimientos filológicos y literarios, pero además lo tenían que hacer no de cualquier manera, sino “con ritmos muy solemnes”, ya que estaban preservados para las grandes ceremonias pentecostales. Además, habían de realizarse con la intención que se pudieran conservar para constituir un fondo documental, del que formaban parte los “escritos de autores antiguos los fundadores de su escuela, que han dejado muchos documentos del género alegórico”.⁸⁴ Todo este conjunto gráfico se guardaría como acervo patrimonial de la comunidad, lo cual, además de subrayar la importancia y tradición de esta variedad de escritos, nos informa de que en la congregación no constituyen los mismos una novedad de la época filónica, sino que tenían ya una cierta tradición. Ahora bien, desconocemos su antigüedad, por no tener noticias de la fundación del grupo, no obstante, los métodos de lectura, interpretación y elaboración que empleaban, según el tratado, seguían siendo los mismos de sus predecesores.⁸⁵

En cuanto a la conservación de los textos que menciona Filón en *De vita contemplativa*, hay que tener presente que los escritos sagrados, sobre todo, si contenían el nombre de Dios no se podían destruir, ni alterar, ni abandonar, sino que debían ser custodiados y preservados.⁸⁶ Y, respecto a la tarea de elaboración de manuscritos, que ellos también

(Congr. 79). Sobre la música en Filón de Alejandría, véanse Feldman, 1996, pp. 504-528 y Ferguson, 2003.

82. Filón utiliza un rico vocabulario literario-musical para comunicar la importancia que este arte tenía en el poblado mareótico: ῥαψωδία, ὕμνος, προσόδιος ὕμνος, παραβώμιος ὕμνος, παρασπόνδειος ὕμνος, μέτρα, μέλος, ἔπος, τρίμετρος, στάσιμος χορικός, στροφή, πολύστροφος, χορός, ἀντιστροφή, ἐμμελής, ἀντίφωνος, βαρὺς ἦχος, συμφωνία, μουσικός, χορευτής, χορεύω, ἀρμονία, ἄδω, ἐπιχειροτονέω, ἐπορχέομαι (*Contempl.* 17, 80, 83, 84, 88).

83. *Contempl.* 83 (traducción Vidal, 2005).

84. *Contempl.* 29 (traducción Vidal, 2005).

85. *Contempl.* 29.

86. De ahí la tradición de las genizas en las sinagogas, donde los libros sagrados inservibles son abandonados a una destrucción natural, para evitar que cualquier escrito que contenga el nombre divino sea tratado de manera indigna. En caso de que la geniza se llenara, y no hubiese posibilidad de un mayor almacenaje, se retiraba el material, se quemaba y enterraba respetuosamente. Aunque no son genizas, una parecida explicación, en cuanto a la tradición judía por la veneración y la preservación de documentos sagrados, se puede dar para el caso de las cuevas de Qumrán, al servir de lugares

llevaban a cabo,⁸⁷ debemos considerar que las palabras de la *Torá* tenían que ser escrupulosamente reproducidas, ya que, al ser el Código de Dios, estaba absolutamente prohibido someter estas obras a la mínima variación, de hecho los escribas amanuenses estaban obligados a proceder con sumo cuidado evitando cometer cualquier error.⁸⁸

4. EPÍLOGO

Recapitulando, y siguiendo las palabras de Filón,⁸⁹ diremos que estos terapeutas *suplicantes* se dedicaban durante los días laborables de la semana, en general, a varias cosas, como hemos visto, aunque sabemos que el ejercicio espiritual o σκέψις, era la labor primordial reservada a su interioridad: la meditación contemplativa, columna vertebral de su vida diaria. Para el *suplicante* esta vivencia se resguarda en el συνέδριον de su conciencia donde el alma se repliega en su búsqueda de la verdad.⁹⁰ El propio *sanedrín* es como un tribunal de justicia interno, que analiza y juzga al alma desnuda,⁹¹ mediante una especie de severo examen de conciencia.⁹² La justicia se transforma así en una responsabilidad personal, compromiso de uno con uno mismo, pero también hacia el otro, configurando un sentido riguroso, íntegro y piadoso de vida comunitaria.⁹³

donde guardar cuidadosamente los rollos depositados en ellas, en su mayor parte de *Escrituras Santas*, para que no cayeran en manos inapropiadas al abandonar el lugar la secta que los poseía. Cf. Florentino García Martínez en Piñero y Fernández-Galiano, 2003, pp. 25-29; Roitman, 2006, pp. 218-222.

87. *Contempl.* 29.

88. No obstante, este rigor extremo era más habitual en los escritos en hebreo, que eran considerados realizados con la caligrafía santa. Hemos de pensar que en Alejandría, al hablarse y escribirse en griego y usarse la *Septuaginta*, redactada en este idioma, la norma sería algo más flexible. En cualquier caso, hay que tener presente que los libros en esta época eran objetos muy valiosos y escasos ya de por sí, y los que los poseían, los cuidarían siempre con esmero dado su valor intrínseco, al margen de la temática que trataran. Cf. Casson, 2003 y Riaño Alonso, 2005.

89. *Contempl.* 29.

90. *Contempl.* 27. El συνέδριον o *sanedrín* era el tribunal judío compuesto por los “sabios” del lugar. Su máximo exponente era el *Gran Sanedrín* de Jerusalén, una especie de Tribunal Supremo hebreo. Aquí es utilizado metafóricamente por Filón para referirse al tribunal supremo de la conciencia moral, en un sentido espiritual, que también se puede encontrar en otras obras filonianas (*Confus.* 86; *Praem.* 28). Cf. Martín, 1986, pp. 79-83.

91. *Contempl.* 27. Es el *enstasis* del que hemos hablado, la contemplación del propio yo mediante una concentración en el ser. Cf. *supra* n. 11.

92. Séneca en su práctica del examen de conciencia, a veces emplea también el símil del tribunal de justicia ante el cual comparece el alma para rendir cuentas. Cf. Hadot, 1998, p. 220.

93. Taub, 2016, p. 226. También constituye una valoración de la libertad, siempre presente en el colectivo terapeuta.

Por todo lo relatado, Joan E. Taylor indica que, a pesar de esta vivencia reservada y ascética, en realidad los terapeutas no eran unos puros contemplativos, sino que, siguiendo la norma bíblica, al margen de su dedicación a la contemplación, estaban ocupados seis días en sus investigaciones, estudios y composiciones, es decir, en una cierta actividad especulativa e intelectual, y descansaban el sábado.⁹⁴ Pues Filón, según la investigadora, algo que corroboramos, nunca fue un abierto defensor de la vida absolutamente retirada y exclusivamente de meditación, sino que él pensaba que la más recomendable era la que combinaba, o había combinado, ambas facetas, la activa y la contemplativa, como la suya propia.⁹⁵

La afirmación de Taylor es aplicable a Filón, si nos atenemos al género de vida que llevó, pero no a los propios terapeutas, que fueron un ejemplo de existencia contemplativa. De todas formas, en esto el alejandrino no es claro, o cambia de parecer, ya que unas veces pondera el modelo de vida ascética como el más recomendable y en otras ocasiones el mixto.⁹⁶ Incluso, en alguna de sus obras al proponer un ideal de judaísmo, frente a los magos persas, a los filósofos griegos, o a los gimnosofistas indios, acude a los esenios, ejemplo de vida activa según el propio alejandrino, y no a los terapeutas.⁹⁷ Naturalmente una existencia activa puede ser ejemplar y nada tiene que ver con una vida voluptuosa dedicada a los placeres. Y en lo que concierne a los mareóticos, la vida contemplativa tampoco debía significar una completa inanición. Así que, concluimos afirmando que el día a día de los ascéticos alejandrinos, aun teniendo en cuenta sus actividades intelectuales, o quizás también debido a ello, se puede considerar una excelente muestra, un paradigma incluso, de existencia virtuosa, dedicada a la auténtica vida contemplativa:⁹⁸ “la virtud, es a la vez teórica y práctica... y... el camino hacia ella encierra una teoría, la filosofía, y además obras, pues la virtud es un arte de toda la vida, en el que se dan juntos todos los géneros de acciones”.⁹⁹

94. Taylor, 2019, p. 231. Valéry Laurand hace una afirmación similar al decir que los terapeutas, como seguidores de Moisés, saben que la virtud es a la vez teórica y práctica, y por ello combinan ambos géneros de vida. Cf. Laurand, 2012, p. 124. En cierto modo es así, porque llevar una pura vida contemplativa es casi imposible, aunque en el caso de los mareóticos la contemplación era su “actividad” fundamental.

95. *Praem.* 11. Cf. Taylor, 2019, p. 232. La forma de vida que más tarde se implantará en el mundo cristiano obedeciendo a lo que constituirá el lema de su monacato: *ora et labora*.

96. Que combina la vida contemplativa y la activa (*Q.G.* 4, 47). Cf. Paul, 2005, p. 2.

97. *Prob.* 75-92. Cf. Daniélou, 1962, p. 49.

98. Que no tiene por qué excluir toda acción. Moisés fue a la vez el perfecto político y el perfecto contemplativo y los terapeutas como discípulos suyos lo imitan (*Mos.* 1, 48; *Contempl.* 63-64). Cf. Laurand, 2012, p. 125. Además no podemos olvidar que los terapeutas antes de constituir o de integrarse en la comunidad, abandonaron su vida cotidiana, que presumimos que no era contemplativa (*Contempl.* 13).

99. *Leg.* 1, 57 (traducción adaptada y resumida de Triviño, 1975-1976).

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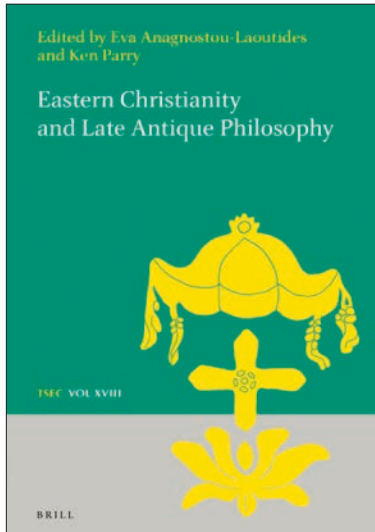
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RECENSIONES

EASTERN CHRISTIANITY AND LATE ANTIQUE PHILOSOPHY



ANAGNOSTOU-LAOUTIDES,
EVA & PARRY, KEN (eds.) (2020).
*Eastern Christianity and Late Antique
Philosophy*. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 342
pp., 164 € [ISBN: 978-9-0044-1188-3].

MARCO ALVIZ FERNÁNDEZ

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE EDUCACIÓN A DISTANCIA /

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

malviz@bec.uned.es

ESTE VOLUMEN COLECTIVO ES EL RESULTADO FINAL de una conferencia internacional que llevó el título “Eastern Christianity and Late Antique Philosophy” y que se celebró en la Universidad de Macquarie, en Sidney, Australia, en abril de 2017. La temática de los capítulos que integran el libro pone bajo el foco la importancia de la filosofía griega en la Antigüedad Tardía tanto en lo concerniente a los menguantes círculos paganos como en los incipientes grupos de poder cristianos del Mediterráneo oriental. De esta forma, poniendo en comunión algunas de aquellas comunidades y sus escritos, desde la Sardes del siglo IV a la Mosul del IX, el objeto de los

editores “*is to contribute to the on-going discussion about Neoplatonic philosophy in late antiquity and its reception in the Byzantine and Eastern Christian worlds*” (p. 1).

El libro está compuesto por un total de catorce capítulos que, a su vez, se dividen en cinco partes encuadradas por cuestiones afines. Todo ello se encuentra precedido por un prefacio y por una introducción que presentan el volumen, su temática y sus contribuciones. Cada capítulo detalla su propia bibliografía (separada entre fuentes primarias y secundarias) y en las páginas finales se añade un útil índice general de nombres propios, conceptos y materias.

La primera parte se titula “Identity and Terminology”. Contiene dos capítulos de carácter más bien introductorio, los cuales ayudan al lector a situarse en el contexto filosófico del periodo tardoantiguo en el que se centra la obra en su conjunto. De hecho, es uno de los editores, Ken Parry, quien abre el compendio hablando de la cercana relación entre el cristianismo oriental de los siglos VI al IX y la herencia filosófica griega, cuyo último estertor se mantuvo vivo en las escuelas de filosofía de algunas ciudades de mayor tradición pagana como Atenas o Alejandría. A continuación, Johannes Zachhuber estudia aspectos terminológicos y conceptuales de filosofía y teología tardoantiguas. En rasgos generales, el autor rechaza que en época patristica existiera una dualidad claramente diferenciada entre teología y filosofía: “*Historically, this distinction originated with the foundation of the Western medieval university and its separate philosophical and theological faculties*” (p. 56). Asimismo, observa problemas en la analogía del cristianismo en tanto que escuela filosófica y desarrolla esta interesante cuestión.

La segunda parte es la más larga de la obra con cuatro capítulos y se denomina “Greek Christian Thought”. La otra editora del volumen, Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides, es la autora del primero de ellos en el que se encarga de examinar el consumo de vino en la tradición filosófica helena y su relación con la eucaristía cristiana: “*The Christian Apologists tried to revamp the intellectual pedigree of Christianity by bringing it in sync with the prevalent Greco-Jewish traditions*” (p. 81, n. 1). Por su parte, Matthew Crawford llama la atención en su contribución sobre la importancia del *Contra Iulianum* para comprender el pensamiento de Cirilo de Alejandría y su papel en la polémica religiosa de principios de siglo IV; el artículo es una suerte de introducción a la nueva traducción al inglés del citado tratado, de próxima aparición. A continuación, Michael Champion explora la idea de las similitudes e influencias entre la aspiración última de la filosofía griega de asemejarse a la divinidad y la del ascetismo del cristianismo primitivo concluyendo, en líneas generales, que, entre aquellas, “*philosophical practices, methods of interpretation, and goals are shared*” (p. 147). Dirk Krausmüller examina los términos asociados con la cristología post-calcedoniana y su carácter ortodoxo presentes en los escritos de Leoncio de Bizancio, autor del siglo

VI. Finalmente, Vassilis Adrahtas se ocupa de Juan de Damasco en una comparativa con el filósofo neoplatónico Proclo y la influencia del contexto sociopolítico en las regiones siropalestina y ateniense, respectivamente, así como en las similitudes de lo que ambos entendían por salvación según sus escuelas de pensamiento.

La tercera parte del volumen colectivo lleva el título “Proclus the Neoplatonist”. Se trata de una sección monográfica en torno al filósofo neoplatónico, que floreció en el siglo V como director de la escuela de pensamiento (neo)platónico en Atenas. Dirk Baltzly atiende a la ética neoplatónica en relación con la idea clásica de la semejanza a dios presente en Platón, con lo que subraya la importancia de la mística y de la dimensión teúrgica que había adquirido esta escuela de pensamiento en la Tardoantigüedad y cómo ello se desarrolla en los escritos del autor. Por otro lado, Graeme Miles estudia a través de los comentarios de Proclo a la teoría platónica presente en su República el contexto educacional neoplatónico y su objeto último de la visión del Bien.

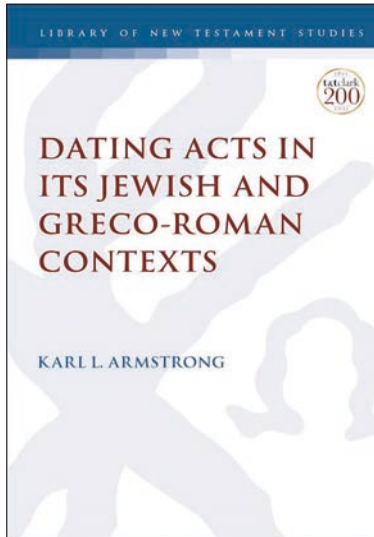
La cuarta parte se denomina “Pagans and Christians in Byzantium” y contiene tres capítulos. Comienza Han Baltussen con una contribución centrada en la obra *Vidas de filósofos y sofistas* del sofista del siglo IV Eunapio de Sardes. En sus líneas se cuestiona si es posible hablar de “santos paganos” en referencia a los cuadros de “hombres divinos” que dibuja el sardiano en su obra. De la misma manera que otro de los capítulos precedentes, se trata de una auténtica introducción temática a la nueva edición para la Loeb Classical Library del citado tratado biográfico, cuando se cumple una centuria de su primera traducción al inglés en la citada biblioteca clásica. A continuación, Meaghan McEvoy efectúa una aproximación monográfica sobre el gramático, poeta y filósofo Pamfrepio de Panópolis y su estancia en la corte constantinopolitana de finales del siglo V bajo la égida de un general usurpador de malogrado final. Por último, Brownen Neil atiende de forma más bien breve a la teoría de los sueños en Máximo el Confesor desarrollada en el juicio que este tuvo que afrontar por haber tenido uno considerado por el emperador Constante II como traición y su papel en la polémica cristológica del monotelismo.

El volumen se cierra con una quinta sección dedicada a “Syriac and Arabic Christian Thought” con dos contribuciones. La primera la firma Nestor Kavvadas, quien analiza el empleo de terminología y silogismos del campo de la lógica por parte de miembros de la Iglesia cristiana siria en el seno del califato Abasí y subraya la importancia de las escuelas de educación superior sirias durante este convulso periodo de la denominada “*Long Late Antiquity*”. En último lugar, el capítulo tiene la autoría de Elvira Wakelnig e investiga el empleo de refutaciones filosóficas por parte de autores cristianos que escribían en árabe en la Mosul del siglo IX.

A modo de conclusión, la presente obra cumple de manera óptima sus propósitos de seguir la línea propuesta recientemente por académicos de prestigio como

Illaria Ramelli o Mark Edwards, entre otros, a saber, “*the need to reassess our appreciation and understanding of the Christian philosophical engagement*” (p. 8). En definitiva, pone en liza la importancia de la herencia cultural helena en los cimientos de la mentalidad cristiana de la larga Antigüedad Tardía que dará forma al pensamiento dominante en el medievo.

DATING ACTS IN ITS JEWISH AND GRECO-ROMAN CONTEXTS



ARMSTRONG, KARL L. (2021).
Dating Acts in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts. Library of New Testament Studies. London: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 403 pp., 36,19 € [ISBN: 978-0-5676-9858-2].

LYNNE MOSS BAHR
ROCKHURST UNIVERSITY
Lynne.bahr@rockhurst.edu

IN *DATING ACTS IN ITS JEWISH AND GRECO-ROMAN CONTEXTS*, Karl L. Armstrong argues for an early date for *Acts of the Apostles*, around 64 CE. Engaging protracted debates regarding the dating, for middle range (70-90 CE) or late (after 90 CE), Armstrong seeks to demonstrate that scholars upholding these dates have used flawed methodologies and have not adequately considered the Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts that underlie the text. He employs a historiographical approach, along with textual criticism and linguistics, asserting that the combination of these methods corrects the inadequate empirical methods and assumptions of other scholars. His understanding of historiography is post structural and thus chiefly concerned with the self-conscious selection and interpretation of sources. Given that Armstrong is arguing for a date for Acts within only a few decades of the late date assigned by

other scholars, his approach requires careful parsing of the claims of other scholars, which he accomplishes, albeit with the notable exception of serious engagement with a range of scholars using literary theory or narrative criticism, such as, for narrative criticism, John A. Darr and William S. Kurz.¹ Nevertheless, Armstrong offers a sound case for careful reconsideration of the historicity of elements within Acts that are often glossed over, most notably, the truncated ending and unresolved fate of Paul and the omission of references to the destruction of the Temple and the fire of Rome.

In the first chapter Armstrong presents the primary flaws of the arguments for later dating of Acts. This is a fairly brief chapter that outlines the positions of previous scholars, with an emphasis on Henry J. Cadbury's statement that either early or late dating is "improbable", and thus a new method is necessary to make inroads on this question of dating, a method Armstrong will use himself with his historiographical approach. He includes helpful tables with dates relating Acts to the early Roman imperial period and others featuring scholars and their respective dating of Acts. Focusing on the work of Richard Pervo because of his widespread influence on the late date of Acts that is the majority view, Armstrong emphasizes that the late dating by him and others is based on intertextualities and presuppositions regarding the concerns of Marcion and the early church. While he acknowledges the validity of some of their observations, he argues they are better understood as emerging before Marcionite Christianity, not least because in his assessment the manuscript evidence does not support such a view.

In the second chapter, Armstrong presents his historiographical approach. He explains that the historical context of any text is inexorably tied to its date and therefore profoundly influences subsequent interpretations. His main criticism of the late dates concerns the parallels these scholars find between Acts and the literary environment of the 2nd century. These scholars rely on a comparative study of the texts, and Armstrong argues they do so at the expense of textual criticism and recent advances in grammar and linguistics, along with no serious consideration of the epistemological debates among philosophers and historians after the "linguistic turn" (p. 29). After identifying the differences between empiricist historiography and post-structural historiography, he justifies his choices of sources, facts, and events, emphasizing that his approach addresses the manuscript record in addition to the historiographical and archaeological evidence, offering a more comprehensive approach than previous studies.

1. Kurz, 1993; Darr, 2020.

In the two chapters that follow, Armstrong continues his critique of other scholars, beginning with the debates around dating the sources, to Paul's letters and the works of Josephus, to the vexing ending of Acts. On whether the author of Acts was dependent on the letters of Paul, Armstrong carefully examines Pervo's assessment that he was, focusing on the parallels Pervo cites between Acts and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. As support for his early dating, Armstrong calls into question some of Pervo's assumptions, showing that the parallels suggest a common tradition in circulation during the lifetime of both writers and therefore not "ironclad" proof of a late date. Again, looking to Pervo, Armstrong refutes his claim that the author of Acts relied on the works of Josephus, stating that "even a casual reading of the two accounts shows the vast differences in detail" (p. 87). While some scholars explain these differences as inaccuracies on the part of one author or another, Armstrong argues that Luke relied on his own memory of the events described. Furthermore, if he is using sources, we cannot assume that Josephus was the only available source he had, and we do not know which other sources he may have used. Listing ten reasons why Luke did not rely on Josephus, mostly concerning the lack of precise parallels, Armstrong rules out completely Luke's use of *Antiquities*, which would support a late dating.

Armstrong builds upon these claims to address the so-called enigmatic ending of Acts. By situating the ending of Acts in its historical context, Armstrong aims to show that Luke only wrote what he was aware of, and that he did not know of Paul's fate; thus he ends the narrative with Paul under house arrest for two years. This ending prompts questions for generations of readers about why Luke does not address Paul's martyrdom and the systematic destruction of Christians under Nero that is attested in Roman sources. Armstrong looks to ancient sources for an explanation, such as the writings of Clement, Eusebius, and John Chryostom, finding that all these writings do not offer any clues about what happened to Paul after what is described in Acts. Armstrong then outlines literary approaches of modern interpreters to account for Luke's silence with theories of foreshadowing and intentional ambivalence, finding them lacking clear evidence. He concludes this section with a brief statement of his own position, which is that the reason scholars find the ending of Acts enigmatic is that they uncritically accept a late dating.

Armstrong begins the constructive part of his project in the remaining chapters. He first addresses the ending of Acts and Jewish responses, presenting the scholarly positions on the ending as a picture of either tragedy and rejection of the gospel or one of hope. To reinforce the case for a hopeful picture that supports his early date, Armstrong adds a discussion of Isaiah 6:9-10, which appears in Acts 28:26-27. He then attends briefly to the Jewish background of Paul to correct the Christian biases

in other scholars who favor the tragic view of the end of Acts. In Armstrong's reading, the reference to a "fattening of the heart" from Isaiah signals not a condemnation of the Jews, but rather a "deprivation in wisdom" that reflects the experience of the apostles and the Pauline mission in particular and a promise of future redemption. In terms of Paul's Jewish identity in Acts, Armstrong sees Paul as a Jewish hero whose mission was "quite substantial" in Rome (p. 137). He cites this as further evidence for the early date of Acts, as tensions between Jews and Christians emerge at a later date.

To remedy the lack of attention to textual variants of Acts, Armstrong looks to Western and other textual variants outside the Nestle-Aland to explore how these contribute to the social history and theological challenges of early Christianity. He concludes that the Western variants do not present any major theological, social, cultural, or historical differences when compared with the Alexandrian text. Because the Western scribes tend to expand on Acts, that they do not do so at the end of Acts points to a collection of variants of the same period in history, around 64 CE. Given the combined silence on Paul's fate and the catastrophic events in the Roman empire during the 60s and 70s CE, Armstrong concludes the early dating is the simplest explanation. He writes, "No credible historian, whether ancient or modern, much less the 'first Christian historian', could invent such an ending if these events had already passed. If such a fabricated ending can be justified by popular literary theories then the book of Acts should be relegated to a fictional class of literature that ignores the historical context" (p. 155).

The most compelling chapter of the book is chapter eight, in which Armstrong situates Acts within a pre-70 CE social-historical context. Centering on events in Rome and Jerusalem, Armstrong argues that the great fire of Rome of 64 CE and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE are not mentioned or developed because they had not yet occurred when Luke is writing. Evaluating the linguistic evidence, he sees any references to the siege of Jerusalem in Luke or Acts as reflecting the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. Moreover, he states the entire narrative of Luke-Acts depicts a city functioning according to business as usual, including an active Sanhedrin and office of the High Priest. He acknowledges that the gospel narratives, too, do not describe the destruction of the Temple other than in the form of prophecies, nor do they mention the fire of Rome, which seems only to further Armstrong's aims in asserting that the most logical explanation is that these events had not yet happened. He devotes considerable attention to Roman historical accounts of the fire by Tacitus and Suetonius. However, he does not engage scholarship on ancient

historiography for these sources, nor for Josephus, and thus uncritically accepts the details of these reports as historically factual.²

Dating Acts in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts contributes to long-standing and unresolved debates centered on the historicity of Acts in its careful parsing of claims by scholars dominating the majority view. Too often New Testament scholars neglect to revisit claims by 19th century scholars whose views are taken as self-evidently true. Armstrong's work revisits this earlier work and that proceeding from it to demonstrate that many open questions remain with not just the dating of Acts but its accompanying level of historical detail about the early Christian movement. The thrust of his argument tends to be critical of other scholars' work rather than constructive of his own interpretation, and his focus is a bit narrow at times with respect to the merits of literary and narrative criticism and the impact of new methods such as social memory theory. Nevertheless, Armstrong's work takes seriously the historical content of Acts and persistently pursues the difficult problems that are too often dismissed as intractable.

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2. For instance, Becker considers of the role social memory theory and Hellenistic literary tradition in the formation of early Christian texts. Cf. Becker, 2017.

TRANSFORMATIONEN STADTRÖMISCHER HEILIGTÜMER



ARNHOLD, MARLIS (2020). *Transformationen stadtrömischer Heiligtümer während der späten Republik und Kaiserzeit*. Contextualizing the Sacred, 10. Turnhout: Brepols, 382 pp., 110,12 € [ISBN: 978-2-5035-8835-3].

ANNA-KATHARINA RIEGER
UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ / UNIVERISTY OF WARSAW
anna.rieger@uni-graz.at

WANDERING THROUGH MODERN ROME, ONE OF THE MOST intriguing and ubiquitous impression is sacred architecture: many of the temples and sanctuaries of Roman Republican and Imperial times are still to be found in various stages of preservation – the sunken area at the Largo di Torre Argentina, the temples below the church of San Omobono, the temples that have been converted into churches, such as the temple of Portunus or the three of the Forum Holitorium. Their architectures have, to a certain extent, outlasted the religious changes through Medieval and Early Modern times and underwent changes induced by socio-political transformations and urban growth; however, many others disappeared completely, such as the temples in the Porticus Octaviae. The transformation into churches was often the most effective preservative measure.

The multifaceted transformations of sanctuaries and temple buildings in the city of Rome between late Roman Republican and Imperial times is the topic of the dissertation by Marlis Arnhold turned to a book in the series of “Contextualising the Sacred”. It deals with complicated excavations, with a times scarce evidence, with manifold categories of sources and the often scattered documentation concerning one of the most dynamic times Rome has seen. A.’s approach to a selection of sacred buildings and precincts of the *urbs Roma* is of great value for understanding the “*Sakraltopographie*” (sacred topography) of the city in a period when a new political system, the Principate, seems to have been the logical choice for a highly competitively acting elite following decades of civil war. The study, which has been conducted under the supervision of renowned experts of Roman architecture and Roman religion, Henner von Hesberg (Cologne) and Jörg Rüpke (Erfurt), where A., as a member of the Research group on “Religious Individualization in Historical Perspective” received her PhD in 2013, succeeds in discussing puzzled evidence and in bringing up differentiated interpretations.

With her approach to the topic, she brings together strands of research on temple buildings in Republican and Imperial times – periods when so many new buildings made their appearance in a new style – and on certain areas of the city of Rome and their building history through time.¹ In the context of recent urbanistic studies, she is able to draw for example on the work of Jon Albers (2016), who analysed the changes between Republican and Imperial times in the *Campus Martius*.² A. is interested in how the urban fabric interplays with temple buildings and their elite donators – either families or the emperor – and in how the newly built or already existing temples and sacred precincts reacted to other buildings and developments in their surroundings, as well as to the major impacts of destruction. She is interested not only in the spatial and architectural solutions, but relates them to purposes of self-representation, staging and orchestration of ritual practices (“*Inszenierung*”, a term which A. uses frequently), and not primarily the religious functions of the buildings and squares.

1. On Republican phases see Ziołkowski, 1986 and 1992; Zevi, 1987; and for Imperial times Zanker, 1997; Palombi, 2014; on certain areas in the city of Rome see Köb, 2000; Marcattili, 2012; Albers, 2016.

2. Arnhold (with Schmölder, 2009, Albers, 2016, or the author of this review: Rieger, 2004) stands in the German tradition of dissertations in Classical Archaeology that restudy evidence, use archival material and revise building and urban history adding new approaches and interpretations. In combination with the high-quality research which mainly the Italian, French and Spanish colleagues in Rome accomplish, such studies still add to the Roman archaeology.

It is important to note A.'s use of the plural "transformations", since how the architecture changes cannot be explained in a one-fits-all model (p. xxvi), but rather, in a way that the kind of changes depends on location, type of building, or sometimes also deities and donors. Moreover, her interest is to differentiate the role of the emperor as builder and commissioner of architectural and urbanistic transformations in the *urbs* (p. xxiii). One of A.'s hypotheses is that architectural forms changed to a concentration on interior rooms because of the increasing density of the urban fabric, while ritual acts had to be kept visible so that temples remained experienceable in the urban environment (p. xxi). The changes in the commissioners and financing agents involved, on the one hand, individuals from magistral officials to members of the imperial court and associations, on the other. These changes had impacts on the buildings, their spatial layouts, inventories, and functions (p. xxvi).

This approach broadens the – in scholarly discourse cemented – view on self-representation of elites in Republican Rome, architectural styles in the early Principate or on religious change to integrating the dynamic urban fabric of the city of Rome, the changing utilisations of buildings and squares and the broader urban public. Following the examples of Filippo Coarelli and, recently, Penelope J.E. Davies, the agents behind the architectures obtain a more prominent role in A.'s argumentation as well as religious practices as acts of communication – not only with the deities, but also with an urban audience.³ Here she is indebted to her background at Cologne and Erfurt, and ideas in von Hesberg's as well as in Rüpke's work,⁴ even though – as a Classical archaeologist dealing with an architectural topic in an urban context where (documented) small finds are not the rule, but the exception – she rightly bases her arguments on evidence of urbanism, religious practices in general, and of donators and commissioners as agents.

The book is divided into two parts. In part I, A. describes her eight case studies (pp. 3-307, chapters 1-8), where each example ends with a paragraph on the transformations; in part II, she offers a synopsis of these architectural transformations (pp. 307-369) and comparatively interprets the temple areas under the aspects of "Architekturen" (architectures, pp. 307-316, ch. 9), to continue with "Räumlicher Wandel von Heiligtümern" (spatial changes in sacred objects, pp. 317-324, ch. 10) and end with "Nutzungen und Funktionen" (uses and functions, pp. 325-328, ch. 11) as well as "Kultfragen" (cult issues, pp. 329-352, ch. 12). The length of the

3. See the various publications of Filippo Coarelli in the bibliography of A., and Davies, 2017.

4. *E.g.* Frevel & von Hesberg, 2007; Rüpke, 2015; Albrecht *et al.*, 2018.

second section in part II on architectures with 50 pages attests not only to the focus of the author, but also to certain limitations of the evidence. This structure along the case studies instead of the interpretative topics is rightly explained at p. xxvi because there have been too few studies on the Imperial phases of the sanctuaries, which this book now delivers. An English summary, an index of places, keywords, persons and sources repr. ancient authors accomplishes the book, which is with 167 figures and plans of a high quality very well illustrated.⁵

The following synopses of the case studies differ in terms of scrutiny and details. They can only pick up specific points or phenomena of the sacred areas and temple buildings which do not reflect the depth and details of A.'s arguments as well as some – in Roman archaeology long debated – locations, reconstructions, or labels for buildings, areas, architectural decoration, and statues.

The Area Sacra at the Largo di Torre Argentina (pp. 1-71) in the central *Campus Martius* forms the core piece of the book. The reason for this is its complexity not only of remains but also of later conservation measures as well as its density with four temples surviving into Late Antiquity, which make them a good example of transformations. The first two temples in an individual precinct date from the end of the 4th / beginning of the 3rd cent. BCE (temples A and C), two more (temples B and D) were added in the first half of 1st cent. BCE. At a slightly earlier period changes were made in their squares following on a considerable rise of the terrain, so that the altar platforms finally were given up (p. 8). All four temples faced east, and they formed a part of an even longer series of temple buildings that lined a street or thoroughfare (Abb. 2). Questioning the assumption that the area was planned as a consistent square with temples already in the renovation phase in the first half of the 1st cent. BCE, as a result of the fire of 111 BCE, A. presents the hypothesis that the burnt material found in the area was not adequate to support the theory of a fire, but is more likely to have originated from intentional depositions (pp. 12-13). The changes in the late 2nd and 1st cent. BCE consisted in the limitation of the precinct of Temple C for making space for Temple B and the turn of the altars that now face the temples are interpreted

5. Plans, photographs, and collages of plans are of high quality. Her way of marking the various parts of the sanctuaries (as e.g. in Abb. 72) with letters in the photograph is a very sufficient way to explain the complex contexts ("Befunde"). It is only in the course of reading and coming across the often-mentioned visibility ("Sichtbarkeit"), perceivability ("Erfahrbarkeit"), orchestration ("Inszenierung"), exclusivity or openness of the sacred areas, that the reviewer wished to see a sketch of a reconstructed view e.g. of the situation in the Forum Holitorium. A.'s description show that she has clear images about the urban situation in 3D in her mind, however such sketches would have been far beyond what one can manage in such a dissertation.

by A. as “*einander zugewandte und entgegengesetzte Positionen*” (facing and opposite positions) (p. 15) that still refer to the distancing in the former phases when the altars stood on the large platforms but staged in a different way. Moreover, the common dating of Temple D as erected in the 2nd cent. BCE is questioned by A. proposing the erection in the 1st cent. BCE because of analogies in the crepis of the temple to the temple of Portunus (pp. 3 and 26).

Temples C and B were donations dedicated by two high ranked magistrates (A. Postumius Albinus: p. 11; Q. Lutatius Catulus: p. 20), and these are the agents A. is interested in. Especially with the rather progressive architectural form of the rotunda encircled by columns dedicated to *Fortuna huiusce diei* by Q. Lutatius Catulus and probably a porticus as limitation, the question of how such a building is transformed in later phases and with it the practices of memorizing former phases and uses are at stake (pp. 16-21).⁶ The finds of the colossal statue of Fortuna are a sign of how cults may have come to an end or how the meaning of buildings changed: the statue was buried in the 1st cent. CE – and, despite having stood in the Temple B for some generations, the image could not be adapted to the form and intention of the building in the 1st cent. CE.⁷

The next phase embraces the construction of the Pompey’s Theatre to the changes under the emperor Domitian (55 BCE to 80 CE). In this time – so A.’s claim – changes on the building complex of the four temples, but also changes in the temple surroundings such as the Theatre of Pompey and the Hekatosylon to the west and north, had the result rendering the area as a coherent square. This is a case in point to bear in mind when considering urban sacred locations standing in highly dynamic environments, where changes in the adjacent areas have an inevitable effect on (p. 28). The layout of Temples A and B was changed thoroughly (Abb. 22) when A became a *peripteros*,⁸ and the cella of B was enlarged by closing the intercolumnia.

At the end of these major changes, another rise of the level in 80 CE implies a stepwise diminution of the height of the temple buildings (Abb. 23).⁹ A harmonisation takes place, with the square receiving a travertine pavement (*CIL* VI 40456, p. 58), which by the way connects these temples to a coherent precinct (also the one

6. A. does not follow the idea that the walls under the Temple B belong to a *sacellum* of Juno Caprotina (as recently repeated by De Stefano, 2017, Tab. 215b).

7. The statue she reconstructs – following the excavator Marchetti-Longhi – with a stick instead of a *cornucopia* in the right arm (pp. 22-23).

8. See recently Zink, Ceci & Pflug, 2021 and their reconstruction as half-column *dipteros*.

9. See also Zink, Ceci & Pflug, 2021, Fig. 2, phase 3a and b.

in Via delle Botteghe Oscure). Finally, in the first half of the 2nd cent. CE the overall appearance of the area sacra was standardised by a porticus of pilasters at the eastern side (pp. 57-60, Abb. 29). It might have included the thoroughfare and did not cut off the precinct. However, the differentiation of temple buildings at the rear of a square, where the cellae and the altars have been squeezed, plays a minor role, while rooms of various functions and additional installations (pp. 40-45) were added between the temples. The spaces and functions are more rigidly allocated.¹⁰ The past of the area and its architectural language are no longer of interest (p. 56), even though A. is reluctant to be more detailed about the analogies to early imperial buildings (p. 57). She rightly admits, however, that we do not know to what extent any traditions related to the Area Sacra at the Largo di Torre Argentina remained alive either orally or in practices.

One of the main points A. makes in this detailed treatise on the area sacra is the homogenisation and the “pressure” exerted by the surrounding urban fabric on this sacred area. A. ascribes to the emperor the large-scale measures during the last quarter of 1st cent. CE in the layout and the square together with the major development of raising the level and paving the square (p. 57). A tension between inside and outside respectively in front of or behind the temples as structuring elements is the means of the early Imperial phase, altered from the tiered spaces of the Republican phase. The implications for religious practices are described by A. as a juxtaposition of audience and the one active in the ritual (p. 71).

The next chapter (ch. 2) is dedicated to the temple in the Via delle Botteghe Oscure at between the Via di San Nicola de’ Cesarin and the Via Celsa, which represents the continuation of the Largo Argentina precinct, since it is located to the east of the area and opposite to the temples A and C in the 1st cent. BCE, even though no uniform pavement – at this period still in tufa – has been found (a possibility which would appear logical, since some form of thoroughfare must be assumed, p. 78). This building is closely related to the question of the location of the *Villa publica*, the *Porticus Minucia Vetus* and the *Porticus Minucia Frumentaria* erected in 80 CE, which is discussed by A. in the last ch. 12 of “Kultfragen” – which are functional questions in this case, related to the *annona* under the surveillance of the *censores* located at the *Villa publica*. It is a fragment of the *Forma Urbis Romae* which helps to allocate findings of columns on a podium (Via Celsa, p.

10. It is not necessarily clear if the closeness of the altars to the *cella* can be interpreted as an attempt (pp. 44-45) to be closer to the deities. This shift could also be the wish of differentiated areas in a denser urban fabric as A. also evokes.

77) as well as in the basements of later houses. This sacred building serves A. to show the heavy impact late Republican donations of temples had on the central *Campus Martius*, in contrast with the Largo Argentina-temples, however, it is an individual podium temple of immense dimensions (p. 80). Situated parallel to the Area Sacra of the Largo Argentina, it was surrounded by a porticus in late Flavian times showing the same changes of the level (p. 87). The extension and organisation of the sacred areas in middle and late Republican times is comparable to the area at the Largo del Torre Argentina: The surrounding walls of the precinct were neither high nor solid, whereas the altar area in front of the temple was very wide. In the interpretation, in contrast to the first case study, the focus lies on the different impacts resulting from different functions – the temple at the Via delle Botteghe Oscure served as the archive of the *censores* and was not the gift of an individual donor. More phases of transformation and adaptations can be seen in its architectural décor (pp. 82-84) in order to adapt *kymata* and columns to a more classicizing style. However, from the 2nd cent. CE onwards, little seems to have changed in the spatial layout and the architecture could still meet situational requirements (p. 89) – in contrast to the buildings at the Largo di Torre Argentina, where new rooms for congregations were provided.

In chapters 3 and 4, A. moves on to the *Forum Holitorium* and the *Forum Boarium*, where a certain density of sacred buildings can be noted already from Republican times onwards, which continued into Late Antiquity. The temple of Portunus close to the Tiber is the second oldest in this area. A. underpins with this case study the impact of the densifying urban fabric around the temple building as well as shift in the agents who initiated or were beneficiaries of renovations.¹¹ The (well preserved, but also reconstructed) prostyle *pseudoperipteros* visible today represents the newly erected building of the 1st cent. CE of a Republican predecessor. It experienced level rises, especially in course of measures against Tiber floods. Even though the materials used – tufa and travertine – reflect an Italic tradition, the Ionic order, and other details (e.g., the *geison*) demonstrate the will of the commissioners – who remain a little vague – to build something modern (pp. 96 and 105). Structures, especially to the left and right of the podium (Abb. 63-65), enclose the temple in not clearly dated phases, whereas at its back a room was equipped in early Imperial times (p. 100). The renovation in the 1st-2nd cent. CE, with the use of marble stucco and an enrichment of

11. To reconstruct activities of a *collegium* of the wreath binders which she reads from the passage of Fronto, *Ep.* I 7, 2 (p. 101) seems far-fetched. Those selling wreaths at the temple do not have to be a *collegium*.

the architectural elements (pp. 101-105), is another example of an “update” a temple building receives, which A. explains as the intention to satisfy the requirements of a more local audience. Whether the limited space was perceived as a loss of exclusivity (p. 99) might be discussed. Yet, it shows that the embedding of religious rituals in the urban fabric changed and took place in a denser environment.

The so-called Area Sacra di San Omobono is dealt with in ch. 4 and is another complicated find spots of Roman temple buildings with a long history, but also some deep stratigraphies.¹² In this case A. goes back to the archaic phases of the twin temples and discusses the terracotta decoration and its allocation to building remains (pp. 117-123, which is not of high relevance for the question of later urban transformation). The main point is that until the 3rd cent. BCE this area has not changed very much, with “only” honorific monuments having been added (for M. Flavius Flaccus and Camillus). In the 3rd to the 1st cent. BCE the temples underwent alterations but no limitations on and of the podium, as is the case with the Largo-Argentina temples (pp. 133-137). The high podia are not only intended as protection against flooding¹³, but for increasing the exclusivity and access, respectively the visibility provided for the rituals taking place at the altars. Moreover, the presence of various members of the senatorial elite is more readily understood because of some literary sources. Like the Largo Argentina, this very old sanctuary was a site of regular competition among various noblemen (e.g., L. Stertinius, Ti. Sempronius Gracchus), but in contrast to the area in the *Campus Martius* it remained unaltered down to the time of Hadrian. A. argues against Coarelli’s reconstruction of the buildings in this phase with *cellae* without *pronaoi* but instead with a quadrifrons arch between them which allows for cellae in the same size as in Republican times on a platform with the altars probably at the same positions (pp. 141-142).¹⁴ The “commodification” of the sacred area in the 2nd cent. CE, comparable to the temple of Portunus, can be seen in the *tabernae* in the platform (pp. 143-144), that were in use until the 4th cent. CE. However, A. is able to show that this does not apply to the ones at the northern and eastern sides, which were only added in the 3rd cent. CE (p. 145). Different dynamics for the utilisation

12. Footnote 143 (pp. 127-128) shows how little we know about personal and cultic rituals even though we have sacrificial remains from the archaic period (pp. 123-124).

13. Brocato, Ceci & Terrenato, 2018.

14. The reviewer is in favour of a solution with a corridor-like hall in front of the temples and a marked passage in the middle because of similarities with the Quattro Tempietti at Ostia (see Rieger, 2004, fig. 57, taken up by Pensabene, 2007, fig. 36 and 90 with n. 326 with columns instead of more closed façades), even though at San Omobono it was not meant as a daily passage (see pp. 143-144, with Abb. 91).

of space in and around the temple platform are active. What she can neatly demonstrate is that this old sacred place remained frequented as the centre of the triangle between the *Forum Romanum*, *Forum Holitorium* and *Forum Boarium*, rather than as an extraordinary place of self-representation (pp. 145-148 and 152), whereas the “*gesamtrömische Identität*” (the overall Roman identity) that A. claims to be established through the architectural design and the products that one could buy nearby seems to go too far in the opinion of the reviewer.

Chapter 5 revolves around the three podium temples in the *Forum Holitorium* opposite the temple of Portunus. They were originally four and are, like the ones at the Largo Argentina, erected as donations by triumphators to Juno *Sospita*, to Janus, to Spes and to Pietas between the 3rd and 2nd cent. BCE, with the northern and central in Ionic order and the southern in Tuscan order. With this case, A. presents temples where members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty were active in the renovations during the early Principate.¹⁵ It is not by chance that the first pages deal with passageways, porticus and connections in this spatially extremely interlaced area of valleys, hills, the river and urban buildings, which hosted so many different people and activities (pp. 157-161, continuing at p. 167 to Trajan’s times). Her observations offer a very useful and profound analysis of this very specific urban space, which had an impact on the architecture and activities at the temples. The chronology of the three visible temples is discussed, in which she sees some minor problems in the differentiation between the early Augustan and late Augustan periods as the time for their re-erection (pp. 167-168). Apart from the block-like appearance against the porticus behind them, they emerge distinctly because of the high podia on which they are erected. *Tabernae* were implemented in the middle temple of Juno *Sospita* (pp. 169-170) as was done in the northern temple, which was the highest and the “slimmest” of them. Any action taking place in front of the temples on the podia was thus “elevated” above the pedestrians and spectators, when they were not able to watch from the surrounding porticus.

The adaptation to the less compressed architectural style of the early Augustan period is described very elegantly by A. in the case of the central temple of Juno (pp. 180-181). The southern temple dedicated to Spes refers in its sober architectural style to Republican predecessors.¹⁶ A play with orders, stucco, and material as in the case of the temple of Portunus can also be observed here. Whoever was in charge of planning

15. The reference to the very useful Abb. 71 which shows the situation of the temples on the *Fora Boarium et Holitorium* could have mentioned earlier, not only at p. 158.

16. See also Maschek, 2012, pp. 196 and 221, with n. 1028.

and commissioning the renovations of the three temples, they demonstrated a high sophistication in alteration, change, and also in maintaining tradition. Republican appearance was also preserved, *e.g.*, in the northern temple. One can easily follow A. in assuming the Imperial court was the user of these buildings to demonstrate continuity in times of change, a suggestion attested to especially in the case of the Temple of Spes. From an urbanistic point of view, these temples in the centre of the dense conglomerations of the *Forum Holitorium* represented a fix point in the daily rushes. In how far they were only recognisable if action took place, might remain open (p. 183).

With the *Porticus Octaviae* and *Porticus Philippi* at the *Circus Flaminius* A. moves back north and deals with, those off-set sanctuaries which retained their isolated position even in the densifying city, comparable to the temple in the *Via delle Botteghe Oscure*. As in the previous chapters, A. offers a very good description of the urban situation of the two porticus at the *Circus Flaminius*, where she argues for the correlation of all the buildings in the area starting from the 3rd cent. BCE, which are connected to the various assemblies (*concilium plebis*, *contiones*) and *ludi*. The temple buildings as such are here less important than their porticus around, the exhibited works of art, and their functions for *collegia* and donators. The temples at the northern end of the *Circus* were erected progressively from the beginning of the 2nd cent. BCE, first the one of the *Hercules Musarum*, followed by *Juno Regina* (by M. Aemilius Lepidus) and in the second half of the century by *Jupiter Stator*. Together with this temple, the donator Q. Caecilius Metellus also builds the *Porticus Metelli* (replaced later by the Augustan *Porticus Octaviae*) around it and the temple to *Juno Regina*. The *Porticus Philippi* was added in the 1st cent. BCE around the rotunda (or open precinct – see Albers, 2015) of *Hercules*. The architectural predecessor to the quadriporticus in this area was the *Porticus Octavia* (by Cn. Octavius) built in the first half of the 2nd cent. BCE. The entire neighbourhood was characterised by mercantile functions – in addition to the socio-political role and the *ludi* on the large open area of the *Circus*.

The statues and imagery of the sanctuaries are dealt with along the discussion of the literary sources where A. delineates in a very good style (pp. 190-192) of how to read these, how “urban legends” about Greek art in Roman contexts could have come into existence, and how they may have been perceived in mid- and late Republican and early Imperial times.¹⁷ A. argues that the northern part of the *Porticus Octaviae* was used as a closed room for assemblies, whereas a focus lies on the reconstruction of the historizising aspects of the Imperial phase of the building

17. Pp. 336-337 is another passage, where A. shows a good sense of interpreting literary sources.

as a gallery and knowledge basis re-appropriated by the emperor (pp. 205-207). A. follows Viscogliosi's reconstruction of the southern part of the porticus without *exedrae* (different to Lauter who assumes *exedrae*) and reconstructs the hall as open and permeable to the *Circus Flaminius*.¹⁸ In Severan times the closure of the southern part of the porticus (which was a relatively common phenomenon) has the effect of establishing an architecture focused on the interior (p. 210). However, with the probable exhibition of paintings of the Parthian successes of Septimius Severus, characterizing the notion of great deeds (p. 211), the temples and their cults or rituals play a minor role, and their intention is the the creation of a collective reference point and identity.

A. briefly touches on the question of the decades in which the temple of Hercules *Musarum* could have been dedicated by M. Fulvius Nobilior, following Coarelli (1997), in order to dwell more on its form, function and the quadriporticus around it. This was built in Augustan times by L. Marcius Philippus (based on a precinct surrounded by walls, p. 254) including a reconstruction of the temple on the podium and the rather particular postaments filling the square of the quadriporticus (as visible on the FUR 31 hh).¹⁹ The postaments were intended to provide bases for the statues that were already present on the site, while all paintings that have already been mentioned, could have been exhibited in the porticus, whereas the enclosure in its entirety became the seat of the *collegium poetarum*. It was explicitly designed as a kind of "center of the arts", including the calendar controlling of time, since *fasti* were put on display there. Despite Marcius Philippus not having been related to the Imperial house, he controlled the processes in the functions of architecture and its "Innenleben" (inner parts) – instigated in Augustan times – that included control of history (the myths of Troy, Alexander, *elogia* works of poets), and also the scheduling and recording control of time (*fasti*, calendar). It is less the architectural decoration or materials as in the cases before but the concept and the imagery that attest to the "programmatic" changes.²⁰

Protected from the impacts of the urban processes taking place around them, the temples remained untouched in their spatial layout over the centuries; only the décor

18. See Viscogliosi, 1999 and Lauter, 1980-1981.

19. This reconstruction is different from that proposed by Albers, 2015, p. 41, n. 14 who assumes no adjacent buildings at all.

20. In Abb. 117, A. could have marked the short piece of curved wall that is preserved of the circular cella of the temple. In this case she does not provide a plan of the reconstruction of the porticus with the temple, since so very little has been preserved of this structure. One only wonders why she did not refer to the reconstruction of Albers, 2015 as a hypaethral area made in 2015, since he referred to her dissertation.

was renovated and the porticus changed. Cultic practices and their effects are only mentioned marginally (p. 123), since they are less prominent and could only have been understood when one had entered the porticus. However, because of spatial settings and the furnishing with statues and works of art representing socio-political values, they both possessed and continuously maintained a conservational, historicizing function. Whether we can go as far as A. does in describing this as an attempt to create a “stadtrömische kollektive Identität” (collective identity of the *urbs Roma*) or even “*gesamtrömische kollektive(n) Identität*” (pan-Roman collective identity) (p. 226) must be left to her readers. The intense mercantile utilisation of the vicinity outside the porticus in Imperial times certainly had a strong impact on the establishment of a collective identity for the neighbourhood.

The temples of Apollo and Bellona *in circo* are both the last examples from the *urbs Roma* and also the example par excellence that present the grandeur of certain magistrates in Republican times and of the subsequent Imperial impact on their donated temple buildings. The temple of Apollo is one of the oldest presented in this study together with the temples of San Omobono. It was erected on a comparably high podium to that of San Omobono. The temple of Bellona is later, since it was donated by Ap. Claudius Caecus at the beginning of 3rd cent. BCE. The first was for long the only temple dedicated to Apollo in Rome with significant implications for the cult activities (p. 236) and used for the assemblies of the Senate. The second of the two – the temple of Bellona – was the point where every *imperator* left or returned to Rome before and after a campaign, and it was used for *comitia* at least down to Sullan times (p. 240). Spatially and functionally, they are closely intertwined, although A. does not describe the intervening spaces in detail but refers to a recent study of the area.²¹

The temple and the veneration of Apollo in a *cultus graecus* but in a temple with Tuscan order, is representative for the Roman way of adapting religion (p. 241). C. Sosius rebuilt it at the end of the 1st cent. BCE, and henceforth the temple became the example *par excellence* of early Augustan style in architectural design and décor. In its Augustan phase white and coloured marbles are employed in the architectural decoration (pp. 244-248) comparable to the temple of Mars *Uitor* on the *Forum Augustum*, which clearly indicates that the renovation had a close relationship to the Imperial court.

The less detailed, more sober elements of the temple of Bellona belong to the mid-Augustan period and represent the less overwhelming phase of the Principate

21. Vitti, 2010.

(p. 252) characterised by the “*gesetztere und gefestigere Erscheinungsbild*” (more settled and solid presentation), evoking “*Beständigkeit und Kontinuität*” (persistence and continuity). In the triad with the theatre of Marcellus at a time of dynastic consolidation, this area was rendered a hot spot of the new architectural style imposed on century-old buildings. Thus, the transformations are rather architecturally intelligible than self-explicable in religious terms at this place, where rituals, especially those for military purposes, were still taking place. One only wonders whether the frieze with triumphal scenes and sacrifices in the cella could have added to its religious character.²²

The eighth chapter (pp. 255-304) is dedicated to the Area Sacra dei Templi Republicanani at the city of Ostia.²³ With this very detailed chapter, A. closes the circle referring back to the area of the Largo di Torre Argentina. The precinct at a crossroads, situated outside the Ostian *castrum*, is a good example for the transformations from the 3rd cent. BCE through to those of Late Antiquity: A. traces the growth of the harbour city, urbanistic requirements, as well as adapted religious practices and changing agents. The kind of evidence at hand is distinct from the Roman examples, since she can also draw on inscriptions, reliefs, and sculpture. However, differences, which A. could have mentioned in more depth, were also to be found in the character of the city itself, which is not that of a center of political power which Rome was, but a community having a very direct and close relationship to it.²⁴ The way in which alterations and densifications took place in the triangular area comprising the temple of Hercules, the temple of the Ara Rotonda and the temple of the Republican Altars is clearly explained. From the Republican area where notables of the city had been active (*e.g.*, C. Cartilius Poplicola with an honorific statue) to the sanctuary in Imperial times, not only did the street level increase considerably, but also many buildings were added. The area literally sinks below the Flavian and Severan street level; spatial claims shift and space is obtained by the addition of new functional units such as *thermae*, which might have been part of a reorganisation and financing of the sacred place (pp. 257-297). The 3rd cent. CE is characterised as, in some of the Roman examples, by the concentration to the inner spaces. More obvious than *e.g.*, at the Largo di Torre Argentina is the activity of associations or *collegia* and the spaces

22. See Huet, 2011.

23. The precinct was studied by Bolder-Boos, 2017 as spin-off of her dissertation. A. has also dealt with the various sacred space of Ostia where her knowledge of Ostia and her interpretation of sacred architecture have already brought to bear on the evidence.

24. There is strong tension at Ostia between independence of and extreme closeness to Rome, especially in the field of religion, see Rieger, 2004.

they might have used, since they can be better distinguished architectonically (Abb. 155, F). The engagement of *collegia* in the cults of the temple(s) might be related to the presence of the emperor's cult of some kind (p. 298).²⁵ However, the urban, social, and religious dynamics at work in Ostia might have called for different adaptations. A sign for this, that could have been stated more clearly, are the living quarters, which close the eastern side of the sacred area in the times of Trajan.

Despite leaving the ground of the *urbs Roma*, A. offers with this fine-grained analysis of the changes in spatial settings and active people in the Area Sacra dei Templi Republicanici at Ostia a good and comparable example to her case studies from the *urbs Roma* regarding the interrelations of religious architecture, meaning, society and urbanism. Her command of the history and pitfalls of the research and excavation on Ostia is as profound as her knowledge of the archaeology of Rome.

After the exposition of the temple areas the author dives into comparative interpretation firstly on the "Architekturen" (architectures) (ch. 9, pp. 307-316, where the plural embraces the layouts as well as the architectural décor), then into a synopsis of the spatial transformation of sanctuaries ("Räumlicher Wandel von Heiligtümern", ch. 10, pp. 317-324), which focuses on surrounding areas, summarizes then utilisation and functions ("Nutzungen und Funktionen, ch. 11, pp. 325-328) to end with questions of the religious practices ("Kultfragen", ch. 12, pp. 329-352).

A.'s inclusion of the "*Umfeld der Kultbauten*" (environment of the cult buildings) (p. 311), which have long been overlooked in research, that aims at clean reconstructions and labels on (often idealising) phases offers a new perspective on politics, urbanism, and religion in Rome. Her distinction between the visible borders of sanctuaries such as porticus which visitors or urban dwellers could experience and real *temene* is a welcome consequence of her approach and makes the temporal aspects of sacralizing demarcations when rituals or anything else happened at or in the temples in her argument stronger.

She points to the economization of the building work for renovations (pp. 307-309) or to the gradual disappearance of sacred areas as a result of increasing street levels, to which alterations in the décor, the layout, and the areas around were the answers of the agents and commissioners (p. 308). Architectural elements as well as materials can add a "*Gegenwartsbezug*" (reference to the present) (p. 308) to old religious buildings as answers to the new socio-political order of the Principate but also to the growing urban environment. Proportions, appearance, closedness or openness

25. Only at p. 315 she discusses the role of *collegia* and *corpora* more detailed. I would make a distinction between the *collegium poetarum* and one at Ostia, since they differ in their official status.

as well as visibility are the architectural instruments with which architects, craftsmen and commissioners worked and which the urban dwellers could experience. She phrases these strategies as medialisation and hierarchisation of spaces accompanied by a hierarchisation of the activities that take place (p. 310) as it could be seen at the Largo Argentina-temples and the twin temple of San Omobono in late Republican times; her observations on the position of the altars, also in the Ostian examples are insightful for understanding ritual, participants and the change from an exclusivity that was maintained during Republican times to a visible (even not accessible) presentation of religious practices in Imperial times (pp. 318-319). Her claim is that the urban fabric calls for individual architectural solutions.

The chapter on “Kultfragen” discusses the arguments pro and contra certain attributions of temples to gods or gods to temples, where A. demonstrates her command of sources, archaeological contexts, and opinions. For the reader it might be difficult to correlate the descriptions of the architectural remains *e.g.*, of the temples at the Largo Argentina, with this discussion. However, A.’s structure has the advantage that one does not get lost from the start in complex treatises on ascriptions, but one can follow her focus on the urbanistic transformation.

The conclusion (pp. 353-354) underpins the problem of how to deal with old religious buildings in a growing city with a new political system and elite, which in Republican times was the magistral elite looking for prestige, influence, and distinction from their peers. Alterations that were added to the religious buildings in the Republican phases, so A.’s claim, were meant to enable the correct performance of cult practices as answers to crisis situations. In imperial times this attitude shifted to buildings, or respectively to restorations as a continuous disguise of authority through the use of a new architectural language and by establishing continuity through the historicizing of old sacred places. Now *splendor* and expensive decoration – so the argument of A. – are to be seen as symbols for the ability of the emperor to cope with, or even to bring about real improvements to difficult or new situations. On the other hand, such changes could have been strategies in order not to overlook places, such as the temples at the *Forum Holitorium*, which had been encroached upon by the urban growth.²⁶

26. It is a huge task for a young researcher to discuss the views of doyens of urban history of Rome and public religious architecture (P. Carafa, A. Carandini, F. Coarelli, P. Gros, E. La Rocca, G. Marchetti Longhi, N. Terrenato, F. Zevi) and all recent studies, and it is one in which A. succeeds. Solely for the reason of completeness I point to publications that only appeared in the course of copy-editing the manuscript – the study of Zink, Cenci & Pflug on the Temple A at the Largo di Torre Argentina (2021) which they reconstruct as halfcolumn-*dipteros*, van Haepelen on the *fana et delubra* (2019), or Moser on altars in Republican Rome and Latium (2019).

A. offers a profound study of sanctuaries in Republican and Imperial Rome and their transformations and relates this to religious practices for which they served as their primary function. Some musing about future trajectories of research on religion in the *urbs Roma* might be added that open out from this study: A recurring theme is the “*Inszenierung*” (orchestration) and the perceivability of the sacred places. The question of what people walking and working in Rome perceived as a cult area is of course crucial and A. offers many points where this can be made comprehensible. However, at some points the stage character of cult practices degrades the visitors as well as every-day idlers to passive consumers or mere spectators, whereas the magistrates performing rituals are conceived as actors on these stages, which are the temples. A shift to the spaces constructed by practices, following the claims of the spatial turn, could be the next step in looking at the various, now well-defined phases of transformations in the sanctuaries and urban spaces.

Beyond the buildings and their architectural design and decoration research could proceed to a differentiated view on religion and urbanity in Rome by integrating a different material category – the small finds, made from pottery, glass, metal, or bone. Deposits of such material found at the temple of Apollo *in circo* are not yet published (p. 236) as it is the case with early layers of ritual remains at San Omobono (p. 123). Their potential for being deciphered as reflections of religious practices could on the one hand add to the urbanistic transformations, but could on the other hand reveal more about what A. calls “*alltägliches Kultgeschehen*” (everyday cult activities) (pp. 318-319, see also pp. 325-326): This material as remains of religious practices could offer insights into agents beyond the noble families, the emperor or organised associations or *collegia*.

Related to the issue of associations, which became a socio-political and religious player in Imperial times, is the question concerning the imperial cult, in which they play a fundamental role. A. does not explicitly touch on that, which is motivated in the choice of sacred places that do not offer many hints of any veneration for *Divi* and *Divae* (*Porticus Octaviae*, Apollo *in circo*, Republican temples at Ostia). One wonders how a study on the transformation of the city’s landscape might appear, where many and various grades of intrusion of the Imperial house can be imagined between the negative evidence and the prominent examples of individual temples for the *Divi* or institutions such as the *Lares Augusti* in the neighbourhoods (see e.g., Palombi, 2014; Rieger, 2020).

Yet, these are only additional ideas instigated by the intriguing study offered by A. In the first place, scholars of Rome’s sacred topography, of urbanism and architecture are contended with a thorough and comprehensive study of sanctuaries with the focus on their transformations. A. offers a fresh perspective on the dynamics of the

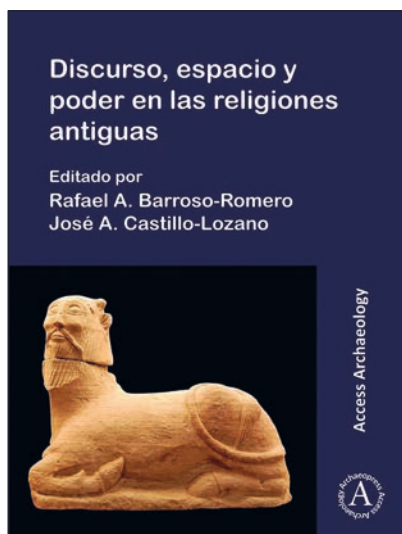
city as well as urban and political powers as reflected in religious buildings and succeeds in bringing complex contexts of Roman archaeology of religion to the readers.

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DISCURSO, ESPACIO Y PODER



BARROSO-ROMERO, RAFAEL ANTONIO & CASTILLO-LOZANO, JOSÉ ÁNGEL (eds.) (2021). *Discurso, espacio y poder en las religiones antiguas*. Oxford: Archaeopress Access Archaeology. 212 pp., 40 € [ISBN: 978-1-78969-884-8; ISBN: 978-1-78969-885-5 (e-Pdf)].

PAULA ARBELOA BORBÓN
 UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA
 paula.arbeloa@unizar.es

DURANTE EL TRANCURSO DE LA EDAD ANTIGUA, LAS RELIGIONES, junto con las diversas formas de poder político adoptadas, configuraron a través de estrategias de diversa índole una multiplicidad de discursos que se vieron perpetuados en los espacios de las comunidades que los integraban. Es decir, una serie de narrativas desarrolladas por las diferentes sociedades para explicarse a sí mismas y justificar sus propias estructuras de poder, que en última instancia ejercieron una notable influencia en los espacios, especialmente en aquellos de naturaleza pública. Bajo esta premisa, discurso, espacio y poder es el trinomio conceptual que vertebra el presente volumen

colectivo centrado en las religiones de la Antigüedad, cuya novedad reside en ofrecer una aproximación a los elementos históricos mencionados a tenor de nuevas metodologías y aportes teóricos.

La obra, editada por Rafael Antonio Barroso-Romero (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt – Universidad Complutense de Madrid) y José Ángel Castillo-Lozano (Universidad de Murcia), ha sido publicada en 2021 por la prestigiosa editorial oxoniense Archaeopress en la serie “Access Archaeology”, que permite una mayor difusión de los trabajos académicos y a su vez contribuye a la transmisión del conocimiento científico. Se trata de una publicación nacida gracias a la diligencia y profesionalidad de la Asociación de Jóvenes Investigadores en Ciencias de las Religiones (AJICR), que viene desempeñando una loable labor en el estudio del fenómeno religioso desde 2016. Dado que uno de los fines prioritarios de dicha asociación reside en impulsar un espacio común donde se permita intercambiar proyectos y estudios en los distintos ámbitos relacionados con la Historia de las Religiones, en esta obra se integran contribuciones de investigadores con una amplia trayectoria académica con aportaciones significativas de investigadores noveles. En total, la obra que el lector tiene entre sus manos está compuesta por catorce trabajos, que firman un total de dieciséis especialistas en la materia, procedentes de once centros de investigación y universidades nacionales e internacionales.

Tras el prólogo de Ramón Soneira Martínez (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt), el libro se estructura en tres secciones de diferente extensión, estando cada una de ellas organizada de manera cronológica. La primera de ellas, “Aspectos teóricos”, incluye dos contribuciones que constituyen un conjunto de sugestivas e interesantes nociones introductorias acerca del tema objeto de estudio. De este modo, el primer texto, a cargo de los editores Rafael Antonio Barroso-Romero y José Ángel Castillo-Lozano, es una puesta en valor del discurso creado por las élites en la construcción de lo sagrado en las comunidades de época antigua, a la par que da cuenta a través de determinados ejemplos tomados de la Antigüedad Tardía de la estrecha relación existente entre discurso, espacio y poder (pp. 7-17). La segunda contribución es firmada por Francisco Díez de Velasco (Universidad de La Laguna), quien presenta un interesante estudio sobre el papel desempeñado por las emociones en la violencia religiosa (pp. 18-31). Considerando episodios pertenecientes en su mayoría a la historia contemporánea de España, Díez de Velasco articula su ensayo en torno a tres elementos (identidad, diferencia y privilegio) con el encomiable propósito de “*building an approach that seeks to overcome the perplexity produced by the seemingly counter-intuitive combination of violence and religion*” (p. 18).

La segunda sección del libro aquí reseñado, “Discursos sociorreligiosos en la configuración del poder”, es, sin duda, uno de los *key points* de este volumen, no solo

por el rigor científico de cada una de las nueve aportaciones que lo componen, sino por la variedad de culturas antiguas que abarca. En el primer capítulo, Iria Souto Castro (Universidade de Vigo – Universidad de Alcalá), ofrece un análisis del estado de la cuestión sobre el nacimiento de la religión personal en Egipto, sugiriendo que, aunque las prácticas de piedad personal crecieron exponencialmente durante la Revolución de Amarna, desde fines del Imperio Antiguo se produjo un *continuum* en la religión individual (pp. 32-42).

Jorge García Cardiel (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) dedica su contribución a la escenografía arquitectónica y escultórica de las sepulturas ibéricas en pos de una aproximación a los discursos simbólicos que las comunidades íberas y sus élites configuraron sobre el tránsito al Allende (pp. 43-59). A través de la sistematización de la iconografía funeraria, traza la evolución que experimentó el imaginario escatológico ibero desde época arcaica hasta el siglo V a.C. Desde la coexistencia de una variada gama de animales psicopompos de corte orientalizante, hasta el predominio de un modelo único de conductor de almas: el del fallecido cabalgando a lomos de un caballo con la aquiescencia de la divinidad protectora.

A continuación, Ana Canalejo Palazón (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), dirige su interés al dios griego Hermes, que es analizado dentro del arquetipo de *trickster* en base al contenido del *Himno Homérico IV* (pp. 60-68). Tras introducir algunas características, tanto comunes como generales, que permiten definir esta categoría de análisis, narra aquellas aventuras a partir de las cuales Hermes es considerado un *trickster*, destacando acciones como la invención de la lira, el robo de las vacas de Apolo, y el engaño a miembros de su familia, entre otras.

Por su parte, Alberto Bernabé Pajares (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), contribuye al volumen con una cuidada revisión de los testimonios más significativos conservados para el estudio de la teología negativa en el pensamiento presocrático, prestando especial atención al poeta y filósofo Jenófanes de Colofón (pp. 69-80). Las fuentes analizadas por el autor, que son fruto de la insuficiencia de la religión griega tradicional, elaboran nuevas versiones de lo divino contradictorias a las ideas relativas de los dioses del pensamiento griego. No obstante, ninguno de estos postulados filosóficos fue capaz de eliminar una de las principales creencias griegas, la concepción de las divinidades como primordialmente objetos de culto.

La contribución de María del Pilar García Arroyo (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia) se enmarca en el debate historiográfico irresuelto sobre el llamado “chamanismo griego”, fenómeno para cuyo reconocimiento la autora establece una serie de criterios, como, por ejemplo, el dominio de la técnica del *vuelo del alma* y la realización de curaciones mágicas (pp. 81-93). Expuestos los rasgos, analiza críticamente los elementos chamánicos existentes en la biografía de Pitágoras sugiriendo

finalmente que la imagen transmitida por los autores clásicos tardíos como Porfirio y Jámblico sobre este matemático y filósofo griego se adecúa en mayor medida a la de un líder carismático (*theios aner*), fundador de una nueva escuela filosófica.

En la siguiente aportación, Diego Meseguer González (Universidad de Zaragoza) acomete el estudio de un pasaje del *Satiricón* de Petronio (131, 4-7) centrado en un complejo ritual contra la impotencia sexual sufrida por el protagonista de la novela, Encolpio (pp. 94-107). A partir del análisis de las operaciones efectuadas por la maga-curandera Proseleno, en ninguna de las cuales actúa sobre el miembro viril del cliente, el autor reflexiona sobre la posibilidad de que el rito narrado por Petronio destinado a deshacer el maleficio sufrido por Encolpio no constituyera un encantamiento para curar la impotencia, sino que se tratara realmente de un hechizo de magia apotropaica.

Guillermo Iznaola Rodríguez (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) dedica su texto a las dos obras principales de pedagogía retórica de Cicerón y Agustín de Hipona: *De Oratore* y *Doctrina Christiana IV*, respectivamente (pp. 108-120). Así pues, con el propósito de determinar (o no) la influencia ciceroniana en las aportaciones del obispo de Hipona dedica las líneas que siguen a narrar detalladamente los arquetipos de ambos autores clásicos respecto al orador ideal en función de tres principios básicos, a saber: ética, formación y estilo.

Sergio López Calero (Universidad de Córdoba) se centra en Alejandro Magno, uno de los personajes más significativos e influyentes de la Historia (pp. 121-134). Concretamente, proporciona un interesante estudio de síntesis sobre el proceso de divinización del macedonio a partir de las fuentes literarias, analizando de manera crítica las evidencias documentadas relativas a su deificación en el panteón griego con anterioridad a su fallecimiento, entre otros aspectos de interés.

Cierra la nómina de contribuciones de la segunda sección del volumen, el sugestivo estudio de Aitor Boada Benito (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), que, sirviéndose del martirio del obispo Policarpo de Esmirna, considerado como el primer relato hagiográfico cristiano, reconstruye el discurso identitario del cristianismo en la Antigüedad Tardía, configurado en su mayoría por oposición al poder político del Imperio Romano, bajo el marco metodológico de la corporeidad (pp. 135-146).

La tercera y última sección del volumen, “Apropiación religiosa del espacio y proyección del poder”, se compone de tres capítulos cuya piedra angular son las modificaciones experimentadas por el espacio a causa de la influencia de los discursos político-religiosos. La primera contribución es autoría de los investigadores José Luis Ramos Soldado y Eduardo Ferrer Albelda (Universidad de Sevilla), que proponen un novedoso análisis sobre el registro zooarqueológico hallado en cinco santuarios tartésicos del Bajo Guadalquivir: *Onoba* (Huelva), El Carambolo, *Caura*, Carmona y Montemolín (Sevilla), a la vez que reflexionan acerca de la trascendencia

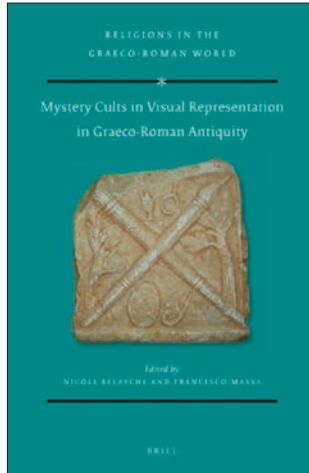
de los sacrificios de animales en lugares de culto como base de la celebración de los ritos de comensalidad (pp. 147-163).

Por su parte, el trabajo de Jörg Rüpke (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt), enmarcado en una tendencia historiográfica novedosa como son los estudios sobre la materialidad de la religión, se centra en el culto celebrado en honor a los *Lares compitales* en las encrucijadas y *vici* de la ciudad de Roma en época imperial, para concluir con la propuesta de una nueva visión e interpretación de la institución de los *vicomagistri* y de las aspiraciones de sus miembros a la luz de las fuentes materiales y epigráficas (pp. 164-177).

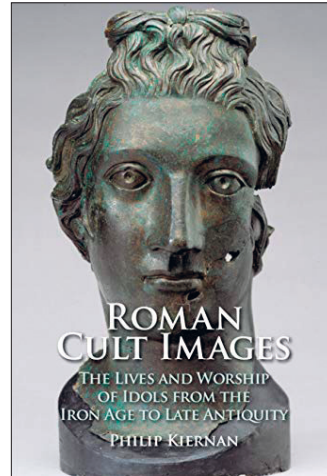
El volumen finaliza con la aportación de José Antonio Molina Gómez (Universidad de Murcia) cuyo artículo discute en profundidad y de un modo magistral la visión que el cristianismo primitivo desarrolló sobre la naturaleza, cuyos preceptos originales hundían mayoritariamente sus raíces en la cosmovisión pagana (pp. 178-207). En este sentido, aunque los autores cristianos no otorgaron a la naturaleza una concepción divina, siguieron reconociendo su sacralidad y vieron en ella el mejor heraldo de Dios.

Por último, cabe señalar un aspecto que, a mi juicio, debe valorarse muy positivamente. Esta miscelánea de estudios se ha visto enriquecida por su aproximación multidisciplinar pues las aportaciones han sido enfocadas desde una amplia variedad de disciplinas científicas como la Historia de las Religiones, la Filología, la Historia y la Arqueología. Igualmente, no cabe duda de que nos encontramos ante una colección de ensayos novedosos y de gran valor científico para los estudiosos de las sociedades antiguas en su conjunto, y que en la historiografía de habla castellana viene a llenar un vacío historiográfico sobre el trinomio conceptual discurso-espacio-poder. Las diferentes contribuciones, al abarcar una amplia cronología y contextos culturales diversos, facilitan la comprensión de las realidades y creencias tan poliédricas que subyacen en la articulación de las religiones pasadas. En definitiva, de todo lo comentado con anterioridad se infiere que se trata de una obra de gran calidad, aspecto que garantiza *per se* su publicación en la editorial académica Archaeopress.

MYSTERY CULTS IN VISUAL REPRESENTATION & ROMAN CULT IMAGES



BELAYCHE, NICOLE & MASSA, FRANCESCO (eds.) (2021). *Mystery Cults in Visual Representation in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, 194. Leiden & Boston: Brill. 237 pp., 96 € [ISBN: 978-9-0044-3932-0].



KIERNAN, PHILIP (2020). *Roman Cult Images. The Lives and Worship of Idols from the Iron Age to Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 377 pp., 109,24 € [ISBN: 978-1-1084-8734-4].

SYLVIA ESTIENNE
ECOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE - ANHIMA
sylvia.estienne@ens.psl.eu

LE VOLUME DIRIGÉ PAR NICOLE BELAYCHE ET FRANCESCO MASSA s'inscrit dans une série de publications issues d'un programme de recherche consacré « aux cultes à mystères et à leurs agents culturels », mené conjointement par le centre de

recherche français AnHIMA (UMR 8210, CNRS) et des équipes suisses des universités de Genève, puis de Lausanne entre 2014 et 2018. La rencontre liminaire avait paru dès 2016 dans la revue *Mètis* ;¹ les résultats de ces travaux ont donné lieu à deux autres livres, également parus en 2021.²

Dans ce volume, les mystères restent clairement au cœur des problématiques abordées, même si elles le sont au prisme de la culture visuelle. Dans une introduction consistante (« *Mystery Cults and Visual Language in Graeco-Roman Antiquity : An Introduction* », pp. 1-37), Belayche et Massa définissent clairement les différents enjeux épistémologiques. Si les mystères se caractérisent par leur secret, la perception visuelle y joue un rôle important : ils visaient autant à voiler qu'à dévoiler. Dans quelle mesure la médiation des images peut-elle être explorée pour rendre compte de cette expérience spécifique ? Les images ne peuvent plus aujourd'hui être considérées comme de simples illustrations, elles ne donnent aucun accès direct aux rites eux-mêmes ; mais elles constituent un discours sur les mystères dont les logiques nécessitent d'être explorées. Après avoir replacé le projet dans les récents renouvellements historiographiques, les deux auteurs évoquent deux exemples comme point de départ des réflexions : des autels tauroboliques d'Attique et les fresques de différents *mithraea*.

La première section est consacrée aux images des mystères dionysiaques, de loin le corpus iconographique le plus fourni et le plus étendu dans le temps, mais également le plus hétérogène. Les trois contributions évitent néanmoins le risque de dispersion en se concentrant sur des dossiers délimités, tant du point de vue des supports que de la chronologie.

Cornelia Isler-Kerényi (« Comment figurer l'ineffable, comment lire les images ? », pp. 43-61) ouvre la réflexion avec une étude de l'imagerie attique sur céramique à l'époque classique, élargissant brièvement le point de vue à la céramique apulienne du IV^e s. av. n. è. S'appuyant sur la définition des mystères élaborée par Burkert,³ elle part du postulat que l'iconographie attique offrait à un large public l'occasion de se remémorer des émotions expérimentées dans le cadre de mystères bacchiques largement diffusés. Elle explore ainsi plusieurs motifs (la fabrication du vin, les paires d'yeux ou la figure de Sémélé, etc.) qui lui semblent pouvoir faire allusion de façon métaphorique à l'expérience des mystères, qu'elle définit comme un parcours initiatique, orienté vers la mort.

1. Belayche & Massa, 2016.

2. Belayche, Massa & Hoffmann, 2021 ; Massa & Belayche, 2021.

3. Burkert, 1987.

La contribution de Stéphanie Wyler (« Le phallus qui cache le mystère ? Les images dionysiaques dans les décors romains : à propos d'une fresque de la *Domus Transitoria* », pp. 62-79) précise le questionnement : il ne s'agit pas de chercher dans l'imagerie dionysiaque romaine la trace de rites mystériques (ou du moins de rites initiatiques, précise-telle avec prudence), mais de reconstruire les logiques de la culture visuelle des Romains pour mieux éclairer ce que l'on peut savoir de ces mystères. Non sans audace, elle propose un cas d'études a priori désespéré, une fresque dionysiaque, mise au jour en 1720 dans un nymphée souterrain de la *Domus transitoria* de Néron ; très mal conservée, la frise peut être reconstituée grâce à des aquarelles de Bartoli, peu exactes dans le détail. L'examen de ce dossier méconnu permet de ouvrir une réflexion méthodologique sur le statut sémiotique des images.

Janine Balty clôt le parcours chronologique par un dossier consacré aux « Échos de la Teletè dionysiaque dans la mosaïque romaine tardive » (pp. 80-98). L'examen de deux séries d'images sur des mosaïques syriennes, les unes du milieu du III^e s. de n. è. (Zeugma), l'autre du VI^e s. de n. è. (Sarrîn) permet de conclure à la persistance de la référence aux pratiques initiatiques dionysiaques dans la culture de l'Antiquité tardive, sous une forme allégorique.

La seconde section de l'ouvrage s'inscrit dans une perspective de déconstruction, revenant sur des séries d'images utilisées aux siècles précédents pour restituer les liturgies mystériques, quand les sources écrites étaient jugées insuffisamment explicites.

Le traitement de la documentation iconographique des *mithraea*, déjà évoquée dans l'introduction (pp. 33-36), en offre un bon exemple. Philippa Adrych rappelle ainsi comment la diversité de la documentation mithriaque a été sous-estimée, au profit d'une interprétation normative et standardisée. Elle s'appuie sur les représentations des grades initiatiques, notamment celles du *mithraeum* de Felicissimus à Ostie, pour remettre en perspective le modèle des sept grades, attesté seulement à Ostie et à Rome.

Richard Veymiers revient sur les représentations des époques hellénistique et romaine longtemps conçues comme des illustrations de mystères isiaques, largement reconstruits à partir du livre XI des *Métamorphoses* d'Apulée. Rares sont les identifications qui résistent à un réexamen critique. Dans un deuxième temps, R.V. s'intéresse aux stratégies visuelles déployées par les Anciens pour mettre en image les pratiques mystériques, sans remettre en cause le caractère secret et ineffable qui les caractérise. Il choisit d'étudier un motif de la *cista*, une corbeille fermée, souvent associée à un serpent, propre à l'imagerie gréco-romaine des mystères. Rarement mise en scène dans des scènes liturgiques, la ciste apparaît avant tout comme un marqueur symbolique de l'initiation, réinvesti par les Isiaques.

La troisième et dernière section est centrée sur le rôle joué par certains objets ayant une connotation mystérique dans différents types de représentation. Sont-ils

de simples marqueurs visuels, ayant une valeur de synecdoque ? Peut-on y voir de véritables signes iconiques, transcrivant dans le langage visuel une référence spécifique aux mystères ? Partant du modèle éleusinien qui semble avoir joué un rôle fondamental dans la diffusion des pratiques mystériques, Anne-Françoise Jaccottet choisit de suivre sur différents supports la représentation de trois objets utilisés lors des mystères : le faisceau de l'initié éleusinien, le *liknon* (le panier plat) et la *cista* (la corbeille). Le premier reste un marqueur discret, limité à la céramique attique ; il ne constitue pas un signe iconographique aussi efficace que le *liknon* ou la *cista*, dont la fonction permettant à la fois de cacher et de dévoiler les objets sacrés est une métaphore du rituel.

Françoise Van Haeperen s'interroge sur la dimension mystérique du culte de la Mater Magna romaine en analysant les représentations de ciste sur certains monuments métroaques. À travers les associations mises en œuvre dans les images, souvent funéraires, elle réfléchit à la fois aux usages rituels d'un tel objet et à sa portée symbolique. La relative rareté du motif dans l'iconographie métroaque justifie toutefois une prudence certaine de l'interprétation.

L'ensemble de l'ouvrage constitue un volume de taille modeste, mais dont la cohérence est renforcée par l'apparat introductif, mettant en valeur les enjeux généraux et les dynamiques communes. La manipulation est facilitée par la présence d'*indices* (sources littéraires et épigraphiques ; noms). En plus de la bibliographie citée de façon exhaustive dans les notes des articles, une bibliographie sélective permet de faire ressortir les principaux ouvrages sur la thématique. L'édition est soignée et les illustrations de taille et de définition correctes offrent un bon rendu dans l'ensemble (sauf la figure 8.7).

L'enquête s'inscrit à l'intersection de deux champs récemment renouvelés, celui des cultes à mystères d'une part, qui, à la suite de Walter Burkert, s'est progressivement défait de l'héritage de Franz Cumont, et d'autre part celui des images, suivant un « *iconic turn* » rapidement évoqué par Belayche et Massa (pp. 25-28). La perspective est originale et vient compléter utilement un angle mort des recherches en cours autour de la catégorie des mystères et de leur place dans les sociétés antiques. Si la plupart des contributeurs prennent soin de replacer leur enquête dans cette perspective, seuls quelques-uns d'entre eux en revanche reviennent sur les logiques et les dynamiques qui sous-tendent la notion de « langage visuel ». Par ailleurs, la majorité des images envisagées proviennent de contextes extérieurs aux rites eux-mêmes (domestiques, funéraires, etc.), rendant certes plus complexe la compréhension des arrière-plans de la culture visuelle des Anciens, mais permettant également de mettre l'image à distance du rituel lui-même. Dans la perspective d'un véritable *iconic turn*, il serait sans doute utile de prendre également en compte les effets réciproques :

qu'apportaient les images au déroulement et à la perception des rituels mystérieux ? Le dossier des images mithriaques, qui s'inscrivent souvent dans l'espace même du rituel, aurait de ce point de vue mérité un traitement plus approfondi. C'est le seul petit regret qu'on peut formuler à la lecture de ce beau volume.

* * *

Les images de culte, ou plus exactement les « idoles », sont au cœur de la monographie de Philip Kiernan. Plus que le titre général de l'ouvrage (*Roman Cult Images*) – sans doute jugé plus consensuel par l'éditeur – c'est le sous-titre (*The Lives and Worship of Idols from the Iron Age to Late Antiquity*) qui nous renseigne sur les perspectives adoptées par Philip Kiernan [désormais P.K.]. En assumant le terme d'« idoles », fortement connoté par le discours chrétien, l'auteur entend dégager ces objets de toute perspective artistique ou muséographique pour les étudier comme des objets de culte, c'est-à-dire au prisme de leur fonction religieuse et sociale, sans préjuger de leur iconographie (pour lui, le terme idole permet de ne pas exclure les représentations aniconiques). Il fonde sa démarche sur les travaux de Alfred Gell,⁴ en définissant les « idoles » comme des objets dotés d'une certaine agentivité sociale (*social agency*) qui les distingue des autres « images culturelles ». C'est également à un anthropologue⁵ qu'il emprunte l'approche biographique qui structure les différents chapitres du livre (« The Birth of Cult Images », ch. 2 et 3; « The Life of Idols », ch. 4 et 5; « The Dead of Idols », ch. 6). Mais le point de vue reste avant tout celui d'un archéologue, cherchant à remettre en contexte une catégorie spécifique d'objets. Au-delà de la définition des « idoles », c'est également la question de l'organisation des espaces de culte en Gaule qui intéresse l'auteur.

L'introduction (pp. 1-24), bien informée et efficace, fait utilement le point sur les travaux récents et les choix assumés de l'auteur. Le propos est volontairement clair et accessible, suivant le parti pris annoncé en fin d'introduction de s'adresser à un large public, sans verser dans l'érudition ou les controverses scientifiques. C'est là d'ailleurs un des points forts de l'ouvrage, de lecture aisée et appuyé sur de nombreuses illustrations (près d'une centaine) ainsi que sur d'utiles tableaux récapitulatifs (pp. 11, 32, 48 et 282). La clarté du discours ne doit pas néanmoins masquer certains partis pris moins bien assurés que d'autres.

4. Gell, 1998.

5. Kopytoff, 1986.

Si l'on suit volontiers P.K. sur la définition des « idoles » comme des objets déterminés à la fois par leur place centrale dans les lieux de culte et leur *social agency*, on peut s'interroger sur la pertinence d'une approche biographique, a priori plus efficace pour des objets singuliers que pour une catégorie d'objets aussi vaste que diverse. La délimitation géographique de l'étude aurait également mérité un meilleur fondement méthodologique. La majeure partie de l'ouvrage porte en effet sur les régions gauloises et germaniques (cette restriction du champ d'études aurait pu d'ailleurs être explicitée dans le titre même de l'ouvrage), choix dont la justification est sommairement expédiée en une page (p. 22). P.K. rejette, de façon certes salutaire, la question complexe des identités provinciales, mais sans pour autant justifier réellement son choix, ni faire place aux débats qui sous-tendent en partie son enquête (sur les images dans la religion gauloise ou sur les temples romano-celtiques, etc.).

Le ch. 2 (« The Birth of Cult Images. Early Rome and the Iron Age ») est à mon sens l'un des plus convaincants de l'ouvrage. Le passage d'un culte « primitif » aniconique à la vénération de statues de culte anthropomorphes sous l'influence de modèles étrangers, schéma explicatif déjà très largement remis en cause pour le monde grec et pour Rome elle-même, est ici démonté de façon approfondie pour les religions gauloises, en s'appuyant sur des contextes archéologiques récents, prudemment explorés et bien illustrés.

Le ch. 3 (« The Birth of Cult Images. Continuity and Innovation in the Imperial Period ») envisage de façon tout à fait stimulante la question de la matérialité des images cultuelles, notamment la prévalence des artefacts en bois ; dans un deuxième temps, la typologie proposée (« *native and combined iconography* » / « *classical iconography* » = *gréco-romaine* / « *Mystery cults and Mithraic cult images* ») est plus convenue, mais reste utile pour appréhender la documentation archéologique de ces régions de façon globale.

Le ch. 4 (« Idols at Home ») porte sur l'autre question centrale de l'ouvrage, l'emplacement de l'« idole » dans le temple et la distinction avec les autres « images cultuelles ». Le cœur du chapitre est consacré au temple dit romano-celtique et permet d'examiner à partir de contextes bien documentés les questions de visibilité, de hiérarchie et d'accès des « idoles », ainsi que celle de l'évolution de ces dispositifs dans le temps.

Le ch. 5 (« Idols in Action ») s'intéresse à la délicate question des interactions des visiteurs avec les « idoles » dans le cadre des rituels (statues ointes, habillées, baignées, nourries, portées en procession, etc.). À l'examen des sources écrites – déjà bien étudiées – P.K. ajoute l'étude de quelques rares contextes archéologiques, ainsi que le témoignage indirect de reliefs et une rapide comparaison de nature anthropologique avec les pratiques hindoues.

Le ch. 6 enfin envisage la « mort » des « idoles », en examinant trois types de processus de destruction (destruction par les barbares, destruction par les chrétiens et procédures de fermeture rituelle par les païens eux-mêmes). La plupart des exemples s'inscrivent certes à la fin de l'Antiquité, entre la fin du III^e s. de n. è. et l'époque médiévale, mais les contextes documentés archéologiquement permettent de mettre en lumière la variabilité des processus et la diversité des acteurs ; seul point commun finalement : les modalités de destruction et de mise au rebut attestent indirectement de l'*agency* qui était encore celle de ces idoles au moment même de leur destruction.

On pourrait sans doute discuter certains choix de l'auteur, notamment celui du terme d'« idole », non pas tant pour ses connotations polémiques que pour l'usage qu'en fait P.K. La distinction entre l'« idole », objet central doté d'*agency*, et les autres « images cultuelles » présentes dans les sanctuaires ne paraît pas toujours opératoire, notamment dans les ch. 2 et 4. Il n'en reste pas moins que le pari de P.K. est au final plutôt réussi. La dimension régionale de l'enquête est confortée par la qualité de la documentation archéologique réunie et sa relative cohérence d'un chapitre à l'autre. Les questionnements proposés s'inscrivent dans les renouvellements actuels de l'histoire des religions et de l'archéologie, sur la matérialité des rites notamment, et contribueront certainement à enrichir les débats actuels autour de la *lived religion*.

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RITUELS RELIGIEUX ET SENSORIALITÉ



CASEAU CHEVALLIER, BÉATRICE
& NERI, ELISABETTA (eds.)
(2021). *Rituels religieux et sensorialité
(Antiquité et Moyen Âge). Parcours de
recherche*. Milano: Silvana Editoriale,
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4858-0].

ADELINE GRAND-CLÉMENT
UNIVERSITÉ DE TOULOUSE 2 JEAN JAURÈS
adeline.grand-clement@univ-tlse2.fr

CE COPIEUX OUVRAGE, RICHE DE 485 PAGES, EST LE FRUIT de plusieurs années de recherches collectives (un colloque et des séminaires tenus entre 2015 et 2017) menées dans le cadre du Labex « Religions et sociétés en Méditerranée » (ResMed). La vingtaine de contributions qui y sont rassemblées portent sur la façon dont les stimulations sensorielles participent aux rituels et construisent des voies d'accès au divin dans différentes traditions religieuses. L'empan chronologique couvert est vaste, puisque l'on navigue de l'Antiquité (principalement grecque, avec des incursions chez

les Hittites et les Romains) jusqu'à la fin du Moyen Âge, autour de la Méditerranée. Le volume présente l'intérêt de réunir des études qui traitent des polythéismes ainsi que des monothéismes (essentiellement le christianisme, avec ses branches orientales et latine) et qui proviennent d'horizons disciplinaires variés : histoire de l'art, philologie, anthropologie historique, histoire des sociétés antiques et médiévales, musicologie, archéologie sont tour à tour convoquées.

Il s'agit là d'une collaboration réussie entre les deux éditrices qui ont mis à profit leur propre domaine de compétence : Béatrice Caseau est spécialiste d'histoire religieuse byzantine et travaille sur les sens depuis de nombreuses années ; Elisabetta Neri est archéologue et étudie la culture matérielle en lien avec les systèmes de représentation entre Antiquité et Moyen Âge. La palette des rituels envisagés dans le volume est vaste, comprenant tant les grandes célébrations publiques que les gestes de dévotion privés : des sacrifices sanglants de type alimentaire aux liturgies chrétiennes, de l'initiation mystérieuse aux rituels de consécration, des cérémonies processionnelles aux rites guérisseurs. Le lien avec les discours théologiques est abordé dans plusieurs des communications, permettant d'articuler normes, représentations et pratiques : il est par exemple question des débats antiques sur le rôle des sens comme voie d'accès au divin. Le livre fournit ainsi un excellent aperçu de la pluralité des modalités de sollicitation des sens lors des dévotions et des rituels, de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge. La diversité des méthodes et types d'analyses reflète la dimension interdisciplinaire du volume. Processions, hymnes, danse et chant choral, encensement, gestes de dévotion sont autant de terrains d'enquête permettant d'éclairer les éléments d'une « grammaire sensorielle » spécifique. On mesure à la lecture du volume l'intérêt d'une approche par le temps long : cerner des évolutions et mettre en lumière la vitalité des traditions religieuses, animée par une dynamique articulant tradition et innovation, entre récupération et rejet, dans le souci de se positionner les unes par rapport aux autres.

Le livre, bien illustré, comporte, outre les 22 contributions (principalement en français), une introduction puis un premier chapitre historiographique (« La question de la sensorialité en histoire antique et médiévale ») dans lequel les éditrices fournissent une synthèse solide de l'état des recherches dans le domaine des études sur le sensible, en particulier en histoire des religions. C'est une ressource précieuse pour les personnes qui souhaiteraient entreprendre des études dans ce domaine – domaine en pleine expansion, comme en témoigne la publication récente du volume *Sensorium. The Senses in Roman Polytheism* (2021). L'un des intérêts de l'ouvrage dirigé par Béatrice Caseau et Elisabetta Neri réside dans son approche pluridisciplinaire, nous l'avons dit, ce qui permet de croiser des données documentaires de nature différente. Si les textes littéraires restent les principaux matériaux exploités dans le

livre, les images et les artefacts sont largement pris en compte, notamment lorsqu'il s'agit de sortir des discours normatifs et d'approcher des formes de piété plus populaires. Plusieurs études recourent ainsi à l'anthropologie de l'image : elles ne s'intéressent pas seulement aux décors eux-mêmes, mais aussi aux objets, aux matériaux qui les composent et à leurs usages : calices, patènes, encensoirs à chaînes, éventails, amulettes et boîtes à médecine, orgue-carillon, mosaïques pariétales...

Le volume comporte deux sections distinctes : l'une rassemble les textes qui portent spécifiquement sur l'Antiquité ; l'autre, nettement plus fournie, concerne le Moyen Âge et a été divisée en sous-sections thématiques. La première d'entre elles insiste sur les combinaisons et associations intersensorielles mises en œuvre lors de performances liturgiques (la vue et l'ouïe jouant souvent un rôle prééminent). Les sections suivantes se concentrent davantage sur un sens en particulier, sans pour autant oublier totalement les autres : vue (couleurs et lumières) ; ouïe ; toucher ; olfaction. Le goût ne donne pas lieu à une partie spécifique et reste finalement peu présent dans le volume – ce que les éditrices relèvent d'ailleurs dans la conclusion finale. Il aurait par exemple été intéressant de traiter du jeûne (mentionné dans la mise au point historiographique), car il offre la possibilité d'explorer un cas de régulation sensorielle – la rupture du jeûne constituant évidemment un moment charnière, par exemple dans le cas des Mystères d'Eleusis. On ajoutera que les stimulations sensorielles ne se réduisent pas à une distribution en cinq sens – c'est par exemple la proprioception qui est sollicitée lors des processions ou des danses, abordées à plusieurs reprises dans le volume.

Il est bien entendu impossible de tout résumer ici. Chaque étude est indépendante, dotée de sa propre bibliographie, et circonscrite à un dossier documentaire précis, soigneusement contextualisé. Si le volume dispose d'un index des noms de lieux, un index thématique aurait sans doute permis de faire ressortir les (nombreux) croisements entre les articles. C'est le cas par exemple de la danse, du *choros* et du tourbillonnement (processus par lequel le divin peut devenir « sensoriellement accessible » aux fidèles, suivant les mots de Bissera Pentcheva, p. 190) ; de l'incubation et des rites de guérison ; des encens (entendus au sens générique de substances aromatiques brûlées) ; d'un lieu comme Sainte-Sophie, qui a donné lieu à de nombreuses *ekphraseis* ; des cloches, qui se répandent en Occident, et finissent par rivaliser avec les simandres employés dans le monde byzantin, à partir du milieu du Moyen Âge. Un autre découpage au sein du livre (mais on sait combien il est difficile d'organiser les chapitres dans un gros volume collectif !), n'isolant pas l'Antiquité au début, aurait pu mettre davantage en exergue les phénomènes d'évolutions, de changement, de transfert, de rivalité entre des traditions religieuses, ainsi que les différences qui se dessinent entre Orient et Occident. Les éditrices du volume ont néanmoins pris

soin de faire figurer à la fin de l'introduction des éléments d'analyse et des pistes de réflexion confrontant les cas d'étude, prenant ainsi un peu de hauteur. Elles suggèrent des voies d'exploration possibles des différences entre cultures religieuses, par exemple sur les formes de manifestations d'une piété tactile, ou sur l'usage de marqueurs olfactifs ou sonores spécifiques dans un contexte de cohabitation ou de compétition. On comprendra que la période tardo-antique constitue de ce point de vue-là un excellent laboratoire. Dans leurs propres études, les éditrices insistent sur de tels processus. L'article qu'elles ont rédigé à six mains, avec Mareva U, sur les processions médio-byzantines, établit clairement que ces dernières reprennent des éléments de la *pompè* sacrificielle grecque ou de la *pompa* romaine, mais en éjectent les dieux (excepté la Victoire quand il s'agit d'une procession publique !), les animaux, et introduisent de nouveaux signaux visuels (notamment la croix). Dans son étude des mosaïques tardo-antiques (IV-VI^e s.), Elisabetta Neri montre que la chrysographie, pratiquée par les Romains, prend une valeur nouvelle avec le christianisme car elle sert désormais à rendre sensible la présence divine. Quant à Béatrice Caseau, lorsqu'elle traite des méthodes d'encensement dans la liturgie chrétienne, elle suggère que les changements de pratiques, notamment le recours à des encensoirs à suspension, ont pu être liés à une reconnaissance de la physiologie propre de l'odorat : le phénomène d'accoutumance assez rapide de l'olfaction implique de cibler un objet, une personne, un espace à encenser, à un moment précis de la liturgie, si l'on veut garder l'effet de saillance perceptive.

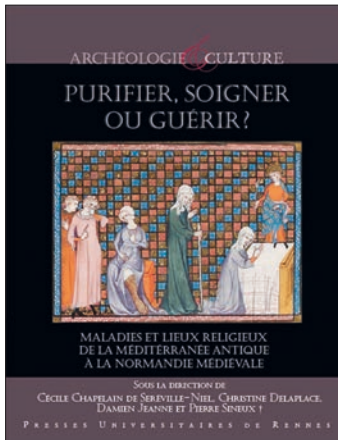
Juste un mot, avant de terminer, sur les études formant la première section consacrée à l'Antiquité. Un élément qui ressort concerne la difficulté de composer avec des sources lacunaires, qu'il s'agisse de reconstituer une procession isiaque, le déroulement des Mystères d'Eleusis, les séances d'incubation, une cérémonie en l'honneur de Dionysos... Se pose en outre le problème du vocabulaire et de la traduction des termes liés aux sensations – patent lorsque l'on tente d'identifier les substances aromatiques brûlées dans l'Anatolie hittite par exemple, comme le fait Alice Mouton. Il y a de fait toujours une part d'interprétation, d'extrapolation pour deviner ce qu'a été l'expérience, le « frisson sacré » si l'on reprend les mots de Paul Veyne, cités par Ludivine Beaurain (p. 127). Cette dernière recourt d'ailleurs à un parallèle ethnographique pour inférer la fabrication de gâteaux spéciaux à l'occasion des festivités, mais elle ne peut guère aller plus loin en matière d'expérience gustative. Dans le cas des Mystères d'Eleusis, Ioanna Patera émet l'hypothèse que « les rites accomplis mènent, à travers la sollicitation des sens évoqués, à une émotionnalité accrue et à une perception spécifique qui n'est pas celle du quotidien » (p. 109). Étudier les rituels en les considérant sous l'angle d'un « cheminement perceptif » (j'emprunte la formule à Joël Candau) me semblerait particulièrement fructueux, notamment pour

les cérémonies initiatiques, le déroulement des processions sacrificielles étudiées par Véronique Mehl (qui insiste fort justement sur les processus de combinaisons entre les sens, en particulier vue/odorat et vue/ouïe) ou les procédures d'incubation envisagées par Clarisse Prêtre (qui attire notre attention sur le rôle de médiation joué par le dieu Asclépios, qui, pour guérir les pèlerins, recourt à des procédés humains, mais garantit un résultat divin).

On trouve rarement de conclusion dans les grands ouvrages collectifs : on ne peut que remercier vivement les éditrices de s'être adonnées à l'exercice ici. Leur conclusion offre en effet de précieux éléments de synthèse et ouvre surtout des perspectives, invitant à élargir le périmètre couvert dans le volume (en ce qui concerne le goût, ou vers des traditions religieuses comme le zoroastrisme et le judaïsme). Trois prolongements au volume sont annoncés : des études archéo-acoustiques sur la façon dont les espaces, leur agencement, leur mobilier créent des conditions particulières d'écoute et des formes d'engagement plus ou moins intenses parmi les fidèles ; une analyse de la sémantique des couleurs, telle qu'elle se recompose au moment de la transition entre fin de l'Antiquité et Moyen Âge ; une histoire sur le temps long des gestes de vénération dans les christianismes latin et orientaux. Parmi d'autres approfondissements possibles, on pourrait suggérer de centrer l'attention sur des phénomènes de contrôle et de manipulation des sens : quel rôle joue l'institutionnalisation des religions dans les efforts de régulation sensorielle par les autorités ? Il faudrait aussi traquer dans notre documentation des indices relatifs aux différences de degrés de participation au cours des rituels. Cela inclut la question du genre, qui surgit à plusieurs reprises (par exemple sur l'exclusion possible des femmes de certains rites ou sur la vision masculine de la sensorialité des Ménades que livrent les sources grecques étudiées par Marie-Hélène Delavaud-Roux). Enfin, il y aurait matière à enquêter sur l'éducation aux sens et le conditionnement sensoriel produit par la répétition de la participation à des rituels, construisant ce que les éditrices nomment une véritable « mémoire sensorielle ».

L'ouvrage, en proposant un éventail aussi riche et stimulant des études possibles, confirme qu'une attention portée à la dimension sensorielle des rituels offre de quoi nourrir l'histoire des religions de la Méditerranée ancienne et médiévale. Les sens sollicités lors de différentes occasions n'ont pas un rôle accessoire : il existe une « grammaire sensorielle » des rituels, une véritable scénographie qui engage les sens des dévots (Béatrice Caseau parle à propos des odeurs de « dramaturgie olfactive ») et participe à la définition des contours d'une identité religieuse spécifique. Pour autant, le volume le montre bien, cette dernière n'est jamais figée : elle évolue en interaction avec les autres communautés.

PURIFIER, SOIGNER OU GUÉRIR ?



CHAPELAIN DE SERÉVILLE-NIEL, CÉCILE ; DELAPLACE, CHRISTINE ; JEANNE, DAMIEN & SINEUX, PIERRE † (eds.) (2020). *Purifier, soigner ou guérir ? Maladies et lieux religieux de la Méditerranée antique à la Normandie médiévale*. Actes du colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle (1-5 octobre 2014). Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 310 pp., 49 € [ISBN: 978-2-7535-8025-1].

CLARISSE PRÊTRE
CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE
clarisse.pretre@cnrs.fr

DEPUIS QUELQUES ANNÉES ONT FLEURI COLLOQUES ET OUVRAGES traitant des pratiques religieuses en lien avec la maladie et par corollaire, des thérapies diverses, rationnelles et irrationnelles, mises en œuvre. Le thème est d'autant plus d'actualité en cette période de crise sanitaire et la parution de ce recueil d'articles trouve encore davantage sa pertinence dans le contexte.

Le colloque dont sont issus ces actes, fut co-organisé en 2014 sous la houlette de Pierre Sineux disparu prématurément en 2016, et constituait alors un recueil pionnier en ce domaine, en proposant de réfléchir à l'influence des phénomènes religieux

dans le traitement des pathologies. L'ouvrage de près de 300 pages reprend l'ambition initiale d'embrasser un vaste champ spatio-temporel comme l'indique le sous-titre « Maladies et lieux religieux de la Méditerranée antique à la Normandie médiévale ».

La table des matières ne manque pas de surprendre en spécifiant les sous-parties de chaque article, quand il y en a, mais en omettant le nom des auteurs. Ce souci du détail ne contribue pas forcément à une impression de cohérence, certains ayant indiqué des introductions et/ou des conclusions, d'autres des remerciements, d'autres encore ayant rédigé leur texte d'un seul trait. La typographie non distincte n'aide pas non plus à repérer au premier coup d'œil les quatre grands chapitres qui rassemblent les contributions et on aurait aimé que cela soit plus marqué.

Ces quelques remarques de forme ne doivent cependant pas cacher l'apport de cet ouvrage faisant appel à des historiens, des anthropologues, des archéologues, des spécialistes de l'histoire de la médecine et de l'histoire des religions, pour aider à souligner les multiples strates d'interaction entre ces deux grands domaines de l'Antiquité et du Moyen-Âge. C'est la force de ce livre que d'illustrer par des études de cas variées la parenté diachronique qu'on observe chez les différents acteurs du parcours thérapeutique, qu'ils soient dieux thaumaturges antiques ou saints guérisseurs, iatrosophistes ou magiciens médiévaux.

Le premier chapitre « Entre punition et élection. Les maladies sont-elles sacrées ? » réunit deux contributions sur la notion de souillure qu'elle soit générée par les lépreux ou par d'autres agents pathogènes souillant l'espace sacré des cimetières ; on s'attache ici aux moyens trouvés pour purifier hommes et lieux.

Le deuxième chapitre « Thérapeutes et mortifères : dieux saints et rois » rassemble trois contributions qui ont en commun de s'intéresser particulièrement aux saints thaumaturges. Dans le monde proto-byzantin ou à l'époque médiévale, les sources hagiographiques, littéraires et même médicales évoquant les miracles de guérison (par exemple pour le feu de Saint-Antoine) montrent que la concomitance des deux médecines, humaine et divine, perdure au-delà du passage du paganisme au monothéisme : loin de se faire concurrence, elles sont alternativement sollicitées par les malades qui se tournent vers l'une ou l'autre en fonction des résultats et de la renommée des thérapeutes.

Le troisième chapitre « Typologie, typographie et fonctions des lieux religieux » constitue le cœur de l'ouvrage avec six contributions consacrées à des études de cas principalement situés dans le monde anglo-normand. Ce point d'ancrage géographique est précédé d'un article sur les lieux de guérison dans la nature au Moyen-Âge (que ce soit en Terre Sainte ou en Gaule) en guise de modèle méthodologique possible, à appliquer à des champs géographiques plus restreints. Une place particulière est réservée aux établissements pour lépreux (Troyes, Reims, Winchester, St

Thomas d'Azier) ; cette documentation nous permet de reconstituer le cheminement thérapeutique et religieux des malades, de la prise en charge dans des édifices hospitaliers spécifiques au traitement et à la gestion des défunts dans les cimetières liés aux léproseries (avec des études fines sur les types d'individus enterrés ou sur les modes d'inhumation), en passant par les différents moyens mis en œuvre pour favoriser l'intercession divine (reliques, programmes iconographiques, patronages saints, incubations, visions miraculeuses).

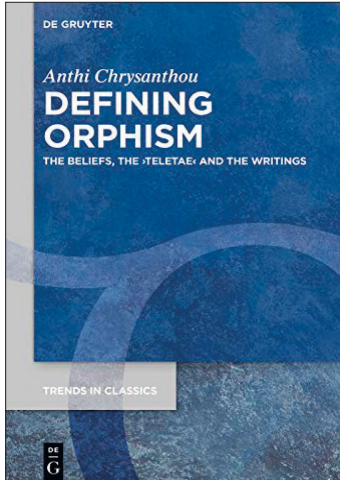
Le quatrième chapitre, « Savoirs médicaux, rites, pratiques de guérison, purification, exorcisme » est le plus conséquent mais aussi le plus disparate, en regroupant sept contributions dont on peine à saisir l'unité. Rassembler dans une même partie des analyses de rites religieux païens liés à la maladie (quatre articles dont deux concernant Asclépios) et des études sur les pratiques magiques (exorcisme, magie astrale) pourrait induire un amalgame fâcheux en opposant paganisme et monothéisme. Pourtant, l'intégralité de l'ouvrage tend à démontrer que l'imbrication des deux médecines, que nous préférons qualifier de rationnelle et irrationnelle, perdure au-delà des religions à travers les gestes des acteurs et des patients. Dans ce chapitre plus précisément, si on repère par exemple que les considérations du XI^e s. sur l'épilepsie comme possession démoniaque font écho aux discours antiques sur la « Maladie Sacrée » démythifiée dans le corpus hippocratique, on constate ainsi la persistance de l'affrontement entre la croyance en une causalité divine et le rationalisme médical : ces points d'accroche permettent de comprendre un peu ce qui rassemble ces articles. On déplorera des lacunes bibliographiques en ce qui concerne les contributions sur le monde antique, dues notamment au trop long moment qui s'est écoulé entre le colloque et la parution des Actes et aux difficultés techniques engendrées par des ajouts sur épreuves.

En conclusion, en dépit de ces quelques remarques, la multiplicité des aires géographiques et chronologiques, loin de brouiller la réflexion, permet au contraire de souligner avec succès combien la pérennité d'un système liant maladie et religion transcende les époques et les croyances. Dans un perpétuel mouvement d'aller-retour, le comparatisme induit par la variété des analyses publiées ici, tend à montrer que l'alliance du rationnel et de l'irrationnel s'observe dans toutes les strates religieuses, sociales, voire professionnelles, de l'Antiquité au Moyen-Age : les dieux païens soignent et punissent à l'instar des saints guérisseurs, la magie côtoie les pratiques chirurgicales, les incantations des prêtres répondent aux discours des médecins, on cherche à guérir les malades mais on les isole à l'orée des villes ou on les relègue dans des cimetières clos, quand le recours à la thérapie, divine ou humaine, n'est plus efficace.

A la lecture de cet ouvrage riche et pluridisciplinaire, la question liminaire du titre « Purifier, soigner ou guérir ? » prend donc tout son sens et souligne qu'il serait dange-

reux et réducteur de penser en termes de simples alternatives. Au contraire, médecins et saints prouvent qu'un domaine n'exclut pas l'autre et que les transmissions des techniques médicales comme des pratiques thaumaturgiques se font au gré d'une ambivalence diachronique jamais disparue. C'est ici un témoignage réussi du caractère protéiforme et complémentaire des histoires de la religion et de la médecine.

DEFINING ORPHISM



CHRYSANTHOU, ANTHI (2020).
*Defining Orphism. The Beliefs, the
 "Teletae" and the Writings*. Berlin:
 De Gruyter, 415 pp., 125,95 €
 [ISBN: 978-3-1106-7839-0].

FRANCESC CASADESÚS BORDOY
 UNIVERSITAT DE LES ILLES BALEARS
 fran.casadesus@uib.es

ESTE NUEVO LIBRO SOBRE EL ORFISMO, QUE VIENE AÑADIRSE a las numerosas publicaciones aparecidas en las últimas décadas sobre esta religión misteriosa, aparece con la declarada intención de su autora de ofrecer “un relato unificado del orfismo” (“*a unified account of Orphism*”, p. 5). La principal motivación para redactarlo es que, en su opinión, “no ha existido una definición específica y ampliamente aceptada de este fenómeno” porque ninguno de los estudiosos anteriores a ella ni tan siquiera se han propuesto una empresa de estas características. La autora tras mencionar, sin aparente voluntad de exhaustividad, los libros publicados por otros autores como Guthrie, Linforth, West o Alderink, centra la atención en varios autores más recientes, como Edmonds y Bernabé, para ponerlos como ejemplo de lo que serían dos extremos opuestos en su concepción del orfismo y que la autora, en cualquier caso, pretende superar: la que sería una posición “antiórfica” de Edmonds, frente a la más

receptiva y abierta de Bernabé. Resulta significativo en este contexto que la autora se refiera expresamente al libro coordinado por Bernabé y Casadesús, *Orfeo y la tradición órfica. Un reencuentro*, en el que colaboraron muchos otros destacados especialistas que ella misma menciona, como Graf, Brisson, West o Burkert, para elogiarlo como una “fuente esencial para los investigadores del orfismo”, aunque finalmente lo considere insuficiente, por no haber ofrecido, debido a la variedad de temáticas tratadas en sus dos volúmenes, la imagen coherente y unificada del orfismo que ella misma se ha propuesto ofrecer. En cualquier caso, resulta llamativo que la autora no mencione, en toda su obra, ningún capítulo de un libro que ella misma califica de “fuente esencial”, ni tan solo alguno de sus coordinadores o de los investigadores destacados por ella. Así pues, frente a todo los trabajos e investigaciones realizados anteriormente, la autora declara que “una definición completa del orfismo es necesaria”, constatación que la obliga a “reexaminar” las antiguas fuentes y crear así “nuevas vías de comprensión y resolver, quizá, los problemas existentes”. El proyecto es tan ambicioso que la autora proclama, ni más ni menos, que “tener una idea clara de lo que fue el orfismo, puede conducir a un nuevo análisis sociológico y antropológico y a la comprensión de la sociedad y mentalidad de la antigua Grecia” (p. 7).

Con el propósito de buscar, desde la época presocrática a la helenística, la coherencia unitaria, tal como anuncia el subtítulo, de las creencias, los ritos iniciáticos y los escritos órficos, que echa a faltar en el resto de estudiosos, la autora estructura el libro en 6 capítulos en los que aborda sucesivamente lo que denomina “material no órfico referido al orfismo”, el mito del desmembramiento de Dioniso por los Titanes, las laminillas de oro, el papiro de Derveni y de Gurob, y los *Hieroi logoi* en 24 *Rapsodias*. Esta vasta empresa la obligará a tratar y comentar una más que considerable cantidad de fuentes primarias y secundarias, desde las más antiguas hasta la *Suda*, y desde los más distintos enfoques procedentes de esos testimonios, ya sean literarios, históricos, arqueológicos, literarios o filosóficos. En la mayoría de ellos, además, se han producido y siguen produciéndose grandes controversias entre los estudiosos, la simple enumeración de las cuales superaría en mucho la extensión de esta reseña. Ante el amplio número de *vexatae quaestiones* que se suscitan en cada uno de los capítulos, la autora parece erigirse en juez y árbitro de cada una de ellas, dando la razón a unos u otros estudiosos en función de que sus opiniones en esas irreconciliables controversias le resulten útiles a sus intereses unificadores. Llama la atención la facilidad con que la autora resuelve la problemática que ha suscitado cada uno de esos conflictivos pasajes sin que, en muchas ocasiones, mencione la relevante y abundante bibliografía que ya ha abordado anteriormente *in extenso* estas cuestiones. En este aspecto, la lista de omisiones bibliográficas es tan larga que citar tan solo las más importantes y significativas se haría interminable. Dicho de otro modo: la

autora no muestra ningún interés por aportar bibliografía esencial en cada una de las conflictivas cuestiones que aborda que no sea la más básica y directa que le permita afianzar su propia posición. Por estos motivos, por expresarlo de manera coloquial, es muy difícil que, dada la propensión de la autora a “meterse en todos los charcos” y a agitar todos los avisperos de los estudios sobre el orfismo, no salga salpicada y, en consecuencia, haya sido severamente criticada por otros estudiosos.

De una lectura de cada uno de los capítulos se colige claramente el *modus operandi* utilizado a lo largo del libro. Consecuente con el deseo de dotar de coherencia al orfismo como un movimiento unitario surgido en época arcaica, la autora centra la atención en los textos que considera más significativos con la intención de extraer de ellos una doctrina, unas creencias y una literatura que no habrían variado sustancialmente con el paso de los años. Sin embargo, el primer capítulo tiene por título el paradójico “Material no órfico referido a prácticas, creencias y escritos órficos”. De hecho, el capítulo se acaba convirtiendo en un cajón de sastre en el que se suceden los fragmentos y pasajes siguiendo un hilo discursivo que atiende tan solo a la estrategia argumentativa de la autora: demostrar que los órficos existieron como grupo, o grupos, organizados alrededor de unas creencias y prácticas rituales fundamentadas en escritos. Para ello, comienza citando el pasaje del *Crátilo* platónico en el que Sócrates menciona a los seguidores de Orfeo, οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφεία, en relación con la teoría de que el cuerpo es la tumba del alma, conocida por σῶμα-σῆμα, con el apoyo de otros textos en los que también se mencionan estos personajes, unos en los que se solo se menciona el nombre de Orfeo y otros en los que supuestamente de alude a ellos. De todos estos textos se intenta extraer algún rasgo de sus posibles creencias y la existencia de escritos, sin tener en cuenta el momento histórico ni el contexto en que cada uno de los autores los escribieron ni las múltiples interpretaciones que han recibido cada uno de ellos. De este modo, citas diversas de Platón, Heródoto, Eurípides, Aristóteles, Heraclides Póntico, Teofrasto, el papiro de Derveni, Plutarco, etc. se suceden ofreciendo una supuesta imagen de unidad órfica que esas informaciones, por ellas mismas, no ofrecen. Asimismo, y a modo simplemente indicativo de las omisiones bibliográficas que ya se han dicho antes, la autora no menciona, por ejemplo, el artículo de A. Bernabé, “Una etimología platónica: σῶμα-σῆμα”,¹ en el que se analiza las intenciones de Platón al elaborar el pasaje del *Crátilo* o no alude a la discusión académica sobre la existencia de dos posibles lecturas del texto de Heródoto II 81. Asimismo, no es una cuestión menor que tanto en el texto de Heródoto como en el fragmento 75

1. Bernabé, 1995.

de Heráclides Póntico y el de Plutarco² se asocie directamente a los órficos con los pitagóricos. De hecho, el pasaje de Heródoto II 81 sostiene que las prácticas atribuidas a los “denominados” órficos y báquicos son en realidad egipcias y pitagóricas y el de Heráclides Póntico sugiere que las ideas pitagóricas sobre las estrellas, el aire y el éter “circulaban en escritos órficos”. Del mismo modo, Aristóteles atribuye en el *De anima* la teoría de que el alma es transportada por los vientos a un discurso escrito en los “denominados”, καλουμένοις, poemas órficos. La autora menciona más tarde en su exposición, un pasaje de Clemente de Alejandría en que afirma que Ion de Quíos sostuvo que Pitágoras atribuyó sus propios escritos a Orfeo, práctica que, según numerosos testimonios, habría sido imitada por otros pitagóricos. La autora consciente de las coincidencias entre determinadas ideas órficas y pitagóricas sugiere la posibilidad de que estas se produjeran debido a sus “potenciales similitudes” (p. 16), sin tener en cuenta la relevancia de las acusaciones de Ion de Quíos (s. V a.C.) de que Pitágoras utilizaba el nombre de Orfeo, en consonancia con la crítica de Heráclito³ que le acusó de mala práctica, κακοτεχνίη, en relación con la selección de escritos mediante la que el filósofo de Samos habría elaborado su propia sabiduría. En cualquier caso, la posibilidad de que el orfismo, del que no conocemos el nombre de ningún órfico, hubiera sido absorbido, para empezar literariamente, por el pitagorismo pondría en cuestión la tesis unitaria de la autora. Sea como fuere, se añora que la autora no recurra a bibliografía complementaria que ha tratado la cuestión de las relaciones entre el pitagorismo y el orfismo, como el trabajo de Burkert⁴ y otros estudios más recientes.

Algo semejante ocurre con los pasajes platónicos que aluden a Orfeo y el orfismo, los más numerosos de las fuentes antiguas y que han sido muy estudiados por los especialistas. Llama la atención que en este caso la autora, que comenta muchos de ellos, tampoco mencione el libro de referencia sobre esta cuestión de Bernabé.⁵ Sin entrar en la cuestión de cómo Platón incorporó en su propia filosofía determinados elementos procedentes de la doctrina órfica, siguiendo el método de lo que Diès denominó “trasposición”, y hasta qué punto esa reeleboración condiciona la visión que tenemos hoy en día del orfismo (incluyendo en ella las posteriores interpretaciones de los autores neoplatónicos que establecieron un nexo entre Orfeo, Pitágoras y Platón), cabe destacar la interpretación que la autora hace del pasaje de la *República*

2. *Quaest. conv.* 635e.

3. D/K B 129.

4. Burkert, 1983.

5. Bernabé, 2011.

364e-365a. La polémica, y su correspondiente literatura, generada por este pasaje es inmensa (Fritz en 1974 la calificó ya de “*umfangreich*”, “extensa”) hasta el punto de que en su momento Kern lo calificó como el “*locus classicus des Orphikerproblems*”. Asimismo, Wilamowitz, consecuente con su actitud antiórfica, lo utilizó como ejemplo para descalificar el orfismo e, incluso, negar su existencia. La autora, dejando a un lado todo este trasfondo histórico, entiende finalmente que los ἀγύρται καὶ μάντιες, charlatanes y adivinos, que manejaban un “vocerío” de libros, βιβλῶν ὄμαδον, que atribuían a Orfeo y Museo representaban tan solo una faceta del orfismo (“*I believe that they constitute only one strand of Orphism and not its totality*”, p. 26). Una rápida y cómoda manera de resolver la cuestión para que un texto tan problemático acabe engullido en su visión “totalista” del orfismo. De hecho, la autora omite que esos mismos personajes citaban también a Homero o Hesíodo y parece ignorar que Platón, en *Leyes*,⁶ identificó directamente a estos personajes con unos ateos merecedores de los más grandes castigos, incluida la pena de muerte. Y es que, en opinión de Nilsson y otros estudiosos, estos individuos debieron de ser unos charlatanes, “*Scharlatane*” (Platón en los pasajes citados de las *Leyes* los identifica con sofistas), que usaban a Orfeo para sus fines lucrativos. La circunstancia, además, de que se utilizara un tumultuoso vocerío, ὄμαδον, de libros, como también lo confirman los versos de Eurípides en el *Hipólito*,⁷ en el que se habla de “un humo de muchos escritos”, πολλῶν γραμμάτων καπνούς, atribuidos a Orfeo, pone de manifiesto que la literatura que circulaba bajo el nombre de Orfeo carecía de un autor, o autores únicos, y era muy confusa y numerosa. Estos testimonios sugieren que fueron muchos los individuos que, por intereses diversos, utilizaron el nombre de Orfeo para su propio beneficio. De ser esto así, la conclusión sería la contraria de la que pretende demostrar la autora a lo largo de su libro: que el orfismo fue básicamente construido desde un inicio por “el material no órfico” que mencionaba a Orfeo y que, por ese motivo, nunca existió un único orfismo que no fuera el resultado de la suma de las sucesivas amalgamas que fueron generando los pitagóricos, Sócrates y Platón o los desconocidos charlatanes que pretendían enriquecerse bajo su nombre.

Sirvan estas consideraciones para mostrar que muchas de las conclusiones a las que llega la autora han sido y siguen siendo discutibles. Algo semejante sucede con el resto de los capítulos en los que también se suscitan múltiples cuestiones que resultaría muy prolijo comentar en esta reseña, pues, como ya se ha dicho, al adentrarse la autora en todo tipo de cuestiones problemáticas, obligaría a analizarlas una

6. 907d3-910e4/933de.

7. 952-957.

a una con detalle. En cualquier caso su técnica es siempre la misma: aprovechar los trabajos de unos y otros para acabar dando la razón, criticándolos o elogiándolos, al estudioso que se ajuste a sus conveniencias en su intento de demostrar la coherencia y unidad histórica en el orfismo. Así, en el capítulo 3, se decanta por la antigüedad del mito del desmembramiento de Dioniso, dando la razón a Bernabé y negándosela a Edmonds en su conocida polémica sobre esta cuestión; en el capítulo 4, la autora parte de la hipótesis, en su esfuerzo por demostrar la linealidad del orfismo desde sus orígenes y siguiendo a Janko y Riedweg, de que las laminillas de oro contienen expresiones que procederían de un antiguo poema katabático órfico. Muchas de las fórmulas contenidas en ellas, como las menciones astronómicas a la vía láctea o a la memoria y el olvido serían el reflejo de las creencias de los órficos en la inmortalidad del alma y un antecedente de los mitos escatológicos, muy particularmente, en el mito de Er en la *República*. Asimismo, en el capítulo 5, la autora presenta el Papiro de Derveni como un documento que concuerda con las ideas órficas ya planteadas en los anteriores capítulos y con grandes similitudes con las *Rapsodias órficas* tratadas en el siguiente capítulo. De este modo, el papiro de Derveni se convierte en un documento clave en la estrategia expositiva de la autora. Por este motivo, no duda en identificar a su anónimo autor con una figura religiosa, “*an Orphic prophetes or exegetes*” (p. 273) que habría comentado un poema órfico con fines rituales e iniciáticos. Hipótesis de la autoría del papiro de Derveni que se suma a las muy variadas, y hasta ahora vanas, propuestas de identificar a su autor. En este contexto, llama la atención que de nuevo la autora ofrezca su opinión sobre las múltiples controversias que han suscitado las numerosas interpretaciones de los especialistas, como el significado de palabra αἰδοῖον que, contra Bernabé que lo interpreta como “falo”, ella entiende como adjetivo con el sentido de “reverendo” (se echa en falta que en esta cuestión que la autora no cite el artículo determinante de apoyo de su interpretación de Santamaría).⁸ Algo semejante ocurre con las similitudes entre diversos aspectos formales y de contenido con los primeros filósofos estoicos planteadas por estudiosos como Brisson, Casadesús o Jourdan y que la autora acaba aceptando como una posible influencia del papiro de Derveni en las interpretaciones que estos filósofos realizaron de los poemas órficos (añadiendo, por cierto, más literatura a la ya existente). Finalmente, en el último capítulo, el más elaborado, dedicado a las *Rapsodias órficas*, la autora presenta una propuesta de reconstrucción partiendo de la tesis de que existiría en ellas una única y continua narrativa teológica (p. 276), en una posición contraria a la de Edmonds y otros estudiosos que consideran que las *Rapsodias* fueron compuestas

8. Santamaría, 2016.

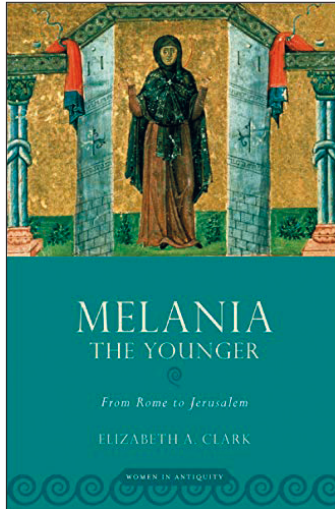
y reelaboradas durante siglos en una especie de bricolaje. La autora también critica el intento de West de reconstruir las teogonías órficas con una metodología que considera que contiene deficiencias y contradicciones. A partir de estas críticas la autora elabora su propia reconstrucción con la correspondiente traducción con todos los fragmentos existentes. Realizada la reconstrucción, que tiene el valor de reunir todos los fragmentos en un orden cosmogónico, teogónico y antropogónico que le permite extraer finalmente la conclusión de que las *Rapsodias* contienen los principales rasgos doctrinales que caracterizaron el orfismo desde un origen.

De este modo el libro concluye con la idea de que el orfismo, frente a las contrapuestas, variadas y sesgadas actitudes y opiniones de los demás especialistas, fue, desde sus inicios, un movimiento compacto y unitario mucho más amplio e influyente, desde época arcaica, de lo que el conjunto de estos estudiosos se ha mostrado dispuesto a aceptar. Tras la lectura del libro resultará incluso más difícil convencerles de esa tesis y de que la autora haya conseguido, de una manera convincente y concluyente, su objetivo principal y prioritario: definir qué fue el orfismo.

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MELANIA THE YOUNGER



CLARK, ELIZABETH A. (2021). *Melania the Younger. From Rome to Jerusalem. Women in Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, xvii + 239 pp., 99,50 € [ISBN: 978-0-1908-8823-7].

BLAKE LEYERLE
 UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
 leyerle.1@nd.edu

NOTWITHSTANDING THE CLARITY OF THE TITLE, THIS BOOK TELLS the story of not one but two remarkable women. Front and very much to the center, stands Melania the younger, the “fabulously wealthy” heiress of a great Roman family who, after converting to an ascetic form of Christianity, spent the rest of her life trying to give away her vast riches. And vast they were. One recent estimate calculates her annual income at over \$93 million in today’s currency, or a sum sufficient to support 16,800 working families for a year (p. 44). This is a transfixing story, set against the sweeping backdrop of the fall of Rome and the ascent of Constantinople, the decline of paganism and the rise of Christianity. In one way or another, Melania seems to have been connected with every powerful person of the time: Her story takes us from the halls of power (both senatorial and episcopal) to the cells of anchorites, from the luxurious, mosaic-inlaid baths of palatial villas to tiny ascetic enclosures and haircloth filled with

vermin. But behind this flamboyant story of “riches to rags” is the constant presence of the narrator: not Gerontius, the monastic author of the original *Life* – although he receives his due – but rather the magisterial presence of the late Elizabeth A. Clark. For in writing this book, she returned to her own earlier work, *The Life of Melania the Younger*, published in 1984. Embedded in the story she tells is also an account of the scholarly upheavals and advances of the last forty years and, in more muted tones, of her own centrality within the burgeoning field of early Christian studies. For it is not only Melania who appears to have known everyone who mattered. To read Clark’s footnotes is to be introduced to most, if not all of the major scholarly figures of our time. Like the subject of her study, Clark was at the center of a dense and far-flung network, established and maintained by travel and the bonds of (fictive) kinship, as well as by the regular exchange of gifts, hospitality, and above all, texts.

The impulse to revisit a topic has not been much explored in academia, but the scholarly return is an intriguing phenomenon. By inviting an assessment of what has changed, it implicitly raises the question of motivation, of what prompted Clark to rethink her earlier work. She herself anticipates the question (p. 15).

The 1984 study reflected the distinctive enthusiasms of second wave feminism. Because it was designed as a retrieval and celebration of a prominent early Christian woman, the centerpiece of the book is a translation of the *Life of Melania*. An introductory chapter recounts the manuscript’s discovery and weighs the priority of the Greek over the Latin recension. A commentary, addressing a number of contextual issues, follows the translation; and a final chapter, assessing the possible influence of the Hellenistic romance, rounds out the study. The question of historical reliability is very much to the fore.

In this new study, the focus has shifted. The *Life* (now translated by Theodore Papalozos) has moved to the end, where it functions almost as an appendix. Matters relating to the manuscript tradition, historical attestation, and literary genre are dealt with quickly in a few introductory pages. The bulk of the work now centers on situating Melania’s story firmly within her society. Keen to remedy what she now perceives to be an earlier oversight, Clark seizes every opportunity to connect Melania’s story to larger economic and social structures. The result is extraordinary. Readers are treated to expert distillations of a wide range of complex topics: “specifics regarding property (estates and their produce, slaves, mansions, art), inheritance, and patronage; the Christianization of the empire; religious divergences, both between Christians and ‘pagans’ and among various Christian groups; travel, its modes and difficulties; and the development of religious and monastic life, especially in Jerusalem” (pp. 18-19). To this already impressive list, other entries could be added: literacy and education, the cult of martyrs and of relics, Marian piety, pilgrimage, legal codification and

(much) doctrinal dispute. Even if necessarily compact, the discussions are nuanced. To “deceptively simple questions”, such as “What did family mean in Late Antiquity?” (p. 45), or “Who was a pagan?” (p. 61), or “What did conversion mean?” (p. 68), the book offers satisfyingly complex answers. Through the lens of one, remarkable life, Clark has produced a compelling introduction to much of what we know about early Christianity within its late antique setting. She offers the study as “a rich resource for historians not only of religion but also of Roman society, culture, economy, and late-ancient power politics” (p. 198).

Fuller attention to context also reveals intriguing silences in the text. By raising these omissions into view, Clark highlights the work of Melania’s original biographer. Although it is possible that Gerontius deliberately withheld information that he considered unimportant or unflattering, she suggests that it is more likely that he was simply ignorant of the events, that he joined Melania only later, after she had settled in Jerusalem (pp. 7, 84, 127, 131, 151).

The book is organized around the cities where Melania lived. And it is told very much as a story. Notwithstanding the wealth of scholarship pooled at the bottom of the page, the style is lively and accessible. We find ourselves swept up into her entourage. The fiction of a travelogue is especially apparent at the conclusion of chapters, which often end with a rousing exhortation to readers, such as “... on to North Africa, where more adventures await” (p. 113), or “To Jerusalem we go” (p. 145). Because we travel at her side, our vision is largely constrained by what Melania might have seen. The view is an aristocratic one. We become acquainted with elite privileges and amenities, and feel the thrill of being received – even courted – by powerful and erudite bishops; we even come to sympathize with the difficulties of disposing of estates that stretched over eight provinces (pp. 81, 86-88, 106-109). Occasionally, Clark widens the lens, allowing us to glimpse the throngs of mostly enslaved persons (perhaps 25,000 in all), who supported Melania’s opulent lifestyle, and whose welfare and livelihood seems hardly to have figured in her equally extravagant dispersal (pp. 91-97). What we do not see, however, is the lives of the vast majority of people: We gain little sense of how the non-elite lived and worked; what they believed and how they worshipped. In this sense, the view of early Christianity remains striking partial.

Another limitation concerns the person in whose company we travel. Clark has no interest in psychological history and scant sympathy for Melania’s ardent Christian beliefs. Thus, despite the richness of the study, there remains an absence at its center: Melania herself remains a cipher. Even with the abundant prosopological information, we gain little insight into her inner self – why she pursued this path. If New Testament teachings played a role (pp. 85, 122-125), why did they strike her so forcefully? The question is perhaps insoluble (p. 80), but finding an answer is a

goal that drives many historians. As for Elizabeth Clark, her sympathies are clearly more aligned with the inclinations of Melania's (reluctantly chaste) husband, Pinian, "whose ascetic life consisted of reading, gardening, and 'solemn conferences'" (p. 134), although she notes with evident approval, Melania's commitment to "intellectual activities, her reading, note-taking, and copying of Scripture" (p. 135).

Magisterial and remarkably comprehensive, the updated scholarly story also has its silences. For the heady enthusiasm of second wave recovery that fueled the publication of *The Life of Melania the Younger* cooled rapidly under the impact of critical theory. Embracing "the linguistic turn", Clark, among others, wondered audibly what historical evidence could be reliably distilled from hagiographic portraits: Was the impression of hard data in a *Life* like that of Melania, simply a literary device, a means of creating a reality effect?¹ With characteristic courage, Clark confronted this challenge in a series of often-cited publications. But of this period of theory-driven doubt, the updated study breathes not a word. Instead, it is very much the product of the last decade and a half of her career, when she turned to archival work. Immersed in the abundant (if dusty) records of early American patristic scholars, she refound her early historical certitude.

As the last major publication of a towering figure in early Christian studies, the book is not without its sober premonitions. In more than one place, as Clark traces a historical trajectory, she pauses to note that by then, Melania would be dead (pp. 145, 171). An inarguable fact, the observation nevertheless sounds a chill note, and one made yet colder by Clark's own death in September, 2021. She will not read this review; but there is comfort in knowing that her erudite words and her inspiring life live on. Like Melania, whose story she pondered not once but twice, she too has been laid to rest clothed "in the virtues she had acquired in life" (p. 238).² *Requiescas in pace*, revered teacher, beloved friend.

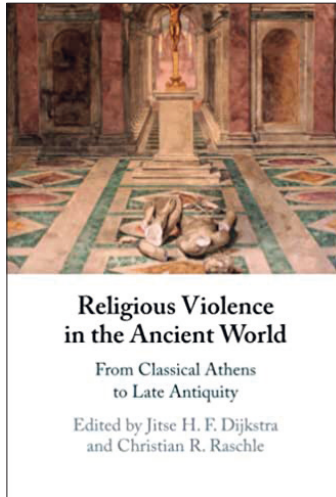
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RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD



DIJKSTRA, JITSE H.F. & RASCHLE, CHRISTIAN R. (eds.) (2020). *Religious Violence in the Ancient World. From Classical Athens to Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, xiv 432 pp., 110,12 € [ISBN: 978-1-1084-9490-8].

LLOYD STEFFEN
LEHIGH UNIVERSITY
lhs1@lehigh.edu

AT THE 2014 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION OF CANADA, scholars from a variety of Antiquity-related fields – biblical and classical studies, history of religions, and religious studies – planned a follow-up workshop on violence and religion in Antiquity. Three years later, under the sponsorship of the Université de Montréal and the University of Ottawa, the workshop brought together scholars with expertise in Greco-Roman religion and early Christianity, and on the docket was the topic of religious violence. Three years after that, this publication appeared.

This impressive volume is comprised of 17 excellent essays that for all of their diversity in the particularities of topic and subject matter make a strong case for a

religion studies approach to the topic of religious violence in the ancient Western world. Taken as a whole, the volume challenges two central ideas: first, the claim that polytheism was necessarily more tolerant and thus less violent than monotheistic religion in this time period, and secondly the assumption that religious violence was pronounced, isolatable, and everywhere present in the ancient world. Aside from the lack of an independent meaning, even a word for “religion” in antiquity, authors in this volume seem in general agreement that it is a fallacy to think that a religious causality for violence can be extracted as an independent variable to explain violence involving religion. Instances of violence in antiquity, while often including religion or what modern scholars would recognize as religion, necessarily involve causal complexity with politics, economics, social stratification, class, slavery and cultural developments adding to the ferment to demonstrate as Jan Bremmer notes insightfully, that “in Antiquity not all religious violence was that religious and not all religious violence that violent” (p. 68).

The book is divided into three sections. The first part deals with methodology, the second with religious violence in the Greco-Roman world, and the third with religious violence in late antiquity.

The two methodological essays by Hans Kippenberg and Jan Bremmer were lectures that both opened and closed the workshop program. Kippenburg discusses violence in both ancient and modern contexts, noting how the 9/11 attacks brought a new public concern to the topic of religious violence. He argues that religion is not the cause of violence but violence is spawned by religious communities whose traditions prefigure violent actions and then provide justification for violence. Bremmer investigates Christian cultural violence. Focusing on the direct violence of Roman persecutions against Christians and Christian violence against pagan temples such as those in Gaza, he argues that some instances of what appears to be religious violence are, in antiquity and late antiquity, not purely religious, and that cultural violence and direct violence must be distinguished. These two essays open up and lay out issues to which authors in the subsequent essays will return frequently.

In the seven essays that examine religious violence in the Greco-Roman world, the second part of the book, authors take on a variety of topics. Included are discussions of political violence in connection with “binding spells” (Esther Eidinow), the expulsion of Isis worshipers and astrologers from Rome (Christian Raschle), the complex historical reports of massacres in Jerusalem and Caesarea in 66 CE (Steve Mason), and the role of structural violence in the Roman emphasis on animal sacrifice (James Rives). Other essays examine violence in the Jewish diaspora under the Flavians (Andreas Bendlin), revelations of ideology in the coinage under the Tetrarchs (Erika Manders), and the impact of Lactantius’ apocalyptic writing pre-

senting Constantine as a Christian commander who avenges religious injustice with violence (Elizabeth DePalma Digeser).

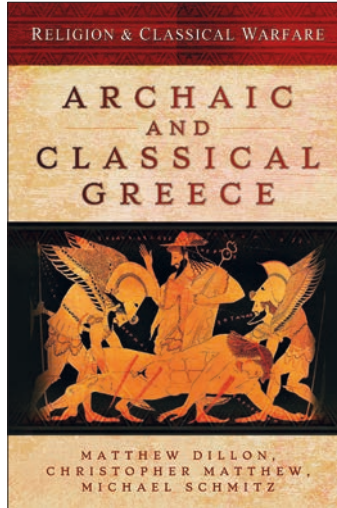
The third section of the book focuses in on the relationship of religion to violence in Late Antiquity. Wendy Mayer discusses religious intolerance and violence. Of concern to her are the assumptions that drive investigations into religious violence, her advice being to explore violence in its local context while also interrogating definitions and theoretical constructs. Augustine is examined in an essay by Peter Van Nuffelen, especially with reference to the Donatist controversy and Augustine's defense of coercion as a corrective, with virtue rather than freedom being held as the highest human aspiration. The role of mob violence as it pertains to the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria in the late 4th cent. is discussed in light of social psychology insights into crowd behavior (Jitse Dijkstra). Among other issues discussed in this section of the book are these: the roles monks played in perpetuating violence based on a reading of Matthew 11.12 (Fabrizio Vecoli); the complex relation between violence and asceticism as a domination discipline in Theodore's *Historia Religiosa* (Chris De Wet); the post-Constantinian challenge that presented anti-Chalcedon Christian groups as martyrs and suffering saints (Christine Shepardon); the religiously motivated revolt of Vitalian against Emperor Anastasius in the 6th cent. (Hugh Elton); and a discussion of urban violence and how the rise in church power accompanied by fading Empire power created the conditions for popular outbreaks of violence (Geoffrey Greatrex).

The essays in the volume are uniformly of the highest scholarly caliber. Well-researched, well-written and the volume as a whole well-edited with essays offering occasional cross-references internal to the volume, the book makes a valuable contribution to understanding such matters as Christian cultural violence, the role of Religious Studies approaches to historical analysis, and a concern for clarity when using such terms as "religion" in a period when the concept, even the word, did not exist as understood in our contemporary situation. That aspiration for clarity extends to "violence" as well – cultural, actual-direct-physical, structural, and psychological. Concerns like those of William Cavanaugh (the "myth" of religious violence) are rarely discussed explicitly but many of the issues attending current discussions of religious violence, like Cavanaugh's, are actually quite present as a background framing for many of the essays.

The range of expertise and depth of understanding among the authors as they address their particular issues is impressive and imposing. The volume attends to a variety of scholarly matters such as the reliability of the Greco-Roman and Late Antiquity literary sources that present the incidents of violence, which are then subject to interpretation and analysis. Beyond that, however, this collection contributes

to discussions so important today in a post 9/11 world, especially the relation of religion to violence and the many variables that affect violence. Religion is beyond any doubt one of those variables. In the end, this collection reminds readers that the call for serious and sustained investigation of violence involving religion must continue apace even if the term “religious violence” is in many instances an inadequate and misleading moniker that inadvertently simplifies the very topic under scrutiny, for religion and violence is a topic that resists simplification.

RELIGION AND CLASSICAL WARFARE. ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREECE



DILLON, MATTHEW, MATTHEW, CHRISTOPHER & SCHMITZ, MICHAEL (eds.) (2020). *Religion and Classical Warfare. Archaic and Classical Greece*. Philadelphia: Pen & Sword Military, 320 pp., 31,06 € [ISBN: 978-1-4738-3429-3].

PIERRE DUCREY
UNIVERSITÉ DE LAUSANNE
pierre.ducrey@unil.ch

DURANT LE DEMI-SIÈCLE ÉCOULÉ, LES RECHERCHES ET LES publications sur la sociologie de la guerre en Grèce archaïque, classique et hellénistique se sont multipliées. C'est sans doute le domaine des études sur l'histoire de la Grèce antique qui a connu récemment le plus de développements, principalement dans les pays anglo-saxons. L'« histoire-batailles » du XIX^e et de la première moitié du XX^e siècle a progressivement cédé la place à des études thématiques. Citons en premier lieu les réflexions sur la bataille proprement dite, plus précisément le combat, sur l'armement, les hoplites, les troupes légères, la cavalerie, sans oublier la guerre sur mer. Parmi les premières études figurent l'opposition entre soldats citoyens et combattants professionnels ou

mercenaires, et les thématiques qui sont liées à cette évolution, soit la solde et les profits de la guerre. À la victoire correspond la défaite, avec des études sur le traitement des soldats vaincus sur le champ de bataille ou en mer. La poliorcétique ou art de prendre les villes entraîne des réflexions sur les fortifications et sur la défense, sur la prise des cités par la force avec leur lot de destructions, la mort des défenseurs et la réduction des femmes et des enfants en esclavage, à l'image de la fin de Troie. On pourrait allonger sans peine ce survol.

Et la religion dans tout cela ? Le présent volume ne propose pas une monographie à proprement parler que l'on pourrait intituler : « Guerre et religion », mais un recueil d'études originales portant sur les aspects les plus divers de la question. Les auteurs sont pour la plupart des spécialistes connus par leurs publications sur des sujets touchant à la guerre dans le monde grec. La répartition géographique de leurs institutions de rattachement est originale : l'Australie (5), les États-Unis (2), l'Angleterre (2) et la Nouvelle Zélande (1).

L'un des éditeurs, Matthew Dillon, ouvre le volume par une mise en perspective du sujet et par un résumé des diverses contributions. Le premier chapitre du volume, signé Bruce LaForse, s'attache aux plus importantes sources de nos connaissances dans le domaine de la religion et des mentalités religieuses, les trois historiens « classiques », Hérodote, Thucydide et Xénophon. L'auteur s'efforce de distinguer au travers de leur récit leur propre attitude face aux divers aspects de la religion et des croyances religieuses dans la guerre.

Matthew Trundle situe son propos aux origines des conflits, et plus particulièrement aux aspects religieux de la déclaration de guerre. Avec ce chapitre, le lecteur est conduit dans la description des rituels précédant nécessairement tous les aspects de la conduite de la guerre et des batailles. Mais, alors que la religion et les croyances sont omniprésentes dans toutes les phases d'un conflit, l'auteur conclut son propos par une citation de Platon, selon lequel, la paix étant un état de guerre non déclarée, les dieux n'étaient pas sans utilité pour déclarer la guerre, mais essentiels dans la décision de combattre et dans l'issue du conflit.¹

Dans la logique de l'ordre des chapitres, Sonya Nevin se penche sur les présages, oracles et autres prédictions, qui précèdent la plupart des décisions concernant les opérations militaires, sans omettre naturellement le rôle des sacrifices et leur interprétation. L'auteur divise son propos en plusieurs phases : avant d'entrer en guerre, avant de lancer une opération militaire, enfin durant une campagne, avec en exergue l'éclipse de lune et la dramatique fin du corps expéditionnaire athénien à Syracuse.

1. Plat., *Lois* 62a.

L'aspect « contractuel » des relations avec la divinité fait l'objet des réflexions de Ian Plant. La première phase consiste en la prestation d'un serment, acte qui peut revêtir un caractère solennel. Le serment s'accompagne d'un choix, la victoire ou la mort, ou encore d'une promesse en cas de réponse favorable de la divinité. L'auteur relève un autre aspect du serment, celui qui consiste à unir les combattants d'une unité par un serment de fidélité. Les traités, les alliances, les contrats s'accompagnent tous d'un serment placé sous le regard de nombreuses divinités.

Le chapitre de Ian Rutherford consacré aux trêves et aux festivals dans leur relation avec la conduite de la guerre propose une suite logique au chapitre précédent. Les trêves (*ekkekheiria*) marquent une suspension de certaines activités, judiciaires et militaires. Elles accompagnent de nombreuses fêtes, festivals et concours, des plus connus (Olympie, Delphes, Isthme, Némée) aux plus locaux, propres à une cité. La période couverte par les trêves sacrées (*hieromenia*) des célébrations panhelléniques s'étendait en principe à l'ensemble du monde grec et était le plus souvent respectée.

Les dieux grecs étaient-ils belliqueux ? C'est à cette question plaisante en apparence que s'attache à répondre Matthew Dillon. Mais, au-delà du trait d'humour et du paradoxe, la participation réelle, mythique ou supposée, de certaines divinités guerrières, comme Athéna, Arès ou Enyalios, avec leurs épiclèses, marque le monde grec depuis l'*Iliade*. Deinos, ou la personnification de la crainte, Phobos, ou encore Enyo s'accompagnent de nombreuses légendes et croyances, tandis que Thanatos plane sur le champ de bataille. Les plus grands dieux, Zeus et Poséidon, ou même Aphrodite peuvent être associés à la guerre. L'art n'est pas en reste : nombreuses sont les représentations de divinités dans l'imagerie guerrière. Les divinités sont invoquées dans la bataille, lorsque les combattants s'élancent en chantant le péan.

Lara O'Sullivan, dans son chapitre consacré aux « épiphanies », passe en revue les cas où les divinités apparaissent en personne dans les combats. Basés sur des récits de faits réels ou allégués, ces « miracles » sont repris et embellis par la tradition, à l'époque classique déjà, mais surtout à l'époque hellénistique.

Avec Christopher Matthew, on change de registre et on entre dans la pensée du combattant et, mieux encore, dans son moral. L'auteur rappelle le rôle des dieux dans la destinée humaine et donc dans celle du combattant. *Moira*, le destin, au-delà même des dieux, façonne le sort des combattants. Et ce destin peut être connu et communiqué par les devins et conjuré par le sacrifice avant la bataille. La conviction que sa destinée est entre les mains des dieux est omniprésente dans la pensée du guerrier.

Après la bataille viennent la victoire et la reconnaissance aux dieux, thème traité par Michael Schmitz. Ce dernier dresse un bref historique des offrandes offertes par le vainqueur à la divinité, sous les formes les plus variées : dépôt d'armes et d'objets divers dans les sanctuaires, consécration de la dîme du butin. La tradition d'élever un

trophée avec les armes prises à l'ennemi après une bataille victorieuse s'impose avec l'apparition des hoplites et de leur armement. De nature périssable à l'origine, les trophées se transforment en monuments de plus en plus imposants et permanents.

Le recueil se termine par un chapitre sur « Magic and Religion in Military Medicine of Classical Greece » dû à Matthew Gonzales. Le titre est quelque peu trompeur, car une partie importante de l'étude est consacrée aux guérisons divines de l'*Iliade* et même à des excursus dans le monde mycénien. Une seconde partie s'attache aux guérisons miraculeuses des grands sanctuaires de dieux médecins, en particulier d'Épidaure. Le ton et l'esprit de ce dernier chapitre se démarque des autres par de surprenantes variations dans le niveau épistémologique, allant du plus élémentaire au plus érudit.

Le volume fait une excellente impression par sa présentation. Les chapitres sont bien conçus, bien écrits. Ils prennent appui sur une lecture soigneuse et attentive des sources antiques, y compris illustrées. La part de l'*Iliade* dans nos connaissances est frappante. Chaque chapitre est accompagné de notes renvoyant aux sources et d'une abondante bibliographie, très riche et bien établie. On pourrait tout au plus ajouter l'article « Guerre et religion » du ThesCRA² ou encore mentionner le petit ouvrage de Harald Popp,³ *Die Einwirkung von Vorzeichen, Opfern und Festen auf die Kriegführung der Griechen im 5. und 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, Diss. Erlangen 1957, publication modeste, mais d'excellent niveau.

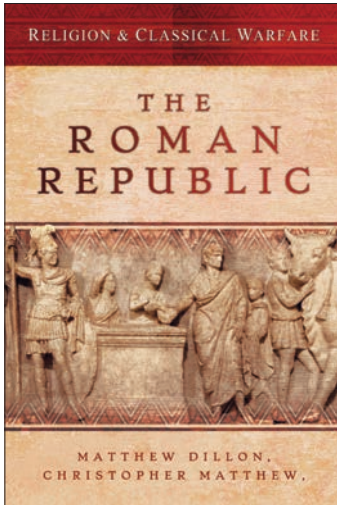
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2. Hermay & Jaeger, 2012, pp. 193-212.

3. Popp, 1957.

RELIGION AND CLASSICAL WARFARE. THE ROMAN REPUBLIC



DILLON, MATTHEW
& MATTHEW,
CHRISTOPHER (eds.)
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& Sword Military, 306 pp.,
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3431-6].

ALEJANDRO DÍAZ FERNÁNDEZ
UNIVERSIDAD DE MÁLAGA
alediaz@uma.es

NO PUEDE SER MÁS ACERTADO COMO MOTIVO DE PORTADA de un libro dedicado al estudio de la guerra y la religión en el periodo republicano el conocido relieve de la *suovetaurilia* procedente del altar de Gn. Domicio Enobarbo (cos. 122 a.C.), una de las contadas escenas que conservamos de esta etapa de la historia de Roma en la que *militia* y *religio* van inequívocamente de la mano (véase pp. 8-9); y es que es justamente éste el eje sobre el que Matthew Dillon (University of New England) y Christopher Matthew (Australian Catholic University) han concebido una obra con la que los editores tratan de paliar la escasez de estudios centrados en los vínculos indisolubles entre milicia y religión durante la República, periodo para el que dispo-

nemos además de bastante menos datos en comparación con la mejor conocida – a la vez que más trabajada – época imperial. De hecho, en el completo volumen publicado hace justo quince años por la editorial Blackwell bajo el título *A Companion to the Roman Army*,¹ por ejemplo, sólo encontramos un capítulo de poco más de veinte páginas dedicado al estudio de la religiosidad en el ejército romano, si bien desde la perspectiva de la época imperial.² En este sentido, no cabe duda de que el libro que nos ocupa constituye una aportación encomiable a la par que muy bienvenida al estudio de la guerra en su relación con la religión, tema al que Pen & Sword, editorial británica especializada en temas militares, ha dedicado también sendos volúmenes (de nuevo bajo la coordinación de Dillon y Matthew) centrados respectivamente en la Grecia Arcaica y Clásica y la Roma imperial.³

De acuerdo con el planteamiento ya comentado, el volumen presenta un total de nueve contribuciones – incluido un capítulo de carácter introductorio a cargo de Dillon (pp. 1-16) – en las que los distintos autores tratan una serie de aspectos relacionados con la vida religiosa y el ámbito de la guerra a partir de temáticas y perspectivas diversas: desde cuestiones vinculadas con cultos y ceremonias relacionadas con el mundo de la milicia al papel cumplido por la mujer en un escenario concebido en principio por y para los hombres, como ha sido tradicionalmente la guerra. Más allá de los temas abordados por cada uno de los colaboradores, todos los capítulos coinciden en presentar una sociedad dominada por dos realidades, la religión y la guerra, que caminaron de la mano durante todo el periodo republicano; no podemos olvidar que la guerra venía justificada en la mentalidad romana por la ineludible necesidad de restaurar la *pax deorum* (pp. 3-4), lo cual insiste no sólo en la relación directa entre ambas realidades, sino también en la importancia de estudiarlas de manera conjunta, como es la intención de este libro.

Debemos señalar, con todo, que los contenidos y planteamientos presentados en los distintos capítulos no siempre se atienen al propósito del volumen: tanto es así que la cuestión religiosa parece diluirse por momentos en varias de las contribuciones, en

1. Erdkamp, 2007.

2. Stoll, 2007. Menos atención dedican al tema los volúmenes colectivos editados por Rich & Shipley, 1993; Sabin, van Wees & Whitby, 2007; Armstrong & Fronda, 2019, por citar sólo varios ejemplos. Lee, 2020, pp. 127-133, incluye un breve capítulo sobre la religiosidad de las tropas romanas en su reciente *Warfare in the Roman World*, pero su interés en el periodo republicano es prácticamente nulo. Dentro del ámbito hispano, la cuestión ha sido tratada recientemente en Perea Yébenes, 2020, si bien debemos matizar que las aportaciones contenidas en el volumen atienden en esencia a la época imperial.

3. Dillon, Matthew & Schmitz, 2020; Dillon & Matthew, 2022.

las que dicho aspecto es tratado tan sólo de manera tangencial mientras el capítulo se desliza hacia temas poco o nada relacionados con la *religio* romana. Aunque no es una constante en toda la obra, lo cierto es que esa tendencia a la dispersión que muestra a veces el libro resta consistencia al conjunto, sin menoscabo en todo caso de su interés. No menos llamativo es el hecho de que varios de los trabajos adolezcan del conocido pecado de hablar de la República a través de testimonios y noticias relativas en realidad a la época imperial. Nadie puede negar los evidentes elementos de continuidad entre una etapa y otra y, sin duda, es inevitable y hasta necesario a veces poner la vista en el Principado para comprender mejor el pasado republicano de Roma; pero hay demasiada tendencia entre los historiadores a proyectar sobre el periodo republicano datos y realidades que corresponden propiamente a la Roma imperial, con el consiguiente peligro de caer en visiones distorsionadas de la época republicana.

A modo de continuación con el capítulo introductorio, John Serrati aborda en su contribución (“Religion and the Roman Warfare in the Middle Republic”) una serie de cuestiones generales con las que el autor trata de subrayar la importancia capital de la religión en el mundo militar romano: desde las ceremonias necesarias para declarar la guerra hasta el concepto de *pax deorum*, pasando por la controvertida idea de *bellum iustum*. De notable interés resulta su interpretación del papel de los *fetiales* en los aspectos ceremoniales y religiosos de la guerra (pp. 18-22); no sin razón, Serrati considera que la institución de dicho sacerdocio podría mantener relación con la necesidad de controlar la política bélica por parte del senado y de evitar así conflictos alentados por intereses particulares con ejércitos privados, en la línea pues de los trabajos realizados en los últimos años por Fred K. Drogula y otros autores a propósito del desarrollo de la guerra en la República temprana.⁴ Desde este punto de vista, podríamos concluir pues que los *fetiales* constituían la materialización del dominio del derecho de guerra ejercido de manera privativa por el senado.

No obstante, el trabajo de Serrati centra sobre todo su atención en los lazos indisolubles entre guerra y religión, así como en su incidencia determinante en una sociedad romana en la que el calendario, como la vida misma, discurría al compás que marcaban una serie de ceremonias religiosas de cariz eminentemente militar. Así lo indican los cultos dedicados a divinidades como Jano, Marte o Bellona, cuya trascendencia no se limitaba sólo al ámbito de la guerra, sino a diversos aspectos de la vida cotidiana romana (tal y como parece indicar la letra del *Carmen Aruale*). Buen ejemplo de ello serían también las ceremonias de iniciación con las que los jóvenes romanos daban el salto a la vida adulta, concebidas en buena parte con el propósito

4. Drogula, 2015 y 2019.

de inspirar en la juventud un deseo de emulación que, como bien indica Serrati, debía de rayar en el adoctrinamiento (pp. 25-26).

A pesar de lo que da a entender el título, el capítulo de Matthew Dillon (“*Evo-catío. Taking Gods away from Enemy States and Peoples*”) no se centra sólo en el rito de la *euocatio*, sino que atiende a las distintas prácticas de las que se servían los romanos para privar a los enemigos de sus divinidades y decantar así la voluntad de los dioses – ya se tratara de los propios o los del adversario – hacia su causa. Después de hacer un breve repaso a los paralelos (no demasiado cercanos) que encontramos en otras culturas de la Antigüedad, el autor define y matiza el concepto de *euocatio* para abordar a continuación los contados casos que conocemos para el período republicano (pp. 62-71). Dillon atribuye a los azares de la tradición el hecho de que no conservemos más noticias de episodios similares, pero no deja de ser llamativo que sólo haya constancia de cuatro *euocationes* (cinco, si admitimos el caso de Vertumno⁵) para toda la etapa republicana. De hecho, teniendo en cuenta las circunstancias en las que se desarrolló la conquista de Hispania, sorprende que no haya la menor noticia de rituales de *euocatio* durante los casi dos siglos que duraron las campañas romanas en la península, ni siquiera en un caso tan conocido como el de sitio de Numancia; tal vez debamos concluir pues que se trataba de una práctica muy poco usual o supeditada a situaciones muy particulares, siendo ciertamente más las veces en las que los romanos se apropiaron de la imagen de la divinidad tras haber sometido al enemigo (pp. 71-74).

Dillon dedica la segunda parte de su capítulo a estudiar otros ejemplos relacionados con la implicación de los dioses en el curso de una campaña, comenzando por una serie de episodios en los que se pondría de manifiesto el desentendimiento de la divinidad hacia uno de los combatientes, tal y como habría sucedido durante la Guerra Civil con la desertión de Dioniso de la causa de Antonio (pp. 76-79). Dillon se detiene además en otro tipo de prácticas, como las controvertidas (tal vez habría que preguntarse si históricas) *deuotiones* de los tres P. Decio Mus (*coss.* 340, 295 y 279 a.C.) que, de acuerdo con la tradición, consagraron sus vidas y las del enemigo a los dioses con la intención de ganar el favor de éstos en la contienda; el cumplimiento de los votos realizados en campaña mediante la dedicación de templos y *ludi* en honor de los dioses; las *supplicationes*, no sólo en su sentido propiciatorio, sino particularmente como manifestación de gratitud

5. Debemos recordar aquí que Tito Tacio, el rey al que Varrón atribuye en *L.L.* V 74 la introducción del dios etrusco Vertumno (o Vortumno) en el panteón romano, no era – hasta donde parece indicar la tradición – un monarca etrusco, como dice Dillon (p. 70), sino sabino.

por el desenlace favorable de una batalla; o la celebración de *lectisternia* (esto es, banquetes rituales) vinculados a campañas militares, como el realizado en 171 a.C. con la intención de plantear a los dioses la conveniencia de una inminente guerra contra el rey Perseo de Macedonia (Liv., XLII 30, 8-9). No se equivoca el autor al concluir que todas estas ceremonias constituyen una muestra de la trascendental importancia que tenía la propiciación de la voluntad divina para los romanos, cuyas victorias en los distintos escenarios de guerra no serían sino la constatación última de la benevolencia de los dioses hacia su causa (así p. 91).

Desde una perspectiva muy distinta, Brandon R. Olson y Christopher Matthew analizan en sus respectivos capítulos las implicaciones religiosas de ciertos elementos del equipamiento militar romano, tales como las armas y otras partes de la panoplia y las *aquilae* o estandartes de las legiones. A partir de una serie de consideraciones historiográficas sobre el estudio del ejército romano en el mundo anglosajón (en las que el autor pasa del todo por alto las aportaciones realizadas en los últimos años desde otros ámbitos académicos),⁶ Olson dedica su contribución (“The Religious Functions of Roman Arms and Armament”) a estudiar las funciones religiosas que los romanos concedían supuestamente a sus armas atendiendo a dos prácticas que iban más allá de su mera finalidad militar: los depósitos votivos llevados a cabo en el curso de los ríos y la inscripción en los cascos legionarios de los nombres de sus portadores con un propósito conmemorativo. Aunque no hay duda de que el planteamiento es tan interesante como atractivo, debemos reconocer que la presentación no resulta tan convincente por la poca consistencia de los argumentos aportados. Así, Olson atribuye la costumbre de realizar depósitos de armas a una tradición adoptada por los romanos de los celtas, lo cual parece cuando menos dudoso teniendo en cuenta que este tipo de prácticas son conocidas desde el Bronce Tardío, y no sólo en la Europa céltica.⁷ Además, el autor sólo se remite a una serie de depósitos de época imperial descubiertos en la Bélgica romana (pp. 111-113), por lo que la pertinencia del ejemplo resulta todavía más discutible en un libro dedicado al periodo republicano.

No menos cuestionable resulta la interpretación de los nombres hallados en una serie de cascos correspondientes – de nuevo – a la época imperial, cuestión que Olson trató hace unos años en un trabajo publicado en *Vulcan. The Journal of the History of Military Technology*, en el que se basa en esencia (a veces de manera literal) la segunda parte de su capítulo.⁸ Después de las correspondientes consideraciones teó-

6. Sirvan a modo de ejemplo los importantes trabajos de Cadiou, 2008 y 2018.

7. Así, por ejemplo, Gabaldón Martínez, 2004, pp. 169-265, precisamente para el ámbito itálico.

8. Olson, 2013.

ricas en torno a la importancia de la memoria póstuma en la cultura romana, el autor presenta un total de tres cascos inscritos con los presumibles nombres de quienes una vez los portaron, conservados respectivamente en el British Museum, el Verulamium Museum de St. Albans y en el Archäologische Staatssammlung de Munich (pp. 117-121). A partir de los nombres indicados en las piezas, Olson relaciona las inscripciones con una suerte de práctica emulativa basada en la conmemoración de quienes usaron esos cascos en el pasado. Admitiendo que la memoria y la emulación de los antepasados eran parte esencial de la conciencia colectiva romana, el hecho de que los legionarios dejaran inscritos sus nombres en los cascos que portaron en un determinado momento no parece razón para atribuir esta práctica a supuestos hábitos conmemorativos que, en cualquier caso, tampoco mantienen una relación directa con la *religio*. Ni siquiera hay testimonios en los autores clásicos que respalden esa posibilidad, por lo que tal vez deberíamos pensar que se trata de simples marcas de propiedad, sin más. No vamos a seguir insistiendo en la necesidad de estudiar el periodo republicano desde datos que, cuando menos, conciernen al periodo republicano, pero parece un tanto paradójico que el autor centre su estudio sobre una serie de cascos de época imperial y cite sólo de pasada, en una breve nota (p. 125, n. 72), uno de los pocos ejemplares inscritos de época republicana que conservamos: un casco de tipo Montefortino custodiado en el Museo de Valladolid (inv. MAVA 10533) con la inscripción *N. PAQVI* en la cubrenuca.⁹

Más convincente resulta el planteamiento de Christopher Matthew (“The Cult of the Eagles in the Roman Republic”), quien dedica su capítulo a la devoción a las *aquilae* legionarias en el ejército romano. Matthew parte no obstante de la consideración tradicional de que Mario introdujo en la estructura del ejército romano cambios determinantes (también en la representación de los estandartes, como apunta Plin., *N.H.* X 5) que han sido muy matizados en los últimos años (por ejemplo, por François Cadiou¹⁰) y que sin duda convendría revisar en aras de un mejor conocimiento y comprensión de la cuestión. Atendiendo a una serie de testimonios y ejemplos, no todos correspondientes a la época republicana, Matthew destaca el desarrollo de un verdadero culto a las águilas legionarias que tendría precisamente su punto de partida en las medidas dictadas por Mario con relación a la simbología de los estandartes. Aunque no todos los testimonios tratados en el capítulo responden a nuestro juicio a manifestaciones religiosas (como el mismo autor parece reconocer al hablar de su “*almost quasi-religious nature*”, p. 135), casos como la inscripción de

9. Quesada Sanz, 1997.

10. Cadiou, 2018.

Ti. Plautio Silvano Eliano, en la que se habla del culto dispensado a los *signa Romana* en las provincias danubianas por orden del personaje en cuestión (a la sazón *legatus pro praetore* en Misia),¹¹ demuestran ciertamente que los estandartes romanos habían adquirido un carácter devocional vinculado con la divinidad representada; es decir, matizando las palabras de Matthew, la simbología religiosa del estandarte dimanaría en última instancia de la divinidad evocada en el *signum* como custodia de la tropa, ya se tratara del *aquila* de Júpiter o de las demás representaciones que, hasta la época de Mario, habían decorado los distintivos de las tropas romanas, según nos cuenta Plinio (*N.H.* X 5). Sólo así se comprende la importancia concedida en la propaganda augústea a la restitución de los estandartes perdidos a manos de los partos en la batalla de Carras.

Lora Holland Goldthwaite y Paul Erdkamp nos trasladan con sus capítulos al estudio del papel de la mujer en un marco dominado esencialmente por el hombre como es el de la guerra. Desde posiciones propias de los llamados *estudios de género*, Goldthwaite (“Women, Warfare and Religion in the Roman Republic”) reivindica de hecho la implicación de la mujer no sólo en la religión romana, sino también en el mundo de la guerra, concebido – hemos de entender – en un sentido que va más allá del combate propiamente dicho.¹² Goldthwaite dedica buena parte de su capítulo a trazar el retrato de esa mujer romana que padece y participa de la guerra, pero conviene tener en cuenta que la autora lo hace acudiendo en no pocos casos a personajes que corresponden en realidad al relato mítico, como son Tarpeya, Clelia o Camila (pp. 161-169), y de los que, en todo caso, podemos deducir modelos de virtud concebidos con una intención y una perspectiva particular, pero nunca ejemplos del verdadero papel que pudieron haber cumplido las mujeres romanas en situaciones bélicas. Más revelador podría resultar a este respecto el estudio de personajes como Fulvia, recientemente abordado por Judith Hallett,¹³ como destaca Goldthwaite (p. 171), cuya personalidad es convenientemente denostada en la literatura clásica como contrapunto de la virtud femenina, o de sacerdocios relacionados con el mundo de la guerra, como las Vestales o esas *Saliae* (p. 159) de las que nos habla un pasaje de Festo (439 Lindsay). De todas maneras, y si bien no se puede negar la implicación de la mujer en ambas realidades, la conjunción entre mujer, religión y guerra de la que habla Goldthwaite no siempre es tan evidente como concluye la autora, ni se hace patente en todos los aspectos de la cuestión (p. 172); posiblemente sea tan necesario

11. *ILS* 986.

12. Así Fabre-Serris & Keith, 2015, p. 3.

13. Hallett, 2015.

sacar de una vez a la mujer del olvido histórico al que ha estado injustamente condenada durante décadas como hacerlo desde la prudencia y la fidelidad a las fuentes, sin caer en distorsiones condicionadas por nuestro presente.

Del mayor interés resulta el capítulo con el que Paul Erdkamp (“War, Vestal Virgins and Live Burials in the Roman Republic”) trata las implicaciones religiosas de los enterramientos rituales sucedidos en 228, 216 y 113 a.C. y sus vínculos con los sepultamientos de vestales llevados a cabo justo en los años inmediatamente anteriores a tales episodios. Erdkamp desarrolla aquí una propuesta que el historiador neerlandés había planteado ya en un trabajo aparecido en *Classical Philology*¹⁴ y que ha dado pie en los últimos años a un interesante intercambio de pareceres con Arthur Eckstein, que no tardó en responder a las tesis de Erdkamp en un artículo publicado poco después en la misma revista.¹⁵ De acuerdo con las conclusiones de Erdkamp, la decisión de consultar los Libros Sibilinos y de enterrar a continuación a sendas parejas de galos y griegos en el *forum Boarium*, tal y como recuerda Plutarco a propósito del suceso del año 228 (*Marc.* 3, 3-4), no estaría relacionada con el supuesto estado de temor ante la amenaza de una posible invasión gala, contrariamente pues a la postura de Eckstein y otros historiadores, sino que sería la respuesta de la comunidad romana a una ruptura de la *pax deorum* provocada por el *incestum* de una vestal y su consecuente condena. Dicha situación se habría repetido en 216 y 113 a.C. (pp. 186-189), cuando se celebraron sendos procesos contra vestales por conducta incestuosa que concluyeron, primero, con el sepultamiento (en este caso sí¹⁶) de las acusadas y, de nuevo, con el enterramiento ritual de dos parejas de galos y griegos como necesarias expiaciones por la muerte de las condenadas; es decir, la decisión de sepultar a la vestal incasta no era simplemente el castigo por una conducta indecorosa, sino la reparación del crimen cometido por una persona de cuyo comportamiento dependía la preservación de la *pax deorum* (y, por lo tanto, el respaldo de los dioses hacia la comunidad), hasta el punto de requerir una inmolación adicional en la persona de los griegos y galos sepultados vivos en el *forum Boarium*.

14. Erdkamp, 2009, pp. 497-499.

15. Eckstein, 2012, pp. 212-219; el artículo de Erdkamp respondía a su vez a un trabajo que Eckstein había publicado en *American Journal of Ancient History* en 1982 (Eckstein, 1982). Erdkamp anuncia de hecho en la bibliografía la inminente publicación de otro trabajo en respuesta de nuevo a los planteamientos de Eckstein.

16. De acuerdo con la tradición, Tucia, la vestal acusada de *incestum* hacia los años 231-229 a.C. (*Liv., Per.* 20), habría salvado la vida mediante una milagrosa demostración de su inocencia (*Plin., N.H.* XXVIII 12).

Acierta posiblemente Erdkamp al destacar que el rechazo que coinciden en mostrar los autores posteriores hacia este tipo de prácticas no debía de ser compartido por quienes vivieron en primera persona tales sucesos (pp. 197-200), en la medida en que la violación de la *pax deorum*, manifestada por los portentos que rodearon al parecer al proceso contra las vestales, era una situación de la mayor gravedad que implicaba una respuesta acorde con el daño cometido y con los dictados de los Libros Sibilinos. Erdkamp se detiene también en otros aspectos de interés, como el posible origen de estos rituales o la desconcertante participación de sendas parejas de galos y griegos en calidad de víctimas necesarias para la restauración del orden divino (pp. 190-193); descartada con buen criterio la posibilidad de que se trate de una práctica heredada de los etruscos (como bien dice Erdkamp, los casos no son comparables a las escenas de sacrificios cruentos que decoran a veces las tumbas etruscas), tal vez debamos buscar su origen en el mundo griego, en la línea que comenta el autor, si bien es indudable que hay todavía numerosos matices que escapan a nuestra comprensión (¿por qué el método escogido para dar muerte a las parejas de griegos y galos era también el sepultamiento?) y a los que los especialistas habrán de dar respuesta en estudios posteriores.

Dentro de un libro dedicado a los vínculos entre religión y guerra en el mundo romano, no cabía sino esperar que nos encontráramos con un capítulo centrado en una cuestión de tanta trascendencia en la Roma republicana como las prácticas adivinatorias. Kim Beerden da debido cumplimiento a esta responsabilidad con una valiosa contribución (“With the Gods of their Side. Divination and Warfare in the Roman Republic”) en la que la autora destaca el papel esencial de la adivinación en la toma de decisiones por parte de las autoridades romanas y, más concretamente, en situaciones bélicas, como demanda la temática del libro. Beerden presenta un cuidadoso estudio de los distintos métodos de adivinación de los que se servían los romanos a la hora de dilucidar los mensajes divinos, estableciendo así una clara y necesaria distinción entre *auspicia*, *prodigia*, *haruspicina* y sueños y oráculos (pp. 221-227), cuya incidencia en la vida pública varió además de manera notable durante el periodo republicano, tal y como matiza la autora. A continuación, Beerden dedica la segunda parte de su capítulo a valorar los usos concedidos a estas prácticas en el mundo militar (pp. 229-241), destacando especialmente su utilidad en la legitimación de decisiones, así como su consecuente manipulación; de acuerdo con el planteamiento de Beerden, no cabe sino concluir que la adivinación se convirtió en un recurso decisivo para determinar lo que había de ser permisible,

lícito y moralmente correcto en el marco de una sociedad en la que, como insisten los distintos capítulos del libro, la *religio* lo dominaba todo.¹⁷

No es casual que Beerden concluya su capítulo con unas acertadas consideraciones en torno a la debatida cuestión de la verdadera naturaleza de las creencias romanas y su papel como instrumento de manipulación de las masas (pp. 239-241), subrayando, con buen criterio a nuestro juicio, el desacierto que supone plantear el asunto en tales términos, dado que el uso tendencioso de las prácticas adivinatorias por una parte de la comunidad romana no entra para nada en contradicción con la devoción a unos cultos a los que los romanos nunca habrían dispensado la más mínima atención de no haberlos considerado útiles y, por ende, verdaderos. Buena parte de culpa de estas interpretaciones la tiene la conocida tendencia a mirar la República con los únicos ojos de Cicerón, cuya particular visión del mundo de los dioses se ha convertido en el prisma habitual desde el que tratar la religión romana; pero también la tiene nuestra propia concepción del hecho religioso, que solemos proyectar hacia el pasado (ya sea o no de manera consciente) sin demasiados miramientos.

Jeremy Armstrong cierra el volumen con un trabajo dedicado a la ceremonia del triunfo (“Triumphal Transgressions”) y a sus implicaciones como parte de la compleja trama social y política de la República romana y de las relaciones que en ella se trababan. Desde una perspectiva de carácter predominantemente teórico, Armstrong concluye que el triunfo era una ceremonia transgresora concebida con el propósito de coadyuvar a la estabilidad de la comunidad mediante una serie de balances entre los comportamientos y actuaciones que se permitía realizar al triunfador, contraviendo por ejemplo normas tan conocidas como la de no entrar en el *pomerium*, y las cortapisas y contraprestaciones que la comunidad le imponía para poder llevarlas a cabo (pp. 263-274). Nos hallamos pues, según Armstrong, ante una ceremonia que rompía todas las normas establecidas, si bien de manera debidamente encauzada para evitar desviaciones capaces de comprometer la estabilidad del sistema. Aunque el punto de vista reviste sin duda interés, el planteamiento del autor resulta a veces poco claro, tal vez por lo especulativo de la interpretación, al mismo tiempo que tiende a distanciarse del eje esencial del libro, que no debería ser otro que los aspectos religiosos del mundo militar romano, para centrarse en las (en cualquier caso, interesantes) implicaciones políticas y sociales de la cuestión.

Dejando a un lado las cuestiones de detalle, como el hecho de trasladar las notas al final de cada capítulo, con el inconveniente que ello supone para la lectura, o de

17. A este respecto, se echa de menos en el capítulo de Beerden cierta atención a los trabajos de Yann Berthelet (en particular, 2015).

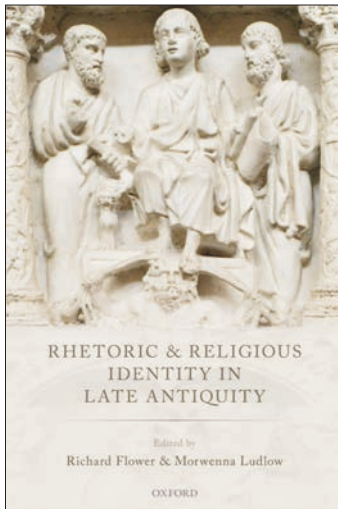
incluir traducciones de autores clásicos sin proporcionar el correspondiente texto en latín o griego (costumbre esta incomprensiblemente habitual en todo tipo de publicaciones destinadas al público académico), la obra presenta una edición muy cuidada, en tapa dura, con un buen número de ilustraciones que ayudan a la mejor comprensión de los contenidos abordados, además de un listado de abreviaturas (muy pertinente, dado lo poco habitual de muchas de las fuentes consultadas) y un completo índice, siempre útil, de nombres y términos. Aunque siempre se podría haber tratado la cuestión atendiendo a otros temas y puntos de vista, y pese a algunas de las consideraciones apuntadas en páginas anteriores, debemos concluir que el resultado del volumen es en conjunto notable, por lo que cabe suponer que el libro se convertirá en referencia necesaria para sucesivos estudios sobre milicia y religión en el periodo republicano.

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RHETORIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY



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HARRY O. MAIER
VANCOUVER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY / UNIVERSITÄT ERFURT
hmaier@vst.edu

RHETORIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN LATE ANTIQUITY PRESENTS a collection of essays that seeks a deeper understanding of the reciprocal formation of rhetoric and identity in “the long 4th century”, from the period of the Tetrarchy to the Theodosians, except for one contribution, within the Roman Empire. Its goal is to “enrich our understanding of the expression of late anti-antique religious identity” and to explore ways in which “religious identity was ascribed, constructed, and contested” to furnish

“a new perspective on rhetoric in late antiquity” (p. 3). It builds on earlier studies that have crossed disciplinary boundaries dividing areas such as classics, philosophy, patristics, and medieval history to explore the dynamics, malleability, and overlapping forms of religious identity in antiquity. To investigate these dynamics, it seeks to move beyond a general discussion of the role of rhetoric in representation of religious identity to consider “*how* that rhetoric worked, *who* used it, and in *what forms*” (p. 2) it did so. These questions are especially important because alongside their dynamic aspects, identities are often crafted in contested, indeed hostile, situations. To capture these dynamic aspects, the essays necessarily deploy broad understandings of both identity and rhetoric, which is both a strength and weakness of the collection. It is a strength because it points to the fluidity of such phenomena, and it is a weakness because it is not always clear what different authors mean when they refer to them. The best essays are those that keep the thematic firmly in view, written with introductions that set the agenda and conclusions that discuss the results.

The editors have grouped the contributions into three parts corresponding respectively to issues of the way rhetoric functioned, who deployed it, and what forms it took. Part One, “The Nature of Religious Identities and their Representations”, consists of three contributions each of which examines categories of identity in scholarly debate and the uses of terms in historical analysis. The first by Éric Rebillard, “Approaching ‘Religious Identity’ in late Antiquity”, reprises earlier arguments dedicated to the issue of the dynamic qualities of Christian religious identity in antiquity and then considers Ausonius as a case study. Rebillard draws on the modern identity theory of Rogers Brubaker to consider the ways in which identity salience and groupness (the conditions of a membership set of role, group, and person) become determinative in different situations. Brubaker developed his theory of groupness in opposition to the idea of groupism – namely the assignment of identities to static collectives. As identity when considered under the aspect of groupness is never singular and always multiple, it is inaccurate as scholars often do to engage in “groupism” by describing Ausonius’ identity as semi-Christian or other indices that focus on religion as a sole classificatory principle. Ausonius is an example of a person who had several identities, one of which was Christian. The essay could have been expanded to illustrate ways in which differing identities come to the fore in differing situations and specifically how rhetoric functioned to serve in the construction of various identities. In “The Rhetoric of Pagan Religious Identities. Porphyry and his First Readers”, Aaron P. Johnson offers a subtle and incisive chapter that complements Rebillard’s formulation of groupness in the Latin West by referring to the “polythetic” aspects of identity in a case study of Greek religion in the East, specifically that of Porphyry and his earliest readers, Iamblichus, and Eusebius of Caesarea. Johnson examines their

use of the term “Hellene” as a designation embedded in several categories such as culture, philosophy, race, and nation. The term should not be used as a synonym for “pagan”, but rather functioned rhetorically to embed religion within larger identity constellations. Johnson alerts us to the fact that Eusebius in cross-examining Porphyry never uses the term “polytheism” as a noun, but always adjectively as a form of rhetorical disparagement, even as he deploys *Judaismos* rhetorically: “Indebted as they are to earlier ways of framing religious difference within and between peoples, the *-ismos* labels are used as a rhetorically effective means of signifying inadequacies of the two rivals of Christianity, at least as long as Eusebius’s construction of those ethnic identities remains in play in the reader’s historiographical, national, and religious imagination” (p. 38). Nevertheless, these authors *do* use terms that subordinate other identity indices such as ethnicity, while not erasing them: *theosophia* (Porphyry and Eusebius though used in different ways) and *theourgos* (Iamblichus). *Goēteia* by contrast was used in ways not marked by such larger categories. Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Eusebius did not have a notion of “religion” distinct from ethnic or national identities, but they did “mark an identification of religion and/as philosophy in such a way that doctrine becomes essential”. Douglas Boin in “The Maccabees, ‘Apostasy’, and Julian’s Appropriation of *Hellenismos* as a Reclaimed Epithet in Christian Conversations of the Fourth Century CE”, takes up another dimension of the term *Hellenismos* in use in the middle of the 4th century to move Julian from the domain of both ancient and modern Christian caricature. Specifically, rather than seeing Julian as “the last pagan” or an “apostate”, he examines his support for “*Hellenismos*” as an act of retrieval: “I suggest that Julian appropriated a term which had negative, in-group connotations to give it a positive, in-group spin” (p. 52). Julian could be considered an “apostate” by “uncompromising Christians” (Gregory of Nazianzus named him as such); Boin advances the thesis that the emperor was “building a broad collation to ensure toleration of all of Rome’s worship practices” (p. 53) and that treating him either an apostate or a convert to paganism occludes what Julian was trying to achieve. More delightfully, Boin, using modern theories of linguistic reclamation, argues that Julian championed the term *Hellenismos* that had by the mid 4th century become in Christian usage a slur (“acting too Greek”) as a way of creating an in-group identity (much as the term “gay” has been reframed). Julian deployed *Hellenismos* as a way of subverting the powerful narrative of “the rise” or “triumph” of Christianity (words that continue to grace modern studies of the period) and the story that the church was supplanting traditional cults. The emperor’s reclamation of *Hellenismos* was intended in part as an appeal for a way of imagining a society not torn apart by a zero-sum religious mentality; by championing “acting too Greek” he was in effect pillorying those who were practicing an intolerant Christianity: “In this interpretation,

the Roman World was *not* engaged in an empire-wide ecumenical dialogue about the universal appeal of different theological views or religious systems. It was being torn asunder by the fact that the Christian community could not agree on what it meant to be a ‘Christian’” (p. 63). Julian sought compromise; those who called him an apostate pursued a more militant vision.

The essays of Part Two entitled “Agents of the Representation of Religious Identity” tackle the question of “who is responsible for representations of religious identity in the fourth century” (p. 3). The essayists consider Julian (Shaun Tougher), Augustine (Susanna Elm), Libanius, John Chrysostom and Augustine (Rafaella Criboire), the Manichaean Kephalaia (Nicholas Baker-Brian), and a host of authors who used the term *magic* as a rhetorical slur (Maijastina Kahlos). Tougher’s “Julian the Apologist. Christians and Pagans on the Mother of the Gods”, sits alongside Boin’s discussion of Julian’s engagement with Christians and takes up the emperor’s apologetic treatise *To the Mother of the Gods* and the polemical discourses of Arnobius of Sicca and Firmicus Maternus, treatises that were written by authors roughly contemporary with each other. Yet whereas Boin asks us to interrogate language of the “conversion” of Julian to paganism, Tougher argues that the emperor’s discourse to the mother of the gods “situates him as a convert to paganism” and that he has “an anti-Christian agenda (p. 81). Tougher would have benefited from Boin’s litigation of terms when he writes, for example, that Julian “is responding to Christian attacks, and drawing on his own experiences and understanding as a Christian” (p. 82). He is right to attend to “the need for Julian to be seen firmly within the context of his own times and in relation to contemporary Christian culture” (p. 82). But the essay suffers from a treatment of terms such as “times” and “culture” as monoliths. So, he can say, “Christians were keen to attack this pagan touchstone of empire, to replace the Great Mother with Christ, whilst for the pagan convert Julian, she was a central part of his programme of religious restoration and restoration of the Empire” (p. 82). Tougher states that for both Christians and pagans “in rhetorical construction of religious identity (...) the mother of the Gods had a critical role” (p. 82), but then takes identities as static realities rather than treating them as dynamically constructed realities in the ways that the essays of Part One invite historians to do. Elm’s rambling “Bodies, Books, Histories. Augustine of Hippo and the Extraordinary *civ Dei* 16.8 and Plin, *HN* 7”, without introduction or conclusions, shoots wide of the mark of the collection’s purported aims to consider the mutual influence of rhetoric and religious identity. The closest the essay comes to the theme is a comparative discussion of extraordinary human bodies by Augustine and Pliny, but without any reference to rhetoric and religious identity. With “Classical Decadence of Christian Aesthetics? Libanius, John Chrysostom, and Augustine on Rhetoric”, Criboire stays

on point and embraces the attention to the dynamics of identity the opening essays champion when she writes of “pagan and Christian relations”, that the two groups “were not written in stone, were not bounded and enduring, but were in continuous evolution. Christian and pagan allegiances were defined not only by practices and convictions but also by social relations” (p. 100). She contrasts the different orientations of Libanius and Chrysostom on the one side and Augustine on the other to rhetorical training. Whereas Chrysostom learned from his teacher Libanius of the importance of traditional and lengthy training as requisites for persuasive speech and applied them to his sermons, Augustine was less convinced of the value of this kind of training for the rank-and-file preachers he engaged with and saw the need for accessibility of rhetorical modes of communication. Criboire’s observations would have been more focussed and serviced the aims of the collection better had she related them to the issue of rhetoric in fashioning the religious identity not only of preachers but also of listeners and how rhetoric might have helped to promote a particular kind of salience amidst the continuous evolution of pagans and Christians she rightly identifies. Baker-Brian’s brief “‘Very Great Are Your Words’. Dialogue as Rhetoric in Manichaean Kephalaia”, begins by promising a discussion of the rhetorical form of a dialogue in the construction of religious identity”. “This chapter argues that Manichaean kephalic material was instrumental in augmenting core aspects of the identity of the religion – as a cumulative, and universalistic faith – by portraying Mani as a forensic figure whose explanations for the origin and workings of the universe trumped all others” (p. 115), but gets somewhat lost in the weeds of redaction and manuscript history – undoubtedly critical to an assessment of the text, but not germane to the volume’s focus. The issue of Mani as creator of religious identity and practitioner of rhetoric finds thoughtful exposition in Baker-Brian’s analysis of Mani engaging in a dialogical form of teaching or as a master teacher who vanquishes opponents through demonstration of superior Manichaean wisdom and its relation to the elite culture of the Sasanian court of 3rd-cent. Iran. The second part concludes with the equally short but incisive “‘A Christian Cannot Employ Magic’. Rhetorical Self-Fashioning on the Magicless Christianity of Late Antiquity” by Kahlos. The argument focuses on “the use of rhetoric in building and reinforcing Christian identity in which magic had no part to play. The image of magicless Christianity was enhanced in many contexts – apologetic, treatises, tractates, sermons, and especially hagiography” (p. 130). Treating magic as “social discourse and discourse of alterity” (p. 130) helps Kahlos explore “how Christian writers and church leaders in their rhetoric also defined the relationship between beliefs and practices they accepted and those they condemned” (pp. 130-131). Yet while figures such as Augustine, Origen, and John Chrysostom championed a magicless Christianity, predictably everyday people saw

no contradiction with mixing and matching their beliefs with practices condemned as magic. Here the examination could have been strengthened with consideration of daily practices that constituted shifting identities in differing situations and their relations to freelance ritual experts. Kahlos helpfully considers how one person's holy person was another's sorcerer and the ways theologians tried to distinguish the two. Accordingly, rather than speaking of those who used magic and who did not, she helpfully refers to "rituals and ritual experts" to show how authority determined what was proper religion and what made for magic. Whether people were involved in religion is of secondary importance to "the issue of analysing rhetoric and self-image" (p. 142).

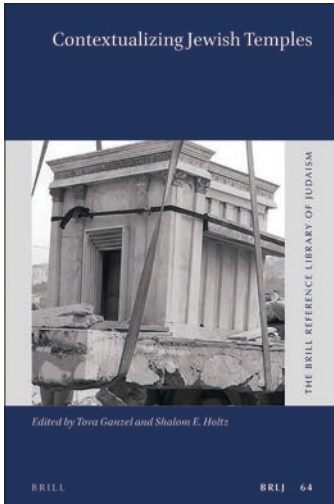
The third part, "Modes of Representation", comprised of six essays, focuses on the "how" of religious identity expression. These essays are central to the scope of the volume since it seeks to extend debate concerning religious identity to a variety of forms that include law codes and funerary art. "The Rhetorical Construction of a Christian Empire in the *Theodosian Code*" by Mark Humphries examines the legislation to observe "how the code represents a specifically mid-fifth-century perspective on recent imperial history" and the way they "produced a specifically Theodosian vision of a Christian empire" (p. 148), especially in Book 16, where "Theodosian" means any law issued between 379 and 438 CE. The essay repays rereading for Humphries' elucidation of the kind of religious and imperial vision of the past and present the Code promotes. Peter van Nuffelen examines a different formulation of the rhetorical construction of imperial past and present in "What Happened after Eusebius. Chronicles and Narrative Identities in the Fourth Century". He considers three case studies of Greek chronicles drawn from the large set of *chronica* composed in the period from after Eusebius (325 CE) and until Annianus (412 CE). Whereas there has been a tendency to interpret them in the light of the Arian controversy, van Nuffelen notes the noticeable lack of concern with doctrine. They are rather concerned to construct anti-pagan histories and to naturalize Christian belief and practice by aligning it with a history that begins with creation and with rituals in harmony with the solar calendar. Co-editor Richard Flower's "The Rhetoric of Heresiological Prefaces" considers Epiphanius's prefaces to the *Panarion*, Filastrius of Brescia's *Diuerarum hereseon liber*, and Augustine of Hippo's *De haeresibus* and their uses of "techniques that were widespread in ancient technical literature to guide their audiences to accepting a particular version of reality" (p. 182). Thus, rather than seeing the works as repositories for reconstructing the errors of heretics, Flower examines the way the prefaces draw on earlier literary conventions rhetorically to craft authorial identities burdened by the circumstances of error around them to address the many heresies that oppose right doctrine. The prefaces "each represent individual engagements with

both the rhetorical norms of ancient technical writing and the distinct concerns of Christian heresiological controversy, allowing their authors to craft religious identities for themselves as expert defenders of orthodoxy against its many enemies” (p. 197). The essay nicely examines authorial identity and appropriations of rhetorical conventions in framing these anti-heretical treatises. In a richly illustrated chapter, Robin M. Jensen turns to visual persuasion through an examination of funerary art in “Constructing Identity in the Tomb. The Visual Rhetoric of Early Christian Iconography”. With characteristic clarity and thoroughness, Jensen surveys the evidence to conclude that in contrast to earlier pagan sarcophagi with mythological iconographical schemes, Christians deployed a set of images “arguably as a compilation of proof texts” to “rehearse the story of salvation as a kind of visual catechism” (p. 217). In doing so they offered a “new kind of visual rhetoric. Perhaps they could be described as the catechism at a glance” (p. 218) and presented “a particularly Christian mode of viewing and a Christian type of *paideia*” (p. 218). “Renunciation and Ascetic Identity in the *Liber ad Renatum* of Asterius Ansedunensis” is the focus in a very brief essay by Hajnalka Tamas who explores Asterius’ theological-anthropological views and his exegetical strategies to defend ascetical renunciation of the world and complete withdrawal from society. By conferring ascetical meaning to passages and stories from scripture and translating their terms with ascetical vocabulary, Asterius “established a theological-anthropological programme that excluded any form of asceticism other than solitary asceticism, understood as renunciation of one’s relation to the world and the others” (p. 230). The question of how this relates to *rhetoric*, however, remains unstated and the essay rather devolves into a discussion of the ways in which Asterius’ conceptualization of asceticism overlapped with and differed from Jerome. The concluding essay by co-editor Morwenna Ludlow, “Christian Literary Identity and Rhetoric about Style”, examines the Cappadocians and their observations about rhetorical style in Scripture to litigate and deconstruct a common perception that they championed plain speech over against the elaborate rhetoric of Hellenism. The essay identifies “three ‘moods’ or ‘sensibilities’ evoked by texts, identified by three families of literary-critical terms” (pp. 233-235) – *i.e.*, “slender”, “pleasant”, and “majestic of sublime”. Rather than reading the two Gregory’s and Basil as siding for the “slender” over against the others, she rather argues that they championed all three but rejected styles of rhetoric that were inappropriately deployed. Moreover, they detected in the Bible the three styles of plain, majestic/sublime, and pleasant speech correctly deployed according to the mood a given passage was seeking to evoke. “For the Cappadocians (...) there is little evidence that they thought there was a clear distinction between an ‘elaborate’ discourse of the classical greats and a ‘plain

and simple' biblical discourse. In whatever they read, they identified the mood and judged whether appropriate means had been used to evoke it" (p. 249).

The strongest essays of this collection are those that work with a clear set of definitions and methods. Part One is by far the most useful section of the book and will repay the attention of readers since issues of identity and rhetoric are at the forefront. The essays that stay on theme and are organized in a way to take up the focus of the book's title are very good. Other essays only implicitly consider the way "religious identity was ascribed, constructed, and contested" and so indirectly offer "a new perspective on rhetoric in late antiquity" (p. 3); the reader is left to draw their own conclusions about this. In these essays it is not clear what "rhetoric" means: is it a form of discourse, a style, a way of talking about a socio-theological orientation? Further, the topic of identity is best serviced by those discussions that expressly refer to issues of the social construction of self and community and their fluidity.

CONTEXTUALIZING JEWISH TEMPLES



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JEAN-MICHEL POIRIER
 INSTITUT CATHOLIQUE DE TOULOUSE
 jean-michel.poirier@ict-toulouse.fr

CE VOLUME COLLECTIF PROPOSE D'ÉCLAIRER À LA FOIS LA présence, le rôle et les fonctions des temples juifs élevés à Jérusalem, à savoir le premier Temple édifié par Salomon et celui reconstruit après l'exil (début du VI^e s. av. n. è.), par les contextes à la fois externes et internes au peuple d'Israël et au pays de Juda/Judée ainsi que par des relectures dans le judaïsme postbiblique et dans le christianisme naissant.

Yuval Levavi s'attache à l'administration des temples néo-babyloniens, singulièrement celui d'Eanna à Uruk confiée à trois types de personnel : le *qīpu* qui veille aux intérêts du roi, le *šatammu* qui organise la vie quotidienne du temple et le scribe du temple qui assure l'administration proprement dite. L'étude s'intéresse

aussi à leurs relations qui peuvent évidemment varier en fonction des personnalités et des époques, être positives ou conflictuelles. Il apparaît que le *šatammu* travaille étroitement avec le scribe du temple. Tous assurent des tâches de veille (*maššartu*, à comparer avec le vocabulaire hébraïque *mishmeret/mishmarôt*) non seulement pour les fonctions religieuses du sanctuaire mais aussi dans sa dimension de pôle économique avec toute la logistique que cela génère : gestion des champs et des canaux d'eau par exemple.

Caroline Waerzeggers poursuit dans le même milieu (l'époque des temples néo-babyloniens au VII^e et VI^e s. av. n. è.) mais sous un autre angle : la rotation des fonctions sacerdotales et de l'administration puisque celle-ci est institutionnelle au Temple de Jérusalem, entre vingt-quatre familles au moins pour le Second Temple. Dans ce contexte, il faut distinguer les différents types de prêtres et le personnel non-sacerdotal au service du temple. Les prêtres ayant accès à la représentation cultuelle de la divinité avaient droit à des prébendes, c'est-à-dire des revenus non liés à un système rotatif des offices, bien que celui-ci ait pu les concerner pour des rôles précis. Les autres, situés à un niveau intermédiaire ou inférieur remplissaient des offices rétribués sur de courtes périodes à des rythmes variés calculés sur un calendrier de 360 jours (12 mois de 30 jours) : trimestriels, mensuels, par quinzaine ou sur un nombre par an déterminé, comme 24 fois dans l'année. Pour autant, les exigences liées à leurs fonctions débordaient du temps dévolu à celles-ci, si bien que beaucoup demeuraient en proximité du temple. Ce pouvaient être de pêcher, de cuire les pains ou de produire de l'huile, bref de tout ce qui était nécessaire au bon fonctionnement du culte. Tout cela est soigneusement régulé comme en attestent les textes étudiés par l'autrice qui s'intéresse également aux rôles joués par l'autorité royale et par la structure familiale.

La question du calendrier occupe aussi Jeffrey Stackert dans une contribution qui porte précisément sur le sabbat. Il explore le hiatus observé entre d'une part les calendriers trouvés par les recherches archéologiques dans des sites de l'ancien Israël (Gezer, 'Aro'er, Tel el-Far'ah) qui indiquent un schéma d'année sur 360 jours avec des semaines de cinq ou de dix jours et d'autre part le calendrier du courant biblique sacerdotal (P) qui promeut une semaine de sept jours. Le non-alignement du second sur le premier est intentionnel suggère l'A. : c'est un signe ('ôt)¹ destiné à attirer l'attention divine sur le sanctuaire qui lui est dédié. Après avoir rappelé que la vision sacerdotale de l'histoire est orientée vers le sanctuaire israélite et sa permanence, il montre que P privilégie les comptes en jours (150 jours pour le Déluge) plutôt qu'en

1. Ex 31,17.

mois et qu'à Jérusalem il promet une division hebdomadaire de 5 jours, ce qui signifie que le sabbat était originellement décompté à part, la semaine dont il est le terme n'étant pas alignée sur les affaires quotidiennes et les autres événements. Alors que pour P, le sabbat est un rappel de YHWH à se souvenir de ce peuple, dans la strate H (Loi de Sainteté) il devient rappel des commandements divins et de leur observance dont dépend la sainteté du peuple. La démonstration de l'A. se fait parfois très technique comme l'impose le sujet. On peine à toujours le suivre, par exemple quand il relie le sabbat à Gn 17,8 où il n'en est pas question ou quand il affirme que pour P, YHWH est « énorme » et a donc besoin d'un peuple nombreux pour produire d'abondants biens agricoles.

Avraham Faust s'interroge sur les relations entre « maison du père » et « maison du Seigneur » en partant du plan de maison à 4 espaces prédominant dans les sites israélites à l'époque du Fer I et au début du Fer II. Un espace large donne accès à trois autres espaces séparés, selon des formes qui peuvent varier. L'A. en suggère deux raisons explicatives. La première est commandée par une idéologie égalitariste, la seconde est qu'elle préserve l'intimité dans la mesure où l'espace commun desservant chaque pièce d'habitation, on n'est pas obligé de passer de l'une à l'autre, ce qui rendait plus aisé l'observance des lois de pureté rituelle. En contraste, les plans du Temple à Jérusalem, ainsi que celui d'Arad bien documenté par les fouilles archéologiques, reflète une conception strictement hiérarchisée qui ne partage pas du tout la conception égalitariste de la société reflétée dans les plans domestiques. La conclusion est que seul Dieu est considéré comme occupant une place radicalement supérieure. De plus, l'impureté n'a pas de place dans le cadre du sanctuaire, ce qui rend la structure en pièces à accès séparés alors inutile.

Gary Anderson propose une approche résolument synchronique de plusieurs textes relatifs au tabernacle du désert : son érection par Moïse,² les consécrationes d'Aaron et de ses fils,³ puis, les commandements divins pour l'action décrite dans les versets suivants.⁴ Il fait valoir les points de contact littéraire du premier texte d'Exode avec Gn 1,1-2,4a, mettant en valeur l'usage de septuples occurrences d'expressions de part et d'autre. Par exemple, cette péripécie d'Ex 40 utilise 28 verbes conjugués (soit 4 fois 7) pour décrire l'action de Moïse, répartie en quatre sections dont l'A. explore les possibles interprétations. Comme l'avait déjà suggéré Ibn Ezra, la construction du tabernacle au désert achève ainsi l'œuvre divine de création. Pareillement Lv 8

2. Ex 40,17-33.

3. Lv 8.

4. Ex 40,1-16.

raconte une série d'actions rituelles consécatoires dont Moïse est l'agent direct pour les six premières et Aaron pour la septième (mais avec la médiation de Moïse pour donner l'ordre). Dans le troisième texte étudié, l'A. retrouve 28 actions à conduire par Moïse décrite par un verbe transitif, dont 14 concernent le tabernacle proprement dit et 14 l'onction du tabernacle et des prêtres. La formule conclusive de cette section⁵ indique que Moïse fait tout ce que le Seigneur lui a commandé alors qu'il faut attendre Lv 8 pour voir la seconde série d'actions effectivement accomplies. Nous trouvons aussi deux théophanies marquant la dédicace du tabernacle : l'une en Ex 40,34-35 et l'autre en Lv 9,23-24, ce qui peut suggérer que ces deux séries de textes se suivaient originellement. Cette lecture est confortée par les « relectures » en Esd 6,13-22 et 2Ch 7,1-3. L'A. complète en raccrochant la thématique du livre des Nombres à cette succession commandée par un souci théologique

Simeon Chavel s'attache à l'expression *l'miqdāš me'aṭ* en Ez 11,16 qu'il explore dans son contexte par une soigneuse analyse linguistique. Après avoir examiné les différentes interprétations proposées du sens de *miqdāš* dans ce contexte, il relève combien le terme *me'aṭ* résonne étrangement. Comment Yahweh pourrait-il être un tant soit peu une « petite » mesure ou une « petite » version de quelque chose qui est saint ? Il rappelle la lecture de Qimḥi qui trouve des manuscrits où *miqdāš* apparaît à l'état construit (*miqdaš*), d'où le sens suivant du syntagme étudié : « le sanctuaire du peu ». D'autres versions amènent à interpréter *me'aṭ* comme renvoyant à une communauté humaine considérée comme « de peu », soit socialement, soit numériquement. Dans ces propositions revient à plusieurs reprises la figure de la synagogue, qui serait un sanctuaire en modèle réduit : mais peut-on le comprendre ainsi ? L'A. en doute. Enfin le v. 11,16b conclue-t-il ce qui précède ou est-il tourné vers ce qui suit dans le texte ? Replacé dans le contexte littéraire, il se réfère au sort d'une partie des Judéens déportés, que ceux restés sur place considère éloignés de YHWH. La syntaxe des versets 15 et 16 ouvre à toute une palette d'interprétations que l'A. déploie, aussi bien dans les anciennes versions que dans les plus récentes.

Pour notre part, nous donnons aux deux *kī* du v. 16 leur valeur emphatique, et au *waw* ouvrant la troisième proposition une valeur adversative. Finalement, l'A. ouvre la possibilité à ce que l'expression considérée (*miqdāš me'aṭ*) puisse désigner des figurines ou des formes miniatures de sanctuaires auquel les israélites auraient pu comparer YHWH à ce moment de leur histoire.

Paul M. Joyce poursuit avec Ezéchiel en étudiant sa conception d'un Temple rénové dans les chapitres 40 à 48 du livre. Ces chapitres, déplore l'A., sont trop

5. Ex 40,16.

souvent traités rapidement dans les commentaires d’Ezéchiel. Plusieurs points sont en question : le processus diachronique sous-jacent à ces chapitres et leur caractère idéaliste et/ou eschatologique. Sur le premier point, Joyce considère ces chapitres en cohérence avec la période exilique riche en programmes de rétablissement d’Israël. Il s’agit de répondre au profond traumatisme suscité par la destruction de Jérusalem et de son temple, et le vide que cela a laissé dans la conscience religieuse. Il interprète l’expression *l’miqdāš me ’aṭ* d’Ez 11,16 (voir contribution précédente) dans le sens d’une présence divine assurée auprès des exilés. En consonance, la vision développée dans les chapitres 40 et 48 peut être comprise comme se référant à un temple céleste plutôt que d’y voir un programme de reconstruction pour le temple de Jérusalem. Telle est du moins la lecture développée en 1982 par Steven Tuell, que l’A. présente et soutient. De fait, aucune indication pratique n’est fournie, aucun ordre dans ce sens n’est donné (mais Joyce en trouve des éléments en 43,10-11) et les chapitres 1 et 8 à 11 du prophète abondent dans le sens d’une conception céleste découverte à Ezéchiel *dès à présent*, non d’un projet réservé pour la fin des temps. Cela n’empêche pas que cette vision annonce le retour de la gloire divine dans le temple bientôt reconstruit à Jérusalem. L’objet de ces chapitres reste d’ancrer la place du temple à la fois dans la pensée des fidèles et dans l’espace du texte, d’autant plus nécessaire lorsque la réalité matérielle et physique est absente.

Avec Lawrence H. Schiffmann, on quitte l’époque biblique proprement dite pour s’intéresser au Rouleau du Temple de Qumrân (11QT^b) et au traité Middôt (dimensions, mesures) de la Mishnah. Le premier se présente comme un plan à mettre en œuvre (dimension prescriptive) alors que le second montre le Temple avant les agrandissements apportés par Hérode le Grand (dimension descriptive). Le Rouleau du Temple propose un sanctuaire bien différent du premier Temple : il choisit plutôt comme modèle la Tente du désert, sans doute aussi le Temple décrit par Ezéchiel dans les chapitres 40 à 48 du livre (voir contribution précédente). Avec ses 12 portes et ses mesures, il se propose d’assurer la sainteté de tout Israël, en ses diverses composantes, la bénédiction divine jaillissant du Tabernacle central où la Présence atteint son apogée. L’A. en donne les détails, ce qui sera fort utile à ceux qui souhaitent s’en faire une idée précise. Le traité Middôt donne des indications pour un Temple basé sur un socle de 500 coudées au carré, que l’archéologie du site semble confirmer comme dimension du temple à l’époque hasmonéenne (voir notamment les travaux de Ritmeyer ou de Bahat). Certes, ce traité est constitué après la destruction du Temple par les Romains en 70 de notre ère, mais on peut le considérer comme en faisant mémoire et en vue d’une éventuelle reconstruction. Comme pour le modèle précédent, l’A. entre dans les détails. Puis il compare les deux documents pour faire valoir les différences de théologie qu’ils reflètent. Alors que le Rouleau du

Temple part de l'intérieur, du Saint des Saints, pour aller vers l'extérieur dans le sens d'une sainteté qui irradie depuis son cœur, le traité Middôt accompagne la démarche des individus qui y viennent en pèlerinage ou y pénètrent pour leurs dévotions en y accédant depuis l'extérieur pour avancer vers le centre.

Enfin deux études abordent la dimension chrétienne sans la déconnecter de son contexte juif. Eyal Regev, de l'Université Bar-Ilan d'Israël se penche sur ce que l'évangile de Matthieu peut révéler du rapport des premiers chrétiens au Temple après 70 de notre ère. Il discute les principaux passages où il est fait référence au Temple et à ce qui s'y passe, comme les conditions requises pour y offrir un sacrifice,⁶ les serments sur le Temple,⁷ l'impôt dû au Temple,⁸ ce qui peut être plus grand que le Temple⁹ et le prix du sang retourné par Judas au Temple.¹⁰ L'intérêt de ces analyses relativement brèves réside surtout dans leur contextualisation en milieu juif. Tout en attestant d'un grand respect du Temple, qui demeure un lieu sacré même pour les chrétiens, ces passages font porter l'accent sur la cohérence éthique dans les relations à autrui. Lu après la destruction du Temple en 70 à laquelle Mt 23,38 fait allusion, cet évangile renforce ainsi la judéité de ses destinataires pour qu'ils se considèrent eux-mêmes comme Judaïsme « officiel » ou « commun ». Il les relie au centre sacré qu'était le Temple qui n'a rien perdu de sa valeur pour cet évangile. Cet apport est intéressant mais manque d'une mise en perspective avec le projet matthéen plus global qui accorde une place centrale à Jésus lui-même plutôt qu'au Temple. C'est précisément cet aspect-là qu'aborde, entre autres, la dernière contribution de l'ouvrage, dévolue à Risa Levitt, et qui porte sur la Présence divine en absence de Temple. L'A. rappelle d'abord que le Second Temple de Jérusalem ne possède plus ni l'arche, ni le Tabernacle, ce qui ouvre la porte à une certaine relativisation de la présence divine en son sein. Ce sentiment varie évidemment suivant les groupes internes au Judaïsme. Les Samaritains ont leur propre temple sur le mont Gerizim tandis que les communautés juives égyptiennes disposent de deux temples : à Eléphantine en Haute-Égypte et à Léontopolis en Basse-Égypte. Les rapports de Jésus avec le Temple sont ambigus, notamment dans sa prétention à pardonner les péchés qui concurrence les dispositifs cultuels mis en place à cet effet dans le cadre du Temple. Finalement, la présence divine semble émaner plutôt de lui, comme cela est manifeste à partir du baptême. La communauté établie à Qumrân considère impur et corrompu le Temple de Jérusalem

6. 5,23-24.

7. 23,16-22.

8. 17,24-27.

9. 12,1-8.

10. 27,7.

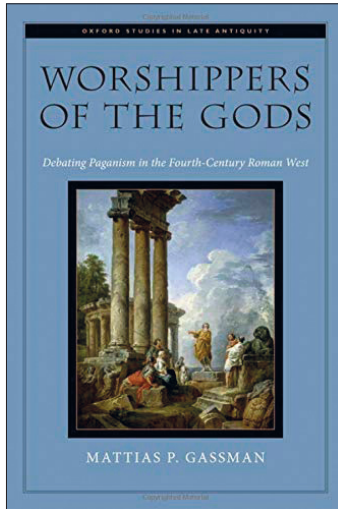
et elle espère le moment où Dieu le rénovera. En attendant, c'est la communauté elle-même qui fonctionne comme Temple, sous la conduite du Maître de Justice. Pour l'apôtre Paul aussi, les membres de la communauté forment un édifice spirituel dont Christ est la pierre angulaire. Mais lui n'attend pas de nouveau Temple matériel. Les Pharisiens ne s'opposent pas au Temple mais étendent la sainteté des prêtres à l'ensemble du peuple. D'autre part, l'attention est portée sur la Loi et ses observances. Après 70, la Torah et son étude deviennent lieux de la rencontre avec Dieu, remplaçant d'une certaine façon le Tabernacle comme résidence divine. Dieu se rencontre aussi dans la prière personnelle et communautaire. Pour l'évangile de Jean, c'est le corps même de Jésus qui constitue le vrai Temple¹¹ tout comme il est le Logos divin. Le discours d'Etienne en Ac 7 témoigne d'un mouvement considérant le Tabernacle céleste comme supérieur au Temple terrestre, construit de mains d'hommes. L'A. ne manque pas en passant d'évoquer la position sous-tendant l'épître aux Hébreux qui ignore le Temple mais se concentre sur la signification du Tabernacle et du sanctuaire tout comme le livre de l'Apocalypse qui ne voit pas d'autre Temple céleste que Dieu et l'Agneau.

Dans ces études bien documentées, toute personne qui s'intéresse au(x) temple(s) dans le Judaïsme pourra y trouver son miel, mais le genre littéraire de ce genre de publication n'offre pas de vue synthétique sur la question. D'autres voies sont encore à explorer pour faire ressortir la signification et la portée particulières de cette réalité commune aux grandes religions antiques, dont Israël partage des aspects mais dont il faudrait faire mieux ressortir le caractère propre qui tient à sa vision singulière du Dieu unique.

Comme cela est habituel dans ce genre d'ouvrage, on trouvera en fin d'ouvrage une belle bibliographie (29 pages) ainsi qu'une table des références bibliques et extra-bibliques, enfin une table thématique.

11. 2,19-22.

WORSHIPPERS OF THE GODS



GASSMAN, MATTIAS P. (2020). *Worshippers of the Gods. Debating Paganism in the Fourth-Century Roman West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 252 pp., 87,16 € [ISBN: 978-0-1900-8244-4].

ÉLISE COIGNET
UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE
elise.coignet@unige.ch

DANS SA MONOGRAPHIE, *WORSHIPPERS OF THE GODS*, ÉLABORÉE à partir de sa thèse de doctorat, Mattias P. Gassman s'interroge sur la manière dont des auteurs latins, qui partagent une éducation et des considérations intellectuelles communes, ont pu repenser le rôle de la religion traditionnelle dans l'Empire au IV^e siècle. En les comprenant comme des témoins des contextes historiques et politiques du siècle, il examine l'avant-après Constantin en comparant les *Institutiones Divines* de Lactance et le *De errore profanarum religionum* de Firmicus Maternus, pour introduire ensuite la question de la « religiosité sénatoriale » et l'apparition de la notion de « paganisme » au IV^e siècle. Son travail poursuit trois objectifs clairement énoncés dans l'intro-

duction : dresser un tableau clair de la multiplicité des conceptions chrétiennes du polythéisme et donner un aperçu de la diversité des approches « païennes » (l'auteur mobilise ici et à plusieurs reprises le terme de *pagan* sans tenir compte de ses biais) ; proposer une évaluation nuancée des objectifs de textes polémiques en fonction de leurs contextes historiques ; réévaluer la construction du concept de paganisme et de ses origines comme interprétation chrétienne de la « religiosité sénatoriale » (p. 17).

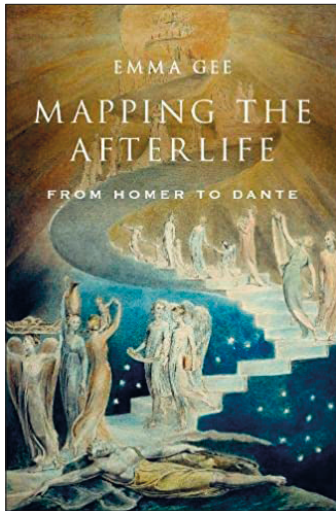
L'intérêt du travail de Gassman repose sur la manière dont sa lecture fine des textes permet de renouveler de plusieurs manière notre approche de ce qui se joue autour de la religion traditionnelle au IV^e siècle. Il déconstruit nombre de présupposés relatifs aux auteurs chrétiens mais surtout à ce qui a longtemps été appelé le « triomphe du christianisme », pour rafraîchir notre perception du basculement des rapports de force entre le christianisme et les autres. Prenant les *Institutiones divines* de Lactance comme témoin de la période pré-constantinienne, il établit qu'elles sont loin d'être une simple réfutation des cultes païens appelant à la tolérance religieuse : « *Sometimes taken as an appeal for mutual religious toleration, Lactantius's challenge, is, in context, an unequivocal assertion of the emptiness of traditional public cults* » (p. 41). Elles se révèlent selon lui comme une véritable tentative d'expliquer les origines et la domination des *falsae religiones* dans la société romaine. Grâce au *De errore profanarum religionum* de Firmicus Maternus, Gassman s'attache à comparer l'avant et l'après Constantin pour montrer que le ton a changé et qu'il ne s'agit plus pour les chrétiens d'attaquer pour se défendre comme chez Lactance mais de condamner pour éradiquer. Les *religiones* des autres ne sont plus *falsae* mais *profanae*, l'erreur des autres devient une menace qu'il faut combattre. L'œuvre de l'astrologue, longtemps négligée car jugée comme celle d'un opportuniste fraîchement converti au christianisme, est réhabilitée par M. P. Gassman comme celle d'un chrétien convaincu, qui mérite toute notre attention (p. 58). Firmicus Maternus, au milieu du 4^e siècle, rompt définitivement avec la tradition apologétique qui cherchait à faire accepter le christianisme comme religion de l'Empire, pour appeler à la destruction complète des cultes polythéistes. Pour la première fois, un auteur chrétien attaque avec la même insistance les cultes officiels et non-officiels et attribue l'existence des cultes non-chrétiens non plus aux démons mais au Diable (p. 60). Reprenant les conclusions de Francesco Massa qui proposait de considérer l'astrologue comme le premier à avoir construit l'opposition entre christianisme comme système théologique et cultes traditionnels comme système rituel, Gassman inscrit son travail dans une dynamique de reconsidération des origines du concept de « paganisme ». Il établit un rapport de proximité entre le texte de Firmicus Maternus et les *Questiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* attribuées à Ambrosiaster, qu'il présente comme dépendants tous deux d'une « *Christian interpretation of pagan henotheistic theology* » dont le contexte est éclairé par le cor-

pus d'inscriptions sénatoriales du *Phrygianum* de Rome. Son étude du corpus épigraphique lui permet de compléter l'hypothèse défendue par Neil McLynn en 1996, selon laquelle les sénateurs usaient de la pratique rituelle comme vitrine du prestige social, pour comprendre le paganisme à la fois comme « *an object of polemical theory and as a system of belief and practice* » (p. 83). En éclairant toute la diversité des « *religious interests* » des sénateurs romains, Gassman pointe l'entière responsabilité chrétienne dans l'invention de l'idée qu'il existait une religion polythéiste unifiée, reposant sur le culte à plusieurs dieux (p. 106). De fait, afin d'éclairer les différents débats et enjeux autour de la construction de l'idée de paganisme, il se propose de réexaminer l'affaire de l'autel de la Victoire et l'épisode du décès de Praetextatus. Alors que l'Ambrosiaster construit pour la première fois le concept de *paganitas* et attaque le paganisme, l'empereur Gratien édite de nouvelles restrictions des cultes publics de Rome. Au-delà des restrictions financières, c'est l'ordre de déplacer l'autel de la Victoire hors du Sénat qui provoque le débat entre deux grandes figures du IV^e siècle : le « païen » Symmaque et le « chrétien » Ambroise, évêque de Milan. En repensant cet épisode à travers les discours construits autour de la polémique, Gassman propose de recontextualiser l'influence et l'autorité de Symmaque et d'Ambroise. Selon lui, leur autorité était probablement moins forte que le laisse penser la rhétorique, du fait qu'Ambroise avait une position ambiguë vis-à-vis des groupes chrétiens rivaux et que Symmaque ne faisait pas l'unanimité parce qu'il ne prenait pas en compte toute la diversité religieuse du Sénat dans sa *Relatio* (p. 116). L'angle d'approche choisi par Gassman révèle que l'idée d'un affrontement discursif opposant l'autorité païenne et l'autorité chrétienne est insuffisante et qu'il convient de remettre en cause cette vision dichotomique qui a longtemps dominé les recherches sur l'Antiquité tardive. Dans la même dynamique, il s'intéresse aux différentes prises de position de Jérôme, du *Carmen contra paganos*, de Symmaque et de Paulina – l'épouse du défunt –, autour du décès de Praetextatus et de la question de sa commémoration. En mobilisant textes et documentation épigraphique, Gassman parvient à illustrer tous les désaccords sur la manière d'approcher et concevoir la religion qui ont pu, par-delà l'opposition des chrétiens aux païens, opposer des chrétiens et des païens entre eux.

La monographie de Gassman offre une mise au point fort utile sur les rapports qu'entretenaient païens et chrétiens au IV^e siècle de notre ère. Grâce à une exploration fine des contextes et enjeux des discours qui se construisent sur la religion traditionnelle romaine, elle invalide les schémas trop simplistes qui ont ponctué la recherche sur les compétitions religieuses dans l'Antiquité tardive. Loin de l'idée du triomphe du christianisme, de la résistance païenne, ou d'un choix des romains de faire bloc face aux tensions religieuses de leur époque, il montre qu'étudier les premiers siècles au moyen des catégories de « païens » et de « chrétiens » pose problème car elles

occultent la diversité des prises de position, contextes et projets polémiques propres à chaque auteur. Comprendre toute la diversité des discours et projets construits autour de la question des cultes traditionnels, c'est comprendre qu'il est essentiel de se départir de la dichotomie païen/chrétien pour étudier le IV^e siècle, un temps où ces catégories, telles que nous les concevons, n'existaient pas encore.

MAPPING THE AFTERLIFE



GEE, EMMA (2020). *Mapping the Afterlife. From Homer to Dante*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 348 pp., 80 € [ISBN: 978-0-1906-7048-1].

MARK F. McCLAY
HILLSDALE COLLEGE
mmclay@hillsdalle.edu

LANDSCAPES OF THE UNDERWORLD, THOUGH IMAGINARY, also stand in definite relation to the real world of the living. This principle – simple in itself, complex in its manifestations – lies at the heart of Emma Gee’s fascinating and imaginative *Mapping the Afterlife. From Homer to Dante*, handsomely produced by Oxford University Press. The book’s title understates its scope and ambition. This is not a conventional study in Classical reception, nor is it exclusively or even primarily focused on poetic tradition. Instead, Gee’s argument traces interactions in ancient thought between portrayals of the afterlife and changing models of the cosmos and natural world (what Gee terms “science”, always in inverted commas).

This interrelation involves a tension between “journey” and “vision”, between the soul’s postmortem itinerary on the one hand and the panoramic overview of the world on the other. In afterlife narratives, the soul’s journey is usually described by means of traditional eschatological images, while the overall vision is accommodated to a “scientific” understanding of the world. Underlying this tension between journey and vision is the imperative to bring the soul into alignment with the cosmos – what Gee, borrowing Jungian psychoanalytic vocabulary, calls “psychic harmonization”. Homer and Dante mark the book’s chronological limits, but its argument incorporates geographers, mapmakers, philosophical writers, and musical theorists as prominently as poets. The collocation of sources not usually studied together repeatedly yields unexpected insights and is one of the book’s signal strengths.

The first set of chapters (1-3) explore the journey-vision paradigm in several ancient sources. Gee begins with Herakles in the Homeric underworld (Chapter 1): in Gee’s argument, the hero’s bilocation as an image (*eidolon*) in Hades and a self (*autos*) among the gods reflects an incorporation of individual afterlife into a multi-tiered vision of the cosmos.¹ Here, as elsewhere, Gee is rightly skeptical of *Quellenforschung* as a means of resolving inconsistencies in ancient afterlife representations. The next chapter (2) discusses underworld space as portrayed in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Polygnotus’ painting at Delphi (known via Pausanias), and Apulian vases: as Gee demonstrates, these imaginary landscapes use forms of spatial organization similar to those found in geographical writers (Strabo, Pomponius Mela) and even maps (notably the medieval *Tabula Peutingeriana*). Chapter 3 examines the shift from a Homeric model of the cosmos, which imagined the world as a multi-layered disc surrounded by the river of Ocean, to the spherical Earth, which was divided into zones. These cosmic models have implications for afterlife imagery, and different authors and mapmakers seek to locate Hades in the spherical world. Claudian’s *De Raptu Proserpinae* interestingly combines features from both the stratified (poetic) and spherical (scientific) models.

The next two chapters (4-5) explore eschatological applications of two different cosmic models. The fourth chapter stands as the intellectual core of the book. Here Gee undertakes to cut a Gordian knot of scholarly debate relating to the afterlife in *Aeneid* 6. In a final synoptic overview of the underworld, the Vergilian narrator describes it as a “wide plains of air” (*aeris in campis latis*): this line has prompted many explanations, including Eduard Norden’s conjecture of “Orphic” influence (1926). Gee instead posits the creation of the human soul by the Demiurge in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in which souls have a celestial origin, as a previously unrecognized background ele-

1. *Od.* XI 601-604.

ment for this and other passages in *Aeneid* 6. This move, which at first seems only to replace one *Quellenforschung* argument with another, assigns the *Timaeus* a key role in several ancient and medieval afterlife portrayals, including their cosmological aspects. The dialogue will reappear like an *idée fixe* in subsequent chapters. As Gee also shows, Dante's *Paradiso* adapts the Platonic descent-from-the-stars theme: within a Christian cosmology, however, the poet must stress that this is a metaphor rather than literal truth.² (Gee shows a healthy skepticism in this chapter toward constructions of "Orphism" that have long informed discussions of ancient eschatology: one wishes similar caution had been applied in other areas of her argument, especially in Chapters 1 and 7).

Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* takes center stage in Chapter 5. Here again Gee observes ways in which the afterlife scheme of Plato's *Republic* has been accommodated to fit two cosmological ideas: the multi-zone spherical earth and the harmony of the spheres. On both these points, Gee observes that Cicero's departures from Plato reflect a different "scientific" understanding of the cosmos. Gee argues that the harmony of the spheres in the Platonic Myth of Er are understood as producing a chord-like blend of pitches rather than degrees of a scale (a contrarian claim carried further in Chapter 6).

The halfway point is marked by a chapter titled "Intermezzo" (The book is suffused with charming musical allusions, of which this section's title is the most prominent). Here Gee considers the tendency of ancient and medieval "scientific" models of the cosmos toward expansion, both temporal and spatial, in search of new principles of order. Thus models of the sun, stars, and planets begin with reckoning time by the solar year (the sun's movement between the tropics), then turn to the lunisolar year (the return of sun and moon together to the same position) and the "Great Year" (the time taken for all planets to return to their same positions), in which the "irregular" movements of the planets are reinterpreted as a principle of regularity. Then comes the precessional year, prompted by Hipparchus's discovery of the "fixed" stars' gradual rotation (about one degree per century). Dante, finally, imagines both a ninth sphere of the Prime Mover beyond the fixed stars (which he attributes to Ptolemy) and a tenth unmoving sphere of the Empyrean Heaven beyond that.³ Across all these developments, an "outer skin of order" (p. 186) is imposed on each new "scientific" understanding of the cosmos. Such developments also expand the territory available to the soul in afterlife imagery.

2. *Aen.* VI 887; *Tim.* 41d8-42b5. Cf. Dante, *Par.* IV 49-63.

3. *Convivio* II 3, 7-8.

The final sections are devoted to Plato's afterlife myths (Chapters 6-8) and the incorporation of the afterlife into astronomical models (Chapters 9-10). Chapter 6 turns again to the *Timaeus*, this time conjecturing that its musical construction of the world soul alludes to the harmonic overtone series, or the acoustic property of vibrating bodies to produce a sequence of pitches above their base tone at intervals corresponding to whole-number ratios of 1:2, 2:3, etc. The phenomenon of overtones, first scientifically understood in modern times, was likely known in some form to ancient musicians.⁴ Gee's speculative reading of the *Timaeus* provides basis for a further reinterpretation of the *Republic's* afterlife myth as a cosmic model for the right ordering of the soul (This interpretation, it should be noted, assumes that the pitch intervals in the *Timaeus* are calculated from the bottom up, as in Western music, rather than the usual Greek habit of reckoning from the highest pitch downward).

The analyses of afterlife myths in Plato's *Phaedrus* (Chapter 7) and *Phaedo* (Chapter 8) count, respectively, as possibly its weakest and strongest chapters. While Gee rightly observes that the eschatological myth of the *Phaedrus* presupposes a spherical and cyclical cosmos, her overall reading of the dialogue is unconvincing on several counts. The interpretation of the narrative frame (Socrates and Phaedrus meeting outside the Athenian city walls) as a *katabasis* or underworld descent is tenuous at best, and much of her argument rests on superficial and unpersuasive parallels with the Orphic-Bacchic gold tablets. Gee's explication of the *Phaedo*, however, ranks among the most compelling in the book. The True Earth is a perfect synthesis of a "scientific" spherical cosmos with traditional eschatology: Plato situates the "ideal" Earth on an upper layer far above the terrestrial surfaces inhabited by mortals; meanwhile Tartarus is relocated to a cavity of the spherical world and the underworld rivers are reimagined as channels through the Earth's interior.⁵ Gee also focuses on the variegated coloring of the True Earth. Though the dialogue uses Anaxagoras as its explicit foil for Socratic/Platonic philosophy, here Gee finds the fingerprints of a different Presocratic: Empedocles, especially his description of a painter mixing colors. Empedocles uses this metaphor to illustrate the mixture of the four elements; for Socrates, the same image serves as an analogy for the wholeness of the True Earth, in which a variety of colors are blended into a unity. The True Earth also has bodily properties, including respiration: on this point Gee again detects Empedoclean influence.⁶

4. *Tim.* 35b-36b; see Arist., *Prob.* XI 6, 899a; XIX 8, 918a; *de Aud.* 803b-804a.

5. *Phd.* 111e-112a (Tartarus); 112e-113c (rivers).

6. *Phd.* 110b-111a (coloring); 112b-c (respiration); cf. Empedocles fr. 31 B23.1-8; 31 B100 DK.

The final section (Chapters 9-10) turns to Platonic afterlife images as developed in Plutarch and Dante. Chapter 9 brilliantly interprets Plutarch's *On the Face in the Moon* as a transposition of Plato's True Earth into a different three-tiered cosmic model. In Plutarch's adaptation, the ideal version of Earth is relocated on the Moon; Earth becomes Tartarus; Hades is the region between Earth and Moon. The parts of the cosmos also become identified with aspects of the human self: body (Earth), soul (Moon), and mind (Sun). Plutarch offers perhaps the most explicit case of "psychic harmonization" among the ancient sources discussed in the book. The final chapter (10) turns to Dante's *Paradiso* and its engagement with Platonic tradition (adumbrated in Chapter 4). Gee focuses on the senses, especially sight and sound: in the vision of paradise, the senses are blended and frequently fail to grasp the true nature of the created order. This failure is most dramatic when Dante flips the classical cosmos and its concentric spheres inside out: this is an extra-sensory image, impossible to visualize, and accessible only in abstraction. As in Plato, the senses point to a reality that is ultimately beyond sensory perception; in Dante's cosmos, however, this Platonist tendency toward the ideal is tempered by Christian theological considerations, as "transhuman" transcendence of sensation is impossible.⁷

The book's cross-disciplinary scope is a great asset, and it will offer readers an invaluable orientation to unfamiliar texts and questions. This same breadth is also the volume's greatest liability, as it will be difficult to please academic specialists across such a range of subject areas. Noticeable to this reviewer is Gee's uneven engagement with recent debates about "Orphism" – important to any treatment of ancient eschatology – which weakens her argument at several points (noted above). The book's overall framing also hangs somewhat askew. As a foil to her argument, Gee places excessive weight on the venerable but outdated work of Erwin Rohde while giving less than full attention to current narrative-focused approaches to afterlife traditions.⁸ While an exhaustive bibliography should not be expected in a study of such breadth, certain omissions are surprising. The book's final chapter, describing the afterlife's multi-sensory character in Plato and Dante, oddly asserts that there is "no language that can express the intersection of the senses – for that we'd have to invent a whole new set of sensory terminology" (p. 315): this overlooks research in ancient aesthetics on precisely this question.⁹

7. *Par.* XXVII 46-51; cf. *Par.* I 70-1.

8. Rohde, 1890-1894. For an instance of the narrative approach, see Edmonds, 2004, which Gee only cursorily acknowledges on p. 9.

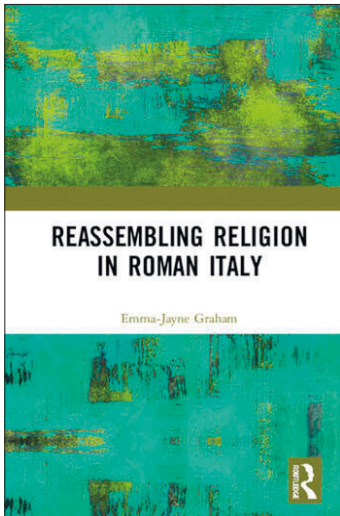
9. See esp. Porter, 2010 and Butler & Purves, 2013.

Such blemishes, however, should not eclipse the work's larger merits. It is an intellectual achievement of a high order, developing important and original arguments that will merit serious attention across several subfields of Classics, Religious Studies, and the History of Science. Though the book assumes familiarity with some ancient sources (especially Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedo*), most primary texts are quoted at length, making the book accessible to a wide readership. Even if one is reluctant to accept the claim that harmonization is a cross-cultural "psychological constant" (p. 5), this interpretive lens proves insightful for analysis of ancient (or medieval, or modern) eschatology. The book itself, whether by design or not, seems to instantiate its own journey-vision paradigm. The reader is brought in linear fashion through successive *tableaux* of the imaginary world beyond death: but what gradually comes into focus is a synoptic vision of the relation between soul and cosmos. For those who attempt the underworld journey, Gee is a worthy successor to the Sibyl. At each station, her guidance is sure to illumine, provoke, and invite us to seek further.

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REASSEMBLING RELIGION IN ROMAN ITALY



GRAHAM, EMMA-JAYNE
(2021). *Reassembling Religion in Roman Italy*. London & New York: Routledge, 268 pp., 142 € [ISBN: 978-1-1382-8271-1].

MASSIMILIANO DI FAZIO
UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA
massimiliano.difazio@unipv.it

NEL PROCESSO DI INTERPRETAZIONE DELL'ANTICO È INEVITABILE mettere in conto un certo grado di soggettività. Quando si cerca di andare oltre un livello di analisi puramente descrittivo, infatti, intervengono tanti elementi di valutazione che dipendono dall'approccio dello studioso, dai suoi percorsi, dalle scelte di metodo. Ciò vuol dire, come ben sa chiunque faccia questo mestiere, che può capitare di leggere un saggio che tecnicamente non ha particolari errori di analisi, ma col quale tuttavia non si riesce ad essere in sintonia. Il libro che qui si recensisce e questa recensione ne sono un esempio.

Il volume in oggetto si colloca per certi versi sulla scia di un nuovo approccio alla religione antica che va sotto il nome di *Lived ancient religion* (d'ora in avanti LAR), il cui principale fautore è Jörg Rüpke e il vivace gruppo di studio riunito presso

il Max-Weber Kolleg di Erfurt. A dire il vero, la Graham spiega che il suo approccio è solo parzialmente coincidente con quello del LAR: “*The specific theoretical underpinnings of this study are rather different from those explored by members of the LAR project, but ultimately they are about seeking alternative paths to not dissimilar ends: understanding what it means when we say that ancient religion was ‘lived’*” (p. 9).¹ Vedremo tuttavia che in vari aspetti l’influenza dell’approccio LAR si avverte.

Il libro è strutturato in un capitolo introduttivo e uno conclusivo che racchiudono sei capitoli dedicati a sei temi. L’introduzione è particolarmente importante, perché presenta il tentativo di spiegare al lettore l’approccio, la prospettiva e le strategie che saranno poi adottati nei capitoli successivi. L’approccio è, per così dire, più “filosofico” che storico o archeologico: nell’introduzione, come poi nel resto del libro, ricorrono concetti presi a prestito dai più recenti dibattiti teorici che caratterizzano le scienze sociali, come “*posthumanism*”, “*thingliness of things*”, “*agency*”. Obiettivo dichiarato è quello di mettere in evidenza l’importanza dell’elemento materiale, della *thingliness*, nel vissuto della religione romana, attraverso uno sguardo di tipo “*new-materialist*”. Il proposito è piuttosto ambizioso: il libro “*seeks to change quite radically the way in which ancient religion is approached and understood*” (p. 7). L’A. parte dal presupposto critico secondo cui gli studi sulla religione romana soffrono di due debolezze: sono troppo ancorati alla tradizione testuale, sottovalutando l’importanza del dato materiale,² e sono troppo attenti alla larga scala del fenomeno, ovvero le dimensioni pubblica e civica. Ciò che giustifica un nuovo – e dichiaratamente innovativo – libro sul tema della religione romana è l’approccio più attento all’importanza della materialità: una materialità vista con prospettiva diversa da quelle tradizionali, che vengono considerate “antiquaria”. Un punto importante nell’introduzione è proprio l’insistenza sulla necessità di portare l’archeologia classica al tavolo delle teorie, e nello specifico di incrementare gli apporti delle riflessioni teoretiche allo studio della religione romana: cosa che in passato sarebbe stata fatta poco e male, ovvero in maniera poco concreta. A p. 12 troviamo alcuni passaggi chiave: l’A. si propone di interrogarsi su “*What did Romans understand ‘religion’ to mean*”, e di farlo in maniera diversa, cioè non “*by exploring what individuals and communities thought they were doing when they performed sacrifices, dedicated offerings, and visited sacred*

1. Cf. anche p. 19: “*in contrast to the works cited earlier [testi su LAR], I seek to pay closer attention to how ancient lived religion was not a product of human individual intentionality or self-awareness alone but a result of experiences of material engagement*”.

2. In un saggio che intende rivalutare l’aspetto materiale della religione sarebbe forse stato utile considerare i contributi di Colin Renfrew e opere di riferimento sul tema come ad esempio Insoll, 2004; Kyriakidis, 2007; Droogan, 2013.

locations, or how these ideas were represented within, or symbolised by, material, epigraphic, and textual evidence”, ma piuttosto cercando di comprendere “*what the relationships forged between ancient persons and other things as part of this active doing of ritualised activities actually did to the world, and how this produced lived religion*”. I brani appena citati sono cruciali a livello programmatico; eppure suscitano qualche perplessità, su cui mi soffermerò a conclusione di questa rassegna. Sempre nell’introduzione, vengono tratteggiati i limiti cronologici e spaziali della indagine, che si concentra su casi che vanno grossomodo dal V secolo a.C. al V d.C., anche se il più dei casi presi in considerazione si addensa tra la media Repubblica e gli inizi dell’età imperiale: l’A. è convinta che vi sia una sostanziale continuità nelle forme di “*ritual knowledge*” attraverso i secoli. Sul piano geografico, l’area considerata è quella che include Roma, il Lazio e più in generale l’area tirrenica: anche in questo caso, pur riconoscendo che alcune aree non possono essere considerate pienamente “romane” nelle epoche più antiche considerate, l’A. sostiene vi sia una certa coerenza nei meccanismi materiali coinvolti nella produzione religiosa. Torneremo anche su questi punti in conclusione.

Il capitolo 2 è dedicato ad approfondire gli strumenti con i quali l’A. intende dare corpo ai propositi espressi nell’introduzione. Il primo punto riguarda la nozione stessa di religione, per la quale viene dato credito alle posizioni espresse in anni recenti da Brent Nongbri,³ secondo cui sarebbe un concetto privo di senso in relazione al mondo antico: un punto di vista, questo, che non è esente da critiche anche piuttosto fondate.⁴ Si passa poi all’idea di LAR, a cui si riconosce il merito di aver dato il via ad una nuova ventata di interpretazioni del fenomeno religioso. L’A. poi passa in rassegna i concetti che verranno utilizzati nei capitoli seguenti: il concetto di *proximal* e *distal knowledge*, la *thingliness of things*, il concetto di “*assemblage*” che assume un’importanza centrale (da cui il “*Reassembling*” del titolo), e in generale l’approccio neo-materialista alle questioni culturali e rituali.

Con il capitolo 3, che è intitolato “Place”, si inizia a trattare di esempi concreti. Anzi, in questi capitoli l’A. sceglie in maniera efficace di iniziare il discorso con la presentazione di un caso esemplare: nelle pagine introduttive il caso è quello dell’enigmatico rito degli Argei, fantocci di giunco che venivano gettati nel Tevere in occasione di una cerimonia religiosa sul cui significato gli studiosi si sono interrogati da sempre. Nel capitolo 3, il caso in apertura è quello della Tavola bronzea scoperta nel XIX secolo ad Agnone, in Molise, contenente un ampio testo religioso in lingua osca.

3. Nongbri, 2013 (che aveva espresso le sue idee già in saggi precedenti).

4. Si veda ad esempio Casadio, 2010.

La scelta è in effetti piuttosto sorprendente. Si tratta di un documento della religiosità osca, dunque di un comparto culturale molto diverso non solo da quello romano, ma anche da quello genericamente definibile “tirrenico” (latino-romano, etrusco) e che la stessa Graham indica come riferimento geografico per il suo libro. Siamo in un ambito appenninico-adriatico che conosce solo tardi il fenomeno urbano, che ha una diversa attitudine nei confronti della scrittura, che in definitiva ha una visione del mondo ben diversa da quella di ambito tirrenico.⁵ Come se non bastasse, va ricordato che il documento in questione è tuttora piuttosto problematico: date le circostanze del rinvenimento ottocentesco, non siamo sicuri nemmeno che il luogo di culto a cui si riferisce fosse lì dove la tavola venne rinvenuta.⁶ Ciò non può non aver conseguenze sui ragionamenti relativi al rapporto tra il luogo di culto e la natura, ai suoi possibili frequentatori, al tipo di rituali che vi potevano aver luogo: ragionamenti molto suggestivi, ma che rischiano di essere poco attendibili stanti le conoscenze attuali sul contesto specifico. Seguono alcune pagine interessanti sulla natura dei luoghi di culto e la loro “stagionalità”, ovvero i cambiamenti a cui poteva andare incontro l’esperienza religiosa di chi frequentava un santuario col cambiare delle stagioni.⁷ Il capitolo prosegue con l’analisi di alcuni celebri santuari del Lazio, in particolare quello della Fortuna Primigenia a Palestrina, quello di Terracina,⁸ e quello di Giunone a Gabii. Non mancano osservazioni interessanti, specie per lo sforzo di aggiungere alla prospettiva tradizionale la dimensione del movimento dei frequentatori del santuario, o di immaginare aspetti di ombra e luce che avranno effettivamente avuto un ruolo nell’impatto emotivo di un grande santuario; altre osservazioni suonano un po’ peculiari.⁹

5. Mi permetto su questo punto di rinviare a Di Fazio, 2017.

6. Del Tutto Palma, 1996.

7. Anche in questo però vorrei sottolineare un elemento che forse manca nel libro, ovvero le fonti giuridiche. La definizione di un luogo di culto infatti, nell’esperienza religiosa romana, è anche una questione giuridica, oltre che religiosa. Il buon vecchio Wissowa, 1912, nel capitolo su *die Örtlichkeiten des Kultus* (pp. 467-475) aveva già raccolto i dati necessari. Idiosincratice – benché legittime – in generale mi sembrano le scelte in bibliografia, come l’assenza di maestri vecchi (Wissowa, Dumézil, Nock) o meno vecchi (Versnel, Linderski, Torelli).

8. La Graham (p. 67) ritiene erronea la tradizionale attribuzione del santuario terracinese a Iuppiter *Anxur*, mentre chi scrive ha in diversi lavori difeso questa possibilità. Ma la questione non viene discussa.

9. In relazione alle ripide rampe di accesso al santuario prenestino leggiamo (p. 60) che “*an ancient visitor to Praeneste encountering its steps would have understood, through familiarity with being in a world in which steps were encountered and regularly negotiated, that they were designed to connect one or more points situated at different levels and that by engaging with them their perspective on the world would be altered*”.

Il quarto capitolo è dedicato a “Objects”. Anche in questo caso, si parte con un esempio concreto: i rilievi dell’Arco degli Agentarii a Roma, con i suoi ricchi dettagli raffiguranti oggetti di culto. Il punto chiave del capitolo è una riflessione sui rapporti tra uomini e cose, ovvero sui diversi agenti degli atti rituali, attraverso un’analisi dell’*agency* degli oggetti che venivano utilizzati nel corso dei rituali di sacrificio. Anche in questo capitolo non mancano osservazioni interessanti: in particolare l’evocazione di aspetti per noi persi delle attività rituali come la musica e più in generale il suono, e la dimensione olfattiva richiamata ad esempio dall’incenso. Altri punti mi risultano francamente meno chiari, come l’insistenza sull’*agency* degli oggetti in uno sforzo di ridimensionare l’importanza dell’azione dell’uomo, che sarebbe piuttosto frutto di un approccio antropocentrico: questo sforzo però mi sembra produca in alcuni casi risultati che lasciano qualche perplessità.¹⁰

Il quinto capitolo è dedicato a “Bodies”, ed è basato su precedenti studi dell’A. sugli oggetti votivi. Il caso di partenza è la cavità dei “Pantanacci” a Lanuvio, che non solo ha restituito una importante quantità di votivi (recuperati grazie ad un provvidenziale intervento della Guardia di Finanza), ma costituisce un insieme cultuale molto suggestivo, caratterizzato da abbondanti acque. Si tratta di un contesto che offre – come sottolineato dall’A. – la possibilità di riflettere sul rapporto tra corpi veri (quelli dei dedicanti che frequentavano il luogo) e corpi finti (quelli d’argilla che venivano dedicati). Il cuore del capitolo è dedicato proprio ai cosiddetti votivi anatomici, una classe di materiale su cui negli ultimi decenni vi è stata una importante attenzione.¹¹ Le riflessioni sono suggestive, ma lasciano anche qualche perplessità. Ad esempio, è interessante notare che una mano in terracotta assomiglia ad una mano umana, ma allo stesso tempo le sue qualità (la materialità fredda e rigida) hanno le potenzialità per far sì che “*human sensory attention might be expressly drawn to the dissonance produced by this multiplicity of divergent qualities and to the fundamental material ‘otherness’ that it implies, leading to an acknowle-*

10. P. 85: “*Looking more closely at what it was that afforded the death of an animal victim reveals that the result of the axe meeting its neck can be understood more accurately as the outcome of a relationship between the qualities of a human thing and those of a more-than-human thing: the materialness of the human body could grasp the materialness of the axe and was also able to swing it, but the material characteristics of the axe, including the weight of the metal head and its capacity to be sharpened to a cutting edge, also brought a certain set of affective qualities to that relationship, combining with the swing of the popa in that ritualised context to make a difference to the world that manifested in the form of a ritually slain animal.*”

11. Purtroppo mancano riferimenti a importanti studi che avrebbero arricchito l’analisi su questi materiali: penso agli studi raccolti in Comella & Mele, 2006, a Strazzulla, 2013, ma anche all’importantissimo volume di Parisi, 2017, che – benché incentrato sulla Magna Grecia – è prezioso per qualunque discorso sui depositi votivi e sui materiali contenuti, anatomici compresi.

dgement that this model is definitely not always a hand” (p. 122). D’altro canto, mi chiedo quali alternative più “morbide” potessero darsi alla creazione di un oggetto in argilla; di conseguenza, la freddezza e rigidità non sono necessariamente elementi chiamati in causa in maniera intenzionale da chi realizzava l’oggetto, e dunque sono un aspetto secondario. Caricare di valenze metaforiche queste qualità accidentali rischia di essere un esercizio intellettuale stimolante, ma che forse va oltre le intenzioni di chi produceva e “consumava” questi oggetti.

Il capitolo 6 è dedicato ai “Gods”, ed è forse il capitolo con più elementi di interesse. Caso di partenza sono le tre statue femminili in trono fittili da Ariccia, identificate comunemente come Demetra e Kore. Uno dei temi chiave del capitolo è proprio la questione dell’identificazione delle statue di culto nel mondo romano, ovvero se si debbano considerare raffigurazioni di una divinità o di un fedele.¹² Il caso di Ariccia è significativo: se due delle figure femminili sono le due dee, la terza chi è? La riflessione sulla natura degli dei porta ad alcune osservazioni interessanti. Condivido, ad esempio, la tesi che *“the efforts of Roman writers to intellectualise or at least schematise the divine world are characteristic of the intellectual spheres of the imperial period and may not reflect the realities of either lived experience or earlier periods of Roman and Italic history”* (p. 145). Importante è anche l’insistenza su due aspetti storici: da un lato l’incremento del ricorso alla scrittura nelle pratiche religiose dall’epoca tardorepubblicana in poi, dall’altro i cambiamenti nel paesaggio religioso romano a partire dalla media Repubblica con la moltiplicazione di templi e di statue, la coniazione di monete con l’iconografia degli dei;¹³ tutti elementi che avranno contribuito a determinare un processo di irrigidimento di nomi e attributi divini e dunque un mutamento in una realtà che invece doveva presentarsi in precedenza più fluida (p. 146). Merita di essere sottolineato questo punto che valorizza la dimensione del cambiamento storico, in contrasto con la posizione espressa dall’A. nell’introduzione e che sembra piuttosto voler dare della religione romana un’immagine poco sensibile ai mutamenti nel tempo. Interessanti sono anche le considerazioni sull’aniconismo nella religione antica (pp. 160-163), e il rigetto di un certo approccio che a volte si incontra negli studi, e che tende a vedere la natura in termini suggestivi e un po’ *naïf* (p. 163). Il resto del capitolo prende in esame in particolare il ruolo dell’acqua in relazione alle figure divine: pagine suggestive, in cui però è frequente il ricorso a formule dubitative. In conclusione del capitolo si afferma – giustamente, a mio avviso – l’esi-

12. Avrebbe giovato all’analisi la consultazione di alcuni dei contributi citati in Parisi, 2017, pp. 512-515.

13. Riguardo a questi temi è un peccato che l’A. non abbia fatto in tempo a prender visione dell’importante libro di Padilla Peralta, 2020, uscito solo un anno prima.

genza di cambiare il modo di considerare gli dei romani, con meno enfasi su dettagli come i nomi e gli attributi e più attenzione alle loro qualità.

Il capitolo 7 è dedicato a “Magic”, e non poteva non iniziare dal clamoroso caso del culto di Anna Perenna a Roma. Alla base del capitolo vi è il tentativo di mostrare che la magia non è che una forma di religione: un tema, come noto, fortemente dibattuto. Non entro nel merito, se non per osservare che le pagine dedicate alla “magia” antica sono per certi versi il frutto di un approccio vicino a quello LAR: accentuando la prospettiva dell’individualità, mi sembra si corra il rischio di sottovalutare gli aspetti più propriamente sociali e politici del discorso religioso, perdendo dunque di vista il fatto che i rituali comunemente etichettati come “magici” hanno spesso aspetti privati, nascosti, di reazione. Ma il tema è molto complesso e andrebbe oltre i compiti di una semplice recensione.

Il libro si chiude con un breve capitolo in cui l’A. procede a riesaminare i principali risultati che ritiene di avere ottenuto, e apre spiragli per ulteriori indagini sulla stessa scia.

Come già detto, nell’introduzione l’A. sottolinea che il suo proposito non è quello di dare una spiegazione di tipo simbolico a rituali, ma piuttosto di comprendere l’interrelazione tra chi partecipava a quei rituali e la materialità che ai riti era funzionale. Però non possiamo trascurare il fatto che i partecipanti avevano una seppur vaga consapevolezza di stare prendendo parte ad un insieme di azioni dotate di un significato. Diverse testimonianze lasciano vedere come un approccio interpretativo ai riti religiosi romani non sia un capriccio intellettualistico di studiosi moderni, ma un percorso suggerito e legittimato dalle stesse fonti antiche.¹⁴ Per cui, è certamente buona idea riflettere sulla materialità degli oggetti, dei corpi, degli spazi coinvolti in queste attività: ma si rischia di perdere di vista quella che era per gli stessi partecipanti la funzione, il senso del loro partecipare. Per dirla in maniera semplice, la sensazione a volte è che, volendo andare a vedere la religiosità nel suo vissuto, si finisca per andare oltre ciò che gli stessi partecipanti ai riti erano convinti di stare facendo.¹⁵

14. Si veda ad esempio Servio, *Aen* II 116: *Et sciendum in sacris simulata pro veris accipi: unde cum de animalibus quae difficile inveniuntur est sacrificandum, de pane vel cera fiunt et pro veris accipiuntur.*

15. Questo, peraltro, mi pare sia un punto di criticità non solo del libro della Graham ma più in generale dell’approccio LAR. Un’analoga critica è infatti nella recensione di John Bodel al libro di Rüpke, *Pantheon* (in *JRA*, 33, 2020, p. 585). Sarebbe a mio avviso utile tornare a riflettere su quanto osservato da Talal Asad, secondo cui le definizioni di religione che enfatizzano l’aspetto dell’individualità interiore sono influenzate da una visione che risente dell’immagine post-antica della religione: Asad, 1993; cf. su questo punto Droogan, 2013, p. 15, che inoltre sottolinea che “*definitions of religion that privilege the*

Un altro punto di perplessità riguarda l'aspetto cronologico e geografico. Al di là di dettagli (come trovare in apertura del capitolo 3 la Tavola di Agnone), vedo qui un elemento critico, che peraltro, a mio modo di vedere, riguarda anche la prima parte dell'importante libro di J rge R pke, *Pantheon*. Il motivo della mia divergenza sta in fondo nella differenza di approccio: chi scrive   convinto, sulla linea di Durkheim, che la religione sia un fenomeno sociale, e che di conseguenza sia portata a cambiamenti a seconda dei mutamenti della societ  che lo esprime. Come gi  sottolineato, l'A. svolge i suoi esempi partendo dal presupposto che non vi siano grandi differenze nei meccanismi che regolano i rapporti tra la materialit  del fenomeno religioso attraverso spazio e tempo. Personalmente, ritengo sia potenzialmente fuorviante tentare di analizzare Roma arcaica con gli strumenti che utilizziamo per le epoche successive. Un esempio concreto dei rischi sta nell'equivoco legato alla distinzione tra culti domestici e religione pubblica: la Graham (p. 25) ritiene, sulla scia di R pke, che tra queste due sfere non vi sia differenza. Ci  pu  avere un valore se parliamo della Roma dalla tarda Repubblica in poi, ma vorrebbe dire sottovalutare l'importanza della struttura "gentilizia" a livello sociale, politico e dunque religioso nella Roma (e nell'Italia) arcaica.¹⁶ Ma questo   un tema che richiederebbe troppo spazio e non pu  essere affrontato in questa sede.¹⁷

In definitiva, ci sono diversi aspetti del libro che suscitano qualche perplessit , e sono questioni sia di dettaglio sia – soprattutto – di metodo, relative all'impostazione teorica. D'altro canto, proprio perch  si tratta di questioni teoriche, un altro lettore potrebbe condividere l'impostazione e di conseguenza trovare il libro stimolante. In ogni caso, ritengo comunque che si tratti di una lettura utile per chi   interessato alla religione e alla cultura romana, poich  contiene riflessioni non scontate e spunti che inducono ad assumere prospettive di analisi diverse da quelle consuete. E questo   comunque sempre un merito.

individual and their interiority (for instance, 'belief') over the social, the externalized and the engaged will reinforce the perceived separation between religion and the material world".

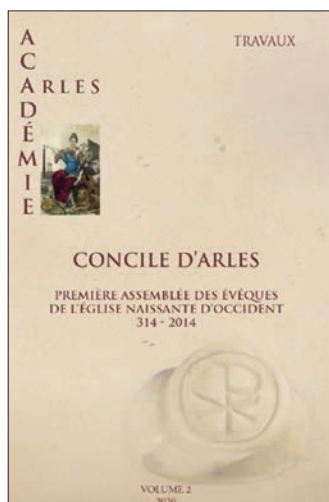
16. Non   un caso che in *Pantheon* il paragrafo dedicato alla questione (R pke, 2018, pp. 255-261) sia incentrato su esempi di et  imperiale.

17. Sulla questione rimando ai saggi raccolti in Di Fazio & Paltineri, 2019.

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CONCILE D'ARLES



HEIJMANS, MARC (ed.) (2020). *Concile d'Arles. Première assemblée des évêques de l'Église naissante d'Occident, 314-2014. Volume 2. Arles: Travaux de l'Académie d'Arles. 108 pp., 15 € [ISBN: 978-2-8695-8523-2].*

ELENA ALGUACIL VILLANÚA
 UNIVERSIDAD DE NAVARRA
 ealguacil@alumni.unav.es

MARC HEIJMANS (PRESIDENTE DE LA ACADEMIA DE ARLÉS), en esta publicación, recoge las actas del coloquio que se celebró el 11 de octubre de 2014, en la Academia de Arlés, con motivo de la conmemoración del 1700 aniversario del primer concilio celebrado en la ciudad de Arlés en el 314 d.C. La importancia de esta asamblea de obispos reside en que su reunión tuvo lugar debido a la voluntad propia del emperador Constantino. Es por ello por lo que la celebración de este coloquio y la revisión de dicho acontecimiento merecen una publicación como la que a continuación se presenta pues supuso un hito en la Historia del mundo romano y en la Historia de la Iglesia.

Este concilio, celebrado poco después de la conquista de Roma por parte de Constantino en el 312, ha sido objeto de numerosos estudios. Se trata de una reunión que surge a raíz del problema donatista, también tratado en diferentes artículos y publicaciones referidas a la Historia de la Iglesia y de la de Roma. Relativos al problema donatista y el concilio celebrado en la ciudad de Arlés en el 314 se pueden destacar las aportaciones de André Mehat,¹ Charles M. Odahl,² Elizabeth DePalma Digeser,³ John L. Boojamra,⁴ Harold A. Drake,⁵ Richard Miles,⁶ Noel Lenski⁷ y Giuseppe Zecchini,⁸ entre otros muchos. Aun contando con numerosas publicaciones que recogen este acontecimiento, hay que señalar que la escasez de monografías centradas únicamente en esta reunión de obispos hace de estas actas un volumen necesario para el estudio del concilio de Arlés en sí mismo dentro del problema donatista.

El volumen, dedicado al promotor del congreso que se celebró en 2014, Jean-Maurice Rouquette, presenta una estructura deductiva, donde los diferentes autores contextualizan el acontecimiento, desgranán sus cánones y su razón de ser, además de exponer su repercusión en la ciudad de Arlés y las consecuencias de su celebración.

En su prefacio (pp. 9-12), el editor de la obra, Marc Heijmans, enuncia las particularidades del congreso y la sucesión de coloquios relacionados con la controversia cristiana del siglo IV asociada a esta región francesa y, en concreto, a la ciudad de Arlés que la Academia de Arlés y los Amigos de Saint-Trophine llevan celebrando desde 2013.

A modo de contextualización histórica del periodo en el que el concilio de Arlés se circunscribe, Jean-Maurice Rouquette, promotor del congreso y antiguo presidente de la Academia de Arlés, en la “Introducción” (pp. 13-18) expone las particularidades del periodo del siglo IV en materia religiosa, concretamente, en la historia del cristianismo, desde la promulgación del Edicto de Tolerancia del 311 por Galerio hasta la celebración de dicha reunión de obispos. Para ello, presentó el problema donatista y la situación del Imperio tras los Acuerdos de Milán del 313. En las páginas que siguen a esta introducción, se transcriben las “Palabras de acogida” al congreso (pp. 19-20) que Jean-Maurice Rouquette realizó, a modo de bienvenida, al inicio de la reunión.

1. Mehat, 1989.

2. Odahl, 1993.

3. DePalma Digeser, 1994.

4. Boojamra, 1998.

5. Drake, 2002.

6. Miles, 2016.

7. Lenski, 2016.

8. Zecchini, 2017.

En el primer capítulo de las actas, “La diffusion du Christianisme en Occident en 314” (pp. 21-40), el investigador Jean Guyon se centra en la presentación de las diferentes comunidades cristianas que estaban próximas a la ciudad de Arlés. A través de diferentes mapas, el lector puede observar la distribución y aumento de las comunidades cristianas y la difusión del cristianismo desde principios del siglo III y hasta principios del IV d.C. Se centra, principalmente, en Hispania, Galia, norte de África, península itálica y Dalmatia. Para ello, no solo se basa en los testimonios escritos sobre obispos o mártires, sino que también fundamenta su estudio en testimonios arqueológicos de los primeros cristianos.

Marc Heijmans, en el segundo capítulo de estas actas: “Arles, été 314, profil d’un cite épiscopale” (pp. 41-50), muestra la localización de la ciudad y la evolución de su urbanismo durante el periodo del Imperio romano, para así valorar los diferentes edificios en donde este concilio pudo haber sido celebrado.

En un tercer capítulo, “Pourquoi un concile en Arles en 314?” (pp. 51-57), Pierre Maraval expone de modo sucinto las particularidades y consecuencias de la batalla del Puente Milvio en el 312 y los Acuerdos de Milán en el 313. Fue a partir del comúnmente llamado “Edicto de Milán” cuando la política del Imperio se reorientó y otorgó un cierto estatus a la Iglesia cristiana, pues en este encuentro entre Constantino y Licinio se reconoció la libertad de culto y, por ende, de conciencia, tanto para paganos como para cristianos, además de devolverse a la Iglesia los bienes que se le habían confiscado.⁹ Es a partir del 313 cuando la Iglesia, gracias a esa *pax constantiniana*, pudo construir templos y reedificar los que le habían sido devueltos.¹⁰ Constantino, de hecho, se convirtió en “mecenas” del cristianismo, favoreciendo la construcción de templos cristianos, aunque sin dejar de patrocinar la erección de templos paganos.¹¹ Tomando este aspecto como premisa, Maraval centra su exposición en la evolución de la comunidad cristiana de Cartago: sus obispos, mártires y cisma donatista. Asimismo, resalta las particulares del sínodo celebrado en Roma un año antes que el de Arlés, en el 313, donde la comunidad donatista, remitidos por Constantino, se reunieron en la capital del Imperio junto con el obispo de Roma, Milcíades, y diversos obispos, entre ellos, algunos de la Galia y el propio obispo de Cartago, Ceciliano.¹² Asimismo, señala las

9. Lactant., *De mort. pers.* 48, 7-9; Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* X 5, 1-14.

10. Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* X 2-3.

11. Moreno Resano, 2013, p. 77.

12. Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* X 5, 18.

posibles razones de la elección de la ciudad de Arlés como ciudad de acogida para el concilio que sustituiría al sínodo celebrado en Roma del año anterior (pp. 54-57).

Más adelante, Luce Pietri, en su intervención “Les canons du concile d’Arles de 314: aux origines de la chrétienté en Europe” (pp. 59-70), realiza de un modo extraordinario un compendio de lo tratado en el concilio de Arlés recopilando todos los testimonios diseminados por las distintas fuentes literarias. Resalta la importancia del concilio, por tratarse del “primer concilio de la nueva era” en occidente (p. 60). Los veintidós cánones del concilio se agrupan en tres grandes temas que Pietri va desgranando a lo largo del capítulo. Como primer tema propone los principios que rigen la institución eclesiástica; le sigue un epígrafe donde comenta el marco de las comunidades cristianas en las provincias del lado occidental del Imperio; y, por último, centra su atención en las medidas de control de la comunidad laica debido al aumento de conversiones al cristianismo para evitar que se contaminaran con creencias propias del paganismo.

En un quinto capítulo, “Le donatiste ou la pureté de l’Eglise?” (pp. 71-78), Xavier Manzano reflexiona sobre la cuestión donatista para una mejor comprensión del concilio de Arlés. En su aportación, partiendo de las cuestiones de pureza y santidad, reflexiona sobre las cuestiones que llevaron al cisma donatista. No solo se centra en las cuestiones teológicas, sino también expone las consecuencias de la conversión de ciudadanos romanos y el nombramiento de nuevos obispos dentro de un momento de profundo cambio, es decir, cómo las razones políticas de las diferentes persecuciones acaecidas el norte de África hasta el 311 produjeron la rama donatista dentro de la religión cristiana. Asimismo, estudia las tesis donatistas poniendo de relieve las razones que llevaron a la comunidad del Norte de África a generar tal controversia.

Michel Baudat, en el último capítulo que lleva por título “Constantinia, la mémoire rêvée des Arlésiens” (pp. 79-102), ofrece un estudio pormenorizado de la identidad arlesiana y la importancia de la ciudad en tiempos de Constantino, que, incluso, llegó a cambiar su nombre a *Constantina* en honor a Constantino II en el 328 o 329.¹³ Baudat hace un repaso del estudio de la ciudad y sus monumentos más emblemáticos desde época de Constantino hasta el siglo XX, comentando diferentes fuentes literarias y yacimiento arqueológicos desde la Antigüedad tardía en adelante. Asimismo, repasa los símbolos de la ciudad de Arlés y la tradición constantiniana que de ella se desprende.

Las conclusiones (pp. 103-106) corren a cargo de Jean Guyon, quien, a modo de cierre del coloquio celebrado en 2014, expone el motivo de la celebración de dicha

13. RIC 7 *Arelate* 318-426.

reunión y, además de recoger las aportaciones de cada ponente, incide en las condiciones que favorecieron la celebración del concilio de la ciudad de Arlés.

Por lo tanto, y como se ha resaltado hasta ahora, con el deseo de poner fin al conflicto donatista, se celebraron en Roma, en el 313, un sínodo, y en Arlés, en el 314, un concilio. El cisma donatista se había fraguado en el norte de África, en donde la comunidad cristiana movida por Donato de *Casae Nigrae* se separó de la Iglesia por considerarla contaminada y poco rigurosa. Tanto en el sínodo celebrado en Roma como en el concilio de Arlés el veredicto fue desfavorable para los donatistas.¹⁴ La decisión de Constantino de convocar esta reunión en Arlés supuso un hito en la historia del cristianismo, ya que, por primera vez, un cargo político tomaba la iniciativa de convocar una reunión de obispos, pues era algo exclusivo de la jerarquía eclesiástica cristiana.¹⁵ Por todo lo expuesto anteriormente, la publicación de las actas del congreso celebrado en el 2014 resulta interesante y necesario para poner de relieve, en un volumen, la importancia del concilio celebrado en el 314. Pero no solo eso, sino que se trata de una aportación importante al estudio de la ciudad de Arlés durante este periodo y a la situación de la Historia de la Iglesia durante el periodo constantiniano.

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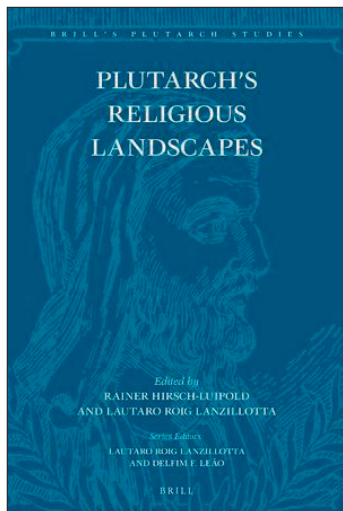
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15. Drake, 2012, p. 118.

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PLUTARCH'S RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPES



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DANIELE MORRONE
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA
daniele.morrone2@unibo.it

THIS BOOK COLLECTS NINETEEN PAPERS FROM TWO consecutive meetings of the *Réseau International de recherche Plutarque* (RED) which took place under the title “Plutarch and the Ancient Religious Landscape” at the Universities of Groningen (27-29 September 2017) and Bern (28-30 June 2018), with the addition of an introductory chapter on Plutarch’s general relationship with the religious sphere. All the chapters are written in English, except for chapter 11 and 20, written in French. The result is an extensive and rich miscellanea on the many religious and theological themes touched upon in Plutarch’s writings. The term “landscapes” in the book’s title is used mainly in a metaphorical sense, as the spatial dimension of rituals or escha-

tological narrations is only given prominence in chapters 7, 14, and 17. The *leitmotiv* of the collection is the study of Plutarch's testimony on ancient religion "both as a scientific observer and as an actor" (p. 1) – being him both a Platonist philosopher and a priest at Delphi – and of his own elaborations of theological and eschatological themes, in the frame of his "religious philosophy and philosophical religion". In this endeavour, whose outcome is an important and worthy addition to the large bibliography on the subject, it is only unfortunate to note that very little attention has been paid to Plutarch's theological dialogue *De sera numinis vindicta*, which might limit the validity or exhaustiveness of some of the contributions in the volume.

Since Plutarch is also studied as an informer on religious practices and conceptions, the interest of the book is not limited to scholars working specifically on this author: some chapters are very informative on Greek religion in a way which goes beyond Plutarch's own interests and views (14, 16, 17); others present comparisons between his thought and the imagery he employs with tendencies in early Christian texts (5) and Gnosticism (6, 8); and others investigate the reception of Plutarch's works in the Early Modern age (19, 20). Two chapters are only loosely concerned with ancient religion, rather focusing on "lay" ethics and psychology (11) or on physical cosmology (19).

After the introduction, the book is divided in three sections: part 2 (chapters 2-11) has a more philosophical focus; part 3 (chapters 12-18) is of higher interest to the history of religions; and part 4 (chapters 19-20) is dedicated to Plutarch's Early Modern reception. The book is usefully complemented with an index of ancient sources.

Since there is no overarching message uniting the individual chapters, each can be read independently from the others and deserves its own discussion. In the limited space of this review, I will only comment on a few of their merits and potential issues. On a general level, it may be observed that the latest complete critical edition of Plutarch's *Moralia*¹ is not taken into account in any of the chapters, including those engaging in philological discussions (3, 7, 17).

Chapter 1 (pp. 11-36), by Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, is titled "Religions, Religion, and Theology in Plutarch". This chapter is the best short overview of Plutarch's relationship with religion that is currently available in the English language, and it can definitely substitute Hirsch-Luipold's earlier synopsis in the Blackwell companion,² except for the subject of Plutarch's eschatological myths, here not touched upon.³

1. For the first volume, see Ingenkamp & Bernardakis, 2008.

2. Hirsch-Luipold, 2014.

3. On these, I suggest referring to Deuse, 2010.

Giving central prominence to Plutarch's peculiar form of monotheism (§ 3.4), labelled "polyatric" for its openness to foreign rituals and conceptions of the divine sphere,⁴ the chapter means to convey two central messages: first, that Plutarch's interest in the Greek religious tradition, as well as in the others, is always theological-ly-oriented and never merely antiquarian, taking the form of symbolic interpretations programmatically used to attain truth (§ 2); second, that religion is at the centre of his philosophy, functioning both as an essential "starting point" for any truthful insight (§ 1, § 3.1) and as a "measuring rod against which all human experience has to be evaluated" (§ 3.2). Both messages, albeit true for a part of Plutarch's production, are open to question if generalized: the first might overshadow the mostly etiological approach exhibited by Plutarch in *Quaest. rom.* and *Quaest. graec.*, or the rather ethical concern of many of the religiously themed narrations in the *Vitae* (which is acknowledged in § 2.2); the second, similarly, might overshadow the importance of Platonic hermeneutics manifested in *De an. procr.* and *Quaest. Plat.*, and most importantly Plutarch's great interest in physics, which he probably also conceived as a starting point for higher forms of reasoning.⁵ In this frame, one might be surprised by Hirsch-Luipold's reference to the physical discussion on the patina of the Delphic statues⁶ as a passage in which a religious object "is interpreted theologically by way of a symbolic or metaphorical interpretation" (§ 2.2).⁷ Among the short overviews of Plutarch's relationship with the Egyptian (§ 2.3), Zoroastrian (§ 2.4), and Jewish and Christian (§ 2.5) religions, the latter is of special interest, containing speculation on how Plutarch came to know about Jewish practices and why he never mentioned Christians in his *corpus*.

Chapter 2 (pp. 39-56), by Inger N.I. Kuin, is titled "Deaf to the Gods: Atheism in Plutarch's *De superstitione*". It focuses on Plutarch's conception of atheism as presented in *De sup.*, mentioned throughout the work as a lesser evil with respect to superstition, and accordingly characterized with mostly positive attributes. Kuin reviews the earlier literature on the treatise in order to reject both the doubts on its authenticity and its interpretations as a facetious exercise of rhetoric (§ 2). In this discussion, Kuin would have benefitted from taking into account Laurenti and Santaniello's recent edition of *De sup.*,⁸ since the editors reach similar conclusions to Kuin's, while also showing that the treatise is constructed as a *súnkrisis* (a genre fea-

4. Hirsch-Luipold, 2016, pp. 44-45.

5. See Meeusen, 2015.

6. *De Pyth. or.* 2-4, 395a-396c.

7. See rather Babut, 1992, pp. 190-192; Meeusen, 2017, p. 91.

8. Laurenti & Santaniello, 2007, spec. pp. 19-27.

ture which connects it closely with the rhetorical trends of the Early Imperial age). The following analysis of *atheótēs* (§§ 3-6) is in any case well structured, combining terminological considerations (also on the terms νομίζειν and πίστις) with specific discussions of metaphors and analogies, and ending with a short comparison with how the concept is presented in other Plutarchan works (§ 6).

Chapter 3 (pp. 57-70), by Michiel Meeusen, is titled “Plutarch on the Platonic Synthesis: A Synthesis”. This is a development of Meeusen’s earlier treatment of Plutarch’s “double” view on causality,⁹ which involves the concurrence of physical processes with teleological divine causes in the determination of phenomena in the sensible world. After analysing the main textual sources on this conception (§§ 2-3), with a focus on its Platonic inspiration and on Plutarch’s presentation of Plato as the pioneer who introduced this view, Meeusen dedicates a section (§ 4) to discussing Donini’s earlier proposal “to emend δι’ οὐ (= the instrumental cause in the traditional scheme) in δι’ ὅ (= final cause)” in a crucial passage in *De def. or.* 48 (436d-e).¹⁰ Meeusen convincingly argues for the conservation of the manuscripts’ reading; the next step should be to find parallel passages to support his interpretation of the δι’ οὐ as referring to the “divine λόγος”, *i.e.*, allegedly, to the instrument through which the god “shapes the world and remains in contact with it”.

Chapter 4 (pp. 71-83), by Peter Lötscher, is titled “Plutarch’s Monotheism and the God of Mathematics”. It is concerned with how the forms of monotheism professed by Plutarch and those professed by the early Christians differ, identifying two main points: Christian monotheism was not “polyatric” like Plutarch’s (cf. chapter 1, above), and number symbolism was completely absent from the early apologetic *corpus*. Lötscher focuses on the latter difference, thus presenting an overview (§§ 3-5) of Plutarchan passages mentioning the god’s oneness and Pythagorean numerology, giving prominence to Ammonius’s speech in *De E* (17-21, 391e-394c). Then, he devotes a section (§ 6) to denying that Plutarch’s dualism was “essential”, but his arguments do not directly engage with the recent scholarship on this difficult topic.¹¹ The “God of Mathematics” in the chapter’s title comes from an unusual reading of the phrase ἀπάροξασθαι τῷ θεῷ τῆς φίλης μαθηματικῆς used by Eustrophus in the same dialogue (7, 387e); all of its recent translations are in accordance with Franck C. Babbitt’s: “to offer to the god the

9. Meeusen, 2016, pp. 258-277.

10. See Donini, 1992.

11. See Ferrari in De Simone, 2016, pp. 40-43 and the critical bibliographies in Boys-Stones, 2018, pp. 22, 111-115.

first-fruits of our beloved mathematics”.¹² A discussion of the possible ambiguity of this sentence would have helped the readers to better understand Lötscher’s view.

Chapter 5 (pp. 84-114), by Geert Roskam, is titled “Plutarch’s Theonomous Ethics and Christianity: A Few Thoughts on a Much-Discussed Problem”. In comparing Plutarch with the early Christian authors, this chapter stirs up an impressively rich bibliography on the parallels and differences between the two (§ 2) – as well as on Plutarch’s popularity among later Christian authors (n. 40) –, which makes it an excellent starting point for further studies on the topic. It begins with an analysis of Plutarch’s ethics aimed at showing their “theonomous” aspect (§ 1), *i.e.* their final orientation towards a Platonically conceived “assimilation to god” (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ). Although not entirely convincing on its general conclusions (especially on the rigid scheme of layered exemplarity reconstructed at pp. 89-90), this discussion acts as an appropriate introduction to Roskam’s comparison between the ethics and theology of Plutarch with John’s (§§ 3-6). This focuses on the self-centeredness of Plutarch’s god – surely overblown, as the god’s πρόνοια (“providence”), central to both the cosmology of *De facie* and the soteriology of *De sera num.*, is not taken into account – and on John’s identification of his god with love, which results in an essentially altruistic ethics (as opposed to Plutarch’s, focused on virtue). In the chapter’s conclusion (§ 7), the Christian view is presented as an objective historical improvement, breaking through the “limitations” of Plutarch’s ethics.

Chapter 6 (pp. 115-135), by Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, is titled “An End in Itself, or a Means to an End? The Role of Ethics in the Second Century: Plutarch’s *Moralia* and the *Nag Hammadi* Writings”. This is a well-structured and aptly documented comparison between Plutarch’s take on how to reach Platonic ὁμοίωσις θεῷ (§ 2; see chapter 5, above) and the Gnostics’ views on the same matter found in the *Nag Hammadi* writings (§ 3). Roig Lanzillotta underlines that practical ethics were important for both – crucially as a way to neutralize the negative influence of passions onto the intellectual part of the soul –, and that both believed a proper ethical care to be necessary for the attainment of divine contemplation after death. Commendably, he decides to avoid speculating on historical derivations, rather considering both Plutarch and the Gnostics to be part of a common “philosophical-religious continuum” (§ 1) – which I would at least characterize as philo-Platonist. This point could have been strengthened by referring to an important article by Heinrich Dörrie,¹³

12. Babbitt, 1936.

13. Dörrie, 1981.

in which the parallels between Plutarch's and the Gnostic views were already interpreted to prove nothing more than "Affinität".

Chapter 7 (pp. 136-153), by Luisa Lesage Gárriga, is titled "Reincarnation and Other Experiences of the Soul in Plutarch's *De facie*: Two Case Studies". This chapter, surely connected with Lesage Gárriga's work on her recently published critical edition of *De facie* (2021),¹⁴ presents a detailed analysis (§ 2) of the souls' vicissitudes in the afterworld as described in Sulla's myth (*De facie* 26-30, 940f-945e), with a focus on the varying locations with which the souls are associated and on the identification of the kind of souls participating to each stage. Her schematic analysis of the locations allows to notice in the text an "orderly pattern" (§ 4), but her original proposals (§ 3) on the identification of the two groups of souls said to be "without intellect" in 28 (943b-d, ἄνοον) and 30 (945b-c, ἄνευ νοῦ) is more dubious. She decides to explain these passages "exclusively through *De facie*, without resorting to other texts" (§ 1), but this approach, although commendable in its bottom-up orientation, is risky when the ambiguity of the text – as in this case – is such as to require some interpretative creativity, which can only be substantiated by parallel passages. Since she refers to the problem of a possibly contradicting eschatology to support her claims, some consideration of the myth in *De sera num.* would not have been beside the point, as this also stages two apparently incompatible processes leading to the souls' reincarnation (in 27, 565f-566a and 32, 567e-568a). Nonetheless, her discussion is a worthy addition to the debate, and her arguments are thoroughly confronted with the earlier literature.

Chapter 8 (pp. 154-176), by Israel Muñoz Gallarte, is titled "The Conception of the Last Steps towards Salvation Revisited: The *Telos* of the Soul in Plutarch and Its Context". It highlights some correspondences in the imagery employed by Plutarch and Gnostic authors to refer to the souls' ultimate reunion with the divine, taken as a corroboration that they were united in a common "cultural intertextuality".¹⁵ The comparison is preceded by two sections which are highly dependent on earlier work by Frederick E. Brenk:¹⁶ the first (§ 2) is an introduction to Plato's conception of *epopteía* (afterlife "contemplation" of the higher truths) in its historical context, and the second (§ 3) explores Plutarch's development of the theme in his own works. Special attention is paid to the imagery of its descriptions, and prominently to the motif of souls "marrying" or "consorting" with the divine, found in

14. Lesage Gárriga, 2021.

15. Valantasis, 1997.

16. Brenk, 1992 and 1994.

Amatorius 20 (766b) and *De Is. et Os.* 58 (374f-375a). Despite the presentation of the latter passage being not entirely convincing in its details (Isis does not seem to be correctly understood as a symbol of either the world soul or the cosmos' animated matter),¹⁷ it is clear that the metaphor of "marriage" is relevant to Plutarch's eschatology, which allows Muñoz Gallarte to present an excellent overview of similar Gnostic sources (§ 4), in which it was common.

Chapter 9 (pp. 177-191), by Delfim F. Leão, is titled "Gods, Impiety and Pollution in the Life and Death of Phocion". This is a well-structured and insightful presentation of the parallels between Plutarch's biographies of Phocion and Alcibiades, especially focused on their common link with the Eleusinian mysteries (§ 2) and with the description of their protagonists' death sentences, both related to impiety (§ 3). In Alcibiades's case, impiety was the reason of his execution; in Phocion's case, impiety was the result of his ungrateful condemnation by the Athenian population. In presenting the latter, Plutarch mentions Socrates for a comparison (*Phoc.* 38), but it might be a stretch to infer with Leão that in this way Phocion "is represented as a worthy successor to the philosopher" (§ 4).

Chapter 10 (pp. 192-207), by Serena Citro, is titled "The Religiosity of (Greek and Roman) στρατηγοί". In the frame of the Leuven school's "hypomnematic" approach to Plutarch's *corpus*,¹⁸ this chapter analyses the anecdote about Timotheus's reply to the accusation that he conquered cities by mere luck as is narrated in three Plutarchan texts, compared against each other (§ 2): *Reg. et imp. apophth.* (187b-c), *De Her. mal.* (7, 865b-c) and *Sull.* (6, 3). In the latter, Sulla's religious exaltation of his own supposed luck is contrasted with Timotheus's irritated reply to those who diminished his valor by reference to *túkhē* ("in this campaign, at least, [...] fortune has no share" – a different reply from the cocky joke reported in the two other texts): while Sulla made a virtue and a political tool of such insinuations, Timotheus cared about the recognition of his own honour, until he began to be struck by misfortune. Citro's analysis is sound for the most part, but her inferences on this last episode, which she takes to represent Plutarch's own views on divine resentment ("the strategos [...] had committed the sin of presumption", thus arousing "the resentment of the Divine", p. 202), might be undermined by her insufficient consideration of the context of indirect quotation (φασιν, 6, 4) and by her likely misinterpretation of the *hapax* ἀντιμειρακιεύεσθαι. It was an unspecified plurality of people, due to Timotheus's bitter replies, to describe his misfortunes as an effect of the divinity "acting in

17. See Boys-Stones, 2018, pp. 114-115.

18. Van der Stockt, 1999.

return like a (petulant) youth” (my translation; Plutarch would hardly refer this verb to his benevolent god in a serious way), and not Plutarch himself.

Chapter 11 (pp. 208-225), by Joaquim Pinheiro, is titled “La valeur de la *tolma* dans les *Moralia* de Plutarque”. This is primarily a survey of the occurrences of the term τόλμα (“audacity”) in Plutarch’s *Moralia*, aimed at analyzing how the concept is articulated, connotated, and related with the philosopher’s ethical and psychological views. The analysis is presented in a smooth thematic flow, but the persuasiveness of its conclusions is varying; for instance, one may raise some doubts on Pinheiro’s interpretation of the passage in *De ad. et am.* 12 (56b), which quotes Thucydides (*Hist.* III 82) on the subversion of language brought about during wars as a manipulative way to justify generalized abuse (“*c’est souvent le contexte même qui influence de forme décisive la signification des mots. Plutarque a recours à Thucydides pour le justifier*” etc., p. 217). The tentative connections with religion (§ 3) prove to be a dead end in the *Moralia* (except for the use of the adjective δαιμόνιος with τόλμα in *Mul. virt.* 245d), and Pinheiro’s mention of a “metaphysical” use of the concept in the Neoplatonist, Neopythagorean, and Gnostic traditions is not supported with textual evidence or references to secondary literature.

Chapter 12 (pp. 229-238), by Fabio Tanga, is titled “The Religious Landscape of Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Graecae*”. This is an organized survey of the *Quaestiones Graecae* which concern religious themes (25 out of 59), arranged by sub-themes and relevant characters, possibly useful as a starting point for an inquiry into the topic. It mostly summarizes the *quaestiones*’ content, adding few interpretative claims which in turn, strangely, never take into account the etiological, zetematic, and possibly hypomnematic character of the work.¹⁹ This seems rather to be treated as a narrative text akin to *Mul. virt.* or *Am. narr.* with a concern for the entertainment of the reader, despite its etiological structure being formally acknowledged too (only from p. 235 on).

Chapter 13 (pp. 239-255), by Carlos Alcalde-Martín, is titled “Human Sacrifices: Can They Be Justified?”. This is a very accurate, well-structured, and generally sound analysis of some of Plutarch’s presentations of historical episodes involving human sacrifices, either executed or circumvented: *Pel.* 20-21, *Ages.* 6, *Them.* 13, and *Marc.* 3. It is argued that Plutarch frames all these sacrifices as not compliant “with Greek and Roman religious rules” and “as exceptional happenings” occurring in moments of “extreme necessity”, required “to achieve military victory and save the country” (§ 1). The claim is corroborated by a detailed examination of each (§§ 2-5), with

19. See Meeusen, 2016, pp. 76, 85, 96, 168-169.

consideration of their rhetorical-connotative functions in the economy of the *Vitae*, their philosophical-religious implications, and their narrative and etiological purposes. Alcalde-Martín's interpretation of *Quaest. rom.* 83 (283f-284c, in § 4) might be debatable: in this passage, Plutarch only uses the adjective ἄτοπος (“absurd”) to refer to the apparent (logical) contradiction in the Romans' behaviour when they accepted to sacrifice humans – which is what prompts the *quaestio* –, and it certainly does not communicate his condemnation of their act.

Chapter 14 (pp. 256-285), by Nerea López Carrasco, is titled “The Conception of the Goddess Hecate in Plutarch”. In this contribution, Plutarchan testimonies on Hecate are arranged according to their informativity on either the “ritual context” of her cult – in turn divided in “regular worship” (§ 2) and “magic worship” (§ 3) – or the “astral context” of the goddess's assimilation with heavenly bodies or celestial regions (§ 4). The detailed analysis of the evidence focuses on everything of interest: Hecate's epithets, places of worship, associated deities and other entities, associated animals, powers and cosmic domains, the rituals' objects, procedures and functions, and correspondences with akin divinities and cults in Greek and Roman religion, all provided with an impressively rich documentation considering textual as well as iconographical parallels. The resulting picture shows Plutarch as a turning point on the literary tradition on Hecate, as the first informer on the goddess's association with the moon. The section on the “astral context” (§ 4) is arguably less convincing than the other two, especially for López Carrasco's interpretation of *De facie* 29 (944c): according to her, the fact that the place of punishment of *daímones* – described to be located on the moon just like the “Elysian plain” – is here named “Hecate's recess” can be taken as a proof that Plutarch identified the moon with Hecate, but one may counter that the mythic toponym may only corroborate the association of the goddess with underworld torments and evil spirits (on which see § 3). This discussion might have benefited, perhaps, from an accurate consideration of the passage in *De sera num.* 28-29 (566a-e) about the “oracle common to Night and Moon”, considering the role that Hecate will be assigned in prophetic dreams in the *Oracula Chaldaica* (§ 3).

Chapter 15 (pp. 286-296), by Paola Volpe, is titled “Plutarch and the Ambiguity of the God Dionysus”. This is an overview of several sources, both Plutarchan and non-Plutarchan, on the life and nature of Dionysus and on his cult. The sources are never criticized nor placed in their historical contexts, and mythological narrations on the distant past are treated on par with historical reports on Plutarch's times. The bibliography is minimal: the reader may integrate it with the references in the following two chapters.

Chapter 16 (pp. 297-310), by Soraya Planchas Gallarte, is titled “Interpretations of Dionysus Ἴσοδαίτης in an Orphic Ritual (Plutarch, *De E apud Delphos* 389A)”.

This contribution examines “the term Ἴσοδαίτης (‘the one who divides equitably’), an unusual epithet referring to Pluto and Dionysus”, based on the testimonies of Lucian, *Ep. Sat.* 32 and Plutarch, *De E* 9 (389a). In the latter text, the name is associated with Dionysus, Zagreus and Nyctelius in a context of mythological symbolism which Planchas Gallarte, building on earlier scholarship, interprets to be connected with Orphic rituals. This is the frame in which she proposes her original interpretation of the term: she begins with a very sound etymological discussion coupled with an analytical criticism of the earlier interpretations (§ 2); then, she suggests two possible implicit objects for the δαίεσθαι (“to distribute”) embedded in the term (§ 3): either the “fruits and vegetables” which “used to be offered in the Orphic ritual”, or “the same destiny” assigned by Dionysus to “every initiate” to the Orphic mysteries; both conclusions are convincing and well argued. Of special interest is the documentary evidence found in the Orphic tablets from Pelinna (4th cent. BCE), of which Planchas Gallarte reports several extracts.

Chapter 17 (pp. 311-331), by Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal, is titled “The Epiphany of Dionysus in Elis and the Miracle of the Wine (Plutarch, *Quaestiones Graecae* 299 B)”. In *Quaest. graec.* 36 (299b), “Plutarch wonders why the women of Elis sung a hymn to Dionysus asking him to come to them ‘with ox foot’”. This chapter analyses Plutarch’s *quaestio*, along with all the relevant parallel sources, in an attempt to reconstruct the “ritual context” of the Elian invocation and explain its wording. The analysis, grounded in an impressively rich bibliography, begins with considerations on the genre of the hymn to establish its cletic character (§ 2): this entails that it could be sung at different festivals from the Dionysia or Anthesteria, and specifically to invoke the god. The focus is then switched to the profile of the “sixteen” Elian women (§ 3) and to the historical links of the city of Elis with Dionysus, with special attention to the local celebration of the Thyia as presented by external sources (§ 4). Jiménez San Cristóbal shows the similarities between this festival – which involved the recurrence of the miraculous event of a self-filling wine cauldron – and the celebration presented by Plutarch, both on a surface level and in their inferable features. Following this (§ 5), she links such rituals with the first consumption of fully aged wine “toward the end of winter or beginning of spring”, symbolized as Dionysus’s return to life, which allows her to draw a brilliant comparison with the Athenian Anthesteria, showing several correspondences with what has been established about the Elian Thyia. The identification of the Thyia as a local version of the Anthesteria might be destined to remain speculative, but it seems now probable that Plutarch saw an affinity between the two (note that at p. 318 one of Plutarch’s wild guesses on the meaning of the expression “with ox foot” is inappropriately treated as evidence for a historical reconstruction, as though it were a reliable report on the Elian festival).

Chapter 18 (pp. 332-347), by Elsa Giovanna Simonetti, is titled “Divination in Plutarch’s *Life of Cicero*”. This chapter provides an overview of all the passages related to divination and omens in *Cic.* to highlight the relationships between such narrations and Plutarch’s religious and philosophical concerns. The paper is well-structured and overall reliable as a presentation of the supernatural episodes in the biography, but it is very short on bibliographic and textual references. Most of the themes which are here touched upon were properly discussed by Simonetti in her monograph on Plutarch’s views on divination and in a recent book chapter on prophetic dreams.²⁰ The overview is preceded by general considerations (§ 2) on Plutarch’s relationship with Roman religion, his Latin sources, and his philosophical-religious evaluation of the person of Cicero, both a self-proclaimed Academician and an augur. All the relevant scenes are then presented (§ 3) with short analyses concerning their functions in the economy of the work and their implications with respect to the depiction of Cicero’s character, religiosity, and divine sanction on Apollo’s part. As for Simonetti’s “ethical” interpretation of the omen of the ravens in *Cic.* 47, one might wonder whether it was rather meant to underline that Cicero was under Apollo’s protection (without relation to the moral paradigmaticity of animals). The providential character of Cicero’s lifecycle is confirmed and made explicit in the account of the historical events following his death (§ 4).

Chapter 19 (pp. 351-366), by Christina Harker, is titled “The Reception of Plutarch’s Universe”. This contribution focuses on the Early Modern reception of Plutarch’s “scientific” works in the context of the 16th and 17th-cent. debate over non-geocentric views, as these are given some prominence in the then-rediscovered *De facie, Quaest. Plat.* 8 and *Plac. philos.* The central part of the chapter (§§ 4-6) is dedicated to the newly proposed heliocentric views and their relationship with Plutarch’s texts. Harker first introduces the context of the debate, along with the generalized practice of appealing to antiquity to corroborate cosmological views (§ 2). Then she explores the hypothesis that Plutarch’s references to the non-geocentric option might have been mediated to the European humanists by famous Islamic authors (§ 3). Proceeding to the European heliocentric astronomers, she firstly focuses on Copernicus, who quoted Plutarch explicitly in his works, to attempt to determine whether he actually read the latter’s references to heliocentric views and in which period (§ 4); she then considers Galileo’s demonstrable interest for Plutarch’s works, with an overview of the correspondences between the scientific output of the former and some of the features and details of *De facie* (§ 5); she finally comments on Kepler’s great

20. Simonetti, 2017 and 2019.

affection for *De facie*, with a focus on the astronomer's allegorical *Somnium* narrating a journey to the moon, followed by explanatory notes and by a full translation with commentary of Plutarch's dialogue (§ 6). In its whole, the chapter is largely reliant on earlier scholarship with little addition on Harker's part, but the presentation is well-organized and informative (except for the references to Plutarch, especially in n. 9, where the ending myth of *De facie* is misrepresented as Sulla's "famous myth about the Selenites or moon-dwellers", who are instead the object of a thought experiment developed by Lamprias in 25, 940b-f).

Chapter 20 (pp. 367-382), by Sixtine Desmoulins and Olivier Guerrier, is titled "Les *daimons* de Plutarque et leur réception dans la Renaissance française". This contribution explores the extent to which Plutarch's references to demons were Christianized by some of the humanists of the 16th century. It opens with a well-structured overview of the ideas on demons exhibited in Plutarch's *Moralia* (§ 1), with little problematization of how they fit with Plutarch's thought.²¹ Its only function is to set the backdrop against which it is possible to evaluate the receptions of these themes by the later Christian authors, and Plutarch's references to "evil" demons are accordingly given central prominence; Desmoulins and Guerrier's question, in fact, is whether the 16th-cent. humanists understood these pagan entities to be identifiable with devilish beings in the Christian sense or not. Before answering it, they show that the Christianization of Plutarch began with the ancient Apologists (§ 2), who often referred to him in their refutations of pagan religion and demonology, most prominently done in Eusebius' *Preparatio Evangelica*; this treatise was well appreciated in the 16th century, and there is clear evidence that Amyot, who wrote the first French translation of the *Moralia*, often considered the testimony of Eusebius for his selection of the variant readings in Plutarch's text. They also show that Eusebius's interpretation of the tale of the death of Pan (Plutarch, *De def. or.* 17, 419b-e) as alluding to the disappearance of pagan demons caused by divine Redemption influenced its Early Modern presentations as a tale on the death of Christ. In this frame, they test the hypothesis of such widespread Christianization having an effect on Amyot's translations of Plutarch's passages on demons (§ 3), and careful terminological analysis leads to a negative conclusion. As they show with extensive quotations, the opposite is true for the interpretative paratext in Goulart's edition of the *Moralia*. The chapter ends with an analysis of a beautiful passage from Montaigne (§ 4), which shows how he "psychologized" the concept of the demon of Socrates as an "*impulsion de volonté*" in a wise soul, paralleling some of Plutarch's considerations in *De genio Socr.*

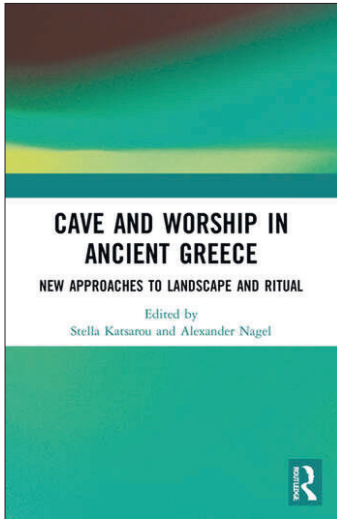
21. On this subject, see Brenk, 1977, pp. 85-144; Deuse, 2010, pp. 182-187, 191-193.

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CAVE AND WORSHIP IN ANCIENT GREECE



KATSAROU, STELLA & NAGEL, ALEXANDER (eds.) (2020). *Cave and Worship in Ancient Greece. New Approaches to Landscape and Ritual*. New York: Routledge, 270 pp., 142 € [ISBN: 978-0-3678-5916-9].

ALEXANDRA CREOLA
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
alcreola@umich.edu

DARK CAVES ARE LIT BY FLICKERING FLAMES, AND THE REFLECTION of water dances upon the ceiling, where stalactites hang, dripping with condensation. Such are the images one encounters when thinking about cave sites in the ancient world as places for potential religious experience. *Cave and Worship in Ancient Greece. New Approaches to Landscape and Ritual* edited by Stella Katsarou and Alexander Nagel contains an assortment of essays on the topic of ancient Greek cave shrines. According to the editors, the goal of this volume is “to situate the ancient Greek cave shrine

on the forefront as an independent and important source of archaeology, providing insights to the practical, behavioral, and social aspects of worship and their relation to the ancient Mediterranean environment” (p. 1). The edited volume presents a cohesive sample of case studies that positions the work within broader scholarship on the archaeology of ritual, sensory/phenomenological archaeology, and gender archaeology. The essays address the following questions: Who were the worshippers in these caves? What types of sensory experiences did those who worshipped in these caves encounter? What types of rituals occurred within the caves? Finally, what can a study of these caves reveal about social and political networks regarding local and non-local use of these spaces and their possible relationship to polis religion? Despite the array of case studies and the diverse approaches of the authors, these questions are considered in each chapter, thus creating a coordinated and balanced volume.

The archaeology of caves and cave shrines typically engages with phenomenological or sensorial practices when trying to reconstruct ancient religious ritual and experience, and the essays within this volume are no exception. Phenomenology, which became popular in archaeology in the 1990s and 2000s, emerged from British archaeology’s post-processual movement, and there have been many criticisms of it over the years.¹ Mainly, scholars have challenged the assumption that what we see and experience now would have been conceived of in the same way in ancient times, and critics argue that phenomenological claims cannot easily be evaluated using archaeological methods. More recently, “sensory archaeology” has become popular, especially in classical archaeology.² However, to some scholars sensory archaeology appears to be a rebranding of phenomenology, or, at the very least, most researchers acknowledge that it is a movement that grew directly out of phenomenological research.³ Nevertheless, despite some of the very valid critiques of phenomenology and sensory archaeology, I found the discussions of sensory experiences in caves in this volume intriguing. In particular, Nassos Papalexandrou (ch. 3, “Caves as Sites of Sensory and Cognitive Enhancement. The Idaean Cave on Crete”, pp. 49-69) discusses compelling case studies from cultural anthropologists who have documented a seemingly similar response to the use of caves for religious practices and rites across the globe throughout different time periods and locations, and Erica Angliker (ch. 9, “Cult and Ritual in Cycladic Caves”, pp. 188-213) likewise offers examples of caves that have continuously been used since antiquity as spaces of religious worship and

1. Johnson, 2012.

2. Hunter-Crawley, 2019.

3. Skeates & Day, 2019b.

places of epiphany. Both chapters link the specific physical features of caves to the perception of caves as numinous, liminal spaces both in the past and in more recent times. Papalexandrou's argument goes a step further, incorporating material studies to discuss how exotic materials and sensory driven objects housed within caves such as the Idaean Cave on Crete would further contribute to a unique experience. Angliker, on the other hand, focuses on the spatial accessibility of the caves and how their physical location combined with the caves' geologic features create unique experiences sought by the individual worshipper. This theme of a person's sensory experience in caves appears throughout all chapters of the volume, but both Papalexandrou and Angliker forefront this theme in their analysis in a particularly captivating way.

The authors of the volume also take on the Herculean task of attempting to reconstruct cave rituals and identifying the worshippers. The archaeology of ritual, while part of a theoretical and methodological turn that emerged nearly twenty years ago, continues to offer a valuable way for archaeologists to attempt to identify religious activity in the material record.⁴ For cave sites, which generally lack stratigraphic data due to both human and natural activities such as looting and natural erosion, reconstructing ritual is particularly difficult. Nevertheless, the authors of the volume put forth some fascinating evidence for different types of ritual practices in Greek caves. This evidence consists mainly of hearths, ceramics, graffiti, and votive assemblages. Here I will highlight a few examples of the volume's exciting approaches to ritual. In ch. 4, "Caves and Consumption. The Case of Polis Bay, Ithaca" (pp. 70-92), Catherine Morgan and Chris Hayward undertake a comprehensive study of all ceramic material from the Polis "cave" site in Ithaca to explore evidence of ritual feasting, leading to a reinterpretation of the site, which scholars have previously discussed only in "Homeric" terms. Their results indicate that a more robust approach to ceramic analysis at other cave sites could produce further meaningful data. Alexander Nagel in ch. 6, "A River Ran Through It. Circulating Images of Ritual and Engaging Communities in Aitolokarnania" (pp. 115-143) discusses the appearance of large collections of shells, which he posits were brought by worshipers who picked up these shells from the Acheloos River. He makes interesting connections between these offerings and what they may imply for the nature of water and worship at the Mastro cave sanctuary. In ch. 8, "The Face of Cave Rituals. Terracotta Figurines in Greek Sacred Caves" (pp. 167-187), Katja Sporn asks the very important question of whether terracotta figurines were only used as gifts left in caves for the gods, or whether these figurines could have served an active role

4. See Insoll, 2004, pp. 65-100, and the edited volume by Kyriakidis, 2007.

in ritual acts. Her identification of examples of burned terracotta figurines pushes the conversation of religious offerings and their use in ritual to a new level and opens the door for future research on this topic.

Another subject that connects several chapters in the volume concerns the identity of Greek cave worshipers. Ch. 5, “Communities, Consumption, and a Cave. The Profile of Cult at Drakaina Cave on Kephallonia” (pp. 93-114) by Agathi Karadima, ch. 7, “The Cave of Pan at Marathon, Attica. New evidence for the Performance of Cult in the Historic Era” (pp. 144-166) by Jorge J. Bravo III and Alexandra Mari, and ch. 8, “The Face of Cave Rituals. Terracotta Figurines in Greek Sacred Caves” (pp. 167-187) by Katja Sporn attempt to reconstruct the gender identity of worshippers based upon the votive offerings recovered from cave sites. The authors of these chapters appear to have been influenced by the recent work of Stéphanie Huysecom-Haxhi and Arthur Muller, who push back against the traditional narrative that the votives represented the deities being worshipped, and instead argue that many female votive figurines from the 4th cent. BCE onward represent the people making the dedications and not the gods.⁵ Several authors in the volume deploy this theory to argue that the terracotta votives must be from female dedicators. The argument by Huysecom-Haxhi and Muller is interesting, as is Karadima’s, Bravo III and Mari’s, and Sporn’s suggestion that such a reading of the material may allow us to make further conjectures about who was worshipping at Greek cave sites. If we follow the traditional theory that the votives represent deities and not the dedicator, then men as well as women could have dedicated these figurines. However, if we think of these votives as representations of humans and not deities, we open up new potential avenues of investigation. The argument by these authors that the votives could represent the worshipers is certainly possible, but it is not the only option. I offer a third alternative, which is that these votives could represent a human female family member on behalf of whom the dedicator made an offering. Just as the votives representing children and babies were likely not dedicated by the children themselves, but rather by an adult seeking help or protection for that child, the votives of women could represent a female relative or wife for whom the dedicator is seeking protection. In this case, we cannot assume that the gender of the worshipper is in alignment with that of the individual represented in votive form. The question of who dedicated these votives is strongly tied to how we interpret the figurines and whom they are meant to represent.

Another possible way to think about the question of who left these votive offerings in the cave is to try to identify materials that belong to a certain gendered

5. Huysecom-Haxhi & Muller, 2007 and 2015b.

“sphere” based on what we know about gendered activities within a particular culture. This is the tactic used by Rebecca Miller Ammerman in ch. 10, “Grottoes and the Construction of Cult in Southern Italy” (pp. 214-247) and, to an extent, by Bravo III and Mari in ch. 7, which I find to be a more compelling approach than aligning the worshiper’s gender with that of the gender represented by a votive figurine. However, one can also critique this method. For example, it is often assumed, when trying to identify items involving women and female spheres, that any type of votive of a child or baby was likely dedicated by a woman who wanted to have children. However, I do not think that we can assume that men in the ancient world were not also concerned with the prospect of conceiving children. I agree with the authors in this volume that we should attempt to better distinguish traces of people who historically are difficult to detect because they come from more marginalized or silenced communities, such as women, children, and the non-elite. Although there are still some possible pitfalls, I personally am more convinced by arguments that discuss materials pertaining to generalized spheres of gendered activity reinforced by other types of evidence, including artistic, archaeological, literary, and epigraphic sources.

Beyond gender, the authors in this volume also investigate evidence of local versus non-local visitors to the caves. Many of these studies suggest that the caves under examination were used primarily by local inhabitants. Nagel’s argument in ch. 6 about the evidence of local choroplastic production and how it was linked to ritual use of the Mastro cave during community gatherings is very persuasive. In ch. 9, Angliker reveals that while many of the examples of material from cave sites in the Cyclades were likely made by locals, there is also the example of the cave of Antiparos, where graffiti commemorate the presence of foreign visitors from various Greek islands, colonies in Africa, and places on the Greek mainland. Thus, while a surprising number of sites in these essays showed local use of cave sites, the types of evidence preserved (*i.e.* material object versus epigraphy or graffiti) may also impact our understanding of the types of visitors who worshiped at Greek cave sites.

According to the editors, the overall goal of the volume is to identify Greek cave shrines as their own unique category. The authors of the various chapters approach this subject primarily through archaeological evidence of rituals performed inside of or in front of caves. Yet, ritual activity is not necessarily indicative of religious activity, as several of the chapters note. Rituals are repeated actions, but they are not inherently of a religious nature.⁶ In ch. 2, “The Dawn of Ancient Greek Cave Cult. Prehistoric Cave Sanctuaries” (pp. 17-48), Katsarou provides a very interesting discussion

6. Bradley, 2005.

of the differences in the use of caves for both sedentary and non-sedentary societies. She presents evidence that cave spaces in the Neolithic period functioned not only as religious spaces, but also as spaces for domestic and funerary activities. While Katsarou's investigation clearly indicates that ritual evidence can denote religious and non-religious activity, the use of the term ritual is not as consistent throughout the entire volume. Reconstructing ritual and ritual intention is a complex process, and the addition of a definition of ritual in the introductory chapter could help clarify for the reader the relationship of "ritual" and "religion" as discussed in this book.

This volume lays the groundwork for future exciting inquiry into how we define Greek cave cult sites. One particular point that became evident after reading these essays was the broad definition of what constitutes a "cave". As most of the authors note, there is no formal shape to many so-called "caves" in Greece because they are the result of karst terrain. In ch. 1 "Introduction. On Reading Caves and Ancient Greek Cult" (pp. 1-16), Stella Katsarou and Alexander Nagel note that Greek caves can vary greatly "from rock shelters and shallow cavities, usually appearing on eroded cliffs and littoral zones, to very deep and complex horizontal and vertical subterranean chambers manifesting rich natural decoration by speleothems and active water resources around dripping stalagmites, lakes, or even rivers" (p. 3). Part of the difficulty with trying to link caves to particular types of cultic rituals is that we approach caves as if they were all the same. The studies in this volume demonstrate that different caves had a variety of physical shapes and characteristics; thus, moving forward, perhaps a study that takes into account the different types of cave formations, shapes, and ease of accessibility might further be able to define whether certain types of caves were, indeed, associated with particular types of ritual and religious activities. The foundation for such a study has already been laid by Katja Sporn, Jere Mark Wickens, and E. Loeta Tyree, who have catalogued Greek cave sites in Attica and on Crete.⁷ A systematic study focused specifically on comparing the physical aspects of caves alongside the evidence for how they were used in ancient times appears to be a necessary next step for understanding Greek cave cults.

The essays in this volume also raise the question of how the ancient Greeks conceptualized cave sanctuaries. For example, in ch. 4, Morgan and Hayward demonstrate by means of geological study that the Polis "cave" was never an actual cave with a covered roof, and yet the finds are not dissimilar from those found in other Greek cave cult sites. In ch. 6, Nagel discusses the idea of "wilderness" being associated with the Greek conception of a "cave", and indeed the location of these cave sites and their

7. Tyree, 1974; Wickens, 1986; Sporn, 2020.

proximity to known cities is a recurring theme in many chapters. The final chapter by Ammerman, which is a bit different from the others in that it investigates Greek cult sites in southern Italy, explores votive representations of caves to the nymphs to better understand what particular traits of cave shrines were important. These questions about the mental conception of caves are inherently rooted in the physical, geological, and topographical characteristics of caves, as this volume has shown. A future, systematic examination of the typology of Greek caves and their material remains may give us a better idea of how the ancient Greeks conceptualized natural cave features and how some caves became sites of cultic rites.

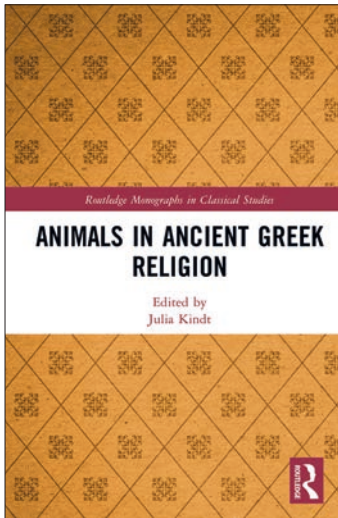
Overall, this volume does an excellent job of foregrounding the idea of the cave as a site of distinct ritual activity in ancient Greek culture. Despite the scanty, fragmentary, and often highly disturbed contexts of archaeological material, the authors of this volume present cohesive arguments regarding cave ritual and religious worship. The authors also ask such questions as who the worshipers in these Greek cave sites were, and how might we begin to investigate gender identity and local versus nonlocal identity of ritual participants. Incorporating the methods of cultural anthropology into archaeological investigations of sensory experiences allows the authors to present interesting data and theorize how ancient viewers may have perceived cave spaces. The volume offers substantive contribution to the study of cultic cave sites and provides interesting avenues for future scholarship on the topic of Greek cave sites as places of cult practice.

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ANIMALS IN ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION



KINDT, JULIA (ed.) (2021).
Animals in Ancient Greek Religion.
London & New York: Routledge,
320 pp., 80 € [ISBN: 978-1-1383-
8888-8].

BRUNO D'ANDREA

UNIVERSIDAD CARLOS III DE MADRID

bruno.dandrea.uni@gmail.com

THIS COLLECTED VOLUME, EDITED BY JULIA KINDT, INVESTIGATES the role played by animals across a variety of areas relating to the ancient Greek religious experience, including myth and ritual, the literary and the material evidence, and the physical world and the imagination. The volume assembles 13 papers, all in English, distributed across three sections: (1) Perspectives, (2) Representations, and (3) Beliefs and Practices. The contributors include both leading scholars and early- and mid-career academics, with the range of perspectives guarantees a high standard of scholarship and an openness to fresh perspectives and approaches. *Animals in Ancient Greek Reli-*

gion opens with a short introduction by the editor, who is also the author of two papers, and closes with a useful general index.

Part 1 contains three papers outlining the *status quaestionis* and future research perspectives. The first, by Jeremy McInerney, proposes the notion of “entanglement” as a useful way of analysing the triad of human, animal, and divine in ancient Greek religion. Using several examples, McInerney shows how this notion enables the exploration of the relationships between and the intermingling of these three groups, connections that are characterized by shifting and changing boundaries. Animals, according to McInerney, are not merely a channel of communication between the human and the divine, and nor do they simply serve as metaphors or means of representing the one or the other. Rather, they are “full members” of the triadic model. The second contribution, by Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, proposes an examination of the sources related to the study of animals in Greek religion (texts, material objects, images, and zooarchaeological material) that explores their limits, potentialities, and cross-uses. Deployment of a number of case-studies allows Gilhus to show that not only the recurrent elements but also – perhaps above all – the gap between the data provided by these sources offers important insights, e.g. on the discrepancy between rules and exceptions, discourses and practices. The final paper in this section, by Emily Kearns, reviews the studies that have been carried out on animals in Greek religion, stressing the absolutely central role played by the topic of sacrifices. Kearns previously highlights the need to consider single animal species rather than the “animal” as a whole and outlines some topics for future research, such as healing cults and philosophical discussions. In fact, it turns out that the future is already here: some of the new approaches suggested by Kearns are pursued in other papers of this volume.

Part 2 is concerned with the way in which animals or animal parts feature in the realm of divine representation. The section opens with a contribution by Hannah Willey, who examines the dual role of animals in myth: while animals can represent bestiality as a negative otherness, their otherness can also be directly associated (and sometimes mixed) with the divine world. Willey argues that animals also help to define the human condition, in particular the distinctiveness of special individuals such as heroes. The next paper, by Jan N. Bremmer, considers the theriomorphism of the major Greek gods. Bremmer retraces the history of scholarship in this area, which has frequently been linked to an evolutionary perspective that considers theriomorphism to be an earlier and more “primitive” stage than anthropomorphism. After a period of relative neglect resulting from the view that this topic was not of direct concern for the study of Greek religion, theriomorphism began to be studied once again in the 2000s. Since this time, it has been analysed from a number of new perspectives, with scholars examining questions such as those related to human reactions to ther-

iomorphic epiphanies and the symbolic meanings of such appearances. Focusing on bulls and horses, in different ways associated with Poseidon and Dionysus, Bremmer concludes that the theriomorphism of the major Greek deities serves different functions in different contexts and cannot be reduced to a single idea. In the next paper, Kindt, the editor of the volume, deepens the approach to this topic by dealing with the conceptual considerations about Egyptian religion's theriomorphism in Greek thought and literature. Three case-studies (Herodotus, Plutarch, and Philostratus) enable Kindt to highlight two levels – homologation and differentiation – on which the relationship with Egypt and its theriomorphism is played out. As Kindt shows, the ancient debates about anthropomorphism and theriomorphism, their meanings and relations, are largely analogous to the modern discussions analysed by Bremmer. The last contribution to this section, by James Henderson Collins II, deals with the philosophical discussions about animals and their place in Greek religion, and especially in sacrifice. The central role assumed by the latter in the philosophical debates matches the importance it came to take on in ritual practices. Reviewing the considerations of philosophers and philosophical schools from different periods (Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, Empedocles, Plato, Socrates, and Theophrastus), Collins shows how the chronological dimension has an important role in the issues and considerations proposed.

Part 3 investigates the use and function of animals in the major forms of human/divine contact in the ancient Greek world. Fritz Graf's paper, which opens the section, deals with animal sacrifices. Graf offers an excellent synthesis of this central and much-debated topic, retracing the history of the scholarship and providing a useful *status questionis* that integrates and combines data from a wide variety of the available sources. The author also examines the background of these practices in the Minoan and Mycenaean world as well as philosophical reflections on the subject. The next contribution, again by Kindt, investigates animals in Greek divination. First, Kindt focuses on two of the most common forms of "artificial" animal divination: bird watching (ornithomancy) and reading the entrails of sacrificial victims, in particular the livers of various domestic animals (hepatomancy). She then goes on to examine several examples in which animals and their behaviour are considered to be "signs" available for interpretation by humans, e.g. in omens, oracles, and prophetic dreams. Finally, Kindt analyses the centrality of this system of signs and divinatory practices related to animals in Herodotus' *Histories*. Milette Gaifman's paper analyses animals in dedications made in thanks for and/or in the hope of divine grace, possibly with the intention of some exchange with the gods. Gaifman explores the multiple religious' meanings, points of view, and interpretations to which votive offerings portraying various species can be subjected. The documentary and interpretative limits

of this approach are clearly presented to the reader. Gaifman then goes on to analyse votives that present anthropomorphic figures carrying animals. She shows that the sacrificial interpretation generally proposed for the latter is not necessarily the only one possible. The next contribution, by Florian Steger and Frank Ursin, examines animals in Greco-Roman medicine, and particularly the role of animals at the intersection of myth, healing cults, and miraculous healings connected with Asclepius. Of the 28 different animals affiliated with this deity, the authors focus on the most important, the snake, as well as dogs and chickens. Korshi Dosoo's paper discusses animals in magical practices, starting with an examination of the notion of magic. Drawing on literary sources, especially Homeric, and curse tablets, Dosoo investigates three motifs: human/animal metamorphoses, curses, and magical sacrifice. The data provided allows the elucidation of the role and use in magical practices of asymmetries and symmetries between humans and animals, their bodies, minds, and languages, thus conceptualizing humans and animals as both different and alike. In the second part of the contribution, Dosoo addresses the link between human sacrifices, animal sacrifices, and magical practices. In the paper that closes the third part, Kindt summarises the contributions made by the volume to the proposed theme, analysing with acumen and balance the advances, methodological issues, and future perspectives.

This book is certainly a welcome contribution to the research on the relationship between humans, gods, and animals. These topics have been very popular in recent years but are still in search of a secure theoretical and methodological framework. Overall, the volume achieves the objectives set out by the editor. It constructively reassesses the role of the animal as a third player and point of reference besides gods and humans. It investigates various neglected issues, such as theriomorphism and the use of animals in dedications, divination, and magical practices. It provides a useful *status questionis*. And, finally, it enables the reader to engage with the discourses and reflections of the Greeks themselves concerning animals and animality. As such, it constitutes both a point of arrival and a point of departure. At a fundamental level, this volume seeks to avoid limiting itself to the discussion of animal sacrifices. This topic, which has been widely analysed for several decades now, has attracted renewed interest and seen important advances in recent years through the adoption of inter- and multidisciplinary approaches,¹ and especially through the combination of the

1. See Naiden 2013; Ekroth, 2014; Ekroth & Wallensten, 2013; Bielawski, 2017; Hitch & Rutherford, 2017; Georgoudi & de Polignac, 2018; Lippolis, Parisi & Vannicelli, 2018.

faunal records with the most recent developments in the “archaeology of ritual”.² The central role of animals in Greek sacrificial practices is a fact, as Graf’s excellent contribution demonstrates, and it is no coincidence that this topic appears, in one way or another, in other papers of the volume (e.g. the contributions by Collins, Dosoo, Gaifman, Gilhus, and Kearns).

The use in the title of the plural “animals” is symptomatic of a methodological perspective that underlies much of the work in the volume, namely the need to evaluate the role of each particular species, since the animal is not a single, monolithic category. This premise is taken up in the majority of the papers. On the one hand, a paper will usefully focus on a single species, such as snakes, horses, or chickens. On the other hand, the authors repeatedly emphasise the important differences between domestic and wild or between birds, fish and “land” animals, and so on. However, in most contributions the desire to pluralize the animal category stops at the inter-species level, setting aside the opportunity to also deepen the intraspecies level by assessing differences/variations in status (domestic/wild), breed, sex, size, age and colour within the same species. This is evident in the treatment of sacrificial practices where sex, age and colour of animals are crucial, as highlighted in Graf’s contribution. As Dosoo did for the notion of magic, it might have been useful to establish the meaning and conceptual use of other categories deployed in the volume, starting with “religion” and “sacrifice”. The same can be said of the domestic-wild dichotomy: in the Greek world, the perception of this dichotomy (*agrios/hêmeros*) appears to be slightly different from its use in the contemporary Western world.³ Moreover, there is a zoological problem to consider, namely the presence of animal species on the borderline of these two categories. This is the case for deer, as highlighted in several of papers in the volume. A similar issue arises for hybrid and monstrous creatures, which occupy different positions within the triad of human, animal, and divine (see e.g. the contributions of Gilhus and Willey). The notions of “proximity” – as opposed to “otherness”, which is used so well in certain papers of the book – and “familiarity” with human communities are likely closer to the classifications and perceptions of animals, real or imaginary, used by societies of the past. Animals, as the other two members of the triad analysed in this volume, are cultural constructions, not natural categories. This makes these concepts inherently fluid and dynamic, as highlighted by

2. The field of the “Archaeology of ritual” was marked by the article of John Scheid, “Pour une archéologie du rite”, published in 2000 in the review *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*. As a result of this programmatic call, several important contributions to this field have been published: e.g. Lepetz & Van Andringa, 2008; Insoll, 2011; Schwartz, 2017.

3. Zucker, 2005, pp. 111-123; Dufour, 2021.

ancient and modern discourses and reflections upon them (see the papers by McInerney and Willey). As McInerney persuasively argues, this constant state of flux leads to a perception of entanglement among these three categories of living beings.

In the volume's Conclusion, Kindt emphasises the need to consider (1) the cross-cultural perspective, and (2) the temporal dimension of the subject at hand. As regards the cross-cultural perspective, while the comparative and intercultural openness of some papers is to be welcomed (see Graf, Kindt, and Steger and Ursin), most contributions remain confined to the Greek world. As regards the chronological framework, some papers successfully use documentation from the 2nd millennium BCE and, especially, from the Roman period, while others highlight continuities and changes across ancient Greek history. Nevertheless, there is sometimes a perception of chronological and spatial flattening that gives the impression of a monolithic, unchanging Greek world. This may be a misperception to which I am prone as someone who is not a specialist in Greek culture. However, it is necessary to broaden our studies and reflections to embrace a more multi-/cross-/intercultural perspective, adapting to (and adopting) the dynamism and connectivity that characterised the ancient Mediterranean. This is evident much more in the research carried out over the last twenty years⁴ than was admitted in the scholarship of earlier times.

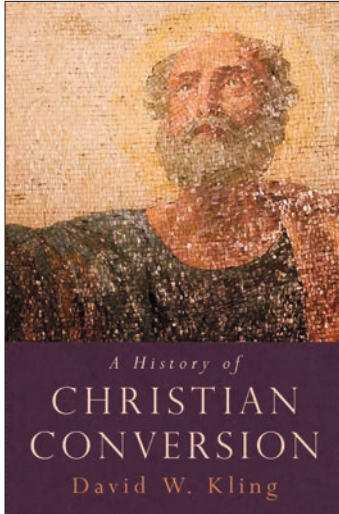
It would have been useful to include abstracts of the collected papers and to place the complete bibliography at the end of the volume rather than localised bibliographies at the end of each contribution. Such an approach would have both mirrored the unity of the book's topic and avoided the repetition of bibliographical titles in different papers. A stronger contribution from archaeologists and archaeozoologists would also have likely allowed for a deeper analysis of practices and exceptions alongside discourses and norms. These minor issues aside, this volume provides great insight and a range of stimulating papers focused around a topic of great interest. The diversity of approaches and materials and the interesting nature of the case studies analysed considerably enrich our knowledge of and reflections on animals across the full spectrum of ancient Greek religious beliefs and practices. The appropriate theoretical and methodological framework, the *status quaestionis* provided for the topics discussed, the attempt to propose new ideas and outline perspectives all make this volume a very useful working tool and an essential reference for future work on the subject.

4. Horden & Purcell, 2000; Malkin, 2011; Broodbank, 2013; Hodos, 2020.

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A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION



KLING, DAVID W. (2020). *A History of Christian Conversion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 852 pp., 110 € [ISBN: 978-0-1953-2092-3].

FRANCIS YOUNG
OXFORD UNIVERSITY
francis.young@conted.ox.ac.uk

DAVID W. KLING'S *HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION* IS AN AMBITIOUS work, on a monumental scale, which sets out to survey the entire history of the phenomenon of conversion in the Christian faith. As Kling acknowledges, conversion remains an essentially mysterious phenomenon; exactly what it means for a person to come to faith or to change faiths, and why, are contested issues in more than one discipline. However, by approaching the subject through history, Kling seeks to provide into what conversion may have meant in different eras without becoming bogged down in theory. However, although Kling eschews any single methodology for his study, he does identify several "broad themes" that recur throughout the book,

such as “human cognizance of divine presence”, the cultural and social context within which conversion occurs, movement towards and resistance to Christianity, internal controversies, the importance of personal testimony, and debates around gender, identity, self and agency (pp. 20-23).

Following an initial discussion of “The Anatomy of Conversion” in the book’s introduction, Kling begins by examining conversion in the Roman world (the New Testament era, the Early Church to 312 and the Imperial Church in the West between 312 and 500). Kling argues that, while some vocabulary of conversion existed in the pre-Christian ancient world, Christianity introduced a new, “universalized” concept of personal transformation that contrasted with prevailing ideas that the natures of peoples and individuals were fixed. As Christianity expanded into the Roman world, conversion often required sacrifice owing to the Roman Empire’s persecution of the new faith, but as the Church entered its 4th century its transformation into the faith of the Empire meant that the meaning of conversion altered considerably. For many, conversion to Christianity became a pragmatic as well as a religious consideration, while for others a conversion of life came to mean dedication to various ascetic forms of life.

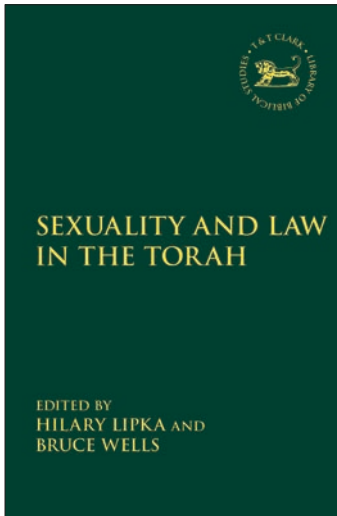
A characteristic feature of Kling’s book, and a particular strength, is the author’s willingness to range widely over the full geographical and cultural range of Christianity as well as its full chronological extent. The subsequent sections of the book after Kling’s consideration of the Early Church adopt a geographical rather than a chronological focus, with sections on medieval Europe, early modern Europe, the Americas, China, India and Africa. The author takes pains to avoid a parochial approach to the history of Christianity focussed too narrowly on Europe and lands colonised by European settlers, and the discussion of Christianity in Asia is particularly commendable and insightful. There are some surprising gaps, however; for example, Kling barely considers Christianity in Africa before the late 19th century, and gives short shrift to early modern developments such as the Kingdom of the Kongo. A rather more serious shortcoming is the book’s omission of the most historically important iteration of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopian Christianity; the author might at least have explained why no account of the conversion of Ethiopia is necessary or appropriate (although it is hard to imagine why this might be so).

The geographical approach throughout much of the book may well be the right choice on the part of the author, dealing with a vast range of material, but it surely hinders the possibility of the drawing of parallels between the evangelisation of disparate regions at the same period of time. It would be intriguing, for example, to compare the late medieval conversion of Lithuania from paganism with the conversions of Minorca (from Islam) and the Canary Islands (from indigenous religion) that

occurred at around the same time, while all three conversion events foreshadowed the imminent encounter between the Old and New Worlds. In a book of such length, however, it is easy to see how such comparative discussions might prove unwieldy, and it is to be hoped that the scope of Kling's book will encourage other scholars to pursue studies of this kind.

In such a wide-ranging book, whose intent is to give a brief account of each region in turn, it would be unfair to be critical of an absence of depth, and the individual scholar will always have their own preferences regarding the details that Kling ought to have included. However, certain assumptions underlying the structure of the book do seem to limit its scope, such as the implicit portrayal of African Christianity as an essentially 19th-century phenomenon. Nevertheless, in spite of some blind spots there can be little doubt that this book will become the standard account of the phenomenon of conversion in the history of Christianity, and its scale and scope are remarkable. *A History of Christian Conversion* is deservedly a landmark book in the field, and will be read and contested for many years to come.

SEXUALITY AND LAW IN THE TORAH



LIPKA, HILARY & WELLS,
BRUCE (eds.) (2020). *Sexuality
and Law in the Torah*. London:
T&T Clark, Library of Biblical
Studies, 344 pp., 110,31 € [ISBN:
978-0-5676-8159-1].

PEDRO GIMÉNEZ DE ARAGÓN SIERRA
UNIVERSIDAD PABLO DE OLAVIDE
pgimsie@upo.es

LOS EDITORES DE ESTE VOLUMEN SON HILARY LIPKA, instructora del Programa de Estudios Religiosos de la Universidad de Nuevo México en Albuquerque, y Bruce Wells, profesor asociado de Estudios del Medio Oriente en la Universidad de Texas en Austin. Han contado para la realización de la obra con colaboradores procedentes mayoritariamente de facultades de teología norteamericanas, aunque también participan un par de investigadores británicos, un profesor alemán y un pastor sueco. Los temas están bien relacionados entre sí, lo cual es un logro en este tipo de obras colectivas. El lector obtiene al final de la lectura una buena impresión

de los problemas que la investigación afronta a la hora de estudiar temas como la homosexualidad (Capítulos 1 y 5), las relaciones extramatrimoniales (6), cuestiones vinculadas con el matrimonio (2, 3, 4, 7 y 8), el control de la sexualidad por el *paterfamilias* (9), el divorcio (10 y 11) y el control y rigor sexual como signo de santidad (12) en la sociedad judía de tiempos bíblicos.

El Capítulo 1, “Categories of Sexuality Indigenous to Biblical Legal Materials”, parte de las nuevas perspectivas de género de autores como Michel Foucault o Daniel Boyarin, que revisan la interpretación del pasado deconstruyendo el enfoque binario patriarcal con que hasta hoy se analizaron los textos antiguos. Su autor, David Tabb Stewart, profesor de Religiones del Próximo Oriente en la Universidad Estatal de California, considera que los antiguos tabúes sexuales judíos no estaban condicionados por la oposición entre homo y heterosexualidad, sino que eran muy similares a las cinco prácticas sexuales catalogadas como antinaturales por Artemidoro en su *Interpretación de los sueños*: penetración entre mujeres, autopenetración, relaciones con cadáveres, con animales y con divinidades. Compara la legislación sexual de la Torá con las leyes hititas para demostrar que las prácticas sexuales estaban organizadas por la Torá en dos grandes grupos, prohibidas y permitidas, siendo tabúes castigados con pena de muerte tan sólo las siguientes: sexo con númenes, relaciones con animales, adulterio, incesto y cópula durante la menstruación.¹ La violación, en general, era equiparada al adulterio tanto en los códigos judíos como en los hititas, y suponía la pena de muerte para el violador y en algunos casos también para la mujer, si sucedía en la zona residencial y no gritaba para que los hombres acudieran en su auxilio.² Cuando la mujer era esclava no se consideraba ni adulterio ni violación aunque, en caso de demostrarse que la relación no fue consentida, se condenaba al violador a pagar con un sacrificio,³ pero en la Biblia, además, se azotaba a ambos, incluyendo a la esclava, probablemente por no evitar que se produjese la violación o consentir la relación. Como puede apreciarse, los antiguos legisladores judíos e hititas estaban más preocupados por la cuestión de cómo dilucidar si la mujer había consentido la relación que por el daño físico o psíquico que le pudiese ocasionar. En cuanto a las prácticas permitidas, el autor distingue en primer lugar aquellas que son celebradas positivamente: el mandamiento principal vinculado con la sexualidad era la reproducción por lo que se consideraba sexualidad positiva el matrimonio en sus diferentes tipos (levirato, monógamo y polígamo). En segundo lugar, habla

1. Lv 18 y 20.

2. HL 197a, 198; Dt 22.23-24.

3. HL 196; Lv 19.20-22.

de prácticas permitidas, pero no celebradas ni prohibidas, sino simplemente reprobadas: la prostitución y las relaciones premaritales. Finalmente distingue un tercer grupo de prácticas tratadas de forma neutral: el sexo con esclavas y esclavos, las relaciones con personas del mismo sexo, el sexo anal y el sexo oral. La tradicional interpretación del episodio de los sodomitas⁴ como condena de la homosexualidad debe – según él – reinterpretarse como condena de las relaciones con númerones, ya que el verdadero pecado de los sodomitas era intentar penetrar a tres ángeles; de la misma manera que lo que se condenaba en el episodio de los ángeles caídos era el hecho de que mantuvieran relaciones con las hijas de los hombres.⁵ La prohibición de relaciones con divinidades es la que ocupa, junto con el animalismo, la mayor parte de su estudio comparativo. Así, si la legislación hitita no considera siquiera una ofensa las relaciones sexuales reales o soñadas con fantasmas,⁶ la legislación bíblica condena con la muerte no sólo las relaciones con los difuntos,⁷ sino también con divinidades, dado que para los legisladores judíos equivalían a idolatría.⁸ Este es el aspecto más diferenciador de la legislación bíblica, ya que en lo referente a animalismo las coincidencias con la legislación hitita son mayores, incluso por la pena máxima.⁹ También es interesante la clasificación que el autor hace de las prohibiciones y reprobaciones sexuales de ambos códigos en función de la clase social y la localización del hecho: la exigencia de pureza es mayor para la casta sacerdotal que para las persona libres y mucho menor para los esclavos y esclavas, de la misma forma que las penas son mayores si el incumplimiento de las leyes sexuales se produce en la ciudad que en el campo o fuera del país.

Aunque Wells, uno de los editores del volumen, sitúa su artículo en el capítulo 5, quizás por humildad, lo lógico es abordarlo a continuación del primero, porque complementa el análisis crítico de la cuestión homosexual en la Biblia. Se titula “On the Beds of a Woman. The Leviticus Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered” porque parte de la revisión de la traducción de Lv 18.22 en la New Revised Standard Version como “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (en castellano prácticamente todas las Biblias traducen de la misma forma, como por ejemplo la Biblia de Jerusalén: “No te acostarás con varón como con mujer; es abo-

4. Gn 19.

5. Gn 6.1-4.

6. HL 190a.

7. Lv 20.6, 27.

8. Dt 31.16; Jer 20.7-18; Lv 18.21, 20.1-5.

9. HL 187-188, 199; Lv 20.15-16; aunque las leyes hititas permiten algunas prácticas con animales (HL 200).

minación”). Una frase similar se repite en Lv 20.13 añadiendo la pena máxima que se establece también para los delitos sexuales de incesto, adulterio o bestialismo: “Si alguien se acuesta con varón, como se hace con mujer, ambos han cometido abominación: morirán sin remedio; su sangre caerá sobre ellos”. La expresión hebrea que acompaña en ambos versículos a “acostarse con un hombre” es משכבי אשה, *mishkbé ishah*, y se ha traducido tradicionalmente de la siguiente manera: “como con mujer”. *Ishah* significa mujer y esposa. El problema está en la traducción de *mishkbé*, plural de משכב, *mishkab*, “cama”, sustantivo relacionado con el verbo שכב, *shakab*, “acostarse”, usado en ambos versículos para referirse al hecho de que un varón tuviese relaciones sexuales con otro hombre. La letra ׀, añadida para sustantivar el verbo no es la partícula adverbial “como”, para la que habría que usar כ, sino una partícula adverbial de localización, por lo que habría que traducirla más bien como “en”. Wells reflexiona sobre las doscientas veces en que el verbo *shakab* aparece en la Biblia sin complemento directo ni ningún tipo de acusativo, así como las trece ocasiones en que es usado como acusativo adverbial, concluyendo que no puede considerarse en ningún caso que la introducción de la letra ׀ sea para convertirlo en acusativo adverbial comparativo sino de localización. A continuación, trata la forma en que estos dos versículos han construido el plural de *mishkab*, “cama”. La palabra aparece en hebreo bíblico construyendo el plural tanto en masculino (añadiendo la desinencia *-e* en el estado constructo que presupone *-im* en el estado absoluto, aunque este último no se constata) como en femenino (añadiendo *-ot*), siendo esta última la forma más habitual¹⁰ y la que se usaba también en la lengua cananea de Ugarit. Además, se sabe que la palabra “cama” en la lengua semítica de Mari era también femenina. La forma masculina sólo aparece en la Biblia en Gn 49.4 y en los dos fragmentos levíticos analizados, las tres ocasiones en estado constructo. Se trata de un cambio semántico además de gramatical, tal y como se constata en otros sustantivos femeninos que en ocasiones hacen plurales en masculino. Antes de explicar su interpretación de dicho cambio semántico, Wells procede a revisar los anteriores estudios al respecto de Saul Olyan, de 1994, y de David Tabb Stewart, de 2006. Para Olyan, la expresión alude a intercambios sexuales entre dos hombres con penetración anal mediante una analogía con expresiones que se refieren a la penetración vaginal entre un hombre y una mujer virgen,¹¹ considerando en consecuencia que cualquier otro acto sexual entre varones quedaba fuera de esta prohibición. Frente a esta interpretación analógica se sitúa la metonímica de Stewart, que critica a Olyan por no distin-

10. Is 57.2; Os 7.14; Mic 2.1; Sal 149.5.

11. Nm 31.17-18; Jc 21.11-12.

guir entre las frases que usan el singular femenino y las que usan el plural masculinizado. En Gn 49.4 Jacob reprochaba a Rubén que se acostase con su esclava hebrea Bilhá, diciéndole: “subiste a las camas de tu padre” (*mishkbé abikha*). No dice “subiste a la cama de la esclava de tu padre”, que sería lo lógico según la hipótesis de Olyan. Stewart considera que el matiz semántico clave es el incesto, dado que la expresión aparece en situaciones de relaciones sexuales ilícitas entre parientes, por lo que concluye que la prohibición de Lv 18.22 y 20.13 se refería sólo a relaciones homosexuales entre varones emparentados, prohibidas de la misma manera que entre personas de diferente género. Wells critica no sólo las interpretaciones de ambos, sino también el hecho de que Olyan evitase hablar de Gn 49.4 y Stewart ignorase un texto qumránico de la Regla de la Congregación¹² en el que se decía que los varones de la comunidad no se acercarían a una mujer para conocerla respecto “a las *mishkbé* de un hombre hasta que haya cumplido los veinte años y conozca el bien y el mal”. Este texto no tiene nada que ver con delitos de incesto, por lo que la tesis de Stewart decae y no debe aplicarse tampoco a los fragmentos levíticos que nos ocupan. Wells parte en su interpretación del carácter de plural abstracto de la palabra *mishkbé*. Tal como explica, el hebreo construye palabras abstractas de varias formas: añadiendo un sufijo en *-an*, en *-ut*, en *-it*, añadiendo las desinencias del femenino tanto singular como plural, pero también, como en nuestro caso, añadiendo las del masculino plural, *-im* y *-e*. Entre los ejemplos que pone, destaca el de la palabra שכב, “campamento”, que con los sufijos plurales masculino y femenino significa “un lugar para acampar”, pero mientras el sufijo femenino en *-ot* indica una generalidad, el sufijo masculino en *-im* se refiere a un lugar concreto, una individualidad. En el caso de *mishkbé*, estado constructo de *mishkbim*, la abstracción se refiere por tanto a un lugar concreto donde acostarse, un espacio de dominio sexual. En Gn 49.4, el reproche de Jacob a Rubén consiste en que este hubiese invadido el espacio de dominio sexual de su padre, el *mishkbé abikha*, “las camas de su padre”. En consecuencia, cuando Levítico habla del *mishkbé ishah*, “las camas de una esposa”, está refiriéndose al dominio sexual de una mujer casada. Una mujer casada ejercería en primer lugar cierto control sobre la sexualidad de su marido (podía, por ejemplo, concederle permiso para mantener relaciones sexuales con una esclava, como en los casos de Lea y Raquel, las esposas de Jacob; permiso similar al que aparece en leyes asirias para un segundo matrimonio). Las relaciones homosexuales del marido se considerarían, por tanto, un delito contra el derecho de la esposa, ya que se estaría cometiendo un fraude contra ella, y tendrían como castigo la pena de muerte, tal como aparece en

12. 1QSa 1.8-11.

Lv 20.13. Wells considera que el hecho de que en ambos versículos se utilice un término genérico para “varón” y no el término “esposo” implica que bajo el dominio de la esposa se situaban también varones que estaban bajo la guardia y custodia de la mujer, aunque no tuviese derecho a mantener relaciones sexuales con ellos. Si un hombre no tiene derecho a mantener relaciones sexuales con su hija y su hijo, pero sí ejerce el control sobre la sexualidad de su hija e hijo menor de edad, la mujer ejercería ese derecho de control sobre sus hijos varones menores de edad cuando el padre de los mismos hubiese fallecido, incluso si casase con otro hombre por segunda vez. Fuera de esta prohibición de relaciones homosexuales “en las camas de una mujer” quedarían, por tanto, los esclavos, los viajeros extranjeros (no residentes) y los prostitutas, con los que dichas relaciones serían lícitas. Apunta, en este sentido, que del mismo modo que las relaciones con esclavas o prostitutas por parte de un hombre casado no estaban condenadas por la ley, tampoco las relaciones de un hombre casado con un esclavo o prostituto lo estarían. Finalmente, señala el hecho de que las prohibiciones sexuales de Lv 18 y 20 contradicen las costumbres sexuales que narra el Génesis en la Historia de los Patriarcas,¹³ por lo que considera que la normativa contra las relaciones homosexuales con varones que están bajo el dominio de una mujer casada son una innovación más de los escribas sacerdotales que redactaron este código. El motivo por el que se endurecieron en ese momento las prescripciones sexuales sería el ya señalado por múltiples estudios sociológicos: cuando un grupo minoritario siente que su identidad está en riesgo, tiende a preservar la sexualidad dentro de la comunidad propia, orientándola especialmente a la procreación como modo de supervivencia, pero también porque su auto-contemplación como grupo especialmente puro y la denigración del resto como impuros evita la pérdida de efectivos (especialmente mujeres) que se vayan a otras comunidades.

Wells comenta cómo evoluciona el texto hebreo en griego, pero desgraciadamente no aborda su evolución en latín, que explicaría la interpretación tradicional e indicaría cuándo comenzó a hacerse extensible la prohibición a todo tipo de relaciones homosexuales masculinas. La traducción de la Septuaginta en el siglo II a.C. es literal del hebreo: μετά ἄρσεως οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ κοίτην γυναικείαν (“con varón no yacerás en cama de mujer”). La palabra κοίτην se usaba habitualmente en griego para referirse al lecho nupcial o matrimonial. El hecho de que Pablo usase por primera vez el neologismo *arsenokoités* a partir de este pasaje del Levítico para referirse a aquellos

13. Por ejemplo, Lv 20.17 prohibiría el matrimonio de Abraham y su media hermana Sara y Lv 18.18 el de Jacob con las hermanas Lea y Raquel.

que practicaban un tipo de relación homosexual condenable¹⁴ y no *androkoités*, que sería el término griego clásico para “homosexual”, indica que entendía el significado restringido del texto hebreo y no deseaba usar una palabra, *androkoités*, que hubiese supuesto la condena de todos los que practicaban relaciones homosexuales. En consecuencia, Pablo – según Wells – tan sólo condenaba a los que practicaban relaciones homosexuales con hombres casados y menores de edad bajo el dominio de una mujer, en consonancia con el Levítico. La traducción de Lv 20.13 en la Vetus Latina Itálica¹⁵ (entre los siglos II-III d.C.) es la siguiente: *quicumque manserit cum masculo concubito muliebri*, “el que permaneciese con varón en unión sexual de mujer”. *Concubito* es participio de *concubo*, “acostarse con”, y se traduce sustantivado por “unión sexual”. *Concubinatus* indica cierta convivencia. Curiosamente la traducción al latín del neologismo *arsenokoités* utilizado por Pablo sería *masculorum concubitores*, tanto en la Vetus Latina como en la Vulgata. No se usa *concupinus* porque se quiere hacer alusión más bien al acto sexual que a la convivencia, pero, en cualquier caso, nada hay aquí referente al lecho nupcial, de modo que la prohibición parece ya extenderse a todo tipo de relación homosexual masculina. San Jerónimo en la Vulgata (en torno al 400 d.C.) traduciría *κοίτην* por *coitu*, palabra latina muy similar a la griega, pero con un significado distinto: *Qui dormierit cum masculo coitu femineo*, “el que se acostase con varón en coito femenino”. *Coitus* se utilizaba en latín para referirse al acto sexual con penetración y no al lecho nupcial. Nótese que *coitu* está en ablativo para especificar el tipo de relación sexual prohibida y que no hay comparativo ni aquí ni en el texto griego, lo que refuerza la interpretación del original hebreo realizada por Wells. Pero el texto latino supondría una prohibición totalmente distinta, ya que incluiría la penetración anal entre varones sin referirse de ninguna forma al estado civil de los mismos. Aunque – como dijo Olyan – no prohibiría otro tipo de relaciones homosexuales. En cualquier caso, son las traducciones latinas las que inspirarían las primeras traducciones al inglés y al español de Lv 20.13. Siglos antes de la traducción de la New Revised Standard Version criticada por Wells, ya la Biblia del Rey James (1611) decía: “*If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman...*”; y de forma aún más explícita lo expresaba la Biblia del Oso (1569): “cualquiera que tuviere ayuntamiento con macho como con mujer, abominación hicieron; ambos morirán; su sangre será sobre ellos”.

14. 1Co 6.9; 1Tim 1.9-10.

15. Códices S. Pauli, Orat. B. VI-VII S. Petri, 21. Vatic. 4220, utilizados por P. Sabatier en su edición de 1762.

La coeditora del volumen, Hilary Lipka, escribe el capítulo 6, “The Offense, Its Consequences, and the Meaning of זִנָּה in Leviticus 19:29”. El verbo זִנָּה, *zonah*, significa “entablar relaciones sexuales fuera o aparte del matrimonio”, pero de las 19 veces en que aparece en la Biblia, unas se interpreta literalmente – y en esos casos siempre se refiere a una mujer – y otras alegóricamente como “infidelidad hacia Dios”.¹⁶ El objetivo de Lipka es revisar la traducción de Lv 19.29, pasaje traducido al inglés por la Biblia del Rey James como “Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness” y en la moderna edición inglesa revisada como “Profane not thy daughter, to make her a harlot; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness”, utilizando en ambos casos palabras (whore y harlot) que significan “prostituta”. Lipka cuestiona que la intención del redactor hebreo fuera aludir a la prostitución de las hijas y revisa el caso. Por desgracia desconoce la antigua traducción al español de la Biblia del Oso que traducía el versículo así: “No contaminarás tu hija haciéndola fornicar; para que no se prostituya la tierra, y se llene de maldad”. Antes de llegar a sus conclusiones, Lipka examina la posibilidad de que el sentido del verbo *zonah* en este versículo no sea el literal, sino el figurativo o alegórico. Hace notar que cuando el verbo aparece en participio acompañando a *ishah*, “mujer”, significa inequívocamente “prostituta” en el sentido profesional del término, una actividad perfectamente lícita y tolerada en la sociedad hebrea de tiempos bíblicos, por lo que si se interpretase en sentido literal sería más lógico traducir por “fornicar”. Por otra parte, en Lv 19.29 el verbo está en hifil y tal como explica la autora, en las otras ocho ocasiones en que se usaba en hifil en el texto bíblico, aludía a un objeto y nada tenía que ver con prostitución, sino que adquiriría el sentido alegórico de “infidelidad hacia Dios”.¹⁷ El mandato de Lv 19.29 no sólo está formulado en hifil, sino que es precedido y seguido por normas relativas a prácticas religiosas prohibidas. Sin embargo, no se refiere a ningún objeto por lo que el sentido de hifil aquí es distinto. El hifil es una forma verbal causativa, pero en ocasiones tiene un sentido modal, denotando permiso para una acción. Aquí sería “permitiendo a sus hijas fornicar”. La falta la cometían los padres que permitían a las hijas mantener relaciones sexuales antes del matrimonio. Esta interpretación se fortalece, además, si se compara con Lv 21.9: “Y la hija del varón sacerdote, si comenzare a fornicar, a su padre contamina; quemada será en fuego”.¹⁸ La palabra que Casiodoro de Reina traduce por “contaminar” y las versiones anglosajonas por “to profane”, tal

16. Por ejemplo, en Lv 17.7; Nm 15.39; Dt 31.16; Jc 2.17; 1Cro 5.25; Ex 16.26-34; 23.1-21.

17. Ex 34.16; 2Cro 21.11 y 13 – aquí dos veces –; Os 4.10; 18 – dos veces –; 5.3.

18. Biblia del Oso.

como explica Lipka, es usada en hebreo bíblico para expresar “pérdida de santidad” y se refiere siempre a un objeto, sea el nombre de Dios,¹⁹ sean instrumentos sagrados u ofrendas sacrificiales,²⁰ lugares sagrados como el templo²¹ o personas, como en estos dos casos. Sin embargo, la pena de las hijas de los judíos laicos es mucho menor en Lv 19.21 que las de las hijas de los sacerdotes en Lv 21.9. No debían ser quemadas como las hijas de los sacerdotes, cuyo pecado de fornicación contaminaba a sus padres y por tanto al culto templario, sino que, simplemente, perdían santidad. Ahora bien, la pérdida de santidad de las hijas de los ciudadanos judíos contaminaba a la tierra, como dice en la segunda parte del versículo y como también se decía en otros casos de pecados sexuales.²² Y si la tierra de Israel se contaminaba, la consecuencia no era otra que el exilio del pueblo.²³

A continuación, voy a reseñar los capítulos dedicados a diversas cuestiones conectadas con el matrimonio. El 2 se titula “The Daughter Sold into Slavery and Marriage”. Pamela Barmash, profesora de Biblia Hebrea en la Universidad Washington de St. Louis (Missouri), compara dos pasajes del Código de la Alianza y el Código Deuteronomico, concretamente Ex 21.1-11 y Dt 15.12-18, que tratan la situación de las hijas de israelitas vendidas como esclavas y de las condiciones de su liberación al séptimo año. Sin entrar en el debate sobre la datación de ambos cuerpos legislativos, parte de la base de que el lector comparte las conclusiones generalmente admitidas de una datación más remota del primero y posterior del segundo (para algunos, el Código de la Alianza es la Torá del rey Josías, siglo VII a.C., y para otros incluso más antigua, mientras que el Código Deuteronomico procedería para la gran mayoría de la corte davídica en el exilio babilónico del siglo VI a.C.). Antes de profundizar en el tema, repasa el estatus de hombres y mujeres en la Biblia hebrea, admitiendo los indiscutibles privilegios del varón respecto a la mujer, pero advirtiendo que en determinados espacios y en las clases sociales altas las mujeres ejercían un poder y una autoridad significativa, así como que existían mujeres profesionales que ejercían de curadoras, tejedoras, nodrizas, plañideras, etc., con diversos grados de independencia. A continuación, revisa la cuestión del matrimonio y el divorcio con la misma metodología de género para proponer que no sólo se producía el repudio de la esposa por parte del marido, sino que hay indicios a favor de la posible iniciativa de la mujer para disolver el matrimonio, por lo que la sociedad judía no sería tan diferente de la

19. Lv 18.21; 19.12; 20.3; 21.6; 22.2; 22.32; Ez 20.39; Am 2.7.

20. Ex 31.14; Ez 20.13-24; 22.8; 23.38; Is 56.2-6; Ne 13.15-22.

21. Lv 21.23; Ez 44.7.

22. Lv 18.24-30; 20.22-24.

23. Ez 22.9-16.

mesopotámica o la egipcia, en la que esto es indudable. Pero el dato proporcionado por Barmash de un caso de divorcio por iniciativa femenina en los papiros de Elefantina no puede considerarse ninguna prueba al respecto, dado que los judíos de esta guarnición persa en Egipto no conocían la Torá (como es obvio por la carta al Sumo Sacerdote de Jerusalén pidiendo indicaciones sobre cómo celebrar la Pascua), ni profesaban el monoteísmo patriarcal (constando su culto a la diosa Anat de Yahvé), de modo que es más lógico suponer que se regían por códigos matrimoniales similares a los del país en que residían. En cuanto a los pasajes bíblicos mencionados²⁴ no son claros al respecto. Tampoco el hecho de que el matrimonio sea definido como una “alianza” en Mal 2.14; Ez 16.8 y Prov 2.17 supone – como sugiere Barmash – reconocimiento mutuo por parte de ambos cónyuges, puesto que el término se refiere más bien a alianza entre dos varones (el novio y el padre de la novia) o dos familias, sin igualdad jurídica entre los cónyuges. En cuanto al *mohar* o pago del novio a la familia de la novia por la cesión de su hija en matrimonio, la autora intenta convencer al lector de que se trata más de un emblema o símbolo que de un pago, pero no resulta convincente y se aprecia demasiada subjetividad en su interpretación de una realidad social primitiva que era indudablemente más patriarcal que la de otras sociedades de la Antigüedad. Aunque sea obvio que el pago por una novia no era equivalente al pago por una esclava, dado que la familia de la novia debía también pagar la dote, mientras que el padre de la hija vendida como esclava no entregaba más que a su hija, lo cierto es que esta diferencia simplemente garantizaba cierto estatus y oportunidades de supervivencia a la esposa repudiada, ya que podía subsistir con la dote o emprender un negocio invirtiéndola o conseguir un segundo marido en parte gracias a ella. La esclava, en cambio, cuando era liberada al séptimo año no tenía otro medio de supervivencia que su propio cuerpo y mano de obra. Al menos así era en el Código de la Alianza, donde se dice que la *amah* no sería liberada al séptimo año del mismo modo que los *abadim* o esclavos varones hebreos, sino que permanecería con su amo *sine die*, siempre que él cumpliera con los tres deberes conyugales: alimentos, vestidos y actividad sexual (incluso en el caso de que el amo introdujese a otra mujer en su hogar). Si el amo dejase de cumplir alguno de los tres preceptos porque la esclava ya no le agradase, la debería dejar libre al séptimo año sin necesidad de que pagase su manumisión. Pero también podía venderla a otro israelita antes de que se cumpliesen los siete años, como se deduce del hecho de que el código prohibiese venderla a un hombre de otra nación. Diferente es el caso de que el amo la destinase para su hijo, en tal caso debería actuar con ella como si fuese su hija, es decir, darle una dote para

24. Ex 21.10-11; Dt 22.13-19; 24.1-4; Jc 19.2.

que fuese la esposa de su hijo. No deja claro el texto qué ocurriría con los hijos de la *amah* y el amo. Barmash indica que existía la posibilidad de que el amo los reconociera como propios y se convirtieran en herederos, con lo que la situación de la *amah* podría mejorar y asimilarse a la de una esposa. Pero también podría considerarlos como esclavos, de la misma manera que ocurría con los hijos engendrados por los *abadim* hebreos en esclavas, que debían renunciar a ellos si querían marcharse de casa del amo al séptimo año. Frente a la frágil situación de la *amah* en el Código de la Alianza, el Código Deuteronomico la protege más: no sólo iguala a la esclava y el esclavo hebreo en cuanto a la liberación al séptimo año (salvo el caso de que la esclava o el esclavo rechacen la libertad y deseen mantener para siempre su condición por amor al dueño), sino que introduce en ambos casos la obligación por parte del amo de dar una dote con parte de su rebaño, su era y su lagar, de acuerdo a sus riquezas, añadiendo como razón que los antepasados de los hebreos fueron esclavos en Egipto y Dios los redimió. Barmash no sólo destaca el importante cambio legislativo que supuso el Deuteronomio, sino que demuestra filológicamente la dependencia sobre el texto del Código de la Alianza, contribuyendo así a consolidar la hipótesis sobre la datación de ambos anteriormente mencionada.

Rachel Magdalene, abogada y profesora jubilada del United Theological Seminary de Dayton (Ohio), en su capítulo “Rachel’s Betrothal Contract and the Origins of the Contract Law”, parte de un estudio historiográfico sobre el pasaje del acuerdo entre Labán y Jacob para desposar a Raquel²⁵ para concluir que la mayoría de los investigadores desprecian el carácter contractual de dicho acuerdo, dejándose influir por el prejuicio occidental de que el contrato escrito es una invención romana del siglo III a.C. Por ello, considera necesario reivindicar la existencia de contratos formales no escritos en el Próximo Oriente anteriores cronológicamente a la invención romana, como por ejemplo los contratos orales babilónicos usualmente formalizados mediante ritos simbólicos o por *verba solemnna* o por una combinación de ambos elementos. De hecho, los matrimonios en el Imperio Neobabilónico solían celebrarse exclusivamente mediante contratos verbales y ritos, normalmente ante testigos. A continuación, la autora analiza el caso de la negociación entre Jacob y Labán como un modelo de contrato verbal sin testigos ni ritos pero con fórmulas discursivas y estructuras narrativas que pretenden mostrarnos las partes del proceso. Dado que el primer contrato es violado por Labán, que entrega por la noche a su hija mayor Lea en lugar de Raquel, por la que Jacob había trabajado como siervo hebreo durante siete años pastoreando el ganado de Labán, se produce un conflicto que se resuelve con la cele-

25. Gn 29.

bración de un nuevo contrato por el que Labán entrega además a Raquel y parte de su ganado a cambio de otros siete años más de servicio. El procedimiento es en ambos casos el mismo: siempre se comienza con fórmulas discursivas, se produce un discurso retórico sobre la necesidad de formalizar un contrato y otro invitando a hacer una oferta, tras la realización de la misma se plantean consideraciones legales por ambas partes y, tras la aceptación de la oferta, se formaliza y lleva a cabo el contrato (en el primer contrato antes se efectúan los siete años de servicio y luego la entrega de la hija; en el segundo contrato primero se entrega la hija y luego se realizan otros siete años de trabajo). Puesto que los contratos se realizan sin ritos ni testigos, se trata de un tipo más primitivo de contrato verbal informal, basado en la confianza (en este caso, propia del parentesco que unía a Jacob y su tío Labán). En sus conclusiones, Magdalene reflexiona, por una parte, sobre el hecho de que Lea y Raquel son observadores pasivos bajo el control del hombre que negocia por ellas y decide su destino (observación que no es novedosa, sino harto reconocida) y, por otra parte, añade que “the refinement that we see here in contract formation and maturation leads us to question the view that Rome is the home of the origins of the modern-day contract”, interpretación a mi parecer forzada, porque nadie pretende negar que antes de Roma existieron acuerdos entre partes más o menos formalizadas, pero eso no significa que haya que ignorar el mérito del Derecho romano en cuanto a generalización de fórmulas contractuales escritas que garanticen el cumplimiento de lo acordado por ambas partes y permitan recurrir a un tribunal en caso de incumplimiento total o parcial de lo acordado, como fue el caso de Labán, que engañó a Jacob y se ganó incluso el rechazo de Lea y Raquel, que aceptan el plan de huida de Jacob exclamando: “¿Acaso tenemos todavía parte o heredad en la casa de nuestro padre? ¿No nos tiene ya como por extrañas, pues que nos vendió, y aun se ha comido del todo nuestro precio?”²⁶ En lo que sin duda tiene razón Rachel Magdalene es en la necesidad de analizar la estructura narrativa de otros episodios bíblicos como Gn 24.31-61 (negociación del matrimonio entre Isaac y Rebeca) para identificar fórmulas específicas que nos permitan distinguir tipos contractuales y conocer mejor el sistema legal del Antiguo Próximo Oriente, más intrincado y sofisticado de lo que el historiador del Derecho occidental suele imaginar.

El capítulo 4, “Judah, Tamar, and the Law of Levirate Marriage”, lo escribe Eryl W. Davies, profesor emérito de la Universidad de Bangor en el País de Gales y presidente desde 2013 de la Society for Old Testament Study. Partiendo del capítulo 38 del Génesis, se pregunta si en los orígenes la costumbre del levirato incluía el matrimo-

26. Gn 31.14-15.

nio de la viuda con su cuñado o simplemente obligaba al cuñado a engendrar un hijo con la viuda que no sólo tendría el nombre del hermano difunto, sino que recibiría la parte que le correspondía en herencia. El pecado de Onán, que derramaba su semen en la tierra para evitar engendrar ese heredero de su hermano difunto, apunta hacia una obligación exclusivamente sexual, aunque en Dt 25.5-10 se habla explícitamente de matrimonio, al igual que en el libro de Ruth. Otra cuestión que se plantea es si el levirato fue siempre opcional u obligatorio. Se deduce tanto de Deuteronomio como de Ruth que hubo opcionalidad. Aunque en Gn 38 Dios castigue a Onán con la muerte y Judá decidiese no dar a su hijo pequeño en matrimonio a la viuda Tamar, esto no prueba – según Davies – el carácter opcional primitivo del levirato, ya que hay un paralelo contextual, la ley asiria 43, en que se establece la edad mínima de diez años para que un padre entregue su nuera viuda a un hijo. Una tercera pregunta del artículo es si la obligación del levirato incluía al suegro en caso de no haber hijos disponibles para la viuda. En este sentido aporta los interesantes paralelos legislativos de la ley asiria 33 y la ley hitita 193 que incluyen la posibilidad del matrimonio de la viuda con el suegro, algo que parece desprenderse de Gn 38 dado que finalmente Tamar engendra un hijo de su suegro Judá, aunque no esté recogido en Dt 25. El análisis de la situación lleva a Davies a la conclusión de que hubo cierta evolución en la ley del levirato: el estadio más antiguo sería el de Gn 38, en que la obligatoriedad es mayor y del que se deduce la inclusión del suegro en la obligación de proporcionar un heredero a la viuda y al difunto, un segundo estadio sería el de Dt 25 en que no hay obligatoriedad pero sí oprobio y rechazo social al hermano del difunto que se niegue a cumplir con su obligación del levirato, finalmente el tercer estadio estaría representado por Ruth en que la opcionalidad es mayor, se extiende a parientes más lejanos y no hay oprobio ni rechazo social contra el que rechaza desposar a la viuda. Esta evolución podría culminar con la abrogación levítica del levirato en Lv 18.16 y 20.21, que prohíben las relaciones sexuales entre la esposa de un hombre y su cuñado, aunque como Davies sugiere, esta prohibición probablemente se refería sólo al período en que el hermano estaba vivo, mientras que el levirato sólo operaba en caso de viudedad de la esposa. La introducción de la legislación asiria e hitita para explicar el levirato es muy interesante, pero, en mi opinión, hay una debilidad fundamental en la argumentación: la consideración del Gn 38 como un texto más antiguo que Dt 25. Hoy la mayoría de los expertos consideran el Tetratéuco como obra posterior al Deuteronomio, fruto de los escribas sacerdotales que reconstruyen el Segundo Templo frente a la legislación y la Historia Deuteronomista elaborada por los escribas de los reyes de Judá en el exilio babilónico. Posterior aún es la “Novela de José”, datada en torno a los siglos IV y II a.C., en la cual se interpola Gn 38, redactado por escribas de la corriente davídica para reivindicar al patriarca Judá y situar en la

Historia Sagrada los ancestros de David. Los argumentos de Alessandro Catastini en su *Storia di Giuseppe (Genesi 37-50)*, publicada en Venecia en 1994, demuestran que hay que datar el pasaje hacia el siglo II a.C. La misma fecha propuesta para el libro de Ruth por Erich Zenger en su comentario de 1986 del *Zürcher Bibelkommentare. Altes Testament*. Si consideramos así la cuestión, la evolución sería distinta: Dt 25 sería el texto más antiguo en que tan sólo se incluía en la obligación moral de cumplir con el levirato al hermano que vivía con el difunto y la viuda en su misma casa y propiedades, siendo opcional pero sujeto a oprobio público en caso de negativa del cuñado mediante el ritual de la sandalia; Gn 38 sería una historieta influenciada por la legislación mesopotámica en que el levirato incluía también al suegro y excluía a los cuñados menores de edad, introducida por sacerdotes que habían vivido en territorio asirio durante el exilio y apreciaron como positivas dichas limitaciones inexistentes en el código deuteronomico; Ruth muestra una evolución aún mayor en la que el deber de protección de las viudas incluye a personas con grados diferentes de parentesco que superaban el marco de la familia nuclear, siendo el tribunal de ancianos el encargado de consultarlos por orden de mayor a menor cercanía. El ritual de la sandalia se había convertido para aquel entonces en un simple modo de delegación de una obligación moral en otro pariente sin que acarrese al que había desistido ningún reproche legal ni social.²⁷

Sarah Shectman, una investigadora y editora feminista de California, trata en el capítulo 7 sobre las “Priestly Marriage Restrictions”. En el exilio en Babilonia durante el siglo VI a.C., Ezequiel estableció limitaciones para los tipos de mujer con los que un sacerdote y un sumo sacerdote podían casarse: una mujer israelita virgen, con la única excepción de una viuda de otro sacerdote.²⁸ Después del exilio, los escribas sacerdotales del Levítico limitaron las restricciones para los sacerdotes regulares a las prostitutas, las profanadas o fornicadoras y las divorciadas, y las incrementaron para el sumo sacerdote incluyendo a todas las viudas y toda mujer que no fuera virgen y “de su misma piel”.²⁹ Sara Shectman argumenta con lógica que a los sacerdotes regulares se les permitía casarse con mujeres israelitas que no perteneciesen a clanes sacerdotales, dado que la prohibición de casarse con prostitutas y profanadas o fornicadoras no tiene sentido en el caso de hijas de sacerdotes, ya que estas debían ser quemadas en caso de descubrirse que habían fornicado o se habían prostituido, como se lee en Lv 21.9. Por tanto, la expresión “de su misma piel” debe referirse a

27. Ruth 4.7-8.

28. Ez 44.22.

29. Lv 21. 7 y 13-14.

hijas de sacerdotes. A los sacerdotes regulares, en definitiva, se les permitía desposar a un solo tipo de mujeres que no fueran vírgenes: las viudas. Schectman se pregunta por qué se les permite desposar a una viuda y no a una divorciada. No cabe suponer que se hacía porque la divorciada estuviera de algún modo impregnada por la esencia sexual de otro hombre, dado que también las viudas lo estaban. Por ello propone que se tenga en cuenta el único factor que las diferencia: el ex-marido de la divorciada aún estaba vivo. La defunción del marido de la viuda suponía para los legisladores bíblicos la disolución de un vínculo o conexión que en caso de divorcio quedaba cortado pero no disuelto del todo. Es como si el sacerdote que casase con la ex-mujer de otro hombre pudiese sufrir la transmisión de impureza por parte del ex-marido. En este sentido, argumenta que el prestigio de una mujer en aquella sociedad dependía del hombre con el que estaba conectada y que era responsable de su correcto comportamiento sexual y cuando una mujer se divorciaba, la posible falta de prestigio del ex-marido la contaminaba en cierto modo, al menos para un sacerdote. Concluye finalmente que para que una mujer pudiera casarse por segunda vez con un judío laico bastaba que la conexión se hubiese cortado (divorcio), mientras que para casar con un sacerdote se requería que la conexión se hubiese disuelto definitivamente (defunción del marido), y para casar con un sumo sacerdote la mujer, además de ser hija de un sacerdote, debía no haber tenido jamás ningún tipo de conexión con otro hombre, es decir, debía ser virgen.

El capítulo 8, “The Inheritance Injunction of Numbers 36. Zelophehad’s Daughters and the Intersection of Ancestral Land and Sex Regulation”, es obra de M.L. Case, investigadora postdoctoral de Estudios Judaicos en la Universidad de Blacksburg en Virginia. En Nm 27.1-11 Moisés acudió de nuevo a Yahvé para consultarle respecto al caso de las hijas de Zelofehad, que había muerto en el desierto. Yahvé proporcionó una nueva ley en la que la herencia del difunto que falleciese sin hijos varones debía recaer en primer lugar en sus hijas y, si no tuviese hijas, en los hermanos del difunto y, si no tuviese hermanos propios, en los hermanos de su padre, y finalmente, en el pariente más cercano. Posteriormente, en Nm 36 Moisés añade a esta ley una cláusula de salvaguarda para la tribu de Manesés: las hijas que heredasen por inexistencia de hijos varones debían desposar en la misma tribu que su padre, para que las tierras de su heredad no pasasen de una tribu a otra ni se produjesen distorsiones en las redistribuciones de tierras de los Jubileos. Este es el aspecto que le interesa a Case, el vínculo entre la tierra ancestral y las regulaciones sexuales. Algunas investigadoras han querido ver en las hijas de Zelofehad a las primeras israelitas feministas, pero también hay estudios que aprecian en ellas una ideología imperialista, dado que estaban reclamando parte de unas tierras que aún estaban ocupadas por sus ancestrales propietarios cananeos. Case, aún admitiendo el carácter reivindicativo de las hijas de

Zelofehad, concluye que el resultado final es de nuevo negativo para las mujeres. En efecto, si el decreto de Yahvé se hubiera llevado a cabo tal como se puso en su boca en Nm 27, el carácter patrilineal de la sociedad israelí se hubiese quebrado, puesto que el nombre y la herencia de Zelofehad se hubieran transmitido por vía femenina. La reivindicación de los patriarcas de la tribu de Manasés en Nm 36 no sólo afectaba a la propiedad tribal de la tierra, como argumentan, sino también al control de la sexualidad de las mujeres. Que hubiera mujeres propietarias y no sometidas a un *paterfamilias* suponía que podrían tomar decisiones libres sobre su sexualidad. Esto sería un peligro para el orden patriarcal establecido. La concesión de Moisés, limitando el derecho de las hijas de Zelofehad a heredar si se casaban dentro de la tribu de Manasés implicaba que, en consecuencia, no eran ellas las que heredarían, sino sus maridos y tampoco se perpetuaría el nombre de Zelofehad, ya que sus nietos llevarían el nombre de los maridos de sus hijas.

El capítulo 9, “Reproducing Torah. Human and Divine Sexuality in the Book of Deuteronomy”, lo escribe Steffan Mathias, investigador cuya tesis doctoral leída en la facultad de Teología del Kings College de Londres en 2015 ha sido publicada en 2021 en la misma editorial del libro que estamos reseñando. Parte de la distopía de Dt 28 (si desobedecen a Yahvé, los israelitas serán cercados por sus enemigos, que violarán y esclavizarán a sus hijas e hijos, y pasarán tanta hambre que se comerán la carne de sus familiares) y de los presupuestos de Foucault (el poder es tolerable sólo si una parte importante del mismo se enmascara bajo un discurso), para explicar las leyes sexuales del Código Deuteronomico, de carácter muy patriarcal: prohibición del adulterio,³⁰ permiso para usar sexualmente a la mujer capturada en la guerra e incluso convertirla en mujer legítima tras un mes de espera, por si está embarazada,³¹ prohibición de usar vestidos propios del otro sexo,³² castigos para las desposadas que no eran vírgenes al contraer matrimonio y para los que acusen falsamente a sus nuevas mujeres por disgustarles tras mantener relaciones sexuales con ellas,³³ castigos para los violadores y las vírgenes que no griten pidiendo ayuda en caso de violación en la ciudad,³⁴ prohibición de casar con la viuda del padre,³⁵ prohibición de ejercer la prostitución masculina o femenina en templos paganos,³⁶ prohibición de desposar

30. Dt 5.18 y 21; 22.22.

31. Dt 20.14 y 21.10-14.

32. Dt 22.5.

33. Dt 22.13-21.

34. Dt 22.23-29.

35. Dt 23.1.

36. Dt 23.18-19.

por segunda vez con la propia mujer repudiada que se volvió a casar con otro hombre y fue de nuevo repudiada,³⁷ prohibición de admitir en la congregación israelita a eunucos con los testículos o el pene mutilado,³⁸ exención militar para los varones recién casados hasta cumplido el primer año de matrimonio para “hacer feliz a la esposa” y engendrar hijos,³⁹ pena de cortar la mano a la mujer que agarre de los testículos al enemigo israelita de su marido por dañar sus órganos reproductivos,⁴⁰ matrimonio por levirato.⁴¹ Esta parte, la más extensa del capítulo, no es innovadora. A continuación, Mathias dedica cinco páginas a argumentar sobre el hecho de que el Deuteronomio considera a Yahvé como el *paterfamilias* de los judíos, que serían sus hijos, por lo que actúa con ellos de forma patriarcal. De la misma forma que el *paterfamilias* controla la sexualidad de sus hijos e hijas, Yahvé lo hace con todos los israelitas. En un texto monolátrico como el Deuteronomio, en el que ha desaparecido la esposa de Yahvé de los tiempos preexílicos, Yahvé ejerce como *paterfamilias* del pueblo que ha elegido, por lo que – termina Mathias diciendo – la Torá regula el derecho reproductivo de Yahvé. Una conclusión interesante, pero me da la sensación que inconclusa. Si retomamos la idea de Foucault sobre la necesidad de enmascarar el poder para hacerlo soportable y la conectamos con el hecho de que el Deuteronomio refleja la transferencia del poder legislativo de la monarquía davídica a la casta sacerdotal realizada durante y después del Exilio en Babilonia (y no como dice Bernard Levinson, citado por Mathias en la página 222, transferencia del poder monárquico a la nación, concepto anacrónico para estos tiempos), el resultado sería el siguiente: la Torá regula el derecho reproductivo del pueblo bajo el control de la teocracia sacerdotal que ejercería así de *parterfamilias* del pueblo durante la época persa y helenística, de la misma manera que antes lo había hecho el rey. El discurso deuteronomico, en definitiva, ocultaba parcialmente el poder de la casta sacerdotal sobre el pueblo y el dominio del varón sobre la mujer y los hijos mediante la máscara de Yahvé.

Anselm C. Hagedorn, profesor de Biblia Hebrea y Antiguo Judaísmo en la Universidad de Osnabrück y de Teología en Göttingen y Heidelberg, compara las leyes sobre el divorcio del Código Deuteronomista con el Código de Gortina en “Divorce in Archaic Crete. Comparative Perspectives on Deuteronomy 24:1-4”. Parte incluso de una breve referencia al matrimonio y el divorcio en Atenas, citando el gran discurso que Eurípides, en su tragedia *Medea* (431 a.C.), pone en boca de la protago-

37. Dt 24.1-4.

38. Dt 23. 1.

39. Dt 24.5.

40. Dt 25.11.

41. Dt 25.5-10.

nista: “mi esposo me ha resultado el más malvado de los hombres. De todas las cosas cuantas tienen vida y pensamiento, las mujeres somos el ser más desdichado. En primer lugar debemos comprar un esposo con derroche de riqueza y tomar un dueño de nuestro cuerpo (...) Pues a las mujeres no les dan buena fama las separaciones y resulta imposible repudiar al esposo”.⁴² En Atenas, el matrimonio era bastante similar al del resto de sociedades del Mediterráneo Oriental. El divorcio era un procedimiento sencillo para el marido: bastaba echar a la mujer de su casa, es decir, repudiarla. La esposa debía solicitar el divorcio por escrito al arconte y este, tras un procedimiento judicial, concedérselo. La mujer podía recuperar su dote, pero la división de bienes no siempre era amigable. En cualquier caso, toda mujer divorciada soportaba el estigma de no haber sido una buena esposa, capaz de satisfacer plenamente a su ex-marido. En esto, Atenas se parece más a Judea que a la ciudad cretense de Gortina, donde la mujer podía tener la iniciativa. Aunque en Dt 24.1-4, al menos, se prescribe que el marido debe entregar a la mujer un certificado de divorcio, en el que debía pormenorizarse los bienes que le correspondían por la dote aportada al matrimonio. La cuestión de la dote con la que se “compraba” el marido también es un aspecto común entre las leyes de Judea y Atenas (en realidad de casi todo el mundo mediterráneo), que no existía en Gortina. La inscripción del Código de Gortina fue publicada por primera vez en 1863 y se encuentra actualmente en el Museo del Louvre. Se data en el siglo V a.C., pero es una recopilación de leyes más antiguas, por tanto, coetáneas al Código Deuteronomico. No hay dote porque la mujer es propietaria de sus bienes y puede administrarlos ella misma. Tiene derecho a la mitad de los rendimientos producidos por los bienes matrimoniales en el momento del divorcio, a lo que haya tejido e incluso a una indemnización de cinco estáteres en caso de que el motivo del divorcio lo ocasionase el marido.⁴³ Como en todo el mundo antiguo, la patria potestad la tenía el marido y los niños se quedaban con él, excepto en el caso de que la esposa estuviese embarazada durante el divorcio. Entonces debía llevar al bebé con testigos ante el ex-marido y, si este lo rechazaba, la potestad recaía en la madre que podría decidir libremente si criarlo o exponerlo.⁴⁴ Sólo en Creta se usa la palabra *matroia* para referirse al estado materno con derechos sobre hijos y bienes, similar a *patroia*. Otra gran diferencia entre el Código de Gortina y el Deuteronomio (que se parece más al resto del mundo antiguo) es que allí algunas personas no libres tenían

42. 230-252, traducción de E.A. Ramos Jurado, ed. Kadmos.

43. III 11.

44. La exposición suponía normalmente la muerte del niño y si la mujer la llevaba a cabo sin renuncia al hijo por parte del ex-marido debía pagarle 50 estáteres si era libre y 25 si no lo era (IV 18 y 20).

derecho al matrimonio y al divorcio, correspondiendo a las mujeres las mismas capacidades de iniciativa en el proceso, pero no el derecho sobre el bebé en caso de encontrarse embarazada durante el proceso de divorcio, ya que la potestad sobre el mismo correspondía al amo del ex-marido o, si este renunciaba a él, al amo de la mujer (pero si la pareja se casaba de nuevo antes de un año, el niño pasaría al dominio del amo del marido). En realidad estos derechos correspondían más bien a los colonos (Φουκῆες) que a los esclavos (δῶλοι), respecto a los que Hagedorn dice: “The social status of the serf is not clearly defined in the Gortyn Code, as slave and serf occasionally seem to be assimilated into one and the same group”. Pero lo cierto es que el código usa la palabra Φουκῆες para referirse a los no-libres que tenían derechos matrimoniales y de divorcio. De todos modos, sí es cierto que en Gortina los esclavos y las esclavas tenían más derechos que en la mayor parte del mundo antiguo, ya que la ley penaba la violación de la propia esclava doméstica.⁴⁵ Lo más novedoso del artículo de Hagedorn es que repasa en la coincidencia de ambos códigos al regular la posibilidad de que una mujer se volviese a casar con su primer ex-marido. Dt 24.2-4 considera que si esa mujer se ha casado con un segundo marido y se ha divorciado de él, no puede casarse de nuevo con el primer ex-marido, ya que es “una abominación delante del Señor”; mientras que el Código de Gortina admite un segundo matrimonio entre parejas de colonos, como se ha visto, por lo que – deduce Hagedorn – también lo admitiría en caso de personas libres simplemente como un nuevo matrimonio.

La cuestión del divorcio en Dt 24.1-4 se estudia también en el capítulo 11, “Divorce Instruction and Covenantal Unfaithfulness. A New Examination of the Reuse of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as Metaphor in Jeremiah 3:1-10”, de Kenneth Bergland, un pastor luterano de Vesteralen, en el norte de Noruega, Máster en la Universidad de Oslo y doctorado en Andrews University. Su contribución examina el paralelismo del pasaje deuteronomico sobre el divorcio y Jer 3.1-10, en el que el profeta pone en boca de Yahvé una alegoría: Dios es el marido y Judá e Israel son sus mujeres. A Israel le dio carta de divorcio y ella se prostituyó como árabe en el desierto. Aun así, Yahvé le pidió que volviese con él. Avisó a su hermana Judá en tiempos del rey Josías y ella se prostituyó y adulteró con piedras y leños. En el versículo 12 Yahvé reitera su misericordia y pide que vuelvan. Bergland defiende que el texto de Jeremías depende del deuteronomico basándose en paralelos lingüísticos y literarios: entre Jer 3.1 y Dt 24.2 donde se menciona la carta de divorcio – que también aparece en Is 50.1, así como en el uso de la forma verbal piel como término técnico de divorcio; la secuencia de

45. Dos estáteres si era virgen y, si no lo era, dos óbolos si se produjo de noche y un óbolo si se produjo de día (II 6).

Jer 3.8; y la referencia al desierto árabe que aparece también al principio del Deuteronomio. Al final del capítulo considera que esta dependencia es una prueba de la antigüedad del Deuteronomio, ya que el pasaje de Jeremías se redactaría en época de Josías. El autor parece desconocer que ya en las primeras décadas del siglo XX los estudios de Bernhard Duhm apreciaron redacción deuteronomista en Jeremías y, tras todo un siglo de estudios al respecto, el máximo experto en el texto profético, Thomas Röhrer, sigue hoy argumentando que hay en Jeremías redacción postexílica.

El último capítulo lo escribe Hannah Harrington, profesora de Antiguo Testamento en la Universidad de Oakland, California, y se titula “Sexual Relations and the Transition From Holy People to Human Sanctuary in Second Temple Times”. Parte del uso de la palabra *qadesh*, “sagrado”, usada 470 veces en la Biblia hebrea para referirse a lugares, objetos y personas dedicadas a Yahvé, como el santuario, el arca, la comida sagrada, los sacerdotes, etc. En Ex 19.6 y 22.30-31 se dice que Israel es un “reino de sacerdotes y una nación sagrada” de “hombres sagrados”, y en Is 62.12 se habla de “pueblo sagrado”. La interpretación literal de estos pasajes hizo que algunos judíos del Segundo Templo aplicaran a todo el pueblo las restricciones sexuales y matrimoniales que Lv 21 y 22 contemplaba para los sacerdotes. La autora comenta textos al respecto del *Testamento de Leví*, del que se han encontrado en Qumrán fragmentos en arameo (ALD) del siglo III a.C.,⁴⁶ del *Libro de los Jubileos*, datado a mediados del siglo II a.C.,⁴⁷ del *Documento de Damasco* datado en las mismas fechas⁴⁸ y de la *Regla de la Comunidad*, datada a finales del siglo II a.C.⁴⁹ Para los autores de estos textos qumránicos, considerados mayoritariamente como esenios, los elegidos eran el templo y por tanto estaban sujetos a los límites sexuales sacerdotales, incluso a una total abstinencia. En Pablo de Tarso, el Apocalipsis y otras cartas neotestamentarias más tardías se aprecia el mismo razonamiento.⁵⁰ Harrington considera que una de las prescripciones más importantes a principios del Segundo Templo eran determinadas prohibiciones de matrimonios mixtos con gentiles,⁵¹ argumentos desarrollados en los Manuscritos del Mar Muerto.⁵² Además, detecta que los pasajes alusivos a la prohibición del sacrificio *molk* de los primogénitos⁵³ son reinterpretados en clave de matri-

46. T.Levi 9.9-10; ALD 6.4, col a 17-18; 4Q213a, 3-4.

47. 33.20.

48. CD 3.19; 4.6.13; 5.2.9.

49. 1QS 9.3-4.

50. 1Co 3.16-17; 6.12-20; 2Co 6.14-18; Ap 3.12; Ef 2.20-22; 1Pe 2.5.

51. Dt 23.4; 1Re 11.1-2; Ne 13.3 y 13.25-26; Esd 9.1-2; 44-6-9.

52. 4QMMT B 39-49; 4QFlorilegium = 4Q174 1.2-7.

53. Lv 18.21; 20.3.

monios mixtos, como hizo ya en los inicios del Segundo Templo el profeta Malaquías parafraseando Lv 20.3,⁵⁴ en el siglo II a.C. Jubileos combinando Lv 20.3 con Lv 21.9⁵⁵ y mucho más tarde el autor del *Targum del Pseudo-Jonatán* sobre Lv 18.21. Y aunque no haya citas directas de Lv 20.3, el mismo sentido se aprecia en otros textos qumránicos aludiendo al cuerpo de los elegidos como receptáculo del espíritu de Yahvé,⁵⁶ misma idea que se aprecia de nuevo en Pablo de Tarso.⁵⁷ Magistral cierre de un libro sobre la sexualidad en la Torá que abre un tema para otro libro: la sexualidad en el Nuevo Testamento, indiscutiblemente enraizada en el proceso descrito que experimentaron algunos judíos del Segundo Templo.

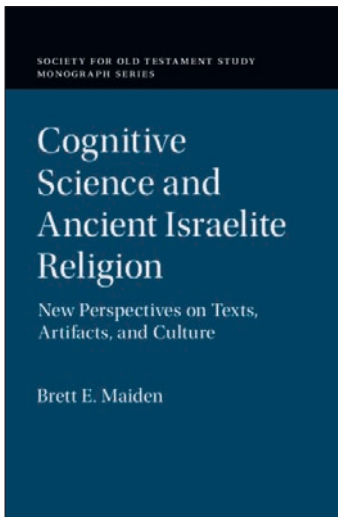
54. Mal 2.10-11.

55. Jub 30.8-16; 41.26.

56. 1QHa 8.29-32; 12.11-13; 16.14; 20.11-16; 1QS 4.10; 8.16; 4Q 444.1-5; 4Q 393 l ii .4-8; CD 6.14; 7.3-5.

57. 2Tim 3.16.

COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND ANCIENT ISRAELITE RELIGION



MAIDEN, BRETT E. (2020).
*Cognitive Science and Ancient
Israelite Religion. New Perspectives
on Texts, Artifacts, and Culture.*
Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, xii + 298 pp., 89,28 € [ISBN:
978-1-1084-8778-8].

THOMAS KAZEN

STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE STOCKHOLM
thomas.kazen@ehs.se

BRETT MAIDEN IS THE FIRST, TO MY KNOWLEDGE, WHO CONSISTENTLY applies theories and methods from Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible in a full-length study. He does this together with, or rather, as an integral part of, traditional historical in-depth analyses of texts and artefacts. The book is based on an Emory dissertation, but in spite of being the author's first book it reflects the writing of a mature scholar. In this pioneering study, Maiden demonstrates both the usefulness of CSR for Biblical Studies and how CSR can be fully integrated with the traditional toolbox that exegetes and ancient historians normally employ. Maiden

in a sense does for Hebrew Bible Studies what Risto Uro and Istvan Czachesz have done for CSR in the field of New Testament.¹ The only other work I know of so far to similarly review various CSR approaches and apply them to the Hebrew Bible, is Isaac Alderman's *The Animal at Unease with Itself*, published later the same year, but the two are very different in structure and content.²

The book consists of seven chapters: an introduction, five main chapters, and a conclusion. In the first chapter, Maiden introduces CSR perspectives in general, with special emphasis on issues relevant for a distinction between optimal and costly religion. The chapter serves as an excellent short introduction to CSR in general and the author shows his ability to explain, summarise, and make accessible a research area which is otherwise not quite so easy to appropriate through the publications of its main proponents. The introduction especially paves the ground for the subsequent chapters two and three; in chapter four, more CSR aspects are added.

In the second chapter, Maiden revisits the common popular/official religion dichotomy and suggests replacing it with a more nuanced understanding, based on CSR perspectives, of optimal versus costly religion. He dispels not only earlier and outdated dichotomies but also more recent understandings of the difference between elite and folk religion and goes further than recent revisions. He in fact successfully questions and dismantles a very popular paradigm.

In chapter three, the discussion is taken further by examining Deuteronomic theology as an example of cognitively costly religion. Maiden revisits major scholarly issues, such as the Deuteronomic reform, Deuteronomic name theology, cult centralisation, and aniconic worship with the help of CSR perspectives. In all this, he makes a markedly balanced and critical use of CSR – far from all those dissertations that pick up a fancy method and press it onto the material, whether it fits or not. Maiden, in contrast, is careful and discriminate in his application of method, clearly aware of its limitations, as he integrates CSR with classical Biblical Studies approaches in an exemplary manner.

In the fourth chapter Maiden discusses ancient Near Eastern hybrid creatures, in art as well as in texts. Here he takes the concept of minimal counterintuitiveness, already introduced and employed in the first chapters, further and complements it with Sperber's theory of cultural epidemiology. The chapter especially analyses iconographic evidence and is filled with illustrations. CSR perspectives contribute

1. Uro, 2016; Czachesz, 2017.

2. Alderman, 2020.

to a nuanced understanding of how hybrid creatures were variously represented and remembered, mentally as well as in iconography and in texts.

From here, the fifth chapter, “On Artifacts and Agency”, follows naturally. The focus is on the *mis pi* ritual, and the application of the concept of minimal counterintuitiveness results in a revised understanding of cult statues as simultaneously artefacts and deities, which goes beyond previous interpretations and critiques them.

In chapter six, Maiden revisits another major scholarly issue, the interpretation of the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16. Again, he complements his initial survey of CSR methods with McCauley and Lawson’s Theory of Ritual Form and manages to explain this highly complicated construction and sift out its main components, which are useful for his purpose. He combines this with Whitehouse’s Modes theory, already employed earlier, and complements with a couple of other CSR perspectives (Hazard-Precautions Systems, Cognitive Resource Depletion, and Ritual Efficacy). Leviticus 16 is then analysed with the help of these CSR theories and perspectives, in continuous critical dialogue with current and dominant interpretations. To do this in such an accessible and convincing way requires a thorough familiarity with both CSR and the textual issues.

The final chapter summarises the study and places the various issues studied along a scale with the intuitive/optimal at one end and the reflective/costly at the other. Maiden ends with a list of further topics to be studied, which his book does not cover.

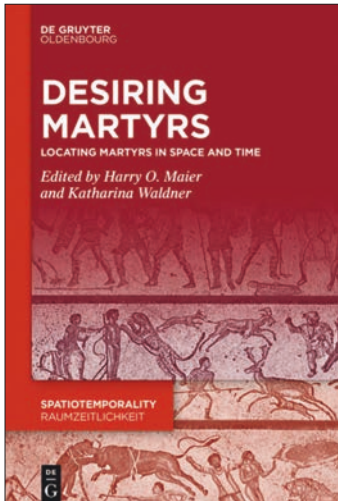
The volume has two indices: and index of Biblical texts (but no other sources) and a subject index of which maybe half consists of authors mentioned in the main text (Kauffman in the index is Kaufmann in the text). Fuller indices would have been appreciated, but perhaps most people today read their books on the screen, so search-and-find takes care of all needs.

On the last page, the author describes “the relationship between biblical scholars and cognitive researchers [as] a two-way street, with vital roles to be played on both sides” (p. 262). I think that Maiden’s book proves his case and that it will be instrumental in adding fruitful new perspectives to Biblical Studies, perspectives that *do not detract from but deepen* the application of more traditional historical, linguistic, and literary methods, as well as studies of material culture. Brett Maiden’s *Cognitive Science and Ancient Israelite Religion* is highly recommended.

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DESIRING MARTYRS



MAIER, HARRY O. & WALDNER, KATHARINA (eds.) (2021). *Desiring Martyrs. Locating Martyrs in Space and Time*. Berlin: De Gruyter, xviii + 236 pp., 59,95 € [ISBN: 978-3-1106-8248-9].

MARIJANA VUKOVIĆ
 UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN DENMARK
 mavuk@sdu.dk

IN THE COLLECTIVE VOLUME *DESIRING MARTYRS. LOCATING MARTYRS IN SPACE AND TIME*, the editors Harry O. Maier and Katharina Waldner published the proceedings of an international workshop, “Martyrs in Space and Time”, organized at the University of Erfurt in 2017. The *Desiring Martyrs* is dedicated to the spatial and temporal considerations of the literature that emerged in the early Christian period (p. 1). The volume addresses the assortment of sources and does not necessarily focus solely on martyrdom narratives. Other genres, such as letters, apocalypses, Apocrypha, and biblical books, are likewise examined. With that said, martyrs and martyrdom are treated in all articles. The volume *Desiring Martyrs* has contributed to the study of

early Christian martyrdom literature and literature discussing martyrdom through the spatiotemporal approach.

Spatiotemporality presents an innovative framework in the study of this literature. The volume appears a year after Paul Middleton's *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom* (2020),¹ which came in after some years of silence ever since the cutting-edge scholarship of Candida Moss (2010-2013).² Although it may seem challenging to delve into the subject where the leading scholars just had their say, the editors rightly note that the discussion of spatiotemporal questions presents a novel and unexplored way of studying early Christian literature.

The martyrdom and martyrdom literature studies have not been traditionally bound to a specific branch of knowledge. Their examination is at the crossroads of religious studies, theology, early Christian studies, Biblical studies, Jewish studies, the studies of Christian sanctity, and hagiography. Their reception may emerge in the research outcome of any period, from medieval (Western Latin, Byzantine, Oriental) to contemporary. Consequently, various analyses of martyrdom inevitably link to the specific area under whose umbrella they appeared. Besides, the investigations of martyrdom literature have not been caught thus far by the "spatial turn", which gained ground in Biblical studies and the studies of the Old Testament.³ According to the editors, the spatiotemporal considerations have been barely touched upon in the scholarship of martyrdom literature, for example in the writings of Judith Perkins, Elisabeth Castelli, and Candida Moss.⁴

The book is published in the series "Spatiotemporality" of Walter de Gruyter, which, although relatively new, presents a good platform with a solid variety of books for the study of practices and concepts in the two-fold perspective of space and time, which strives for interdisciplinarity and covers both historical and contemporary contexts, informed by current theoretical approaches. The editors' aim in this volume is to encourage other scholars to "continue the spatiotemporal investigations" (p. 11).

In the "Introduction", the editors devote space to defining of the term "martyr", providing a literature overview in German and English. Such a trend has been set in the previous scholarship on martyrdom: many scholars, such as Brox, van Henten, Avemarie, Rajak, Boyarin, Middleton, and Moss, discussed the concept previously

1. Middleton, 2020.

2. Moss, 2010; 2012; 2013.

3. Stewart, 2012, pp. 139-150; Schreiner, 2016, pp. 340-371.

4. Perkins, 2001; 2002; 2008; Castelli, 2004; Moss, 2012.

(p. 3). The editors further stress that this volume presents a ground-breaking study that addresses how texts from early Christianity “represent and produce configurations of time and space” (p. 1). The volume focuses on the “narrative and rhetorical dimensions” of the martyrdom narratives and literature mentioning martyrdom (p. 4). The editors explain the volume’s title as two-fold: in one way, it refers to the characters in stories (martyrs). It also seeks to answer questions related to the implied author, audience, and communal self-understanding. The editors stress that they “move outward from definitions to considerations of where, when, amongst and for whom accounts unfold and how narratives create and reflect spatiotemporal worlds” (pp. 5-6).

The following essay of the volume, “Sacral Meals and Post-Traumatic Places. Revision and Coherence in the Epistle to the Hebrews”, is Michael Thate’s discussion of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* investigated through the viewpoint of trauma studies. The *Epistle* is a venue for reconsiderating the past from the traumatic event of Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus’ violent death was a traumatic, shameful event (p. 18). The author aims to track the themes such as “the narrative assemblage of trauma, place, and therapies of desire” (p. 18). The *Epistle* is, in his view, “an important witness to the complex transgenerational phenomena of post-traumatic place-making in early Christianity” (p. 19). The story, initially uncomplicated, is revised by the community of believers: it alters the trauma of crucifixion into a place of repair, desire, communal belonging, and solidarity. The death of Jesus is reconsidered through the coherence of priestly sacrifice and the sharing of the priestly meal.

The author contributed to the argument of reading early Christian texts as complex post-traumatic phenomena in his other works.⁵ His statement contrasts some previous publications discussing martyrdom narratives, such as Candida Moss’ *The Myth of Persecution*.⁶ The textual analysis includes a close reading of the text, analyzed by the combination of philological methods and theological interpretations, at times becoming admirably specialized (p. 23). The article is written for experts familiar with this text and the Bible. Those unfamiliar with ancient languages, such as Greek and Hebrew, may find navigating difficult (although the author provides translations). The article does not extensively engage the theoretical literature on spatiotemporality. Its central theme, overall, answers the primary pursuits of the volume.

5. Thate, 2019.

6. Moss, 2013.

In the following article, ‘Who are These Clothed in White Robes and Whence Have They Come? The Book of Revelation and the Spatiotemporal Creation of Trauma’, Harry O. Maier discusses the *Book of Revelation* in connection to the desire for the imitation of Christ and martyrdom from the perspective of the absence of trauma. The author engages extensively with the literature on early Christianity. Besides, drawing from the writings of Lefebvre, Soja, and Bakhtin, he proposes that John wrote the *Book of Revelation* to inspire the imitation of Christ through a set of contrasting spatiotemporal depictions (pp. 7 and 50). Based on Soja’s book, *Third-place*, the author elaborates on the trialectical spatial consideration of *Revelation* (p. 51). Bakhtin’s conceptual tools complement Soja and Lefebvre in analyzing how *Revelation*’s characters inhabit differing spatiotemporal realities (p. 52). To produce an experience of trauma, according to Maier, John creates in his *Revelation* what he calls two “chronotropes” (Bakhtin’s concept): one produced by the martyrs who suffer for their faith, and another, produced at various locations where “idolaters curse the God and worship the beast” (p. 53). “The narrator constructs two sites of trauma to compel his listeners to choose one spatiotemporality or chronotrope over the other” (p. 53). In *Revelation*, there is a desire for the martyrs’ biographies to unfold in the future. For this, John creates the sites of trauma where he invites his audience.

In his contribution, “Murder at the Temple. Space, Time and Concealment in the *Proto-gospel of James*”, Christopher Frilingos analyzes the *Proto-gospel of James*, a 2nd-cent. infancy narrative that refers to the death of Zecharias and the flight of Elizabeth during Herod’s massacre of the infants (as in Mt. 2:16). Relying on Boyarin’s comparison of Jewish and Christian martyrs, Frilingos attempts to answer whether Zecharias’ death is martyrdom by applying a variety of spacetime configurations. Frilingos states that, beyond martyrdom, “a new understanding can be found in an array of spatial and temporal features in the account” (p. 65). His focus is the “cycles of liturgical time, correspondences between the secret depths of physical spaces, and the complexity of familial bonds” (p. 66). Zacharias does not die for faith and God; he dies for his family (p. 66). In his view, this apocryphal gospel does not display a desire for martyrdom. It is instead a love story of a husband towards his wife. A minor drawback in this otherwise elaborate article is that some subtitles are written with fonts smaller than others, which may give a false impression of a hierarchy among them.

In his article “Roman Judge vs. Christian Bishop. The Trial of Phileas During the Great Persecution”, Jan Bremmer examines the historicity of early Christian martyrdom narratives in response to Candida Moss’ study of their fictionality. Bremmer criticizes such an approach in recent scholarship where a tendency exists to minimize the number of victims of Christian persecutions (p. 89); this inclination is the most

vivid in Moss' book, *The Myth of Persecution*. He focuses on the manuscript tradition of the *Acta Phileae*, opening the article with the Bollandist approach, where he discusses the source, versions, and the old and vexing problem of authenticity (pp. 81-87). The discussions of the authenticity of hagiography and martyrdom literature have dominated the field for at least the first half of the twentieth century. Bremmer, however, adds to it a fresh approach, multi-lingual and all-encompassing, where he engages the entirety of the known literary sources on saint Phileas in many languages. Media studies additionally help his analysis. Bremmer safely bases the study of this martyrdom narrative on papyri, among other sources, which has not been widely utilized in earlier scholarship. However, it presents an excellent way to safely date texts, considering that papyri usually have stable early dating. Bremmer moves further from mere questions of facts and fiction and discusses the appropriation and readership. A better question is how these historical records were adapted and used to promote a certain kind of memory and to which end. His article may not directly contribute to spatiotemporality, but it is a fine addition to the study of authenticity and reception of martyrdom narratives.

In his article about Ignatius' letter to Romans, entitled "Pure Bread of Christ. Imperial Necropolitics and the Eucharistic Martyrdom of Ignatius", Eric C. Smith applies postcolonial theory and the concept of necropolitics to explore the postcolonial mechanism of imperial subversion (p. 8). The article of Smith rightly starts by explaining the postcolonial concept of necropolitics and Foucault's concept of biopower (pp. 120-122). When he turns to the source, Smith does not neglect further solid use of theory; he elaborately intertwines it into the principal analysis. In the view of postcolonial theory, "Ignatius' rhetoric of martyrdom and his performance of subjection and captivity emerge as expressions of agency by a colonized and subjugated person" (p. 120). Smith concludes that by dying for God and imitating Jesus, Ignatius reclaims agency over death and reveals the limits of Roman power. "Ignatius' death and his letters are a necropolitical protest and a denial to Empire of the thing it prized most: control over life and death" (p. 134).

Further, in her article, "From Prison to Palace. The *Carcer* as Heterotopia in North African Martyr Accounts", L. Stephanie Cobb offers a subterranean view of martyrs in prison. It is another site of necropolitics where imperial power was inscribed on bodies through humiliation and suffering (p. 9). She focuses on martyrdom literature to explore the experience of prison and "the subterranean world of darkness, stench, chains, and torture" (pp. 138-139). She uses Foucault's concept of heterotopia (p. 139) to define prisons as "counter-sites" (p. 146), places with new meaning where martyrs produced an alternative spatiotemporality (p. 9). She argues that prisons turn from heterotopic places to places of refreshment and neatness,

experienced as palaces (p. 139). “The prison is constructed as a sacred site for Christians even as it retains its horror” (p. 146). One drawback of this article is that it is the only article that misses the abstract in the opening.

Nicole Hartmann next studies the afterlife of the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch from Irenaeus to the other late antique and Byzantine *Acts of Ignatius*. Her article is entitled “Bones Ground by Wild Beast’s Teeth. Late Ancient Imaginations of the Death of Ignatius of Antioch”. The martyrdom of Ignatius story was exposed to acceptance, affirmation, circulation, and extensive rewritings and adaptations in several genres (p. 156). Hartmann’s analysis also pertains to studying the saint’s posthumous cult. Hartmann concludes that the different martyr traditions regarding Ignatius of Antioch are highly diverse and, more importantly, disconnected (p. 172). Ignatius took “many journeys through space and time as communities refashioned his travels to conform to their liturgical needs and theological expectations” (p. 9). In this way, both Bremmer and Hartmann conclude that “the past is appropriated for new goals and public desires” (p. 9). Hartmann’s article likewise may not be a straightforward contribution to the study of spatiotemporality, but it presents an innovative examination of the variety and reception of martyrdom literature.

In the penultimate contribution of the volume, entitled “When the City Cries: The Spacetime of Persecution in Eusebius’ *Martyrs of Palestine*”, Katharina Waldner analyzes the *Martyrs of Palestine* in two versions, from Eusebius and a Syriac translation with Greek fragments. She employs Soja’s concept of thirdspace. By first writing down the extended version of the *Martyrs of Palestine*, and abbreviating and inserting it into his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius “transformed these individual experiences of violence into a ‘cultural trauma,’ that is, ‘a catastrophe that continues to be recalled in cultural memory in such a way that its wounds are revealed and not healed in time’” (p. 183). Eusebius uses space and time to construct a Christian identity that refers explicitly to the province of Palestine (p. 183). The places of martyrdom turn into the memory spaces of cultural trauma of martyrdom (p. 186), which form the new identity of the Palestinian Christians.

The final essay by Jennifer Otto, “Making Martyrs Mennonite”, is displaced from the early Christian period and studies a 17th-cent. *Martyrs Mirror*, composed by Thieleman van Braght, a work that preserves an Anabaptist historical memory for the Mennonite community (p. 10). The author incorporates the martyrs of the early church into this anthology, by which he expands the chronological and territorial boundaries of previous Mennonite martyrologies. Otto discusses the “way a diversity of accounts could be shaped and serviced to create a uniform spatial, temporally oriented desire” (p. 11). By layering narratives from different times and places, the

author invites readers to reflect on their own lives on this example of faithfulness at any cost, repeatedly told (p. 208).

While applying spatiotemporal considerations is praiseworthy in some articles, one may not find their discussion equally consistent in all the individual pieces of the volume. The editors may have left it to individual authors to choose the direction to take within the study of spatiotemporality. Thus, the approaches in the individual articles embark on diverse aspects of spacetime studies, while some articles may not necessarily insist on the study of spatiotemporality. Although volumes of this kind, being the work of many authors, tend to over-promise a debate on a specific subject, the aimed direction to take in the study of martyrdom literature and literature mentioning martyrdom is commendable as it may inspire new contributions.

This volume reveals is a necessity for communication and consultation of the various mentioned disciplines and fields of study regarding martyrdom and martyrdom literature, starting from the use of the same terminology. One reference to this point is that the authors mainly use “martyrology” to designate martyrdom texts or narratives. This term could be misleading. For the scholars of Latin medieval sanctity, martyrologies were collections containing saints’ names and their feast days, aligned by calendars. Such collections of martyrologies were widespread in the Middle Ages.

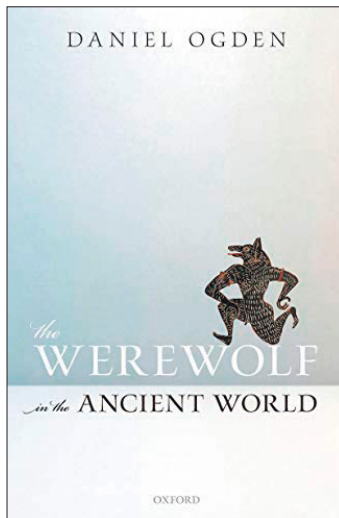
Besides, while some concepts in the volume are over-explained, such as the term “martyr”, the other concepts, including the novel and uncommon ones, such as “spacetime”, could have benefited from a more elaborate explanation, mainly as they are central to the volume’s theme (p. 2). The book also has a few typos and added words that were not sifted through the proofreading process.

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THE WEREWOLF IN THE ANCIENT WORLD



OGDEN, DANIEL (2021). *The Werewolf in the Ancient World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, xvii + 261 pp., 33 € [ISBN: 978-0-1988-5431-9].

TOMMASO BRACCINI
UNIVERSITÀ DI SIENA
tommaso.braccini@unisi.it

DANIEL OGDEN, CONTINUING HIS MERITORIOUS EXPLORATION of the Greco-Roman fantastic imagery, after his essays on – among others – the tales in Lucian’s *Philopseudes*¹ and various dragons,² publishes this work on werewolves, in his own words an offshoot of his very successful sourcebook *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*.³

1. Ogden, 2007.

2. Ogden, 2013.

3. Ogden, 2002 (2nd ed. 2009).

In his Introduction, the author gives his definition of what, for the purposes of this book, he will consider as a werewolf: “a creature that changes form, or appears to do so, or can be inferred to do so, in whole or in part, between the humanoid and the lupine” (p. 7). Immediately thereafter, he specifies that he will not consider a whole series of aspects, including whether the transformation into a wolf is permanent. This point, however, has evidently aroused some hesitations in Ogden, who refers (“sympathizing a little”) to other viewpoints (like that of Madeleine Jost) according to which the transience of the transformation is fundamental for the identification of the werewolf (thus, among other things, excluding the mythical Lycaon from lycanthropes proper). Ogden’s broader choice, in fact, seems to go against one of the few definitions of lycanthropy that come to us from antiquity (and probably the most effective of them), that of Pliny, who in *Naturalis Historia* VIII 80, referring to the *fabula versipellium*, expresses himself like this: *homines in lupos verti rursusque restitui sibi falsum esse confidenter existimare debemus aut credere omnia quae fabulosa tot saeculis conperimus*. Ogden’s decision not to limit himself to this “emic” definition, although perhaps questionable, in any case allows him to broaden the discussion considerably, by including a whole series of testimonies relating to a phenomenology that could be defined as “peri-lycanthropic”, relating to witches and ghosts.

The book, it can be anticipated, is (also for this very reason) extremely rich and thought-provoking. In this review we will try to account for at least some of the most important elements that emerge from its pages.

In the Introduction, which takes its cue from the famous story of werewolves in the *Cena Trimalchionis*,⁴ the author has good cause to stigmatise the relatively scant attention the tale has received in the modern monographs on Petronius. The crux of the problem, as Ogden notes, lies in the difficulty and unwillingness of classicists to confront the folkloric nature of the material, not only in Petronius, but concerning werewolves in antiquity in general. The unfamiliarity with the tools of folkloric research, and the irresistible attraction of the conventional and reassuring sirens of purely literary intertextuality, fatally lead to errors of perspective, like those that induce many scholars to give disproportionate importance to presumed “mythical antecedents” of the werewolf phenomenon, such as that of Lycaon, which instead, as Ogden notes, have a secondary and derivative character. In the author’s caustic words (p. 9), in these cases classicists show a disturbing propensity to enact what is known as the “drunkard’s search”, that of someone who loses his wallet in a dark alley but insists on looking for it under a lamppost “because there is more light there”.

4. *Satyricon* 61.

In the Introduction, the author also mentions an important element that will recur in the rest of the book, that of lycanthropy identified with a psychiatric medical condition. It is not at all a peculiarity confined to antiquity or to eras far removed from our own. In fact, the use of the term “*lupo mannaro*” (werewolf) or “*licantropo*” to indicate people suffering from psychic disorders is still well documented in the Italian press of the last century. Headlines (without any irony) such as *Movimentato inseguimento di un licantropo a Roma* (“Spirited werewolf-chase in Rome”) or *Il licantropo si rotolava nelle acque dell’Arno* (“The werewolf rolled in the waters of the Arno”) recur in national newspapers still in 1950.⁵ By the way, the etymology that the author proposes (p. 7) for the Italian “*lupo mannaro*”, from the Germanic “*Mann*”, does not seem to enjoy particular credence. Generally, it is thought that the word derives from the Latin *lupus hominarius*, a parallel of *lupus homininus*, which in turn gave rise to the form “*lupo menino*”, attested in the 15th century.⁶

The first chapter then moves on to explore the relationships between witches, sorcerers and werewolves. Sometimes the label of “werewolves” seems dubious, as in the case of men turned into wolves by Circe; in other occurrences, however, the relationship is clearly there, as in the case of Virgil’s Moeris:⁷ *his ego saepe lupum fieri et se condere siluis / Moerim, saepe animas imis excire sepulchris, / atque satas alio uidi traducere messis*. The same goes for Propertius’ Acanthis, accustomed to *audax cantatae leges imponere lunae / et sua nocturno fallere terga lupo* (IV 5, 13-14), and for Ovid’s Medea, who adds to her rejuvenation filter *in... uirum soliti uultus mutare ferinos / ambigui prosecta lupi* (*Met.* VII 270-271). The author has good reason to underline the peculiarity of this last passage, from which it seems to emerge that, at least in this case, the “basic form” of the werewolf is that of the wolf and not that of man (p. 42). Less convincing seems to be the hypothesis (cautiously put forward) that the term *lupulae* used by Photis in Apuleius (*Met.* III 22) might refer to witches who transform themselves into she-wolves. The word, as other internal comparisons with Apuleius’ work show,⁸ seems instead to denote jealousy and rivalry: it is not by chance that Psyche’s sisters are also called *perfidae lupulae* (V 11). It also seems a bit of a stretch to compare (pp. 44-47) the story of Socrates, recounted once again in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, with the fable of the wolf and the kids.⁹ Although this fable

5. See respectively *Corriere d’Informazione*, 29-30/5/1950, p. 2, and 16-17/9/1950, p. 5.

6. Cortelazzo & Zolli, 1999, p. 897, s.v. “*lupo*”.

7. *Ecl.* VIII 97-99.

8. See *ThLL* VII 2, p. 1851.73-80, s.v.

9. ATU 123.

was indeed already known in antiquity,¹⁰ the fact that the wolf's belly is filled with stones after the still-living kids are taken out of it, and that the predator dies when he goes to drink, dragged into the pond by the weight, does not actually seem comparable – except for some superficial similarities – to the fate of Socrates, whose heart is taken away by witches and replaced by a sponge, that falls out when he bends down to drink in a river. The substitution of the entrails of a witch's victim with minced meat, straw or dry leaves (an explanation for otherwise inexplicable forms of rapid decay followed by death) is well attested also in the European folklore of medieval and modern times,¹¹ and it seems quite different, in tone and substance, from the childish and cartoon-like imagery at the basis, instead, of the fable of the wolf and the kids.

On the other hand, the author's use of late antique and medieval hagiographic texts, which often have less qualms than other sources about reporting folkloric beliefs, is always very interesting and productive. A notable case, for example, is that of the so-called "Were-women" of Mount Lebanon (perhaps linked in some way to hyenas?) mentioned in the Syriac *Life* of Simeon Stylites (pp. 53-54). Medieval sources could also be relevant to corroborate the relevance of the Neuri (pp. 24-26, 64-67), a people from the steppes mentioned by Herodotus (IV 105) as *goetes* who transformed themselves into wolves for a few days every year. One might suspect that the simultaneous accusation of witchcraft and lycanthropy also weighed heavily, over time, on other peoples who had arrived from "outside" to threaten civilisation: one need only think of the accusations against the Bulgarian prince Bajan that circulated in the mid-10th cent. at the court of Constantinople. In his *Antapodosis*, Liutprand of Cremona recalls that *Baianum autem adeo ferunt magicam didicisse, ut ex homine subito fieri lupum quamuecumque cerneret feram* (III 29).

The second chapter deals with the connection of werewolves with ghosts and the dead. There are indeed many convincing connections highlighted by the author, which in some cases can be further strengthened. The case of the plague demon who is stoned to death and under the heap of stones takes the form of a large dog, as narrated in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* IV 10), is very close indeed to a medieval legend in which the victim is expressly transformed into a wolf. The reference is to the heresiarch Lykopteros, "Peter the Wolf", who, according to the words of the monk Euthymius of Peribleptos (11th cent.), was stoned to death in Georgia and, when people tried to examine his remains under the pile of stones, "they found his body prodigiously changed into the shape of a wolf; and when all the stones were

10. See Braccini, 2018, pp. 170-176.

11. See Cherubini, 2010, pp. 40-41.

taken away from him, the wretch leaped away in the form of a wolf before the eyes of all, and fled to the mountains".¹²

Equally relevant are the points of contact (attested since the Middle Ages) between werewolves and vampires, to the point that, as the author reminds us, the most common Greek name for the vampire, *vrykolakas*, derives from a Slavic root meaning precisely "werewolf". On the one hand, this could be due to a sort of osmosis of folkloric elements, but on the other hand, the binomial dead-wolf may also have roots in the ethology of this animal species. It should be borne in mind, in fact, that especially in the past cemeteries and burial grounds could actually be infested with dogs and wolves (or hybrids of the two species), which, especially at night, dug up the corpses and fed on them. Ogden himself (p. 100) quotes a passage from Aristotle where precisely this possibility is taken into account.¹³ Faced with the sight of a wolf (or a dog) walking away from an open pit, the horrified spectator could easily be led to one of two explanations. Either the wolf had killed a vampire trying to get out of the grave (which would be the origin of the belief, much older than *Underworld* or *Twilight*, that the werewolf is the vampire's mortal enemy); or, conversely, the vampire had momentarily left his body and turned into a wolf (or a dog).¹⁴

The third chapter ("The Werewolf, Inside and Out") offers, among other things, many valuable insights into the anatomy and physiology of the werewolf, starting with the question of the fur that, as also implied by the term *versipellis*, would have grown inside him.

The striking 16th cent. testimony (p. 88) by Hiob Finsel, about a self-styled werewolf from Padua who, on trial, claimed to be a real wolf, "save for the fact that his fur grew inwards from his skin instead of outwards", raises interesting questions about the possible interweaving of folk beliefs and psychoses of various kinds. The latter, in some cases, could have been a precursor to the paranoid imagery underlying, for example, the so-called, controversial "Morgellons' disease", today alarmistically fueled by posts on the internet (a simple Google search will provide plenty of documentation). Morgellons' "patients" are convinced, among other things, of the existence in their bodies of mysterious "fibres" of various kinds, that emerge from the wounds they cause by scratching themselves.

Also of great value is the treatment of what the author effectively labels as "Identifying wound" (pp. 93-98), also present in the above-mentioned Petronian

12. See Hamilton & Hamilton, 1998, pp. 155-157 and Braccini, 2011, pp. 117-119.

13. *History of Animals* 594ab.

14. See Barber, 1988, p. 93; Braccini, 2011, pp. 114-117.

narrative. In Niceros' story, however, this feature is clearly plethoric (the narrator had seen with his own eyes the transformation of the soldier into a werewolf, he didn't need any other proof), and this shows how here the author of the *Satyricon* was influenced by "what must have been an already long-established, deeply familiar and powerful motif".

The fourth chapter, one of the most impressive of the book, deals with the interpretation of lycanthropy as a phenomenon linked to the so-called "projected souls". The "projection of the soul" is well documented in antiquity, as shown by the cases of, among others, Aristeas of Proconnesus and Hermotimus of Clazomenae. This phenomenon, generally associated with shamanism, is explicitly linked to werewolves in the Icelandic sagas, not to mention the famous Livonian case of Old Thiess, on which, as Ogden points out, Carlo Ginzburg and Bruce Lincoln have also recently written.¹⁵ This connection was also active in late antiquity: it is postulated (also in reference to transformations into a wolf) by Augustine in the *City of God*¹⁶ and recurs also in a passage about witches in the so-called *De strygibus*, a very interesting short writing traditionally attributed to John Damascene, although it is most probably a rhetorical progymnasm dating from the 11th century.¹⁷ Less convincing, however, is the far-fetched attempt (pp. 131-135) to somehow link the conceptions of the projection of the soul to a passage in Petronius' tale of the werewolf, in which the narrator declares that he has run home "like the robbed innkeeper" (*domum fugi tamquam copo compilatus*). At the root of it all is a connection, practically certain (and postulated almost a century ago¹⁸), between Petronius' passage and a fable¹⁹ that has found its way into the modern editions of the Aesopic corpus, in which an innkeeper is robbed of his clothes by a thief pretending to be a werewolf about to be transformed. In order to support his complicated hypothesis, the author is forced to postulate a series of chain equivalences, in which the guardianship of the clothes of the werewolf is equated to the guardianship of the body of the one who projects his soul, and the escape of the innkeeper deprived of his clothes is compared to the fate of the werewolf deprived of his clothes, by means of the bad reputation and bad stories that in antiquity circulated about tavernkeepers. The convoluted conclusion is that "perhaps here too we are dealing with a tale in which traditional motifs have become kaleidoscope: the innkeeper must not, at any cost, have his cloak stolen, for he, again, is a (real) werewolf, and

15. See Ginzburg & Lincoln, 2020.

16. XVIII 16-18.

17. See Roueché, 2002, pp. 130-135.

18. See Citroni, 1984, pp. 33-36.

19. 301 Hausrath = 419 Perry.

depends upon it for his human form – and if the thief were inadvertently to turn the [sic] into a werewolf by stripping him of his cloak, that is of his humanity, what, do we suppose, would happen to him next?” I must confess, with all due respect, that I am unable to follow the author in these speculations. If anything, I prefer to note that the aforementioned Aesopic fable 301 Hausrath is only handed down from two very late manuscripts.²⁰ The fact that Petronius alludes to this fable, documents its existence well in advance of its appearance in the two manuscripts that preserve it (the most recent of which, moreover, is a copy of the oldest). The language in which the tale is written, as noted by Ben Edwin Perry, is characteristically medieval,²¹ suggesting a long period of oral circulation (perhaps mediated by some lost storybook from the Middle East), which further confirms the importance of folkloric inspiration in the construction of the Petronian lycanthropic episode.

The fifth chapter deals with the famous case of the so-called Hero of Temesa and its wolfish connections. In his in-depth treatment, the author takes into due consideration, among other things, the 1992 monograph that Monica Visintin dedicated specifically to this topic. I find particularly remarkable the gently bewildered and politely dismissive approach (p. 144), which I absolutely agree with, regarding the scarce usefulness of the “curious, algebraic” Proppian analysis to which, in deference to the fashion raging at the time in Italy (and elsewhere), Visintin had dedicated more than ten pages of her work. In addition to this monograph, as is well known, much other has been written about the Temesan episode (even a novel, the Dutch *De held van Temesa* of 1962, by Simon Vestdijk, mentioned on p. 137, n. 1). The author, in dealing with the various approaches, is perfectly right to warn against attempts to create a single story by combining the accounts in our possession: it seems much more judicious, instead, to accept the existence of several versions, not always compatible with each other, and for this very reason particularly interesting, as a reflection of traditions that differ in time and space.

A similar, deleterious tendency to unify discordant traditions is also opposed in the last chapter, entitled “The Werewolves of Arcadia”. The author argues persuasively that the complex of narratives concerning the myth of King Lycaon, the maturation rituals of the Anthids and the story of the athlete Damarchus, who was transformed into a wolf for nine years, have too often been considered as the basis of all ancient traditions on lycanthropy, and have therefore enjoyed a disproportionate amount

20. Laur. 57, 30, from the 16th century, and the much less well-known codex 1201 of the National Library of Athens, from the 15th century.

21. See Perry, 1961, pp. 10-11.

of attention, especially since, as mentioned, they are three aspects to be considered separately. Trying to clarify these three different traditions, the author assumes convincingly that the real duration of the Anthids' lupine initiation was not nine years, but much shorter (as in the case of comparable transition rites such as the *ephebeia-krypteia*), and that this detail was inferred by analogy with the story of Damarchus. In dealing with this aspect, Ogden also clears up two "myths" that have been asserted or reiterated even in recent studies. The first (pp. 191-192) is that the link between the full moon and lycanthropy is "a modern invention": in reality, the association already existed in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, as documented by the mention of the moon, *luna lucebat tamquam meridie*, in Petronius' episode (which once again proves to be a true collector of ancient folkloric traditions about werewolves), and a very clear passage from Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia*.²² The second (p. 197) is the popular scholarly belief, also recently "confirmed" by news of sensational archaeological finds (later revealed to be much less significant than it seemed at first), that human sacrifices took place on Mount Lykaion during the Lykaia: as the author points out, the analysis of the altar of ashes that still remains on the site of the sacrifices has revealed, however, that the victims were goats and sheep. With regard to the story of the athlete Damarchus, transformed into a werewolf for having eaten (perhaps inadvertently?) human flesh during the Lykaia, the author argues in an exemplary manner (pp. 198-205) how this historical character, like other famous athletes, became a magnet for migratory supernatural legends, who coagulated around him to prove and corroborate his ultimately superhuman status. And among these legends, therefore, must be included also that of the transformation into a wolf.

The Conclusion offers a rather generous list of werewolf stories attested in antiquity (not all of them will be perceived as such by everyone). Less controversial, and in fact absolutely convincing, is the contextualization of the places and occasions where werewolf stories were most likely circulated and exchanged in the ancient world (pp. 208-210): dinners and symposia, on the one hand, and travellers' haunts (such as taverns, to which one could also add ships) on the other, in both cases as a form of entertainment, and finally shrines and sanctuaries, in aretalogical contexts or linked to memorials and votive offerings. These locations, in fact, have remained of extreme folkloric relevance up to contemporary times, and constitute a further element encouraging the continuation of studies such as this one, which illuminate and clarify lesser-known aspects of Antiquity through judicious comparison with the folklore of later periods.

22. III 120.

The work continues with three short appendices, one on Circe as a witch, another (of great interest) on the cynocephali and the last one on “false werewolves” such as Dolone and the *luperci* and concludes with a bibliography of about thirty pages and a general index.

The book has the airy and elegant layout that is a trademark of Oxford University Press; the editorial care has been high, and only a handful of typos are detectable, but these do not constitute an obstacle to comprehension.²³

Summing up, the importance of this work is undeniable: *The Werewolf in the Ancient World* is destined to become the reference treatise on lycanthropy in antiquity, and it certainly has what it takes to be so – not least, the author’s familiarity with scholarly literature in languages other than English. In addition, throughout his work the author did not content himself with references and summaries available in existing literature (e.g. in Montague Summers’ classic *The Werewolf*), but commendably took the trouble to verify the sources, in more than one case correcting the inaccurate statements of his predecessors (see for instance the Portuguese case reported by Oswald Crawford, summarized on pp. 102-103). As always, in works of broad synthesis like this one, there is room for minor quibbles of various kinds, and certainly not all the interpretations proposed, especially the most daring, will find everyone in agreement. Nevertheless, the materials collected by the author, and also his debunking of some “myths” and scholarly conventions, especially with regard to the Arcadian “sagas” about werewolves, are valuable and commendable, and will undoubtedly constitute the term of comparison for any future research on lycanthropy in Greece and Rome.

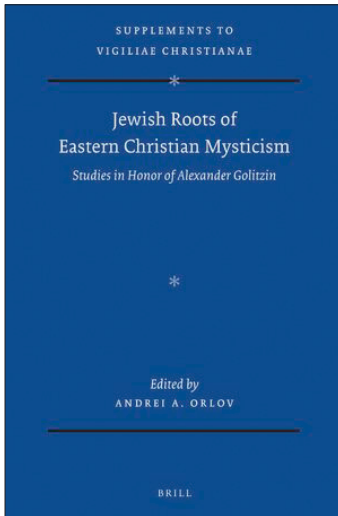
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23. For instance, on p. 49, n. 117, read “*pharmakis*” for “*pharakis*”; on p. 71, l. 13, read “*cynanthropy*” for “*cyanthropy*”; on p. 174, l. 25, read “*Catasterismi*” for “*Catasterimsi*”; on p. 176, l. 9, a full stop is missing at the end of the sentence; on p. 182, n. 82, read “*Imperialia*” for “*Imperiala*”.

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JEWISH ROOTS OF EASTERN CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM



ORLOV, ANDREI A. (ed.) (2020). *Jewish Roots of Early Christian Mysticism. Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin*. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 387 pp., 142 € [ISBN: 978-9-0044-2952-9].

RODRIGO LAHAM COHEN

UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES / UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE SAN MARTÍN
r_lahamcohen@hotmail.com

JEWISH ROOTS OF EASTERN CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM. STUDIES IN HONOR OF ALEXANDER GOLITZIN es un libro – como lo indica su subtítulo – destinado a homenajear a Alexander Golitzin, actual arzobispo de Dallas, el Sur y la Diócesis Búlgara de la Iglesia Ortodoxa en América.

La trayectoria de Golitzin, así lo explica en la introducción Andrei Orlov – el editor del libro – es vasta y no se limita al ámbito religioso sino que también abarca el académico. Egresado de la Universidad de California en Berkeley, obtuvo luego una

Maestría de Divinidad en el Seminario teológico ortodoxo St. Vladimir. Su doctorado lo realizó en la Universidad de Oxford, trabajando sobre el corpus del Pseudo Dionisio.

Tal como resalta Orlov, Golitzin pasó un año en el monasterio de Simonos Petra en el Monte Athos, experiencia que impactó de lleno en su visión no solo del monacato sino también, y más en general, sobre la esfera de lo sagrado y el misticismo. La mayor parte de su carrera como docente e investigador la llevó a cabo en la *Marquette University* de Milwaukee. Antes de llegar al arzobispado, Golitzin fue diácono, sacerdote, obispo e, incluso, fue tonsurado en el ya mentado monasterio de Simonos Petra.

Si bien la introducción de Orlov no ofrece detalles sobre los capítulos del libro, sí apunta a explicar el título de este. Es que Alexander Golitzin indagó, en una parte importante de sus múltiples investigaciones, en torno a las huellas de la matriz judía en la tradición teológica ortodoxa oriental. Debe decirse, sin embargo, que solo algunos capítulos del libro se alinean con el título.

Tal como marca Orlov y como dejan traslucir algunos de los capítulos de *Jewish Roots*, si bien el trabajo de Golitzin fue siempre ponderado, fue muy resistido en diversos ámbitos académicos y, sobre todo, en la propia academia ortodoxa donde las huellas judías no fueron siempre encontradas.

Golitzin, en sus diversos trabajos, rastrea, por ejemplo, el impacto de tradiciones sacerdotales y litúrgicas judías en los testimonios místicos ortodoxos. Buscaba, también, las reformulaciones cristianas de los rituales del Gran Templo. En el fondo, como resalta Orlov, Golitzin brega por no exagerar las rupturas entre judaísmo y cristianismo tempranos. Esta cuestión, como el lector/la lectora imaginará, es un aspecto que ha hecho correr ríos de tinta (y lo seguirá haciendo, sin dudas).

Pasemos, ahora sí, a la estructura del libro. Este comienza con el listado de bibliografía del autor homenajeado, que se compone de ocho libros e innumerables artículos. A la ya mentada introducción de Orlov, se suman 18 capítulos de autores/as individuales repartidos en cuatro secciones.

Reseñar un libro de estas características es sumamente difícil por varias razones. Como gran parte de las compilaciones de este tipo, involucra trabajos de temas muy diferentes, por lo que la evaluación de cada uno debe ser necesariamente individual. En este caso, además, la estructura y el tamaño de cada capítulo es dispar, hecho que dificulta un análisis global.

Por otra parte, como ya anticipé, si bien varios artículos sí ponen el foco en las raíces judías del misticismo cristiano, la mayoría no lo hace y discurre por otros temas. La impresión es que se trata de un conjunto de trabajos de gran calidad pero que no dialogan entre sí y, en ocasiones, ni siquiera dialogan con el homenajeado, más allá de los agradecimientos adicionados. No se lea esto como una crítica, sino

como una descripción del modo en el que funcionan las compilaciones (de las que yo también he sido editor y parte, con las mismas consecuencias).

Presentaré, entonces, un resumen muy limitado de los temas principales de cada capítulo y me detendré en aquellos que, por mis propios intereses, me han atraído más.

La primera sección se denomina “Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism and Mysticism”. El capítulo primero, “Traumatic Mysteries. Pathways of Mysticism among the Early Christians”, escrito por April D. DeConick se relaciona de lleno con el objetivo declarado del libro y analiza los núcleos compartidos por el misticismo judío y cristiano de los primeros siglos, ambos familiares a la religiosidad judía del Segundo Templo. Indaga, luego, en las diversas formas que adoptó el misticismo y recalca en tres cuestiones comunes que, entiende, involucra: trauma, éxtasis y reforma de uno mismo. Es en la noción de trauma donde DeConick pone la lupa. Pero va más allá: ingresa al campo de la medicina, escrutando, en sus palabras, la plataforma biológica donde se desarrolla el misticismo y pensando a los rituales cristianos como herramientas, asociadas al trauma, para experimentar el misterio de Cristo. Experiencia que, siempre en su lógica, fue – para quienes la experimentaron – real; biológica.

El segundo capítulo “The importance of the Parables of 1 Enoch for Understanding the Son of Man in the Four Gospel”, por Charles Gieschen, investiga las interpretaciones que recibió la noción bíblica de “Hijo del Hombre”, con énfasis en 1 Enoc con el fin de rastrear el sustrato precristiano de tal visión y como esta, junto a la lectura de Daniel, impactó en los evangelios.

El siguiente capítulo, el tercero, fue escrito por Silviu Bunta, alumno doctoral de Golitzin. Es un capítulo muy interesante porque, también en sintonía con el libro, traza comparaciones entre textos judíos y cristianos. Su título es “Driven Away with a Stick. The Femininity of the Godhead in *y Ber. 12d*, the Emergence of Rabbinic Modalist Orthodoxy, and the Christian Binitarian Complex” y se centra en el pasaje del Génesis sobre la creación del ser humano y en una lectura binaria (varón-mujer) de Dios que, siglos más tarde, llegaría a la *Kabalá*. Indaga para ello en el Talmud de Jerusalén y en autores cristianos como Jacobo de Edesa. Concluye que la noción de binarismo divino era antigua y contra ella pugnaron tanto judíos como cristianos, señal de que persistió en los márgenes de cada grupo.

La parte primera la cierra James Russell con “The Nativity of Ben Sira Reconsidered”, quien rastrea, luego de un análisis historiográfico sobre el lugar de lo iranio en los estudios judíos, cómo en el *Alfabeto de Ben Sira* hubo influencias zoroastrianas. En oposición a las recientes lecturas de Ilan y Kiperwasser, considera, en línea con Yasif – el más reciente editor del texto – que proviene del Irak pos-sasánida.

La segunda parte del libro, “Theophany and Transformation”, inicia con el capítulo 5: “Historical Memory and the Eschatological Vision of God’s Glory in Iranaeus”

de la pluma de Khaled Anatolios. El autor remarca, ante todo, la falta de estudios sobre la mirada de Ireneo en torno a la persistencia de la memoria histórica de la humanidad y su vinculación con la visión escatológica de la divina gloria. Concluye, luego de un minucioso análisis, que en la visión de Ireneo se presupone que la memoria de la experiencia histórica de la humanidad, tanto del pecado como de la salvación, estará en la consumación escatológica. Sigue el capítulo “Flesh Invested with the Paternal Light. St Irenaeus on the Transfiguration of the Body” de John Behr, también centrado en Ireneo pero con un estudio sobre la transfiguración del cuerpo.

El séptimo capítulo, sobre Orígenes, fue escrito por Charles Stang y se denomina “Flesh and Fire. Incarnation and Deification in Origen of Alexandria”. Su objetivo es analizar como Orígenes piensa la encarnación y la deificación, cuestión que lo lleva a analizar, con detalle, tanto la cristología origeniana como su soteriología.

Marcus Plested es quien escribió “St John Chrysostom in the West”, un capítulo algo alejado del concepto general del libro ya que analiza el impacto de la obra de Crisóstomo en el Oeste latino, llegando incluso hasta la modernidad. El capítulo es bueno pero, en línea con toda esta sección de la compilación, no se relaciona con aquello que el editor propone como objetivo.

Cierra el apartado “Divine Light and Salvific Illumination in St. Symeon the New Theologian’s *Hymns of Divine Eros*” de John McGuckin. El protagonista es Simeón el Nuevo Teólogo y su doctrina sobre la luz divina, la cual estaría expresando no solo su forma de pensar sino sus experiencias concretas en torno a la vida espiritual.

Llegamos así a la tercera parte del libro, “Jewish Temple and Christian Liturgy”, donde se retoma lo propuesto en el título de la obra. Es el propio editor del texto, Orlov, quien escribió el capítulo décimo: “Leviathan’s Knot. The High Priest’s Sash as a Cosmological Symbol”. En sintonía con las preocupaciones de Golitzin, analiza la figura del sumo sacerdote, sus vestimentas y su rol simbólico como templo micro-cósmico. Entreteje gradualmente interpretaciones que vinculan la faja al Leviatán y el Sumo sacerdote al Adán escatológico, así como la resignificación positiva del monstruo marino en tiempos mesiánicos. Todo el trabajo es realizado con textos judíos y cristianos, canónicos y apócrifos.

Sigue el capítulo 11, “Moses as the First Priest-Gnostikos in the Works of Evagrius of Pontus”, por Robin Young, quien realiza una lectura que abarca diversos padres de la Iglesia en torno a Moisés como antecesor del sacerdocio contemplativo. Registra, también, antecedentes de esta lectura en fuentes judías tempranas que fueron retomadas (y potenciadas) por Filón de Alejandría. Así, explica Young, la figura de Moisés fue utilizada por diversos autores cristianos como modelo de monje, como amigo de Jesús y, también, como sacerdote gnóstico pero no como modelo de liderazgo episcopal.

La reconocida Susan Ashbrook Harvey es quien se encarga de capítulo 12: “Holy Sound. Preaching as Divine Song in Late Antique Syriac Tradition”. En un trabajo genial analiza la fuerte expansión de la poesía litúrgica en el mundo siríaco, tanto en formato de *madrasha* como de *memre*. Indaga en los textos de Efrén, Rabula, Narsai y Jacobo de Serug. A partir de ellos desarrolla la idea de que existía una clara imbricación entre enseñar, predicar y cantar. El canto, de hecho, es analizado por la autora tanto en su dimensión terapéutica como pedagógica. Concluye, entonces, con la existencia de un “musical ministry of teaching”. Sería interesante, para enriquecer el eje comparativo del libro, poner en diálogo los textos aquí analizados con la expansión del *piyyut* (poesía litúrgica producida en medios judíos en el mismo período).

Bagdan Bucur es quien despliega el capítulo 13: “The Lord Himself, One Lord, One Power. Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Isaiah 63:9 and Daniel 7:13”. El trabajo hace gala no solo del espíritu del libro, sino que también dialoga con los trabajos de Golitzin. Así, analiza y compara los debates intracristianos e intrajudíos en torno a la unicidad de Dios. Del lado cristiano, en relación a la figura de Cristo y, en el espacio judío, sobre las disputas rabínicas contra la idea de los *minim* (una forma talmúdica de mentar a las voces disidentes) sobre la doctrina de los dos poderes en el cielo. El análisis parte de las distintas interpretaciones, judías y cristianas, de Isaías 63:9 tanto desde el texto masorético como desde la Septuaginta. Discurre en autores como Ireneo, Cipriano, Tertuliano y Orígenes y, del lado judío, *Mekhilta de Rabi Ismael*, *Avot de Rabi Natán* y *Sifre Deuteronomio*. Tanto desde el cristianismo como desde el judaísmo se discutían temas como la agencia directa e indirecta de Dios y el monoteísmo estricto o binario. Mismas tensiones, sigue Bucur, se revelaron con las interpretaciones de Daniel 7:13. Concluye que, paradójicamente, quienes aspiraban a constituirse como ortodoxias, tanto cristianas como judías, tenían puntos en común en muchas interpretaciones del texto bíblico al calor de discusiones no entre ellos sino, principalmente, con disidencias internas. El autor, en relación a buscar puntos de contacto entre textos, es muy consciente (habla explícitamente del tema) tanto de la “paralelomanía” de la que bien nos advirtió Sandmel hace ya muchos años, como de la “paralelofobia” sobre la que nos puso en guardia, hace no tanto tiempo, Yuval.

Comienza luego la última parte del libro, la cuarta: “Pseudo-Dionysius, Plato and Proclus”, temas a los que Golitzin destinó muchos años y en los que ha dejado huella. Abre la sección István Perczel con “Revisiting the Christian Platonism of Pseudo-Dionysius”. Analiza, en diálogo con Golitzin, si la inspiración del Pseudo Dionisio es fundamentalmente platónica o cristiana. Es interesante que el hoy arzobispo había abiertamente criticado la posición de Perczel. Este va lentamente exponiendo las influencias de Proclo en el corpus estudiado, concluyendo que quien escribiera los textos agrupados en el corpus del Pseudo Dionisio reutilizó y adaptó la obra

de aquel. Es loable que este libro, que homenajea a Golitzin, habilite la existencia de un capítulo donde se discute al propio homenajeado, si bien – como, entiendo, corresponde – Perczel le reconoce méritos y debate desde el respeto.

El capítulo 15 “Individual and Liturgical Piety in Dionysius the Areopagite”, de Andrew Loth, avanza nuevamente sobre el Pseudo Dionisio, específicamente sobre aquello que Golitzin vio como una tensión entre la piedad individual y la litúrgica. El trabajo pone de manifiesto, también, como algunas de las líneas exploradas por Golitzin no fueron seguidas por la crítica y, de hecho, fueron abiertamente confrontadas. Loth concluye – analizando diversos textos – que, más allá del consenso historiográfico, el Pseudo Dionisio, tal como afirmaba Golitzin, estaba muy preocupado por la tirantez entre lo individual y lo litúrgico

“Ps.-Ps. Dionysius on the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. The Armenian Letter of Dionysius to Titus” es el siguiente capítulo, a cargo de Stephen Shoemaker. Analiza un famoso pasaje del Pseudo Dionisio que generalmente ha sido interpretado como la dormición de María. A continuación estudia el mismo evento en la epístola armenia de Dionisio a Tito, la cual traduce en el apéndice del capítulo. Ubica el texto en una tradición aún más amplia, en línea con las ideas de Golitzin sobre las múltiples influencias del corpus dionisiaco.

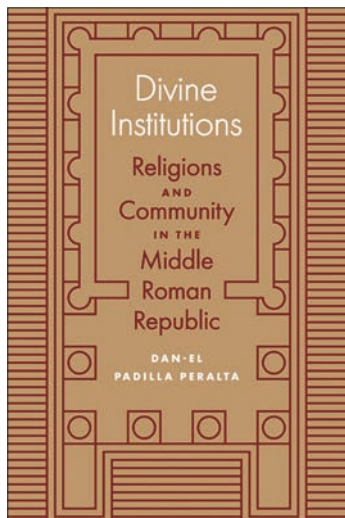
En el capítulo 17, “The ‘Platonic’ Character of Gregory of Nyssa’s Psychology. The Old Canon”, Michel Barnes aborda la psicología de Gregorio de Nisa intentando apartarse del típico análisis en torno el vínculo entre este y la filosofía de su tiempo. Pasa revista a las investigaciones clásicas sobre el carácter platónico del pensamiento de Gregorio y concluye que, en realidad, la discusión debe ser ampliada: no hay un solo pensamiento en Gregorio, sino múltiples psicologías (en plural las presenta) que son hijas de su tiempo y por tanto, son eclécticas y polémicas al estar cargadas de mediaciones. En tal sentido, no hay que olvidar, razona, el contexto cristiano en el que Gregorio se desarrolló, evitando limitar la investigación de su pensamiento a un catálogo de comparaciones con los textos platónicos y aristotélicos.

La cuarta sección y, a la vez, el libro, se cierran con el gran Sebastian Brock y el capítulo llamado “Charioteer and Helmsman. Some Distant Echoes of Plato’s *Phaedrus* in Syriac Literature” donde analiza la forma en la que las imágenes de Platón en torno al alma permearon diversas tradiciones. En este caso el autor pone el ojo en la tradición siríaca en general y en Narsai en particular concluyendo que aunque Platón nunca se tradujo al siríaco, sus ideas en torno al alma lograron penetrar, si bien muy modificadas, en el mundo siríaco.

Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism. Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin es un justo homenaje a un autor prolífico que, aceptado o no, generó

debates. Desde el punto de vista de los/las lectores/as es un libro que probablemente sea leído solo por partes, dada la disparidad de temas. Sus capítulos, si bien cortos, ofrecen ventanas al universo del cristianismo inicial, tanto en su faceta mística como en otras.

DIVINE INSTITUTIONS



PADILLA PERALTA,
DAN-EL (2020). *Divine Institutions. Religions and Community in the Middle Roman Republic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 344 pp., 40 € [ISBN: 978-0-6911-6867-8].

GIORGIO FERRI

SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA
giorgio.ferri@uniroma1.it

DAN-EL PADILLA PERALTA È PROFESSORE ASSOCIATO in *Classics* presso il prestigioso ateneo statunitense di Princeton e figura di spicco negli studi antichistici contemporanei. La sua ricerca si focalizza sulla storia romana di epoca repubblicana e altoimperiale e sulla ricezione del mondo classico nelle culture americana e latinoamericana odierne. Le direttrici della ricerca dell'autore (d'ora in poi abbreviato in A.) devono molto, per sua stessa ammissione, alle sue origini: egli si definisce infatti “*Dominican by birth and New Yorker by upbringing*”¹ così come “*Dominican*

1. <https://classics.princeton.edu/people/faculty/core/dan-el-padilla-peralta>.

Diaspora classicist”.² L’incontro tra l’esperienza migratoria in tenera età, l’identità dominicana e la formazione come classicista hanno avuto quale esito un’autobiografia³ e un forte impegno nei campi della giustizia sociale, dei diritti degli immigrati e dell’inclusività, sia su un piano generale, nella società statunitense, che nel campo degli studi classici contemporanei.⁴

Il volume dal titolo *Divine Institutions. Religions and Community in the Middle Roman Republic* si incentra sull’importanza fondamentale della religione in generale, e dell’edilizia templare in particolare, per la società romana nello snodo cruciale del periodo mediorepubblicano, vale a dire tra IV e III secolo a.C. Come affermato nell’introduzione (“Introduction. One State, under the Gods”, pp. 1-28), scopo conclamato del libro è di illustrare il processo mediante il quale lo stato romano tra 400 e 200 a.C. “remade and retooled itself into a republic defined and organized around a specific brand of institutionalized ritual practices and commitments” (p. 2), ottenendo di consolidare la propria coesione interna e venendo a sua volta influenzato sul lungo periodo da tale processo, dal quale emerse infine “a new kind of statehood”.

Uno dei principali *Leitmotiv* del lavoro dell’A. è il concetto, desunto dal lavoro di Richard Blanton e Lane Fargher,⁵ di “quasi-voluntary compliance”, che potremmo rendere con “adesione quasi volontaria”: la pratica religiosa romana pubblica nel periodo considerato avrebbe ricoperto un ruolo decisivo nel destare un consenso non passivo ma partecipato nei diversi strati della società romana. Operando in una medesima direzione, i fenomeni interconnessi dello sviluppo imperiale e militare da un lato e delle pratiche religiose dall’altro avrebbero portato la *res publica* ad una dimensione “statale” mai raggiunta prima, oltre che alla trasformazione monumentale della città di Roma. Per diventare “quasi volontaria”, l’adesione che avrebbe reso possibile tali cambiamenti fondamentali aveva bisogno di essere radicata nella fiducia che le performance e i rituali religiosi furono capaci di negoziare, generare e garantire stabilmente nella società romana. Di questo fenomeno non devono essere sottovalutate peraltro le ricadute economiche: nell’accrescere la coesione sociale (e culturale), così come la fiducia collettiva mediante attività rituali condivise e ripetute, la pratica religiosa mediorepubblicana provvedeva infatti all’ulteriore funzione di (re)distribuire le risorse sempre più rilevanti ottenute con le varie guerre combattute in modo via via crescente nel periodo considerato.

2. <https://twitter.com/platanoclassics> (profilo Twitter ufficiale).

3. Padilla Peralta, 2015.

4. <https://classics.stanford.edu/dan-el-padilla-peralta-why-why-classics>.

5. Blanton & Fargher, 2008.

La prima parte del volume (“Build”) si apre con il capitolo 2, intitolato “Temple Construction: from Vows to Numbers” (pp. 31-78). L’esplosione dell’edilizia templare rivestirebbe un significato più ampio che quello di semplice indicatore dell’accresciuta dimensione dell’imperialismo romano nel periodo preso in esame, fornendo le coordinate per tracciare “*a new cultural history*” (p. 32), prima di tutto grazie ad un’attenta valutazione delle risorse finanziarie e umane dispiegate a questo scopo; vi è inoltre da considerare la conformazione architettonica dei nuovi templi, il loro numero e il ritmo di costruzione. Il “sistema” delle fondazioni templari, direttamente connesso, nella grande maggioranza dei casi, all’attività militare e a voti formulati da generali, prevedeva una serie di procedure complesse quali finanziamento, *locatio*, *inauguratio*, *dedicatio*, gradualmente sistematizzate e standardizzate: “*temple building and its proceduralization were codependent and coemergent phenomena: the more temple building that took place, the more clearly elucidated and refined the system that evolved to handle it*” (p. 36). Alla base di questo processo di progressiva istituzionalizzazione del processo di realizzazione di un nuovo tempio vi era il concorso di tre differenti fenomeni: la progressiva ellenizzazione culturale di Roma, la competizione politica delle élite, la competizione con altre comunità. Il complesso di questi fattori e degli attori in gioco faceva sì che nessuna fondazione fosse autenticamente individuale.

La dedica di un nuovo tempio diventa così gradualmente uno dei pilastri della competizione delle élite e per questo regolata da una serie di norme (*mos*) finalizzate a mantenere il consenso con gli dèi, tramite la *pax deorum*, e all’interno della *nobilitas*. Per questo nessun tempio risultava troppo più grande e monumentale rispetto agli altri: ciò “*reified a distribution of religious power that was deliberately calibrated so as to prevent any individual of family from monopolizing the sacro-monumental apparatus*” (p. 43), lasciando il primato al tempio di Giove Capitolino: “*unsurprisingly, mid-republican temple construction was republican in scope and form*” (*ibid.*). Il confronto con altre realtà statali contemporanee, secondo la “*peer-polity theory*”, che considera lo sviluppo di qualsivoglia unità politica in parallelo con i processi analoghi delle realtà finite, non fa che dimostrare la rilevanza eccezionale dell’edilizia templare a Roma in questo periodo rispetto ad altre realtà quali il mondo etrusco e quello greco-ellenistico.

La fioritura delle dediche templari contemporaneamente all’intensificazione dell’espansione militare dimostra che vi era sufficiente manodopera per entrambe le attività: l’A. a questo punto propone un modello quantitativo che, fissando alcuni parametri (ore di lavoro necessarie per la costruzione di un nuovo tempio, unità di manodopera, etc.), mira a confermare le ipotesi proposte. Una riprova ulteriore è ricercata soffermandosi su casi di analoghi “*construction programs*” di contesto romano (costruzione delle mura serviane, degli acquedotti, delle strade) – tenendo sempre fermo il dato che le risorse umane a disposizione erano sempre e comunque destinate in prima

battuta all'attività militare – e su paralleli di ambito mediterraneo. Parte del “*genius*” dello “*shell game*” mediorepubblicano si sarebbe esplicitata in una monumentalizzazione “moderata” che non influiva su altre imprese su larga scala ma al tempo stesso restituiva i benefici di tale tipo di edilizia, evitando peraltro la resistenza plebea a tale tipo di iniziative e la possibilità di rivolte schiavili.

Il terzo capitolo (“Temples and the Civic Order. From Numbers to Rhythms”, pp. 79-128) ha l'obiettivo di esporre gli esiti istituzionali e infrastrutturali assieme al ruolo dell'edilizia templare nel promuovere e consolidare la “*quasi-voluntary social compliance*” che teneva insieme la *res publica*, per cui “*Rome's 'precarious statehood' during the middle Republic came increasingly to depend on multifunctional temples to mediate the execution of civic responsibilities that in later centuries would be tackled by a differentiated bureaucracy*” (p. 79). In quanto edifici multifunzionali, i templi offrivano varie opportunità per azioni collettive sia su piccola che su larga scala, i cui effetti “moltiplicatori” avrebbero alimentato ulteriormente l'evoluzione di Roma nella direzione di una “*ritual polity*”. I templi, la cui costruzione derivava principalmente dall'attività militare, agivano anche come meccanismi di redistribuzione della ricchezza proveniente dalla suddetta attività e si ponevano quale *medium* efficace non solo per la glorificazione del generale dedicante ma per trasmettere il messaggio che la guerra apportava benefici a tutti: “*by channeling at least some of the battle's proceeds into sacred construction, the Roman aristocracy supplied tangible proof of a commitment to the public weal, improving in the process the likelihood of securing the quasi-voluntary compliance that was needed for the military engine to keep firing on all cylinders*” (p. 86). Destinare il bottino all'edilizia monumentale comunicava alla popolazione che la guerra rappresentava un investimento proficuo per la collettività; il consenso era ulteriormente accresciuto dalla funzione principale dei templi: il culto e la glorificazione degli dèi. I templi diventano sempre più presenti nella morfologia istituzionale mediorepubblicana, ad esempio quali luoghi di riunione del senato (la stessa curia era un *templum*) per le questioni più serie e delicate; molti di questi edifici sono essi stessi prodotto dell'azione senatoriale e funzionali all'(auto)definizione del prestigioso consesso, di cui sottolineavano la cura e la gestione della relazione tra la *res publica* e gli dèi, conferendo altresì una sorta di sacralizzazione a questa cruciale responsabilità.

La testimonianza più pregnante delle capacità e possibilità multifunzionali degli edifici sacri romani costruiti in questo periodo è offerta da alcuni esempi considerati attentamente dall'A. Il primo si riferisce ad alcune strutture dell'area di Largo Argentina legate alla prevenzione degli incendi e alla distribuzione dell'acqua, la cui ristrutturazione su larga scala avviene immediatamente dopo la prima guerra punica grazie alla disponibilità di *praeda*. Le dediche del Campo Marzio parlavano non solo al presente, ma anche al futuro: esse “*implemented an institutionally embedded program of response*

to future calamities of flood and fire, 'speaking into being' an infrastructural power that had not previously existed" (p. 105); tale programma armonizzava il culto degli dèi preposti al controllo di acqua e fuoco con le novità amministrative di centralizzazione della distribuzione dell'acqua e della lotta agli incendi. In questo senso la *res publica* "transacted what it could control – the provisioning of the cult to the gods – to assert a measure of control over what in the end defied the infrastructural capabilities of most urbanizing premodern states: the vulnerability of densely crowded cities to fires" (p. 107). Un caso analogo è costituito dalla costruzione di templi a divinità salutari, la cui integrazione nella topografia sacra di Roma determinò "the emergence of a sacralized 'public health ministry' oriented toward the safeguarding of the *res publica*" (p. 109). Fondare un culto ad Esculapio non provvedeva solo a ringraziare il dio del superamento della pestilenza contro cui se ne era ricercata la protezione, e a facilitarne il culto, presente e futuro, per effetto del quale sia l'individuo che la comunità avrebbero potuto evitare ulteriori malanni, ma forniva un'espressione "strutturale" alla volontà dello stato di provvedere alla salute e all'igiene pubbliche.

Altro aspetto fondamentale legato alla costruzione dei templi era la consapevolezza del potenziale dell'intrattenimento di massa di *ludi* e rappresentazioni teatrali. Le modifiche al calendario con l'introduzione di nuove feste e *dies natales* di templi provvedevano inoltre a ristrutturare il tempo civico: "the expanding number of the *dies natales templorum* promoted greater engagement with and social investment in the chronographic knowledge that the calendar embodied" (p. 122); l'esperienza vissuta del giorno era cambiata dalle celebrazioni dell'anniversario: "temple anniversaries, each affixed to a specific temple and to the individual magistrate(s) behind the temple's vowing and dedication, helped 'make real' the new patterning of political and communal life that Rome's cultic monumentalization engendered" (p. 123), così come diventava importante mantenere e perpetuare la memoria di tali celebrazioni. In conclusione "Temples and their agglutinative social practices became increasingly bound to the 'mnemo-scapes' and 'chronotopic maps' that restructured civic life, collaborating with other civic monuments to shape the experience of urban space down to its most concrete and quotidian aspects, such as the street address" (p. 126).

La seconda parte del volume ("Socialize") si apre con il capitolo quattro ("Temples, Festivals, and Common Knowledge. From Rhythms to Identities", pp. 131-177), incentrato sull'importanza della partecipazione a giochi e feste nella costruzione della identità civica di Roma; tale cultura festiva ruotante attorno a templi (e agli anniversari della loro fondazione) rivestiva un ruolo decisivo nella formazione dell'(auto)consapevolezza civica e nella coltivazione e diffusione del cosiddetto "common knowledge" ("the distributed recognition that you know what I know, and that I know what you know", p. 132): "In fourth- and third-century Rome, festivals took off as prime sites for civic inter-

visibility because their inception and celebration was closely bound to the monumentalizing landscape, which contributed its own messaging to the consensus-building traffic in shared knowledge. The propagation of shared knowledge in festival contexts familiarized Latin and non-Latin allies with what was believed to make Rome special, facilitating their quasi-voluntary compliance with the demands of the mid-republican state in the process” (p. 139). La cultura festiva si poneva come attiva creatrice di “ontologia del sociale” (secondo una definizione di Clifford Ando), come è evidente ad esempio in occasione dei banchetti festivi: *“Reanimated every single time that animals were slaughtered and portions of their meat distributed for elite and nonelite consumption, the materiality and physicality of sustained carnivalesque interaction with Rome’s monumental sacred landscape contoured those habits of mind through which Romans re-cognized themselves and their community afresh, and in contradistinction to non-Roman Others”* (p. 140).

Anche il teatro romano era fortemente connotato da contenuti religiosi: luogo d’insegnamento delle *res divinae*, in scena i personaggi rimarcavano il favore divino *in conspectu dei*, contribuendo a costituire la *res publica* come un tipo di comunità i cui divertimenti erano connessi al culto degli dèi; inoltre i teatri agivano quali spazi per la negoziazione di “identità e alterità”, con la proiezione da parte dello stato romano di messaggi su di sé e sui suoi cittadini verso l’esterno, alimentando soprattutto la riflessione greca su Roma: *“Religious festivals were ideal for the outward projection of informations about Roman practices because they enlisted the machinery of dramatic and performative art to produce a streamlined and digestible version of Roman civic identity”* (p. 163). I vari elementi della prassi scenica secondo tali termini avrebbero dovuto trasmettere un messaggio coerente: *“Rome was a theocracy; its gods oversaw and legitimated the partitioning of the world into statuses of freedom and unfreedom whose calibration and refinement it was the exclusive responsibility of the imperial Republic to arbitrate”* (p. 165), rafforzando e ricordando l’(auto)consapevolezza della struttura sociale della *res publica*: *“Through public cult at Rome, distinctions between elite and nonelite religious practitioners were reified and concretized”* (pp. 165-166). Tutto ciò con una conseguenza capitale sul lungo periodo: *“In the long run, one important phenomenological and discursive outcome of the fusion of temples and festivals was the emergence of ‘religion’ as a category of cultural and historical analysis in its own right”* (p. 176).

Il quinto capitolo (“Pilgrimage to Mid-Republican Rome. From Dedications to Networks”, pp. 178-229) si sofferma su una delle conseguenze più rilevanti dell’investimento plurisecolare nella monumentalizzazione del paesaggio sacro urbano di Roma, vale a dire il suo assurgere a centro di pellegrinaggio: *“Between the monumental sedimentation of the city on one end and its calendrical accumulation of festivals on the other, mid-republican Rome evolved a palimpsestic urban texture whose success at propagating*

the 'virtual presence' of both living divinities and of the Romans alive and deceased who had worshipped them enhanced its appeal as a destination for pilgrimage” (p. 179). Il termine “pellegrinaggio” usato dall’A. intende evidenziare “*the small-scale but nonetheless time- and resource-consuming movement of individuals for the explicit purpose of visiting Rome’s sanctuaries and participating to the ludi*” (p. 183). Uno dei metodi più efficaci per ricostruire il pellegrinaggio mediorepubblicano è costituito dal numero di ex-voto anatomici offerti nei santuari di Roma: il metodo di analisi quantitativa è applicato dall’A. a un *corpus* di ritrovamenti ottocenteschi presso il Tevere durante i lavori per la costruzione dei muraglioni, il cui picco è individuabile nel III sec. a.C. Altro indicatore considerato dall’A. per tracciare direttrici e flussi dei pellegrinaggi verso Roma è il vasellame, soprattutto dei *pocola* con teonimo iscritto riportati dai “pellegrini” alle loro città d’origine come “oggetti-ricordo”; tale *corpus* (ulteriormente approfondito nell’appendice *The Pocola Deorum: An Annotated CATALOG*, pp. 247-255) è significativo quanto gli altri esaminati nelle pagine precedenti: “*If indeed the pocola are indices of a sacred economy whose lines of communication and exchange spoked outward from Rome – in synergy with the developing road network – they deserve to be grouped together with the explosion in anatomical terracottas throughout central Italy, the appearance of votive dedications within Rome, and the temple building that created the structures at which these dedications were deposited*” (p. 210). In quanto veri e propri *souvenir*, i *pocola* contribuiscono a propagandare i culti e le informazioni fondamentali ad essi relativi – divinità venerate in primis. Chiudono il capitolo altri modelli quantitativi destinati ad illustrare “*how sacred mobility, as an urbanized network phenomenon, interacted with the twin drives for ‘reproduction’ and ‘control’ that fueled Roman state formation during the fourth and the third centuries*” (p. 214), dimostrando l’efficacia del movimento religiosamente determinato anche per la promozione di “reti fiduciarie” centrate su Roma oltre che per l’erosione dell’importanza degli altri santuari “concorrenti”. Nella stessa pagina con efficace sintesi l’A. ricorda e sottolinea nuovamente l’intento alla base della redazione della monografia: “*Roman religion’s efficacy in bootstrapping the res publica into statehood capitalized on the reach of power of public ritual to drive institutionalized integration, the formation of civic consciousness, and the elicitation of quasi-voluntary compliance*”.

L’ultimo capitolo (“Conclusion. Religion and the Enduring State”, pp. 230-246) mira ad approfondire quanto e come i processi esaminati nei capitoli precedenti siano tornati alla ribalta durante la seconda guerra punica, “*when the Roman state exploited practically every means at its disposal to stabilize and when necessary repair the relationship of its human community to the gods*” (p. 229). Strumento principe in questo frangente si sarebbe rivelato il sistema di espiazione dei prodigi, assai efficace nel creare uno spazio di attività collaborativa per numerosi attori (élite e non, urbani e rurali, Romani

e alleati) con lo scopo di partecipare alla conservazione della *res publica*. Fondamentale per il successo di questo processo era l'allineamento tra ripetizione e innovazione, cui contribuivano le infrastrutture monumentali sacre di Roma e degli alleati, presso le quali spesso i *prodigia* si manifestavano. In secondo luogo il sistema dei prodigi strutturava il movimento per, attraverso e da Roma. Infine, esso si pone quale esito storico contingente della formazione dello stato romano; la maggior parte delle notizie relative si concentra nella seconda metà del III sec. a.C.: ciò costituirebbe un “powerful signal of a shift in Roman state formation. The prodigy-expiation system around which these reports congregate marks the successful crystallization of those mid-republican structures of religious expression that we studied in the previous chapters” (p. 233). Il controllo e la manipolazione strategica della paura erano finalizzate all'attività militare: “The monumental buildup of the Roman city, and the training of the citizen body through regularized cultic observance to attend ever-vigilantly to those spaces in which the gods were worshipped, created conditions for the (re)production of fear and for the ritual release from that fear, following which military activity could be resumed with the guarantee of the gods' backing the endorsement” (p. 237).

A conclusione del capitolo vi è un ultimo modello quantitativo relativo al numero di persone-ore impiegate nel servizio militare a paragone con l'attività politica e religiosa. Da ciò risulta la grande importanza della religione sotto vari aspetti: per la tenuta della *res publica*; per la sua funzione centrale nella creazione e nel mantenimento del consenso; per le varie opportunità di impegno religioso che offriva a diversi livelli e a diversi attori, anche non cittadini, plasmando l'azione collettiva e contribuendo decisamente alla creazione del “common knowledge”. Durante il periodo mediorepubblicano si assiste ad un fenomeno di “government by ritual”: “This book has insisted on the value and enduring rewards of the Republic's promotion of a cultural space, defined above all by the channeling of resources to monumentality and the restructuring of civic time, through which religious experience became an indispensable foundation for the consolidation and regeneration of the Roman state” (p. 246).

Quello di Dan-el Padilla Peralta è un volume solido e ben documentato, estremamente erudito e che non si esime dal tentare di offrire una nuova prospettiva sulla religione romana nel periodo preso in esame. Tra i suoi punti di forza vi è sicuramente la messa a punto degli studi in tutti i campi considerati (ad es. l'edilizia templare e il sistema prodigio-espiazione), con il ricorso ad una bibliografia completa ed esauriente (pp. 257-309), in gran parte di lingua inglese. Vi è inoltre una grande attenzione alla precisa definizione e messa a fuoco di alcuni concetti chiave del saggio, spesso dati per scontati o non adeguatamente problematizzati: un esempio su tutti quello di “stato” (p. 2), ma anche di “consensus” (pp. 26-27) e “religione” (“I take religion to consist of a set of ritual practices by which humans acknowledge, honor, and negotiate with superhuman

agents”, p. 27). Anche la periodizzazione è effettuata definendo con cura limiti e problemi della “*so-called ‘Middle Republic’ in modern scholarly jargon*”⁶ (pp. 11-16). Molto apprezzabile è anche la considerazione attenta della cultura materiale, a proposito della quale l’A. dimostra grande competenza e sicurezza. Il tutto è scritto in una lingua scorrevole e accattivante⁷ e con rarissimi refusi.⁸

Le parti dell’opera forse meno digeribili e che potrebbero ingenerare più di un dubbio e di una perplessità negli specialisti sono quelle in cui l’A. si produce nell’elaborazione di modelli quantitativi che intendono mostrare in termini più precisi e “numerici” l’effettivo investimento dello stato romano nell’edilizia templare in termini di persone-ore di lavoro. Tale direttrice di ricerca non costituisce di per sé una novità,⁹ ma ad essa l’A. aggiunge uno sforzo ulteriore di visualizzazione, fornendo numerosi diagrammi, tabelle e soprattutto rappresentazioni grafiche effettuate secondo i dettami della *Social Network Analysis* (quest’ultima soprattutto relativamente al cap. 5 per visualizzare la rete sociale delle varie persone coinvolte nei pellegrinaggi a Roma). Si potrebbe obiettare che nonostante il rigore scientifico e metodologico, assieme alla cautela, con cui tale tentativo viene intrapreso – e che l’A. non manca di sottolineare più volte¹⁰ – i dati a nostra disposizione siano comunque pochi e frammentari, e che un tale sforzo possa essere solo relativamente produttivo e in definitiva esposto a critiche: “[Divine Institutions] is sometimes highly technical, deploying some heady theoretical modelling and number-crunching that I suspect will keep specialists arguing for years”¹¹.

Ciò detto non si può però non apprezzare il coraggio e l’ambizione dimostrati in questo campo dall’A., che giunge a parlare di “nuova metodologia” a proposito della pratica religiosa mediorepubblicana come spinta alla formazione di un nuovo tipo di

6. Beard, 2021 (recensione al volume qui considerato).

7. Un esempio: destinando una parte delle risorse militare all’edilizia sacra, l’aristocrazia romana forniva una prova tangibile della sua dedizione al bene comune, aumentando nel contempo la probabilità di assicurarsi “*the quasi-voluntary compliance that was needed for the military engine to keep firing on all cylinders*” (p. 86).

8. Se ne segnala solo uno: “*technica edilizia*” a p. 56, n. 73.

9. Cf. ad es. Couralt & Marquez, 2020.

10. Cf. ad es., a proposito della *votive economy* dei non Romani che si recavano a Roma per una dedica: “*although this may be a by-product of the spatial distribution of modern archaeological excavations*” (p. 220); “*This visualization should not be taken as authoritative*” (p. 221); ma soprattutto p. 223: “*Again, as with other models developed in this chapter [scil. il capitolo 5], I do not aspire to unassailable comprehensiveness or accuracy, only to a method of structuring and representing social relations that enables their cumulative impact to be grasped and their significance to be better appreciated*”.

11. Beard, 2021. Vale la pena riportare anche la frase successiva: “*Not for the faint-hearted, I warn you, are the detailed attempts to model the social interactions between residents of the city of Rome and ‘outsiders’ over the Middle Republic*” (enfasi nostra).

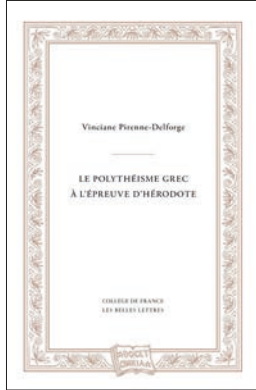
stato,¹² di contro alla visione che la traiettoria della formazione dello stato mediorepubblicano concerna fundamentalmente la politica e le conquiste. Pur se il fenomeno risulta già in parte desumibile dalle fonti “classiche” (soprattutto letterarie e archeologiche) non si può obiettare che tali modelli forniscano un altro punto di vista, una prospettiva comunque innovativa e una dimostrazione ulteriore del fatto che nella tornata di quei due secoli fondamentali Roma poté dispiegare sicuramente ingenti risorse umane in ambito militare, aumentando al contempo il volume di quelle destinate all’edilizia templare, settore allora fondamentale per tutte le considerazioni sopra dispiegate. Sulla dottrina ed erudizione di Dan-el Padilla Peralta invece nessuna ombra di dubbio: *Divine Institutions* rimarrà per lungo tempo un’opera fondamentale per chiunque intenda accostarsi alle dinamiche religiose della Roma mediorepubblicana.

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12. Cf. ancora a proposito dei *networks* del cap. 5: “*But the more ambitious project is to harmonize the appearance and function of these network with the state-formation thesis at the heart of this book*” (p. 227).

LE POLYTHÉISME GREC À L'ÉPREUVE D'HÉRODOTE & FREMDE RELIGION IN HERODOTS "HISTORIEN"



PIRENNE-DELFORGE, VINCIANE (2020). *Le polythéisme grec à l'épreuve d'Hérodote*. Paris: Collège de France et Les Belles Lettres. 256 pp., 21,50 € [ISBN: 978-2-2514-5145-9].



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FABRIZIO GAETANO
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI VERONA
f.gaetano88@gmail.com

IL 2020 SEMBRA ESSERE STATO UN ANNO PARTICOLARMENTE FELICE per gli studi erodotei. Presento qui di seguito due contributi, apparsi a breve distanza temporale, sul tema della religione. Si tratta di lavori diversi per impostazione metodologica, ma parimenti esemplari della ricchezza di nuove riflessioni che le *Storie*, nonostante la pletora di pubblicazioni sull'argomento, possono ancora suscitare.

Prodotto delle lezioni tenute al Collège de France nel corso dell'anno accademico 2017-2018, il libro di Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge si propone di analizzare l'esperienza religiosa greca utilizzando le *Storie* di Erodoto come filo conduttore dell'indagine. Non si tratta, pertanto, di uno studio che mira alla chiarificazione di un sentimento religioso personale – quello di Erodoto, appunto –, quanto del tentativo di sottoporre i caratteri fondamentali del politeismo greco alla verifica di un'opera composta nel V secolo prima della nostra era. L'uso di Erodoto è preponderante ma non esclusivo, poiché l'Autrice (A., da questo punto in poi) afferma di accogliere volentieri sia altri autori antichi sia documenti non letterari, laddove questi siano ritenuti utili a precisare alcuni passaggi dell'argomentazione.

Pienamente consapevole dei pericoli derivanti da una prospettiva culturale deterministica e della costante necessità di contestualizzazione storica, l'A. ricorre a ciascuna fonte per cercare di rispondere ai dubbi interpretativi che giustificano, in partenza, la scrittura del volume e lo percorrono, poi, per intero: in che senso la pluralità è costitutiva della religione greca? Come si possono spiegare e conciliare fra loro le differenti declinazioni che essa assume in ambiti territoriali specifici? Le figure divine sono dotate di un profilo univoco o quest'ultimo si dissolve nei numerosi epiteti epicorici? Le pratiche locali di sacrificio sono riconducibili o meno a un'usanza sacrificale più ampia e condivisa? Secondo l'A. tutta l'esperienza religiosa greca è attraversata da questa tensione fra generale e particolare, di cui i sei capitoli che compongono il volume esaminano le possibili manifestazioni.

Il primo capitolo (“Religion et polythéisme: des mots aux concepts”, pp. 25-57) è, in realtà, di tipo preparatorio: prima di entrare nei dettagli del tema prescelto, l'A. giudica prudente e opportuno riflettere brevemente sullo sviluppo semantico che ha interessato, nel corso dei secoli, i termini “religione” e “politeismo”.

Del primo vengono rapidamente messi in evidenza il significato attribuito dagli autori romani (Cicerone, soprattutto) – cioè un atteggiamento di rispetto, da tenersi in ogni sfera dell'esistenza – e la sua successiva specializzazione, ad opera di autori cristiani come Tertulliano e Agostino, nell'indicare l'innovativo, unico e vero culto di Dio che ha conquistato tutto l'impero. “Religione” diventa parola connotata nel senso di rivelazione cristiana, e proprio la persistente produttività di questa sua accezione, pur messa in crisi dalle scoperte geografiche e dai nuovi orientamenti della cristianità di XV e XVI secolo, deve indurre gli specialisti delle religioni antiche a un utilizzo cauto ed equilibrato della nozione. Ad ogni modo, considerata la mancanza di alternative lessicali veramente soddisfacenti, l'A., da un lato, ammette l'impossibilità di rinunciare del tutto all'impiego del termine “religione”; dall'altro, dichiara di servirsi del medesimo come categoria operativa al fine di illustrare i comportamenti che le comunità umane adottano in rapporto a entità sovrumane. A questo scopo,

l'A. accetta e riprende la formulazione dell'antropologo statunitense Melford Spiro, secondo il quale "*religion is an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated supra-human beings*".

Le pagine dedicate al termine "politeismo" contengono un diverso ordine di considerazioni. Nonostante la sua evidente matrice etimologica, non ci sono attestazioni del lessema nelle fonti greche antiche: nelle *Supplici* Eschilo usa l'aggettivo *polytheos* per qualificare le *hedrai* di un tempio, ma si tratta di un *unicum*; è piuttosto Filone di Alessandria, autore greco di cultura ebraica vissuto a cavallo tra I secolo a.C. e I secolo d.C., a servirsi con costanza sia dell'attributo che di una sua variante nominale, *polytheia*. L'obiettivo di Filone consiste nel creare un linguaggio polemico contro quelle forme di devozione a divinità che egli condanna come false e ingannatrici: in questa prospettiva, *polytheos* e *polytheia* assumono una forte valenza dispregiativa, tramite la quale Filone sottolinea l'imperdonabile difetto delle religioni che, pretendendo di ripartire la potenza divina in più figure (*poly-*, appunto) e innalzando a esse delle statue, si trovano in contrasto con il comandamento ebraico che impone al fedele di adorare *il* solo e unico Dio.

Secondo l'A., l'influenza del pensiero di Filone sull'inaccettabilità della *polytheia* e sull'associazione tra questa e l'idolatria è tangibile non solo nelle opere dei primi autori cristiani di lingua greca – i quali permettono di registrare la prima comparsa dei composti in *-ismos*, che individuano una tradizione religiosa specifica: "cristianesimo", "giudaismo", etc. – ma anche, e ancora, nella riflessione di due intellettuali francesi del '500: Guillaume Budé e Jean Bodin. Entrambi riprendono la connotazione negativa di *polytheos* e *polytheia* ma, mentre Budé, in continuità con Filone, si mostra preoccupato sostanzialmente dal problema del recupero degli autori classici in chiave cristiana, Bodin devia dalla norma coniato e impiegando "politeismo" per riferirsi alla molteplicità delle eresie cristiane diffuse nel periodo. La svolta decisiva nella storia del termine avviene fra '700 e '800, quando "politeismo" perde la patina denigratoria che lo ha accompagnato per lungo tempo e acquista, al contrario, valore storiografico e descrittivo: nelle opere di Hume, Constant, Müller, Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim, Weber, Usener – a ciascuno dei quali l'A. dedica un sintetico approfondimento –, "politeismo" identifica una fase, iniziale o intermedia, dello sviluppo religioso di un popolo. Nel corso del '900, infine, il termine ottiene progressivamente solida validità scientifica; in riferimento all'esperienza religiosa greca, in particolare, nei lavori di Nilsson, Rudhardt, Brelich, Gernet, Vernant, Detienne, Burkert, Parker "politeismo" appare destinato a mettere in risalto l'organizzazione del mondo sovrumano e la complessità e varietà delle pratiche culturali da esso determinate in contesti altrettanto numerosi e vari. Quest'ultima è anche la definizione di "politeismo" che l'A., in chiusura di capitolo, accoglie esplicitamente.

Il percorso definitorio fin qui tracciato trova naturale prosecuzione nel secondo capitolo (“Hérodote, la religion et l’histoire du polythéisme”, pp. 59-93), nel quale l’A., dopo aver velocemente giustificato la predilezione per il testo di Erodoto sulla base di quattro ragioni fondamentali (la quantità del materiale disponibile; la prospettiva autoriale, che alla conoscenza garantita dalle Muse preferisce la ricerca portata avanti da uomini; la ricchezza dei confronti etnografici con civiltà diverse da quella greca; il conflitto grecopersiano come fulcro della narrazione), procede a un commento del brano nel quale Erodoto descrive le usanze persiane.¹ L’analisi consente all’A. di concludere, innanzitutto, che i *nomoi* sono fenomeni, religiosi e non, sanzionati socialmente, ispirati da precisi sistemi culturali e suscettibili di essere accettati altrove o meno: di conseguenza, la nozione generale di *nomos* desumibile dal passaggio risulta parzialmente sovrapponibile alla nozione di “religione” proposta da Spiro. L’osservazione erodotea sulla stretta connessione fra natura umana delle divinità greche (l’aggettivo è *anthropophyes*) e costruzione di altari, templi e statue, poi, dà modo all’A. di sostenere con forza che per i Greci l’immagine mentale è inscindibile dalla pratica rituale: in altre parole, che le rappresentazioni degli dei e i riti per gli dei sono componenti essenziali dei *nomoi* e si influenzano reciprocamente.

Ora, le divinità che Erodoto include nel proprio lavoro non sono certo le divinità decisamente attive dei poemi omerici; anzi, l’A. dimostra che le *theia pregmata*, le *questioni divine* che lo storico asserisce di non voler affrontare,² riguardano proprio quelle situazioni che rischierebbero di richiamare la spiccata agentività di cui gli dei danno prova nel modello epico. Alle *theia pregmata*, così, Erodoto antepone le *anthropeia pregmata*,³ nelle quali l’intervento divino non è escluso ma relegato in secondo o terzo piano rispetto al contributo e alle azioni specificamente umani. Ciò significa anche che Erodoto è incuriosito più dagli uomini che parlano degli dei che non dagli dei in sé. Il suo apporto fondamentale alla storia del politeismo greco, pertanto, si rivela, per l’A., nelle sezioni in cui la formazione del pantheon è ricondotta ai meccanismi di prestiti nominali fra Egiziani, Pelasgi e Greci⁴ e al ruolo dei poeti.⁵ Gli *ounomata* divini che dall’Egitto giunsero in Grecia attraverso la mediazione dei Pelasgi sono intesi dall’autrice non tanto come trasposizione letterale, che renderebbe ingiustificate le differenze dei significanti, quanto come processo di elaborazione denominativa che segue il riconoscimento di una potenza divina.

1. I 131-132.

2. II 3 e 65.

3. II 4.

4. II 4, 50, 52.

5. II 53.

Per citare l'esempio proposto dalla stessa A., il greco Zeus, che deriva a sua volta da un nome pelasgico non noto, rappresenta la scelta nominale successiva all'identificazione di un dio "straniero" competente nel dominio della sovranità, come può essere l'egizio Ammone. La potenza è prioritaria e a disposizione di tutti – al punto da poter essere mutuata da un'altra civiltà –, mentre la denominazione costituisce una contingenza culturale secondaria. In questo quadro, il merito di Omero e di Esiodo è quello di aver assegnato agli dei *eponymiai*, *timai*, *technai* ed *eidea*. È soprattutto il quarto elemento a suscitare l'interesse dell'A. Queste *forme*, queste *figurazioni* divine *indicate* (*semaino*) dai poeti, sono il prodotto di un atto creativo umano che si traduce nell'attribuzione di qualità antropomorfe (l'*anthropophyes* di cui parla Erodoto), le quali rappresentano, tuttavia, *una sola* modalità di presentificare qualcosa che resta fundamentalmente invisibile. Detto altrimenti, la personificazione degli dei non costituisce una soluzione esclusiva.

Sempre attenta alla dialettica fra particolare e generale, nel terzo capitolo ("Dieux grecs, dieux des Grecs", pp. 95-115) l'A., di fronte alla constatazione del frazionamento epicorico delle figure divine, si impegna nella ricerca di caratteri religiosi che possano dirsi effettivamente collettivi e andare oltre i particolarismi delle singole *poleis*. Punto di avvio è il celebre passo erodoteo sull'*Hellenikon*,⁶ ossia su quello che, per bocca degli Ateniesi, lo storico ritiene contraddistinguere la *grecità*: al possesso di uno stesso sangue e di una stessa lingua si aggiungono usanze simili e *theon hidrymata te koina kai thysiai*. Il neutro plurale *hidrymata*, attestato solo qui nelle *Storie*, rimanda al lessico tecnico della fondazione, cioè indica la realizzazione di un'opera architettonica sacralizzata, in seguito, dal legame con una divinità; la presenza dell'aggettivo *koina*, d'altro canto, rende chiaro come ad agire da fattore di aggregazione non sia la religione greca in generale, ma il caso specifico di santuari (come Delfi e Olimpia) nei quali i sacrifici comuni possono essere compiuti solo grazie a una precedente fondazione comune. Circa quattro secoli dopo Erodoto, il referente religioso dell'*Hellenikon* sarà individuato da Dionigi di Alicarnasso negli dei greci.⁷ È evidente che la situazione è profondamente mutata: se Dionigi sembra ammettere l'esistenza di una categoria generale e astratta di divinità greche, Erodoto, al contrario, mette l'accento su una compartecipazione religiosa transitoria, ancorata a uno spazio dato e, soprattutto, alla pratica reiterata e concreta del culto da parte degli attori coinvolti nella fondazione. Per il primo la prospettiva è culturale; per il secondo, invece, la centralità è tutta del rito: gli dei "comuni" o "greci" di cui si fa menzione nelle *Storie*

6. VIII 144.

7. *Antichità romane* I 89, 4.

sono coloro ai quali sono riservati luoghi sacri panellenici, che sono stati stabiliti per iniziativa condivisa. Nel V secolo a.C., quindi, la spazialità si rivela essenziale al politeismo greco, in quanto la religiosità dell' *Hellenikon* è produttiva solo in territori determinati. Quest' ultimo punto viene dall' A. ulteriormente approfondito tramite la lettura del brano relativo all' *Hellenion* di Naucrati,⁸ il famoso santuario fondato da Ioni e Cari nel Delta del Nilo.

Sulla tensione fra unità e molteplicità l' A. ritorna nelle pagine conclusive del capitolo, domandandosi per quale motivo Erodoto usi *eponymiai* per riferirsi ai nomi coi quali gli Egizi avrebbero chiamato per primi i Dodici Dei, venendo poi imitati in questo, come in molto altro, dai Greci.⁹ Poiché lo storico di Alicarnasso attribuisce esplicitamente le *eponymiai* all' attività poetica di Omero e di Esiodo (si veda *supra*), ci si aspetterebbe che egli impiegasse, piuttosto, *ounomata*. La difficoltà può essere superata, secondo l' A., se si suppone che *ounoma* sia la definizione stessa di Dodici Dei – un nome collettivo – e che le *eponymiai* siano teonimi con funzione discriminante rispetto all' *ounoma* generale. Un gruppo di divinità è concepita come un' entità unica alla quale destinare un culto; questo non esclude, però, la possibilità di livelli di differenziazione fra la parte (ossia la singola divinità) e il tutto.

Il termine *eponymia* costituisce il tema di apertura e di confronto del quarto capitolo, focalizzato in misura maggiore sulla questione denominativa (“Nommer les dieux”, pp. 117-138). L' A. non condivide la distinzione moderna fra *epiteto* ed *epiclesi* – che ha il difetto di perpetuare l' errata dicotomia fra “divinità della poesia” e “divinità del culto” – ma dichiara di adottare la seconda traduzione come categoria operativa per esprimere le designazioni rituali di una divinità. Proprio le epiclesi locali sembrano rappresentare un potente fattore di moltiplicazione del pantheon greco; eppure, per l' A. la diffusione e la varietà delle epiclesi non consentono di ipotizzare né una parcellizzazione esasperata della figura divina né, tantomeno, la creazione di nuovi dei a se stanti – di nuove “persone”, si potrebbe dire. Nel *logos* lidio Erodoto scrive che lo Zeus invocato da Cresò con le epiclesi *katharsios*, *ephestios* e *hetaireios* è lo stesso dio.¹⁰ Secondo l' A., questa precisazione ha un scopo puramente formale: sul piano narrativo, essa mira a chiarire semplicemente la disposizione sintattica degli enunciati e a sottolineare il collegamento fra tutte le epiclesi e il singolo teonimo. Non c' è nessun intento teologico o volontà di fissare una nuova ontologia divina: l' espressione non ha valore di eccezione rispetto a un' inesistente abitudine religiosa dei

8. II 178.

9. II 4.

10. I 44.

Greci a porre ciascuna sfera di competenza – la purificazione, la cura del focolare e la vigilanza sui rapporti fra *hetairoi* – sotto la protezione di uno Zeus autonomo dagli altri due. Allo stesso modo, i commenti rigorosi a un passaggio di Senofonte¹¹ e a un frammento di Callimaco citato da Strabone¹² portano l'A., tramite l'esempio della polinomia di cui gode la dea Afrodite, a ribadire ulteriormente l'unicità della figura divina e a ricondurre la pluralità delle epiclesi alla dimensione dei culti locali. L'analisi conclusiva delle *eponymiai* contenute nei calendari dei demi attici di Torico¹³ e di Erchia¹⁴ e l'esame di un documento proveniente da Cos e relativo a Eracle,¹⁵ infine, confermano che la territorialità e i riti giocano un ruolo fondamentale nel segmentare e strutturare i numerosi aspetti e l'ampio ventaglio di *technai* di una medesima divinità.

Proprio i riti diventano oggetto privilegiato di studio nel quinto capitolo ("Sacrifier aux dieux", pp. 139-159), nel quale la contrapposizione fra generale e particolare è indagata nell'ambito delle azioni sacrificali veicolate dal termine *thysia*. L'A. riconosce al sacrificio greco una sorta di struttura minima – una "*trame sacrificielle*", per usare le sue stesse parole (p. 140) –, di cui il brano di Erodoto sul sacrificio in uso presso i Persiani permette di ricostruire, per analogia e contrasto, gli aspetti essenziali:¹⁶ l'importanza del fuoco e delle libagioni, nonché dell'accompagnamento musicale; gli atti che il/i sacrificante/i deve/ono compiere; la modalità di disporre delle diverse parti della vittima animale ecc. Sul trattamento di quest'ultima una prescrizione rituale, testimoniata da un'epigrafe risalente al II secolo a.C. e rinvenuta in Tessaglia,¹⁷ aiuta l'A. a mettere in luce la consuetudine tipicamente greca. Si tratta di una fonte di grande rilevanza. L'A. nota, infatti, come la presenza di una procedura sacrificale condivisa faccia spesso sì che nelle epigrafi greche relative a *thysiai* non siano contenute indicazioni esplicite in merito agli aspetti del rito giudicati, appunto, di pubblico dominio – "interiorizzati" dal gruppo, per così dire. Ora, l'iscrizione tessalica è prodotto di una comunità religiosa mista – un'associazione di Greci e non Greci dediti al culto di una dea orientale non nominata –, che determina la necessità di specificare ciò che è tradizionale nel *nomos* sacrificale greco; questa stessa esigenza giustifica l'elenco esaustivo delle *splanchna* – le *viscere* – e la descrizione del loro impiego rituale,

11. *Simposio* VIII 9.

12. IX 5, 17.

13. CGRN 32.

14. CGRN 52.

15. CGRN 221.

16. I 132: si veda *supra*.

17. CGRN 225.

i dettagli del quale, al contrario, nel resto della nostra documentazione appaiono solo in caso di variazioni epicoriche del sacrificio rispetto alla “*trame sacrificielle*” generale (un’altra variazione possibile riguarda quello che ciascuna città può scegliere di porre sulle *trapezometa*, le tavole su cui venivano deposte le offerte destinate alle divinità).

Nel sesto capitolo (“*Croire aux dieux?*”, pp. 161-186), come avviene nel primo, l’A. introduce una discussione di tipo lessicale in merito all’opportunità di utilizzare la nozione di “credenza” e il verbo “credere” in riferimento alle religioni antiche. Oltre al problema di essere fortemente connotati in senso cristiano, questi due vocaboli sono caratterizzati da un grado di ambiguità semantica non trascurabile: “credenza” può esprimere sia *ciò in cui si crede* sia *il fatto stesso di credere*; la polisemia di “credere” – *credere a, credere in, credere che* – attiva, a livello mentale, differenti forme di partecipazione e conosce declinazioni del tutto profane e laiche. L’A. si ricollega alla formulazione proposta da Émile Durkheim, secondo il quale le credenze religiose sono “*états de l’opinion*” (o del pensiero) che consistono in rappresentazioni culturali astratte, e ne verifica la validità e la pertinenza all’interno di un’esperienza religiosa, come quella greca, che appare, invece, riservare un certo grado di priorità alla componente concreta delle pratiche rituali.

Il dubbio di partenza concerne l’esistenza di un corrispettivo terminologico. L’A. analizza i due brani erodotei sui costumi dei Persiani e degli Sciti¹⁸ allo scopo di evidenziare una duplice accezione del verbo *nomizein*: l’adesione cognitiva a qualcosa – i Persiani non *ritengono* che gli dei abbiano forma umana, gli Sciti *pensano* che Gea sia la sposa di Zeus; il costume di eseguire o non eseguire qualcosa – i Persiani *hanno l’abitudine* di sacrificare a Zeus sulle montagne più alte, gli Sciti *sono soliti* costruire altari, templi e statue solo per Ares. Il suffisso causativo (-izo) traduce l’iscrizione dell’oggetto nel quadro del *nomos*, ossia in una tradizione la cui sostanza sembra costituita, allo stesso tempo, da una dose di pensiero e da una dose di comportamento. L’espressione *nomizein tous theous* e il sintagma formata da *nomizo* accompagnato da un teonimo e dal termine “dio” (una locuzione per l’esame della quale l’A. compie una breve digressione nell’opera di Pausania) implicano che le divinità siano identificate come tali (sfera del pensiero) e, in seguito, onorate materialmente nel culto per il tramite di azioni definite (sfera del comportamento). La stessa accusa rivolta a Socrate, colpevole di non *riconoscere* gli dei che la polis *riconosce*, evoca, secondo l’A., la duplicità del registro semantico di *nomizein*: al fine di demolire quella che ritiene una diffamazione ingiustificata,

18. I 131; IV 59.

Senofonte¹⁹ afferma che Socrate ha compiuto sacrifici privati e pubblici (registro del fare) e ha sempre ammesso, esattamente come chi pratica la divinazione, che gli dei possano manifestarsi nelle vicende umane attraverso segni (registro dell'identificare).

Per rispondere alla domanda che dà il titolo al capitolo, quindi, l'A. chiarisce come per i Greci *croire aux dieux* non significhi, cristianamente, aderire con fede e fiducia totale a un messaggio rivelato che ha pretese di verità esclusiva, ma sviluppare un sistema fluido e negoziabile di *“états de l'opinion”* e di riti (l'A. recupera, a tal proposito, una definizione dell'antropologa Roberte Hamayon, che parla di *“dynamique spéculative”*). Conseguentemente, nello studio delle religioni politeiste “credenza” può trovare posto solo al plurale e solo nel senso di *rappresentazioni culturali* associate a pratiche determinate: l'esperienza fattiva va di pari passo con la riflessione teorica, producendo, fra i Greci e le loro divinità, modalità di relazione potenzialmente infinite e, senz'altro, in continua trasformazione.

Nell'ultimo contributo del volume (*“Dieux épiques, dieux topiques”*, pp. 187-204), l'A. si chiede che cosa comportasse il radicamento nello spazio di un qualsiasi culto civico rispetto alla possibilità, per un cittadino che non appartenesse alla medesima comunità politica o una persona che rientrasse in categorie sociali determinate, di prendervi parte. L'A. esamina una serie di episodi di interdizione religiosa – Erodoto racconta che al re di Sparta Cleomene fu proibito di compiere sacrifici sia ad Atene che ad Argo;²⁰ norme rituali conservate su epigrafi vietano l'accesso a donne e schiavi o a chi non ha completato il percorso iniziatico²¹ – e ne deduce, ribadendo un concetto già espresso altrove, che le dinamiche di reciprocità fra le divinità destinatarie del culto e i *politai* non sono astrazioni *“hors sol”* (p. 201), ossia indipendenti dal territorio. In altre parole, pur in presenza di un pantheon condiviso, se uno stesso dio è venerato in due *poleis* differenti la qualità del rapporto suscettibile di essere instaurato – poniamo – da uno Spartano ad Atene o viceversa non sarà la medesima nei due santuari. Anche in questa circostanza, dunque, si ha una conferma della tensione fra generale e particolare che pervade i fenomeni religiosi del politeismo greco.

Il volume si chiude con una ricca bibliografia, un indice delle fonti, suddivise in letterarie ed epigrafiche, e un dettagliato e utile indice generale.

Il lavoro di Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge è lodevole per la profondità dell'analisi e per le prospettive di interpretazione, innovative e originali, che guidano la lettura di

19. *Memorabilia* I 1, 1-5.

20. V 72; VI 81.

21. CGRN 156 e 224.

celebri – e quindi assai studiati dalla critica moderna – passi erodotei (penso soprattutto al brano sull' *Hellenikon*, su ciò che significa per gli Ateniesi – e forse anche per Erodoto? – essere Greci). Alcuni punti, a mio parere, soffrono un po' di mancanza di chiarezza: credo, per esempio, che la sezione sullo sviluppo semantico dei termini "religione" e "politeismo" avrebbe meritato un'esposizione più dettagliata e meno cursoria, in quanto i molti nomi di autori moderni possono generare confusione nel lettore che non abbia contezza della storia degli studi sulla religione greca. Questo non pregiudica, in ogni caso, la comprensione della tesi generale dell'A. sulla materia, l'ampiezza della quale ha costretto senza dubbio a scelte di sintesi e concisione.

Segnalo, inoltre, che alcuni approfondimenti, su cui pure l'A. si concentra a lungo, non mi appaiono così necessari a sorreggere la sostanza dell'argomentazione. Nell'ultimo contributo l'A. dedica molte pagine a un confronto fra la volontà di Cleomene di sacrificare sull'Acropoli di Atene con la pretesa di essere acheo e non doro e la mancata difesa di Troia da parte della dea Atena nonostante le ripetute preghiere dei Troiani. Secondo l'A. i due episodi sono mutualmente intellegibili, ma la connessione con la tematica principale risulta – perlomeno a chi scrive – poco limpida.

Dal punto di vista tipografico e formale il volume appare molto accurato e privo di refusi significativi: segnalo solo, a p. 196, un "Isocrate" in luogo di un probabile "Isagoras".

Il giudizio globale è del tutto positivo. Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge si muove con disinvoltura, ma sempre con eccezionale rigore filologico, fra le diverse fonti a sua disposizione, mostrando l'inopportunità di una qualsiasi dicotomia fra approccio storico e approccio letterario, indirizzati felicemente verso un unico sforzo interpretativo. Il volume è di sicura utilità sia per gli studiosi di Erodoto, che troveranno interessanti proposte esegetiche in relazione a numerosi passaggi delle *Storie*, sia per gli specialisti di religione greca, che potranno disporre di un ulteriore e notevole strumento per tentare di sbrogliare la matassa di un tema vario e complesso.

Il lavoro di Andreas Schwab costituisce l'esito finale di un percorso di formazione universitaria conclusosi nel 2017 presso l'università di Heidelberg. Se lo scopo analitico di Pirenne-Delforge risulta maggiormente diretto verso il politeismo greco, di cui le *Storie* consentono di apprezzare e studiare numerose testimonianze particolari, l'Autore (A., da questo punto in poi), invece, eleva proprio l'opera di Erodoto a oggetto principale dell'indagine, focalizzando la sua attenzione sull'atteggiamento conoscitivo dello storico di Alicarnasso di fronte alle esperienze religiose egiziana e persiana. Così come Pirenne-Delforge, l'A. sottolinea l'insufficienza semantica e lo scarso valore euristico della moderna nozione di religione; dopo alcune pagine dedicate al commento di una selezione di contributi sul tema della religione in Erodoto, l'A. espone con chiarezza il proprio metodo, che consiste nell'applicazione della teoria della pluridimensionalità

religiosa, elaborata da Klaus Hoch nel volume *Einführung in die Religionwissenschaft* e spiegata nel dettaglio nel capitolo introduttivo (pp. 13-42).

Punto di partenza è il rifiuto di una prospettiva esclusivamente teocentrica, che tende a subordinare eccessivamente all'autorità delle potenze divine ogni manifestazione religiosa umana e, per ciò stesso, a rendere unidimensionale la categoria stessa di religione. Per Erodoto stesso, d'altra parte, gli dei non sono prioritari nella descrizione di un'altra civiltà. L'A. sostiene, quindi, la necessità di considerare anche quei fenomeni religiosi nei quali gli dei e i sacrifici non siano esplicitamente menzionati, e per i quali appaia possibile sviluppare riflessioni che coinvolgono, secondo l'organizzazione concettuale proposta dallo stesso A., le categorie di *Soziales, Raum, Zeit, Innere und äussere Sinne, Vergleich und Interaktion*. Questi cinque criteri formano il quadro interpretativo al quale l'A. suggerisce di ricondurre le sezioni erodotee dedicate alla religione egiziana e alla religione persiana. Si tratta di un approccio che permette di abbracciare un'ampia varietà di episodi, e un importante corollario del quale è costituito dalla possibilità di includere anche i passaggi delle *Storie* non focalizzati sui *nomoi*, i quali, per l'A., spesso non permettono di rendere adeguata ragione di tutti gli aspetti – temporali (*Zeit*), estetico/psicologici (*innere und äussere Sinne*), sociali (*soziales*), ambientali (*Raum*) e comparativi (*Vergleich und Interaktion*) – della religione. È un punto importante, su cui l'A. insiste con particolare enfasi nel secondo capitolo (pp. 43-86), nel quale è fornita una serie di esempi esplicativi.

Vero cuore del volume sono, però, i successivi cinque capitoli (pp. 87-269), in cui l'A. dispiega appieno la propria metodologia presentando i fenomeni religiosi degli Egizi e dei Persiani in interazione con i cinque criteri di analisi sopra menzionati. L'A. procede costruendo uno schema argomentativo che resta sostanzialmente invariato (e sul quale, dunque, non appare necessario, a chi scrive, entrare eccessivamente nel dettaglio): al testo greco, accompagnato da traduzione, segue la spiegazione del passo in oggetto e l'invito a rivalutare gli elementi del racconto che sembrano meno vincolati alla dimensione religiosa propriamente detta. In questa prospettiva, per esempio, il brano del secondo *logos* sulla cerimonia religiosa di Bubasti, in Egitto,²² rivela come Erodoto accordi una maggiore preminenza agli attori sociali – il *Soziales*, appunto – rispetto agli addetti al culto.

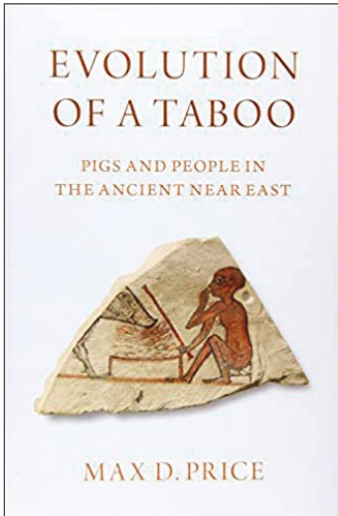
Il lavoro è completato da un capitolo conclusivo con funzione marcatamente riassuntiva più che sintetica, da un'ampia bibliografia e due utili indici, che consentono di muoversi con agilità nel volume e di ritrovare le sezioni di interesse.

22. Hdt., II 60, 1-3.

Rispetto al contributo di Pirenne-Delforge, il libro di Schwab si segnala per l'abbondanza dei passaggi delle *Storie* esaminati. L'analisi, tuttavia, resta spesso a un livello che appare davvero troppo superficiale: descrizione e spiegazione del singolo episodio non si accompagnano a un reale sforzo interpretativo, al punto che chi scrive ha ricavato l'impressione che Schwab, in più di un'occasione, si limiti a una sorta di parafrasi del testo erodoteo. Non giovano ad alleggerire il dettato, che pure appare fluido e ben costruito, né le insistenti ripetizioni di concetti e idee, che sono stati espressi e chiariti già altrove, né le frequenti anticipazioni che introducono al contenuto di un nuovo paragrafo (e che sono, poi, ulteriormente ribadite in chiusura).

Dal punto di vista scientifico, l'approccio di Schwab è degno di nota nella misura in cui muove da premesse di metodo e da costruzioni teoriche senz'altro solide e non banali; eppure, questa base metodologica non appare adeguatamente sfruttata per interrogare le *Storie* in maniera innovativa o fornire una chiave di lettura originale dell'esperienza religiosa greca. In sostanza e in sintesi, Pirenne-Delforge coglie benissimo il carattere storico-antropologico del fenomeno religioso greco, riuscendo a ricondurre la particolarità di un'esperienza individuale (l'opera di Erodoto) a un quadro sociale più ampio e complesso, interpretato nella sua totalità; Schwab, al contrario, sembra accordare troppo spazio alla semplice narrazione, senza riuscire a cogliere la dimensione culturale del prodotto letterario, esaminato come un oggetto inerte più che come manifesto e oggettivazione dei caratteri di civiltà storicamente determinate.

EVOLUTION OF A TABOO



PRICE, MAX D. (2020). *Evolution of a Taboo. Pigs and People in the Ancient Near East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 312 pp., 38,30 € [ISBN: 978-0-1975-4237-6].

YOURI VOLOKHINE
UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE
youri.volokhine@unige.ch

MAX PRICE (NOW MP) OFFERS AN ORIGINAL AND ATTRACTIVE SYNTHESIS around the history of pigs, considered here vertically (since prehistory), successfully combining archaeozoology and anthropology. The book is pleasantly written and embellished with skillfully introduced digressions towards contemporary questions related to the problem. The author claims prudence and discernment in this dense subject, which has already produced a very abundant literature, which offers an impressive bibliography (pp. 247-307) revealing in itself the very broad investigations carried out by the author. We would like to highlight here first of all the qualities of the work,

which tackles this very broad documentation mastered. Certainly, when one brews an archaeological and historical material which extends over more than ten millennia, the need for simplification is essential, and one can congratulate the author for having been able to order such a large mass of data.

The comparative treatment of the subject (the “taboo” of pork in the Near East) is not in itself new. The author’s material was the subject in 2006 of a publication bringing together various specialists in the ancient Near East, edited by Brigitte Lion and Cécile Michel.¹ This book is known to MP, but his use of it is quite limited. However, important theoretical and methodological axes are exposed there, and touch exactly on this complex problem – transcultural and transdisciplinary: the question of the so-called “taboo” concerning pork in the Jewish religion, then in Islam, considered in its possible origins or prefigurations in the Near East. The author assumes a more than broad chronological horizon, since it unfolds from the Pleistocene to the contemporary era, while granting great importance to prehistoric times which see the first major changes linked to the relationship between man and animal, passing from the hunted animal (the wild pig, wild boar) to domestication, and the questions inherent to it. The landscape is therefore a Near East that stretches from Egypt to present-day Turkey.

This story, which leads to the Iron Age, would be for MP the cradle of what will constitute the central subject of the book, namely the constitution of the “taboo”. The cross-cultural approach is undoubtedly important for the comparison between cultural groups. But it necessarily leads the author to frequent areas that he more or less masters. This is the case here with the treatment of ancient Egypt, which is at the very least incomplete, fragmented and insufficiently documented. The present reader is embarrassed to have to point out in these lines that he himself wrote a monograph on pork in ancient Egypt (which MP does not cite), which also offers an anthropological reflection on what would constitute a “taboo”.² To tell the truth, the sources used by MP concerning Egypt are in my opinion too meager for the author to be able to extract a real problematic from them. However, this requires taking account in a balanced way not only of archaeozoology (which offers specific insights into specific contexts) but also of more general religious and symbolic data, which emanate from the particular treatment of the animal in the pharaonic context, which implies a general reflection on the place of animals in pharaonic thought. Thus, MP misses the fact that, in Egypt, the pig and its female, the sow, are not at all connoted in the same

1. Lion & Michel, 2006.

2. Volokhine 2014, 2015, 2019 and 2020.

manner. The pig is conceived as an aggressive animal that takes life (link with Seth, gradually becoming an enemy god) and the sow, maternal and protective (which is linked to the celestial Nut). This particularity is not without interest with regard to the food consequences. Also, MP passes too quickly on the fact that the speech of the potential rejection of the animal, present to various degrees in the Egyptian texts, asks to reflect fundamentally on the Egyptian notion of *bwt*, which asks to evaluate the question within the framework of an Egyptian idea of the forbidden in a sacerdotal (and not social) setting. The links between the priestly world and society are also to be considered in the other ancient worlds that are treated here. It was the Greeks, since Herodotus, who misunderstood the status of pigs in Egypt to anchor the idea of a general impurity affecting the species. In this respect, MP necessarily evokes Greece, but there too one might be surprised at the absence of references to some key works.³ It is thus the Greek authors who will really constitute a discourse on the prohibitions linked to the consumption of pigs, a discourse in which the Egyptians and the Jews meet, and everything happens as if we were involuntarily always following in their footsteps. The articulation between archaeozoology and the study of discourses is certainly a very delicate thing, one showing what the other hides, and vice versa. The author brings to light precisely what he calls the “complexity of the pig”. But truth be told, the pig is no more complicated than any other animal: it is human discourses that makes it complex. And the first step to lift the veil on this complexity would also be to question not only the theories on taboos, but ultimately the very notion of “taboo”. However, this does not really bother MP, who uses it constantly, as if it were anthropological evidence. The historiography of the notion is treated quickly (pp. 92-95) (Steiner’s omission is surprising),⁴ which perhaps reveals that the author uses this notion of “taboo” in short posed as a universal category. We would have expected may be more nuance in this case. On the other hand, the author then engages in a useful examination of the various theories proposed about the prohibition of pork in the Jewish religion and manages skillfully to refute all the reductionist proposals. For MP, the “taboo” is a social fact in constant evolution, which depends on socio-economic contingencies, carrying within it a charged imagination inherited from its genesis. In general, if the author considers with finesse the socio-economic or political conditions, he does not, in my opinion, go into enough detail of an anthropology of diet considered not only with regard to consumption habits, but especially with regard to the symbolic status of animals, in the perspective for example of a

3. Grottanelli, 2004.

4. Steiner, 1956.

Michel Pastoureau.⁵ However, this question is not unrelated to agricultural hierarchies, and often prevails over utilitarian aspects. The theme of the prohibition of pork in the Jewish religion is obviously central. In the end, the author does not add much to this two-thousand-year-old debate, except that he summarizes it, to conclude, no doubt with reason, that the “taboo” of pork is a heritage reinterpreted from a perspective identity. But the question of the identity of a group is not, any more than that of the “taboo”, devoid of presuppositions. If the pork “taboo” provides an identity barrier to separate Jews from others, then of course that would also be the function of all the other particular religious rules. However, this theme, more than others, has been emblemized, but above all in the context of relations between the Jews and their Greco-Roman and then Christian neighbors. On the uses of the animal as a negative emblem of identity, such as what the author aptly calls “weaponry”, and it should be noted here that the work of Misgav Har-Peled⁶ escaped the author. The question of imaginary ritual crimes and the presence of the pig in these discourses, discussed by MP, until the famous case of the “Judensau” could obviously have been considerably extended, insofar as this is indeed where expresses the idea of identity of the uses of the animal, but we recognize that the author does not pass over anything in silence and constantly opens the horizon.⁷ On the question of the treatment of pork in the Islamic world, MP could have quoted the works of Mohammed Benkheira an author who has the advantage of also integrating to an anthropology of diet the question of the prohibition of the swine.⁸

In conclusion, one could think that the option of linking the prehistory of the pig to the history of discourses on the animal is ultimately not that convincing. The “prehistoric” part and the part dealing with debates and discourses can almost be read independently. In the end, the wild boar of Göbekli Tepe does not so much enlighten the pigs of Nippur, any more than the pigs of Amarna anticipate those of the garbage collectors of contemporary Cairo. Knowledge of the genealogy of the life of the species and its domestication certainly provide a background, but this remains not very enlightening in the end for understanding ideas whose putting into perspective and analysis is often guided by our own conceptions of what establishes an identity or a community. Finally, despite the few specific reservations we have expressed, we can only recommend reading this book, which is now essential on the subject.

5. Buren, Pastoureau & Verroust, 1987.

6. Har-Peled, 2011-2012, and 2013.

7. Fabre-Vassas, 1981 and 1985; Har-Peled, 2016.

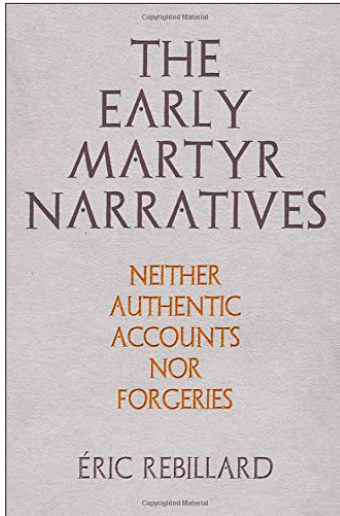
8. Benkheira, 2000, 2002 and 2006.

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THE EARLY MARTYR NARRATIVES



REBILLARD, ÉRIC (2020). *The Early Martyr Narratives. Neither Authentic Accounts nor Forgeries*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 192 pp., 58, 20 € [ISBN: 978-0-8122-5260-6].

NICOLA DENZEY LEWIS
CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY
nicola.denzeylewis@cgu.edu

I AM NOT SURE I CAN THINK OF ANOTHER BOOK IN EARLY CHRISTIAN studies that states its central argument so succinctly in its subtitle, but Éric Rebillard's latest book excels in brevity and elegance, so perhaps the subtitle is not entirely surprising. Although we know as soon as we pick up the book what R. will be arguing, the question remains as to why he maintains that the early Christian martyr narratives are "neither authentic accounts nor forgeries", and how he comes to this conclusion. His path through ancient materials – as well as his engagement with modern schol-

arship – is well laid out in this brief volume (eighty-seven pages of text, not counting appendices and endnotes). Each of the book's four chapters builds on the arguments of the previous chapter, making sequential reading essential.

The Early Martyr Narratives is what I would call a “European-style” book: detailed and thorough, it differs markedly from the perhaps flashier “American style” of scholars of martyr narratives based in the United States such as Candida Moss or Bart Ehrman, both of whom he engages and yet with whom he ultimately disagrees. At issue is Moss's and Ehrman's assessment of early Christian martyr narratives as “forgeries” or even “fraud”, which R. finds entirely beside the point he wishes to make. Throughout this book, R. argues vehemently against this dubious criterion of “authenticity” that Moss and particularly Ehrman want to question. Authenticity presumes that an original text once existed as an eyewitness account, unsullied by later redactions and emendations. To search for the authentic, original text behind later redactions is a natural way for New Testament scholars to think about textual productions. R. rejects this approach entirely. Instead, he argues, each iteration of a martyr narrative constitutes a legitimate textual performance, such that martyr narratives are best understood as “living texts”. Further, he argues, “the intended audience did not expect a precise historical report and was prepared to hear or read a version of the story” (p. 5). R. claims that historical accuracy was never the point of martyr texts; rather, “ancient audiences could believe in the historicity of the martyrs, but were not concerned to hear or read a truthful story” (p. 5). This is a provocative claim, and I fully suspect that R. is right. And yet, his claim remains unproven. How can we know what ancient audiences expected of a text? Indeed, was there only one audience and one response?

R.'s first move (Chapter One) is to establish a corpus of the earliest extant martyr narratives. He accomplishes this, crucially, not through internal cues concerning dating, but through locating their *terminus ante quem* in patristic literature. His initial data set, then, is a tiny corpus of four texts, all of which concerned Christian persecution prior to 260 CE, and which are attested in external evidence before 300 CE. These texts are BHG 1546, the *Martyrdom of Pionius*; BHG 1556-59, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*; BHL 2041, the *Life of Cyprian by Pontius*; and BHL 6633, the *Passion of Perpetua, Felicity, and Their Companions*. This list itself strikes me as, so far, uncontroversial. R. then attempts to lessen the 40-year difference between the time of writing and the time of their *terminus ante quem* by examining the social context in which each text was first attested. His stated interest is in the “function or role the texts performed in the earliest context in which they were used” in order to derive “a sense of what early Christians expected of these narratives” (p. 13).

When R. does determine the texts' function, it is striking. He already set us up for this conclusion in his introduction: "Texts were not produced simply in response to the events they report" (p. 5). R. argues, provocatively, that the point of martyr texts was not to document the persecutions, nor to use these texts for missionizing and converting, despite Tertullian's famous claim that "the blood of Christians is seed!". At the conclusion of chapter one, R. writes, "The small group of texts that I can determine to be produced before 300 were exploited to promote agendas unrelated to the martyrdoms themselves. Their utility lay in the authority that was granted to the martyrs and could be put to the service of a cause or a party" (p. 20).

Chapter Two confronts the issue of court recordings and protocols incorporated into martyr texts. Three texts contain such court recordings: the *Acts of Justin*, the *Acts of the Scilitan Martyrs*, and the *Acts of Cyprian* – already identified as a group by Timothy Barnes. R. argues that it was only after the Great Persecution that the protocol form was used in martyr narratives, as a sort of authenticating strategy. This chapter contains invaluable information on Roman court protocols and their availability to members of the public at various stages of the Roman Empire and late antiquity. R.'s key finding is that court protocols were used primarily after the fourth century. Freely available, these documents could be added to or redacted by the author of the martyr narrative rather freely. Not only did incorporating a court recording work as an authenticating strategy, it also worked well for adapting martyr narratives for liturgical use (pp. 34-35).

In Chapter Three, R. draws on Christine Thomas's assessment of ancient novels and the apocryphal acts as "stories without authors and without texts" or "open texts" (p. 43), before arriving at his preferred term, "living texts". He writes, "Ultimately, I suggest that we abandon the pursuit of an alleged original and recognize all versions as independent performances" (p. 46). R. then demonstrates the utility of this approach by arranging various manuscripts of the same martyr narrative in parallel columns, such that their differences become evident. These differences from one text to the other cannot be reconciled, nor dismissed as "scribal errors". His point is clear: it would be foolhardy to claim which "performance" of a narrative is the original *Urtext*. We simply cannot tell – but at any rate, any search for an original, "authentic" text desensitizes us to a martyr narrative's essential fungibility, freely adaptable to differing settings and communities. Although R. does not come out and say this bluntly, most of the scholarship on martyr narratives rely upon critical editions that did, in fact, edit various manuscript "performances" together into a master text. He is right: another approach – what he calls a "different model" (p. 57) – is necessary to fully understand the role of the storyteller in each "independent performance", in that each subtle addition or redaction produces a complete, useful text that spoke to

particular concerns in its specific context. It is in this sense, then, that each martyr narrative is a “living text”.

In the final chapter, R. takes on the issue of “history” versus “fiction”. Within the world of sacred texts, the issue is, needless to say, highly charged. R. argues for martyr narratives’ resolute “textuality”, which is to say, he maintains that ancient readers or listeners would have been perfectly capable of recognizing literary tropes, and of understanding the work that a trope does within a text. He uses the example of the oft-repeated line in martyr narratives, “I am a Christian!” which, he notes, did not mean that Christians undergoing interrogation in a Roman tribunal all said the exact same thing which eyewitnesses carefully wrote down for posterity, but that as a recognizable trope, the point of the cry “I am a Christian!” was to mark this text as doing a certain kind of work, including (perhaps ironically) authenticating the narrative itself.

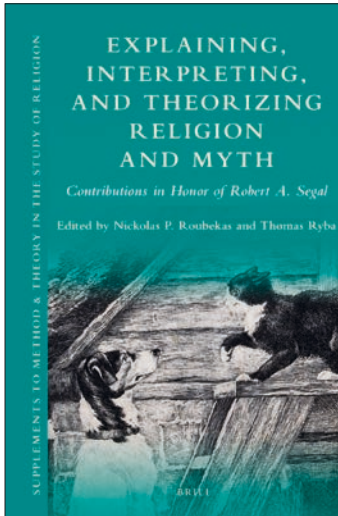
This book is compact; it packs a lot of technical information into its pages, much of which concerns manuscript variants. This degree of technical detail, however, is necessary to support R.’s argument: that martyrdom narratives “cannot be studied with the traditional categories mobilized in favor of or against their authenticity” (p. 84). Indeed, this book has a real structural elegance; the chapters flow seamlessly from one to the other, and each of R.’s claims builds upon the previous. He does not try to do too much, nor develop a grand theory that applies equally to every single martyr narrative. At the same time, his argument that martyr texts “cannot be reducible to an ‘original’ form” (p. 58) mostly likely *could* be extended to martyr texts in general. Most compelling to me is his argument that “In each case, we find that it is a context of intra-ecclesiastical conflict during a period free of persecution” (p. 4) where these martyr stories came to function as “living text”, deployed not for the reasons we conventionally think martyr stories were used (*i.e.*, to build up faith during times of persecution, or to aid in inspiring people to convert – although I never found this second argument convincing), but generally within intra-ecclesiastical disputes, wherein the martyrs became important confessors to bolster one group’s theological position against another’s. With this, R. accomplishes his aim to “decouple the history of the persecutions from the history of martyr narrative writing” (p. 87).

To offer only two mild critiques: I was intrigued by R.’s mention of Derrida’s concept of hauntology in the introduction (p. 3), but R. unfortunately never delves into his insights; hauntology is left hanging, and if it indeed “haunts” this book or even the ancient texts that it treats, it is difficult to see. Beyond page 3, “hauntology” or “haunting” is never mentioned again, which seems to me a bit of a missed opportunity. A second critique concerns R.’s assessment of martyr narratives as “living texts”. Although I fully agree with this, I wonder if a turn to literary theory might

provide additional technical language to support his claims. Literary theory provides ample vocabulary to outline the difference between a narrative, a story, a plot, even – to borrow from Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky – the chronological plot (the *fabula*) versus the way in which an author organizes a story (the *sjuzhet*). Instead – mystifyingly, to me – R. turns to the data model proposed by the rather obscure Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) with their taxonomic model of Work, Expression, Manifestation, and Item (p. 57). It is not clear to me that this taxonomy works better for R.'s purposes than other commonly used terms drawn from literary critical theory. This is all the much stranger to me, considering R.'s insistence throughout that we consider martyr narratives not as historical testimony, but as textual productions – a perspective with which I fully concur.

In the final few paragraphs, R. argues, “The moral truth of the story was what mattered” (p. 86). Again, I agree. But R.'s book does not end here, precisely, but proceeds with another thirty pages of appendices, containing Latin and Greek texts and their English facing-page translations. These include texts and translations of various manuscript editions of the *Acts of the Scilitan Martyrs*, preparations for a synoptic edition that further support R.'s contention that each text constituted an independent performance rather than a derivation from a single narrative that became progressively more corrupted as it moved from telling to telling, or more accurately, copying to copying. This is a learned book, and a refreshing “take” on an old problem; one that holds promise for those of us who consider other early Christian “textual productions” and the work that these did for the communities which drew on them to support their sense of what mattered.

EXPLAINING, INTERPRETING, AND THEORIZING RELIGION AND MYTH



ROUBEKAS, NICKOLAS P. & RYBA, THOMAS (eds.) (2020). *Explaining, Interpreting, and Theorizing Religion and Myth*. Contributions in Honor of Robert A. Segal. Supplements to Method & Theory in the Study of Religion, 16. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 491 pp., 153 € [ISBN: 978-9-0044-3501-8].

RAFAEL A. BARROSO ROMERO

UNIVERSITÄT ERFURT / UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

rafael.barroso_romero@uni-erfurt.de / rafaelab@ucm.es

LA OBRA RESEÑADA ES UN COMPENDIO DE ESTUDIOS de reconocidos especialistas de distintas disciplinas procedentes de Europa y, sobre todo, de Estados Unidos. Con ello buscan rendir homenaje a Robert A. Segal, conocido teórico de los mitos y de la religión cuya dilatada trayectoria de publicaciones queda recogida en un listado en forma de anexo al final del volumen que cubre más de treinta años de producción científica. Si bien no se trata de una publicación ingente en cuanto a su extensión, sí lo es en cuanto a su contenido, ya que cubre numerosos enfoques y teorías que dialogan constantemente y en intensidades diferentes con la obra de Segal, lo que demuestra

el alcance intelectual del autor. Constituye por lo tanto no solo un homenaje académico, sino una declaración de intenciones de naturaleza epistemológica por cuanto la pretensión de continuar refinando las críticas, métodos, y teorías propuestas por el homenajeado a lo largo de su carrera es el hilo conductor de cada capítulo.

Los autores de los dieciocho capítulos comparten la religión y/o el mito como objeto de estudio, pero también son metodológicamente afines a la disciplina que estudia la religión desde un punto de vista científico. Si bien es conocida generalmente como *Religious Studies*, en la introducción Thomas Ryba cuestiona esta denominación y aboga por el término “Religiología”, que se centra en la aplicación del método científico en el estudio de los fenómenos religiosos, libre de sesgos de cualquier tipo a favor o en contra de las religiones. Por lo tanto, haría referencia a un enfoque específico dentro de los *Religious Studies*. El capítulo se centra en resumir las principales contribuciones metodológicas del homenajeado en el desarrollo del estudio académico de la religión, es decir, lo que el autor llama una “*segalian religiology*”. Considerando el historial científico de Segal como metateórico, esta se enfocaría sobre todo en la crítica comparativista a las teorías de las religiones, pero también a las religiones en sí mismas al tratar las afirmaciones de cada religión como hipótesis que deben fijarse de forma precisa en aras de ser verificadas o falseadas. En síntesis, la religiología segeliana se trata de un programa de investigación caracterizado por ser “*precise in its definitions, interpretively consistent, without a priori insulation to refutation, Lakatosian in structure; and it would take empirical discovery and critique as means to propel its advance*” (p. 16). Con ello se espera reforzar una tradición investigadora bien organizada y en curso con una identidad disciplinar propia, con un núcleo compuesto por teorías validadas y bien establecidas, fundada en hipótesis que se revisan constantemente.

Los trabajos que siguen a la introducción se agrupan en seis secciones de tres capítulos. La primera de ellas, bajo el epígrafe “Debating Religion”, es encabezada por Daniel L. Pals, que debate acerca del paradigma reduccionista en el estudio de las religiones tal y como lo entiende el homenajeado desde que lo definiera en 1983. Este reduccionismo tuvo una importancia capital de cara a desmontar el paradigma “no reduccionista” que entonces dominaba los *Religious Studies*, basado en la premisa de que la religión debe entenderse en sus propios términos, es decir, prestando especial atención al punto de vista del creyente, con Mircea Eliade como su principal valedor. El autor del capítulo desglosa los principales aspectos de la crítica segeliana, a saber: el cuestionamiento de la viabilidad de la fenomenología, del método comparativo y del *Verstehen* de Max Weber como posibles apoyos del no reduccionismo, y la aparente superioridad del reduccionismo, en el sentido de que su solvencia científica

radica precisamente en que no mezcla el enfoque analítico con el objeto de estudio, rechazando cualquier posibilidad de entender la religión de una forma religiosa.

En el siguiente capítulo, Douglas Allen valora cómo las ideas de interpretación y explicación nos pueden ayudar a entender las religiones. Ambos conceptos han sido ampliamente utilizados de forma opuesta; sin embargo, el autor reivindica que se trata de una falsa dicotomía, ya que no se puede hablar de una sin la otra independientemente de la disciplina que los utilice. El autor aboga por defender el diálogo entre el reduccionismo de Segal y la fenomenología, aun siendo insuficiente por sí sola para la completa comprensión de la religión, sí permite describir con detalle cómo se experimenta y qué significa para los creyentes. Solo a través del diálogo entre los distintos enfoques es posible ampliar y mejorar las formas de explicar la religión teniendo siempre en cuenta la otredad religiosa.

La sección termina con un análisis de Segal como filósofo de la religión a cargo de Bryan S. Rennie, para quien la “buena filosofía” (p. 70) busca construir razonamientos de calidad utilizando formas de argumentación correctamente validadas, con premisas sólidas y evitando descuidos o posibles malentendidos en el discurso. Justamente este escrúpulo lógico es lo que el autor atribuye al homenajeado, y teniendo presentes tales términos, se dedica a analizar la forma de argumentar de Segal en un ensayo de 2016 donde reflexiona sobre la naturaleza de la religión y la metodología más adecuada para su estudio, utilizando como catalizador la crítica al conocidísimo libro que Brent Nongbri había publicado tres años antes.¹ Rennie concluye que los esfuerzos del estudio académico de la religión deben ir orientados a tratar de desarrollar un concepto de religión solvente que permita reforzar su estudio académico.

La segunda parte del libro, “History, Theory, and Religion”, comienza con un escrito de uno de los editores, Nickolas P. Roubekas, que analiza las teorías presocráticas de la religión como modelos que buscan explicar el origen de la religión y qué función tiene o debe tener en la sociedad. Centrándose sobre todo en las figuras de Pródico y Protágoras, el autor cuestiona la idea de que mito y *logos* sean algo contrapuesto. Es decir, que no debemos entender que la religión y la filosofía sean algo que debe concebirse en términos opuestos en la Grecia de la época, sino más bien al contrario. Presocráticos como Parménides o Jenófanes buscaban, al igual que los modernos académicos, entender la religión y su papel como fenómeno social clave, sin oponerse a la aparente irracionalidad que en la actualidad se le suele atribuir a las religiones antiguas.

1. Nongbri, 2013.

El siguiente capítulo corre a cargo de Ivan Strenski. Este reflexiona sobre cómo los criterios que hacen que una ciencia sea considerada como tal cambiaron ya en los inicios de los *Religious Studies* y por tanto son históricamente relativos y discutibles. Para ello, toma el ejemplo de Cornelis P. Tiele y sus manifiestas indecisiones conceptuales en relación con sus intentos de desarrollar un estudio científico de la religión. Este intelectual holandés, que desarrolló su labor a lo largo de la segunda mitad del s. XIX, basaba su cientificidad en adoptar una postura evolucionista, aunque no a la manera de Darwin, sino entendido como el estudio de los orígenes, el cambio, el crecimiento, el desarrollo histórico de las religiones. En el caso de Tiele, parece que este enfoque tenía en realidad pretensiones apologéticas y teológicas, más si cabe si tenemos en cuenta su interés por la morfología de las religiones, en virtud de la cual las clasificaba con criterios arbitrarios y profundamente sesgados.

Por su parte, Eric Ziolkowski trata de arrojar luz sobre distintas formas de entender el pluralismo religioso analizando tres metáforas procedentes de Asia. Concretamente, el autor compara tres analogías en el contexto histórico-religioso en el que surgieron: la noción del “Uno” al que “los sabios le dan muchos títulos”, tomada del *Rigveda*; la parábola de los ciegos y el elefante, atribuida al Buda histórico; y la analogía usada por Mōngke Kan para reivindicar la convivencia de distintas religiones en su imperio. El autor concluye que debió ser a través de la confrontación y de la competición entre religiones como los distintos pueblos adquirieron la conciencia de sí mismos y de sus tradiciones como “religiosas”.

La tercera sección, “Reapproaching Religion”, está inaugurada por Dexter E. Callender Jr. con un trabajo en el que se ocupa de reconsiderar el concepto de arquetipo definido por el crítico literario Northrop Frye a la luz de los recientes modelos actuales de la ciencia cognitiva. Tras desgranar la crítica académica en torno a dicho concepto, el autor lo aplica al análisis del episodio del encuentro de Moisés con la zarza ardiente en el monte Sinaí. Esta teofanía es calificada como un arquetipo subyacente a la producción del texto bíblico, una suerte de esquema cognitivo que ayuda a afrontar los peligros y las oportunidades del entorno al aunar, por un lado, el contexto de la tierra salvaje deshabitada (el monte) y por otro el proceso de copelación (el fuego en la zarza) al que se hace referencia en otros pasajes del Antiguo Testamento.

Henry Munson firma el siguiente capítulo, donde pone en relación el anti-semitismo cristiano y el secular. Empieza identificando lo que considera que es la base bíblica del antijudaísmo cristiano: los pasajes del Nuevo Testamento que condenan las actitudes de determinados individuos o grupos, pero que luego fueron atribuidos a todo el pueblo judío, especialmente a través de las interpretaciones de tales fragmentos en las obras de Lutero y de Hitler. Así sucede con el episodio de la expulsión de los mercaderes del templo por parte de Jesús o aquellos que condenan

a los fariseos, pero los más relevantes son los que se refieren a los judíos como los hijos de aquellos que mataron a los profetas y, sobre todo, a Jesús. Por su parte, el antisemitismo secular es ilustrado a través de los estatutos de limpieza de sangre de la España moderna, que tenían un fuerte componente racial. Este fue particularmente promovido por una de las obras de Lutero, personaje muy enaltecido por la propaganda nazi, que desarrolló el antisemitismo secular y lo fusionó con el clásico, puramente religioso.

La autora del noveno capítulo, Fiona Bowie, dedica su estudio a las *core experiences*, lo que incluye experiencias cercanas a la muerte, experiencias extracorpóreas, del tipo médium, viajes chamánicos, espiritualidades terapéuticas, o encuentros con seres espirituales. Sin embargo, la autora no estudia estas experiencias utilizando la evidencia etnográfica, sino desde una perspectiva historiográfica. Empieza reivindicando la importancia que tales experiencias tienen en la antropología de cara a abordar cuestiones ontológicas sobre la naturaleza de la religión (y su experiencia) y el mundo. Aboga por lo que denomina una “antropología transpersonal” que integre la dimensión espiritual en nuestro entendimiento de lo que significa ser humano. Tras esto, discute cada una de las posturas adoptadas por distintas escuelas en relación con este tipo de experiencias, con un énfasis especial en la relación entre la fenomenología y los *Religious Studies*, la antropología de la religión y el giro ontológico. Finalmente, Bowie termina proponiendo una fenomenología etnográfica centrada en examinar la naturaleza ontológica de tales experiencias fundamentales. Esta se basa en el reconocimiento de que se trata de experiencias cognitivas, en la empatía (y por tanto en la importancia del discurso *insider*) y en el compromiso del investigador, que debería participar en este tipo de rituales y eventos.

Bajo el epígrafe “Debating Myth”, la cuarta sección recoge tres estudios que, desde distintos enfoques, reflexionan sobre el propio concepto de mito y sus implicaciones epistemológicas. Así, el primer trabajo, a cargo de Angus Nicholls, debate las implicaciones políticas de la distinción entre teoría del mito frente a metateoría del mito. Su estudio se divide en dos partes: la primera es en esencia una reelaboración de su antigua reseña del libro de Segal, *Myth. A Very Short Introduction*,² enfocado más en la crítica de las modernas teorías del mito que en los mitos en sí. En la segunda parte, el autor se centra en el rol de la metateoría del mito de Segal, en este caso a través de una revisión crítica de los principales pensadores que teorizaron acerca de los mitos políticos, entendidos como discursos efectistas que no atienden a su propio contenido de verdad, sino que buscan cautivar a las masas. Este punto es

2. Segal, 2015.

ilustrado principalmente a través de las narrativas de los políticos y partidos defensores del Brexit.

En el decimoprimer capítulo, Jon Mills busca deconstruir el concepto de mito para tratar de identificar su significado, estructura y especialmente su esencia. Partiendo de la convulsa historia de sus orígenes, semántica y funciones, el autor argumenta que la deconstrucción sirve para mejorar la forma en la que se teoriza sobre el mito. Así, revisa los principales elementos que las teorías del mito, de acuerdo con Segal, han abordado de cara a explicar los mitos en las distintas culturas, a saber: el origen (1), pues los mitos abordan los fundamentos, historia o génesis de un aspecto de la realidad, y por tanto implican una ontología; la función (2), que siempre es diversa y hasta cierto punto individual o idiosincrática, aun estando siempre enfocada en lo social, lo colectivo, el grupo, y por ello tiene que ver con la utilidad y eficacia; el significado (3), que es igualmente heterogéneo ya que puede ser personal o colectivo y atender a la literalidad, ser figurativo, metafórico, simbólico, etc. Finalmente, tras revisar las aportaciones críticas de Segal a las teorías del mito, aborda de nuevo el debate sobre explicación versus interpretación y sugiere y desarrolla una serie de elementos que componen la esencia de todo mito: una fuente (en el sentido del origen ontológico de cierto fenómeno); una fuerza (o principios organizativos que subyacen a la narrativa); una forma (relacionada con la tipología de la historia mítica); un objeto (su contenido, lugar, contexto, contingencias, etc.); y un objetivo (que es siempre interpretar y explicar la narrativa).

Roderick Main concluye la cuarta sección con un análisis crítico de la visión de Segal de la teoría psicológica del mito de Carl G. Jung, pero en combinación con su concepto de sincronicidad. De acuerdo con el homenajeado, para que una teoría del mito sea válida y aplicable en nuestro mundo, debe cumplir tres criterios: involucrar personalidades divinas causalmente efectivas; explicar el mundo físico; y ser compatible con la ciencia moderna. El autor del capítulo hace una revisión de las principales teorías del mito abordadas por Segal a lo largo de su carrera para concluir que la de Jung es la que verdaderamente podría cumplir con esos criterios, aunque reformulando el concepto de sincronicidad para que de esa forma pueda explicar el mundo físico. El psicólogo argumentó que los mitos son expresiones de arquetipos del inconsciente colectivo que surgen de forma autónoma, pero que se elaboran culturalmente. Para Segal, esto significa que estudiar mitos implica estudiar la mente humana, y en concreto, el inconsciente colectivo. El concepto de sincronicidad en la teoría de Jung es un principio conector acausal que propone que los eventos físicos y psíquicos pueden a veces ser experimentados como correspondencias acausales a través del significado que expresan conjuntamente, lo que sugiere la identificación de una realidad psicológicamente neutral, el campo en el que operan los arqueti-

pos. La conclusión de Main es que los arquetipos son la clave para que la teoría de Jung explique el mundo físico de dos maneras: si consideramos que los arquetipos producen efectos en el mundo físico, es necesario acudir a ellos para explicar cada acontecimiento (explicación causal), pero también revelando el patrón de significado arquetípico que cada acontecimiento expresa (explicación acausal).

“Interrogating Myth” es el título de la quinta parte del libro. Sus tres capítulos abordan el mito a partir de estudios de caso concretos. William Hansen cuestiona el carácter de las narrativas etiológicas al reivindicar que no se trata solamente de historias que explican el origen de determinados fenómenos, sino que algunas también dan cuenta de cosas que (ya) no existen en nuestro mundo; el autor las denomina etiologías de la pérdida (o negativas), frente a las tradicionales, que serían de la ganancia (o positivas). Para ejemplificar esta realidad, el autor identifica una serie de temas en tales etiologías: la pérdida de la vida fácil, de la vida interminable, de determinadas cosas corrientes, del hueso del pene (con el que sí cuentan muchos mamíferos). Las referencias a narraciones bíblicas, las *Edda*, mitos griegos o mesopotámicos son constantes.

Laura Feldt, en el decimocuarto capítulo, debate sobre el nexo entre religión y ficción utilizando los relatos épicos de Gilgamesh como caso de estudio. A partir de un sentido del mito de corte folclórico, la autora trata de demostrar que la *Epopéya de Gilgamesh* puede y debe considerarse un mito y examina algunas de las funciones que la ficción desempeña en la religión. De esta forma, concluye argumentando que los mitos no pueden ser entendidos como narrativas factuales, sino que siempre implican elementos ficcionales en cierto grado. Analizar el mito como literatura, y por ende sus cualidades y formas literarias, permite entender de forma clara su formación y su función.

El fin de la quinta sección viene de la mano de Lukas Pokorny, en un estudio cuyo objetivo es analizar el rol del “mito del milenio” en los discursos de los nuevos movimientos religiosos de Asia oriental. Dicho mito alude a una “historia de transición soteriológica que pronto culminará en su totalidad o en gran parte” (p. 313), y se suele articular en términos etnocéntricos. Tras un exhaustivo análisis de las narrativas de algunos de dichos movimientos religiosos procedentes de Corea, Japón, China y Vietnam, el autor concluye que el mito del milenio es el núcleo de los nuevos movimientos religiosos estudiados, ya que les permite justificar su propia existencia y sobre él se construyen las claves sobre cómo completar su papel.

La última sección está, como las dos anteriores, dedicada al mito con el nombre de “Myth Revisited”. La encabeza un estudio de Steven F. Walker donde examina la película *A Serious Man* y la conecta con el mito del dybbuk y el *Libro de Job*. La comedia negra de los hermanos Coen trata sobre la vida de un profesor de física de

una universidad desconocida que afronta problemas con su matrimonio y con su situación financiera. Sin embargo, el autor trata de demostrar que la presencia de los dos mitos tradicionales judíos aleja a la cinta de la banalidad al presentar la pregunta de cómo surgen el mal y el sufrimiento en el mundo. A través de constantes referencias al *Libro de Job*, queda demostrado que el mito bíblico actúa como subtexto de la trama a pesar del proceso de demitologización al que se ve sometida por sus directores, que tratan de desvincularla de lo sagrado y de cualquier pretensión de encontrar un sentido al sufrimiento y al mal. Esta pregunta también subyace a la historia de Job, aunque en la película no encuentra ninguna respuesta, ya que los elementos que en la historia original proporcionaban una respuesta (la voz en el torbellino, los tres sabios y Dios) no actúan de la misma manera en el filme. Del mismo modo, el mito del dybuk sugiere que el mal no es algo intrínseco al ser humano, sino que viene de fuera de la realidad humana, es traído por los espíritus malignos, y por tanto los males de Job no son su responsabilidad. Sin embargo, el personaje basado en el dybuk no es descrito como poseído. De esta forma, parece que el cinismo posmoderno de los directores es recubierto con un recurso compensatorio a los mitos, para dar un mensaje de que el mal simplemente es.

El decimoséptimo capítulo, tiene de nuevo como protagonista a Jung, pero en esta ocasión, Raya A. Jones analiza cómo el psicólogo introdujo el mito en el estudio de la mente. Desgrana críticamente su entendimiento del mito y especula sobre por qué hablar de mitos es, desde la perspectiva del suizo, hablar sobre la mente humana. La autora expone el contexto intelectual en el que Jung desarrolló su teoría para dejar claro que su interés fue, ante todo, psicológico, y por lo tanto médico, lo que significa que estudiaba mitos para entender los principios de la psique y así ayudar a las personas a organizar sus experiencias de forma “sana”. Esto explica que su forma de tratar los mitos no fuese orientada a analizarlos, sino a amplificarlos, es decir, usarlos heurísticamente para hacer patentes los problemas personales de los pacientes. Seleccionaba de los mitos lo que se ajustaba a su narrativa sobre la psique, pues buscaba en ellos signos del inconsciente colectivo, buscaba identificar arquetipos. En el debate de Jung con sus contemporáneos acerca del pensamiento mítico y la función creadora de símbolos, la autora identifica la idea de que el inconsciente colectivo no es un sistema heredado de ideas, sino de disposiciones innatas que conducen a la formación de ideas. Así, los arquetipos son útiles porque permiten clasificar el material mítico y utilizarlo como prueba de la uniformidad de la psique, pero no deben ser confundidos con los símbolos. Los primeros son cualidades humanas que vienen dadas biológicamente, los segundos son construcciones históricas y culturales. En definitiva, para la autora, Jung puso los mitos al servicio de la psicología con el objeto de entender mejor la mente.

Finalmente, el último estudio está firmado por José Manuel Losada, quien desde su conocida mitocrítica cultural busca dar un paso adelante en la identificación de las causas que explican la desmitificación de la sociedad actual y, en concreto, algunos elementos de nuestro tiempo que influyen en la asimilación, modificación y reutilización de los mitos tradicionales. Los tres grandes elementos considerados son los que articulan el contenido del capítulo. El primero de ellos es la globalización, que implica un trasiego efímero de los mitos a lo largo y ancho del mundo tanto en su versión social (transferencia y mezcla indiscriminada de elementos míticos entre distintos países y culturas) como tecnológica (constante actualización de lo telemático, audiovisual, virtual, al contrario que la realidad constante del mito). El segundo es la lógica de la inmanencia que vertebra la sociedad occidental, tanto desde su reflexividad inmanente (y patente p. ej. en el existencialismo filosófico) como en la experiencia inmanente, que transfiere la trascendencia inherente al mito a otros productos culturales. Por último, se examina la *doxa* del relativismo, que se opone a marcos absolutos como los principios universalmente válidos del mito. Esta opera desde la democracia, lo que supone el riesgo de proyectar valores democráticos actuales a la crítica y recepción de los mitos; pero también desde la mentalidad de consumidor, donde lo duradero desaparece frente al consumo rápido, efímero, al contrario que los modelos ofrecidos por el mito.

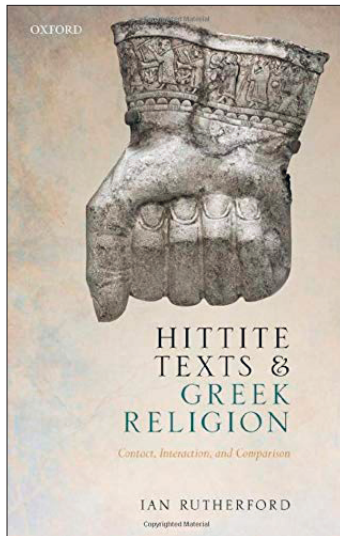
Por un lado, la obra en su conjunto es una cura de humildad para el estudio académico de las religiones por cuanto alude varias veces a la “inmadurez” de la disciplina (algo que ni es nuevo ni inesperado, pues no deja de ser una disciplina relativamente joven si se compara con otras). No obstante, al mismo tiempo es un estimulante testimonio de que su desarrollo está en auge y no pretende detenerse. Al contrario, el debate está más vivo que nunca, y existe un abundante y generalizado interés por el refinamiento metodológico del estudio académico de las religiones. Sin duda, el volumen se convertirá en una referencia a la altura del resto de monografías que integran la prestigiosa serie a la que pertenece, “Supplements to Method & Theory in the Study of Religion”. Asimismo, presenta una edición bien cuidada, si bien es pertinente indicar que la lectura de algunos de sus capítulos no está destinada a estudiantes ni legos, pues aquellas secciones dedicadas al debate puramente teórico, a diferencia de los capítulos que exponen estudios de caso, requieren un conocimiento más profundo de las discusiones surgidas al amparo de las teorías más destacadas de los *Religious Studies*. Con todo, cualquier lector encontrará orientación en los índices de nombres y de materias que ocupan las últimas páginas del libro.

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HITTITE TEXTS & GREEK RELIGION



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JUAN ANTONIO ÁLVAREZ-PEDROSA
UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID
japedros@ucm.es

EL TEMA DE LAS RELACIONES ENTRE LOS HITITAS Y LOS GRIEGOS micénicos ha dado lugar a una abundante bibliografía desde que Emil Orgetorix Forrer propusiera en 1924 la identificación de los Ahhiyawa que aparecen repetidamente en los textos hititas con los aqueos. Como es bien sabido, dicha propuesta fue recibida con un gran escepticismo por la comunidad científica de la época; sin embargo, el tiempo ha

venido a dar la razón al estudioso suizo y los materiales que demuestran la existencia de intensos contactos culturales, políticos y lingüísticos entre los griegos micénicos y los hititas no han dejado de crecer desde las primeras identificaciones, tal como detalla el autor (a partir de ahora R.) en el Estado de la cuestión (pp. 7-11). La presente monografía busca ocuparse de los contactos y eventuales préstamos o difusiones de elementos de carácter religioso entre ambas culturas; su modelo explicativo parte, por tanto, de la idea de la existencia de un contacto cultural intenso, mucho más que de los antiguos modelos metodológicos del origen común como explicación de los parecidos. El método empleado en el estudio de los distintos casos que aborda es el comparativo, que se combina con el estudio de las tendencias regionales y la historia de las prácticas religiosas, todo ello combinado con datos históricos. R. insiste que uno de los objetivos principales de la comparación no es solo identificar las similitudes, sino también las diferencias, que pueden ser tan informativas como las primeras. Enfrentado a tantísimo material, el plan de la obra es estudiar a fondo dos temas principales: 1) poner el foco en las zonas y contextos históricos donde pudo darse el contacto (capítulos 5-8) y 2) analizar aspectos específicos de ambas religiones (capítulos 9-12).

El capítulo 2 (pp. 18-58) presenta una excelente y recomendable introducción al complejo mundo de la religión hitita, que conocemos de una manera privilegiada por la enorme cantidad de textos de contenido religioso que se han conservado en el archivo de Boğazköy: R. hace un somero resumen del contexto histórico y de las fuentes; una de las novedades del estudio es la incorporación del análisis de los diversos estratos etnolingüísticos de la religión hitita: R. ha trabajado en equipo con los investigadores que actualmente están estudiando este asunto (Alice Mouton e Ilya Yakubovich) y su conocimiento de los estratos hurrita y luvita de la composición de los textos religiosos hititas resulta muy productivo. Hace también una rápida introducción a los santuarios y espacios sagrados, aunque desde mi punto de vista su introducción al panteón es quizá demasiado sucinta, para la abundancia y complejidad de los dioses. Bajo el epígrafe “Elementos clave de la religión” (pp. 34-49), analiza los vínculos entre religión y política, sobre todo en las personas del rey y la reina; la estructura ritual, comenzando por los festivales y siguiendo por la adivinación; los informes rituales y la magia analógica; el sistema sacrificial, los rituales relativos a las divinidades el inframundo; canto e invocaciones; plegarias; narraciones míticas y uso ritual. Otro epígrafe importante es el que tiene que ver con la conservación de los rasgos culturales hititas en los reinos neohititas y Anatolia de la Edad de Hierro (pp. 49-58) y la continuidad religiosa en el SE y O de Anatolia.

En el capítulo 3 (59-78) lleva a cabo un resumen sobre la religión griega desde el Bronce tardío hasta el Primer milenio a.C. Se trata de una empresa complicada,

por la enormidad de los materiales y de hecho, en una de las partes de mayor interés, la referida a la religión micénica, se echa en falta todo lo referente a las tablillas de Tebas; en cuanto a la religión de época clásica, R. resalta los elementos de continuidad entre la religión micénica y la del Primer Milenio, sobre todo en teónimos; pero también pone el acento en los cambios, de la estructura palacial a la religión cívica de las *poleis*, dentro de nuestras carencias de conocimiento de la religión micénica.

Un interesante apartado lo constituye la difusión de la religión griega en Anatolia, especialmente en las zonas meridional y sudoriental (pp. 73-78) y la interacción de las antiguas continuidades hititas y los modelos religiosos importados.

En el capítulo 4 (pp. 79-96) R. aborda una reflexión metodológica sobre la comparación de datos religiosos y la aproximación histórica y tipológica. Pone el foco en los materiales comparativos en áreas en las que hititas y griegos han estado en contacto, por ejemplo, la costa anatolia occidental. Asimismo, identifica los problemas que plantean la comparación de rituales en detalle y el eventual carácter universal que pueden tener algunos de ellos. En ocasiones, la detallada información que contienen los informes rituales hititas nos ayuda a comprender mejor los rituales griegos, como es el caso de los rituales de purificación, el uso de los mitos en los rituales o los sacrificios humanos en contexto militar. Más cauto se muestra R. con los casos de difusión y préstamo: un buen ejemplo es la hepatoscopia, pues los testimonios de difusión de oriente a occidente se pueden datar bastante bien. Los agentes de dicha difusión pueden haber sido múltiples y haber actuado durante un largo periodo de tiempo. Añade dos casos de estudio para demostrar el potencial de la metodología comparativa: los dioses que desaparecen en ambas tradiciones religiosas y el valor religioso de la bolsa del cazador: hit. *kursa*, símbolo de prosperidad, comparable a la égida de la mitología griega.

El capítulo 5 (pp. 98-119) se ocupa de los contactos religiosos durante el Bronce tardío. Proporciona una larga y actualizada introducción histórica sobre los contactos de Ahhiyawa y los hititas. Las pruebas del contacto religioso son limitadas, pero muy interesantes: es el caso de un texto oracular que informa del envío de dos divinidades (es de suponer que son dos estatuas cuyos nombres no se mencionan) de Ahhiyawa y Lazpa (Lesbos) a Hattusa para un ritual de purificación y curación del rey Mursili II, donde se ve en aplicación la ideología incorporacionista hitita. Más conocido es la referencia al dios Apaliuna en el tratado entre Muwatalli y Alaksandu de Wilusa; casi todos los estudiosos están hoy de acuerdo en que Apaliuna es Apolo. El problema sigue estando en cómo se ha convertido en dios tutelar de Wilusa; lo más probable es que sea una divinidad griega o pre-griega que ha entrado en la Tróade por influencia griega (p. 113). Un caso de influencia en dirección contraria, de Anatolia a Grecia, lo constituye la Potnia Aswiya micénica, la “Soberana de Asuwa”.

En el capítulo 6 (pp. 120-143) se identifica una zona geográfica de contacto privilegiado Arzawa (Anatolia occidental), por lo que se analizan los rituales conservados en el archivo de Hattusa con adscripción a esta zona, o atribuidos a un especialista ritual de esta zona, y se describen sus características principales, así como las divinidades de la zona y los agentes que los realizaban. La conclusión es que hay un tipo de ritual predominante, el que usa el animal sustitutorio adornado con guirnaldas, y los llevados a cabo por augures. Los paralelos detectables en el ámbito griego son los rituales militares en Homero y Polieno: cf. el ritual de purificación del ejército llevado a cabo por Calcante en la *Ilíada*, que sería un augur de tipo arzaweo; por su parte, Polieno recoge un ritual militar jonio que llevaba a cabo una sacerdotisa y que comportaba el uso de un animal adornado, como en la tradición de Arzawa. Por este mismo motivo, los rituales griegos localizados en Jonia, Atenas, Abdera y Marsella, en los que aparecen *pharmakoi*, hombres con función expiatoria, también se podrían relacionar con un origen arzaweo. En las pp. 140-142 R. analiza el complejo problema del origen de la toma de augurios en ámbito griego: puede tener su origen en Arzawa, pero también en ámbito mesopotámico; la amplia difusión por el Mediterráneo de esta práctica complica aún más el asunto.

El capítulo 7 (pp. 144-162) se ocupa de la comparación entre dos textos que versan sobre el mito de la generación de dioses: por el lado griego la *Teogonía* de Hesíodo y por el lado hitita la *Canción de Kumarbi*, ahora conocido como la *Canción de Salir Adelante* (CTG 344), que es su título en hitita. La información cosmogónica se complementa con el contenido de otro texto, *Ea y el monstruo*. Desde que Forrer llamó la atención sobre el parecido entre ambos textos, los diversos estudiosos que se han ocupado sobre el tema durante ochenta años han estudiado los parecidos: tres estadios de dioses que se suceden en la realeza del cielo; entre el estadio 1 y el 2 se produce la emasculación de un dios; los dioses del estadio 3 crecen dentro de un miembro de un dios del estadio 2; un dios traga una piedra pensando que es otro dios: en ambos casos la piedra se convierte en un objeto religioso; un dios produce el nacimiento de otro a través de su cabeza; un dios nace del semen de otro. Pero además de los parecidos hay diferencias importantes. En otro ciclo de textos que pueden ser sujetos de comparación, relativos al reinado en el cielo, Tessub se enfrenta a varios oponentes: son la *Canción de Hedammu*, la *Canción de Ullikummi*, la *Canción del Mar* y la *Canción de Kurunta*; todos ellos recuerdan a diversas batallas de Zeus de la mitología griega: contra los Titanes y contra Tifón. R. también subraya las diferencias existentes entre ambas tradiciones. Además de estas narraciones, ha sobrevivido un mito hitita sobre un desastre cósmico: el mito de Illuyanka, que tiene un gran parecido con el mito de Tifón, no tal como está conservado en la versión hesiódica, sino en las de Apolodoro, Opiano (que conservaría una tradición propia de Cilicia, un

territorio que conservaría la tradición luvita) y Nonno de Panópolis. En definitiva, todos los citados mitos griegos e hititas se corresponderían con el mismo contexto: Cilicia, Chipre y costa siria, donde luvitas, fenicios y griegos coexistieron y mantuvieron un prolongado contacto cultural. Probablemente, Ugarit jugó un papel muy relevante en este contacto; dado que los mitos hititas son de origen hurrita, R. defiende que tanto hititas como griegos tomaron estos mitos como préstamo en dicho ámbito.

El capítulo 8 (pp. 163-183) se ocupa de la zona de contacto de Frigia y su elemento religioso más característico, Cibele. Esta diosa sin duda es el mejor ejemplo de una divinidad de origen anatolio adoptada por los griegos, pero es difícil elucidar si esta adopción remonta al Bronce tardío, pues existe una diosa madre poderosa en el panteón hitita, dicho fenómeno se produce en época posterior, pues los detalles apuntan más bien a un desarrollo específico en Frigia, donde se produciría el contacto con los griegos. Sin embargo, el proceso de préstamo o adaptación puede seguir varias posibilidades, pues los griegos ya tenían su propia diosa madre poderosa, por lo que también cabría un proceso de “traslación”.

El capítulo 9 (pp. 184-206) se ocupa de una comparación general de los panteones hitita y griego. R. explora los teónimos que pueden constituir un préstamo entre las culturas: Hasamili puede haber pasado en préstamo a Casmilo (el hermano de los Cabiros); ese puede ser el caso también del dios de la guerra: Yarri, que se adaptó como Ares, y de Pegaso y el dios de la Tormenta *pihassassi*; más complicada y difícil de demostrar es la relación entre Telipinu y Apolo Delfinio. No hay traducciones directas de divinidades anatólicas al griego hasta el Primer milenio. Por su parte, Hécate tiene dos divinidades candidatas para su comparación en el lado anatolio: la Diosa Sol de la Tierra y Kamrusepa; dado que los propios griegos consideraban que Hécate era una diosa de origen cario, es posible que estemos ante un caso de externalización: una proyección de una divinidad ctónica originaria a la que se atribuye un carácter extranjero para justificar sus rasgos crueles o bárbaros. Por su parte, aunque se han buscado paralelos anatólicos para Dioniso, el único elemento comparable seguro es el nombre del tirso, cf. hit. *tuwaris(a)*-. En suma, los testimonios de contacto y préstamo para los teónimos son más bien escasos, de modo que el autor se suma a la hipótesis de Cline (1991) según la cual el embargo comercial que los hititas aplicaron a los Ahhiyawa afectó también al intercambio de dioses.

En el capítulo 10 (pp. 209-225) se analizan rituales militares comparables en ambas tradiciones religiosas. Un candidato posible para ser considerado préstamo de la tradición hitita a la griega es el ritual de purificación por el que un ejército pasaba entre las piezas de un hombre, un cachorro y un cerdito partidos por la mitad. En conexión con este aspecto están los sacrificios que se llevaban a cabo antes de la batalla, particularmente sacrificios humanos. Otros paralelos estudiados por el autor son

suggerentes, pero no conclusivos y la mayoría de ellos se englobarían en tradiciones más amplias que afectan a todo el Mediterráneo y Mesopotamia.

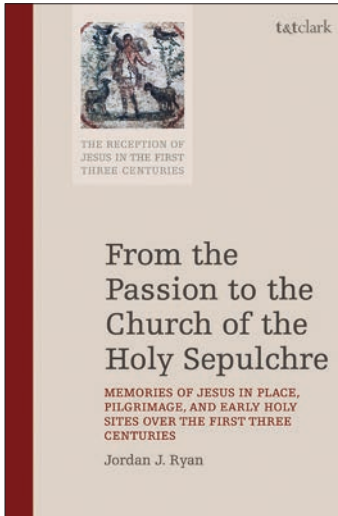
El capítulo 11 (pp. 227-246) estudia las similitudes y sobre todo las diferencias entre las grandes festividades públicas hititas y griegas, los festivales y su vínculo con los calendarios.

Finalmente, el capítulo 12 (pp. 247-271) aborda el problema del sacrificio animal en ambas culturas, que comparten algunos rasgos fundamentales, como la distinción entre el sacrificio ordinario y el que se dirige a las divinidades ctónicas; la distinción entre el sacrificio ordinario y aquel en el que se consume la víctima por fuego; la distinción entre la porción que se reserva a los dioses y la que consumen los humanos, aunque aquí las diferencias son notables; finalmente, la existencia de algunos sacrificios animales con función netamente apotropaica. No cabe excluir elementos de herencia común y otros producidos por el prolongado contacto cultural.

El libro concluye con un Epílogo (pp. 272-275) a modo de recapitulación, un Apéndice (pp. 277-284) donde se recogen las ediciones y traducciones de los textos hititas más citados, la bibliografía y un índice de nombres propios.

En resumen, se trata de una monografía actualizada y muy recomendable tanto para el estudio de religiones en contacto desde una perspectiva metodológica general, como para el mejor conocimiento de los elementos religiosos compartidos entre Anatolia del Bronce tardío y Primera Edad de Hierro y Grecia. Es una lástima que R. no conozca mejor la bibliografía en español sobre el tema, pues hay mucha producción científica, especialmente de los profesores Bernabé y García Trabazo, que le hubiera resultado de mucha utilidad.

FROM THE PASSION TO THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE



RYAN, JORDAN J. (2021). *From the Passion to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Memories of Jesus in Place, Pilgrimage, and Early Holy Sites over the First Three Centuries*. London: T&T Clark, 274 pp., 168,99 € [ISBN: 978-0-5676-7745-7].

LUCREZIA SPERA

UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA TOR VERGATA – PONTIFICIO ISTITUTO DI ARCHEOLOGIA CRISTIANA
spera@piac.it

NOTO PER GLI STUDI SUL GESÙ STORICO e sul ruolo delle sinagoghe nelle sue prediche,¹ contributi già caratterizzati da un approccio complesso e interdisciplinare (storico-filosofico, antropologico, archeologico), Jordan Ryan propone, con il volume *From the Passion to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, un itinerario affascinante sui processi di formazione della memoria di Gesù in Terra Santa, resa visibile, solo a par-

1. Ryan, 2017a; 2017b; 2018.

tire dall'età costantiniana, con la realizzazione di architetture prestigiose. Per come sono formulati, il titolo e soprattutto il sottotitolo (*Memories of Jesus in Place, Pilgrimage, and Early Holy Sites over the First Three Centuries*) propongono una sfida ambiziosa e difficile già in partenza: è risaputa, infatti, l'assenza pressoché totale di tracce materiali del Cristianesimo, precisamente connotate, anche in Terra Santa, nei primi due secoli della nostra era e sono pure ben note le problematiche a restituire gli assetti preesistenti l'edificazione delle grandi chiese dopo l'età della pace.

Tuttavia, è ovvio – e su questa considerazione preliminare si fonda l'impianto del libro, spinto perciò da un'ottica del tutto nuova – che i progetti edilizi del IV secolo nei luoghi legati alla nascita, vita, morte e resurrezione di Cristo non siano altro che il punto di arrivo, la versione “definitiva” di un processo di radicamento e conformazione di una tradizione precocemente affermatasi nei diversi siti e sviluppatasi, spesso con il potenziamento dei significati iniziali, ben prima della fase di realizzazione delle basiliche e cappelle.

Per questo delicato percorso di ricerca l'A. può avvalersi di una approfondita conoscenza delle fonti, bibliche e patristiche, che logicamente svolgono un ruolo primario nella trattazione, ma anche di una certa sensibilità archeologica maturata con la partecipazione diretta agli scavi di Magdala, centro importante della Bassa Galilea, e a Tel Shimron, l'antica Shim'on.

Non risulta centrale, anzi è del tutto irrilevante, come espressamente dichiarato a più riprese, la questione dell'autenticità di luoghi e eventi, una prospettiva del tutto marginale rispetto agli intenti primari del libro. Inoltre, nell'ampia gamma di possibilità di indagine in relazione all'articolata rete di siti che evocano episodi centrali della vita di Gesù descritti dai Vangeli, l'A. opera una selezione convincente sulla base dell'ampiezza della documentazione (e, di conseguenza, dell'importanza dei siti), dando spazio primario ai luoghi della morte e della resurrezione a Gerusalemme (al Golgota e alla tomba sono dedicati i Capp. 2-4, pp. 19-133), a quello della nascita a Betlemme (Cap. 5, pp. 135-159), al Monte degli Ulivi (Cap. 5, pp. 159-181) e ad una scelta di casi, i più significativi, nel territorio della Galilea (Cap. 6, pp. 183-218), tutti monumenti dalla storia complessa, che portano Ryan a riconsiderare problemi spesso assai spinosi, come, per il complesso del Santo Sepolcro, la questione della relazione del tempio adrianeo di Venere con la roccia del Calvario e la tomba di Gesù e le possibilità di sopravvivenza della memoria del luogo.

Si tratta di percorsi paralleli, tra loro organici, che ben rintracciano e discutono, per ognuno di tali *holy sites / lieux de mémoire*, i processi di potenziamento semantico in senso teologico, esegetico e cristologico, che si innestano su un ruolo naturalmente commemorativo degli spazi, ma andando spesso ben al di là della semplice rievocazione dell'evento.

L'A. è capace di evidenziare le “percezioni” dei visitatori, cristiani di Palestina e pellegrini, per i quali – altro aspetto importante e interessante della riflessione – la frequentazione dei luoghi, la tangibilità delle tracce della presenza viva di Gesù ed il valore simbolico di ascendenza scritturistica da questi progressivamente assunto costituivano la base della formulazione di un'identità comune, che aveva risvolti nella liturgia, nell'arte e nei racconti extracanonici: così il Golgota è rappresentazione del Cristo-Adamo in San Paolo, il Santo Sepolcro il nuovo “*Sancta Sanctorum*” riflesso dell'immagine di Ebrei 9, la grotta della Natività il luogo eccelso di Isaia 33,16. L'arricchimento di significati alla memoria originaria si segue molto chiaramente nella disamina delle fonti proposta: per il IV secolo le descrizioni di Egeria, che raccoglie molte tradizioni extracanoniche e, anteriore di qualche decennio a queste, la testimonianza di Eusebio di Cesarea presentano situazioni già complesse e definite per le quali i passaggi da alcuni vangeli apocrifi e da attestazioni come quelle di Origene fanno cogliere sviluppi in progressione. Da Eusebio, per esempio, è interessante e significativa, anche per le questioni generali, la notizia intorno all'intervento di Elena al Monte degli Ulivi:² “E ancora, la madre dell'Imperatore esaltò la memoria dell'ascesa al cielo del Salvatore dell'universo sul Monte degli Ulivi, facendovi costruire edifici superbi e innalzando, quasi sulla cima del monte, nella costa più alta, il sacro edificio di una chiesa e, sempre nel medesimo luogo, edificò un santuario di preghiera in onore del Salvatore che fece sosta proprio in quel luogo, poiché, secondo quanto attesta un racconto veritiero³ lì, in quella stessa grotta, il Salvatore dell'universo iniziò i suoi discepoli ai misteri ineffabili”.

Per tutte queste ragioni – e soprattutto per l'originalità dell'impianto e l'efficacia delle dimostrazioni –, il volume di Jordan Ryan può essere di grande apprezzamento.

Se, tuttavia, nella trattazione delle fonti letterarie, l'A. si mostra piuttosto rigoroso e attento alle questioni interpretative, con esiti evidenti di originalità di lettura, meno convincenti possono apparire, a volte, le chiavi di lettura adottate per gli apparati architettonici, per i quali Ryan si presenta maggiormente legato alla ricca bibliografia di cui tiene conto (non esclusivamente in lingua inglese, come a volte deve lamentarsi per opere di ambito anglosassone). La valutazione delle architetture è troppo spesso sottoposta, si ritiene, ad una “sovrainterpretazione” sulla base di codici di una “iconografia dell'architettura” che Richard Krautheimer teorizzava, come si ricorda nel volume, in relazione all'architettura del Medioevo.⁴ Quella alle origini dell'architettura chiesastica, invece, sembra ancora profondamente debitrice della tradizione costruttiva “antica”, di

2. *Vita Constantini* III 43, 2 (qui nella traduzione di L. Franco).

3. Sc. Matteo 24, 4-25.

4. Krautheimer, 1942.

cui deduce forme in rapporto alle esigenze funzionali, valori e significati. Pare difficile, come l'A. propone, che l'edilizia religiosa costantiniana contenga manifesti espliciti di celebrazione imperiale programmaticamente elaborati. Ma queste idee di Jordan Ryan si prestano comunque a ravvivare ulteriormente il dibattito storiografico che già molto ha discusso su questi temi.⁵ In più, ulteriori approfondimenti dello stesso tipo in rapporto ai luoghi "minori" della memoria di Gesù, tralasciati volutamente dall'A., potrebbero ulteriormente arricchire il già prezioso panorama documentario presentato e rendere le linee generali più chiare.

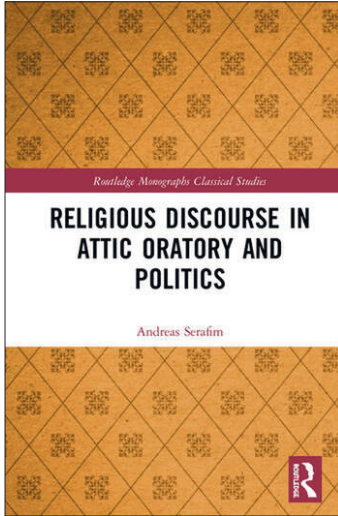
Sempre in relazione agli aspetti archeologico-monumentali, l'A. avrebbe forse dovuto spingere di più l'analisi alle fasi precedenti il momento costantiniano, per chiedersi, valorizzando in questa direzione le fonti disponibili, se, al di là dei luoghi "naturali" (rocce, grotte, sorgenti), che certo potevano essere "luoghi della memoria" pur in mancanza di architetture enfaticanti (come in effetti, per esempio, sulla base di Origene, si può supporre per la cappella realizzata a ricordo della guarigione dell'indemoniato di Gerasa), non vi fossero già prima del IV secolo dei proto-monumenti, dei "segnacoli di memoria", funzione che a Roma, per esempio, avevano svolto dalla fine del II secolo i "tropaia" sulle tombe di Pietro e di Paolo ricordati dalla testimonianza del religioso Gaio riportata nell'*Historia ecclesiastica* di Eusebio.

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5. Krautheimer, 1982; vd., più recentemente, i vari contributi in VV.AA., 2016.

RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE



SERAFIM, ANDREAS (2020).
*Religious Discourse in Attic Oratory
 and Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge,
 176 pp., 112,17 € [ISBN: 978-1-
 1385-7086-3].

ELIAS KOULAKIOTIS
 UNIVERSITY OF IOANNINA
 koulakiotis@uoi.gr

THE WORK IS WRITTEN BY A SPECIALIST IN THE FIELD, as Andreas Serafim (S.) has already published as author and editor works on oratory and rhetoric.¹ In his last work he endeavors a large-scale exploration of religious discourse in the corpus of 151 forensic, sym-bouleutic and epideictic speeches of the Attic orators (Aeschines, Andocides, Antiphon, Demosthenes, Dinarchus, Hypereides, Isaeus, Isocrates, Lycurgus and Lysias).

1. Serafim, 2017; Papaioannou, Serafim & Demetriou, 2020; Papaioannou, Serafim & Edwards, 2022.

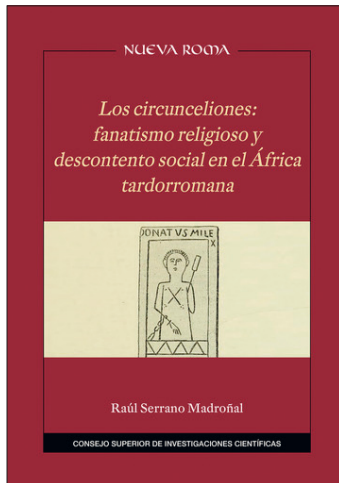
The premises in doing so are multifaced: Inter alia, the rhetorical character of religion itself and the omnipresence of religion as a constitutive element in every aspect of communal and personal life within a *polis* (see “Introduction”). Unlike previous works focused on single orators or subjects, the author examines the entire oratory canon known to us and offers a holistic approach: S. collects about 931 sections throughout the speeches referring to talking about gods, prayers, curses, hymns, oaths, and oracular utterance (ch. 1 “Religious Discourse in Attic Oratory. A Full Survey”). This enables S. to evaluate the rhetorical context, *i.e.*, reference to words spoken or written for a specific audience (*boulè*, assembly, court) resulting to different appropriateness of the religious discourse (ch. 2 “Contextualizing Religious Discourse”). In examining the cognitive and emotional aspects of the religious discourse (ch. 3 “Reacting to the ‘Airy Nothing’”), S. applies an interdisciplinary approach (New institutionalism, identity construction and social identity theory) in the ways a sense of community is formed, communicated, and perceived (ch. 4 “Civic/Political Identity in Religious Discourse”).

The outcome is a very stimulating investigation in the means in which religion permeated and shaped law, oratory, and politics as well as in the strategies of persuasion applied in decision making institutions (see “Conclusion”). The book is a very rewarding lecture offering a new, insightful approach which can be used as a methodological tool for further investigation in the field of religion as persuasive and identity construction mechanism.

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LOS CIRCUNCELIONES



SERRANO MADROÑAL, RAÚL (2020). *Los circunceliones: fanatismo religioso y descontento social en el África tardorromana*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 263 pp., 27 € [ISBN: 978-8-4001-0642-3].

JESSE HOOVER
 BAYLOR UNIVERSITY
 jesse_hoover@baylor.edu

FEW MOVEMENTS IN LATE ANTIQUITY HAVE engendered such divergent interpretations among modern historians as the enigmatic Circumcellions of 4th and 5th cent. North Africa. They were infamous for their attacks against landowners, pagans, and Catholic clergy: but is this evidence of an incipient nationalism, a proto-class struggle, or religious extremism? How closely did their goals align with the schismatic Donatist church, with whom they are invariably grouped? Were they a class of itinerant farm laborers whose Donatist allegiance formed only a part of their identity, or

were they primarily religious ascetics, the radical edge of the Donatist cause? Similarly, what does their name – “wanderers around the *cellae*”, itself a pejorative term coined by their opponents – refer to? Are *cellae* rural granaries or martyrs’ shrines?

Answering these questions is tricky. In *Los circunceliones: fanatismo religioso y desconento social en el África tardorromana*, a substantial revision of Raúl Serano Madroñal’s doctoral dissertation at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, the author highlights two reasons for returning to them: first, very little historiography has been conducted on the phenomenon of Circumcellionism in Spanish, a deficiency that Madroñal hopes to rectify. Second, and perhaps more crucially, he argues that there is a substantial disconnect between what our primary sources actually say about the movement and the often strained extrapolations that historians have derived from them. In his opening chapter, Madroñal identifies two myths in particular that need to be laid to rest. First, while a social dimension does seem to have played a role in Circumcellion activities, they were not anti-Roman in orientation. Instead, they were radical Donatists whose ire was directed primarily against their Catholic opponents. Second, while they do appear to have been primarily rural, Circumcellions should not be identified as a specific class within the Roman social order. Instead, they functioned as something like – though not quite identifiable with – a primitive monastic movement. Above all, Circumcellions were religious extremists: “a local representation of that fanaticism that, for many, destroyed the Classical world” (p. 20).

A unique strength of this book is its attention to detail: the majority of the work is simply a commentary on every allusion – explicit or hypothesized – to the Circumcellion movement in late antiquity. The book is divided into five “complementary axes” (p. 21): North African religious antecedents to the Circumcellion phenomenon, a critical review of explicit references to the Circumcellions in our primary sources, a further review of possible implicit references to Circumcellion activity, an assessment of any archaeological and epigraphic sources that have been claimed at one point or another as relating to the movement, and finally an outline of the historiography of Circumcellionism among modern writers. Let us examine each in turn.

In Part I, Madroñal sets up his thesis by focusing on the religious controversies that immediately preceded the rise of the Circumcellions. After noting that by the Flavian period, North Africa appears to have been quite Romanized with few hints of local independence movements, he proceeds to consider first Tertullian, whose “rigorist” theological stance had important implications for the tenor of North African Christianity. Tertullian, Madroñal notes, argued that Christians are “immersed in a fight against Satan and his demons” at all times by the will of God, who “constantly subjects his faithful to tests of faith” (p. 35). More immediately relevant to the later

schism is Cyprian, whose views on the lapsed and veneration of martyrs directly informed later Donatist approaches to both issues. Indeed, as Madroñal notes, the Donatist schism is in many ways merely a continuation of Cyprian's battles with his opponents, a "new manifestation of an old problem" (p. 68). A short overview of the Donatist movement then follows, taking in the whole scope of its history from the first dissident bishop Majorinus in the early fourth century to the final remonstrances of Gregory the Great in the sixth. Madroñal is careful to note that the Donatists, while clearly suspicious of the empire given its hostile stance towards them, were not inherently anti-Roman: after all, as their opponents would endlessly harp, they were the first to appeal to the emperor for mediation.

Part II, by far the longest section in the book, covers all major explicit allusions to the Circumcellions in our primary sources. It is divided into twelve sub-chapters, each of which represents a different witness to the movement – though it is worth noting that the chapter devoted to Augustine is further subdivided into thirty-three subsections. Most of these entries are quite short, reflecting the rather fleeting nature of their sources. Predictably, the writings of Optatus (pp. 71-79), Augustine (pp. 81-128) and the decrees preserved in the *Theodosian Code* (pp. 133-137) dominate the discussion. Madroñal is rightly suspicious of the utility of later sources, such as the edict of the Vandal king Huneric in 486 CE, to shed light on Circumcellion activity. Such later sources are too far removed from the original events to transmit a faithful picture. Isidore's characterization of Circumcellions with rogue "gyrovague" monks, for instance, is simply a mistaken amalgam of two separate Augustinian texts, while Beatus of Liébana's pericope on the same topic, sometimes identified as a lost snippet of Tyconius,¹ is simply a rehash of Isidore's error.

These entries provide convincing background for the lengthy conclusion to this section (pp. 157-172), in which Madroñal marshals the evidence amassed so far to offer some valuable perspectives on a number of contested facets of Circumcellion identity. Were the Circumcellions Donatist partisans from the beginning, or was their relationship more tenuous? Madroñal reminds us that our earliest mention of the Circumcellions depicts their leaders as *duces sanctorum*, thus implying a specifically religious dimension to their activities from the start (p. 158). What were the enigmatic *cellae* that they haunted? Probably rural granaries, not martyrs' shrines (p. 171). Did they really jump off of cliffs? Yes: they had, after all, a venerated example in Bishop Marculus, who had been thrown off a cliff by the Roman authorities during the Macarian repression (p. 164).

1. Frend, 1969.

In Parts III and IV, Madroñal turns to a more difficult quarry: an evaluation of literary allusions (Part III) and potential archaeological/epigraphical evidence of Circumcellions (Part IV). Confusingly, the first entry in Part III concerns the famous “Harvester of Mactar”, a Latin epigraphical text now found in the Louvre and identified as a Circumcellion self-description by Emin Tengström (p. 223).² Tengström’s argument is reliant on the assumption that the Circumcellions constituted a distinct agricultural class within Roman society, a claim Madroñal disputes (he also notes that the inscription dates from the 260s, nearly a century before the first named appearance of the Circumcellions). Other potential references to Circumcellion activity include Optatus’s account of attacks against Catholic basilicas during the reign of the emperor Julian and Augustine’s *violentissimae turbae* who engaged in similar tactics in the 390s. Both, Madroñal concludes, probably do reflect Circumcellion involvement, despite the lack of explicit confirmation. The records of writers outside of North Africa such as Philastrius of Brescia and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, on the other hand, preserve only garbled rumors of Circumcellion activity.

Part IV surveys five potential Donatist sites in North Africa that are sometimes linked to the Circumcellions, such as the basilica dedicated to Marculus in modern Ksar-el-Kelb, the basilica allegedly dedicated by Optatus in Timgad, or the headstone of the martyr Robba. With the exception of the Timgad basilica, Madroñal affirms their Donatist provenance. He is more skeptical of the sixty-five epitaphs found in Djebel Nif-en-Nser and Djebel Anouda which William Hugh Clifford Frend had claimed as evidence of Circumcellion cliff-jumping,³ noting that the evidence is entirely circumstantial. A slightly more positive assessment is given of the Henchir Bou-Said stele, located within a basilica whose arch is inscribed with the words “deo laudes”. According to Madroñal, it is “not absurd” that this artifact, which portrays a chained man holding a club, may represent a Circumcellion, though it is ultimately unprovable. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that a representation of the Henchir Bou-Said stele forms the cover of the book under review.

After a brief historiographical overview in Part V, Madroñal proceeds to his general conclusions. Throughout the survey, two areas in particular have remained contested: whether the Circumcellion movement involved a social dimension and whether “Circumcellions” ought to be identified as primarily as a class of itinerant agricultural workers, and only secondarily as a religious group. Madroñal acknowledges that there was a social element in Circumcellion activity, although he cautions that it is mentioned

2. Tengström, 1964.

3. Frend, 1971.

in only 6% of entries (p. 240). According to both Optatus and Augustine, Circumcellions threatened creditors and freed slaves, providing “a space of refuge for offenders from the social sphere” (p. 167). In keeping with his argument that Circumcellions ought to be seen as religious extremists, Madroñal argues that the impulse for such phenomena was rooted in the Old and New Testaments. Deuteronomy, for example, condemns slavery within the Israelite community, while the Pauline epistles preach spiritual equality between masters and slaves. “It is plausible”, he concludes, “that the biblical rigor of these agonistic Circumcellions before 347 moved them to radically position themselves against usury and to promote equality between masters and slaves, following these controversial scriptural precepts” (p. 161).

Such an argument, of course, would be strengthened if it could be proved that the Circumcellions were primarily a religious phenomenon rather than a class of migratory farm workers. Without getting into the weeds of Madroñal’s argument, which seems to be directed primarily against Brent Shaw’s detailed defense of the latter claim in chapter 14 of *Sacred Violence*,⁴ his basic point is that the primary sources which could be used to support it are vanishingly small: “Only the questionable interpretation of one of these explicit references, linked in a forced way with another of the non-explicit references, can support this explanation, which means neglecting 96% of the total volume of the preserved record” (pp. 237-238). The case for the Circumcellions as agricultural laborers relies almost exclusively on an entry in the *Theodosian Code* in which in which *circumcelliones* are listed alongside other Roman classes like *spectabiles*, *senatores*, *negotiatores* and *plebei* as liable for a fine if they continue to embrace the Donatist cause. That statement, plus the next clause which *might*, depending on how it is translated, render agricultural administrators responsible for Circumcellions (rather than, according to Madroñal’s translation, “Donatists” in general) working on their farms, is all the explicit evidence that can be marshaled in support of the theory. For Madroñal, this is far from convincing, and he argues that Circumcellions were instead “bands of Donatist Christian extremists” who represented the radical edge of the movement. Freeing slaves and threatening creditors was a genuine, if minor part of their legacy, but it was rooted in a fanatical devotion to the Christian scriptures rather than any sort of antipathy towards Rome.

One of the two reasons why Madroñal wrote the present book was because of the scarcity of academic literature on the Circumcellions in Spanish. In *Los Circumcelliones*, however, he has succeeded in producing a sourcebook that is essential for scholars of the movement in any language. While Madroñal cannot claim to have

4. Shaw, 2011.

collated all known allusions to the Circumcellions in Augustine's massive corpus,⁵ he has created an indispensable guide to the main primary sources crucial for our understanding of the movement. There are times that I wish the author might have been more skeptical: while acknowledging that we do not have any testimony from the Donatist (let alone Circumcellion) side of the story, he sometimes seems to assume that if a motif is sufficiently represented in the primary sources, it must be broadly accurate (p. 241). This comes out especially clearly in portrayals of the alleged Circumcellion penchant for suicide by cliff-jumping, which Madroñal defends on the basis of many allusions to the practice in Augustine's writings and the fact that they might have had an exemplar in the martyrdom of Marculus (pp. 163-164). But Augustine, as Madroñal reminds us on p. 162, is often "repetitive", and significantly never offers us a specific example of this suicidal tendency. We are left to wonder whether "cliff-jumping" was really so significant a component of Circumcellion self-identity as it appears in Catholic writings, or whether an isolated incident has been transformed into a caricature.

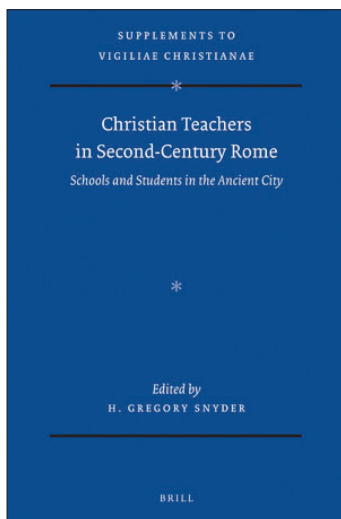
Nevertheless, Madroñal's desire to base his portrait of the Circumcellions directly on the combined witness of the available sources is commendable. In so doing, he is able to bring a statistical component to the debate. While we should not overstate the value of statistics here (after all: should we count all of Augustine's writings separately for the purpose of statistical analysis, or should we group them together as offering us the perspective of one author?), his deployment of quantitative analysis can help us visualize how important a particular facet of the movement was to the controversy. There is a certain romanticism which surrounds the Circumcellion movement which all too often renders it susceptible to wildly diverging interpretations: they have, after all, been successively portrayed as religious ascetics, suffering proletariat, or violent nationalists, their association with Donatism either tenuous or extreme. By both carefully collating our limited corpus of sources and critically examining what we can and cannot know from them, Madroñal has created a compelling re-evaluation of the enigmatic Circumcellions.

5. I noticed, for example, that references to "cliff-jumpers" in Augustine's Sermon 162A.1 or *Homily on John* 11.15 are missing.

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CHRISTIAN TEACHERS IN SECOND-CENTURY ROME



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MANUEL ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ-MUÑOZ
UNIVERSIDAD PABLO DE OLAVIDE
magonmuo@upo.es

EL PRESENTE VOLUMEN TIENE COMO OBJETO LA REEXAMINACIÓN de autores cristianos, sus imágenes y sus textos (como Justino Mártir, Taciano, Marción o los valentinianos) que desarrollaron su labor de enseñanza en la Roma del s. II. La obra, perteneciente a la serie *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* y editada por H. Gregory Snyder, es el resultado de la publicación de un notable elenco de conferencias presentadas en un *workshop* celebrado en el marco de la *Oxford Patristics Conference* en 2015. El volumen se compone de nueve capítulos con su propia bibliografía, además de un par de índices

(de autores modernos citados y de fuentes empleadas) incorporados al final. A modo de introducción, el editor realiza una presentación somera y crítica de cada una de las contribuciones, a la que añade una reflexión acerca de los lugares de enseñanza del cristianismo en la Roma de los Antoninos y los condicionantes espaciales en su didáctica y ritualidad, proyectada como futuro campo de trabajo.

En el primer capítulo (“Jewish Teachers in Rome?”), Judith M. Lieu indaga en la existencia de maestros judíos en la *Urbs*. Por un lado, observa que los vestigios (principalmente epigráficos y vinculados a las catacumbas) del “judaísmo de la diáspora” presentes en Roma manifiestan rasgos particulares de pertenencia a grupos aplicables a estas comunidades en Roma. Asumiendo para su análisis interpretaciones coetáneas del “movimiento rabínico” y siguiendo las descripciones de autores como Galeno, aproxima su interpretación de los maestros judíos a través de un análisis del *Diálogo* de Justino Mártir con el rabino Trifón. Así, encuentra en el texto rasgos de un diálogo de tipo filosófico basado en la *erotapokriseis*, donde Justino se opone a los maestros, líderes de las sinagogas entendidos como las autoridades judías vinculadas con Trifón. Para Lieu, el texto reflejaría la participación de los judíos en el ambiente intelectual del momento en los mismos términos que los cristianos, lo que en un símil empresarial explica como “*a shared venture and shared assertion of the place of the Scriptures in the intellectual marketplace*” (p. 28).

Los dos siguientes capítulos abordan aspectos de la enseñanza entre los gnósticos. A propósito del grupo de los valentinianos, Einar Thomassen (“Were There Valentinian Schools?”) rechaza la denominación “escuelas valentinianas” en favor de “comunidades religiosas” al observar que las alusiones de este grupo con el término *shole* (como opuesto de *ekklesia*) ocurre en fuentes contrarias a los gnósticos. Ya que esta comunidad reconoce cierta instrucción previa al bautismo, el autor indaga en la dimensión performativa de ciertos textos valentinianos que precisarían la figura de un maestro: los tratados sistemáticos, que desarrollan dobles lecturas a través del uso de terminología propia de teorías neopitagóricas coetáneas, donde el maestro ofrecería la guía para su correcta interpretación; las exégesis de las escrituras, cuyo origen vincula al ámbito escolar y al popular comentario de los textos de autoridades; o en las colecciones de comentarios sobre varios temas (especialmente el *Evangelio* de Felipe, que pudo componerse del mismo modo que hizo Arriano con su maestro Epícteto). Por su parte, Christoph Marksches (“Esoteric Knowledge in Platonism and in Christian Gnosis”) se propone observar el carácter secreto en las prácticas de los gnósticos mediante su comparación con tradiciones filosófico-paganas, especialmente platónicas, a través de sus conceptos. Así, el valor de “apócrifo”, presente en varias obras gnósticas como el *Apócrifo* de Juan o los evangelios de Judas y de Tomás, alude a libros de carácter muy secreto

para los gnósticos a la vez que es empleado en la autorrepresentación de grupos cristianos a comienzos del s. II d.C. Por otro lado, estudia los términos “esotérico” y “exotérico” referidos al conocimiento en los textos antiguos: mientras que en autores paganos, como Luciano o Galeno, el binomio establece dicotomías acerca de su apertura (“*public / not public*”) y de la educación (“*of-the-discipline / extra-disciplinary*”) (p. 51), en autores cristianos ya se advierte el secretismo de determinadas enseñanzas y es equiparado a una práctica corriente de la filosofía, como en el *Stromateis* de Clemente de Alejandría. Tras su reflexión sobre la distinción de lo “esotérico” y lo “exotérico” con su práctica más o menos secreta, Markschiefs presenta un nuevo modelo para la interpretación de textos valentinianos, a los que concede unas consecuencias trascendentales que promete desarrollar en trabajos posteriores.

Si bien las fuentes literarias constituyen el principal recurso de las aportaciones del volumen, la iconografía resulta igualmente un campo fecundo. Es el caso de la contribución de Robin M. Jensen (“Visual Representations of Early Christian Teachers and of Christ as the True Philosopher”) toma como fuente las diversas representaciones para buscar el origen del modelo en las imágenes de Jesús en la iconografía cristiana. Su análisis combina una comparación triple: por un lado, las representaciones de los sabios en época romana (aún vigentes en el s. IV), atendiendo a la importancia de la fisonomía y apariencia física; por otro, la caracterización de los maestros en textos de autores cristianos (como la descripción de Justino Mártir frente al judío Trifón, o la apología de Tertuliano sobre el *pallium*), abiertos a la conversación y al debate erudito y en contra de los asuntos mundanos, interpretada como una forma de autorrepresentación que los hace herederos de los filósofos paganos; por último, su estudio de diversos monumentos funerarios (especialmente, sarcófagos), donde el difunto es representado como un erudito, imagen adoptada en la iconografía cristiana y a menudo acompañada de otros elementos iconográficos particulares. Así, como se observa en los múltiples ejemplos e ilustraciones referidos a un contexto funerario que aporta el autor, la representación de Jesús reconoce cierta evolución en torno al s. IV, cuando las acciones milagrosas anteriores son reemplazadas por imágenes de Jesús como maestro. Este cambio manifestaría la transformación y ascensión definitiva de Jesús como maestro del conocimiento verdadero y la fe. El comentario de Jensen es un complemento perfecto a la visión de los maestros cristianos, realizando un recorrido histórico y artístico entre los siglos II y IV.

Al margen de conceptos comunes empleados en el presente volumen como “escuela” o “maestros”, el estudio de Heidi Wendt (“Christians as and among Writer-Intellectuals in Second-Century Rome”) apuesta por la secularización de autores y textos del cristianismo temprano en favor de su propio contexto, de gran dinamismo intelectual y convivencia de múltiples corrientes de pensamiento. Así,

suspende la condición “cristiana” de estos autores para incorporarlos dentro de un aglutinante mayor, el de intelectuales y “expertos” en religión, cuya legitimación no es institucional sino individual, basada en sus propias habilidades intelectuales y retóricas. Para los autores del momento – “freelance experts” – existe una relación entre textualidad y autoridad religiosa, observable en la semejanza de sus habilidades, ambiciones, expectativas y contextos sociales. De hecho, frente a la noción de su composición aislada, la intertextualidad (p.ej., en el uso de los textos de Josefo en los *Hechos* de Lucas o la visión estoica de Jesús en el *Evangelio* de Marcos), su condición de intelectuales manifestaría la dependencia y la retroalimentación del mismo contexto literario y cultural. Así, entre sus avances, la autora sugiere que los evangelios (canónicos y no canónicos) serían el producto de la práctica textual de los intelectuales de su tiempo, con una fuerte carga performativa (“*Instead of the disinterested reflections of pious communities, might the gospels have been written instead to lend credence to the proprietary religious program of one figure or group at the expense of others?*”, p. 97). En líneas generales, la contribución de Wendt constituye un agudo y estimulante aporte para nuevas exploraciones de los autores/expertos cristianos dentro del mundo intelectual en el Imperio del s. II.

Los siguientes capítulos se centran en estudios particulares de autores relevantes, sus textos o escuelas. Winrich Löhr aborda en su trabajo el personaje de Marción centrándose en la problemática que rodea a su figura (“Problems of Profiling Marcion”), tanto por haberse conservado a través de fuentes contrarias (Justino Mártir, Ireneo, Rodón o Tertuliano) como por la proyección de profeta y reformista derivada de la obra de Adolf von Harnack (*Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott / Neue Studien zu Marcion*, 1985). Su trabajo, que parte de las fuentes antiguas para revisar y rebatir las interpretaciones posteriores, está dividido en dos partes. En la primera atiende a las escasas informaciones biográficas: un *nautês* procedente del Ponto, cuya actividad en Roma gozó de cierta proyección entre finales del s. II y principios del s. III, atestiguada por la existencia de discípulos (marcionitas) y opositores (Justino Mártir, Rodón, Tertuliano). En la segunda parte ahonda en la producción de Marción: una epístola, las *Antítesis* y su llamada *Biblia*, integrada por un evangelio (generalmente considerado el de Lucas) y diez cartas paulinas. La propuesta de Löhr pretende deshacerse de la visión de Marción como editor y censor de su *Biblia* y profundizar en el objetivo último de las *Antítesis* a través de su labor editorial. Como conclusión de esta propuesta, que acompaña de prolijas notas, el autor afirma que, en el estado actual de la investigación y a partir de las fuentes disponibles, el estudio de Marción solo puede abordarse en sus dos vertientes: como editor del evangelio y las diez cartas de Pablo, y como maestro cristiano del s. II.

Por su parte, Justino Mártir es el protagonista del trabajo de Fernando Rivas Rebaque (“Justin Martir as an Organic Christian Intellectual in Rome”), abordado de acuerdo con el concepto de “intelectual orgánico”, opuesto al de “intelectual tradicional”, acuñado por Antonio Gramsci (*Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, 1969). En este marco, establece que la evolución del movimiento cristiano en el s. II trajo consigo la propia necesidad de adaptación a las corrientes filosóficas y culturales contemporáneas como la segunda sofística, obligando al reemplazo de las formas previas (profetas, ancianos y maestros) por la del heterogéneo grupo de apologistas. Rivas Rebaque observa una suerte de relación de intereses entre las partes: así, mientras Justino y otros intelectuales en constante desplazamiento encuentran en las comunidades cristianas (*ekklesiai*) – especialmente en las grandes ciudades como Roma, Éfeso o Alejandría – amparo y acogida así como contactos con miembros de las élites y sus hijos, a través de estos nuevos intelectuales orgánicos estas comunidades aprovechan para abrirse y consolidarse tanto hacia el exterior como dentro de la amplia comunidad cristiana, distinguiéndose de los paganos, los judíos y los herejes. Durante su pervivencia, abundan sus mensajes de reivindicación de una identidad propia, observándose que el nuevo perfil de “intelectual orgánico” como el de Justino (relacionado con las nuevas élites, instruido en la filosofía y en la interpretación de los textos escritos, especialmente los sagrados) apelaba a otro tipo de cristiano. Posteriormente, la nueva dinastía severa y el cambio en las condiciones ecuménicas propiciaría la emergencia de los obispos como los nuevos intelectuales orgánicos, con mayor atención a la perpetuación de su figura dentro de la iglesia cristiana; solo algunos apologistas desbancados fueron seleccionados, especialmente por su cualidad ejemplarizante, como fue el caso de Justino. El capítulo de Rivas Rebaque es reseñable igualmente por la exhaustiva bibliografía que emplea, que equipara en extensión al texto de su contribución.

Relacionado con Justino, el capítulo de Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui se centra en su “discípulo” Taciano y su presentación como maestro (“Tatian *Theodidaktos* on Mimetic Knowledge”), a partir de una revisión de su pensamiento en su única obra conservada, la *Oratio ad Graecos*. Partiendo de la relación del autor con el ambiente intelectual de la segunda sofística y su profundo conocimiento filosófico, el estudio aborda fundamentalmente el análisis de los conceptos de *mimesis*, *thauma* y *pathos* en su texto. Especialmente en cuanto a la *mimesis*, Herrero reconoce que Taciano lo emplea principalmente en términos negativos para mostrar el falso conocimiento que aportan la cultura griega en general y los maestros y filósofos en particular, mientras que le confiere un uso legítimo exclusivamente cuando es aplicado a Justino y a sí mismo en la medida en que esta *mimesis* deriva de Dios. En general, se observa que estos tres conceptos constituyen un conjunto coherente dentro del pensamiento

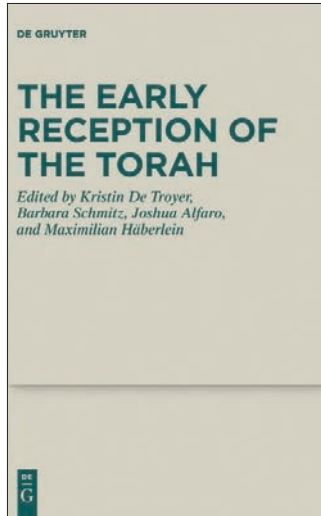
de Taciano y su doctrina, que aboga por un conocimiento derivado directamente de Dios y de la interpretación de las sagradas escrituras. Como en los casos anteriores, Taciano asume la preocupación por presentarse como referente válido; así, *theodidaktos* se convierte en su propia denominación y en su autorrepresentación y, a la vez, en la contraposición con otros referentes, como Héraclito. Complementada con dos anexos (*Adam's Condemnation* y *Rhodon vs. Apelles*) que abundan en la aportación del autor cristiano y su legado, la contribución de Herrero sigue la línea de los más recientes trabajos para la reconsideración de Taciano.

En último lugar, el capítulo de H. Gregory Snyder aporta una revalorización de Teódoto el Curtidor y su entorno físico en la Roma del finales del s. II (“Shoemakers and Syllogisms: Theodotus ‘the Cobbler’ and His School”). Al margen de su concepción como heresiarca y fundador del adopcionismo, Snyder rastrea y recoge las fuentes que hablan del individuo y la imagen que presentan de él. Especialmente interesado en su aspecto profesional, el autor revisa la construcción de la imagen del “curtidor (*shoemaker*)-filósofo” especialmente en la literatura imperial latina, destacando además como referentes las figuras de Simón el Curtidor (contemporáneo e interlocutor de Sócrates cuyo taller se encontraba próximo al ágora) y del apóstol Pablo (originalmente también un curtidor, y en quien reconoce ciertas coincidencias con el adopcionismo). Así, la imagen del artesano en el taller formaría parte de la propia autorrepresentación de Teódoto, inspirándose en estos referentes anteriores, útil en la diferenciación de otros intelectuales y autores cristianos más reconocibles. Al margen de las fuentes literarias, Snyder aborda la condición social de los curtidores a través de epígrafes y estelas funerarias con relieves (especialmente el caso de *C. Iulius Heliuss*, procedente de *Porta Fontinalis*, en las proximidades del Foro en Roma) y observa su especial concentración en las inmediaciones de estos espacios públicos del poder (concretamente en el *vicus Sandalarius*, donde existía un altar consagrado a *Apollo Sandalarius*). Aunque no persiga descubrir la ubicación concreta del taller de Teódoto, la reconstrucción de Snyder para este ambiente artesanal a través de piezas y planos es una plausible aproximación del ambiente social y cultural para la escuela del heresiarca, y aporta una imagen más realista de las interacciones intelectuales y religiosas en la ciudad de Roma en el s. II.

En conjunto, los trabajos que componen el volumen dan cuenta del variado crisol de grupos y agentes cristianos activos en las enseñanzas cristianas en el contexto de la capital romana. Sin duda, uno de los grandes aciertos de las contribuciones y lo que les aporta una mirada fresca es la apertura al contexto intelectual y cultural en el que se insertan las figuras (Justino Mártir, Taciano o Marción), permitiendo observar cómo se nutren de una formación grecorromana común a la vez que se reconocen patrones comunes en ellos, tales como la relevancia de su capacidad performativa y

la preocupación por revalidar su imagen pública. En general, esta obra aporta una visión actualizada e innovadora sobre los maestros cristianos, sus influencias contemporáneas y sus espacios en la Roma cosmopolita durante el momento de mayor efervescencia cultural de época imperial, el s. II d.C.

THE EARLY RECEPTION OF THE TORAH



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CAYETANA H. JOHNSON
UNIVERSIDAD ECLESIASTICA SAN DÁMASO
cayetanah@sandamaso.es

ES MUY GRATA TAREA LA REALIZACIÓN DE ESTA RESEÑA sobre un excelente trabajo de comentario, interpretación e investigación sobre diversos aspectos de la Torá, el texto sagrado de los hijos de Israel. Los autores de cada uno de los artículos que componen este volumen no decepcionan por su rigor y erudición.

El libro que se va a comentar inicia con una introducción en la que se expone la intención de su publicación a partir de las conferencias de una reunión de la SBL, “Program Unit on Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature”, que tuvo lugar en Bos-

ton en 2017. En este congreso se abordó el estudio de la Torá hebrea con diversos puntos de vista y temas, desde una especialización del aspecto jurídico hasta los conceptos de la emotividad, el temor de Dios o las pruebas a las que el ser humano se ve sometido en algunas circunstancias, especialmente las que suponen un cambio radical. El punto de partida de esta colección de artículos gira alrededor de cómo se interpretó/especuló con la idea de la obediencia de Abraham en la teología del período del Segundo Templo, es decir, desde el retorno del exilio de Babilonia con los persas aqueménidas hasta la destrucción del lugar más santo para el judaísmo en el año 70 d.C. bajo las legiones de Tito. Aunque el patriarca Abraham es muy anterior a la recepción de la Torá en el Sinaí con Moisés, uno de los autores de este volumen sostiene que en Abraham ya se percibe una actitud y forma de expresión muy próximas al estilo deuteronomista. Por ello, Mark Mariani, el primer articulista, propone un estudio sobre el *De Abrahamo* de Filón de Alejandría, el *Libro de los Jubileos*, el Documento de Damasco de la comunidad de Qumrán y Ben Sira, donde se centra en el “himno de los ancestros” que glosa personajes desde Enoc hasta la época macabea. La propuesta de Mariani ofrece una perspectiva en la que las tensiones exegéticas eran muy vivas y dinámicas en aparente contradicción como suele presentarse la polémica hebrea en el plano ideológico y doctrinal. En el fondo, el judaísmo de entonces buscaba en sus orígenes y a través del patriarca Abraham al precursor del proyecto de Dios que ya se iba anticipando en la salida de Ur y que formalizará en la teofanía del Sinaí.

El siguiente artículo aborda la queja de los israelitas ante Moisés al tener sed cuya referencia es *Éxodo* 17, 1-7. Supone un punto importante de inflexión en el relato bíblico pues Israel presenta dudas y falta de confianza ante Moisés y Dios. Este episodio ha sido tratado desde diversas fuentes, la Yahvista, la Elohista y la Sacerdotal, incluso desde el punto de vista de Richard E. Friedman¹ se trata de la visión polémica de un redactor bíblico que favorecía a Moisés contra su hermano Aarón. De nuevo y en el marco de la especulación doctrinal de la época del Segundo Templo, los autores del este artículo, Van Henten y Castelli, hacen referencia cruzada con la versión ofrecida en la Septuaginta (el texto griego leído en la liturgia hebrea de habla griega) tanto de *Éxodo* 17, 1-7 como del *Deuteronomio* 33, 8-11, donde se indica que se da un traducción ligeramente diferente al texto masorético y, además, este episodio es visto en el *Dt* en un contexto mesiánico y escatológico.

El motivo de la prueba sobre Moisés también encuentra su espejo en el *Libro de Judit*, según Van Henten y Castelli mencionados arriba, ya que la heroína judía ve en la

1. Friedman, 1987, pp. 197-201.

prueba de Moisés y la carencia de agua para los israelitas en el desierto una prueba radical sobre su pueblo y sus líderes. Por analogía, Judit se identifica con la prueba que Dios envía sobre su persona, se presenta como una líder de su pueblo y recibe la bendición de los ancianos con el modelo del *Deut.* 33, 8-11 al haber superado la prueba.

De manera contrastada, Van Henten y Castelli ofrecen el contrapunto de Flavio Josefo, el sacerdote- historiador testigo de la destrucción del año 70. Josefo prefiere obviar el motivo de la prueba para resaltar el papel de Moisés y el milagro del agua que hace brotar de una roca para dar de beber a los intranquilos hijos de Israel.² En este sentido, para Josefo es más importante la admiración que sienten los israelitas hacia Moisés que toma la iniciativa y consigue el milagro del agua para satisfacer la sed de su pueblo.

Con el artículo de Angela Harkins Kim se aborda el aspecto emocional de la Torá, muy en consonancia con la importancia que dan los judíos al estudio de la Ley, sus mandamientos y la preservación de la conducta ética basados en el amor en un sentido muy amplio pues implica también la razón. Por ello, la autora señala que la emoción “sirve para un propósito pedagógico que crea recuerdos fuertes y palpables”. La memoria de toda la historia de Israel es fundamental para entender su supervivencia como nación. Por ello en la celebración de Pesaj, la Pascua judía, se lee la Hagadá que recrea la experiencia de Moisés, la salida de Egipto, el desierto, las debilidades y las bondades de un pueblo itinerante. Harkins Kim propone el *Libro de Baruj* como ejemplo del vaivén de emociones que refleja adecuadamente el modelo afectivo que se daba en el período del Segundo Templo. A través de sus himnos y plegarias, se mueve y conmueve al lector para que no olvide la experiencia del desierto y la continua presencia de Dios en tiempos legendarios. A la plegaria penitencial recogida en Baruj le sigue la Sabiduría presente en la Torá, la esencia femenina que consuela y nutre.

En su artículo, Beate Ego propone una nueva aproximación al *Libro de Ester* y al *Libro de Tobit* y su estrecha relación con el cumplimiento de la Torá. Los dos libros se sitúan en un contexto de diáspora y desde el libro canónico de Ester se percibe una clara conexión con el mundo de los apócrifos del Antiguo Testamento representado en *Tobit*. Las versiones griegas de ambos ponen un especial acento alrededor de la Torá, probablemente porque ya en la Septuaginta se siente que el pueblo judío goza de una mayor integridad con su Dios y la Torá. Además, el mismo espíritu va a ser la fuerza que gire alrededor de la Revuelta Macabea, que estalla por las sucesivas persecuciones religiosas contra los hebreos que les suponía no poder cumplir con la Torá.

2. *Antigüedades* III 36-37.

Tanto la observancia de la Ley como la persecución no hacían más que reforzar los vínculos del pueblo judío, aún a costa de su vida.

Continuando con otra aportación sobre el *Libro de Tobit*, Joseph A. Weaks propone un trabajo minucioso de comparación en las diversas versiones de *Tobit* que se han preservado, llamando la atención de por qué el personaje no tenía mayor presencia en el s. I ya que sólo se han conservado fragmentos en lengua aramea en Qumrán. Tobit es el paradigma de un judío devoto de la Ley Mosaica y resuenan constantemente diversos versos del *Deuteronomio* 6: “teme al Señor Dios”, “todos los días de tu vida”, “ama a Dios con todo tu corazón y toda tu alma” (expresiones también localizadas en otras partes de la Biblia hebrea),³ todo ello con una mayor frecuencia que en la propia Biblia masorética y la Septuaginta. Por tanto, el autor expone con gran claridad pedagógica que el autor de *Tobit* debía tener en mente estos aspectos deuteronomistas con la intención de mostrar que la Ley es lo que identifica la fidelidad a Dios y a Israel.

No se puede separar la tradición sapiencial de la Torá como ley. De ello trata la aportación de JiSeong James Kwon a través del Libro de Ben Sira en el que se busca conciliar en qué punto se da una mayor influencia del aspecto sapiencial propio de la época del Segundo Templo sobre la Torá deuteronomista de su tiempo. Para ello, Kwon expone las diversas ideas sobre hasta dónde Ben Sira se puede incluir en la tradición legalista de la Torá para luego acometer los contenidos judíos de piedad, libre albedrío, elección y misericordia dentro de este marco. Según el autor, la Torá se había convertido en la norma religiosa fundamental en el período del Segundo Templo y rara vez se la identificaba con la literatura sapiencial hasta que en Ben Sira se propone la cuestión. Igualmente, Kwon sostiene que, quizás, habría que reformular la pregunta e interpretar que el autor de Ben Sira buscó legitimar el contenido de *Sabiduría* propuesto con la autoridad mosaica de la Torá (algo similar ocurre con el *Libro de Jubileos*). No quiere decir que Ben Sira sea iconoclasta con respecto a la tradición oral y Moisés pero que contiene aspectos propios de los que representa la palabra *filosofía* y su encuentro con la *paideia* como educación donde la Ley como *nomos* tiene un lugar dominante. Muy al estilo helenístico desde el punto de vista literario, por cierto.

Con Hanna Tervanotko se aborda el tema de la adivinación y la Ley. A partir de 1 *Macabeos* 3, 48 la autora expone hasta qué punto la Torá seguía utilizándose en tiempos posexílicos con valor oracular en lo tocante al cumplimiento de la Ley Mosaica, tanto en el plano individual como en los procesos judiciales. Desde el punto

3. Como *Josué*, 1 y 2 *Reyes* y *Crónicas*.

de vista jurídico se sabe que la función de los tribunales del Gran Sanhedrín era la de investigar de manera exquisita desde una perspectiva forense los casos a los que debían hacer frente. Sin embargo, todavía persistía el componente sobrenatural en las acciones del tribunal judío cuando la circunstancia del caso era muy difícil, por tanto, el sacerdote-juez buscaba la inspiración divina a través de la Torá. Tervanotko expone ejemplos del mundo clásico en los que se hacían las consultas oraculares a las imágenes de los dioses grecorromanos. Algo similar se realizaba en Israel con la Torá al ser el Libro de los Libros revelado en el Sinaí. La autora concluye que el redactor de 1 *Macabeos* probablemente era conocedor de la práctica oracular de estatuas de sus vecinos griegos, así como los judíos, en particular los helenizados (especialmente perseguidos en la Revuelta Macabea). Mas información sobre estas prácticas la tenemos en la *Sabiduría de Salomón*. En consecuencia, tampoco debe parecer extraño que la consulta jurídica practicada sobre la Ley de Moisés en sentido adivinatorio se pueda poner en un contexto de pueblos en contacto, especialmente en la era helenística, pero con la diferencia de que en lo que se conoce como el período del Segundo Templo en el lado hebreo, la importancia de la Ley Escrita era máxima y se recurría a ella para saber de los tiempos venideros en vez de las estatuas como era la costumbre griega. Algo de esta actitud ya se anticipa en Ezra y Nehemías, artífices del retorno del exilio de Babilonia: prevalece la Torá y no hay nada más que ella.

Es sabida la importancia del Shabbat en el judaísmo, el descanso semanal mencionado más de 80 veces en la Torá que debe su terminología como *sabatu* en Mesopotamia desde el punto de vista agrícola, por ejemplo. Para los hebreos, su significado tiene un aspecto que va más allá de los ciclos de la vida terrenal ya que se interioriza como una imitación de Dios en el día del descanso de la Creación que estableció tal como se puede leer en *Génesis* 2, 2-3. Con su artículo, Gerbern S. Oegema se centra en el período de la Revuelta Macabea hasta el final del siglo I d.C. para poner en contexto con otros textos (*Jubileos*, 1 *Enoc*, los Manuscritos del Mar Muerto, Flavio Josefo y el Nuevo Testamento) las diversas interpretaciones de la tradición oral y la halajá del precepto de shabbat en este momento tan apasionante como el del Segundo Templo. El mismo autor reconoce la complejidad del asunto ya que no se percibe con claridad hasta qué punto el shabbat era observado de manera estricta antes de los Macabeos ya que determinados grupos hacían valer sus intereses socioeconómicos por encima de la interpretación legalista del día del descanso. En este contexto, el episodio neotestamentario en el que se le pregunta a Jesús de Nazaret si se puede buscar el sustento en shabbat (véase la p. 148 sobre *Mateo* 12, 1-13) queda iluminado por el discurso y análisis de Oegema.

Sobre la problemática de la Torá y su relación con 4 *Macabeos* trata la exposición de Tessa Rajak. En este *Macabeos* se narra la muerte de los siete hermanos por mar-

tirio junto a su madre. Es llamativa la propuesta de Rajak de indicar que el autor de este texto muestra una clara y paradójica tendencia hacia un auditorio griego que no refleja el estilo de la Septuaginta y otros. En cambio, los valores que se exponen en 4 *Macabeos* sí representan la genuina tradición judía de héroes bíblicos cuya protección siempre viene de lo Alto, del Dios de Israel que protege a Su nación gracias a la resistencia frente a la apostasía. Y aún hay más ya que Rajak conecta el aspecto sapiencial judío con la sabiduría griega interpretándola como filosofía de muy alto nivel. Si se tiene en cuenta que el ambiente en el que se origina 4 *Macabeos* es la ciudad de Antioquía del Orontes, de gran diversidad cultural en clave del período helenístico y romano, suena más que razonable que, aun conservando el espíritu judío, el autor de 4 *Macabeos* debía tener una amplia formación, no tanto como judío helenizado que tanto denunciaron los Macabeos históricos, sino como hijo de unas circunstancias sociohistóricas propias de pueblos en contacto.

El artículo más arriesgado es el propuesto por Michael Langlois. El *Libro de Enoc* forma parte del canon de la Biblia en Etiopía y, según Langlois, quizás la relación entre la Torá y *Enoc* sea un aspecto difícil de manejar. Por un lado, porque las tradiciones que nutren la iglesia etiópica con respecto a la Ley y el mundo de Enoc divergen en diversos aspectos, que tienen que ver con la composición tanto del Pentateuco como de *Enoc*. Por otra parte, si uno se adhiere a las fuentes documentales, la redacción sacerdotal P parece seguir las tradiciones enóquicas por lo que se lee en *Génesis* 5 junto al episodio de los ángeles caídos. Pero también hay una aparente contradicción con la fuente Yahvista J, que prescinde de cualquier asociación con Enoc. Con este discurso, Langlois nos presenta un aspecto también propio de la discusión en tiempos de formalización de textos y el gusto polemizante del Próximo Oriente se hace sentir desde el punto de vista creativo: los opuestos se atraen y quizás haya que ver en esta oposición entre la Ley Mosaica y *Enoc* una mayor contribución mutua que un cisma declarado.

Cerrar este pequeño pero intenso volumen con espíritus malignos y demonios es un buen broche y más en estos tiempos convulsos en los que esta comentarista hace la reseña. El *Libro de Jubileos* participa de esta creencia de seres diabólicos, ampliamente desarrollados en los Manuscritos del Mar Muerto y la literatura cristiana, probablemente como respuesta a unos tiempos convulsos que trae a la memoria diversos episodios del pasado de Israel, tentados por otros dioses que provocaban el desvío, el hundimiento y el exilio hebreo. Por ello, Ryan Stokes presenta un interesante artículo sobre cómo se percibía el mal en el mundo a través de estos seres inferiores y demonios. En consecuencia, Stokes inicia con un estudio de estas criaturas en el *Libro de Jubileos* (que, por otra parte, es un antiquísimo lugar común en la literatura de exorcismos del Próximo Oriente Antiguo) para, a

continuación, exponer hasta qué punto estas presencias se vivían como algo real o, por lo contrario, era una manera de afirmar la Torá en la vida judía. Aunque hay opiniones divergentes entre especialistas (véase la Bibliografía del capítulo), el autor de *Jubileos* sí enfatiza que para que Dios conserve su prometida protección sobre la nación elegida, es necesario que Israel mantenga su compromiso con la Torá ya que, si se prescinde de ella, la nación quedará expuesta al enemigo y a la deportación. En este sentido, la Torá quizás sea la fenomenal guía de exorcismo en la aplicación ética diaria, siempre desde la honradez espiritual.

Ciertamente la lectura de este volumen, *The Early Reception of the Torah*, es valiosa para aquellos interesados en la literatura bíblica comparada, igualmente en el campo de la historia de las religiones y la filosofía y su impacto en el mundo de la Biblia, especialmente en los tiempos de emergencia del cristianismo. La variedad de temas expuestos no hace más que ser el espejo de la vida cotidiana, sus reflexiones y debates entre la existencia humana y Dios, no siempre en armonía. Tal como era entonces, así sigue siendo en nuestro presente. Cada artículo añade una amplia biografía que aporta vías de investigación y facilita la localización de temas. Todo un reto mantener viva esta disciplina desde el punto de vista transversal.

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LA RELIGIONE URBANA



URCIUOLI, EMILIANO RUBENS (2020). *La religione urbana. Come la città ha prodotto il cristianesimo*. Bologna: EDB, 160 pp., 12 € [ISBN: 978-1-1084-9490-8].

MAR MARCOS
 UNIVERSIDAD DE CANTABRIA
 marcosm@unican.es

EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI (EL A.) CONDENA EN ESTE PEQUEÑO libro el resultado de la investigación llevada a cabo en el marco del proyecto de investigación *Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Formations*, desarrollado en el Max-Weber-Kolleg de la Universidad de Erfurt, que ha dado, entre otros notables resultados, el libro colectivo del mismo título.¹ El proyecto estudia la relación entre el cambio religioso y las transformaciones en el espacio y las formas de vida urbanos, así como las prácticas y los

1. Rüpke & Rau, 2020.

discursos de urbanidad en un amplio marco espacial y temporal. El A. define lo que se entiende por *religión urbana* en este libro: “el impacto de lo urbano sobre la religión, o el proceso a través del cual la interacción con lo urbano da forma a la religión, analizando los factores y las dinámicas que en ella pueden considerarse como *efectos urbanos*” (p. 39). El libro contiene nueve “retratos urbanos” (p. 37) independientes y avanzan en orden cronológico desde mediados del siglo I (Pablo de Tarso) hasta las primeras décadas del siglo IV (Eusebio de Cesarea).

Los dos primeros capítulos tienen un carácter preliminar y explican la teoría. En el capítulo 1 (“A scuola da (Henri) Lefebvre. Un approccio spaziale-critico all’antica religione di Cristo”, pp. 13-29), el A. expone el punto de partida de su análisis a partir de una frase del filósofo y sociólogo marxista Henri Lefevre, en su teoría crítica del espacio: “no se puede pensar en algo sin situarlo espacialmente”. Así sucede en el caso de las religiones: el espacio se crea y, una vez creado, produce efectos. La ideología religiosa se hace presente en los lugares (en el caso del cristianismo, en las iglesias, los altares y los santuarios) y necesita materializarse en el espacio para sobrevivir. ¿Qué espacios se asocian al cristianismo de los orígenes, los físicos o los imaginarios? En el libro se opta por los espacios materiales, que, en el caso del cristianismo antiguo, pueden ser rastreados porque algunos existen todavía hoy, o quedan de ellos restos arqueológicos, o pueden asociarse a formas y modelos espaciales más o menos transculturales o porque poseemos sobre ellos textos escritos. El A. se propone escribir una historia del cristianismo “espacialmente” desde la época de Cristo hasta la de Constantino, a partir de la tesis de que fue la ciudad, como organización compleja de espacios, redes y usos espaciales, la que produjo el cristianismo. El capítulo 2 (“Urbanizzando Gesù. Cenni di teoria generale e panoramica del volume”, pp. 31-39) pone el acento en la diferenciación entre espacios y lugares. Las ciudades de la Antigüedad funcionaban más como lo primero que como lo segundo. La gente hacía en ellas vida de barrio, con una circulación limitada, y la religión era una forma de trascender los límites de lo local, “de salir de casa sin moverse”. Sobre estas premisas, a partir de una selección de fuentes, el A. se embarca en el análisis de los procesos a través de los cuales la interacción con lo urbano da forma al cristianismo.

Nueve “retratos urbanos” lo ilustran. El primero (capítulo 3: “Prima lettera ai Tessalonicesi. Un’associazione professionale dirottata”, pp. 41-51) analiza la carta de Pablo a los tesalonicenses, el texto cristiano más antiguo conservado (escrito entre el 49 y el 51 d.C.). La carta permite conocer la propaganda religiosa en las ciudades y cómo se implanta una religión que viene de fuera. Pablo y sus colaboradores, instalados por un tiempo en Tesalónica como trabajadores manuales, construyen a partir de este entorno profesional la comunidad cristiana. Siguiendo la tesis de Ascough, el A. defiende que los primeros cristianos fueron reclutados en el ambiente de traba-

jadores manuales gentiles, reunidos en una asociación profesional activa en el escenario urbano, que sustituyó la divinidad tutelar tradicional por Cristo. Pablo habría sabido así aprovechar las oportunidades que ofrecía el espacio urbano de crear redes sociales. El capítulo 4 (“Prima lettera di Pietro. Una casa per gli stranieri”, pp. 53-63) se sitúa apenas un decenio más tarde de estos hechos. El texto, apócrifo, escrito en griego (ca. 80-95 d.C.) quizás en Roma en forma de carta abierta está dirigido a los cristianos de Asia Menor, “extranjeros dispersos”. Estos extranjeros, ¿lo son en sentido metafórico o real? El A. se inclina por la segunda opción, la de que pudieran ser marginados sociales en la ciudad, que encontraban en la asamblea cristiana confort espiritual y un espacio de acogida, quizás no sólo espiritual sino también físico, para quienes, como extranjeros, estaban excluidos de la beneficencia cívica.

En los capítulos 5 y 6 el escenario cambia para situarse en la populosa Roma de mediados del siglo II. “Giustino. Un filosofo *freelance* nella megalopoli” (pp. 65-76) presenta al filósofo cristiano, inmigrante palestino, en una Roma sofocante y poco cómoda para la circulación, trabajando con sus estudiantes en su apartamento. Sobre la base de las Actas de su martirio (Justino fue ajusticiado entre el 163 y el 168), el A. reconstruye las condiciones de su vida en Roma, en un apartamento encima de unos baños públicos, un espacio estratégicamente situado para la captación de estudiantes jóvenes, provinciales expatriados que Justino ayudaría a integrarse en el nuevo ambiente urbano. El capítulo 6 (“Erma. Visionario di quartiere”, pp. 77-87) estudia el *Pastor de Hermas*, un texto de tradición intelectual urbana producido en Roma, casi contemporáneo de Justino. El A. identifica a Hermas como un comerciante o productor de sal a las afueras de Roma, en la vía Campana que conduce al Adriático. Analiza la relación entre los espacios visionarios extraurbanos que relata el narrador y los espacios físicos urbanos del “empresario religioso” y del público (urbano) al que va destinada la obra, un auditorio heterogéneo de inmigrantes residentes, para quienes el texto fabrica y evoca lugares. El capítulo 7 (“*A Diogneto* o sulla discrezione”, pp. 89-99) se adentra en el análisis de este enigmático texto, del que se desconoce el autor, la fecha (entre mediados del siglo II e inicios del III) y el entorno urbano en el que fue producido (¿Roma, Alejandría, Esmirna?). De este texto apologético frecuentemente estudiado, al A. le interesa su utilidad para conocer un aspecto decisivo de la urbanidad: la gestión de la información, cómo se difunde y se recibe la información sobre las preferencias religiosas en los espacios urbanos. *A Diogneto* es, bajo la mirada del A., “un pequeño manual cifrado de urbanidad cristiana” (p. 97).

El capítulo 8 (“Pionio. Un martire a zonzo”, pp. 101-112) estudia el martirio cristiano como un fenómeno urbano. Son urbanos los escenarios donde se ejecutan los suplicios ante un público igualmente urbano, que disfruta gratis del espectáculo. El A. elige el relato del martirio de Pionio, ambientado en Esmirna en la segunda

mitad del siglo III, en la época de Decio, porque, como ningún otro relato de martirio proto-cristiano, conduce al lector por la ciudad: de la casa del protagonista al ágora, a la prisión, al altar de los sacrificios, acabando en el estadio donde Pionio es quemado vivo. Un auténtico *city tour* por lugares clave de Esmirna, presentando al mártir como “un trozo de su ciudad” (p. 112). El capítulo 9 (“Un attore tra noi: Cipriano e la divisione sociale del lavoro”, pp. 113-123) ilustra también la relación profunda del mártir y su ciudad, partiendo de la negativa de Cipriano a abandonar su sede episcopal, Cartago, la capital de África, para ser ajusticiado en otro lugar. A partir de una carta de este sobre un cristiano que ejercía la profesión de actor, el A. analiza la estigmatización de algunas profesiones urbanas entre los cristianos para poner de manifiesto la continuidad de tabúes y prejuicios de la sociedad en la que los estos se insertan.

El capítulo 10 (“Dura-Europos. Rumor(e) urbano e *restyling* cristiano”, pp. 125-136) explora los prejuicios anticristianos relacionados con el espacio a partir del material arqueológico. El A. estudia la reestructuración de una casa descubierta en 1932, reacondicionada como edificio de culto cristiano a mediados del siglo III. El edificio, que constituye el ejemplo más antiguo de arquitectura cristiana, se encuentra en una calle a lo largo del lado occidental de la muralla donde se alinean otras casas transformadas en santuarios (de los dioses palmirenos, de Zeus Kyrío, Aphlad, Mitra y una sinagoga). La forma urbana condiciona la cohabitación de grupos religiosos, todos ellos orientados al interior, sin voluntad de ostentación pública – como sucede, por otra parte, con los edificios privados de Dura. El acondicionamiento del edificio cristiano, que incluía un espacio para la lectura, un baptisterio y decoración pictórica en las paredes, evidencia un tiempo de tranquilidad y seguridad en el que, como reza el título del capítulo, los cristianos podían hacer, sin temor, “un poco de ruido”.

El capítulo 11 (“Eusebio. L’ancoraggio spaziale e il diritto alla città”, pp. 138-154) estudia el inicio del proceso de apropiación total del espacio urbano por parte de los cristianos. El ascenso al poder de Constantino y el fin de las persecuciones permitió a estos aspirar al control espacial de las ciudades. Eusebio de Cesarea, uno de los mejores exponentes de una nueva generación de *capi* religiosos con influencia política, dio voz al sentido de orgullo y revancha de los cristianos en el uso del espacio. Eusebio proporciona la primera descripción de un majestuoso edificio para el culto cristiano, la basílica de Tiro en Fenicia. Desde Constantino, los cristianos consiguieron un nuevo y transformado acceso a la vida urbana, con el derecho de usar y transformar el espacio; un derecho que, con el paso de las décadas, pasó a ser un privilegio que condujo al monopolio urbano, eliminando mediante diversas estrategias (expropiación, profanación, incorporación y reutilización) los espacios de los rivales.

Se podría objetar que este bello libro no trata de aspectos fundamentales de la “urbanización” del cristianismo, como las creencias, los ritos o la circulación de

los libros, que fue crucial en la cristianización. El A. mismo lo reconoce. Pero la obra aporta otras perspectivas innovadoras: el valor de la comunicación y las redes urbanas, la integración y el aislamiento, la visibilidad y la invisibilidad de los grupos religiosos, la topografía como factor de identidad. Podría objetarse también que, a menudo, el A. trabaja sobre hipótesis, fundamentadas en la autoridad de otros, pero al fin y al cabo hipótesis. Pero si se quiere innovar en la interpretación de textos como los que aquí se estudian, ya muchas veces transitados, hay que arriesgar y el A. así lo ha hecho. El resultado es una obra de muy agradable lectura, tanto para especialistas en la materia como para un público interesado, que merecería ser traducida a otras lenguas. El culto lector y el estudioso del cristianismo antiguo encontrará en ella una mirada original y refrescante, con fundamentos metodológicos sólidos, que combinan el análisis histórico-filológico, la sociología y, cuando ha sido posible, la arqueológica.

La aparente sencillez de estos textos cortos, que no suelen sobrepasar las diez páginas y pueden leerse independientemente, es el resultado de muchos años de estudio y del vigor de un concepto, el de “religión urbana”, que el grupo de Erfurt ha logrado convertir en categoría de análisis. Esta pequeña joya de Emiliano Urciuoli se suma a otras obras del autor sobre la construcción de la identidad religiosa,² que lo han consagrado como uno de los estudiosos más innovadores del cristianismo antiguo.

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2. Urciuoli, 2013; Urciuoli, 2018.

HEILIGE BÄUME



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MARION MEYER
 UNIVERSITÄT WIEN
 marion.meyer@univie.ac.at

THIS MONOGRAPH EVOLVED FROM A MASTER'S THESIS, submitted in 2019 in Ancient History at the University of Göttingen. The text (120 pages) and the endnotes (70 pages) are followed by the bibliography, a useful general index, one map and a short abstract.

The introduction (chapter 1, pp. 9-23) defines the subject and its treatment in scholarship. The author (MZ) studies trees that are “*von Bedeutung*” (which can mean of relevance, significance, importance) in religious contexts (cult and myth). Which functions did they have and which relevance was ascribed to them? The focus is on cases that are best attested for the Greek mainland, including islands (and exam-

ples in Asia Minor), from Archaic through Hellenistic times. The study is based on literary sources, with epigraphical ones added when relevant. Images are considered selectively. Archaeological remains are scarce; the trees studied do not exist anymore.

The term “sacred tree” emerged in 19th century scholarship which was obsessed with “nature” as a primordial principle of religious thought. Divinities were thought to have been derived from natural phenomena, venerated in nature and next to natural landmarks, including trees.¹ Edward B. Tylor’s concept of animism and fetishism and James G. Frazer’s belief that religion originated with fertility cults were highly influential.² Greek sacred trees were thought to have been the seat of divine power or spirit.³ Animistic approaches have long been abandoned in studies of Greek religion. However, as MZ argues, ancient evidence for specific sacred trees (qualified as *hieros*) calls for a nuanced study of the phenomenon.

Chapter 2 (pp. 25-37) discusses trees in groves. An *alsos* (grove) was an area characterized by its vegetation, connected to (or defined as) a sacred area. An *alsos* provided the visitors of sanctuaries with shade and a pleasant atmosphere (in Hellenistic times, a sepulchral area could qualify as a grove, too). Groves may have been chosen or created by the cult recipients themselves, and they were protected by them, as demonstrated by Callimachus (Hymn 6: Demeter appears and punishes Erysichthon who felled a tree in her “beautiful” grove in Dotion, Thessaly) and Herodotus VI 75 (grove of Argos), and by *leges sacrae*. Some activities reported for groves remain obscure (e.g., the fate of chariots in Poseidon’s grove in Onchestos, mentioned in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo).

Groves were sacred because they belonged to the owner of the sanctuary. MZ asks whether there was anything else to convey their sacredness. Were nymphs supposed to live in the trees, were trees thought *to be* nymphs? The tree about to be felled by Erysichthon in Dotion yelled; Ovid has a nymph living in the tree and speaking. Nymphs can visualize springs or trees since Homeric times, and they can live together with trees (Homeric hymn to Aphrodite). Their existence can be linked to trees, but as anthropomorphic figures with speech they are different from trees. MZ adds that there were no attested cults for nymphs of trees.

Chapter 3 (pp. 39-78) investigates single trees in sanctuaries, focusing on four examples: Zeus’s oak tree in Dodona, Athena’s olive tree on the Acropolis in Athens, the *kótinós* in Olympia, and a tree on Delos.

1. See Bötticher, 1856.

2. Tylor, 1871; Frazer, 1890.

3. Mannhardt, 1877.

The oak tree in Dodona (pp. 39-57) is mentioned in the *Odyssey* as the seat of Zeus's oracle.⁴ There are, however, divergent traditions regarding the oracle; doves or priestesses are also attested as a medium. MZ emphasizes that Homer (as well as Aeschylus and Sophocles) insist on a speaking oak tree (without priests as interpreters); later sources might have maintained this Homeric tradition (because this was how the Greeks wanted to imagine the origin of the oracle). The sources do not give clear information about the practice of the oracle in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. However, there is one lead tablet (of the many ones that contain questions to the oracle, dating from late 6th cent. to late 2nd century BCE) that mentions the oak tree (in the early 4th cent.), and coins of ca. 300 BCE with an image of the tree attest to its function as a distinctive marker of the sanctuary.

One cannot expect a master's thesis in ancient history to engage with the subtleties of archaeological research and debate, but MZ's comment on the reconstruction of the various phases of the sanctuary as hypothetical and the location of the tree as "*unsicher*" (uncertain) might be misleading. Is there a plausible alternative to the location suggested by the excavator Sotiris I. Dakaris,⁵ widely accepted by scholarship?

When the god "speaks" by the tree, what does this say about the tree and its "agency" (p. 39)? Apparently MZ is not sure whether the tree is a representative of Zeus or his occasional seat, and she oscillates throughout the text between the "talented oak tree" and its function as a medium. She looks for other cases of trees sacred to Zeus or trees in which divinities may house (but I think one should separate these examples from the unique case of an oracular tree). In the end, MZ sees its function as a medium as a hypothetical possibility. As she is right to point out, the tree is not linked to the god in a way it might be to a nymph. It seems not even to have been originally linked to Zeus (as a scholion to the *Odyssey* suggests). The oak tree gets its "*Bedeutung*" (relevance, importance, significance) through the association with Zeus; in MZ's words: "*erst dadurch wird dem Baum 'agency' zugesprochen*" (p. 56). No, the tree might be speaking, but it is not its agency; it is the god who speaks, with the tree as the medium (and the tree has no independent message). If a god takes the shape of a hero's companion or of a swan or of rain, it is not the companion's or the swan's or the rain's agency, it is the divinity's agency, and the divinity is acting in disguise.

The olive tree was Athena's gift to the Athenians (pp. 58-64). MZ starts with Apollodorus who says that Athena was "the first to plant the olive tree", in the context

4. For Dodona and its oracle, see now Chapinal-Heras, 2021.

5. See Dakaris, 1963, pp. 35-49 (with reconstructions).

of the strife between Athena and Poseidon for Attica. This myth is not attested before the mid-5th cent. BCE.⁶ Athena's olive tree on the Acropolis, however, was thought to be one of the most ancient trees in the Greek world (sources in n. 312). The Epidaurians asked for Athenian olive trees as material for statues of two goddesses because these trees were either the only ones existing at that time or the most sacred ones (Hdt., V 82; reference for a 7th-6th cent. date in n. 332).

Numerous sources attest to the importance of the olive tree for Athens.⁷ Athena's tree, situated in the Pandroseion next to the Erechtheion, was said to have been burnt by the Persians in 480 BCE but to have budded the next day, and this was taken as a demonstration of Athena's continuous presence and care and of the continuation of Athenian life and cult, as MZ points out. I also agree that it is not necessary to assume the existence of one everlasting plant. Although physically replaced from time to time, the tree symbolically remained the same one. It is not attested to have had a function in cult practice. .

The wild olive tree (*kótinós*) in Olympia (pp. 65-69) was introduced by Herakles, in order to provide crowns for the winners (Pindar) – a tradition that pushes the origin of the games back to mythical times. The *kótinós* is among the oldest trees mentioned by Theophrastus. MZ assumes a possible reference to Athens and its cultivated olive, with the Olympian wild olive as a deliberate counterpart (and, according to one source, it derived from a tree in the Ilissos area of Athens). MZ doubts whether the *kótinós* can be exactly located (but Paus., V 15, 3 saw it behind the temple of Zeus, that is, west of it!). The relationship of this *kótinós* to the attested grove in the sanctuary remains unclear (since Hellenistic times, the crowns were taken from only one tree). The tree apparently served no cultic function.

The games in Olympia were the oldest Panhellenic ones, and those introduced later in Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea likewise awarded crowns made of plants. In Isthmia, the crowns were also taken from the leaves of trees in a sacred grove (of pine trees).

A tree on Delos (pp. 70-78) was thought to have supported Leto when she arrived on the island to give birth to Apollo and Artemis. Was it a palm tree (Homeric hymn to Apollo) or an olive tree (Callimachus) or an olive tree associated with a palm tree and a laurel tree (Euripides)? A palm tree is commonly associated with Apollo, and a palm tree on Delos was listed by Theophrastus among the oldest trees. The winners of the games on Delos were crowned with palm branches, a custom introduced by

6. For a discussion of the relevant sources see Meyer, 2018.

7. This subchapter might have profited from a consultation of the reviewer's monograph: Meyer, 2017, pp. 38-41, 69-70, 295-299, 395-415 (on the olive tree and the strife of Athena and Poseidon).

Theseus (Pausanias). MZ assumes that the olive tree, Athens' sacred plant, was added to the older tradition at the time of Athens' dominant position in the Delian League.

MZ takes Callimachus's statement about the stump or trunk of the olive tree being "guarded" by the Delians as a starting point for reflections on the fate of the physical trees. She is – with good reason – skeptical whether decayed trees were preserved as sacred relics (but ponders the idea that such an interest might have emerged in Hellenistic times). The existence of sacred trees in Roman Imperial times presupposes cases of replacements, as MZ reminds us. She cites the case of a tree felled in a sanctuary and subsequently dedicated as a clue for a possible interest in preserving the material remains of sacred trees.

Sacred trees in sanctuaries often were, as MZ convincingly argues, connected to a divinity or a hero and as such reminders of a distant past, evidence for a long tradition of the sanctuary. They were not sacred because of their material quality, but because of their symbolic value. They were neither objects of cults nor included in cult practices.

Chapter 4 (pp. 79-115) discusses individual trees outside sanctuaries.

Such trees were not the property of cult recipients but might be part of their myths (as they are seen, treated or planted by gods or heroes) and might thus serve as links of the location to a figure of the remote past (and MZ is right to point out that this is not a late phenomenon, of Hellenistic and Roman Imperial times). As examples, MZ lists the plane tree in Gortyn that marked the spot of Zeus's union with Europa and the Lygos tree on Samos that was Hera's birthplace (and, according to Pausanias, the oldest tree). By including this tree (which had been given much attention by the excavator Ernst Buschor) in this chapter MZ implies that the Lygos tree stood outside the sanctuary, but is it plausible to assume that Hera's sanctuary did not comprise Hera's tree? (cf. Paus., VII 4, 4: near the Imbrasos river).

The relevance and function of individual "sacred" trees in the context of cult is usually not specified by the sources. An example of a tree that got local attention beyond the myth is the myrtle tree in Boiai (chosen by Artemis as the location for the foundation of the city and subsequently venerated).

Prominent examples for trees of relevance in cult are the Athenian *moriai*, sacred trees that provided the oil for the prizes at the Panathenaia, Athens' main festival for the city goddess. According to late sources (Photios, Suda), the *moriai* in the Academy were used for the prize oil. However, as Lysias's 7th speech (shortly after 397 BCE) and a passage in the *Athenaion politeia* (see below) reveal, *moriai* also grew next to other olive trees (that were not sacred) on private ground – and they were protected not just by divine powers (Athena and Zeus Morios), but also by Athenian law. MZ convincingly concludes that the sacredness of the *moriai* was defined by function, not by location or ownership. Both sources raise further questions that MZ

prefers to leave open. Was the dissemination of the *moriai* (from the Academy to more sites in Attica) a gradual process?⁸ Was the *sekos* referred to in Lysias's speech a tree stump or an enclosure? Did the change in the practice of recruiting the prize oil, as attested in the *Athenaion politeia* (formerly by private leaseholders, later by the archon, collected as a tax on the estate and not from individual trees) mark a decrease of relevance of the *moriai*? And might the tradition that the *moriai* were descendants of Athena's sacred tree on the Acropolis (a belief not attested until Hellenistic times, as MZ emphasizes) be a late construction in order to compensate for their decreased relevance? I prefer to think that the *moriai* had always been believed to be descendants of Athena's gift. The *Athenaion politeia* furthermore states that formerly anybody who dug up a *moria* or fell one was tried by the Areopagos and, if convicted, punished with death; later, the law remained in force, but there were no trials. MZ interprets the severe punishment at the time of Lysias's speech with the experience of the damage done to the Attic countryside at the time of the Peloponnesian war.⁹ Curiously, she does not discuss the date of the changes attested in the *Athenaion politeia*, convincingly based on the first appearance of the archon's names on the prize amphorai in 392/391 BCE.¹⁰

Is there any evidence for a "*Baumkult*" (trees as object of cult), as assumed in the 19th century? MZ analyzes the practice described in Theocritus' poem of the marriage of Helen and Menelaos, with a chorus of girls singing about a plane tree with an inscription that calls for the veneration of the tree as a plant of Helen. MZ (who considers the passage to be the poet's fiction, n. 611) concludes that hanging ribbons on trees is no proof of cult practice concerning the tree but part of the cult for a divine being; the plane tree has to be considered as the tree of a heroine (Helen).

Was *Baumkult* practiced in order to evoke the epiphany of a divinity? As there is evidence for cult images made of sacred trees, MZ discusses the relationship of such images to the respective tree. Trees could remind of the wood a cult image was made of, but they did not become sacred nor could a living tree serve as a kind of an aniconic cult image. MZ compares the tradition of "sacred stones" and natural phenomena as objects of cult. Convincingly, she aligns sacred trees to sacred mountains.

8. For the *moriai* as the providers of the prize oil see Bentz, 1998, pp. 23-40. For the enormous quantities of oil required for the amount of prizes given in the early 4th cent. BCE, see Papazarkadas, 2011, pp. 271-275 (Papazarkadas's book is listed in MZ's bibliography).

9. *Contra* Papazarkadas, 2011, pp. 267-268.

10. See Bentz, 1998, pp. 23-27 and Papazarkadas, 2011, p. 267. The most comprehensive study of the phenomenon of the *moriai* remains Papazarkadas, 2011, pp. 260-284 (consulted by MZ). On the collection and use of the prize oil see Valavanis, 2014.

The sacredness of a mountain depends on its connection to a divinity as whose seat it serves. Rivers, on the other hand, are venerated in their own right – and in anthropomorphic shape, as personifications. This is revealing: Wouldn't the cult of a tree presuppose the personification of such a tree, as a female figure, a nymph?

Chapter 5 (pp. 117-120) summarizes the results. Sacred trees are a complex phenomenon. Their location is a decisive criterion for their function and "Bedeutung". They generally owe their sacredness to a connection with a cult recipient (and this is true for Zeus's oracular oak tree, too), and, as property of a divine being, they were not allowed to be felled. Holy groves contribute to the atmosphere of a sanctuary. Individual trees often serve as reminders of the connection to a mythical figure and thereby link the location to the remote past and a long tradition. Sacred trees could be used for specific purposes (crowns for the winners in Olympia, olive oil for the winners in Athens).

Sacred trees might be involved in cult ritual but, contrary to assumptions by earlier scholarship, they were not the object of cult (and the idea of nymphs living in trees has turned out to be of minor relevance for the sacredness of trees).

MZ has chosen a complex topic. The evidence for sacred trees is of diverse nature and usefulness, scattered over centuries, and often ambiguous. In numerous cases, the evidence raises more questions than it can answer, and MZ cannot be blamed for the fact that much remains elusive. I do see, however, a certain reluctance to take decisions in matters that are controversially discussed and a tendency to leave questions open. Is it really that hard to arrive at a conclusion about the meaning of *sekos* in Lysias's speech? How could a *moria* be distinguished from other trees nearby if not by some kind of enclosure?

MZ has consulted a vast number of authors, and she is eager to demonstrate this in abundant endnotes. These are the main place for her comments on the approaches and arguments by previous scholarship. Not all of the endnotes contribute substantially to the discussed topic. MZ's concentration on literary sources is fully legitimate for a master's thesis in ancient history, but she would have been well advised to consult at least some standard studies in archaeology (e.g., Bentz 1998 on the Panathenaic Amphorai and their olive oil).

Her text would have profited from an attempt to achieve more consistency and – above all – clarity. It is not at all easy to follow MZ's arguments and interpretation. She tends to present long, convoluted sentences with idiosyncratic syntax and phrasing. Even a native speaker has a hard time understanding what she intends to say.

With this book, MZ presents a survey of a multifaceted phenomenon of Greek culture that has been difficult to grasp in its diversity and ambiguity. She has focused

on the most relevant examples, discussed the pertinent evidence and scholarship, and, hopefully, once for all closed the debate about the worship of trees.

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