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'The Gods of the Nations are Idols' (Ps. 96:5): Paganism and Idolatry in Near Eastern Christianity

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This thesis will explore the presentation in Christian literature of gentile religious life in the Roman Near East in the first few centuries AD. It will do so by performing a close study of three sources – the Syriac *Oration of Meliton the Philosopher*, the Syriac translation of the *Apology* of Aristides, and the Greek *Address to the Greeks* of Tatian. It will compare their presentation of a number of areas of gentile religious life – focussing particularly on iconolatry, sacrifice, and morality – and attempt to build a coherent picture of Christian attitudes to these areas. It will then compare these attitudes with a variety of non-Christian evidence: the majority of this will be literary sources, and in particular Lucian of Samosata, but will also include epigraphic evidence from the region. Other Latin and Greek sources will be compared when applicable, but the focus will remain on religious life in the Roman Near East. In the process, this dissertation will not only determine whether it is possible to talk about a single Christian 'attitude' towards gentile religious life in the area, but also develop a more detailed picture of the perception of that religious life by its gentile participants.

This dissertation will also help to improve our understanding of the relationship between Christians and their gentile neighbours in the Roman Near East. In particular, it will explore the role that Christian literature played in the development of hostility towards the cult in this period. It will conclude by exploring the reasons for this hostility, and placing Christian literary attitudes in their proper context, by demonstrating that Christian literature, and the attitudes that it promotes, could have had a significant impact on their interaction with gentiles, and that this impact has largely been overlooked in scholarship on the development of Christianity.

'The Gods of the Nations are Idols' (*Ps.* 96:5):
Paganism and Idolatry in Near Eastern Christianity

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List of Transliterations

The following table demonstrates the standard transliterations for Hebrew and Syriac lettering used in this thesis.

Letter	Hebrew	Syriac (Serto)	Syriac (Estrangula)	English
alaph	א	ܐ	ܐ	ʾ
beth	ב	ܒ	ܒ	b
gamal	ג	ܓ	ܓ	g
dalath	ד	ܕ	ܕ	d
he	ה	ܗ	ܗ	h
waw	ו	ܘ	ܘ	w
zayn	ז	ܙ	ܙ	z
ḥeth	ח	ܚ	ܚ	ḥ
ṭeth	ט	ܛ	ܛ	ṭ
yod	י	ܝ	ܝ	y
kaph	כ	ܟ	ܟ	k
lamad	ל	ܠ	ܠ	l
mem	מ	ܡ	ܡ	m
nun	נ	ܢ	ܢ	n
semkath	ס	ܣ	ܣ	s
ʿe	ע	ܥ	ܥ	ʿ
pe	פ	ܦ	ܦ	p
ṣade	צ	ܨ	ܨ	ṣ
qoph	ק	ܩ	ܩ	q
resh	ר	ܪ	ܪ	r
shin	ש	ܫ	ܫ	š
taw	ת	ܬ	ܬ	t

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List of Abbreviations

AAS	Annales Archéologiques de Syrie
AJPh	American Journal of Philology
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
BIWK	Petzl 1994
BMC	British Museum Catalogue
ChHist	Church History
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum
CIS	Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum
CJ	The Classical Journal
ClAnt	Classical Antiquity
CQ	Classical Quarterly
CR	The Classical Review
ECA	Eastern Christian Art in its Late Antique and Islamic Contexts
FGrH	Die Fragmente die griechischen Historiker
G&R	Greece & Rome
HThR	Harvard Theological Review
IGLS	Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie
ILS	Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JHI	Journal of the History of Ideas
JR	Journal of Religion
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JThS	Journal of Theological Studies
KRS	Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1963
NT	Novum Testamentum
OGIS	Orientis Graeci inscriptiones selectae
P&P	Past & Present
PAT	Hillers and Cussini 1996
RB	Revue Biblique
RelStud	Religious Studies
RSP	Gawlikowski 1974.
SEG	Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum
TAM	Tituli Asiae Minoris
TEAD	*The Inscriptions at Dura-Europos conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters*. New Haven.
VC	Vigiliae Christianae
VT	Vetus Testamentum
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful mum, Liz, who, sadly, won't see this work, but she has, in some sense, been with me every step of the way.

In loving memory.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1   Introduction

Religious life in the Roman Near East is a notoriously thorny business. Writing about the Near East itself is troublesome enough; Millar, in his work on the area, demonstrated that producing a coherent history of a region with so much ethnic and linguistic variation would be impossible, not least because of the 'amnesia' that inhabitants often demonstrate of pre-Hellenistic history.[1] Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to write about religious life, independently from socio-political or cultural developments, in a society that had no sense of the secular.[2] The issue is complicated by the arrival, in the first and second centuries, of a new and seemingly dangerous cult: Christianity. Scholarship is divided as to the impact that Christianity had on religious life, both in the Near East and in the Graeco-Roman world as a whole; Holm argued that Christianity, and the process of conversion, needed to be examined at a civic level,[3] while Nock and MacMullen considered it a primarily personal experience.[4] This debate is most clearly seen in the studies of Franz Cumont, whose *Religions Orientales*[5] examined a number of cults of oriental origin[6] and attempted to identify parallels with Christianity. It has long been demonstrated that this approach gives a misleading understanding of these so-called 'oriental cults',[7] and that it distorts our perception of the interaction between early Christians and their neighbours.

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[1] Millar 2003:6. This is further complicated by a tendency to abandon history which was incompatible with the Hellenistic world (Butcher 2003:280).

[2] Berlin 1996a:2. That is not to suggest that the Western Graeco-Roman world *did* have a sense of the secular: as Davies argued, such a concept would make little sense in ancient thought (2004:230).

[3] Holm 1996:137

[4] Nock 1933:7; MacMullen 1984:95-7. See also Butcher 2003:366-7.

[5] I refer to the 2006 5th edition, edited by Bonnet and Van Haeperen, which is identical to the 1929 4th edition. For convenience's sake, however, I cite the 1911 English translation.

[6] These cults were not necessarily oriental in nature, and as such Cumont's work is not directly relevant to the question at hand: however, it does serve to show the uncertainty over the degree of impact that early Christianity had in the Graeco-Roman world as a whole. See Beard, North and Price 1998a:246. See below, 1.2.1.

[7] For more on some of these cults and the relationship with Christianity, see below, 3.3.4.

Fortunately, we are in a position to assess, at least to some degree, the attitudes of early Christians to local religious life in the Near East, and therefore to better understand the impact that Christianity may have had in this area. We are in possession of texts (or translations of texts) that, on some level, relate to exactly this topic (because they are written either by, or about, inhabitants of the Near East). By using these texts, we can better assess the attitudes that these early Christians had towards religious life in the Levant. At the same time, we can compare this attitude with that seen in non-Christian sources,[8] which will help us to build up a better picture of Near Eastern Christian attitudes, and what role they played in the developing dialogue with their non-Christian neighbours.

This thesis will take the three most relevant of these texts – namely, the Syriac *Oration of Meliton the Philosopher*, Tatian's *Address to the Greeks* and the Syriac translation of the *Apology* of Aristides – and examine them in detail. I aim to establish the degree to which it is possible to identify Christian attitudes to local religious life in the Roman Near East, and whether these attitudes match the picture given by the limited non-Christian sources that we do have. By doing so, I aim to build on our understanding of Near Eastern Christianity in the early period, and to investigate how the attitudes such texts display could improve our overall understanding of religious life in the Roman Near East. Finally, my thesis will examine the role these attitudes may have played in the relationship between Christianity and their opponents, and whether or not it could have contributed to persecution. It will focus on three key ideas within the texts: traditional polytheistic attitudes to the statues of their gods, to the powers and efficacy of their gods, and to the morality of the gods and of

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[8] As Kaizer noted, "research into religious life in the Classical Levant seems handicapped by the nearly complete absence of sources which may hint at what the inhabitants of the region in the Hellenistic and Roman periods actually 'believed'" (2008a:25). However, as I shall show, I am not interested in what people *believed*, for such a word is dangerous in this context; I am primarily concerned with how religious life was *perceived*. See below, 1.6.

the worshippers themselves. It will combine these studies with the limited information that we find in relevant polytheistic literary sources, both contemporary and older ones, as well as epigraphic and archaeological evidence where appropriate. In the process, I hope to establish the role such texts played in the developing dialogue with the non-Christian world.

1.2   The Roman Near East

Thus far, I have used the terms 'Near East' or 'Roman Near East' with little explanation. I use Millar's definition of the region, as "the region, or series of linked regions… between the Taurus Mountains and the Red Sea",[9] which overlaps with the modern countries of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. However, I will also use texts and inscriptions which relate to Asia Minor, namely the so-called 'confession inscriptions', as well as to the Latin- and Greek-speaking parts of the Empire to the west of the Near East. Even in the three texts named above, their focus is not solely on the Near East, and so it will be important to keep a broad perspective.

1.2.1   Religious life in the Roman Near East

Some discussion is needed of the current state of scholarship on religious life in the Roman Near East. Much modern scholarship has been concerned with the approach of Franz Cumont, who discussed 'Oriental cults' (meaning, primarily, the so-called 'mystery cults' associated with Cybele, Isis, Mithras and others). To call these cults 'Oriental' implies firstly that they share a unity in theology or practice, and secondly that this unity is distinctive to the East. Cumont argued that it was the influence of these 'Oriental' cults which corrupted

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[9] Millar 1993:3. For a similar geographical definition, see Butcher 2003:11-12.

Western religious practice and led to the decline apparent in the first Christian centuries.[10]

This position has been comprehensively undermined in the last century: MacMullen was extremely critical of the term 'oriental cults', which "has meaning only for those who think that most of the Levant and Near East, with Egypt and parts of the Middle East tossed in, shared religious beliefs and practices sufficiently similar all to fit better together than any of them might fit with the Greco-Roman – that is, that Mithra was more like Sarapis than like Dionysus, the Syrian triad more like Isis than like the Capitoline triad".[11] MacMullen's attitude is generally shared by scholars, who suggest that the variety of religious practice in the Roman Near East is too vast to attach such a handy label. However, it is worth highlighting some of the characteristics which Cumont attributed to these 'oriental cults', as they will feature to some extent in the Christian material which this thesis examines. In particular, Cumont suggests that these cults share a pre-occupation with immortality,[12] and a tendency towards aniconic worship (characterised by the worship of water, high places and trees as well as the baetyls more commonly associated with aniconic practice).[13] It is certainly true that these features are prominent in these 'oriental religions', but, as I shall show, they are far from characteristic, and in no way can they be used to distinguish 'Eastern' from 'Western' religious life and practice.

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[10] Cumont 1911:10. In particular, Cumont argued that these cults thrived because they fulfilled a spiritual need which the "cold and prosaic" traditional cults were unable to do (1911:28-9); this interpretation was shared by Godwin (1981:38). As I shall show below, however, such Oriental cults may fulfil a different, but no more important, need. To characterise traditional cults as purely "prosaic" is to misunderstand the potential significance of religious practice to the individual in the Graeco-Roman world.

[11] MacMullen 1981:127. See also Estienne 2006:151. On modern 'triadomania' and the tendency to view triads as characteristic of the Roman Near East, see Butcher 2003:342

[12] Cumont 1911:43.

[13] Ibid: 116. Stewart argued that such depictions were characteristic of the Near East (2008:298), whilst Butcher similarly argued that Near Eastern cults shared a tendency to depart from "the norms of classical representations" (2003:336). An example of this distinctiveness may be seen in Herodian's attitude to the statue of Elagabal: he observes that ἄγαλμα μὲν οὖν, ὥσπερ παρ' Ἕλλησιν ἢ Ῥωμαίοις (5.3.5, 'it was no statue of the sort that Greeks and Romans put up'; on the use of ἄγαλμα, see below, 2.3.1). See also Millar 1993:12, who argued that this question was "essential" to our understanding of religious life in the area.

A second issue with the characterisation of 'Eastern religions' is found in the apparent conflict between 'indigenous' and Hellenistic or Roman cult, since "the religious history of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East has invariably been analysed in terms of an intersection between 'indigenous' and 'foreign'".[14] To what degree should we envisage a 'culture clash' between indigenous, Semitic-speaking locals, and Hellenistic settlers? We must address this question in order to produce a meaningful assessment of religious conditions in the Roman Near East.

Before we do so, however, some discussion of the terms 'Semitic' and 'Hellenistic' is required. By 'Semitic', I do not intend to refer to any specific racial group, as there is little evidence that ancient authors did so.[15] 'Semitic' will therefore refer only to a linguistic group (including primarily Hebrew, Syriac and Aramaic). 'Hellenism', however, is more difficult to define; it has what Sartre describes as a "variable geography".[16] Although derived from Ἑλληνίζειν, 'to speak Greek', it cannot be reduced to a simple literary phenomenon,[17] since it also entails religious and cultural processes.

Bowersock argued that 'Hellenism' in the Near East was the result not simply of Hellenistic influence, but of mediation by later Roman occupiers,[18] which makes it

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[14] Kaizer 2008a:21.

[15] Although Strabo, quoting Posidonius, perhaps comes closest to identifying ethnic consistency, kinship or common characteristics amongst the peoples of the Near East (*Geog.* 1.2.34): ἄριστα δ' ἂν δόξειεν εἰπεῖν ὁ Ποσειδώνος, κἀνταῦθα ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν ἐθνῶν συγγενείας καὶ κοινότητος ἐτυμολογῶν. τό γὰρ τῶν Ἀρμενίων ἔθνος καὶ τὸ τῶν Σύρων καὶ Ἀράβων πολλὴν ὁμοφυλίαν ἐμφαίνει, κατά τε τὴν διάλεκτον καὶ τοὺς βίους καὶ τοὺς τῶν σωμάτων χαρακτῆρας ('Poseidonius seems to say it best, in looking for the etymology of names in nations of one stock and community. For the race of the Armenians, that of the Syrians, and that of the Arabs display a great similarity, through their language, their way of life and the build of their bodies'). See also Sartre 2008:34.

[16] Ibid: 26.

[17] Ibid: 26. See also Butcher 2003:278.

[18] Bowersock 2008:22. Similarly, Millar argued that "the "Hellenistic" Syria, with a distinctive mixed culture, which our evidence allows us to encounter, is that which evolved under the Roman Empire" (2006:29).

impossible to identify the degree of influence of this process on indigenous religious life.[19]

Nevertheless, Sartre maintained that "native cults succeeded in resisting, whether or not they were modified under the influence of Hellenistic fashions".[20] This would imply a conflict between Hellenistic religious life and local, indigenous practice, some of which was modified, or superseded, by the introduction of Hellenism. This raises the question of whether or not it is possible to identify an 'indigenous' form of religious life, or indeed of social life. Bradford Welles argued that in places like Dura-Europos, Greek culture was exclusive to the governing classes, while the 'locals' spoke in Semitic tongues, and continued to worship their indigenous gods.[21] Butcher argued that religious practice was surprisingly resilient to the influence of Hellenism, and that this was therefore one means through which a local identity could be expressed in an otherwise Hellenistic social setting.[22] However, Millar also observed the difficulties in distinguishing between 'indigenous' and 'Hellenistic' religious life: he highlighted a phenomenon of 'amnesia', particularly in the cities of the Syrian Decapolis, whereby the inhabitants of the region display a lack of awareness their

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[19] Similarly, Butcher argued against the suggestion that Hellenism was merely a 'veneer' covering an otherwise indigenous set of social and religious practices (2003:274).

[20] Sartre 2008:43.

[21] However, he suggested that, in the Roman period, the ruling class began to display an increasingly 'Semitic' character (Bradford Welles 1951:261). Notwithstanding his use of 'Semitic' as an ethnic, rather than linguistic, marker, Bradford Welles' model of the Hellenistic ruling class, based largely on the prominence of names in inscriptions, ignores the question of 'subscribed' rather than 'factual' identity: Pollard questioned whether any of the inhabitants of Dura-Europos could trace their ancestry back to the original Macedonian settlers, but that these "manifestations of identity", whether real or not, were equally significant (2007:88); bilingual inscriptions represented deliberate adherence to Hellenistic cultural norms as a means of social advancement (ibid. 95) and therefore cannot confidently be used to identify changes in the ethnic make-up of Dura-Europos' population, as Bradford Welles attempts to do: such a distinction is impossible to drawn in the Roman period (Lichtenberger 2008:151). On subscribed identity, see also Millar 1993:5 and 1998:7.

[22] Butcher 2003:335, although he also noted that this did not imply a general culture of such resistance.

history.[23] Outside the Jewish territories (and perhaps the cities of the Phoenician coast), genuine continuity with the pre-Hellenistic period can only be seen in Mabog/Hierapolis.[24]

It would therefore be impossible to identify an indigenous religious heritage in the Roman Near East: the influence of Hellenism (whether 'true' or 'Roman' Hellenism) modified such traditions to the extent that the inhabitants themselves subscribed to a Hellenistic model of civic religious life. That is not to say that the introduction of 'new' gods caused the old gods to be abandoned. This is an inadequate model for describing the relationship between two traditions;[25] it is better to think in terms of a 'hybridization' of two cultures.[26] As such, we should not consider that Hellenism in the Near East was identical to the Hellenism of the Western Greek world: if indigenous religious life was influenced by Hellenism, then undoubtedly Hellenism in the region was influenced by local conditions. I do not therefore intend to distinguish between Semitic-speaking and Greek-speaking culture during this thesis, as this would create a misleading impression of the situation in the Roman period.

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[23] Millar 1993:2; he highlighted Damascus as the most prominent example of this phenomenon (2006:21). Butcher argued that such cities deliberately abandoned any history which did not fit the 'new' Hellenistic model (2003:280), but there is little evidence of this.

[24] Millar 2006:22, although when Lucian, in *On the Syrian Goddess*, asks the locals about the origin of the temple of Atargatis, they display very little concrete awareness, and the author is presented with a variety of stories.

[25] As seen, for example, in the altar from Dura-Europos dedicated to Θεῷ πατρῴῳ/ Διὶ Βετύλῳ ('Zeus Baetylos, the ancestral god') (*SEG* 7.341). The juxtaposition of the Greek Zeus with the Semitic 'Baetylos' demonstrates a tendency to interpret through association rather than suppression; the same phenomenon may be seen in the erection of a temple on Jebel Sheikh Barakat (in North-western Syria) to 'Zeus Madbachos (from the Aramaic *mdbk'*, 'altar') and Selamenes, the ancestral gods' (*IGLS* 2.465). See Millar 1993:1-2 and 254-5.

[26] Sartre 2008:41; see also Butcher 2008:48.

1.3   Discussion of source material

Christian sources tend to be discussed in two separate groups. The first group, internal texts, are written between Christians, whether to an individual or a community; they are often referred to as hortatory texts, because their purpose is usually to encourage the recipient to hold fast in their faith, and to reaffirm Christian identity and doctrine. The most famous examples of internal texts are the New Testament epistles, some of which were written to individuals and others to communities. The second group, external texts, are addressed to an outsider, one or more non-Christians.[27] This group of texts can have a variety of purposes: they may aim to convert (as, for example, John states in the conclusion to his Gospel)[28] through a variety of means, or they may aim to defend Christians against accusations of improper religious or moral conduct. Such texts are usually categorised as polemic or apologetic.

1.3.1   Apologetic and polemic

Extensive scholarship has been done on the nature of Christian apologetic and polemic.[29] The basic definition of these terms is clear: apologetic is intended to act primarily as a legal defence against charges (as was the case in Plato's account of Socrates' apology), while polemic is an attack on the beliefs, practices or standards of an external group. However, this distinction often fails to function in practice:[30] apologetic aims can often be

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[27] It may well be that such texts were never actually intended to be read by the alleged addressee(s): for more on this, see below, 1.4.

[28] *John* 20:31: ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ('these things have been written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that as you believe you might have life in His name').

[29] See esp. Edwards, Goodman and Price1999, Fiorenza 1976.

[30] Price 1999:106-7; Frede argued that the classification of apologetic and polemic "often seems so vague as to be useless" (1999:132), because apologetics and missionary propaganda "functioned like two sides of the same coin" (Fiorenza 1976:3). However, Bitz argued that apologetic was essentially at odds with a religion with claims to absolute truth, because it required the admission of deficiencies; it also required a logical,

achieved by using polemic to deflect criticism from Christians back onto their accusers.[31]

There is also a positive aspect to apologetic: it is regularly used to advertise the appeal of a

Christian way of life, and thus to win converts, so it should not be treated as a purely

defensive approach. I do not intend to talk about either as a fixed category. I shall highlight

instances when the texts display characteristics of one (or both), but it would be dangerous to

label a text apologetic, even when it gives its own title as an *Apology*.

1.4   The nature of the Christian sources

All of my sources, both Christian and non-Christian, present a variety of different

problems which must be addressed before we can use them as source material for this

dissertation. There is a remarkable amount of Christian literature from which to choose:

however, in order to properly address the questions posed by this dissertation, they must fulfil

three main criteria, in that they must be:

1) Of an early (pre-third century) date. By the end of the second century AD, and

    particularly after the events at Lyons in 177,[32] genuine apologetic as a defence against

    accusations became extremely prominent in Christian texts. As a result, later texts are

    more concerned with providing a defence of Christian doctrine and practice than

    giving insights (genuine or otherwise) into the religious life of the non-Christians

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reasonable justification of the irrational: "apologetics is the defense of the indefensible" (1976:100). In
addition, as Edwards et al. pointed out, genres change over time (1999:2), and the setting is often fictional (a
'scenario' rather than a 'genre') (Alexander 1999:24). Young argued that apologetic is difficult to identify as
a genre before the emergence of Christian apologists in the second century, but the existence of Jewish
apologetic (such as Philo's *Embassy to Gaius*) indicates that this is not the case (1999:82; cf. Fiorenza
1976:2).

[31] It will be seen below that both Aristides and Tatian use this approach in their texts. Suddith highlighted a
distinction within the category of apologetic itself: 'positive' (which asserted that God was true) and
'negative' (which defended the beliefs and practices of the Christians) apologetic (2003:299). Most authors,
however, rely on both policies, which renders this distinction particularly unhelpful.

[32] For an account of these martyrdoms, see Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 5.1. For more on Christian persecutions in general
in the first and second centuries, see below, Chapter 5.

around them.[33] As such, as useful as they may be for defining Christian identity in this formative period, they offer little to the questions at hand.

2) <u>External texts (that is, addressed to non-Christians)</u>. Johnson has highlighted three key features of internal or hortatory Christian text: staying in touch with one another; instructing or educating; or defining group identity.[34] However, such texts contain little discussion of non-Christian religious life, and cannot often tell us about Near Eastern Christian attitudes towards their gentile neighbours. These attitudes are, however, considerably more prominent in external texts. As noted above, these texts fall into two main categories: apologetic and polemic. It might be argued that the majority of external texts were rhetorical exercises designed to remind other Christians of the wickedness of gentiles and were never in fact intended to be read by their gentile addressees,[35] which would make them in actual fact internal texts. However, although this may be that case, two points must be raised against this objection. Firstly, such texts would inevitably influence Christian attitudes towards their non-Christian neighbours; they would therefore at the very least reach the addressee indirectly (or second-hand, as it were).[36] Secondly, regardless of the addressee, the discussion of religious life in the world around them remains relevant

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[33] Although, as noted above, the two should not be entirely distinguished.

[34] Johnson 2009:173. See also Fiorenza 1976:4: "the understanding of early Christian mission rests on the dichotomy between inside and outside". Lieu agreed that identity formation is a key part of all Christian texts, both in defining the identity of the group and in reinforcing the 'correct' version of the truth (2004:73-87). This goal can be accomplished whether the supposed addressee is a Christian or non-Christian; we therefore see another reason for removing the distinction between apologetic and polemic. However, a distinction between internal and external text remains integral to the question of this thesis, because explicitly internal text will not allow us to examine Near Eastern Christian attitudes to local polytheistic religious life.

[35] Beard, North and Price 1998a:310.

[36] "It is the texts' own presupposition that they will shape their audiences' self-understanding, even if their authors must have taken for granted how few would actually *read* them" (Lieu 2004:10). Furthermore, as Cameron pointed out, if apologetic text were written only for the converted, it would not explain the success or the spread of Christianity (1991:45).

whether it is Christians or non-Christians who are understood to be reading these texts.

3) <u>Written by, or addressed to, inhabitants of the Roman Near East</u>. The aim of this dissertation (to assess Christian attitudes towards religious life in the Near East) can only be achieved by using texts with a specific relevance to that region. As self-explanatory as this may sound, it requires a little elaboration. This relevance may be because the author is Near Eastern himself (in which case we would expect at least some understanding of that religious life to be evident in the text), or because the addressee, either rhetorical or actual, is (in which case we would expect an attempt to make it relevant to that readership).

There are three key texts that seem to fulfil these three criteria better than any others, namely the Syriac translation of the *Apology* of Aristides, the *Oration of Meliton the Philosopher*, and the *Address to the Greeks* of Tatian.

1.4.1   The Syriac translation of Aristides' *Apology*.

This text is, in some respects, the most complicated of the three on which I focus, at least in terms of its provenance. It is a Syriac translation, found at the convent of St. Catharine on Mt. Sinai,[37] of a lost Greek apology, and is transmitted in Rendel Harris' 1893 edition, as well as by Pouderon and Pierre in a 2003 French edition.[38] We know little of the author himself. Eusebius records two apologists, named Aristides and Quadratus, presenting apologies to the emperor Hadrian during a visit to Athens in AD 124.[39] We know little more

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[37] For discussion of the manuscript tradition, see Rendel Harris 1893:3-6 and Pouderon and Pierre 2003:32.

[38] For the Syriac text, I use Rendel Harris' edition. My own translation is provided in the appendices, and all chapter references are taken from that translation.

[39] Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 4.3.3: καὶ Ἀριστείδης δέ, πιστὸς ἀνὴρ τῆς καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς ὁρμώμενος εὐσεβείας, τῷ Κοδράτῳ παραπλησίως ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ἀπολογίαν ἐπιφωνήσας Ἁδριανῷ καταλέλοιπεν. ('Aristides too, a man of faith and devoted to our religion, like Quadratus, left an apology for our faith addressed to Hadrian'). The dating depends upon a fragmentary reference to Aristides which appears in the Armenian fragments of the

of Quadratus, although both men are also mentioned by Jerome.[40] However, although the original may be missing, we have a collection of other versions: we have a number of fragments of the text in Armenian, and, most significantly, what appears to be a quotation, in Greek, of large portions of the *Apology* is found in the novel *Barlaam and Josaphat*, which is often attributed to the eighth-century author John of Damascus, but is almost certainly earlier than this.[41] This quotation takes the form of an extended speech by the monk Barlaam to an Indian prince, pleading with him to convert, and, although extensive, accounts for only two-thirds of the text as found in the Syriac, which is by far the longest account.

If the text had a Greek original, however, are we justified in exploring it as an 'Eastern' text? I shall attempt to answer this by means of an exploration of the date and character of the text itself. Dating the original Greek apology to the reign of Hadrian, and certainly to the mid-120s as Eusebius does, is problematic, as Rendel Harris demonstrated.[42] Firstly, the Syriac is ambiguous in its addressee. While the title gives *hdryns mlk'*,[43] the speech itself appears to be addressed to *qsr ṭṭws hdrynws 'nṭwnynws sgyd' wmrḥmn'*.[44] This does not refer to Hadrian, whose name was Publius Aelius Hadrianus, but to his successor,

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Chronicon, in which he is referred to as a *philosophus Atheniensis*, giving *apologeticas* before *Adriano*. It appears only in the Latin rendering of the Armenian version for the year AD 124; the fragmentary Greek has no record of it. One of the Armenian manuscripts (N) moves the date to 125, which matches better with a known visit of Hadrian in 125-6 (Rendel Harris 1893:6). Pouderon and Pierre argued, based on the Latin *cognomen* 'Marcianus', which appears as *mrqynws* in the Syriac manuscript, that we must conclude that Aristides was a westerner (2003:29).

[40] Jer. *De vir. ill.* 20: *Aristides Atheniensis, philosophus eloquentissimus et sub pristine habitu discipulus Christi, volumen nostri dogmatis rationem continens eodem tempore quo et Quadratus, Hadriano principi dedit, id est, apologeticum pro Christiani* ('Aristides of Athens, a most eloquent philosopher and a follower of Christ in his traditional clothing, presented to Hadrian, at the same time as Quadratus, a book containing an account of our beliefs; that is, an apology on behalf of the Christians'. This is so similar to Eusebius' account that we may safely assume that Jerome based his account on that found in *Church History*. On the false dichotomy between oral and written tradition in Christian literary history, see Downing 2000:15.

[41] Rendel Harris 1893:70. The passage is quoted in *Barlaam and Josaphat* 27.238-255. For an excellent edition of the text, with translation and notes, see Pouderon and Pierre 2003:256-303 (references to the Greek version use this edition). For the Armenian fragments, see ibid. 305-13. For a fuller discussion of the various versions, see ibid.23-4.

[42] Rendel Harris 1893:13.

[43] Aristides 1.1: 'Hadrian the king'.

[44] Ibid. 1.2: 'Caesar Titus Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius'.

Antoninus Pius.[45] The apology could possibly have been addressed to both of them,[46] with Eusebius losing the second part and the Syriac translator having lost the first. This would make sense of the fact that the adjectives applied to the addressee are pointed in the plural. However, the last two adjectives which are applied to the addressee, *sgyd'* and *mrḥmn'*, translate as 'Augustus' and 'Pius' respectively:[47] the latter title was not awarded to Antoninus until after the death of Hadrian in AD 138, for a variety of different reasons.[48] Robinson concluded from this that since the speech was unlikely to be delivered on the emperor's deathbed, it is most likely to have been presented to Antoninus Pius on a visit to Smyrna (a conclusion based, somewhat tenuously, on a reference in a letter of Irenaeus to a royal house at Smyrna) early in his reign.[49] However, if Eusebius is wrong about the speech being delivered to Hadrian in Athens, we lose our only witness that the speech ever *was* delivered in person before the emperor. In fact, it is not at all clear that Eusebius' account supports a spoken address at all: Aristides is described as having 'left behind' (καταλέλοιπεν) the speech, which does not seem to me to suggest the delivery of a speech as much as a letter.[50]

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[45] Assuming, of course, that the translation of *mrhmn'* as 'Pius' is correct (see below); however, the combination of other names would suggest that no other understanding is as plausible. This would also fit with Lightfoot's observation that the majority of speeches of which we are aware were addressed to either Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius (2007:62). Hennecke argued that the *Apology* was dated to the last years of Hadrian's reign, but was presented to Antoninus Pius after the former's death (1893:98-101); Kerestzes was not certain of the date, but agreed that it was addressed to Antoninus Pius (1989:131).

[46] Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, for example, addresses Antoninus Pius and his two (adopted) sons, Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius. For a fuller discussion of this possibility, see Rendel Harris 1893:8. On the whole, however, the idea that both Eusebius and the Syriac scribe each lost (opposing) halves of the name seems rather implausible.

[47] Neither *sgyd'* ('Augustus') nor *mrḥmn* ('Pius') are understood as technical terms. Payne Smith defines *sgd* as 'to worship', 'to honour' or 'to pay obeisance': the passive participle *sgyd'* therefore means 'worshipful' or 'revered one', and is therefore the Syriac translation of *Augustus* (or, more accurately, of the Greek Σεβαστός). Similarly, *mrḥmn'* is defined as 'merciful, tender, compassionate, or benevolent'. This lacks some of the semantic range of the Latin *pius* (such as one's duty to the gods), and one could argue that this would be uncomfortable for a Christian, but *Augustus* would surely present more problems (I shall return to this topic in a later chapter). I can only conclude that both *Augustus* and *pius* have been given their closest possible translation, but that *pius* does not have a precise translation in Syriac.

[48] Including his attention to his father-in-law and his exceptional clemency: see *SHA Antoninus Pius* 2.3-5.

[49] Rendel Harris 1893:17.

[50] In support of this, the Latin translation has rendered it *conscripsit.* Jerome clearly understood that Aristides presented a written document rather than a speech, for in his account (which, as noted, almost certainly

However, it is worth noting that the 'address' to Hadrian (ἐπιφωνήσας Ἀδριανῷ) *does* suggest oratory of some form. In short, Eusebius' account cannot conclusively prove whether or not the *Apology* was delivered in person.[51]

Another possibility is that, as Eusebius supposes, the original apology *was* delivered to Hadrian in Athens (in some form, at least), but that the Syriac translator, writing during the reign of Antoninus Pius, attempted to make the speech more relevant. However, the Armenian version is clearly addressed to Hadrian,[52] and the only evidence we have to suggest that Hadrian was *not* the original addressee is the single reference in the Syriac text. The most likely interpretation, therefore, is that the scribe may simply have inserted the wrong name.[53]

What of the relationship between the Syriac and the original? Unfortunately, any conclusions will inevitably be hypothetical; we can base them only on a comparison of the Syriac, the Armenian translation and the Greek quotation in *Barlaam and Josaphat.* Josaphat was an Indian prince who encountered a wandering monk, Barlaam. The monk was led to Josaphat's father, the king, and promptly delivered a long oration that almost exactly corresponds to the Syriac translation of Aristides. However, the relevant section in the Syriac is approximately one and a half times the length of the Greek. We are left with two possible interpretations: that the Syriac author modified the Greek, or that the author of *Barlaam and Josaphat* considerably reduced the original. Robinson was undecided, and pointed to the

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depends upon Eusebius), he uses the term *volumen* (*De vir. ill.* 20). However, it is worth remembering that the dichotomy between oral and written tradition in Christian literary history is a false one (Downing 2000:15).

[51] Pouderon and Pierre argued that this would be extremely unlikely: if the addressee was Hadrian, then the attitude which is seen in the *Rescript to Minucius Fundanus* would have made delivery in person impossibly dangerous (2003:41-2), given that Christians who confessed were to be punished: for fuller discussion of the *Rescript* and the threat of persecution, see below, 5.2.

[52] Pouderon and Pierre. 2003:306-7. They conclude that Hadrian *was* the addressee, and therefore date the *Apology* to 124-5 (ibid. 32).

[53] Ibid. 35: they argued that the Syriac address to Antoninus Pius is "trop étrange pour être credible" (ibid:34).

usual reliability and accuracy of the Syriac translators; however, it is significant that the major expansions in the Syriac version, by and large, are found in the histories of the Greek gods. It may, therefore, simply be the case that the author felt that his (non-Greek) readership required more explanation of the doings of Classical deities. Alternatively, it may simply reflect a tendency of Syriac translators to expound on their source material: the Syriac translation of the *Address to the Nations*, usually attributed to Justin Martyr, is similarly one and a half times the length of the Greek original.[54] Rendel Harris admitted that "a Syriac translator, finding an early Greek Apology and desiring to reproduce it in his own language, might have no scruple whatever in dealing very freely with his author, in expunging sentences which he was not able or did not care to translate, and in supplementing the original here and there out of his own resources".[55] As noted, we cannot be certain that these differences were not features of the original. However, in the absence of any significant amount of original material, I suggest that we are justified in addressing the Syriac translation of Aristides as a text in its own right, and comparing it with other, similar sources. For convenience's sake, therefore, I shall refer to the Syriac text simply as Aristides' *Apology* unless further clarification is needed.

Finally, a brief note on the Christianity of Aristides' *Apology*. O'Ceallaigh argued forcibly that the text was originally a piece of Jewish apologetic to which a later Christian scribe added the concluding passages on the lifestyle of Christians. This would, in O'Ceallaigh's view, explain Aristides' apparent lack of hostility towards the Jews, and the focus on God rather than on Christ.[56] However, although the tone towards the Jews is indeed

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[54]Rendel Harris 1893:72. See below for further discussion.
[55]Ibid:74.
[56] O'Ceallaigh 1958:227. On Aristides' attitude towards the Jews, and particularly their moral practices, see below, 4.5.1.

mild, this may simply be a consequence of its early date.[57] Furthermore, O'Ceallaigh is wrong to suggest that there is no hostility towards the Jews: although Aristides approves of their morally upstanding lifestyles, he clearly observes that the object of their worship is not God, but angels.[58] Finally, O'Ceallaigh's argument relies on the assumption that the entire tradition, which has the *Apology* addressed to Hadrian in the extant text, as well as in the works of Eusebius and Jerome, is mistaken, and this is immensely unlikely.[59]

1.4.2   The Syriac *Oration of Meliton the Philosopher*[60]

Described by Millar as "remarkably frustrating",[61] this is a much shorter Syriac apology, approximately half the length of that of Aristides. The text is found in a sixth- or seventh- century manuscript, along with Bardesan's *On the Laws of the Nations*[62] and the so-called *Letter of Mara Bar Serapion*;[63] these texts are all presented in Cureton's 1855 edition.[64] The author is commonly referred to as Pseudo-Melito,[65] on the assumption that the text appears to be "pretending"[66] to be the apology of Melito, Bishop of Sardis, made to Marcus Aurelius.[67] It is clear that the two texts are not the same: Lightfoot demonstrated this on the basis of tone (which in the Syriac version is considerably more hostile than the

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[57] Rendel Harris gave the lack of hostility as a reason for preferring an early date (1893:13). If the text is to be dated to 124-5, then it comes only 50 years after the destruction of the temple, and before the banishment of the Jews from Jerusalem (which was to be renamed Aelia Capitolina) in 135, which was a major turning point for the relationship between Jews and Christians. See Hunt 2003:7.

[58] Aristides 23.1. For more on the relationship between morality and the worship of God in Aristides, see below, 4.5.1.

[59] O'Ceallaigh "supposerait en effet un concours de circonstances assez extraordinaire" (Pouderon and Pierre 2003:31). On whether the compliments to the Jews were part of the original apology, see ibid: 57-8.

[60] For fuller discussion of the identity of the text, see Nichols: forthcoming.

[61] Millar 1993:243.

[62] On this text, and on Bardesan himself, see Drijvers 1966, 1970 and 1971.

[63] The *Letter of Mara Bar Serapion* has received coverage in a recent volume edited by Merz and Tieleman (2012).

[64] My own translation of the Syriac is found in the appendices, and all chapter references are taken from that translation.

[65] Lightfoot, in her two articles on the text, does so consistenctly (2007, 2009), as does Kaizer, in his brief discussion of the Euhemeristic account of the origin of local cults (2006:35ff).

[66] Kaizer 2008a:1.

[67] This apology exists only in fragments transmitted by Eusebius (*Church History* 4.26).

respectful Greek apology), content and style, none of which match.[68] I do not intend to repeat

Lightfoot's arguments, which were thorough and conclusive; however, I do intend to

demonstrate that it is unnecessary to associate the two authors in the first place. This

perceived association is based entirely on the similarities in both addressee and author. The

author of the Syriac gives his name as *mylyṭwn pylswp'* ('Meliton the philosopher'), while the

Greek apologist is given as Μελίτων.[69] However, in neither text is the addressee clear:

according to Eusebius, the Greek was addressed πρὸς Ἀντωνῖνον,[70] who is understood to be

Antoninus Verus (or Marcus Aurelius); in similar fashion, the Syriac gives the addressee as

'ntwnynws qsr. However, 'Antoninus Caesar' does not necessarily refer to Marcus Aurelius,

for it could refer to any one of a number of emperors: Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius,

Commodus, Caracalla, or Elagabalus.[71] On two occasions in the text, the emperor's children

are mentioned;[72] it is possible that the sons are Commodus and Annius Verus, but since the

latter died young, this is less likely. Far more probable is that *'ntwnynws qsr* refers to

Antoninus Pius, and the 'sons' to his adopted children, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.

This conclusion would give the text a still earlier date, and make the association with the

Bishop of Sardis still more tentative. We are left with two possible conclusions: either one

accepts that there were indeed two Melitos who wrote separate addresses to (possibly)

different Antonine emperors, or one concludes that a later scribe, based on the reference

within the text to *'ntwnynws qsr* ('Antoninus Caesar'), presumed that this was the lost

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[68] For Lightfoot's thorough analysis of these areas, see 2007:59-60. See also Jacobi 1856:107-8. Lightfoot argued that the original language of the *Oration* was Syriac (2007:77); however, there are a number of close similarities between Meliton's text and the LXX text of *Wisdom of Solomon*, with a number of key phrases appearing in both works. From this we must deduce that Meliton was at least familiar with Greek (and the LXX), even if this does not mean that he *wrote* in Greek. On the *Wisdom of Solomon*, see Grabbe 2003 and Laudun 1983.

[69] Note that in Syriac final *n* is often omitted in latinisation of the script, as is the case with Greek final ν.

[70] Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.2.

[71] Lightfoot (ibid:61) discusses all these possibilities. Although Jacobi favoured Caracalla or Elagabalus (1856:107), either of these would be unlikely; as I shall demonstrate below, an early date for the text is preferable, and the reference to the sons of the emperor would seem to exclude these two.

[72] Meliton 9.5, 10.2.

apology of Melito of Sardis and added the title *mylyṭwn pylswp'* ('Meliton the Philosopher'), to the introductory and concluding paragraphs, which are the only instances in which the name is given at all.[73] The Syriac author certainly makes no claim to associate himself with Melito of Sardis; referring to himself as a *pylswp'* does not appear to me to suggest that he viewed himself within the Church hierarchy.[74] Similarly, he does not claim that his work is an ἀπολογία: this has a Syriac equivalent, *mpq brwḥ'* (which Aristides uses to describe his *Apology*). Meliton, however, uses *m'mr'*, which is simply a speech with no legal setting, or even an element of defence. Either way, I see no reason to assume that the Syriac author was "sheltering behind Meliton's [sc. the Bishop of Sardis'] name".[75] Rather than Pseudo-Melito, therefore, I refer to him as Meliton (as I have done in the heading of this section), to distinguish the Syriac author from the Bishop of Sardis.

What of the date of the text? If one accepts the conclusion that the subject of the *Oration* is either Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius, then one must conclude a mid- to late-second-century date, although Millar suggested that it was perhaps written in the early third century.[76] Other than this, there is no internal evidence at all for the date (a subject Lightfoot largely avoided). As Lightfoot pointed out, however, there is no reference whatsoever to persecution within the text. This would suggest either an early (pre-third century) or late (probably post-Constantinian) date: any date after the late second or early third century would

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[73] Lightfoot admitted this possibility, but gave it no further attention: she favoured the interpretation of a pseudonymous claim on the author's part (2007:61).

[74] Kaizer suggested that the use of *pylswp'* (philosopher) may indicate that the text was written soon after its model, the apology of the Melito of Sardis, became known in the Near East (2006:33). However, *pylswp'* is by no means a rare title (Lightfoot 2007:60): the Syriac translator of Aristides gives this as his own title. Furthermore, in the case of Meliton, there is no need to ascribe deliberate pseudonymity at all.

[75] Lightfoot 2007:60. Lightfoot does not go into great detail on the reasons why the author might make a pseudonymous claim, merely stating that he "wanted his work to appear to emanate from one of the apologists who spoke of Christianity in such terms, perhaps because their audience also had philosophic pretensions" (ibid:60). Again, however, one would expect much greater similarity between the pretensions of the Syriac Meliton and the (admittedly fragmentary) Greek of Melito of Sardis.

[76] Millar 1993:243. Kaizer (2006:33) endorsed this possibility, although Drijvers put it in the second half of the second century (1996:173).

surely refer to increased persecutions.[77] In the latter case, one would expect more formalised reference to Christian doctrine, another feature which, as Lightfoot observed, is entirely lacking; nor is there any note of Christianity triumphant, which we might expect at such a late date. This makes a second-century date for the text far from implausible.[78]

The addressee, as discussed, is imprecise at best. However, it is far from clear that the text was ever delivered to an emperor.[79] Lightfoot discussed this in considerable detail, and concluded that no emperor was ever involved, and that the emperor's name was added as an advertisement, in order to give the text rhetorical weight. This raises further questions. Assuming (as is likely) that Lightfoot is correct in her conclusion, is the text to be understood as internal or external (that is, addressed to Christians or gentiles)? If we consider the three features of internal text which Johnson highlighted, and which were discussed above (namely staying in touch with one another; instructing or educating; or defining group identity), then we see that none of these features are present in the text; indeed, so limited is reference to Christian thought that Lightfoot drew attention to similarities with Philo and questioned

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[77] For discussion of the dates of Christian persecution, see Clark 2004, and especially the debate of Sherwin-White (1964) and de Ste Croix (1963/1964). For fuller discussion of the motivations behind these persecutions, see below, 5.2-4. Cameron claimed that the second century became a "battleground" in which Christians struggled to control their discourse (1991:25), but this does not necessarily suggest that this battleground was founded upon persecution. Although Hunt argued that Christianity in the second century was "forced underground by frequent persecution" (2003:1), this is clearly not the case. This does not imply that persecution did not occur, or that it was particularly rare, but that it was sporadic rather than systematic until the reign of Decius (Beard, North and Price 1998a:237-8; Rives 2007:199; see also Keresztes 1964 for more on the sporadic pattern of legal trials in the second century). Indeed, the persecution of Christians under Marcus Aurelius, for example at Lyons in AD 177 (Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 5:1), was such that this may be another reason for preferring Antoninus Pius, and not Marcus Aurelius, as the addressee.

[78] Although the majority of extent Syriac texts (such as the writings of Ephrem or Bardesan) were created during, or after, the third century, Drijvers suggested that, by the end of the second century, Syriac Christianity, particularly centred around Edessa, was already a "many-colored pattern" (1982b:175). It is conceivable that a text like Meliton's *Oration* could have formed part of this pattern.

[79] Lightfoot (2007:63) calls the situation "at best ill-defined, at worst implausible". Despite her reservations about the addressee, Lightfoot continued to treat the attempt to convert an emperor as one of the most strikingly novel, and brash, features of the text (ibid:62). See also Palmer 1983:237, who argued that although apologies *may* have been addressed to emperors, it is impossible to consider them wholly as petitions setting out the legal basis of Christianity.

whether we might consider a Jewish authorship for the work.[80] However, the consistent presence of key words, such as *šrrʾ* ('truth') and *ṭybwtʾ* ('grace'), which would become important terms in the Syriac church,[81] together with apocalyptic themes which are strongly emphasised throughout, would strongly imply a Christian authorship.

Lightfoot has also raised questions about Meliton's textual integrity: she argued that the central section, which consists of a series of short Euhemeristic *historiolae*,[82] may have been a later addition by a scribe. I shall discuss this conclusion below,[83] but I wish to highlight the fact that both Kaizer and Lightfoot have focussed their studies of the text on these *historiolae* at the expense of the text as a whole;[84] I intend to deal with the text in its entirety as far as possible.

1.4.3 Tatian's *Address to the Greeks*

The *Address to the Greeks* (henceforth *Address*) is a second-century text written in Greek by Tatian, the pupil of Justin Martyr; the text is found in Whittaker's 1982 edition and Markovic's 1995 edition.[85] It is an extensive philosophical exploration of Christianity that sets it up as a philosophy to rival the schools of the gentile world, which Tatian claims to have dabbled in. It also deals extensively with gentile cults and myths in a variety of forms, while there is also considerable discussion of Christian theology, and a determined attempt to demonstrate that Moses was older than Homer (and that he was thus imbued with more

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[80] Lightfoot 2007:66.

[81] This may of course be put forward as an argument for proposing a later date for the text; however, there is no way of knowing how far such terms were in common usage by the end of the second century, and so this does not necessarily discredit the early date I have tentatively proposed.

[82] This is her word to describe the short stories on the origin of cults.

[83] Below, 3.2.1

[84] Lightfoot insisted that this was the "real curiosity" of the text (2007:59). Kaizer, in his admittedly brief discussion of the text, similarly focussed almost exclusively on the central section on local cult, despite acknowledging that the remainder constitutes the "longest and very wordy" part of the text (2006:35).

[85] All references are to Whittaker's 1982 edition.

authority). The *Address* is the most extensive of Tatian's work still extant: he was, however, better known as the author of the *Diatessaron*, the harmony of the gospels which became the main text used by the Syriac church.[86]

The *Address* would appear to be easier to date than either Meliton's *Oration* or Aristides' *Apology*, because we know more of Tatian himself: he lived from AD 120-180, and studied in Rome under Justin Martyr (c. 100 - c. 165). However, there is considerable debate about when exactly the *Address* was written. Grant argued that it must have been written after late 176 (possibly in 177 or 178), based on an allusion to the emperor's paying a salary to philosophers.[87] However, the amount named (six hundred gold pieces) does not match the amount which the *Historia Augusta* suggests was given,[88] and would therefore require scribal error; equally, we know of several other emperors whose habit it was to give philosophers stipends,[89] and so the allusion to this sum should not be taken as evidence of a date in 177 or 178. It has widely been concluded that there is insufficient internal evidence for dating the text;[90] possibly the only satisfactory evidence is found in an allusion to the philosopher Crescens, who was seeking to put Tatian and Justin to death.[91] Although Crescens was successful in having Justin executed, there is no evidence in the text that he had already achieved this when the *Address* was written, or Tatian would presumably have

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[86] Hunt claimed that the creation of the *Diatessaron* was due to Tatian's objection to the internal inconsistency of the gospels (2003:16); see also Hawthorne 1964:164. Hawthorne argued that, such was the importance of the *Diatessaron*, we might even view Tatian as the founder of Assyrian Christianity (ibid: 165). On the relationship between the *Diatessaron* and the Dura fragment, see below, 5.4.

[87] Tatian *Or.* 19.1; see Grant 1953:99-100. He also argued that the discussion of bodily resurrection (Tatian *Or.* 6.2) may be an allusion to the martyrdoms at Lyons in 177, and that the *Address* should be considered part of a small body of material published in response to these events (including the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and Athenagoras' *Embassy* (Grant 1953:99). However, there is no evidence within the text to support this position, and little discussion of persecution at all (Clark 1967:123).

[88] *SHA Marcus* 7.6-7.

[89] *SHA Hadrian* 16.8; *SHA Ant. Pius* 11.3; *SHA Alex. Sev.* 44.4. The second-century emperors were "notorious" for this practice (Clark 1967:124).

[90] Hunt 2003:3; see also Clark 1967:128. Puech argued a date of 172 (1903:8-9; 1912:151), but there is still less evidence for this.

[91] Tatian *Or.* 19.1.

mentioned it. Hunt argued that, since Justin was executed in c. 165, we may tentatively place the writing of the *Address* before this date.[92]

The date of the *Address* is critical for our understanding of Tatian's relationship with Christianity.[93] It is commonly accepted, based on Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, that soon after Justin's martyrdom Tatian abandoned Rome and seceded from the church.[94] Irenaeus accused Tatian of a Valentinian focus on invisible aeons, of rejecting marriage as fornication,[95] and of denying the salvation of Adam. However, there are reasons to challenge the assumption that Tatian was a heretic, at least at the time of the writing of the *Address*. Tatian's own student, Rhodo, is presented by Eusebius as a model of orthodoxy, vigorously challenging the heresies of Marcion;[96] in the process, Rhodo presented Tatian himself as orthodox. Secondly, if Hunt is right to date the *Address* to before Justin's death, then according to the tradition based on Irenaeus, Tatian was not considered heretical at the time that he wrote the *Address*.[97]

Given that Tatian wrote in Greek, and that the *Address* was probably written in Rome, are we justified in associating this with other 'Eastern' texts? For the following reasons, I

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[92] Hunt 2003:3.

[93] Some scholars are more sceptical of this relationship than others: Hawthorne, for instance, argued that, but for an allusion to the incarnation, and another to the suffering Christ, one might miss the fact that Tatian was a Christian (1964:161).

[94] Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.28.

[95] Grant attempted to identify the source of this accusation, and claimed to find it in the mockery of the ethical conduct of the gods (Tatian *Or.* 8.1-2; see Grant 1954:64). However, there is nothing here to suggest an association of marriage and fornication; indeed, the two are kept quite separate.

[96] Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 5.14. On Rhodo and Tatian, see Elze 1960:113-6.

[97] Although Whittaker argued that it is possible he seceded in 150 (1982:ix), based on Epiphanius (*Panarion* 1.3.46). There is insufficient evidence to challenge the Irenaeus tradition, however. Hunt strongly challenged the position that we should view Tatian as heretical at all, partly because, at a time with such doctrinal fluidity, it was very difficult to identify orthodoxy and heresy at all (2003:13); see also Clark 2004:2. For discussion of Tatian's heresy, see Hunt 2003:10-19, Hawthorne 1964:165-7 and Grant 1954. Clark argued that, although accusations of heresy may have formed part of internal power struggles, they also brought into focus key beliefs (2004:23).

suggest that we are. Firstly, Tatian identifies himself, not as a Westerner,[98] but as an Assyrian (γεννηθεὶς μὲν ἐν τῇ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων γῇ).[99] There is disagreement as to the precise meaning of this word: Fergus Millar has argued that it simply means he originated from the Roman province of Syria (that is, west of the Euphrates),[100] although Whittaker argued that 'Assyrian' meant precisely that, and that he was from the East of the Euphrates.[101] Given his identification of his addressees specifically as 'Greek' (for more on which, see below), it is tempting to agree with Whittaker. However, *On the Syrian Goddess*, commonly attributed to Lucian, describes its author as Ἀσσύριος; if the attribution is correct, then we know that Lucian hailed from Samosata, in the former kingdom of Commagene, and therefore West of the Euphrates.[102] Ultimately, however, Tatian's precise point of origin is unimportant compared with his perspective: being 'Assyrian' is an important part of his self-identification as ὁ κατὰ βαρβάρους φιλοσοφῶν,[103] and, in this context, self-identification is just as important as the actual historical reality.[104] It seems fair to give Tatian at least the benefit of

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[98] 'Westerner' in this context meaning an inhabitant of the Greek-speaking world of the Mediterranean, rather than the Western regions of the Empire.

[99] Tatian *Or.* 42.1: 'for I was born in the land of the Assyrian'.

[100] Millar 1993:227; "was he in origin therefore a Syriac- or Aramaic-speaking 'Oriental' from outside the Roman Empire? Not at all. 'Assyria' and 'Assyrioi' were common terms for Syria and its inhabitants, which is why, like so many other people from that area, he had a name which is in origin Latin, with an extended ending, and transliterated into Greek". Millar followed Nöldeke, who argued that the distinction between Σύριοι, Σύροι and Ἀσσύριοι was inconsequential: "an beiden Gegenden haftet denn auch der Name der Assyrer und Syrer zum deutlichen Zeichen, dass beide Formen dasselbe bedeuten" (1891:444). These arguments depend upon Herodotus' claim that 'Syrian' is simply a Greek synonym for the Assyrians' self-designation: οὗτοι δὲ ὑπὸ μὲν Ἑλλήνων καλέονται Σύριοι, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν βαρβάρων Ἀσσύριοι ἐκλήθησαν ('they are called 'Syrians' by the Greeks, and 'Assyrians' by foreigners', *Hist.* 7.63). On Tatian as Syrian, see also Drijvers 1982b:172.

[101] Whittaker 1982:ix.

[102] Lucian makes the claim in *Hist. conscr.* 24; for a fuller discussion of the attribution, see Lightfoot 2003:184-208. See also below, 1.5.1.

[103] Tatian *Or.* 42.1: 'one who is a philosopher amongst the barbarians'.

[104] As observed above, in another context Millar himself argued that "the question of ascribed identity, of belonging or not to some identifiable group persisting through time, is of crucial importance to what the population of the Roman Near East was. The question is not a factual one, of actual biological descent (which is both wholly unanswerable and of limited importance anyway) but of identity and 'ethnicity'" (1993:5). Similarly, Andrade argued that many Near Easterners advertised their Hellenism through adhering to Greek cultural norms rather than through actual biological descent (2010:350). The same suggestion may be said to apply here. What matters in this context is not Tatian's biological descent, but his claim to be an Assyrian writing to Greeks. See also Butcher 2003:337.

the doubt until it can be shown that his is a 'Western' text. Secondly, and far more importantly, the *Address* is directed at the Greeks (ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες).[105] However, it is not clear whether 'Greeks' here refers to 'gentiles' (as in the case of Augustine's *City of God*, for example),[106] or 'to the inhabitants of the Greek world'. The overwhelming focus on ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες, repeated frequently throughout the text, suggests that it is used as a synonym for both Greeks *and* Romans, although the Romans are mentioned by name on numerous occasions.[107] However, it is most implausible that 'Greeks' was intended to exclude Romans: as Whittaker pointed out, Tatian was certainly not making a racial distinction between Greeks and Romans.[108] The distinction is racial only in the sense that the Christians are now defined as a new race,[109] and the border is drawn along those lines.[110] In short, I suggest that the ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες should be understood as 'gentiles who live in the Greek- or Latin-speaking regions of the empire': Tatian's focus on Greece in contrast to the Barbarians, of whom he is one, strongly implies that he cannot mean 'gentiles everywhere'.

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[105] This argument does not imply a firm racial distinction between 'Western' Greeks and 'Eastern' Syrians: as noted above, it is impossible to draw such a distinction (1.2). 'Syrian' can encompass everyone who lives in Syria, whether the descendant of a colonist of a Hellenised native (Sartre 2008:29). Frye has suggested that Greek use of the word 'Syrian' was based on the distinctive use of Aramaic as a *lingua franca* (1992:282); however, it is abundantly clear from bilingual epigraphy that there is no evidence for a separate 'Aramaic' or 'Syrian' culture. Andrade has discussed at length the complexity in the use of 'Greek' as a racial label; he argued that "people of Syrian ethnic origin often classified themselves as both Greek and Syrian" (2010:343), and that the concept of what it meant to be 'Greek' could be redefined to include a number of seemingly Aramaic cultural characteristics (ibid:350). If this is accepted, however, it is even more significant that Tatian does *not* identify himself as a Greek. In a society where one could happily be both Syrian *and* Greek, setting the two up in opposition, as Tatian does, gives considerable weight to the argument that he was writing as a *self-perceived* outsider, whether or not that distinction existed *in reality*.

[106] It is occasionally used in this sense in the New Testament: in *Acts* 16:1, for example, Timothy's mother, who is a believer, is contrasted with his father, who is a Greek.

[107] See e.g. Tatian *Or.* 19.1, 28.1, 35.1-2. I suggest that Tatian mentions Romans in these instances primarily for the purposes of rhetorical variety: for example, it is significant that in his rejection of τῇ Ῥωμαίων μεγαλαυχίᾳ καὶ τῇ Ἀθηναίων ψυχρολογίᾳ ('Roman arrogance and cold Athenian logic', 35.2), Tatian distinguishes between Romans and Athenians, *not* Romans and Greeks. Christians in the East attempted to relate to Greek, rather than Roman, identity if they wished to move into mainstream cultural and social life (Edwards et al. 1999:2). See also Young 1999:85.

[108] Whittaker 1982:xii.

[109] As in the case of the Syriac translator of Aristides, who distinguishes between Greeks, Barbarians, Jews and Christians (3.2).

[110] This is in keeping with Andrade's observation that in the time of Josephus, distinctions between Greek and Syrian were blurred, and the line was instead drawn between Gentile and Jew (2010:350).

Regardless of the precise identity of the ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες, Tatian's relationship to them is clear: he portrays himself as an outsider to the world of his addressees, both spiritually and geographically.[111] In this sense, Tatian's text serves as the perfect compromise between eastern and western sources: a text written by an Easterner, but addressed to Westerners. As a result, I argue that it is perfectly legitimate to compare Tatian with Aristides and Meliton, as each is written (or translated) by an Easterner and addressed (technically, at least) to non-Near Easterners, be that an emperor or the wider gentile community at large.

1.4.4   Other Christian sources

As mentioned above, I focus on these three sources because they fit three specific categories: they are of an early (second-century) date, they are addressed to outsiders (at least ostensibly), and they are written (or expanded) by inhabitants of the Near East. There is a huge abundance of other texts which do not fit all three categories: for example, much of the other literary output of the Syriac church, amongst which Ephrem is the most prominent, dates considerably later than this. Such texts may nonetheless prove to be useful in elaborating the portrayal of the gentile world that we find in Eastern Christianity. There are a number of other Syriac texts which I do not intend to deal with to any great degree: these texts include the *Acts of Mar Mari the Apostle* and the collection of Syriac martyr acts.[112] These cover a broad time span, and do not fulfill the three criteria established above: the dates in particular make them problematic for the purposes of this dissertation. For the same reasons, New Testament sources will play only a limited role: they are internal and hortatory

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[111] This is reinforced by Tatian's self-identification both as an Assyrian and as a barbarian, a traditional 'outsider' to the Greek world.

[112] These include the *Martyrdom of Habbib the Deacon* and the *Martyrdom of the Holy Confessors Shamuna and Guria*. As noted, these texts, along with *Mar Mari*, are significantly later: for example, Harrak dates Mar Mari to the late sixth century, albeit cautiously (2005:xiv), while Burkitt dated the death of Habbib to 310 and Shamuna and Guria to 309 (1913:29-30). Nevertheless, it will be important to compare them when appropriate in order to identify the development of Christian attitudes to the religious world around them.

texts, rather than being directed towards the non-Christian world. However, they may help to construct a picture of *general* Christian attitudes of the period towards certain features of gentile religious life. Therefore I will use a number of the letters that are addressed to communities in the eastern half of the empire (in particular *1 Peter*). On occasion our authors make specific reference to the New Testament, but these exceptions aside, excessive reliance on this material will inevitably lead to a view of Christianity which focusses on its unity and consistent doctrinal ideas, which, as I argued above, would not be the case at this early date.

1.5   Non-Christian sources

1.5.1   Lucian of Samosata

The most prominent author (in terms of output) on religious life in the Near East is Lucian of Samosata. Very little of his work is a discussion of religious life in the same way as the Christian material, although *On the Syrian Goddess* is an extended discussion of the origin of the cult of Atargatis at Hierapolis, and as such will be the most important of his works for the purposes of comparison (particularly since, as will be seen, Meliton, refers explicitly to the cult at Hierapolis). However, much of Lucian's satirical work deals with key religious themes such as sacrifice and the powers of the gods: these works will therefore be very important for comparing his attitude with those of the Christian authors. The importance of Lucian is found in the fact that, like Tatian, he identifies himself as an Assyrian[113]: he claims to hail from Samosata, as noted above. Unlike Tatian, however, his Syrian origin does not prevent him from claiming Greek identity.[114] As a result, he interprets cult "in a perfectly

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[113] He makes this explicit at the start of *On the Syrian Goddess*: γράφω δὲ Ἀσσύριος ἐών ('I myself that write am an Assyrian', *Syr. D.* 1, tr. Lightfoot).

[114] Sartre 2008:47.

Hellenocentric way".[115] Lucian's satire has caused discomfort to some scholars: as Richter noted, we must not assume that "the many voices of Lucian's dialogues are each somehow Lucian's own".[116] The criticism is raised against those who would construct a biography of Lucian from his text, but applies equally here. Furthermore, MacMullen insisted that Lucian's work was "quite ill-suited to the demands of our curiosity".[117] MacMullen raised the same objection to Apuleius and Aelius Aristides, both of whom will appear frequently in this thesis. MacMullen's arguments were based on the principle that none of them give an accurate reflection of religious practice. However, as I shall demonstrate below, I am primarily concerned with how authors *perceived* local religious life: Lucian, Apuleius and Aelius Aristides are extremely useful in achieving this purpose.

One final observation needs to be made on the subject of Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess*: Lightfoot has convincingly demonstrated that the work is a skilled imitation of Herodotus, adopting his "dialect, style and mannerisms… to describe its subject".[118] Given this, it is clear that we must exercise caution in assessing Lucian's treatment of cult: we must at all times ask how much this treatment depends upon his model and not his own viewpoint.[119]

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[115] Ibid. 45. See also Lightfoot 2003:87.
[116] Richter 2005:76.
[117] MacMullen 1981:9.
[118] Lightfoot 2003:88.
[119] Although Kaizer argued that Lucian nevertheless needed to provide a realistic picture, even if details are often rather tongue-in-cheek (2008a:27).

1.5.2   Philo of Byblos' *Phoenician History*

A key author for the perception of certain areas of religious life is the first- or early second-century AD Euhemeristic writer Philo of Byblos.[120] His *Phoenician History*, which exists only as quoted by Eusebius in his *Preparation for Evangelism*,[121] tells a series of stories of the origins of the cults of the gods in cities throughout the region. These stories, he claims, are a simple translation of the work of the Phoenician author Sanchuniathon. As such, it will be useful comparative material for the similar Euhemeristic sections of Aristides and Meliton;[122] it is, however, limited in its treatment of the practical and theological functioning of these cults, and therefore offers less to this dissertation than Lucian, since it tells us little of local religious attitudes. Indeed, perhaps the most prominent feature in this respect is the evidence of Euhemerism as a phenomenon in its own right. Similarly, if Sanchuniathon was indeed a real figure and the source of Philo's work,[123] his antiquity is such that the *Phoenician History* is less useful as directly comparable material.[124]

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[120] For a fuller discussion of Philo's fragmentary bibliography, see Baumgarten 1981:31-5; Philo was probably born under Nero but survived to write about Hadrian.

[121] "By surveying the pagan religions, Eusebius hopes to show that the Christians acted correctly in deserting them… Eusebius will demonstrate the error of paganism by quoting the works of believers in paganism" (Baumgarten 1981:36). I cite the text given by Brill's New Jacoby, translated and edited by Kaldellis and López.

[122] The Euhemeristic approach, which claimed that the gods were originally men given divine honours in recognition of the benefits which they gave to mankind, is far from uncommon, especially in Christian literature. Klauck argued that we see the same tendency in the association of Paul and Barnabas with Hermes and Zeus by the Lystrians in *Acts* 14:8-13 (Klauck 2000:12). Spyridakis argued that this was the logical outcome of "the rationalistic tendencies of the Hellenistic world which had witnessed the superhuman achievement and subsequent deification of Alexander" (1968:337). Nevertheless, the approach is not always popular: Plutarch accused Euhemerus of atheism (*Mor.* 360a), an attack which Baumgarten attributed to the similarity between Euhemerism and Plutarch's allegorising approach (1996:97-99).

[123] A claim which was questioned by Baumgarten (1981:2): he discussed at length Philo and Porphyry's accounts of Sanchuniathon (ibid. 41-93).

[124] Although its date does not make it *incomparable*: as I shall demonstrate below, it is legitimate to use source material from different periods for this purpose. On the issues presented by the text, see Millar 1993:277-279.

1.5.3   Other sources

It is impossible to comprehensively list here the number of other sources which I will make use of in this study. I also intend to make limited use of a range of Latin and Greek sources from the Western world. These include, but are not limited to, Plato, Aristophanes, Plutarch, Cicero, Varro, Livy, Tacitus, and Seneca.[125] It may appear problematic to use western Latin and Greek sources to understand the perception of religious life in the Near East.[126] However, as discussed above, it is clear that we should not form a clear distinction between 'Eastern' and 'Western' forms of religion.[127] Certainly, the deities involved change, and certain features of rite, mythology or iconography vary (considerably, at times),[128] but this variation nonetheless covers a set of core religious systems that shared familiar features. As an example, the alleged tendency towards aniconic imagery in the Near East, which certain scholars argued was characteristic of the region,[129] might seem unusual to those used to anthropomorphic statues of Jupiter or Minerva, but they would certainly recognise the desire to honour the deity, to provide them with sacrifice, and to pray to them for goods or blessings. Certainly, as will be demonstrated, similar attitudes in this respect are shared by

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[125] Each of these must be treated independently; we cannot, for example, treat the writings of Seneca and Aristophanes as immediately comparable, since each has an entirely different purpose. Furthermore, as Gradel observed, philosophical treatises in particular can be particularly troublesome in reconstructing an image of religious life (2002:2).

[126] As Davies observed, in studying these texts we need to "reconstruct the cultural knowledge that informed the text in antiquity" (2004:2), and this cultural context will differ from text to text.

[127] It is virtually impossible to identify 'Near Eastern' religion as we might with 'Greek' or 'Roman' religion (Kaizer 2008a:2). Teixidor argued that religion in the cities of the east was characterised by a piety largely absent from the Greek and Roman world, and epitomised by the prominence of mystery in local inscriptions (1979:ix). However, this is a rather simplistic interpretation: see below (n.132) for the danger in talking about 'belief' or 'piety' in this sense; on the dangers of characterising 'mystery cults' in this manner, see below, 3.3.4.

[128] These differences are very often due to the difference in Hellenistic assimilation achieved by local populations (ibid. 8). Friedland uses this difference to explain the variety of artistic styles found in the Near East: most depictions reveal an interest "not in wholesale assimilation (as we see in the larger coastal cities of Palestine and the nearby Decapolis city of Philadelphia/Amman in Arabia), but in negotiating between their native religion and that of their Roman rulers" (2008:341-2).

[129] See above, 1.2.1.

Philo and Pliny, or Lucian and Livy.[130] There is nothing inappropriate about applying characteristics of one to the other, as long as variations in local conditions are borne in mind.[131] As noted above, there is no sense in which an indigenous 'Semitic' world (and particularly in the religious sense) can be compared to or contrasted with a Hellenistic one which intruded and suppressed it:[132] it is therefore legitimate to use sources from different areas, particularly since Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides do not appear to distinguish between local religious life and religious life at large.

The same may be said of different chronological periods. As well as first- and second-century sources, I also intend to use sources of considerably earlier dates, albeit with certain restrictions. These include the Homeric poems, Plato, Xenophanes and Aristophanes. It might be argued that these texts have little value in clarifying the religious context of early Christianity, but there is no evidence that key religious conditions had changed sufficiently to make them inapplicable: many of the themes found in Plato or Aristophanes, for example,

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[130] Alston made the point that use of Latin sources in this context tends to a Romano-centric view of the Near East (2007:1): however, his argument applies to the socio-political conditions of the region, and not to religious life, which appears to remain consistent.

[131] Trombley was extremely critical of the mixing of evidence, "as though Greek, Latin, Arabic, Aramaic, Egyptian, and Armenian religiosity conformed to some quasi-uniform standard of "Graeco-Roman" polytheism that was invariably interchangeable and homogenous" (1993a:xi). Trombley's point is a good one, but it does not mean that such evidence *cannot* be compared: it simply means we must be careful in doing so. On the differences between cult (particularly civic cult) in the East and West, see Beard, North and Price 1998a:339ff.

[132] A brief example may further demonstrate some of the problems in assuming a contrast between 'alien' Greek and indigenous religious culture. An inscription near the Great Colonnade at Apamea, although fragmentary, reads '...on the orders of (the) Greatest God, Sacred Belos, Aur(elios) Belios Philippos, priest and successor in Apamea of the Epikoureioi' (see Rey-Coquais 1973:66ff). Not only does this refer to 'Bel', the Babylonian supreme deity, but the priest mentioned identifies himself with a combination of Greek (Aurelios... Philippos) and Semitic (Belios) names. The mention of the 'Epicureans', although there is no previous evidence of an Epicurean school at Apamea (see Millar 1993:263), shows interaction between two apparently different elements, in the Greek Epicurean school and the indigenous deity Bel, but the author has no qualms about expressing both elements simultaneously; the name of the priest also implies that there was no apparent stigma in his use of a Semitic name such as 'Belio', albeit transliterated into Greek. This suggests that the writer was expressing his identity as an adherent of the indigenous god Bel whilst simultaneously subscribing to a Graeco-Roman cultural feature; the two are not in contrast, and there is certainly no suggestion that one 'suppressed' the other. It is clearly not possible to draw such a firm distinction between 'East' and 'West': the author of this inscription did not see it in those terms, and as such I argue that it is perfectly legitimate to use sources from both 'halves' of the Empire.

continue to resonate in the second century AD. Not only this, but, as I shall demonstrate, the Near Eastern Christian texts occasionally allude directly to such works, and to Plato in particular.

1.6   Other types of evidence

It will be observed that the majority of the evidence used in this thesis is literary. Ando argued that studies with an exclusively literary focus produce a limited and misleading effect.[133] Firstly, however, it is not strictly true to say that my focus is *exclusively* literary: given the limited availability of literary sources on religious life in the Roman Near East, I will also deal with archaeological, iconographical and particularly epigraphic sources. Secondly, this dissertation is concerned primarily with the perception of religious life, rather than its factual reality.[134]   For example, in accounts of walking statues, there is almost certainly some mechanical trickery at work.[135] However, for the purpose at hand, it is far more significant that our sources *perceived it to be possible* that a statue would walk, sweat, talk or bleed than whether or not it actually did.[136] This tension is particularly prominent in our historical authors, because they consistently raise issues surrounding omens, as I shall discuss below. In these cases, the question is not 'did this omen actually occur in reality?' but 'what is the significance of the fact that our author has raised it at this point?' In this regard, it

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[133] Such studies "tend to develop theories that privilege discursive interpretations of ritual over and against cognition-in-performance" (Ando 2008:xiii). These are not the only problems raised in a textual approach: these texts come from "not only a tiny minority within the whole population but one whose members generally felt themselves to be different from the majority, different in culture, sometimes aggressively so" (MacMullen 1981:9). See also Keel and Uehlinger 1998:10-11: such approaches "ought to get little or no hearing".

[134] Lieu (2004:8) observed that a textual approach has an additional value in "warning us against looking for some essential and abiding reality independent of the texts", although she acknowledged that texts tend to privilege the understanding of the literary elite.

[135] See below, 3.2.1.1; see also Weddle 2010:91-2 for fuller discussion.

[136] "The first assumption appears to be one of divine involvement in the vocal communication of images, over and above any desire to raise the kinds of questions implied in accusations of religious fraud" (ibid:101). See also MacMullen 1984:22, Engberg 2007:23.

is significant that Christian authors deal almost entirely with the *perception* of gentile religion, rather than its *reality*.[137] They do argue that, for example, it is clearly impossible for statues to move, or feed themselves: but for this claim to make any sense at all it relies entirely on the assumption that their audience *perceived* that they could. This is an important distinction that will become more apparent during close study of the texts in question. It should be noted that, when I discuss the religious mentality of these authors, I am not interested in what our ancient authors 'believed': 'belief' is a word that causes considerable discomfort in Classical scholars.[138] I do not intend to debate whether or not Livy or Lucian 'believed' the gods would respond to sacrifice, as this is a question that is unlikely to yield a helpful answer. Instead, this study focusses on our authors' understanding of the theology and practice of daily religious life.[139]

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[137] Drijvers highlighted this as a limitation of using Christian source material: "attacks by Christian authors on their pagan opponents are mostly of a very general character mentioning pagan deities and sacrifices, but they are not informative on what really took place in a pagan temple" (1982a:35).

[138] The majority of scholars tend to dismiss belief as "profoundly Christian in its implications" (Price 1984:10), which, as a monotheistic construct, is inappropriate in a religious system which operated through ritual practice and worried little about orthodoxy (Ando 2008:ix, Beard, North and Price 1998:x; Davies 2004:5); "it is hard to know what religious conviction might mean in a world where no religious affiliation resulted from it" (ibid:42). However, there is a growing tendency to recognise that in our determination not to allow Christian concepts to influence our understanding of Graeco-Roman religious life, we have perhaps been guilty of throwing out the baby with the bathwater (Rives 2007:48; Versnel 2011:5): Ando recognised that the rejection of faith had produced an impasse, and that we should ask not whether the Romans had faith, but what they had instead" (2008:xi). Both Rives and King challenged the understanding of 'belief' and argued that it simply meant "a proposition that a person accepts as true even without proof" (ibid. 48), or "conviction that an individual (or a group of individuals) holds independently of the need for empirical support" (King 2003:278). Therefore a belief is not a purely religious construction and can be held of the weather forecast, for example. It is to be distinguished from faith, which implies a deeply held conviction with personal significance (although Johnson argued that it was wrong to "privilege Christianity by terming it "faith" in contrast to "religion"" (2009:131). Even a system based on practice functioned only if a set of key beliefs were upheld: that the gods existed, that they were generally benevolent towards mankind, and that they would respond to sacrifice; Cicero's Academic Cotta makes this point in *Nat. D.* 1.115-6. In Rives' estimation, what distinguished Graeco-Roman religion from Christianity was "the absence not of religious beliefs, but of pressures to define and scrutinize those beliefs" (2007:48). Our ancient authors simply did not feel the need to talk about it; as a result, Davies argued that the very question of whether one 'believed' or was a 'sceptic' imposed a dichotomy that did not exist in our ancient sources (2004:6).

[139] As Beard, North and Price pointed out, it is not chance that very little 'religious biography' exists: it is a sign that such reflection was not considered important (1998a:78).

1.7   Key definitions

1.7.1   Christian

It was made clear in the discussion of Tatian above that it is very difficult indeed to distinguish between orthodoxy and heresy at this period, in part due to doctrinal fluidity.[140] This makes it extremely difficult to determine what identified a Christian.[141] Today, with the presence of formalised sets of belief set out in the canonised Bible and through established creeds, the categorisation of 'a Christian' is considerably easier. The discussion of the identification of ancient Christianity (or, we might even say, ancient Christianities) would comfortably fill a thesis or more in its own right. In order to avoid this issue, by 'Christian' I here mean a person who holds one or more beliefs founded on Biblical (and particularly New Testament) concepts.

1.7.2   Pagans and Gentiles

If defining a Christian is troublesome, defining a non-Christian is even more so. The most commonly used term, 'pagan', requires extreme caution. Firstly, we cannot talk about a single religious system, namely 'paganism', which these 'pagans' followed. It will rapidly become clear that the sheer variety of religious life within a single region, let alone the entire Graeco-Roman world, makes it impossible to talk about a system that would be comparable

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[140] Hunt 2003:1. Cameron argued that it was exactly this fluidity and multiplicity which contributed to Christianity's success (1991:9).

[141] Scholars often tend to talk in terms of variants of Christianity: Pauline Christianity, Johanine Christianity, and so on: "if Christianity is 'unique' with respect to other religions, then apostolic (or Pauline) Christianity is 'unique' with respect to other (especially later) modes of Christianity" (Smith 2003:29). Similarly, Beard, North and Price argued that early Christianity was "much less familiar in its doctrines, morality or organisation than we might care to imagine" (1998a:x). However, it is misleading to talk about 'Jewish Christianity' as a 'form' of Christianity, since *all* Christianity is Jewish. Instead, it is best to ask: "when and why did Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism stop considering themselves, and recognizing the other, as belonging to the same religion?" (Lieu 2004:2).

to Christianity or Judaism, notwithstanding their own levels of internal variation.[142] Of the three authors under consideration, Meliton comes closest to identifying a unified opposition to Christianity, although even he refers to them simply as 'men' or 'sons of men' with no further qualification. Secondly, the word *paganus* had no significance for authors of this period. Simply meaning 'farmer' (or perhaps 'country bumpkin'),[143] it came to be used only later as a derogatory term for the opponents of Christianity. It is significant that Aristides and Tatian both define the non-Christian not by adherence to a religious system but by their ethnicity: Aristides as either Greek or Barbarian, and Tatian as Greek. This reflects the use of ethnic terminology throughout the New Testament, and particularly in Paul. The closest thing to a term for the 'non-Christian' is τὰ ἔθνη, the Latin translation of which, *gentes*, gives us the term gentile. In the Hebrew Bible, its equivalent, *h'mym*, is used for the non-Jew (as in the title of this thesis, *Psalm* 96:5, but Paul reappropriates its meaning, since the Christians have become the new Israel, the chosen people of God.[144] Halbertal and Margalit justified the use of 'pagan' by observing that "the concept of "pagan" has changed from a purely derogatory concept to a qualitatively differentiating one, that is, to a concept that divides people into grounds with respect to their positive or negative attitude towards its connotations".[145] It would be wrong to suggest that 'pagan' is less than derogatory, but Halbertal and Margalit correctly observed the ethnic, characterising sense of τὰ ἔθνη as used by Paul. In keeping with this approach, I will restrict myself to the use of gentile (as both a noun and adjective), and gentile religious life. While this may seem considerably less neat than 'paganism', it

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[142] "To describe both Greek and Roman polytheists as 'pagans' implies that one perceives the Greek and Roman religious systems as sharing common characteristics" (Petropolou 2008:217). See also Drijvers: it is "impossible to speak of pagan cults and practices in Syria as a well-defined entity" (1982a:37).

[143] For more discussion, see Clark, who argued that it may have been military slang for a civilian (i.e. one who was not enlisted in the army of Christ) (2004:35).

[144] The establishment of God's covenant with the 'new' Israel is found most explicitly in *Hebrews* 8.

[145] Halbertal and Margalit 1992a:8.

avoids a great deal of unnecessary (and misleading) complication,[146] since it is "more suitable to view the Greco-Roman cults and their religious conception as a *religious world* rather than as faith-based religions",[147] and 'gentile religious life' better captures this sense.[148]

1.7.3 <u>Religion.</u>

Religion is an immensely problematic word in its application to Graeco-Roman society. It is derived from the Latin *religio*, but this does not mean 'religion' in the sense of a formalised (let alone unified) religious system or '-ism', like Judaism, Islam or Christianity. Numerous scholars have attempted to put a definition to *religio*: Ando defines it as "a set of practices developed in response to the gods' immanence and action in the world",[149] whilst Rives describes it as an "obligation with respect to the divine".[150] It is therefore best understood as a set of practices that help define one's relationships with the gods.[151] When practiced properly, this is characterised as *pietas*, and, when practiced wrongly or

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[146] Not all scholars agree: Trombley saw no reason to avoid using 'pagan' and 'paganism' as synonyms for the polytheistic opponents of Christianity, the "pre-Christian Aramaic-speaking rustics who worshipped the local Baals and Astartes" (1993a:x). To avoid doing so, he suggested, was pedantic: "if some scholars are troubled about hurting the feelings of generations long past, I cannot discern any scientific or empirical necessity for such compunctions" (ibid:x). However, his argument is based on the derogatory significance of the terms 'pagan' and 'paganism' and not on whether or not they accurately capture the sense of religious life.

[147] Engberg 2007:25.

[148] Although, as Green pointed out, we should not allow this to lead to a concept of *gentilitas*: "they did not think of *gentiles* as followers of another religion (paganism), for they knew that the polytheistic practices of their neighbours did not constitute a set of beliefs or a structured system of worship" (2010:139). As a result, he preferred to refer to heathens. However, it is clear that non-Christians *were* defined ethnically, and gentile best captures this sense. Lieu argued that the label 'gentile' can "come to act as the signifier of anything that is alien and rejected; that it denotes licentious or incestuous practice, or polytheistic identification of images (idols) with deities, is an accepted part of the image, and so can be assumed to require no further demonstration" (2004:281). Many of these characterisations are indeed found in our texts, but unless these points are made explicitly, we should be careful about assuming them to be universal.

[149] Ando 2008:15.

[150] Rives 2007:13-14.

[151] Ando suggested that we might read it as "the sum total of current cult practice" (2008:2): he highlighted Val. Max. 1.1.1a-b and Cic. *Dom.* 121 as evidence of this. See also Rives 2007:14 and Gradel 2002:4.

dangerously, as *superstitio*.[152] I will more fully explore the definition and usage of *superstitio* later in this thesis: in brief, it is best defined as I have done here, as *religio* performed wrongly or excessively.[153] My use of the word 'religion' will therefore be limited to Christianity or Judaism; in describing the relationships between the gentiles and their gods, it is safer to use the somewhat looser 'religious life' or 'polytheistic cults'.

1.7.4 Gods, demons and monotheism.

Gentiles, then, are generally defined ethnically[154] (for the term encompasses all those who are not the children of God, now defined through Christ rather than Abraham),[155] albeit not with so much consistency that they can be comfortably labelled. However, there is even less consistency in the terminology used to define the beings that they worship, and this is reflected in our English terminology. Deities not identified as God or Christ are variously labelled 'gods', 'demons', 'idols' and so on. In this thesis, God (or, in an Old Testament context, YHWH) is used to refer exclusively to the Judaeo-Christian Creator God; gods is used to refer to the deities of gentile religious life. Similarly, both in the thesis and in translations, the third person singular pronoun will be used with a capital letter only for God

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[152] We must, however, be careful with the terms under which religion is classed as 'proper' or 'improper': they are "loaded, shifting terms, whose precise definitions were as much a matter of dispute between Romans as between modern historians; they were discursive categories which framed religious arguments, as well as being labels of approval or disapproval" (Beard, North and Price 1998a:215).

[153] See below, 5.2.5.1.

[154] Berlin argued that in the Near East, "to define a particular people was to define that people's gods" (1996:1); Block, similarly, argued that particular gods were associated with particular territories, and that the association of YHWH with Israel as a people was unique (2000:21-2). However, it is not as simple as this: it is impossible to 'allocate' one set of gods to one set of people, and to delineate them in this way (Kaizer 2008a:1): the "fractionation" of divine worship did not reflect cultic reality. For more on ethnic identity in the Near East, see above, 1.2.

[155] As seen in the Syriac translator of Aristides, who sets Christ against Abraham as the founder of the Christians, the fourth race (*Apol.* 3.2). The idea of the Christians as a *tertius genus* is common amongst apologists (Young 1999:103). However, Aristides is unusual in distinguishing between Greeks and Barbarians; Lieu argued that these categories are not mutually exclusive but must be defined in relation to one another (2004:21), but this is not Aristides' approach. As we shall see, the four ethnic groups are defined individually with little reference to one another.

the Father and the person of Jesus Christ (that is, 'He' as opposed to 'he') in order to aid clarification. Aristides explicitly refers to the recipients of gentile worship as *'lhyn* ('gods'), whilst, as I shall show, Meliton tries not to refer to them at all; only in Tatian do we find any variation. Although he occasionally attacks the οἱ θεοί ('gods'), he refers far more consistently to the οἱ δαίμονες ('demons'). It is made explicitly clear on several occasions that the demons are synonymous with the gods of the gentiles.[156] For the purposes of this dissertation, then, I shall substitute the word 'gods' as consistently as possible, including Tatian's use of 'demons'.

This raises a further problem in terminology. I have previously used the word monotheism with little further discussion, but at this point I must highlight a distinction. Monotheism, particularly in a Christian context, tends to refer to the sole worship of the one true God. However, this does not necessarily preclude an acknowledgement of the *existence* of other spiritual beings, even if one does not worship them. This is seen throughout the New Testament, from Jesus' defeat of the spiritual forces of evil in the gospels to Paul's admission that ἀλλ᾽ ὅτι ἃ θύει τὰ ἔθνη, δαιμονίοις θύει.[157] We even find it in the First Commandment: *l' yhyh lk 'lhym 'ḥrym 'l pny*.[158] This is sometimes reinterpreted in a moralistic sense (that one should regard nothing as one's god except God), but given the prominence of other gods such

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[156] Tatian *Or.* 12.3-4; 13.3; 21.2. Burkert argued that from Xenocrates onwards, δαίμονες were associated with the unclean (1985:76), and that ultimately the understanding of the δαίμων as harmful originated with Plato (ibid:179). However, this association is inconsistent. Burkert defined δαίμονες by their sphere of activity rather than as a specific class of beings (as they appear in Hes. *Op.* 122-6): every god can *act* as a δαίμων, but not every act reveals that he is a god (Burkert 1985:180). As a result, ὁ δαίμων and ὁ θεός are not interchangeable, something Tatian has seemingly ignored. See also MacMullen 1981:79-80 and Petropolou 2008:249.

[157] *1 Cor.* 10.20: 'what the gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons'. I shall return to this verse later in the thesis.

[158] *Exod.* 20:3: 'you shall have *no other gods before me*' (my italics: lit. 'before/above my face'). Rabbinic theology tended to replace *'lhym 'ḥrym*, which appears to acknowledge the existence of other gods, with *'bwdh zrh* ('strange worship'), in order to eradicate precisely this issue (Furstenberg 2010:340). See also Halbertal and Margalit 1992a:3, who also observed that while it was *possible* that the Bible denied the existence of other gods (as opposed to prohibiting their worship), this was by no means certain (ibid:22). Keel and Uehlinger also argued that *Ps.* 82 and 89 suggest similar ideas (1998:3).

as Ba'al and Astarte throughout the Old Testament, it is unlikely that this is the sole significance of the commandment. In this sense, Porter was correct to observe that the fundamental difference between monotheism and polytheism is to be found in the definition of what counts as 'god'.[159] That is not to say that either Jewish or Christian traditions regarded these gods as rival powers: in comparison to God, they are utterly powerless. This sort of monotheism is what I shall term relative monotheism: the gods, in comparison to the Creator God, are so weak that they *might as well* not exist. More rarely, we find a form of absolute monotheism: in this understanding, the other gods do not exist at all.[160] This distinction will prove to be vital: as I shall show, it plays an important role in highlighting the differences between Meliton, Tatian and Aristides.

At the other end of the spectrum of religious mentality, we find true polytheism: an acknowledgement that an abundance of gods exist and the determination to worship as many as possible. Hand in hand with this mentality is the recognition that, if a god is accidentally left out of offerings, they may take offence. It is this true polytheism which gives rise to inscriptions which leave the god unnamed: the most famous example of this phenomenon is the altar established in Athens 'to the unknown God' (Ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ), found in *Acts* 17:23

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[159] Porter 2000:2.

[160] Versnel questioned whether such 'pure' monotheism could exist at all (2000:85); as I shall show, Meliton is one of the very few who demonstrates absolute monotheism, and such statements are extremely elusive (Geller 2000:292). As Pollini pointed out, neither Judaism nor Christianity were strict in their insistence on the existence of only one god; indeed, certain Christians were happy to accept the *genius* of the emperor (2008:167-8). Clark termed this sort of religious attitude 'soft monotheism': a monotheism which allowed lesser divine entities (2004:91), and under these conditions both Judaism and Christianity could be incorporated (to some degree) into the Graeco-Roman world. However, relative monotheism, in the sense that I understand it in this thesis, is slightly different, in that such beings are no less *forbidden* than in the case of absolute monotheism; the fact that Christianity was *not* incorporated into the gentile religious world shows that Clark's approach to 'soft monotheism' is inaccurate. Beard, North and Price highlighted a spectrum of phenomena, ranging from "an extreme form of polytheism (where all of a large number of deities are treated as effectively equal) and an equally extreme position that insists on the existence of only one god; and, in practice, it rarely draws a clear distinction between those who believe that their particular deity is by far the most important and powerful (perhaps, like Isis, incorporating all others) and those who believe that their deity is literally the only one" (1998a:286). This is much more in keeping with my approach: I have simply given labels to various points on the spectrum.

and attacked by Paul. In their determination not to leave any god without offering, the dedicator allows the god to choose their own moniker.[161]

Somewhere between the two polarities we find a phenomenon which Versnel labelled henotheism.[162] Strictly speaking, this expresses the mentality that 'there is no god like X'. This position first emerged (outside philosophical circles, at least) in Asia Minor in the imperial period,[163] but later became considerably more popular in the growing popularity of mystery cults, and particularly the cult of Isis.[164] In this mentality, one god was more prominent than others (considerably more so, in some cases), but at the same time, the worshipper acknowledged that these others existed and was happy to offer them worship while maintaining the superiority of the more prominent deity.[165]

1.8 Script, texts, and translations

As a final note: all translations given in this thesis, unless otherwise specified, are my own. I have provided translations for the *Oration of Meliton the Philosopher* and the Syriac translation of Aristides' *Apology* in the appendices, since translations of these texts are not particularly accessible. Translations of Tatian's *Address to the Greeks* are more readily

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[161] As Versnel pointed out, under these circumstances, one might ask the question 'to which god should I sacrifice?' (just as Moses asked of the burning bush in *Exod.* 3) and the question may have had several answers (1981:13). "It was better to be too extensive than to risk forgetting one god": as an example he highlights Oineus' mistake in omitting Artemis in *Il.* 15.534f. See also Teixidor 1979:115ff. For more discussion of the 'unknown' or 'anonymous' god, see below, 3.3.3.

[162] Versnel 1981:12-3. On the characteristic hallmarks of henotheistic cult, including personal submission and the invincibility of the deity, see Versnel 2000:138-45.

[163] Versnel 1981:12.

[164] Versnel 2000:132ff. For these cults, and the devotion to Isis seen in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, see below, 3.3.4.2.

[165] Dandamayev argued that this was an inevitable feature of political life in the Near East: cities competed to elevate 'their' god above others, leading to the prominence of the Supreme God, such as we see in the form of Dushara in Nabataea (1996:36); Clark argued that this was a tendency which became considerably more marked in the first two centuries AD (2004:14). On the prominence of Dushara in Nabataean cities, see Healey 2001 and Alpass 2013.

available. All chapter titles, including the title of the thesis, are Biblical quotations taken from the English Standard Version. I have done this in order to demonstrate the Christian (by which I mean 'Biblical') standpoint on the issues at hand, but also the influence of that standpoint on modern use of terminology: the effect of this will clearly be seen in subsequent chapters. I have provided transcriptions of all Greek texts, but have transliterated Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac texts. The reason for this is to be found in the sheer variety of scripts: although Aristides and Meliton are both written in Syriac, the former appears in the manuscript in the Serto script, and the latter in Estrangela: direct transcription would therefore make comparison considerably more difficult. The same consideration is made of Aramaic inscriptions: these are found in a number of different fonts and dialects, none of which are easily comparable (and none of which bear much resemblance, if any, to the more familiar Imperial Aramaic script.[166]

1.9   Concluding remarks

Using the definitions provided in this section, we may now turn to the texts of Aristides, Meliton and Tatian and begin to establish what they can tell us about Christian attitudes to gentile religious life in the Roman Near East in the first few centuries AD when we compare them with other, non-Christian material. To that end, we shall begin with one of the most prominent features of the text: attacks on the worship of images and cult statues.

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[166] As Healey observed, "it would have been possible to *create* fonts for Nabataean, Palmyrene, and Hatran… but especially in the Nabataean case there is such variability in the script – several different basic scripts are involved, not to mention the frequent variations in the forms of individual letters – that to choose particular letter-forms as the norm for printing would be an artificial procedure" (2009:vii).

Chapter Two: 'Do not make for yourselves gods of cast metals' (*Deut.* 19:4): Near Eastern Christianity and image worship

2.1   Introduction

The title to this thesis ('the gods of the nations are idols', *Psalm* 96:5) alludes to Christian criticism of the practice of 'idolatry', and suggests that, for Jewish and Christian writers, gentile religious practice can best be described by this term. However, it is far from clear what an idol actually is: the term is often used of both physical images and false gods. I have yet to adequately define the practice; in order to properly understand Near Eastern Christian attitudes to image-worship, which is the aim of this first chapter, we must have a sufficient definition of the terms involved. For the purposes of this thesis, and for reasons that I shall demonstrate below, I define idolatry as 'the worship of anything other than the true God'.[1] This category thus incorporates, but is not limited to, iconolatry, which is strictly 'the worship of images in any form'. The confusion between idolatry and iconolatry is largely due to the central role that image worship has played, both in classical cults (or, more accurately, in our perception of them), and in Christian polemic and apology. It is therefore an obvious starting point in the study of the attitudes of our texts. However, before we progress some further discussion of the two terms idolatry and iconolatry is required to expand upon the distinction drawn here.

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[1] Barton defined it as "worship wrongly directed or worship wrongly practiced" (2007a:1; see also Halbertal and Margalit 1992a:1), although Hartshorne observed that distinctions between sound and unsound religion (or piety and idolatry) are misleading, since it is inevitable that the religion of the 'other' will be classified as idolatry (1970:3; see also Rubiés 2006:571). As shall be seen, Christian authors are primarily, although not universally, concerned with the recipient, rather than the manner, or worship. Not all scholars agree with this definition, however: "if "idolatry" is to have any identifiable content at all, it must entail the use of physical objects and not just the worship of some god other than YHWH" (Greenspahn 2004:481). While idolatry must *include* iconolatry, it is not limited to it. Rowland highlighted the range of issues covered by idolatry (2007:163-8), which is therefore not to be identified with iconolatry (Faur 1978:13; Rubiés 2006:577).

2.2   Defining an idol

Idolatry is, at risk of stating the obvious, the worship of an idol, our understanding of
which derives from the Greek εἴδωλον. This is used throughout the Septuagint translation of
the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, to refer to a variety of beings and objects,
ranging from carved images to illusions. Part of the problem in our understanding is the
inconsistency of the use of εἴδωλον by the Septuagint translators.[2] Hayward conducted a
study of the LXX Pentateuch, in which the word appears on twelve occasions, and is used to
translate very different words. In *Exodus* 20:4, it translates *psl* (meaning a carved image); in
Numbers 33:52 it translates *ṣlm'* ('likeness'). In both these instances, it appears to be
connected with a physical image or object, as it does in both *Leviticus* 26:30 and
Deuteronomy 29:16, when *glwlym* (literally 'log', and therefore used of images in the round)
is translated εἴδωλον;[3] in the latter passage, numerous materials are given from which the
glwlym could be fashioned, again suggestive of a physical image. Three of the twelve uses in
the LXX Pentateuch translate *trpym*.[4] It is unclear what the *teraphim* are, and descriptions are
inconsistent, although they are clearly physical objects of sorts.[5]

However, εἴδωλον is also used to translate *'lwh*,[6] meaning an illusion or phantom,
whilst in *Deut*. 32:21, it translates *bhblyhm* ('emptinesses', 'hot air'). These two usages,

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[2] "It is important to remember that the English word *idol* derives from a transliteration, not a translation, of the Greek word *eidolon*, which had a history of its own before it became a Christian technical term. The Greeks did not use the term *idol* to designate a class of religiously abhorrent images" (Kennedy 1994:198). See also Pfeiffer 1924:227-37.

[3] Hayward 2007:50: "the Hebrew word is strongly pejorative, carrying with it notions of uncleanliness, filth and defilement which are thereby directly related to pagan cult objects". In contrast, Kennedy argued that the Greek only acquired such connotations under Tertullian, who also began the tradition of transliterating, rather than translating, the term (1994:202-4).

[4] *Gen*. 31:19, 34, 35.

[5] In *Gen*. 31:19-35, Rachel is able to sit on them to cover them from Laban; outside the Pentateuch, they also appear in *1 Sam*. 19:13-16, where Michal disguises one as David using a duvet and a wig to baffle Saul's soldiers. For further discussion of the *teraphim*, see Hayward 2007:46.

[6] *Nb*. 25:2.

whilst closest in sense to the Greek εἴδωλον, meaning a 'phantom' or 'illusion',[7] are very far

removed from the sense of *psl*: a carved image, by its very nature, must have substance. *psl*

and *hbl* do appear alongside one another in *Jer.* 8:19: *mdw' hk'swny bpslyhm bhbly nkr.*[8]

Hayward argued that this verse may have been responsible for informing the Septuagint

translators. He also suggested that the *teraphim* were connected with divination and (false)

prophecy, and that they may be connected to the 'empty' idols in this sense.[9]

Hayward's attempts to link the uses of εἴδωλον in the Septuagint translation of the

Pentateuch are useful but inconclusive. The very range of possible understandings of εἴδωλον

suggests ambiguity, and nowhere is this ambiguity more apparent than in the Biblical

prohibitions at the heart of Judaeo-Christian iconoclasm, found in *Exod.* 20:4 and *Lev.* 19:4.[10]

The two are, however, not identical: some discussion of the two verses side by side may help.

Exodus reads *l' t'śh lk psl wkl tmwnh 'šr bšmym mm'l w'šr b'rṣ mtḥt w'šr bmym mtḥt l'rṣ.*[11]

Leviticus, in contrast, reads *'l tpnw 'l h'lylm w'lhy mskh l' t'św lkm 'ny yhwh 'lhykm.*[12] *Lev.*

19:4 appears to be an amalgamation of *Exod.* 20:3-4: *l' yhyh lk 'lhym 'ḥrym 'l pny* ('you shall

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[7] The word is used of the ghosts in the Homeric underworld, for example: *Od.* 11.475. This is the meaning suggested by Brown: it can mean any unsubstantial form, an image reflected in a mirror or water, an image or idea in the mind" (1976:284).

[8] 'Why do they grieve me with their carved images and foreign phantoms?'.

[9] Hayward 2007:46. See also Kennedy 1994:200.

[10] Andrade argued that Jewish attitudes were more ambiguous than the Biblical prohibition suggested: "despite widespread concerns about anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images among Jews, some Jews nonetheless interacted with figurative art in ways that would not have distinguished them from Greeks at all. In fact, Jews of this period had differing views concerning what human and animal likenesses signified, and they disputed whether iconic images were idolatrous likenesses or simply artistic representations that were not problematic so long as they were not actively worshipped. Also, what constituted an idolatrous image could be a point of contention" (2010:360). Josephus, in particular, appears to have objected to the *association* of the image with the divine rather than their *creation* (Barclay 2007:83). Noy highlighted similar ambiguity in discussing the imagery of the synagogue at Dura-Europos, which presented numerous anthropomorphic depictions (2007:75-6), and Sartre argued that the story of the Rabbi Gamaliel, who was asked why he was willing to bathe near a statue of Aphrodite, demonstrated a willingness on the part of the Jews to make iconographic allowances in order to assimilate better (2008:47). See also Greenspahn 2010:485-6; on Gamaliel's comments, see Lapin 2012:126-132.

[11] 'Do not make for yourself a carved image (Gk. εἴδωλον), or any likeness of whatever is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the water below the earth'.

[12] 'Do not turn towards phantoms (Gk εἴδωλοις), and do not make for yourselves gods of cast metal. I am the LORD your God'.

not have any gods before [or above] me'. This is the only verse in the *Exodus* version to use *'lhym* of false gods, which is one reason for the suggestion that *Lev*. 19:4 has incorporated the sense of this verse. Thus, in both versions, there is an apparent separation between the 'empty' gods and gods of cast metal. The difference is found in the LXX translation, for in *Exod*. 20.4, it is the 'carved images' which are translated as εἴδωλα, whilst in *Lev*. 19:4, the εἴδωλα are apparently separate from the 'gods of carved metal'. This further highlights the inconsistency in terminology, and suggests that at the very root of polemic against images lies uncertainty as to what the 'idol' was: was it the god or the statue? It may also reflect the idea that, to the LXX translators at least, the concepts were interchangeable. We should not, therefore, be surprised to find similar uncertainty in our sources, as I shall demonstrate. Furthermore, this ambiguity appears in the use of εἴδωλα in the New Testament, as well as the word 'idol' in English translations, which use the word not only to cover at least the majority of uses of the Greek word, but also a variety of others. Nowhere is this clearer than in the quotation used as the title to this thesis. Taken from *Ps*. 96:5, the Hebrew reads *ky kl 'lhy h'mym 'lylym wyhwh šmym 'śh*, and the LXX πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν δαιμόνια, ὁ δὲ κύριος τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἐποίησεν. However, the English Standard Version gives us 'for all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens', whilst the New International Version has 'for all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens'. The Hebrew uses *'lylym*, 'illusions', for which one might expect the translation εἴδωλα, but the Septuagint translators have rendered this as δαιμόνια.[13] The relationship between demons and idols is unclear, but, as Hayward demonstrated, is clearly connected to

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[13] Curiously, Clement quotes *Ps*. 96:5 as πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν δαιμονίων εἰσίν εἴδωλα (4.54). It is unclear as to whether he is using an alternative textual tradition: no other version of *Ps*. 96:5 appears to use εἴδωλα. Outler points out that some of Clement's quotations of the Platonic Dialogues are occasionally mistaken, and that this is due to error rather than ignorance (1940:223): perhaps the same interpretation should be applied here. On the translation of this verse, see Johnson 2009:2, who argued that the LXX translators regarded gentile gods as part of the daemonic world.

the emptiness of idols: "demons cannot normally be seen, but are often associated with the air, wind or vapour; hence their introduction into a translation of a poem which speaks of *hbl*, 'vapour'. But they can manifest themselves, becoming visible or even tangible; hence 'idol' is a good word for them, appearing to partake of solid reality, but in reality being nothing".[14] I noted in the introduction that δαιμόνια can encompass a wide variety of concepts, and does not need to be associated with demons: elsewhere, it can translate *'lhym*, 'gods' (despite the fact that this is applied throughout the Old Testament to YHWH as well as to foreign deities).[15] Here it provides an excellent example of the breadth of the term 'idol'.

New Testament understandings of εἴδωλα are similarly vague. Of all the uses of εἴδωλα, or its derivatives, in the New Testament, fourteen are found in the *Pauline* letters, with a further four in *Revelation*, two in *Acts* and a sole occurrence in *1 Peter*. Of the fourteen Pauline uses, a startling eleven appear in *1 Corinthians*.[16] Given that over half of the occurrences of the word occur in a single letter, this would appear an obvious starting point. However, even within this single letter, Paul's attitude is remarkably inconsistent. The use of εἰδωλολάτρης in 5:10-11 and 6:9 does not worry us here, for it refers to the immoral practice of 'the idolater'. From 8:1 onwards, however, Paul's attention turns to the practice of eating 'idol food' (εἰδωλόθυτος).[17] There has been considerable discussion about the precise nature of this food, but the key point here is that Paul appears to permit the eating of food offered to 'idols' on the grounds that οἴδαμεν ὅτι οὐδὲν εἴδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ, καὶ ὅτι οὐδεὶς Θεὸς ἕτερος εἰ μὴ εἷς.[18] Since the 'idol' to which it is offered has no real existence, how can one be

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[14] Hayward 2007:44, n. 12.

[15] Examples of this process are extremely numerous; examples of its use of specifically foreign deities may be found in *Exod.* 12:12, 15:11, 20:3, *Deut.* 12:3, 12:31, *Joshua* 24:20.

[16] Derivatives of εἴδωλον are found in *Acts* 15:29, 21:25; *1 Cor.* 5:10, 5:11. 6:9, 8:1, 8:4, 8:7, 8:10, 10:7, 10:14, 10:19, 10:28; *Gal.* 5:20; *Eph.* 5:5; *Col.* 3:5; *1 Pet.* 4:3; *Rev.* 2:14, 2:20, 21:8, 22:15.

[17] This word does not appear in pre-Pauline literature, and may be of Christian origin (Horrell 2007:121).

[18] *1 Cor.* 8:4: 'we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one'.

affected by it? The matter is considerably confused just two chapters later, however, when Paul writes: ἀλλ᾿ ὅτι ἃ θύει τὰ ἔθνη, δαιμονίοις θύει καὶ οὐ Θεῷ· οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι.[19] Why this apparently sudden change of heart? The matter has caused considerable debate amongst scholars, with interpretations ranging from the suggestion that two different kinds of meals are meant,[20] to the possibility that *1 Cor.* 10-16 was originally a separate letter which has become fused to *1 Cor.* 1-9.[21] It is impossible to solve this dilemma here, but I suggest, given the ambiguity apparent in the Old Testament, two different 'kinds' of εἴδωλα are meant here: in *1 Cor.* 8, Paul is talking about food offered to an 'idol' in the sense of food placed before a statue, or perhaps sharing a meal at a Gentile's house (which would commonly involve images of the gods). These images are clearly powerless, and placing food before them, whilst potentially harmful to a new convert (as Paul himself suggests), would have no effect whatsoever. In *1 Cor.* 10, by contrast, Paul is prohibiting the participation in worship of the 'idol' *represented* by the image, or the partaking of sacrificial meat that would often follow.[22] It is clear that (unless we assume that Paul has become confused, or changed his mind) two different kinds of 'idolatry' are intended here. Paul's approach is hugely ambiguous, largely because the Old Testament material with which he was so familiar is ambiguous.

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[19] Ibid. 10:20: 'but what the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to become companions of demons'. Cheung highlighted a similar theme apparent in *Deut.* 32:17 and *Ps.* 106:28: these are likely the source of Paul's interpretation (1999:41). Garrison argued that it was "undeniable" that Paul viewed the former objects of worship as dead (1997:13), but as I have shown, the matter is more ambiguous than that. Johnson highlighted the contradiction, but failed to provide a satisfactory explanation (2009:7).

[20] Willis 1985:47-56: Cheung accepted Willis' argument but favoured the view that it is "very clear that an objective separation between social dining in temples and meals involving religious rites was extremely unlikely" (1999:36).

[21] Cheung (1999:84) provides a brief survey of the evidence but concludes that "there is no textual evidence whatsoever for the composite nature of the section in a comparatively full manuscript tradition".

[22] Naiden has demonstrated that, on the basis of sheer numbers, not all meat in the ancient world would once have been offered in a temple, as other scholars have previously supposed: we can therefore assume that it would have been perfectly possible to avoid eating sacrificial meat sold at markets (2011:9).

It is therefore evident from both the Septuagint and New Testament that εἴδωλα can encompass both physical images and phantom powers, and the vagueness of the English term 'idol' reflects this. Indeed, there is little evidence of any consistent terminology in either Old or New Testament to refer specifically to an image independent of the deity it represents. Perhaps the closest we come to reference to an image is the εἰκών: this word translates *ṣlm'* in *Genesis* 1:26 of the 'likeness' into which man is fashioned.[23] However, although *ṣlm'* has a particular significance for Meliton in particular, as I shall shortly demonstrate, there is little evidence that the same is true of εἰκών in Tatian. This confusion over what constitutes an 'idol' is used by Christian authors to serve their own rhetorical and philosophical purposes. However, it is essential to recognise that there is a distinction, in theory and practice, between 'idolatry' and 'image-worship' (which I shall term 'iconolatry'). By definition, since idols can include icons, all iconolatry is idolatry, but not all idolatry is iconolatry. Given this ambiguity, I will avoid the English word 'idol' where possible, with the exception of the title of this thesis (and the final sentence of this paragraph!). I will render Hebrew or Syriac words such as *'lylym* and *hbl* as 'illusions' or 'phantoms', and where it is necessary (to translate the Greek εἴδωλον, for example) I will endeavour to clarify the original phrase. Defining these terms at this stage will allow us to assess more clearly the way in which similar terms are used by Christian authors. This is essential, as it will become clear that all three of the major authors have different approaches to the representation of the divine and the nature of 'idols'.

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[23] Fletcher-Louis argued that, in fashioning Adam and Eve into the *ṣlm'* of God, they are intended to serve the same purpose as gentilic image (2007:59). This has considerable repercussions for ethical conduct, for we are to treat our fellow man as we would a cult image (ibid:60). See also Kennedy 2004:201.

2.3   Near Eastern Christian attitudes to image-worship

2.3.1   Meliton

Image-worship or iconolatry is one of the most evident features of Meliton's text. Before we examine his presentation of these images, it is worth taking a few moments to examine his use of terminology. Meliton does not use any word which captures the sense of the Greek εἴδωλον: none of those interpreted in this manner by the LXX translators appear here, save *'lhyn*, which is best understood as 'gods' rather than 'idols'.

By far the most prominent term used by Meliton is *ṣlm'* ('image' or 'likeness'), which appears no fewer than twenty times, a remarkable frequency given the comparative shortness of the text. It is this term which is translated as εἰκών in the LXX of *Genesis* 1:26, to describe the likeness of God into which man has been fashioned. Another term that appears on occasion is *glyp'* ('carving'): for example, *kl gyr mṭ' b'ydwhy. wšrk' dṣbwt' 'yk m' d'ytyhyn hkwt ntḥšbn lk. ṣlm' 'yk ṣlm: wglyp' 'yk glyp'*.[24] Both times that this word is used,[25] it appears alongside *ṣlm'*, which raises the question as to whether a clear distinction is intended. Estienne has observed a tendency in the Latin historians to distinguish between *simulacra* and *ornamenta*:[26] according to this argument, the former *belong* to the temple or cult site, and are themselves objects of reverence, whilst the latter are merely decorative gifts, which could be removed, for instance, by renovators, without risking sacrilege.[27] Her argument is convincing: she surveyed the use of terms for religious iconography in Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius, and discovered that virtually all of the uses of *simulacra* were reserved for images of the gods, whilst *statua* was almost exclusively used of images of humans (including

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[24] Meliton 5.1: 'for everything is in His hands. Reckon all other things according to what they are: images as images, and carvings as carvings'.
[25] Ibid. 5.1, 9.8.
[26] Estienne 2010:258.
[27] Ibid. 2010:262. See also Weddle 2010:14.

human rulers), and *ornamenta* for purely decorative depictions and reliefs. Could such a distinction be at work in Meliton's separation of *ṣlm'* ('images') and *glyp'* ('carvings')? Although a tempting conclusion, it is an unlikely one; in the only other use of the word *glyp'* in the text, Meliton suggests that they too are objects of reverence: *wn'qdwn bnynš' 'm ṣlm' d'bdw: w'm glyp' dsgdw*.[28] Is *glyp'*, then, a synonym for *ṣlm'*, used for a rhetorical flourish? This is unlikely; Meliton's style is elsewhere so repetitive that one would expect a similar flourish to occur on more than just two occasions. It is clear that they are an alternative form of image to the *ṣlm'*, but their precise identity is unclear. However, it is very likely that Meliton's use of the word *ṣlm'* is restricted to purely anthropomorphic images. Although he mentions zoomorphic images,[29] the word *ṣlm'* is not used, nor is it used when he describes the worship of celestial beings or the elements.[30]

Admittedly, only rarely does *ṣlm'* appear explicitly of human images: *'n' dyn 'mr 'n'. d'p swl' 'mrt 'lyhwn dlṣlm' hw dmlk' dmytw sgdyn*.[31] However, in each of the other occurrences, it is at most ambiguous, and entirely plausible that anthropomorphic images are at least included. Although this argument from silence is not conclusive, I suggest that, given

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[28] Meliton 9.8: 'the people will be burnt up together with the images which they made, and the carvings which they worshipped'.

[29] Meliton 5.8: *'n mṭl d'tdmy lḥywt knp'. mṭl mn' lh lḥywt knp' l' sgd 'nt. w'n mṭl d'tdmy lḥywṭ šn'. h' ḥywt šn' qnwmh qdmyk* ('if it is because it resembles a winged beast, why do you not worship the winged beast? If it is because it resembles a beast of prey, the beast of prey itself is before you').

[30] Ibid. 2.2-2.4: *'n gyr lnwr' 'nš nqr' 'lh'. l' hwt 'lh'. mṭl dnwr' hy. w'n lmy' 'nš nqr' 'lh'. l' hww 'lh' mṭl dmy' 'nwn. w'n l'r'' hd' ddyšynn : w'n lšmy' hlyn dmtḥzyn ln: w'n lšmš' 'w lshr': 'w lḥd mn kwkb' hlyn dbpwqdn' rhṭyn wl' mšṭlyn. wbṣbyn npšhwn l' mhlkyn... 'ykn' hkyl hlyn 'lh' 'nwn* ('for if a man should call fire 'god', it is not god because it is fire; if a man will call water 'god', it is not god because it is water. And if [we call gods] this earth which we tread upon, and these heavens which we see, and the sun and the moon and one of these stars which run along according to the commandment, and do not stop, not journeying by their own will... how are these things gods?'). A similar passage appears in the *Wisdom of Solomon*: ἀλλ' ἢ πῦρ ἢ πνεῦμα ἢ ταχινὸν ἀέρα ἢ κύκλον ἄστρων ἢ βίαιον ὕδωρ ἢ φωστῆρας οὐρανοῦ πρυτάνεις κόσμου θεοὺς ἐνόμισαν ('but they consider that fire, or wind, or swift air, or the circle of stars, or rushing water or the lights of heaven are the gods which rule the world', *Wis.* 13:2). A number of phrases from *Wis.* 13-15, a section which deals with both iconolatry and idolatry, appear in very similar form in Meliton's *Oration*, suggesting that the apologist was influenced by the apocryphal text.

[31] Ibid. 3.2 ('I say that the Sybil says about them that they worship the images of dead kings'). *ṣlm'* is also used of the images of kings in 3.5, and of the images of Orpheus and Zaradusht which are worshipped at Hierapolis as Nebo and Hadran respectively (4.6).

Meliton's heavy use of the word elsewhere, linguistic variety is not enough to explain the absence of the word *ṣlm'* precisely at the two moments at which non-anthropomorphic images are explicitly mentioned (namely in discussing zoomorphic images and the elements). The reason for this almost certainly comes from its use in the *Gen.* 1:26: man is fashioned in the image (*ṣlm'*) of God, and so *ṣlm'* is, for Meliton at least, explicitly restricted to anthropomorphic imagery. According to this argument, then, *glyp'* is a blanket term intended to encompass all forms of image which are not anthropomorphic in form.[32] Seemingly, *ṣlm'* does not need to refer to the divine explicitly: in her study of the statues found at Hatra, Dirven observed that twenty-one of the extant statues were inscribed with the formula *ṣlm' dy* ('image of').[33] Of the three hundred or so free-standing statues at Hatra, roughly half, according to Dirven, are explicitly of gods, with the remainder being of kings or other prominent inhabitants, including the twenty-one with the relevant inscriptions: Dijkstra argued that the latter were secular,[34] whilst Dirven attempted to blur the distinction, suggesting that "it is this very intimate connection between the socio-political and the religious spheres that is typical of Hatra".[35] It is possible, although by no means provable, that *ṣlm'* has connotations which enable the anthropomorphic image to be associated with the divine (just as ἄγαλμα can be the recipients of worship as well as purely honorific images): the distinction between honorific and cult image is clearly not as distinct as in Latin.[36] At present it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that it has an almost exclusively anthropomorphic sense, but more evidence, both literary and epigraphic,[37] would be needed to argue more

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[32] This has implications for aniconic forms of imagery, to which I shall return later in the chapter.
[33] Dirven 2008:218. Similarly, the author of *Mar Mari* uses *ṣlm'* to refer to bronze statues of a woman (1).
[34] Dijkstra 1995:219.
[35] Dirven 2008:210.
[36] For more discussion on cult terminology in Latin and Greek, see below.
[37] Payne Smith's Syriac dictionary suggests that the word can be used of human depictions on coins, but this does not necessarily rule out a connection with the divine.

convincingly that *ṣlm'* has a specific connection with the divine, and the discovery of such evidence is hugely improbable.

Meliton's focus on *ṣlm'* is startling: the word is used twenty times, compared to two occurences of the word *glyp'* ('carving') and a handful of instances where no word is explicitly used to define the objects of cult.[38] Regardless of the distinction, Meliton's interest is explicitly in images: unlike the Old Testament, which tends to speak of other gods as *'lhym* (although often with the disclaimer that they are false or empty, in order to distinguish them from YHWH, the true *'lh'*), Meliton reserves all derivatives of *'lh'* for the true God, and so does not even allow gentile deities the recognition of being *false* gods: the implication is that they are no gods at all. By focussing so exclusively on the *image* at the expense of the *god* that it represents,[39] Meliton denies these 'false gods' any meaningful existence whatsoever. As a result, he is almost unique amongst Christian authors in this respect. To return to the passage in *1 Corinthians* 8-10 to which I have already referred, the ambiguity in Paul, whereby the existence and power of εἴδωλα is unclear at best, is dealt with entirely by Meliton's firm rejection of all spirits. Indeed, only twice are other spirits mentioned at all: Meliton describes the freeing of a well at Hierapolis by the (soon-to-be) god Hadad from a *rwḥ' ṭnpt'*, an 'unclean spirit',[40] and also describes the worship of *š'd'*, 'demons'.[41] Why these two uses, when elsewhere the existence of spiritual beings is so firmly denied? Frequently, the New Testament authors describe demons and evil spirits as τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ

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[38] In *The Martyrdom of Shamuna and Guria*, the Christians are similarly encouraged to *ṣlm'* (27), but the author regularly uses other synonyms: he shows none of the focus on this term that we find in Meliton.

[39] As, for example, at 5.8: for Meliton, worshipping the image of a winged beast is entirely separate to worship of the beast itself.

[40] Meliton 4.6. *rwḥ'* is used throughout the Old Testament, most commonly as the Spirit of God (as at *Gen.* 1:2, during the Creation) but does appear as evil spirits in opposition to YHWH (*Judges* 9:23).

[41] Ibid. 6.8: *qdm š'd' wṭlnyt': 'l 'r'' mt'rgl wš'l 'nt š'lt' sryqt'. mn mn dlyt lh lmtl* ('you roll on the ground before evil spirits and shadows and you ask empty petitions from that which has nothing to give').

ἀκάθαρτον: *rwḥ' ṭnpt'* is an exact translation of this phrase,[42] which makes it extremely likely that Meliton is not suggesting that this spirit is the object of worship, but is rather drawing on Christian exorcism tradition as part of his narrative. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the objects of worship at Hierapolis, Nebo and Hadran, are described explictly as the *ṣlm'* of humans (Orpheus and Zaradusht respectively), which emphasises worship of the image, not any spiritual power.

In the second instance, Meliton describes the demon as *š'd'*: here, Meliton is not relying on exorcism tradition, and, at first sight, it might appear that he *is* acknowledging the existence, and worship, of other gods. However, this is immediately followed by the commandment to *qwm lk mn lwt hnwn drmyn 'l 'r'': wmnšqyn lk'p': wyhbyn sybrthwn mkwlt' lnwr': wmqrbyn lbwšyhwn lṣlm'*,[43] which clearly associates the *š'd'* with the physical image.

To reinforce his point, Meliton focusses heavily on the connection between *ṣlm'* and material. The contrast between certain materials, particularly gold, and the true God, is one made by many Christian authors (it will appear again in both Aristides and Tatian): the New Testament is full of such contrasts. In *1 Peter*, gold and God are contrasted first on the basis of their value and perishability (πολυτιμότερον χρυσίου τοῦ ἀπολλυμένου διὰ πυρὸς δοκιμαζομένου);[44] the author then reinforces his points by highlighting that the Christians enslaved to sin have been redeemed by the immortal (and infinitely more valuable) blood of

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[42] The Peshitta uses it to translate τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον in *Mk.* 1:23-6. They are also described, much less frequently, as τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ πονηρὸν (*Acts* 19:15).

[43] Meliton 7.1: 'raise yourself from those who lie upon the ground and kiss stones, giving their provisions as food for the fire, and offering their clothes to images'.

[44] *1 Pet.* 1:7: 'more valuable than gold which perishes when tested in the fire'.

Christ, rather than gold.[45] Other uses of this theme appear in *1 Cor.* 3:12-14, which again contrasts the respective values of Christ and of gold, inevitably dismissing the former: εἰ δέ τις ἐποικοδομεῖ ἐπὶ τὸν θεμέλιον τοῦτον χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, λίθους τιμίους, ξύλα, χόρτον, καλάμην, ἑκάστου τὸ ἔργον φανερὸν γενήσεται· ἡ γὰρ ἡμέρα δηλώσει· ὅτι ἐν πυρὶ ἀποκαλύπτεται· καὶ ἑκάστου τὸ ἔργον ὁποῖόν ἐστιν τὸ πῦρ δοκιμάσει. εἴ τινος τὸ ἔργον μενεῖ ὃ ἐπῳκοδόμησε, μισθὸν λήψεται.[46]

For Meliton, however, the contrast between God and gold is not one based on its value: he is happy to compare God with gold *alongside* other, less valuable materials, such as stone and wood.[47] The inclusion of stone in this list might suggest that perishability is not the issue at stake here:[48] rather, the problem is the potential for confusion between object and deity. Meliton does dismiss the value of gold, later in his work: *mkyl rḥm dhb' 'nt wl' rḥm 'lh'.*[49] However, his purpose at that point is to emphasise the potential of wealth to obstruct wise and godly living, and contrasts it with God on those grounds, rather than on grounds of idolatry.

The implications of Meliton's association of statue and divine are many: perishability, vulnerability, dependence and powerlessness are all amongst the features he attacks. These will be explored in the following chapter, but here it is essential to recognise that the basis of

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[45] Ibid. 1:18-19: εἰδότες ὅτι οὐ φθαρτοῖς, ἀργυρίῳ ἢ χρυσίῳ, ἐλυτρώθητε… ἀλλὰ τιμίῳ αἵματι… Χριστοῦ ('for you know that you were ransomed not by perishable things, silver or gold… but by the precious blood… of Christ').

[46] *1 Cor.* 3:12-14: 'if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, each man's work will become apparent. The Day will show it, because it will be revealed by fire, and fire will test what sort of work each man has done. If anyone's work remains which is built upon the foundation, he will receive a reward'.

[47] Meliton 2.3-2.4: *w'n ldhb' 'w ls'm' 'nš nqr' 'lh': l' hw' hlyn 'nwn : dmtḥšḥynn bhwn 'yk ṣbynn. w'n lqys' hlyn dmwqdynn. w'n lk'p' hlyn dmtbryn ḥnn. 'ykn' hkyl hlyn 'lh' 'nwn* ('and if a man should call gold or silver 'gods', they are not, for we use them as we wish. And if [we call gods] these pieces of wood which we burn, and these stones which we shatter, how are these things gods?').

[48] Imagery of Christ as the λίθος of God (such as *1 Pet.* 2:6, quoting *Isa.* 28:16) might suggest that rock and stone had positive connotations in this respect.

[49] Meliton 8.8: 'for you are a lover of gold, and not a lover of God'.

his argument, and therefore the means by which he attacks these characteristics of gentile gods, rests upon the understanding that god and image are one and the same, indistinguishable to Christian philosopher and gentile alike.

Meliton's attitude to iconolatry also informs his Euhemeristic account of the origins of local cults. I shall return to this section in a later chapter, but it is essential to note that, in his view, the fashioning of an image is explicitly connected to the process of deification: *'n' dyn 'yk m' dḥkm 'n'. 'ktwb w'ḥw' 'ykn' wb'ylyn 'lln 't'bdw ṣlm' lmlk' wlṭrwn' : whww 'yk 'lhyn.*[50] Note that the use of *'yk* ('like') strongly suggests that these beings are *not actually* gods:[51] they are not gods: but they are treated *as if they were* gods. This happens, it seems, because good deeds allow one to be recognised with an image, and the fashioning of an image allows one to be treated as a god. Thus, even in the Euhemeristic *historiolae*, which discuss the origin of cult, it is the worship of *images*, and not of the gods at large, which concerns Meliton.

2.3.2   The Syriac translator of Aristides

However, when we compare Meliton's attitude with other sources, we quickly see that it is not characteristic of Near Eastern Christianity. To begin with, the presentation in the Syriac translation of Aristides' *Apology* is dramatically different. Although he, too, uses the word *ṣlm'* of the images of the gods, it is not the *ṣlm'* that is the focus of his work. The most evident difference between Meliton and Aristides is that Aristides frequently uses *'lhyn* of beings other than YHWH: in particular, it is applied to many of the familiar, Classical deities

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[50] Ibid. 3.5: 'I will write and show according to what I know how and for what reasons images are made for kings and tyrants, and they became like gods'.

[51] Indeed, this is one of the few occasions in which the plural *'lhyn* is used to refer to gentile deities. Meliton is clearly happy to do so only because he makes it clear that they are *not* in fact *'lhyn*.

such as Zeus.[52] This is far more in keeping with the Biblical attitude, which consistently uses the Hebrew *ʾlhym* to describe 'other' deities, such as Ba'al or Asherah. Whereas Meliton presented the *ṣlmʾ* as the sole recipient of worship, Aristides recognises that they are merely *likenesses* created by humans to represent deities that already existed: *brbryʾ hkyl mṭl dlʾ ʾdrkwhy lʾlhʾ. ṭʾw bʾsṭwksʾ. wšryw dnplḥwn lbrytʾ ḥlp brwyhyn wmṭlth dhdʾ ʿbdw dmwtʾ wḥbšw bhyklʾ*.[53] It is important to note here that Aristides is no more lenient than Meliton: the worship of other beings than the true Creator remains an error (or sin).[54] The key, however, is that the images worshipped by these sinners are representations of other deities, rather than being the deities themselves, as they are in Meliton's *Oration*. These images are explicitly set alongside the elements (*ʾsṭwksʾ*) as the recipients of worship: *šrʿw mn šrrʾ. wʾzlw btr rgtʾ dtrʿythwn kd plḥyn lʾsṭwksʾ mšṭrynʾ wlṣlmʾ mytʾ*.[55] It is apparent that Aristides, far more clearly than Meliton, has reflected the ambiguity in the identity of gentile gods found throughout the Biblical record.

The task of understanding the attitude of the Syriac translator of Aristides is further complicated by the fact that he uses a less specific vocabulary than Meliton. Where the latter

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[52] He also labels them *ʾsṭwksʾ*, which, although I have rendered it 'elements', is a transliteration of the Greek τὰ στοιχεῖα, and could easily be understood as 'First Principles', and Plato uses it in this sense: τὰ μὲν πρῶτα οἱονπερεὶ στοιχεῖα, ἐξ ὧν ἡμεῖς τε συγκείμεθα καὶ τἆλλα (*Theaet.* 201e: 'those First Principles from which we and everything else are made'; see also *Tim.* 48b). See also Aristole *Metap.* 1.983b: τοῦτο στοιχεῖον καὶ ταύτην ἀρχήν φασιν εἶναι τῶν ὄντων ('this, they say, is an element and an origin of existing things'). Aristides is keen to attack the apparent rationality of Greek philosophers above all, and choosing *ʾsṭwksʾ* as a synonym for *ʾlhyn* would enable him to highlight this. Although Pouderon and Pierre argued strongly that *ʾsṭwksʾ* carried connotations of τὰ στοιχεῖα (2003:193), *ʾsṭwksʾ* is never associated explicitly with *Greek* philosophers: it is associated rather with the philosophers of the Barbarians (or the Chaldaeans in the Greek of *Barlaam and Josaphat*). As a result, *ʾsṭwksʾ* is more likely to refer to celestial elements, and the practice of astronomy, than to the Platonic First Principle. On the difference between 'elements' and 'mortal' gods, see Baumgarten 1996; see also below, 3.9. However, Aristides makes no such distinction here.

[53] Aristides 4.6: 'the Barbarians, then, because they did not understand God, erred with the elements and began to serve created things in place of their Creator, and because of this they made likenesses and shut them up in temples'.

[54] For Meliton's use of these terms, which appear to be interchangeable, see below, 4.5.3.

[55] Ibid. 9.3: 'they fell from the truth and pursued the desires of their own minds when they worshipped perishable elements and dead images'. This association of element and images refutes the suggestion of Pouderon and Pierre that the Greeks alone worship the image, while the Barbarians worship the stars and the Egyptians the animals (2003:364): it is clear that *all* people are guilty of iconolatry.

uses *ṣlm'* on twenty occasions, it appears only four times in Aristides' text (5.2, 9.3, 20.2, 23.4). In the last of these instances, the word is once again explicitly associated with images of men, lending further credence to the suggestion that the word relates specifically to anthropomorphic forms. In two of the other three instances, the *ṣlm'* is described as 'dead' (*myṭ'*), and in the final one as *dl' npš'* ('not living', used purely as a circumlocution to avoid repetition of *myṭ'* which appears two words previously). Aristides, like Meliton, is clearly keen to emphasise that the *ṣlm'* are inanimate and powerless, an argument which is vital for some of his later diatribe. However, where Meliton almost exclusively uses the word *ṣlm'*, Aristides, on five occasions (2.4, 4.6, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5), uses the word *dmwt'*, 'form' or 'likeness'.[56] Is this simply a synonym or do the words have two different purposes? The context of the two words is certainly slightly different; *dmwt'* appears four times in the space of five verses, an on each occasion describes a 'likeness' which was carved to honour the elements (*'sṭwks'*), and, crucially, placed within a temple.[57] This might suggest that *dmwt'* is used of cult statues, whilst *ṣlm'* is used of human images, and in particular anthropomorphic ones: perhaps even honorific images. This distinction soon appears false, however: if *ṣlm'* were used purely of an honorific image, there would be no need to describe it as 'dead' (*myt*). From their context, the *ṣlm'* must also be objects of worship.

The answer to this problem may lie in the fact that the Syriac text of Aristides is the translation of a Greek apology. As noted in the introduction, the translator appears to have expanded to a significant extent; it seems plausible to suggest, however, that Aristides used *dmwt'* and *ṣlm'* because the Greek source used two different words. I noted above that

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[56] The author of *Mar Mari* uses *dmwt'* as 'likeness' to describe the imitation of Christ which his apostles 'put on' (1).

[57] As Weddle argued, the location of a statue went a long way towards identifying its purpose (2010:9); see also Burkert, who argued that the temple and cult image invariably went hand-in-hand (1985:89).

Meliton did not appear to recognise a terminological distinction but it is plausible that the translator of Aristides might have done so. The Greek terms most commonly used to refer to images are ξόανόν and ἄγαλμα; the former is often understood as a cult image, and the latter as an honorific statue (specifically of a human). It is apparent, however, that the distinction between ξόανόν and ἄγαλμα is not nearly as firm as this definition would require. Weddle argued that, although the Latin terms *simulacra* and *statua* have clearly defined semantic ranges which authors almost universally adhered to, the same is not true of Greek terms.[58] Cassius Dio in particular uses ἄγαλμα to denote cult images.[59] The difficulty in defining terminology is particularly apparent in epigraphic evidence, which, as Weddle demonstrated, shows no observable pattern to the use of ξόανα and ἄγαλμα.[60] If we accept Weddle's assessment of the semantic fluidity of these terms, then the apparent overlap between the two Syriac words ceases to be a problem. It therefore does not seem a stretch too far to suggest, tentatively, that the Syriac translator used *dmwt'* to translate ξόανόν and *ṣlm'* for ἄγαλμα (since both are closely associated with the human image).

However, a brief glance at the Greek text of *Barlaam and Josaphat* 27, in which Aristides' apology is quoted, suggests that the matter is not so straightforward (although *ṣlm'* does appear consistently as ἄγαλμα).[61] For example, *dmwt'* appears in the first instance as neither ξόανα nor ἄγαλμα: instead, it appears as μορφώματα,[62] which, whilst it does mean 'image' or 'form', does not have the same cultic connotation. If we assume that the Greek

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[58] Ibid.14; see also Estienne 2010:258.

[59] Weddle suggests that Dio "almost always uses the term *agalma* to describe an image of the gods, often when they were clearly the object of cult": she quotes as evidence 59.28.3, where the statue of Zeus Olympios is described as an ἄγαλμα. See also 41.61.4; 37.9.1-2; 39.15; 45.17.3; 47.40.4.Weddle also highlights a similar tendency in Julian (*Or.* 159c, *Ep.* 89b 203b-c) (2010:13).

[60] Platt argued that the difference was one of appearance or form: ξόανόν is derived from ξέω, 'to polish or smooth by scraping', and therefore refers to "the object's substance rather than its ritual function" (2011:93).

[61] *Barlaam and Josaphat* 27.241, 244. The section in which the other two uses of *ṣlm'* appear (20.2, 23.4) is not quoted by the author of *Barlaam.*

[62] Ibid. 27.241.

text of *Barlaam* is accurate, it is clear that *dmwt'* does not consistently translate any one Greek word; furthermore, neither *dmwt'* nor *ṣlm'* can be exclusively associated with any particular 'form' of image.

Regardless of the terminology used (and their context is not so different that they could not be simple synonyms), it is clear that Aristides' view on iconolatry differs greatly from Meliton's, insofar as Aristides recognises that the images (originally, at least) *represented* the gods whom the gentiles worshipped.[63] Where Aristides does agree with Meliton, however, is in his claim that, by fashioning images of the gods, the likenesses themselves are treated *as* gods: *w'ty' ly d'tdmr 'w mlk' 'l plswpyhwn d'ykn' 'p hnwn ṭ'w. wšmhw 'lh' ldmwt' d't'bd l'yqr' d'sṭwks'. wl' 'stklw ḥkym' d'p hnwn 'sṭwks' mtḥbln' 'ytyhwn wmšṭryn'.*[64] However, on the whole, Aristides does not focus on these images to nearly the same extent. He does refer elsewhere to the practice of fashioning images, and that a craftsman might 'create' a god: *ddwmr' dyn 'ytyh 'w mlk'. 'l ywny': dkd mytryn mn šrk' dklhwn 'mm': bhwpkyhwn wbmlylwthwn 'ykn' ṭ'w btr ptkr' myt' wṣlm' dl' npš'. kd ḥzyn l'lhyhwn dmn 'bwdyhwn mtnsryn wmšṭpyn: wmtkr'n wmtqṭ'yn: wmttwqdyn wmtṣyryn: wlkl dmw lhwn mštḥlpyn.*[65] Like many of the similar observations found in Meliton, this passage must take as its foundation the commandment in *Exod.* 20:4 which explicitly prohibits the carving or fashioning (*'śh*) of images in (seemingly) any form. We may assume, then, that the association of likeness of the gods and their 'carved' or 'fashioned' nature is a stock feature of Christian polemic depending on *Exod.* 20:4.

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[63] Aristides 4.6; see above, n. 53.

[64] Ibid. 5:3: 'it comes to me that I might wonder, o King, regarding their philosophers, how they have also erred and named 'gods' those images (*dmwt'*) which are made for the honour of the elements, and the wise men do not understand that these elements are corruptible and perishable'.

[65] Ibid. 20:2: 'it is a wondrous thing, o King, concerning the Greeks, that although they are greater than all the rest of the nations in their reasoning and their rhetoric, that they should err with dead statues (*ptkr'*) and images which do not live, while they see their gods, which are sawn and polished by their makers, and shortened and cut and burned and shaped and transformed into every shape by them'.

2.3.2.1 <u>Aristides, Xenophanes and iconoclasm</u>

It is perhaps telling that this section is an attack in particular on Greek rationality. It is highly likely that Aristides is appropriating Greek philosophical ideals that appear to reject the fashioning of images in any form, but particularly iconic forms. Arguably the most famous proponent of this position was Xenophanes, the sixth-century BC philosopher.[66] In a famous passage, quoted by Clement of Alexandria in his *Miscellanies*, Xenophanes writes:

εἰ <δέ> τοι ἵπποι ἔχον χέρας ἢ βόες ἠὲ λέοντες

ἢ γράψαι χείρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἅπερ ἄνδρες,

ἵπποι μέν θ᾽ ἵπποισι, βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας

καί κε θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ᾽ ἐποίουν

τοιαῦθ᾽ οἷόνπερ καὐτοὶ δέμας εἶχον ἕκαστοι.[67]

Immediately preceding this, Clement quotes a fragment with an apparently similar meaning:

ἀλλ᾽ οἱ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι γεννᾶσθαι θεοὺς

τὴν σφετέρην ἐσθῆτα <τ᾽> ἔχειν φωνήν τε δέμας τε.[68]

Again,

Αἰθίοπές τε <θεοὺς σφετέρους> σιμοὺς μέλανάς τε

Θρῆκές τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρρούς φασι πελέσθαι.[69]

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[66] Precise dates are uncertain, although most scholars put his date of birth c. 570-560 BC. See further Lesher 1992:3.

[67] Xen. *Fr.* 15, quoted by Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.110: 'but if horses or oxen or lions had hands or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as similar to oxen, and they would make the bodies of the sort which each of them had' (tr. Lesher). See also Versnel 2000:92-6.

[68] Xen. *Fr.* 14, quoted by Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.109: 'but mortals suppose that gods are born, wear their own clothes and have a voice and body' (tr. Lesher). Lesher suggested that δοκέουσι, 'suppose', implies an element of choice, which is a plausible assessment (1992:85): it would imply that an alternative perception of the gods is possible.

[69] Xen. *Fr.* 16, quoted by Clem. Al. *Strom.* 7.22: 'Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black; Thracians say that theirs are blue-eyes and red-haired' (tr. Lesher). Lesher's assessment of why we should perceive the gods as 'like us' is convincing, but not relevant here: see further 1992:94.

These passages are often used to highlight a long-standing tradition in Hellenistic philosophy of the criticism of image worship.[70] According to Lesher, however, this is a slightly simplistic interpretation:[71] it is Clement, not Xenophanes, who interprets the passage as a critique of image worship.[72] Lesher argued that "at least superficially, these are comments on the diversity of belief and on a certain propensity of believers to attribute to gods qualities which the believers themselves possess. We are not told whether these considerations should serve to *undermine* these beliefs, either by having proved them false or having subjected to ridicule, although they are commonly read in this way".[73] Similarly, Ando observed that Xenophanes' approach was more to do with strategies of representation than representation itself.[74] It is, however, vital to observe that whatever the original intention, Christians interpreted them in order to support their own iconoclastic agenda. It is this 'tradition' that Aristides is clearly engaging with here.[75]

Aside from these passages, however, the use of any word that could be interpreted as 'image' is far more limited in Aristides than in Meliton. This is unlikely to be simple linguistic preference on the part of the authors. Such is the disparity in the frequency of such

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[70] This tradition also influenced Roman authors: Varro claimed that the gods would be worshipped more reverently if images of them were excluded altogether (quoted in August. *De civ. D.* 4.31), which suggests, in keeping with Xenophanes, that the worship of images led people away from a true understanding of the divine. However, Varro did not entirely reject images: he regarded the association of image and divine as an important part of Roman religious tradition (Barclay 2007:84). See also Pellizer, who argued that both anthropomorphism and zoomorphism were essential parts of the negotiation with the divine (2009:268). On Varro's apparent iconoclasm, see Estienne 2006:147-9: "Varro donne aux images des dieux une fonction clairement allégorique… la représentation des dieux permet en effet de rendre le monde divin intelligible aux hommes".

[71] Lesher 1992:90.

[72] Clem. Al. *Strom* 7.22: Ἕλληνες δὲ ὥσπερ ἀνθρωπομόρφους οὕτως καὶ ἀνθρωποπαθεῖς τοὺς θεοὺς ὑποτίθενται, καὶ καθάπερ τὰς μορφὰς αὐτῶν ὁμοίας ἑαυτοῖς ἕκαστοι διαζωγραφοῦσιν ('The Greeks suppose that the gods have human shapes and feelings, and each paints their forms exactly like their own'; tr. Lesher).

[73] Lesher 1992:91.

[74] Ando 2008:28.

[75] Another famous passage interpreted in this manner is a fragment of Heraclitus: καὶ τοῖς ἀγάλμασι δὲ τουτέοισιν εὔχονται ὁκοῖον εἴ τις δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο (οὔ τι γινώσκων θεοὺς οὐδ' ἥρωας οἵτινές εἰσι) (*Fr.* 5; 'furthermore, they *pray to* these statues! = <which is> as though one were to <try to> carry on a conversation with *houses*, without any recognition of who gods or heroes <really> are'; tr. Robinson).

words that I suggest that this is actually a symptom of their respective approaches. Since Meliton argues that the gods do *not* exist outside of their representations (dismissing outright the existence of demons and other powers), it is images that receive the brunt of his polemic: if he can destroy the rationality behind image-worship, gentile religious life would lose its entire basis, in theory and in practice. It will be demonstrated in the following chapter that this is exactly what Meliton hopes to achieve. For Aristides, however, the boundary is far more fluid. There are hints that he understands the images to 'be' the divine *as well as* representing them, but it is absolutely clear that he does not imagine them as being limited to this form. As such, for Aristides, the identification of the divine with man-made images, and the worship of them, is a fundamental error that creates its own misunderstandings of the relationship with the divine, but it is only a feature of gentile religious life. In fact, as I shall show, his problems with the 'symptoms' of this religious life are much the same as Meliton's, but based in a more general and fluid understanding of the divine.

2.3.3   Tatian

For Tatian, as for the Syriac translator of Aristides, the practice of iconolatry is not the focus of his attack: it is the implications of this error, to which I shall turn in the following chapter. As such, there is less direct discussion of the concept of the image. That is not to say, however, that it is entirely lacking: indeed, some details are particularly instructive.

From the very beginning of his argument, Tatian is clearly using a very different approach to either Meliton or Aristides. In the opening lines, Tatian describes how many of the religious traditions present in the Graeco-Roman world are inherited from foreign cultures: the reading of bird-flight from the Phrygians, for example, or sacrifice from the

Cyprians. Amongst these, he mentions that the art of sculpture was inherited from the Etruscans.[76] Whilst one might be tempted to read 'sculpture' (πλάττειν) as a reference to the fashioning and worship of these statues, the context makes that unlikely: it comes between a reference to Orpheus as the founder of poetry, and the Egyptians as the founders of history. It seems that 'sculpture' here is understood in a purely artistic sense – there is no reference to the use of these statues in cult. The artistic, rather than 'religious', value of statues is emphasised elsewhere by Tatian: in the only other part of the text in which statues are discussed at any length, the statues mentioned belong to figures from human (particularly cultural) history such as Sappho,[77] amongst others. Tatian's problem is not that these statues are worshipped: in fact, nowhere in this passage does he make this accusation. Instead, he argues that the problem is that these statues commemorate characters who are not worthy of being examplars, particularly because of their moral conduct: καὶ ἡ μὲν Σαπφὼ γύναιον πορνικὸν ἐρωτομανές, καὶ τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἀσέλγειαν ᾄδει.[78]

I can find only one explicit reference to the *worship* of images of any form in Tatian's text: δημιουργίαν τὴν ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ γεγενημένην χάριν ἡμῶν προσκυνεῖν οὐ θέλω. γέγονεν ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη δι᾽ ἡμᾶς· εἶτα πῶς τοὺς ἐμοὺς ὑπηρέτας προσκυνήσω; πῶς δὲ ξύλα καὶ λίθους θεοὺς ἀποθανοῦμαι.[79] The worship of 'sticks and stones', however, does not immediately suggest statues.[80] The focus is not the worship of man-made objects (as is the case in Meliton). Rather, because this also criticises the worship of the sun and moon, it dismisses more broadly the worship of anything that is not God (that is, that was created and is therefore subject to Him), and particularly the worship of the natural world. There is possibly

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[76] Tatian *Or.* 1.1.
[77] Ibid. 33.1.
[78] Ibid. 33.2: 'but Sappho was a wanton woman, driven mad by lust, and sang of her own lack of restraint'.
[79] Ibid. 4.2: 'I do not wish to worship His creation, which came into existence for our sake. The sun and moon [were created] for us: how can I worship my servants? How can I say that sticks and stones are gods?'
[80] Or at least, not anthropomorphic statuary: it may refer to aniconic worship. See below, 2.5.5.

a passing reference to the *crafting* of gods: ἡ δὲ ὥσπερ ἔναυσμα τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ κεκτημένη καὶ διὰ τὸν χωρισμὸν τὰ τέλεια καθορᾶν μὴ δυναμένη, ζητοῦσα τὸν θεὸν κατὰ πλάνην πολλοὺς θεοὺς ἀνετύπωσε.[81] However, the key word, ἀνατυπόω, is translated by Whittaker as 'fashioning': whilst it may certainly carry that meaning, it is also defined by Liddel and Scott as 'imagination', so even this is not certain. Tatian could simply be suggesting that the gentiles *conceived*[82] of a wide variety of gods. The context of the passage, which focusses on the inability of the soul to comprehend the light, would suggest that Tatian's concern is with the 'imagination' of a multitude of gods, rather than necessarily the physical creation of them.

Beyond these two instances, terminology referring to 'images' of any form is extremely scarce in the text; the word εἰκών is used occasionally to refer to a 'likeness', but this always refers to man's 'likeness' to God.[83] It is only man who bears this likeness: the demons do not bear this likeness because they are creatures of spirit, not of flesh (δαίμονες δὲ πάντες σαρκίον μὲν οὐ κέκτηναι, πνευματικὴ δέ ἐστιν αὐτοῖς ἡ σύμπηξις).[84] In fact, the lack of reference to iconolatry in Tatian is just as crucial, for different reasons, as the heavy focus evident in Meliton. It rapidly becomes clear that Tatian has adopted a position almost entirely contradictory to Meliton and Aristides. Where Meliton argued that it was the images that were the objects of worship, and that no supernatural force existed outside these that could be

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[81] Tatian *Or.* 13.2-3: 'the soul retained some sort of spark of its power, but because of its separation it could no longer see those perfect things; in seeking for God, it strayed and formed numerous gods, following the demons and their tricks'.

[82] Whittaker 1982:27.

[83] Based on the fact that, as noted above, it translates ṣlm' in the LXX of *Gen.* 1:26. However, Tatian has not given to εἰκών the broader meaning of *any* human likeness that Meliton and Aristides have given to ṣlm': it refers specifically to the relationship between man and God.

[84] Tatian *Or.* 15.3: 'no demon has any flesh, but their constitution is spiritual'.

the object of worship, Tatian is a relative monotheist:[85] his approach is to distinguish between the 'material spirit' and 'divine spirit': πνεῦμα γὰρ τὸ διὰ τῆς ὕλης διῆκον, ἔλαττον ὑπάρχον τοῦ θειοτέρου πνεύματος, ὥσπερ δὲ τῇ ὕλῃ παρωμοιωμένον, οὐ τιμητέον ἐπ' ἴσης τῷ τελείῳ θεῷ.[86] Only God possesses this divine spirit; however, this material spirit is present in all objects – from living things, including trees, to rivers, and (presumably) inanimate objects. All objects and beings that are not God therefore belong in the material world. Tatian later makes a further distinction: some beings that lack flesh are superior to the 'purely' material, even though they too belong in the material world. It is these 'spiritual' beings that are the recipients of worship, as Tatian himself explicitly states: ὅμως δ' οὖν καὶ οἱ δαίμονες, οἷς ὑμεῖς οὕτω φατέ, σύμπηξιν ἐξ ὕλης λαβόντες κτησάμενοί τε πνεῦμα τὸ ἀπ' αὐτῆς ἄσωτοι καὶ λίχνοι γεγόνασιν, οἱ μέν τινες αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ καθαρώτερον τραπέντες, οἱ δὲ τῆς ὕλης ἐπιλεξάμενοι τὸ ἔλαττον καὶ κατὰ τὸ ὅμοιον αὐτῇ πολιτευόμενοι. τούτους δέ, ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες, προσκυνεῖτε γεγονότας μὲν ἐξ ὕλης, μακρὰν δὲ τῆς εὐταξίας εὑρεθέντας.[87]

This distinction makes it clear that, since these demons are not associated with the purely material, they are therefore not to be associated with images: it is the spiritual beings themselves that receive worship, and not the image. This would explain why his discussion of images in the text is, seemingly, exclusively limited to honorific or artistic depictions, and does not include 'cult' images. This position is entirely in opposition to that of Meliton, for whom the statue is the sole object of worship. Why should the two authors differ so much? Does Tatian, as a self-confessed convert under Justin, possess a more 'accurate' insight into

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[85] Elze argued that Tatian was a strict monotheist and did not even allow for the soteriology of Christ (1960:105); Grant, however, demonstrated that this was not the case (1960:355-6).

[86] Ibid. 4.2: 'for the spirit that pervades matter is inferior to the more divine spirit: since it is almost like matter, it is not worthy of being equal to the perfect God'.

[87] Ibid. 12.3-4: 'however, the demons, as you call them, who were formed from matter, and possessing a spirit made from it, became profligate and greedy. Some of them turned to purer things, others to that which is inferior to matter and behaving in the same way. These, men of Greece, are the ones you worship, even though they were made from matter, and far from orderly in their behaviour'.

religious life? Is his account more reliable? This question will be addressed in more detail by examining some of the gentile sources which discuss image worship, but it is certainly surprising that, given the proliferation of cult images in the ancient world, such images are almost entirely ignored by Tatian.

This difference is largely due to Tatian's philosophical approach. Meliton appears to be concerned in a large part with the functional mechanics of gentile religious life, whilst Tatian addresses a variety of philosophical concepts, and in particular the division between flesh and spirit. It will be seen in the following chapter that even sacrifice, one of the most fundamental building blocks of gentile religious life, is of little concern to Tatian. The prominence of certain key philosophical terms, and in particular ἡ ψυχή and τό πνεῦμα, may suggest that in fact the focus of his attack is not the religious world but the philosophical – and in particular the school of Stoicism.[88] It is important to note that the difference between Meliton and Tatian may be attributed to a considerable difference in approach, and does not necessarily suggest that one is more accurate than the other – as I shall demonstrate. What is clear, however, is that it is impossible to define a 'Near Eastern Christian attitude' to iconolatry: the sources vary too much to do so with any consistency.

It is clear, then, that for these Christian sources,[89] and for Meliton in particular, the practice of forming an image and worshipping it is particularly repellent.[90] This is entirely to

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[88] On the relationship between Tatian and Stoicism, see below, 4.9.3.

[89] Of other Christian authors, Clement of Alexandria deals most explicitly with iconolatry, in his *Exhortation to the Greeks*. He displays more ambiguity towards cults statues than Meliton: at times he appears to suggest that the image is the recipient of cult (*Protr.* 4.41), but elsewhere he argues that mankind has been deceived into worshipping statues because of the skill of artists (ibid. 4.45). This is not an argument that appears in any of our Near Eastern sources, although Aristides perhaps comes closest when he suggests that the Barbarians erred by fashioning likenesses of the gods and ended up worshipping them (Aristides 4.6).

[90] Ando argued that "Christians almost universally regarded idols and cult statues as the proper and exclusive recipients of pagan worship, and their understanding of the mechanics of conversion developed from this simple fact" (2008:161). However, as I have shown, Christian attitudes are more ambiguous than Ando suggested, although the practice itself is always regarded as a *feature* of idolatry.

be expected: the prohibition of exactly this practice in *Exod*. 20:4, which is then followed by the negative *exemplum* of the golden calf, [91] demonstrates that the rejection of iconolatry lies at the heart of Jewish interaction with the world around them, and this was a stance adopted extremely keenly by Christian authors. What is perhaps more surprising is the explicit identification of the statue with the divine, a common theme throughout these sources, but especially in Meliton. In some cases, it is easy to understand it as rhetorical technique; Tatian and the Syriac translation of Aristides are inconsistent in their identification of the god *explicitly with* its statue, for example, and appear to acknowledge that more than one deity exists, however lacking in power this may be: they are, in that sense, relative monotheists, a distinction highlighted in the introduction. In Meliton's case, the association of god and statue is far stronger. He understands that in worshipping a statue, one worships the divine itself – partly because he firmly rejects any other form of the supernatural. Unlike Aristides and Tatian, Meliton is an absolute monotheist: that is, only one deity exists *at all*.[92] Allegations of substitutive error (that is, the explicit identification of god and statue) are extremely troublesome. Our non-Christian sources, when talking about the relationship between statue and divine, are extremely vague on the whole. Let us examine some of these sources and attempt to identify any features of their attitude that could prompt this stance amongst our Near Eastern writers.

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[91] MacDonald argued that the episode of the golden calf highlighted a number of different ways in which idolatry could be understood: as well as illegitimate representation, this could include political rebellion, parody, immorality, greed and folly (2007:23): he interpreted the formation of the calf primarily as rebellion, in the context of the formation of the covenant. Similarly, Winiarski identified adultery as the primary metaphor for idolatry, representing the betrayal of the covenant, beginning with the golden calf (2006:41ff). See also Greenspahn 2010:487. Halbertal and Margalit argued that the rejection of the calf is ambiguous because it is not clear whether the error was the formation of an image of the wrong god, or worship of God in the wrong form (1992a:3). They also questioned why pictoral representation of God was forbidden, but linguistic depiction was permitted, and concluded that it was due to a fear of substitutive error (that is, worship of that which represents, rather than that which is represented): linguistic depiction allows no such error (1992b:25).

[92] For further discussion, see above, 1.7.4.

2.4   Non-Christian sources

2.4.1   Lucian

An obvious place to begin with is Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess*. The discussion of images is very prominent in this text, largely because it is the author's apparent intention to describe the cult practices at Hierapolis as well as the temple itself. A wide variety of vocabulary is seemingly used to define the 'image': ξόανόν and ἄγαλμα are particularly prominent in their usage, as well as other terms like εἶδος. The context in which these terms appear might suggest the possibility of categorisation: ξόανόν, for example, is used of the image of the divine figures,[93] whilst ἄγαλμα is used of images of mortals (specifically characters from the *Iliad*).[94] The use of εἶδος is less clear: it is used of mythic figures such as Procne, Philomela and Tereus, and is perhaps intended as a synonym for ἄγαλμα, given that the two terms appear almost adjacent. It is worth noting that εἶδος is not exclusively reserved for the *human* image: the εἶδος of Tereus, for example, is carved in bird form.[95]

Further categorisation of these terms is difficult; Lucian's text demonstrates much of the semantic fluidity of the terms ξόανα and ἄγαλμα noted by Weddle and discussed above. For example, the image of the goddess Derceto, one of the candidates for rulership of the temple, is defined as an εἶδος.[96] The text does, however, suggest that there *is* a distinction between purely decorative reliefs and statuary and the 'cult image', even if there is no linguistic category by which to define this. In particular, the cult image is described as a unique object that has powers of its own, with the potential to be understood as divine in its own right. For example, whilst other oracles require humans to make their pronouncements,

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[93] Luc. *Syr. D.* 38: ξόανόν is used to describe the images of Atlas and Hermes, among others.
[94] Ibid. 40. On the role of these characters, see Lightfoot 474.
[95] Luc. *Syr. D.* 38.
[96] Ibid.14.

the oracle of Hierapolis is capable of doing so of its own accord: δὲ αὐτός τε κινέεται καὶ τὴν μαντιηΐην ἐς τέλος αὐτουργέει. τρόπος δὲ αὐτῆς τοιόσδε. εὖτ' ἂν ἐθέλῃ χρησμηγορέειν, ἐν τῇ ἕδρῃ πρῶτα κινέεται, οἱ δέ μιν ἱρέες αὐτίκα ἀείρουσιν· ἢν δὲ μὴ ἀείρωσιν, ὁ δὲ ἱδρώει καὶ ἐς μέζον ἔτι κινέεται. εὖτ' ἂν δὲ ὑποδύντες φέρωσιν, ἄγει σφεὰς πάντῃ περιδινέων καὶ ἐς ἄλλον ἐξ ἑτέρου μεταπηδέων. τέλος ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς ἀντιάσας ἐπερέεταί μιν περὶ ἁπάντων πρηγμάτων· ὁ δὲ ἤν τι μὴ ἐθελῃ ποιέεσθαι, ὀπίσω ἀναχωρέει, ἢν δέ τι ἐπαινέῃ, ἄγει ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοὺς προφέροντας ὅκωσπερ ἡνιοχέων.[97] Ignoring for the moment the involvement of human agency and machinery (to which I shall return in the following chapter), this appears to identify the deity with the statue: at the very least, the statue is more than a carved chunk of stone. A similar impression is given in his description of the riverside festivals: the ἱρὰ (translated by Lightfoot as 'cult images') appear to make their own way down to the river.[98] Some quality of the image, then, gives it independent powers, particularly self-locomotion.

Elsewhere, however, Lucian suggests that images are carved purely to represent the divine, because otherwise their worshippers would have no means to understand the deity involved: λέγουσι τοῖσι μὲν ἄλλοισι θεοῖσιν ὅσιον ἔμμεναι ξόανα ποιέεσθαι, οὐ γάρ σφεων ἐμφανέα πάντεσσι τὰ εἴδεα.[99] There is no mention here of the image being associated with the god; instead, the image is used in a purely representational manner. This apparent confusion or contradiction is highlighted most clearly in discussing the statue of Apollo, a unique depiction of the god with a beard: οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλοι πάντες Ἀπόλλωνα νέον τε ἥγηνται

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[97] Ibid. 36 ('this one moves of its own volition and itself brings its soothsaying to fruition. It works like this. When it wants to prophesy, it first moves on its base, and the priests lift it up; if they do not lift it up it sweats and moves even more. When they lift it onto their backs and carry it, it drives them twisting and turning this way and that, leaping from one to another. Finally the chief priest approaches it and inquires about all manner of things: if it does not want something to be done, it retreats; if it approves it, it drives its bearers forwards like a charioteer', tr. Lightfoot). For more on the self-locomotion of images, see below, 3.2.1.1.

[98] Ibid. 47.

[99] Ibid. 34: 'they consider it right to make images of the other gods, because their forms are not visible to all' (tr. Lightfoot). See also Estienne 2006:149.

καὶ πρωθήβην ποιέεσθαι;[100] this implies an association between god and image. Immediately after this, however, Lucian adds: δοκέει αὐτέοισιν ἀσοφίη μεγάλη ἔμμεναι ἀτελέα ποιέεσθαι τοῖσι θεοῖσι τὰ εἴδεα.[101] These two observations appear to be in contrast. In the first instance, the god himself is made; in the second, it is his image. The key word which links both comments is ποιέεσθαι; Lightfoot has attempted to reconcile the two observations by translating this as 'represent' in the first instance and 'make' in the second, thus leading to the conclusion that there is no association between god and statue. Lightfoot's inconsistency in translating ποιέεσθαι entirely misses the point. Lucian's repetition of the word is unlikely to be accident or coincidence, and so we ought to understand that the two verses are linked, and that therefore Lucian *understood* that there was a conflict between the two, or at the very least that he did not have a problem putting the two apparently contradictory uses side by side. Removing this conflict by inconsistency in translation is not only artificial, but it misses the implications of Lucian's statement.

Assuming the attribution of *On the Syrian Goddess* to Lucian of Samosata is correct, then other works present us with examples of his attitude to images: a particularly prominent one is found in *The Tragic Actor*, in which the gods are arranged by hierarchy according to their material: ὥστε παραλαμβάνων κάθιζε αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἕκαστον, ὡς ἂν ὕλης ἢ τέχνης ἔχῃ, ἐν προεδρίᾳ μὲν τοὺς χρυσοῦς, εἶτα ἐπὶ τούτοις τοὺς ἀργυροῦς, εἶτα ἑξῆς ὁπόσοι ἐλεφάντινοι, εἶτα τοὺς χαλκοῦς ἢ λιθίνους.[102] Lucian is clearly satirising the association of god and image; in his view, it is ridiculous that the gods are more or less prominent because of the material from which their statue is made. The same is true of the craftsmanship applied

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[100] Luc. *Syr. D.* 35: 'everyone else thinks of Apollo as young and represent him in early manhood' (tr. Lightfoot).

[101] Ibid. 35: 'they think it great unwisdom to make images of the gods imperfect' (tr. Lightfoot).

[102] Luc. *Iupp. trag.* 7: 'seat each of them in his proper place according to his material and workmanship, those of gold in the front row, then next to them those of silver, then all those of ivory, then those of bronze or stone' (tr. Loeb).

to that statue, for Hermes asks: ἀλλ᾽ ἐκεῖνο οὐ χεῖρον εἰδέναι, ἤν τις αὐτῶν χρυσοῦς μὲν ᾖ καὶ πολυτάλαντος τὴν ὁλκήν, οὐκ ἀκριβὴς δὲ τὴν ἐργασίαν, ἀλλὰ κομιδῇ ἰδιωτικὸς καὶ ἀσύμμετρος, πρὸ τῶν χαλκῶν τῶν Μύρωνος καὶ Πολυκλείτου καὶ τῶν Φειδίου καὶ Ἀλκαμένους λιθίνων καθεδεῖται ἢ προτιμοτέραν χρὴ νομίζειν εἶναι τὴν τέχνην,[103] to which question Zeus responds that ideally, craftsmanship should be valued, but that gold should come first in any case. As a result, the front benches are occupied by foreign deities, since the Greeks tend to make theirs of marble or bronze (perhaps with the slightest smidgen of ivory or gold). Needless to say, the Colossus of Rhodes takes offence at his relegation, and complains that the Rhodians could have made sixteen statues of gold, had they not insisted on making him so unnecessarily large.

Lucian's scene is, of course, ridiculous, but it does serve to highlight the ambiguity with which he treats the images of the gods, and the ambiguity of those whom he satirises. Is the image the god, or does it represent the god? Lucian appears determined to have his cake and eat it: the attitude he appears to display in *On the Syrian Goddess* is the same that he satirises in *Tragic Actor*. One possible solution might be to conclude that Lucian is simply imitating the style of Herodotus (since, as observed above, *On the Syrian Goddess* is a highly skilled imitation), who uses 'god' as a synonym for 'image' on an extremely frequent basis; indeed, this technique is so staggeringly common in Classical literature that perhaps we should not read anything into such a technique here: it is "found with great frequency in almost all ancient authors, regardless of their overall religious temperament".[104] However, this is too simplistic an approach, and does not help explain the interaction of the statues:

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[103] Ibid:7: 'I had better find out about this; if one of them is of gold and very heavy, yet not precise in workmanship but quite ordinary and misshapen, is he to sit in front of the bronzes of Myron and Polyclitus and the marbles of Phidias and Alcamenes, or is precedence to be given to the art?' (tr. Loeb).

[104] Weddle 2010:15. The technique is one which Plutarch deplores (*Mor.* 379c-d), which highlights its popularity amongst ancient authors. Cf. Burkert 1970:360, Ando 2008:23, Platt 2011:78. On Plutarch's complaints, see ibid:19-20.

literary technique is almost certainly at work, but the repetition of ποιέεσθαι, twice in as many lines, implies that there are other factors to consider (never mind the fact that the statue in the temple has powers of self-locomotion and is capable of giving oracles of its own accord). The first question is whether the repetition was a deliberate play on the relationship between image and god, or whether Lucian simply used ποιέεσθαι again because he saw nothing contradictory.

2.4.2 Philo of Byblos

Philo of Byblos' *Phoenician History* has less to offer in helping to explain Near Eastern Christian attitudes to iconolatry. He is primarily concerned with the origin of cults, rather than their practice necessarily. Nevertheless, a few details here prove instructive. In particular, he refers on two occasions to the 'setting up' of objects, but on only one occasion does he explicitly imply that these objects were the recipients of worship. Ousōos, the first man to sail on the sea sets up two stelae to Fire and Water, and after his death receives a ῥάβδος ('branch'), together with his brother Hypsouranios: ἀνιερῶσαι δὲ δύο στήλας Πυρὶ καὶ Πνεύματι καὶ προσκυνῆσαι αἷμά τε σπένδειν αὐταῖς ἐξ ὧν ἤγρευε θηρίων. τούτων δὲ τελευτησάντων τοὺς ἀπολειφθέντας φησὶ ῥάβδους αὐτοῖς ἀφιερῶσαι καὶ τὰς στήλας προσκυνεῖν καὶ τούτοις ἑορτὰς ἄγειν κατ' ἔτος.[105] Unfortunately, this passage is infuriatingly vague. It is not clear what the ῥάβδοι represent; as a result, it is not clear whether the stelae that are worshipped are those established to Fire and Wind, or synonymous with the ῥάβδοι established for the two brothers. If we assume that Philo is at least vaguely consistent in his

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[105] Quoted in Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 1.10.10-11: 'he (Ousōos) dedicated two stelae to Fire and Wind, and worshipped them and made libations of blood to them from beasts he hunted. And when these two died,' he says, 'their descendants dedicated staves to them, and worshipped these staves, and held annual festivals in their honor' (tr. Kaldellis, López). Baumgarten argued that the ῥάβδοι were wooden staves known to be used in the worship of certain Semitic deities; see also Reed 1949:99-101.

use of terminology, then it is extremely likely that the stelae honoured with festivals are those of Fire and Water. This might suggest that the ῥάβδοι erected after the death of Ousōos and Hypsouranios are purely honorific, in recognition of their services.

Another instance, however, suggests that the concept of the purely honorific image is vague at best. Two other characters, 'Field' and 'Hero of the Field', receive 'august images' amongst the Phoenicians: ἀπὸ τούτων ἐγένοντο ἕτεροι, ὧν ὁ μὲν Ἀγρὸς ἐκαλεῖτο, ὁ δὲ Ἀγροῦ Ἥρως ἢ Ἀγρότης, οὗ καὶ ξόανον εἶναι μάλα σεβάσμιον καὶ ναὸν ζυγοφορούμενον ἐν Φοινίκῃ.[106] The interpretation of this observation is very troublesome. In the first place, are we to assume that σεβάσμιον implies that the images themselves were the recipients of worship? The cultic connections of the word would suggest so. Secondly, should ξόανον be interpreted as cultic, honorific or purely decorative depictions? The use of σεβάσμιον surely rules out the latter interpretation: there is no reason why purely decorative images should be described in this way. Beyond this, it is unclear: the ξόανον is clearly established *in honour* of the heroes, and yet is described in terms befitting a cult object itself.

Finally, there is a reference in passing to the relics of Pontus that are established in Beirut: οἳ καὶ τὰ τοῦ Πόντου λείψανα εἰς τὴν Βηρυτὸν ἀφιέρωσαν.[107] There is nothing explicit here about the worship of physical objects, let alone images, but ἀφιέρωσαν, or a similar derivative, was used in both previous instances of the establishment of an object of worship: it is at least plausible, if by no means proven, that the same is intended here. In any case, I cannot think of another purpose for referring to the 'relics of Pontus' at this point. Unfortunately, it is completely unclear what these 'relics' (λείψανα) refer to: Baumgarten,

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[106] Quoted in Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 1.10.12: 'from them sprung others, of whom one was called Field, the other Field Hero or just Hunter, of whom there is in Phoenicia an arcane and highly revered statue as well as a temple drawn by a pair of oxen ' (tr. Kaldellis, López).

[107] Ibid. 1.10.35:'[the Fishers] also consecrated the relics of Pontus in Beirut' (tr. Kaldellis, López). See also Baumgarten 1981:208-9.

Attridge and Oden, Kaldellis and López offer no suggestions, and nothing in the context clarifies whether physical relics are meant, or the children of Pontus, namely Sidon and Poseidon:[108] the latter is the most likely option, since only a few lines before, we are told that Muth, the child of Kronos and Rhea, is also made an object of worship.[109] Overall, Philo's account does not provide enough evidence to wholly address this issue, and is particularly ambiguous on whether the few images he does mention are necessarily objects of worship, or simply honorific.

2.4.3   The Julius Terentius fresco

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, literary sources dealing with the religious life of the Near East are extremely scarce. Therefore some documentary, epigraphic and visual evidence must be used to fully compare Near Eastern Christian attitudes. A striking example of the relationship between statue and divine can be found in the 'Fresco of Julius Terentius' (see below, Fig. 2.1).[110] Excavated in the so-called 'temple of the Palmyrene gods' in Dura-Europos, the fresco shows a crowded sacrificial scene; the eponymous tribune, Julius Terentius, is identified as the central figure by a Latin inscription.

As well as the standard, it is clear that the three figures to the left, dressed in military attire, are standing on bases, which would imply that they are specifically understood as statues, rather than (as one might expect) depicting the god directly in the painting.[111] However, although Downey suggests that these three are the recipients of worship directly (of

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[108] Quoted in Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 1.10.26.

[109] Ibid. 1.10.34. On Muth, see Baumgarten 1981:112-120.

[110] For the context of the piece, see Heyn, who argued that focussing exclusively on the fresco led to a misleading understanding of the piece, and that the apparent lack of coherence in a decorative plan for the temple was a crucial element in its understanding (2011:228).

[111] As Dirven argued, these should be interpreted as gods rather than as statues of Roman emperors (2007:116).

the soldiers of the XX Palmyrene Cohort under Julius Terentius, depicted to the right),[112] I do not think the matter is as clear as that.

Fig. 2.1. The fresco of Julius Terentius, from the 'Temple of the Palmyrene gods' at Dura-Europos.

The two figures beneath the statues are identified as the Τύχη Παλμύρων and Τύχη Δούρας (left and right respectively), but Downey admits that she is uncertain as to whether they themselves are the recipients of cult;[113] given this uncertainty, I suggest that there is little here to suggest that the statues themselves are *explicitly* the objects of worship in the form of sacrifice (rather than, or possibly in addition to, the two figures below), as Downey and suggested. On the other hand, the ambiguity may well reflect the apparent uncertainty detected in our sources.

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[112] Downey 2008:429. She argued that the cult relief was very often the chief object of cult in Dura-Europos (ibid:415), largely because such reliefs were more common than statues in Dura (ibid:430).

[113] Downey 2008:430.

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In the absence of discussion from Near Eastern sources, can we compare Near Eastern Christian attitudes to more familiar Latin and Greek sources? Although they do not (or not very often or in any great detail) refer specifically to the Near East, or to the 'theology' of statuary, there are informative instances. By and large they appear to reflect the same apparent confusion displayed in Lucian and in some of the imagery. This is most apparent in Livy's account of the arrival of the Magna Mater from Pessinus in 205 BC, in which the historian initially appears to distance himself from claims that the black stone *was* the goddess ('*sacrumque iis lapidem quam matrem deum esse incolae dicebant tradidit*').[114] However, by the time the stone arrives in Italy, he begins to treat it *as* the goddess: '*P. Cornelius cum omnibus matronis Ostiam obviam ire deae iussus, isque eam de nave accipere et in terram elatam tradere ferendam matronis*'.[115] Presumably no dramatic change has taken place between the docking and transfer of the statue; either, therefore Livy is not certain as to how to refer to the statue, or else it is entirely appropriate to refer to the statue both as *being* and as *representing* the goddess *simultaneously*, a similar conflict to the one seen in Lucian's text.

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[114] Livy 29.11.7: 'he handed over to them the sacred stone which the natives said was the Mother of the gods'.

[115] Ibid. 29.14.10: 'P. Cornelius (Scipio) was ordered to go to Ostia with all the matrons to meet the goddess; he was to receive her from the ship and hand her over on to the ground, where she was to be carried by the matrons'. On Livy's account, see Bremmer and Horsfall 1987:105-11, Gruen 1990:5-33 and Burton 1996.

2.5 Both 'being' and 'representing': having one's cake and eating it

We might here consider the approach of Ando in dealing with Classical attitudes towards statues and the divine. Rejecting earlier approaches of scholars such as MacMullen (who argued that "it is not reasonable to consider idols *as* gods",[116] instead interpreting them as an aide-memoire), Ando suggested that this approach was misguided, and that it was in fact unnecessary to distinguish between statue *as* god and statue *representing* god.[117] Similarly, Versnel argued that the idea of mutually exclusive categories (that the god 'is' and 'is represented by' the statue) is largely a modern creation: we must accept that gentiles "had to live with two (or more) indeed mutually exclusive realities *and yet coped with the inherent paradoxes and inconsistencies*".[118] This position was reinforced by Platt, who observed that "although the relationship between gods and material bodies was continually explored (and self-consciously problematised) in antiquity, it was not vigorously contested in theological debates that formed the basis of religious identity";[119] it seems there was little pressure to form a concrete position on the subject. Given that religion in the Roman world was not based around fixed 'truths' and doctrines,[120] there is no reason why Lucian *should* demonstrate the same attitude as Livy, or even to maintain the same position consistently in his own writings.[121]

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[116] MacMullen 1981:78, my italics. Similarly, Clark understood statues as the focus of divine presence (2004:36); Versnel, although he argued that the statue *could* be understood as the god, agreed that the presence of the image "fostered the intimate, emotional atmosphere of personal communication" (2011:136). This does not, however, imply that *all* worship required such an image (Burkert 1985:42): I shall deal below with instances in which this is clearly not the case.

[117] Ando 2008:42.

[118] Versnel 2011:85, his italics. In the same way, he argued, the gods could simultaneously live on Mt. Olympus, in their temple, and yet be omnipresent. On the 'doubling-up' of gods, see Platt 2011:83-5.

[119] Platt 2011:22.

[120] As Rives pointed out, religion in the Roman world worked as a conception of the divine expressed through action rather than theology and codified beliefs (2007:27). See also Platt 2011:22, who suggested that the lack of formalised *credo* was a major factor in the variety of perspectives.

[121] "Individuals understood the way that they and others interacted with their images on a hazy, yet fundamental, level; rituals and interactions could be transferred from cult to cult, location to location, and through time

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Dick compared the relationship between divine and statue to the rite of the Christian Eucharist: one can talk about the statue as 'god' in the same way that one can talk about bread and wine as 'the body and blood of Christ',[122] arguing that the cult statue is best seen as "the main conduit of divine self-disclosure".[123] Dick's model is suggestive, but not in the sense that he intended it. The Eucharist is interpreted in a wide number of ways, ranging from the allegorical to full transubstantiation; it is likely that the role of statues was subject to an equally broad range of interpretations: some, undoubtedly, worshipped statues *as* gods, while others were more ambiguous, or rejected statues outright. Lucian's attitude cannot therefore speak for the 'beliefs' of 'the gentiles' as a whole, but his text does serve to show that there is, in his eyes, considerable overlap between the categories of god and statue. Certainly it is impossible, in this text at least, to say that the image clearly *was* the god, as Meliton (and to some extent Aristides and Tatian) understand it. The matter is clearly more complicated than that.

The brief survey of some of the literary evidence provided above appears to support the arguments of Ando and Versnel.[124] Another option here might be to consider that although the statue *represented* the god, the divine had so much interest in the statue (as its representative) that the association of the two would be almost inevitable. Classical authors certainly understood that the gods took the treatment of their statues extremely seriously;[125] offence to the statue could therefore easily be seen as tantamount to offence to the divine.

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with relative ease. Certainly, changes in the religious, intellectual and social climate, the politics of the empire, and so on, had an impact upon religious practices, including interactions with cult images" (Weddle 2010:21). See also Platt 2011:122, who observed that "the bond between gods and their cult statues is, like epiphany itself, continually shifting and elusive".

[122] Dick 2005:49.

[123] Ibid:45.

[124] Ando's use of Platonic metaphysics to explore the apparent contradiction between both 'being' and 'representing' the statue is neither fully convincing nor necessary, a fact he himself admits (2008:42): I do not thing we must *explain* this feature necessarily, but rather to establish how it fits into the literary and social framework, as Versnel suggested and was highlighted above.

[125] Weddle 2010:65. For more on this, see below, 3.7.1.1

One could argue that the treatment of images was symptomatic of the treatment of the divine themselves,[126] but this may be an unnecessary complication. If the gods acted to punish those who violated their images, it is not hard to believe that they could quickly become identified with those images. The common trend of communication with statues can seemingly be understood in a similar way: as the most visible (and tangible) form of the god, they might well be expected to be 'active' participants in communication.[127] It would therefore be misleading to distinguish between communication *with* and communication *through* the image. That is not to say that worshippers 'mistook' the statue for the god; as Weddle argued, such arguments do not fit at all well with our understanding of the rest of the Roman world, and is extremely condescending to those worshippers.[128]

In light of this debate, it is not necessary to imagine that treatment of statues as 'divine' meant that worshippers explicitly envisaged them in this manner. It simply created room for those who did.[129] The ambiguity reflected in our sources, then, is entirely to be expected in that context. Insofar as we can talk of a Near Eastern Christian attitude to iconolatry, we may say that this attitude is correct in identifying the worship of statues as a key component of Near Eastern religious life, as throughout the Graeco-Roman world, but is wrong to suggest that statues were explicitly identified *with* the gods,[130] or were the only recipients of cult, as Meliton suggests. Beyond this, however, we cannot talk about Near Eastern Christian attitudes with any greater specificity.

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[126] Ibid.65.
[127] Ibid.74. The following chapter will examine more closely the forms which this interaction may take.
[128] Ibid.69.
[129] Ibid.70.
[130] As Andrade pointed out, some Jews appeared to recognise a distinction: the erection of statues of Gaius in the temple of Jerusalem was offensive because the statue, as representative of the emperor, emphasised control rather than demanded worship (2010:365).

2.6   Aniconism

One aspect of religious life that appears particularly prominent in the Near East is so-called 'aniconic' worship; as I highlighted in the introduction, Cumont, amongst others, considered it characteristic of oriental religious practice. The worship either of object with no obvious image, or of an apparent lack of image, appears consistently, especially in areas such as the former Nabataean kingdoms, and is often treated as being the "other side of the coin" from iconic depictions.[131] Furthermore, evidence of these so-called 'baetyls' is found at Petra and other Nabataean cities. Stewart discussed the role of these baetyls in religious life, both East and West; he concluded, by examining a wide variety of literary sources, that aniconic baetyl-worship is regarded as extremely distinctive, and as a "phenomenon of the Roman East in particular".[132] Gaifman, however, recognised the attitude of the sources, which appear to regard aniconic worship as antiquarian or quaint, but suggests that this is merely part of the dialogue:[133] in contrast to Stewart, she argued that such images were *not* a distinctive category in their own right, and that this is best demonstrated by the huge variety of images categorised by the term 'baetyl' – including images which appear at least partly iconic.[134] This debate is far too great in scope to fully reopen here; however, I suggest that a brief look at some of the Christian (and indeed Jewish) sources may provide insight into whether we can in any way define aniconism as characteristic of religious life in the Near East.

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[131] As e.g. Cornelius 1997:21. This is not universally true; coins from Asia Minor depict an aniconic form of the goddess of Sardis *alongside* the statue of Ephesian Artemis (*BMC Ionia*, 110-15, pl. 38, esp. 1-2).

[132] Stewart 2008:298. Sartre agreed, and suggested that it was an indigenous phenomenon that gradually became more Hellenised, leading to stelae with eyes, as a position somewhere between aniconism and anthropomorphism (2008:43). Similarly, Butcher observed a "Near Eastern propensity for avoiding anthropomorphic representations of the divine", although he simultaneously suggested that one should "avoid seeing these as evidence for any general Near Eastern religion, which might imply greater spiritual coherence than is actually apparent" (2003:338), since the Near East did not have the monopoly on such images.

[133] Gaifman 2008:39.

[134] Ibid:61.

One key element to recognise in this regard is that aniconic worship is not limited to litholatry;[135] the result of this association is usually to regard aniconism as a form of primitivism.[136] Gaifman determined two different forms of aniconism: one without images *at all*, and one without *human* images; if aniconism is defined by the lack of image, then worship of empty space is also a key factor.[137]

2.6.1 Defining a baetyl

Some discussion of the term 'baetyl' itself is needed. This is assumed to be derived from the Semitic *byt ʾl* ('house of God'). One of the most famous occurrences of this term, and indeed an episode which may cast considerable light, is the story of Jacob's Ladder, which is recounted in *Gen*. 28. After falling asleep and dreaming of angels ascending and descending a great ladder to heaven, Jacob declares: *mh nwrʾ hmqwm hzh ʾyn zh ky ʾm byt ʾlhym wzh šʿr hšmym*.[138] He then takes the stone on which he slept, and establishes it as a pillar. Significantly, although Jacob describes the place as 'the house of God', and the site later becomes known as Bethel (although originally known as Luz), neither the stone (*ʿbn*) nor the pillar (*mzbḥ*) is described in terms of a *byt ʾl*.[139] It is possible the author had in mind considerations of baetyl-worship and chose to avoid the term, but if this were the case,

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[135] Gaifman argued that the creation of the category 'aniconic' "assumes a priori the 'iconic' as a default" (2012:2). Because it is very difficult to determine the 'iconic', the 'aniconic' therefore becomes far broader in scope than is usually accepted.

[136] Gaifman 2010:67.

[137] Gaifman 2012:28-9. See also Cornelius 1997:35. There has been considerable scholarship on the temple in Jerusalem as a prominent example of empty space worship: see in particular Weeks 2007:12-14. Niehr, on the other hand, suggested that this was a post-exilic development, and that Jewish theologians were forced to respond to Nebuchadnezzar's removal of the statue (1997:75ff). However, aniconism in Jewish cult receives no coverage whatsoever in our sources, and so I do not intend to address that question here: for more, see also Mettinger 1997 and Uehlinger 1996.

[138] *Gen*. 28:17: 'this is nothing other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven'.

[139] *mṣbh* appears throughout the Old Testament to describe standing stones. YHWH's attitude towards them, however, is ambiguous; *Gen*. 28 and *Isa*. 19:19 make it clear that a *mṣbh* is pleasing to God, whilst Deut. 16:22 implies quite the opposite (*wlʾ tqym lk mzbh ʾšr śnʾ yhwh ʾlhyk*: 'do not set up for yourselves a pillar, which the LORD your God hates'). This ambiguity can only be explained by supposing that the *mṣbh* is in itself not offensive, but only when dedicated to the wrong object.

repeating the phrase 'house of God' would be non-sensical. It seems more likely that the author did *not* recognise *byt ʾl* as a technical term for such a statue. This is in keeping with the observation of Gaifman that *byt ʾl* is in fact better used either of places or of gods themselves, rather than the object of worship, whether it was strictly aniconic or not.[140] Either way, *Genesis* 28 "is neither an illustration of an overall Near Eastern propensity towards stone worship nor a concrete testimony of the existence of worship of baetyls in the biblical town of Bethel. At most, it is an aetiological story, which tells the history of a sanctuary in the town of Bethel, where there may have been a famous sacred stele that marked Jacob's vision of God".[141]

What of the Greek term βαίτυλος? Interpretations appear to vary, but none of the uses of βαίτυλος, at least as we find them in early sources, appear to match the meaning of the Semitic *byt ʾl*. Pliny the Elder, for example, describes them as a form of ceraunia, black and round in shape, which possessed magical powers.[142] Philo of Byblos gives Βαίτυλος as one of the four sons of Ouranos and Ge, which is probably a Greek transliterated form of the Semitic deity Bethel.[143] This is the closest we come in any of our sources to a direct etymological link between *byt ʾl* and βαίτυλος: other Greek sources, namely Philo of Alexandria and Josephus, tend to transliterate the former as βαιθὴλ,[144] which would suggest that they do not recognise a connection. Nor is there a clear connection in meaning: in the LXX *Gen.* 28, the only word that could possibly have the meaning of 'baetyl', *mzbḥ*, is instead rendered στήλη. Gaifman

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[140] Gaifman argued that consistent modern usage of the term 'baetyl' to define these objects has been largely responsible for creating the perception of the 'aniconic' as a coherent concept, and that it obstructs our view of cultic reality (2008:38-9). I would agree with her insofar as using the word 'baetyl', with its connotations of the residence of the divine, does perhaps imply certain key characteristics, including the divine nature of the object, but nevertheless these themes are still identified by our ancient sources. Modern usage has probably contributed to the suggestion of a coherent concept, but it cannot be wholly, or even largely, responsible.

[141] Gaifman 2008:51.

[142] Plin. *HN* 37.51.

[143] Quoted in Euseb. *Praerp. Evang* 1.10.17. See also Baumgarten 1981:190 and 202-3.

[144] As e.g. Philo *Confus.* 74.4; Joseph. *AJ* 1.342.2.

goes into considerably more detail in attempting to identify the source of our understanding of the word 'baetyl',[145] but it is important here to realise that there appears to be no fixed, defined category identified by our ancient sources, at least under the term βαίτυλος.

2.6.2 Jewish and Christian attitudes

Looking at certain Christian (and Jewish) sources may in fact help enlighten this position. In many cases, as has already become apparent in the study of iconolatry as a whole, they tend to portray a wildly inaccurate depiction of religious life. Here, however, I suggest we may be justified in using them to identify a tendency towards aniconism, if one should exist. A brief look at the Biblical attitude in general may help elucidate this. Firstly, it could be argued that the prohibition towards image-making found in *Exod*. 20:4 refers to objects with an image: *l' t'śh lk psl wkl tmwnh 'šr bšmym mm'l w'šr b'rṣ mtḥt w'šr bmym mtḥt l'rṣ*.[146] This prohibition is apparently not limited to anthropomorphic images: *psl* ('carved image') is used rather than *ṣlm*, which, as demonstrated above, appears to be used exclusively of the image of man. It is not clear what these images are 'of', if anything: the commandment merely states that it may not be fashioned in the form (*tmwnh*) of anything under the heavens, on land or in the sea. The fact that it is *carved* images *fashioned into the form* of something suggests a particular opposition to iconism. This may in turn suggest that aniconism would be more tolerable to Jewish and Christian thinkers, because it seemingly does not violate this prohibition. This suggestion may be reinforced by a further prohibition, immediately following the more familiar ones: *w'm mzbḥ 'bnym t'sh ly l' tbnh 'thn gzyt*.[147] The emphasis

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[145] Gaifman 2008; she was critical of the scholarly tendency to use the term 'baetyl' in a broader sense than that found in Pliny (2012:15).

[146] *Exod*. 20:4: 'do not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything which is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters below the earth'.

[147] Ibid. 20:25: 'if you build me an altar of stone, do not build it of hewn stone'.

on the carved nature of the stone in both prohibitions suggests something wholly inappropriate about a (specifically) man-made object taking the place of YHWH as the object of worship. It would be taking me far outside the objectives of this thesis to explore fully why this might be – but it is vital to at least acknowledge the existence of this apparent distinction.

Is it a distinction acknowledged by Christian sources? Clement of Alexandria, in his *Exhortation*, does appear to recognise a tendency towards worshipping aniconic imagery: significantly, he treats it as characteristic of the East.[148] Gaifman has suggested that, in Clement's analysis, aniconic worship is *worse* than iconic, because one cannot blame the deceptive skill of the artist: one can only blame the magnitude of one's own sin.[149] This argument entirely ignores Clement's own point of view, however: ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἤνθησεν ἡ τέχνη, ηὔξησεν ἡ πλάνη.[150] The distinction is not substantial, but it is present. Like our Classical sources, he too understands it as something primitive, which is crucial. If aniconic worship was regarded as a 'backwoods' survival of primitive cult, practised only in the most rural and uncivilised of areas, and simultaneously as a distinctive feature characteristic of the Near East, then (quite apart from the internal contradiction of these two statements) one could reasonably expect the 'primitive' nature of aniconic worship to draw the fire of Near Eastern Christian authors.

2.6.3   Meliton

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[148] Clem. Al. *Protr.* 4.40: πάλαι μὲν οὖν οἱ Σκύθαι τὸν ἀκινάκην, οἱ Ἄραβες τὸν λίθον, οἱ Πέρσαι τὸν ποταμὸν προσεκύνον ('in antiquity, the Scythians worshipped the dagger, the Arabians the stone, and the Persians the river').
[149] Gaifman 2010:84.
[150] Clem. Al. *Protr.* 4.40: 'when art arrived, error increased'.

With this in mind, it is rather startling that even Meliton, who describes in some detail the origin and behaviour of local cults such as that at Hierapolis, does not explicitly mention aniconic worship. The closest is a brief allusion to the worship of 'material', but, given that this forms a key part of Meliton's polemic on image-worship as a whole, it cannot be used as evidence for aniconism in its own right. The same goes for the use of the term *glyp'* ('carving'). If I am correct in hypothesizing that *ṣlm'* is used purely of anthropomorphic images, then *glyp'* must, if it is even recognized as a category in its own right, stand for *all* other images, which may well include aniconic ones, but must also include zoomorphic and so on: aniconic images do not appear in the text as an independent category.

2.6.3.1 Meliton, Lucian and the σημεῖον

Perhaps the most telling instance is a reference to the goddess Simi, daughter of Hadad, deity of Hierapolis. It is very likely that this is Meliton's misinterpretation of the Greek σημεῖον, the military standard which we know was honoured there, where it appears between the figures of Hadad and Atargatis (see below, fig. 2.2).[151] Whether or not worship of a σημεῖον was considered strictly 'aniconic' is a slightly moot point (it would have been covered in imperial iconography for a start),[152] but it is clear that Meliton has either

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[151] Details of the σημεῖον are given by Lucian (*Syr. D.* 33). Lightfoot's 2003 translation and commentary offers excellent discussion on the relationship between Simi and the σημεῖον (540-547); see also Lightfoot 2007:93-7. Butcher questioned whether or not this might be an example of Roman 'colonization' of indigenous cult, but noted the popularity of such standards in the second- and third- century religious art of Hatra (2003:344). Dirven suggested that the standards at Hierapolis "are not Roman military objects, but cult objects that derive from a long indigenous tradition" (2005:119), but that the degree of Roman influence in the depiction of the standards varied from place to place: for the differences between the standards of Hierapolis and Hatra, see ibid:122-3. The σημεῖον likely became incorporated into local myths, and thence appears as Simi in Meliton's text (Butcher 2003:345).

[152] Although one might consider the incident at Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate in which the Jews objected to the standards displayed around the city: it is not clear whether it was the function or the appearance of the standards that caused offence (Bond 2007:93).

concealed, or, more likely, simply not recognised, any distinction between anthropomorphic deities and more 'aniconic' ones.[153]

Fig. 2.2 Cult relief from Hierapolis/Mabog, showing (l-r)Hadad, the σημεῖον and Atargatis, flanked by twin lions

2.6.4 Aristides

Like Meliton, the Syriac translation of Aristides explicitly rejects the worship of the elements in particular as a form of the divine.[154] However, he goes further than Meliton in claiming that, in fact, images are fashioned in the likeness of these elements. It is significant that Aristides' criticism of the carving or fashioning of images of the form of man is levelled at the Greeks: could Aristides be making a distinction between the Greek world, which

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[153] Despite this, Sartre argued that *Syr. D.* 33 demonstrated that "two clearly antagonistic iconographic traditions coexisted, as if in an attempt to satisfy the tastes and needs of all the faithful" (2008:44); however, it is unclear how far these traditions *were* entirely independent, let alone antagonistic.

[154] Aristides 6.2 (earth), 6.5 (water), 7.2 (fire), 7.3 (wind), 8.3 (sun).

worships the familiar *ṣlm'*, and the 'barbarians', who do not? Unfortunately, tempting though this hypothesis is, it cannot be maintained. Firstly, this theory requires us to assume that the 'barbarians' should be associated with the indigenous inhabitants of the Near East. There is little evidence in the text itself which suggests that the barbarians can be associated with any specific racial group,[155] despite the fact that the Greek text of *Barlaam and Josaphat* gives them as οἱ Χαλδαῖοι, the Chaldaeans.[156] Secondly, and more conclusively, the barbarians are in fact equally culpable of fashioning *ṣlm'*: Aristides says, in fact, that it was they who first carved likenesses of the gods, placed them in temples, and worshipped them (implying that the Greeks adopted their practice from them).[157] If this is the case, which it seemingly must be, why accuse only the Greeks of actually *fashioning* their images (and specifically accusing them of violating the commandment of *Exod.* 20:4)? As noted above, this section is closely connected with the idea of Greek *rationality* (and therefore philosophy) and is therefore adopting *Greek* philosophical ideals about the *irrationality* of forming images of the divine. It in no way suggests that carving recognisable images is a feature of the Greek world in contrast to the 'barbarian' world, even if that could be comfortably identified as the indigenous inhabitants of the Near East, whose religious life was 'imposed upon' by the introduction of Greek forms.[158] Furthermore, I can find no further reference which could in any way endorse this theory; in part, I am sure, this is because Aristides is less concerned with image-worship itself than Meliton, but the same argument that applies to the latter may also apply to the former: that 'aniconic cult' was not a characteristic feature of the Near East and so the Syriac translator does not identify it as such.

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[155] See also the discussion on Tatian and Lucian as 'Assyrians' for the misleading concept of 'indigenous' Semitic social strata in contrast to, or conflict with, 'imported' Greek culture: above, 1.4.3 and 1.5.1.
[156] On this association, see Pouderon and Pierre 2003:49-53.
[157] Aristides 4.5.
[158] Gaifman 2008:67. For more on this discussion, see above, 1.4.3.

2.6.5 Tatian

Because Tatian's concern is largely with the worship of immaterial spirits or demons, his account does not offer much either to support or undermine Stewart's position on the prominence of aniconism. He does at one point question the sense of worshipping sticks and stones (πῶς δὲ ξύλα καὶ λίθους θεοὺς ἀποθανοῦμαι;),[159] which, as noted above, may suggest aniconic forms of image. However, the context makes this extremely unlikely: in the preceding passage he also denies that we should worship the sun or moon, which suggests that here 'sticks and stones' are symbols of the natural world, and the worship of God's creation, rather than referring to any form of image. Beyond this, Tatian has very little to offer in any way on the discussion.

2.7 Concluding remarks

Much more could be said on aniconic cult: however, the brief survey here suggests that it did not feature in any significant way in Christian attitudes towards religious life in the Near East. Whether or not this can be used to entirely deny Stewart's position is a troublesome question: I am inclined to suggest that, although worship of aniconic object was prominent, it was far too varied to categorize in any meaningful way, and that little distinction is drawn between aniconic and iconic, as Gaifman argued. I acknowledge the limitation of my sources in this respect, for it is not in their best interest to portray an accurate perception of religious life, but one would suspect that it would feature heavily in the rhetorical armoury of Meliton in particular if it were in any way characteristic of the region.

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[159] Tatian *Or.* 4.2: 'how am I to declare that sticks and stones are gods?'.

It has become clear during this chapter that Near Eastern Christian attitudes to iconolatry vary considerably. Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides are consistent in the sense that they identify iconolatry as a key component of gentile religious life, and treat it with great hostility due to the violation of the prohibition of *Exod*. 20:4. Beyond this, however, there is too much variation to be specific. As a result, the authors vary when compared with the evidence of non-Christian texts: Meliton appears to be the least accurate, in that he explicitly identifies statue with god, and is therefore an absolute monotheist: there is no evidence in other sources to support this concrete identification. Both Tatian and Aristides, on the other hand, appear to better capture the sense of ambiguity with which the gentile world approaches cult images. An understanding of this ambiguity is found at the very heart of Judaeo-Christian iconoclasm: the incident of the golden calf fails to clarify whether the statue *is*, or *represents*, a god.[160] It is therefore unsurprising that Aristides and Tatian recognise this ambiguity.

However, all three authors use the attacks on iconolatry not as an objective in itself, but as a means to an end. They aim to show the folly of sacrificial cult by highlighting the weakness of the gods to whom these sacrifices are offered: iconolatry represents the first logical step in this process. My next chapter will examine Near Eastern Christian attitudes to this weakness.

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[160] Greenspahn 2010:487. Margalit and Halbertal, however, argued that the commandments 'to have no other god' and 'not to make a graven image' are to be treated entirely separately: we cannot therefore treat *Exod*. 20:3-4 as the root of this ambiguity (1992b:19).

Chapter Three: 'an idol has no real existence, and there is no God but one' (*1 Cor* 8:4):

Near Eastern Christianity and the powerlessness of idols

3.1   Introduction

In the passage from *1 Corinthians* quoted in the previous chapter, Paul discusses the nature of 'idols', saying περὶ τῆς βρόσεως οὖν τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, οἴδαμεν ὅτι οὐδὲν εἴδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ, καὶ ὅτι οὐδεὶς Θεὸς ἕτερος εἰ μὴ εἷς.[1] This can be interpreted in one of two ways: either that other gods do not exist (absolute monotheism), or that they are so lacking in substance and power that, in comparison with the true God, they are virtually nothing (relative monotheism).[2] The concept that the 'idol' is 'nothing' is widely adopted by Christian writers, and Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides are no different in this respect. This powerlessness is expressed in three main areas: firstly, the inability of the divine to respond to sacrifice; secondly, the dependence of the divine and its need for sacrifice; thirdly, the vulnerability of the divine. It could be, perhaps, misleading to distinguish these three issues as clearly as this: as I shall demonstrate, our authors do not make such clear distinctions, and these areas often overlap. Nevertheless, they are the three key areas in which Tatian, Aristides and Meliton attack the powerless of the gods of the gentiles.

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[1] *1 Cor.* 8:4: 'now, as regards food which has been offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one'.

[2] For more on this distinction, see above, 1.7.4. For the application to Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides, see above, 2.3.3.

3.2   Near Eastern Christian attitudes to the powerlessness of idols

3.2.1 Meliton

Let us turn first to Meliton. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, he argued

strongly that gentile gods had no existence at all (in keeping with the quotation from Paul,

without demonstrating any of Paul's ambiguity on the subject). This has profound

implications on his attitude towards their powers, which, as I shall show, differs considerably

from those of Tatian and the Syriac translation of Aristides. We must begin by recognising

that Meliton's argument is based on a clear statement of purpose. In the central section, he

provides a Euhemeristic analysis of the origin of gods: *'n' dyn 'yk m' dḥkm 'n'. 'ktwb w'ḥw':*

'ykn' wb'ylyn 'lln 't'bdw ṣlm' lmlk' wlṭrwn': whww 'yk 'lhyn. 'bdw bny 'rgws ṣlm' lhrqls. mṭl

dbr mdynthwn hw' wḥyltn hw'. wqṭl bḥlyṣwth ḥywt' byšt'. wytyr'yt mṭl ddḥlyn hww mnh.[3]

When I referred to this passage in the previous chapter, I observed that *'yk* ('like') implies

that the 'kings and tyrants' are *not* gods, but are merely *associated* with them, reinforcing

Meliton's argument that other gods simply do not exist; and that, secondly, *all* gods were

made so by human reverence and by the fashioning of an image:[4] there is no distinction

between, for example, Herakles and Dionysus on the one hand, figures whom the Classical

world accepted as mortals-turned-divine, and Zeus or Poseidon on the other. To these two

observations we may add a third: that this reverence was caused by the benevolence of these

great men towards mankind: that is to say, worship (and divinity) is given in response to

power, and particularly benevolence and blessing. This is an aspect of Graeco-Roman

religion which is widely accepted: the position was best stated by Gradel, who claimed that

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[3] Meliton 3.5: 'I will write and show according to what I know how and for what reasons images are made for kings and tyrants, and they became like gods. The sons of Argos made an image for Herakles, because he was an inhabitant of their city and he was strong, and in his strength he killed evil beasts, and especially because they feared him'.
[4] See above, 2.3.1.

power was the only true 'measuring-stick' of divinity in the ancient world.[5] That is, worship is relative to power, and one becomes worthy of worship through the display of this power, particularly when this display is used for the benefit of mankind.[6] This is the approach adopted by Euhemeristic authors like Philo of Byblos, and Meliton here uses it for his own ends.

A brief word on the Euhemeristic section itself. Lightfoot observed that the polemic in Meliton's Euhemeristic *historiolae* is curiously "flaccid"[7] compared with the rest of the text, and suggested that it might be an interpolation, especially since the purely local Syrian *historiolae* appear to differ from some of the more familiar ones, such as the section dealing with Athens. It is certainly true that, when taken as a whole, most of the stories are written in a matter-of-fact style, reporting detail with none of the editorial attack that we might expect. However, where Lightfoot deals almost exclusively with the *historiolae* as the "real curiosity",[8] I suggest that it is possible to explain the lack of polemic by treating this section as part of the overall text, and by recognising that Meliton's focus is almost exclusively on the *ṣlm'* or image. Given this focus, it would not only be unnecessary, but counterproductive, for Meliton to discuss the powers or conduct of the gods in any great detail: to do so would involve admitting that they exist at all, and this is something Meliton is determined to avoid. This, of course, raises the question as to why the *historiolae* should be included at all: at first glance they add nothing to Meliton's argument. I suggest that the answer should be sought

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[5] Gradel 2002:34. Similarly, Rives argued that "the gods were what the gods did" (2007:92), and were thus defined by their activitiy rather than by their attributes. On apotheosis through acts of both conquest and benefaction, see Bosworth 1999:4-7.

[6] Versnel highlighted the paradox inherent in this mentality: "the exalted or omnipotent god owed much of his inaccessible majesty to the fact that he lent an ear to lowly mortals" (1981:35). The humbling of the divine majesty is a particularly prominent theme in Christianity: see esp. *Phil*. 2:6-7. Similarly, Ando argued that *pietas* was due to the gods only insofar as they care for man (2008:5).

[7] Lightfoot 2007:72.

[8] Ibid:59.

not in the argument itself, but in the supposed addressee, *’nṭwnynws qsr*. On at least one other occasion, Meliton attempts to make the *Oration* directly relevant to a royal (or imperial) reader by discussing the conduct of kings.[9] It is entirely possible that the Euhemeristic section was intended to serve a similar purpose, especially since this section immediately follows an observation that the Caesars are worshipped more than other, more traditional gods: *’n’ dyn ’mr ’n’. d’p swl’ ’mrt ʿlyhwn dlṣlm’ hw dmlk’ dmytw sgdyn. whd’ pšyq’ lmdʿh. hʾ gyr ’p hš’. lṣlm’ hw dqsryn’ sgdyn wmyqryn: ytyr mn dlhnwn qdmy’.*[10] Given this context, it is possible that the Euhemeristic account is an attempt either to make the section more relevant to an imperial readership, in the unlikely event that the text ever reached *’nṭwnynws qsr*, or, more likely, as a further reminder of the supposed addressee to the wider readership. I shall deal with the moral aspects of the *historiolae* in the following chapter, but it is certainly worth observing that, while Meliton is less aggressive in his use of Euhemeristic approach than we might expect, it is not necessary to attribute the section to a different author.

By recognising the connection between divinity and power, or more accurately efficacy, Meliton implicitly provides a second string to his polemic: if he can demonstrate that the gods are incapable of responding benevolently and benefiting mankind, the entire justification of gentile sacrifice and religious life is lost. He attempts to do just this: *hydyn yhb lk dṣbynwhy tdʿ. kl mn drḥyq gyr mn ’ydʿt’ d’lh’ ḥy’. myt’ hw wqbyr bpgrh. mṭl hn’ qdm š’d’ wṭlnyt’: ʿl ’rʿ’ mtʿrgl wš’l ’nt š’lt’ sryqt’. mn mn dlyt lh lmtl. ’nt dyn qwm lk mn lwt hnwn drmyn ʿl ’rʿ’: wmnšqyn lk’p’: wyhbyn sybrthwn mkwlt’ lnwr’: wmqrbyn lbwšyhwn lṣlm’: wṣbyn kd mrgšyn dnplḥwn lmdm dl’ mrgš. wš’l ’nt š’lt’ dl’ blyn l’lh’ dl’ bl’: lnpšk dl’ mtḥbl’.*

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[9] Meliton 7.7-8.4.

[10] Meliton 3.2: 'but I say also that the Sybil said about them that they worship the images of dead kings. It is easy to understand, for even now they worship the images of the Caesars even more than their former gods'.

wtthz' h'rwtk mn kdw wdylh 'yṣp.[11] Meliton begins this passage by reinforcing the idea that false gods are 'dead'. He develops on this position by showing that dead objects have nothing to offer to their worshippers: how could they? The petitions that are asked of them are therefore empty. Instead, these petitions should be asked of the immortal God, because He *is* capable of responding to these petitions. Is there a difference between the petitions asked of gentile gods and those asked of the Christian God? The former are *sryqt'* ('empty'), and the latter *l' blyn* ('do not waste away'); however, it is likely that these descriptions depend on the object from whom they are asked, rather than the nature of the petition itself. In fact, there is surprisingly little exploration as to what form these 'petitions' of gentiles might take. Only once does Meliton offer anything with which to interpret this: only the Christian God is able *dntl lk ḥy' dl'lm. dl' mytyn*,[12] and, by implication, this is something which the gentile gods lack the power to do. No other evidence is available within the text to suggest how Meliton intends this concept of eternal life to be interpreted within a gentile religious context; I shall deal with the problem more fully once the evidence from Tatian and the Syriac translation of Aristides has been assessed, since both offer a little more in this respect.

Meliton also attacks the apparent irony of his opponents' position: *w'n lqys' hlyn dmwqdynn. w'n lk'p' hlyn dmtbryn ḥnn. 'ykn' hkyl hlyn 'lh' 'nwn: dh' ḥwšḥ' 'nwn dbny 'nš.*[13] Whilst the gods themselves (that is, the images) are incapable of offering benefit or assistance, the materials themselves, in their natural form, are far more useful than the gods

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[11] Meliton 6.8-7.2: 'then He permits you to know His will. For everything which is far from the living God is dead and buried in the body. Because of this you roll on the ground before evil spirits and shadows and you ask empty petitions from that which has nothing to give. But you, raise yourself from those who lie upon the ground and kiss stones, giving their provisions as food for the fire, and offering their clothes to images. Although they are sentient they wish to serve whatever is not sentient. Ask petitions which do not waste away to God, who does not waste away, for your soul which is imperishable, and your freedom will be seen sufficiently: be careful of it'.

[12] Meliton 4.8: 'to give to you life for eternity, which does not die'.

[13] Meliton 2.4: 'and if these pieces of wood which we burn, and these stones which we shatter, how are these things gods? For they are useful to men'.

into which they are fashioned! This is consistent with Meliton's claims that the god is strictly limited to the statue, and one can therefore expect no more help from the god than one would from any other material.

Other than this, however, Meliton does not deal very much with the efficacy of the divine. God's omnipotence and benevolence is discussed at great length; from this we may deduce that, by way of contrast, the gentile gods lack these powers, but nothing explicit is stated. In view of his broader attitude, however, this absence is perhaps not as surprising as it would first appear. Meliton consistently and firmly denies the existence of 'alternative' supernatural powers, and claims that gentile gods are exclusively limited to the physical image or *ṣlm'*, and as such is an absolute monotheist. Beginning from this position, the fact that the gods are incapable of rendering assistance is therefore self-evident, and requires no further explanation: how could a being that does not exist, or exists only as an inanimate statue, bless their worshippers in response to sacrifice? Discussing the powerlessness of gentile gods at any great length would in fact undermine his own argument: by discussing their efficacy he must admit their existence. It ought to be noted that this does not stop him emphasising the fact that gentile gods are senseless, a characteristic he emphasises on numerous occasions; however, it seems that his focus was on the non-existence, rather than the powerlessness, of false gods.

3.2.1.1 The self-locomotion and independence of images

However, Meliton's position (that images lack any sort of independent power) is not self-evident, as it might initially appear to be; there is evidence in the ancient sources for reports of statues seemingly acting independently, responding to prayers and moving of their own accord. One such account is found in Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess*, and was

mentioned in the previous chapter.[14] Lucian's account highlights considerable overlap between the powers of self-locomotion of the statue itself and the involvement of human agency: despite the fact that it requires priests to carry it around, Lucian claims that the impetus is given by the image itself. A very similar account is found in Diodorus Siculus, talking about the oracular statue of Zeus Ammon at Siwah: τὸ δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ ξόανον ἐκ σμαράγδων καί τινων ἄλλων πολυτελῶν λίθων περιέχεται καὶ τὴν μαντείαν ἰδιάζουσαν ταντελῶς ποιεῖται. ἐπὶ νεὼς γὰρ περιφέρεται χρυσῆς ὑπὸ ἱερέων ὀγδοήκοντα· οὗτοι δ' ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων φέροντες τὸν θεὸν προάγουσιν αὐτομάτως ὅπου ποτ' ἂν ἄγῃ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ νεῦμα τὴν πορείαν.[15] Both here and in the account of Lucian, the statue is able to move by directing the steps of those who carry it: it therefore appears to function through an expression of its divine will rather than through active self-locomotion. A similar phenomenon appears elsewhere in Lucian's text: γίγνοςται δὲ αὐτόθι καὶ πανηγύριές τε μέγισται, καλέονται δὲ ἐς τὴν λίμνην καταβάσιες, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῇσιν ἐς τὴν λίμνην τὰ ἱρὰ πάντα κατέρχεται.[16] Lightfoot demonstrated that this was almost certainly a ceremonial procession as a precursor to ritual washing.[17] However, the term used to describe the images is τὰ ἱρὰ rather than ξόανόν, which Lucian uses elsewhere of images of the gods, or ἄγαλμα, which is commonly used by other authors for statues of mortals.[18] The use of τὰ ἱρὰ may imply that it is not the cult image itself

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[14] See above, 2.4.1. Luc. *Syr. D.* 36: 'this one moves of its own volition and itself brings its soothsaying to fruition. It works like this. When it wants to prophesy, it first moves on its base, and the priests lift it up; if they do not lift it up it sweats and moves even more. When they lift it onto their backs and carry it, it drives them twisting and turning this way and that, leaping from one to another. Finally the chief priest approaches it an inquires about all manner of things: if it does not want something to be done, it retreats; if it approves it, it drives its bearers forwards like a charioteer', tr. Lightfoot.

[15] Diod. Sic. 17.50.6: 'the image of the god is ringed with emeralds and many other precious stones, and it has an absolutely unique power of prophecy. It is carried about on a golden boat by eighty priests; carrying the god on their shoulders, they go about without their own will wherever the sign of the god leads their steps'.

[16] Luc. *Syr. D.* 47: 'very great festivals take place there, which are called 'descents to the lake' because in them all the cult images go down to the lakeside' (tr. Lightfoot).

[17] Lightfoot 2003:492.

[18] See above, 2.3.2.

that is involved in the ritual descent; alternatively, and more likely, it simply demonstrates once again the semantic fluidity in talking about cult statues, particularly in Greek.

Although it is by no means clear that either Lucian or Diodorus Siculus entirely believed either instance quoted here, it is evident that many other people *did* believe in the independent powers of the image,[19] even when the author may suspect fraud. For example, in another of his works, Lucian tells of Alexander, the false prophet of the serpent god Glycon, who forged prophecies for a sum. Lucian comments that initially, he had a huge following, and only later did people with any common sense (πολλοὶ τῶν νοῦν ἐχόντων), largely consisting of followers of Epicurus, begin to suspect fraud;[20] Lucian vehemently criticises the gullibility of those who were taken in by Alexander.[21] Although human agency may be suspected in many cases, Weddle argued that it did not follow that this would be the immediate response of the worshipper: if you pray before a statue expecting to encounter the god, why would you immediately suspect human invovlement?[22] Nor, Weddle argued, was there evidence to support the suggestion that it was only the credulous, uneducated plebs who were taken in by the powers of speech and self-locomotion of the statues.[23] Some Christian authors were clearly aware of this phenomenon: Eusebius attacks the deception of priests in moving the statues in religious fraud,[24] but Meliton does not appear to acknowledge it, despite the explicit association of image and god.

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[19] Weddle 2010:94.
[20] Luc. *Alex.* 25.
[21] Ibid:20.
[22] Weddle 2010:103.
[23] Ibid. 96. This is seen in Lucian's account of the variety of classes taken in by Alexander's fraud.
[24] Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 9.3.

3.2.2 Tatian

Tatian, rather surprisingly, does not discuss the benefits that gentile gods offer in any great detail. On the single occasion that he does deal with these benefits, he is rather vague as to their efficacy: δαιμόνων εἰσὶν ἐπιφοιτήσεις· καὶ ὁ νοσῶν καὶ ὁ λέγων ἐρᾶν καὶ ὁ μισῶν καὶ ὁ βουλόμενος ἀμύνεσθαι τούτους λαμβάνουσιν βοηθούς.[25] The demons help those who offer them sacrifices in a variety of different ways, and a number of these, namely the one who is in love (ὁ λέγων ἐρᾶν) and the one who hates (ὁ μισῶν), show a considerable overlap with the field of magic.[26] Significantly, Tatian does not suggest that the demons are incapable of performing healings and so forth. Quite the reverse: he argues that the demons use such benefits to trick mankind into evil and make them their slaves.[27] The problem for Tatian is not that the gods are powerless, and therefore incapable of offering assistance, but that the assistance the gods offer marks them out as morally corrupt, and therefore not worth worshipping.[28] Tatian adopts a similar approach to the assistance of gods in the form of omens and prodigies, which is an area that Meliton and Aristides ignore. Rather than arguing that the gods are incapable of offering such aid, and therefore that sacrificial cult is worthless, he emphasises the folly of mankind making themselves subject to, for example, the flight of birds; this, he argues, would make mankind inferior to birds.[29] Tatian therefore adopts a

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[25] Tatian *Or.* 17.2: 'there are appearances of demons, and the sick, and the one who says that he is in love, and the one who hates, and the one who wants vengeance: all of these take the demons as their assistants'. The description of the one who 'hates' is consistent with New Testament characterisation of the gentile, and particularly of their reaction to Christianity: see e.g. *John* 7:7, *Lk.* 1:71.

[26] Despite the ambiguity demonstrated here by Tatian, I do not intend to engage with the relationship between religion and magic, except to note that in both areas some return was seemingly expected from the deity. For more on this, see Versnel 1991, Beard, North and Price 1998a:154-5 and 219-20, Janowitz 2001 and Rives 2007, esp. 158-180.

[27] Tatian *Or.* 18.3. The evil here is presumably, although not explicitly, the offering of sacrifices. Grant argued that this passage showed considerable similarities with the Valentinian Theodotus (Clem. Al. *Exc.* 72.2), and thus endorses Irenaeus' rejection of Tatian as a heretic (1954:63. See above, 1.4.3).

[28] Tatian *Or.* 17.3: πῶς δ' ἂν ἀγαθὸν μοιχείαις ὑπηρετεῖν; πῶς δὲ καὶ σπουδαῖον πρὸς τὸ μισεῖν τινας παριόντας βοηθεῖν; ('how is it good to aid in adultery? How is it of good character to help peoples' hatred?').

[29] Ibid. 19.4.

completely different attitude to Meliton, in that he appears to acknowledge the efficacy of sacrifice, but chooses instead to attack its moral aspects.

Furthermore, Tatian appears to attack a second aspect of gentile sacrifice that Meliton largely ignores: the power of the gods to punish. Tatian writes: τί μοι σέβειν θεοὺς δωρολήπτας καὶ ὀργιζομένους ἂν μὴ λάβωσιν.[30] This must be a reference to the demand of the gods for sacrifices and the repercussions if those demands are not met. However, it is clear that, in Tatian's view, this anger is largely impotent. He suggests that demons merely 'take credit' for inflicting sickness on man: εἰσὶν μὲν οὖν καὶ νόσοι καὶ στάσεις τῆς ἐν ἡμῖν ὕλης· δαίμονες δὲ αὐτοὶ τούτων τὰς αἰτίας, ἐπειδὰν συμβαίνωσιν, ἑαυτοῖς προσγράφουσιν, ἐπιόντες ὁπόταν καταλαμβάνῃ κάματος.[31] This statement appears to imply that the demons are not responsible for these illnesses, and that they merely claim that they are (presumably to inspire fear and motivate sacrifice). Immediately after this, however, he appears to claim the opposite: ἔστι δὲ ὅτε καὶ αὐτοὶ χειμῶνι τῆς σφῶν ἀβελτερίας κραδαίνουσιν τὴν ἕξιν τοῦ σώματος· οἳ λόγῳ θεοῦ δυνάμεως πληττόμενοι δεδιότες ἀπίασιν, καὶ ὁ κάμνων θεραπεύεται,[32] which *does* imply the involvement of the gods. However, these sicknesses are caused not by the power of the divine, but by their madness. It is impossible, therefore, that these illnesses should in any way be considered a punishment for the failure to sacrifice. Tatian elsewhere makes it explicit that the demons cannot actively harm mankind: εἰ γὰρ δυνατὸν αὐτοῖς, πάντως ἂν καὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν συνάμα τῇ λοιπῇ ποιήσει καθείλκυσαν· νῦν δὲ τοῦτο μὲν πράττουσιν οὐδαμῶς· ἀδυνατοῦσι γάρ.[33] This, therefore, represents a second

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[30] Ibid. 10.1: 'why should I worship gods who take bribes and are angry if they do not get them?'

[31] Ibid. 16.3: 'there are diseases and disturbances of our material, but, whenever these occur, the demons claim that they are the causes, and they follow distress wherever it takes hold'.

[32] Ibid. 16.3: 'sometimes too they shake the body's system with a fit of their own madness, and then smitten by a word of God's power they go away in fear, and the sick man is healed'. See also Hawthorne 1964:175.

[33] Tatian *Or.* 16.2: 'if they had the power, they would have dragged down the whole heaven, together with the rest of Creation. However, they do no such thing, for they are powerless'.

reason why the demons cannot bless mankind: they are both unwilling to do so, in their malevolence, and incapable of doing so, in their powerlessness. The central argument of Tatian's polemic in this area becomes most explicit when he says: τὴν "πολυκοιρανίην" μᾶλλον ἤπερ τὴν μοναρχίας ἐξησκήσατε καθάπερ ἰσχυροῖς νομίζοντες <τοῖς> δαίμοσι κατακολουθεῖν.[34] The key word here, καθάπερ ('as if') strongly implies that the gods are *not*, in fact, powerful beings. Whilst for Meliton, the non-existence of gods is best exemplified by their failure to provide blessings in exchange for sacrifice, for Tatian (although this idea may be implicit), the argument is almost the opposite: we must not fear the demons' wrath (which, although Tatian does not give an equivalent, we may understand as the *ira deum*) because they are powerless; we therefore do not need to offer sacrifices to appease them.

3.2.2.1 *Excursus:* The *ira deum*

The *ira deum* was a prominent factor in motivating sacrifice, as we can see from both literary and epigraphic sources. At the very beginning of the *Iliad*, for example, extensive sacrifices are made to appease Apollo and divert the plague that he unleashed on the Greeks. This is not guaranteed to succeed, however: Athena subsequently observes that no amount of sacrifice would have appeased her fury at the Greeks for their behaviour after the fall of Troy.[35] We see this phenomenon at work in Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess*, in the account of the building of the temple at Hierapolis: Ἥδε δὴ ὦν ἡ Στρατονίκη ἔτι τῷ προτέρῳ ἀνδρὶ συνοικέουσα ὄναρ τοιόνδε ἐθηήσατο, ὥς μιν ἡ Ἥρη ἐκέλευεν ἐγεῖραί οἱ τὸν ἐν τῇ ἱρῇ πόλει νηόν, εἰ δὲ ἀπειθέοι, πολλά οἱ καὶ κακὰ ἀπείλεεν. ἡ δὲ τὰ μὲν πρῶτα οὐδεμίαν ὥρην ἐποιέετο· μετὰ δέ ὥς μιν μεγάλη νοῦσος ἔλαβεν, τῷ τε ἀνδρὶ τὴν ὄψιν ἀπηγήσατο καὶ τὴν

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[34] Ibid. 14.1: 'you follow the 'rule of many' rather than sole rule, and obey the demons as if they were powerful'.
[35] Hom. *Od.* 3.145-6.

Ἥρην ἱλάσκετο καὶ στήσειν τὸν νηὸν ὑπεδέξατο.[36] Stratonice's dedication of the temple is motivated by the desire to appease the deity and alleviate the illness which the goddess inflicted upon her. The *ira deum* phenomenon is also a key element of the writings of Roman historians, particularly Livy and Tacitus; Davies argued that both authors structured their narratives around a system of prodigies, which were reported, discussed and finally expiated.[37] This system relied upon the assumption that sacrifice would appease the *ira deum* and restore the state to *pax deorum*. It would be a considerable leap to suggest that Tatian is thinking of the system of prodigies, but it is clear that it was a common assumption that the anger of the gods was to be averted through sacrifice; Lucretius' *On the Nature of the Universe*, as an elaboration of Epicurean philosophical ideals, attempts to demonstrate that the fear of the gods is irrational, for they are uninterested and powerless either to harm or to bless:

'*apparet divum numen sedesque quietae,*

quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubile nimbis

aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina

cana cadens violat semperque innubilus aether

integit et large diffuso lumine ridet'.[38]

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[36] Luc. *Syr. D.* 19: 'now while this Stratonice was still married to her first husband she had the following dream: Hera was ordering her to build her the temple in the Holy City, and threatening her with a great many woes if she disobeyed. At first she took no notice; but afterwards, when she fell very ill, she told her husband about her vision, conciliated Hera, and undertook to build the temple' (tr. Lightfoot).

[37] Davies 2004. Tacitus and Livy are commonly treated as sceptical (Davies 2004:18; on Livy's scepticism: Levene 1993, although he admits that there is insufficient evidence to provide a concrete answer (1993:30); on Tacitus' scepticism, see Syme, who argued that the question was irrelevant to Tatitus' narrative (1958a:397)). However, Davies demonstrated that their assessment of events relied on the understanding that the gods were heavily involved in the life of the state, and that Rome's survival and glory depended upon her piety and the continuation of the *pax deorum*; indeed, scepticism as a widespread phenomenon appears to have been an illusion (ibid: 6). However, whilst widely accepted, prodigies "were not to be taken to indicate fated or irreversible processes; nor were they taken as the opportunity for formal divination of the gods' will, since traditionally all prodigies were implicitly bad signs" (Beard, North and Price 1998a:37).

[38] Lucr. 3.18-22: 'the power of the gods appears, and their restful homes, which the winds cannot shake, nor the rain-clouds spray, nor a white snow-fall harm with its firm frost. An ever-cloudless sky covers it, and it laughts with a light diffused far and wide'. This passage plays with the Homeric depiction of the laughter of

If the gods exists, they have no interest in the affairs of men, for better or worse. Lucretius is particularly concerned to show that death is nothing: the gods lack the power to punish us in the afterlife, and so we may live our lives free from such fear. From this, Lucretius argues, we need not fear their punishment in this life either. Such arguments would be unnecessary without a widespread belief in the *ira deum*.[39]

It is worth observing that prodigies decrease in prominence in the imperial period; Beard, North and Price attributed this to the rise in importance of the emperor as the focus of divine (dis)pleasure.[40] This might imply that the *ira deum* is inapplicable to our region or period. However, this is clearly not simply a feature of Roman state cult. A huge number of so-called 'confession' inscriptions from Phrygia and Lydia in the second and third centuries AD[41] demonstrate clearly that the fear of the divine anger could often be a motivating factor to establish stelae recording dedications. For example:

> Ἔτους σγʹ, μη(νὸς) Ἀρτεμεισίου ϛʹ. Ἐ-
> πὶ Τροφίμη Ἀρτεμιδώρου Κι-
> κιννᾶδος κληθεῖσα ὑπό τοῦ
> θεοῦ ἰς ὑπηρεσίας χάριν μὴ
> βουληθοῦσα ταχέος προσελ-

---

the gods in their blessed existence: *Il.* 1.599 or *Od.* 8.326. On Lucretius and the fear of the gods, see Gale 1991, Segal 1990 and Wallach 1976; on Lucretius and Epicurus, see Warren 2010, Clay 1983, Sedley 1998.

[39] The unpopularity of the Epicureans is apparent in Livy, who is very dismissive of them: he "simply notes that some, extremely ill-defined, people did not adhere to traditional interpretations. He does not dignify them with a title" (Davies 2004:23). Similarly, MacMullen argued that to absolutely deny the existence of the gods, or their involvement in the lives of men, would be "absolutely unacceptable" (1981:62).

[40] Beard, North and Price 1998a:252. Davies agreed that this was the reason that prodigies are given less prominence in Tacitus than in Livy: although there is still a great interest in prodigies, "no one in their right mind would report one to an imperial senate", since these would often imply a threat to the emperor. (2004:160-2).

[41] Schnabel (2003:182-7) argued, in part based on the dates, that the prominence of these inscriptions was a response to the success of Christian missionary work in the region, which led to "increased exploitation of traditional mentalities and practices with the goal of solidifying the control of the "gods of the fathers" over the village people" (ibid:187). These arguments highlight the uncertainty raised at the beginning of this thesis as to the degree of influence which Christianity had in the early period.

θεῖν, ἐκολάσετο αὐτὴν καὶ μα-
νῆναι ἐποίησεν· ἠρώτησε οὖν Μη-
τέρα Ταρσηνὴν καὶ Ἀπόλλωα Τάρσι-
ον καὶ Μῆνα Ἀρτεμιδώρου Ἀξι-
οττηνὸν Κορεσα κατέχοντα,
καὶ ἐκέλευσεν στηλλογραφη-
θῆναι νέμεσις καὶ καταγρά-
ψαι ἐμαυτὴν ἰς ὑπερεσίαν
τοῖς θεοῖς.[42]

In this case, the cause of the god's anger is clearly attributed to Trophime's failure to obey an

initial command. This anger is demonstrated through inflicting insanity on the girl, and is

appeased only by her committing herself to temple service. The anger of the gods might also

be averted by making known their greatness and their power, as this inscription demonstrates:

- - - - - - - - -
[   ]ς Ἀπολλ[ω]-
[νί]ου ἐνποδισθ[ῖ]-
σα ἐν τῷ ναῷ ἐκο-
λάσθη ὑπὸ τῶν θε-
ῶν, ἵνα ἀναδίξει
τὰς δυνάμις αὐ-
τῶν. Δαπανήσασα [ἱ]-
λάσετο τοὺς θεοὺ[ς]
καὶ ἐστηλλογράφη-
σεν καὶ ἀνέδειξε
μεγάλας δυνάμις

αὐτῶν, καὶ ἀπὸ νῦν

εὐλογεῖ· ἐπὶ Μητρᾶ

[ἱ]ερέως.[43]

Unlike the first example, here it is unclear as to what form the punishment takes.[44] Neither is the cause of their anger identified, or at least, not explicitly.[45] However, the means of appeasement is clear: Apollonius' daughter is to glorify the gods (beginning with the establishment of this stele), and to make known the manifestations of their power (which were expressed through her punishment).[46] We may, therefore, suspect that the punishment was inflicted for the culprit's expressing some negative views about the gods. In any case, the

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[43] *BIWK* 33: '[the daughter] of Apollonius, who recorded [these words] in the temple, was punished by the gods, in order that she would make known their powers. She paid the money, and appeased the gods, and she set up this stele and made known their great powers, and from now on she praises them. Under the priest Metras'. Petzl (1994:39) restored 'daughter' (θυγάτηρ) in the first line.

[44] This is not uncommon: see also *BIWK* 20, 21, 35, 47, 60, 63, 66, 67, 71, 73, 74, 76. "The fact that the punishment is sometimes not specified indicates that the nature of the calamity is less significant than the fact of punishment which is clearly seen as an expression of the power of the god or the gods mentioned in the inscription" (Schabel 2003:163).

[45] "Mit ἐμποδίζεσθαι wird möglicherweise die Ursache für die Bestrafung der Tochter (?) des Apollonios angegeben" (Petzl 1994:39). Schnabel admitted that there was insufficient evidence to explain the few instances where the offence is not stated: it may be that the offence was considered either too trivial or too complicated, or even that influential village elders 'hushed it up' (2003:172-3). Rostad argued that the absence of details as to the punishment is an indication that confession or admittance of guilt is not as important in the inscriptions as is generally supposed (2002:147). Words like ὁμολογεω and ἐξομολογέομαι are surprisingly infrequent in the texts: of the one hundred and twenty-four inscriptions recorded by Petzl, ὁμολογεω appears just three times and ἐξομολογέομαι six. As a result, Rostad argued, confession vocabulary should not be considered as central to these texts, and we should instead focus on them as records of reconciliation, which had already been achieved *prior* to the establishing of the stele (ibid:150): the account of the transgression itself, when included, should be considered "narrative elements introduced as the reasons why the reconciliation of the deity and the dedication of the inscriptions were necessary, and not as the transgressor's admittance of his or her own guilt" (ibid. 158). While this argument overlooks the fact that in many cases establishing the stele is *part* of the reconciliation ritual, it certainly explains the often startling lack of detail as to the crime that is supposedly being confessed, or the punishment that was inflicted. By making sacrifice, ritual cleansing and the dedication of a stele, rather than the confession of guilt, the essential components of this process (ibid:162), it is clear that these inscriptions closely matches the public practice of expiation seen above. See also MacMullen, who argued that the confession inscriptions were too varied to belong to a single tradition (1981:32). Rostad did not, however, attempt to explain why such inscriptions should appear exclusively in Lydia and Phrygia: he criticised Pleket for attributing them to Oriental influence in the region (2002:149; see Pleket 1981:156), but offered no alternative explanations. Similarly, he could not offer an explanation for why ideas of divine vengeance did not feature in votive stelae, epitaphs and even healing inscriptions from the same region (2002:163; see e.g. *TAM* 5.1.323, 325, 331-2).

[46] Schnabel argued that this was the primary motivation behind the erection of these stelae: by emphasising the humiliation of the offender, the stelae publically reinforced the supremacy of the god and his absolute control over the people of his or her region (2003:178). This is in keeping with his argument that these stelae were a response to the success of Christian missionary work.

pattern is clear: the gods direct their anger against the culprit for some misdemeanour; this anger is expressed through a negative occurrence, and can only be appeased by making propitiatory sacrifices in a form commanded by the gods. This pattern is followed both in Roman state cult (as seen in Livy and Tactitus) and in private life in Asia Minor.[47]

However, it may be a false dichotomy to suggest that Tatian's argument, which focussed on the inability of the gods to punish, is entirely different from Meliton's, which focussed on their inability to reward.[48] In the above-cited episode at the beginning of the *Iliad*, prayers that Apollo might avert his wrath would be identical to prayers for healing, as we shall see below. Thus, prayers for gifts or blessings, which Meliton mentions, and prayers that the gods might be appeased, which we see in Tatian, should not be entirely distinguished: as will be seen below, votive offerings in particular allow for considerable overlap in interpretation.

3.2.3 The Syriac translation of Aristides

The Syriac translator of Aristides begins from an entirely different position than either Meliton or Tatian. As discussed in the previous chapter, for Aristides the gentile gods *do* exist, in some form or another, and it is therefore unsurprising that he spends a considerable amount of time attempting to demonstrate the folly of their worship. He has also adopted a different methodology to that of Meliton; Meliton's sole attack on the powerlessness of gods is found in the context of ritual practice, of sacrifice and prayer. Aristides, however, focusses on the mythological stories found throughout the Near East and the Graeco-Roman world. The logic of his approach is clearly stated: in many of these stories, the gods suffer and are

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[47] For more on these inscriptions and their interpretation, see below, 4.7.1. On the pattern of offence-punishment-confession-healing, see van Straten 1981:101 and Schnabel 2003:161.

[48] As Rives pointed out, it is impossible to precisely identify the emotions which motivated any given sacrifice (2007:98).See also Davies 2004:10 and Versnel 1981:3.

incapable of helping themselves; how, then, are they to help their worshippers? *twb 'mryn 'l 'prwdyṭ' d'lht' lm 'ytyh. wbzbn lm mdyr'. 'm 'lhyhwn. wbzbn dyn mgyr' bbny 'nš. wbzbn dyn hw'n lh rḥm' 'rys. bzbn dyn 'dwns d'ytwhy tmwz'. wbzbn lm. hy 'prwdyṭ' 'ly' hwt wbky' lmwth dylh dtmwz'. w'mryn dnḥtt lšywl 'yk dtzbnywhy l'dnws mn pryspwnws d'ytyh brt šywl. 'n hkyl 'prwdyṭ' 'lht' 'ytyh. wl' 'škḥt dt'drywhy lrḥmh bmwth. 'ykn' mṣy' dl'ḥrn' t'dr.*[49] This formula ('if the god is unable to do X, how are they able to help?') is immediately repeated with a second example: *wtwb 'mryn 'l tmwz' d'ytwhy 'lh'. w'ytwhy lm ṣyd' wgyr'. w'mryn dhw hn' 'tqṭl mn mḥwt' dḥzyr br'. wl' 'škḥ dn'dr lnpšh. w'n lnpšh l' 'škḥ dn'dr. 'ykn' lgns' 'nšy' mškḥ dnprns.*[50] If the gods lack the power to help themselves (or, in Aphrodite's case, those dear to her), they are in no better position than their worshippers, and are thus unable to offer anything. As a result, the gentiles whom the Syriac translator of Aristides attacks are foolish to offer them sacrifices that can have no hope of reward.

3.2.3.1 *Excursus:* The tripartite theology: religion and myth

However, this focus on mythical stories of the gods raises an apparent problem. In order for the arguments made by the Syriac translator of Aristides to be convincing, it is necessary to accept that the stories which he quotes formed an important part of a gentile worshipper's interaction with the gods about whom the stories were told. It is not at all clear how far this is the case. Scholars often quote fragments of Varro's tripartite theology to help

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[49] Aristides 16.4-6: 'again, they say of Aphrodite that she is indeed a goddess. Sometimes, indeed, she dwells with the gods; but sometimes she commits adultery with sons of men. Sometimes she has Ares as a lover, but sometimes Adonis, who is Tammuz. Sometimes, indeed, Aphrodite grieves and mourns for the death of Tammuz. They say that she descended to Sheol in order to ransom Adonis from Persephone, who was the daughter of Sheol. If, then, Aphrodite is a goddess but was not able to help her lover in his death, how can she help others?'

[50] Ibid. 16.7-17.1: 'again, they say of Tammuz that he is a god and is indeed a hunter and an adulterer. They say that he himself was killed by a blow from a wild boar, and was not able to help himself. If he is not able to help himself, how is he able to oversee the human race?'

resolve this issue: *mythicon appellant, quo maxime utuntur poetae; physicon, quo philosophi, ciuile, quo populi.*[51] This is often used to demonstrate that myth and ritual (particularly public ritual) had little interaction;[52] the Jupiter about whom stories of philandering were common was not identical with Jupiter Optimus Maximus to whom sacrifices were offered on behalf of the state.[53] This was, in part, to create "different contextual registers" through which gentiles could interpret seemingly contradictory conceptions of the gods.[54] On the basis of this interpretation, Aristides' arguments are misleading, since the mythic stories which he relates have no bearing on the practice of sacrifice which he is attempting to undermine. Aristides appears to explicitly reveal this fundamental misunderstanding when he says: *sywmyhwn dyn wpylswpyhwn m'lyn w'mryn. dkyn' dklhwn 'lhyhwn 'ytwhy ḥd.*[55] If we take this at face value, Aristides' observation is entirely opposite to that of Varro, by associating the gods of philosophical reflection and of mythic storytelling (although he says nothing about the 'civic gods' of state ritual practice). However, elsewhere, it is clear that Aristides

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[51] The fragment is quoted in August. *De civ. D.* 6.5: 'they call it mythical, which the poets primarily use; the natural, which the philosophers use; and the civic, which the people use'. As Rives noted, Varro did not invent this tripartite theology, but derived it from earlier Greek philosophers (2007:22); see also Momigliano 2003:150. It was evidently widespread, although not all authors used precisely the same classifications: Dio Chrysostom argued that a fourth branch of theology, that of the artists, should be added to the existing three (*Orations* 12.39-47). Rives uses this four-fold division as the basis for his assessment (2007:23). I will use the more traditional three branches advocated by Varro, because, as will be seen, Aristides explicitly engages with these three branches. For fuller discussion of the Tripartite Theology, see Lieberg 1973 and particularly Pepin 1956.

[52] Rives noted that each of these areas should be considered spheres of activity, within which each theology was appropriate, but outside which they were problematic. However, although Varro appears to have favoured the philosophical branch and was critical of traditional myth, he also acknowledged its importance as a form of entertainment and source of literature, and upheld civic religion within the civic sphere (where philosophical reflection would not function properly): "although mythic and civic religious institutions might be "wrong" from a philosophical point of view, they were not to be rejected for that reason, but remained appropriate enough within their own spheres" (ibid. 22). Thus, Varro's tripartite theology should not be used for the basis of rejection of other 'forms' of religiosity, such as we see in Lucretius and other philosophical works.

[53] Beard, North and Price suggested that "differentiation of religion" was as a consequence of the increasing familiarity of the Roman world with Greek philosophy (1998a:151). For the relationship between religion and philosophy, see below, 4.8.

[54] Versnel 2011:7.

[55] Aristides 20.6-21.1: 'but their authors and philosophers introduce and say that the nature of all of their gods is one'.

has indentified elements of Varro's tripartite division: *tš'yt' gyr d'lhyhwn. mnhyn mtl'. wmnhyn kynyt'. wmnhyn zmyrt' wqynt' 'ytyhyn*.[56] It would appear that Varro's physical theology corresponds to *kynyt'*, mythical to *mtl'* and civic to *zmyrt' wqynt'* ('hymns and songs' being understood as *ritual* forms of expression). If this is the case, then Aristides has not simply misunderstood, he has deliberately misrepresented the interaction of the poets and philosophers: it may well be that he is aware of the tension between the two and is attempting to play on that.[57] It is clear that although Aristides recognised an apparent distinction in the writings about the gods, he ignored it for his own rhetorical purposes.[58]

However, there may be a closer link between the myth and ritual than Varro's tripartite theology might suggest, and it would be misleading to simply dismiss Aristides' arguments as inaccurate and inappropriate. Firstly, we need to be careful when we discuss the 'civic gods'. This category covers public, state cult (such as the cult of Jupiter Optimus Maximus). Does this mean that private cult is a different entity? It is possible. Although it is difficult to draw clear distinctions between public and private cult,[59] we should recognise that

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[56] Aristides 22.3: 'as for the stories of the gods, some of them are parables, some of them are physical, some of them hymns and songs'. In the Greek of *Barlaam and Josaphat*, these elements appear as ἱστορία μυθική, ἱστορία φψσική and ἱστορία ἀλληγορική (15.6). See Pouderon and Pierre 2003:369-72.

[57] Ibid:365.

[58] This is not surprising: Christian authors regularly described a relationship between mythology and religious practice that was too close to be an accurate reflection (Garrison 1997:10). Momigliano argued that we must try and forget the tripartite theology in dealing with Christian polemic and apologetic (2003:151): however, as Barclay demonstrated, Jewish authors, and Josephus in particular recognised these tensions and engaged with them (2007:76). We may assume, therefore, that Christian authors did so too.

[59] Klauck argued that private cult *paralleled* state cult but was essentially distinct from it, and that unregulated practice could cause antagonism (2000:62). Similarly, Woolf highlighted the role of state cult or *polis-*religion at the very heart of religious life (2003:41); by extension, private religion existed on the fringes (Beard and Crawford 1985:25); Scheid, similarly, considered both private religion and philosophical reflection as largely unimportant for his treatment of mythic religion (2003:118). However, Woolf admitted that a model focussed exclusively on state cult gives only a partial account of the religious life of the Greek east under Roman rule even during the early imperial period (2003:46). Weddle disagreed: "the differentiation between state- and private- cult can be seen to be blurry at best, and the evidence does not always allow us to determine how we might categorise certain religious practices at all" (2010:39). Similarly, Holm argued that distinguishing between 'public' and 'private' religiosity is "a perpetual habit associated with our preference for individual over group identity" (1996:131). Rives preferred to talk about cult practice in general, rather than civic cult necessarily (2007:23); he also acknowledged that we should

there is much more scope for the involvement of myth in a private individual's religious life, since there is no possible form of orthodoxy even in public cult.[60] That is not to suggest that, for example, the Homeric epics were in any way regarded as 'sacred texts',[61] particularly since there is no one standardised set of myths, but simply that it is very possible that an individual making a private offering may still have recalled some of these stories, and that the possibility for overlap is considerable. Secondly, Scheid questioned the absolute distinction between myth and cult: "there is no question that the majority of rites did not accord the least place to myth, mythical recitation and mythical characters, and that myth as such was an artistic genre that functioned according to its own rules. Yet many cults also displayed direct and intimate connections with myth. The extended descriptions of rites and festivals that have come down to us reveal precisely the respective places of the two types of discourse".[62] Scheid gives as an example the *ludi saeculares*; although myth was very much on the fringes of this religious celebration, the *carmen saeculare,* which formed an integral part of the rite,

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talk about domestic cult as neither an extension of, nor entirely distinct from, public cult (ibid. 121); given that Aristides talks of *zmyrt' wqynt'* ('hymns and songs'), which may be either public *or* private, it would be misleading to entirely distinguish between the two. Dandamayev observed that the primary difference in public and private cult in the Near East was to be found in the media through which it was transmitted: evidence for private cult is almost always found in literary sources, since one would not broadcast it in public media (1996:45). However, this argument entirely ignores the evidence of what are clearly private religious inscriptions, which I shall highlight throughout this thesis.

[60] Roman religion functioned through orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy: see Rives 2007:27, 48. On the difference between myth in private and public cult, see Woolf 2003:45. Similarly, Beard, North and Price argued that "it is possible that for some Romans these private cults would have afforded a separate religious world within which they might have found the personal experience of superhuman beings, the sense of community and their place in it, which the remoteness of the official cult denied them" (1998a:49).

[61] Klauck suggested that the Homeric poems were "justifiably called the 'Bible of the Greeks'" (2000:13; cf. MacMullen 1981:68), but this is clearly not the case. They are not sacred texts except insofar as they provide the model for many types of ritual and sacrifice, as Burkert demonstrates: his *Greek Religion* relies heavily on the Homeric poems for detail. Furthermore, the lack of 'sacred texts' did not mean that texts were unimportant in religious life: hymns and aretalogy formed an important part of some cults (Rives 2007:7), although these were more prominent in the cults of Isis and Demeter in particular than in traditional cult: see below, 3.3.4. See also Clark 2004:90.

[62] Scheid 2003:120. He highlighted the fact that "almost all ancient public cults were linked to myth, if only through the decoration of cult sites" (ibid:119). Burkert agreed in refusing to draw such a firm distinction: "piety was indeed in the Greek view a matter of ritual, but myth was nonetheless ubiquitous. The two were transmitted together because they explained and strengthened each other" (1983:33).

featured myth prominently.[63] The majority of mythic content in the poem revolves around Aeneas and the stories of Julian ancestry; a number of gods, Apollo in particular, feature prominently, but the *Carmen* tends to refer to their mythic *attributes* rather than conduct (such as Apollo, '*augur et fulgente decorus arcu*').[64] This sort of iconography was an essential part of cult, but has less to do with mythic conduct than Scheid suggested: it is this conduct which the Christian polemicists attack.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Varro's tripartite theology is useful, but must be treated with caution. On the one hand, it is essential to distinguish between philosophical reflection, mythic narrative and cultic ritual: the Syriac translator of Aristides has not done this in his approach, and one must therefore question how relevant his mythic arguments are to the practice of religious life. On the other hand, it is surely impossible to believe that these stories were completely irrelevant to gentile worshippers, or that Aristides' polemic would not cause anger or distress; if mythic stories were entirely distinct from religious thought, it is surely unlikely that even a Christian apologist would undermine his own argument by discussing the association unless there were something in it.[65]

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[63] Ibid.122. Scheid suggested that the gods were supposed to take pleasure in the mythological allusions in the *Carmen*, albeit an aesthetic pleasure, different to the pleasure gained from sacrifice or offerings (ibid:123). As will be seen below, however, the idea that myths were pleasing to the gods is far from universal. In agreement with Scheid, Rives demonstrated that myth could "intersect" with cult, even if it were not properly part of it (2007:29).

[64] Hor. *Carm. Saec.* 61: '[Phoebus] the augur, dressed with his gleaming bow'.

[65] Rives 2007:30.

3.3 The blessings of the gods: σωτηρία and salvation

Regardless of its accuracy as regards the relationship between myth and cult, Aristides' arguments are in keeping with those of both Meliton and Tatian in attempting to undermine the idea that the gentile gods were able to bestow blessings upon their worshippers. To what extent does this reflect reality in religious life in the ancient world? Sacrifices are usually expressed in terms of a reciprocal relationship (often labelled *do ut des*). Burkert demonstrated that "the bond between man and the sacred is consummated in the continuous exchange of gift for gift."[66] Given the prominence of this mutual gift-giving in sacrifice, it is hardly surprising that Christian authors have targeted it with their polemic. This raises a further question, however: what is the 'help' that the Syriac translator of Aristides imagines that Aphrodite or Adonis-Tammuz would be able to offer? As noted, Meliton does not discuss at any great length the nature of the help that gentile gods are able to offer, but is at least specific, stating that God and God alone is able *dntl lk ḥy' dl'lm. dl' mytyn*:[67] this is the ultimate reward of the Christian life, and is therefore inaccessible to gentiles. Aristides has a little more to say in this respect, but he is simultaneously more vague than Meliton. He questions how Tammuz would be able to *prns* ('oversee') the human race. This may refer to a wide variety of things, from healing to prosperity or protection.[68] Elsewhere, he is more explicit as to the 'help' which the gods offer (or not): *wh' sgdyn lhwn kd nṭryn lhwn bzhyrwt' rbt'. d'lhyhwn mn lsṭy' l' ntgnbwn. wl' 'stklw brbry'. dkl 'yn' dnṭr rb hw mn hw dmtnṭr. wkl mn dbr' rb hw mn hw mdm dmtbr'. 'n hw hkyl d'lhyhwn mḥylyn lpwrqn' dnpšhwn 'ykn'*

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[66] Burkert 1985:35; this allowed an expression of superiority between dedicator and recipient (ibid:66). It is tempting to regard these exchanges with the divine as mere bargains with little genuine devotion, but "since the formal exchange of benefits was something that characterized a wide range of social relationships in the Graeco-Roman world, it is not surprising that it also helped structure relationships between mortals and immortals" (Rives 2007:24); these interactions tell us nothing in themselves of the worshipper's state of mind. See also Ando 2008:6.

[67] Meliton 4.8: 'to give to you life for eternity and which does not die'.

[68] Payne Smith (1903) also gives as potential definitions 'manage' or 'administer' (particularly with respect to property) or simply 'to care for'. 'To oversee' captures the range of these possibilities.

nprnswn lbnynš' pwrqn'.[69] He attacks the Egyptian gods, and their efficacy, in extremely

similar terms: *wl' 'stklw hkyl mṣry': dhlyn d'yk hkn': l' 'ytyhwn 'lh': hlyn dlyt b'ydyhwn*

pwrqnhwn w'n ky 'l pwrqn' dnpšhwn mḥylyn. 'l pwrqn' dsgwdyhwn ky. mn 'yk' 'yt bhwn ḥylʾ

dnʿdrwn.[70] In both these instances, the weakness of the gods makes it impossible that they

should offer their worshippers *pwrqn'* ('salvation').

3.3.1   *Excursus:* σωτηρία in cult practice

However, it is not fully clear what the Syriac translator of Aristides means by *pwrqn'*.

Payne Smith defines it as 'redemption', 'ransom' or 'salvation'. The Greek equivalent,

σωτηρία, is used throughout the New Testament, always with the meaning of deliverance

from death and eternal life in the kingdom of God, and the Peshitta often uses *pwrqn'* to

translate σωτηρία:[71] although the word is not used by Meliton, he similarly understands that

God is able to deliver eternal life.[72] However, it is possible that by *pwrqn'* Aristides means no

more than the saving of one's (earthly) life, perhaps from illness or starvation, as opposed to

deliverance from death (and the provision of eternal life). The distinction between the two

may seem slight, but, as will be demonstrated below, is crucial to an understanding of both

Christian and gentile concepts of soteriology. σωτηρία is far from unusual in gentile texts and

inscriptions, but it often has a far different meaning to that found in a Christian context. By

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[69] Aristides 4.7-5.2: 'and behold! they worship them when they guard them with great care, that their gods may not be stolen by looters. And the Barbarians did not understand that everything that watches is greater than that which is watched, and anything which creates is greater than that which is created. If it is the case, therefore, that their gods are too weak to deliver their own salvation how is it that they might deliver salvation to mankind?'

[70] Ibid. 19.5: 'therefore the Egyptians do not understand that things like these are not gods, for their salvation is not within their own power. If they are weak for the salvation of themselves, then concerning the salvation of their worshippers, how will they have the strength to help them?'

[71] See, for example, *Acts* 4:12, which emphasises Christ's unique power in delivering σωτηρία. Both *pwrqn'* and σωτηρία in the New Testament belong exclusively to God, and are often contrasted with the fiery judgement to which non-believers are condemned.

[72] See above, 3.3; Meliton 4.8.

studying these texts, it may be possible to identify which form of salvation Aristides is talking about: saving one's life, or deliverance from death.

Both Meliton and Aristides appear to reveal a Near Eastern Christian understanding that gentile cults claim to offer their worshippers 'salvation' in some form or another. How far does this attitude match what we see in our non-Christian sources, in the Near East and elsewhere? One author for whom σωτηρία is particularly prominent is Aelius Aristides;[73] as a second-century author, born near Peramum, his writings will provide useful comparative material.[74] His *Sacred Tales* consistently refer to Asklepios as his σωτήρ in his 'deliverance' from illness.[75] This divine assistance, it seems, manifests itself in the form of advice given through dreams. When followed precisely, it leads to σωτηρία, whilst other, contrary advice may lead to a worsening of the symptoms: Aelius Aristides' foster-father, Zosimus, dies after failing to comply with his dream instructions.[76] Although his focus is largely on σωτηρία in the form of healing, this is not exclusive, which argues against MacMullen's claim that we might consider healing to be "the chief business of religion".[77] Aelius Aristides also thanks his god for his delivery from shipwreck. On one occasion, Aelius Aristides' companions hail *him* as σωτήρ, since it is his prayers that delivered them from shipwreck.[78] These episodes highlight several important features. Firstly, Asklepios is hailed as σωτήρ because of his immediate, practical aid: although he delivers Aelius Aristides from death, this is by no

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[73] In order to distinguish him from Aristides the apologist, I shall refer to him as Aelius Aristides in full. All references are to Behr's 1973 edition. Although Aelius Aristides has little apparent relevance to the study of the Near East, his writings nevertheless provide important comparative material, for reasons given in the introduction (1.5.3).

[74] On his life and career, see Swain 1996:256-60.

[75] Although this is not exclusively true: Apollo and Athena are both referred to as σωτήρ on occasion within the text.

[76] Aelius Aristides *Hier. log.* 1.76-7. Aelius Aristides later says that this is the greatest sign of the god's power (2.73). See also Rives 2007:99.

[77] MacMullen 1981:49. As Johnson observed, however, even when σωτηρία does not refer to healing in the text, it is always of a practical and earthly nature (2009:57). He highlighted *Hier. log.* 1.330-44 to suggest the existence of an afterlife, but this is far from clear.

[78] Aelius Aristides *Hier. log.* 4.36.

means to be understood as a permanent salvation, rather a postponement of his end. Aelius Aristides himself makes this point explicitly: ὁ σῴζων καὶ ἡμέραν ἐφ' ἡμέρᾳ δωρούμενος, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ νῦν αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ σῴζων.[79] Secondly, it is clear that Asklepios' aid is not guaranteed: when Aelius Aristides prays for the deliverance of Zosimus, Asklepios first refuses, and only yields to persistent entreaty:[80] although there is an expectation that the god will respond to sacrifice with blessing, this is not entirely secure.[81] Thirdly, the shipwreck episode makes it clear that Aelius Aristides' trust in Asklepios' salvation makes him unique in some respect, for it is clear that this faith is not shared by his shipmates. This is clear from other episodes in the sacred tales: during one of his apparently frequent illnesses, Aelius Aristides follows the dream-instructions of Asklepios, despite the ridicule of some of his companions, who thought he was being irrational.[82] This shows that Aelius Aristides' belief is not shared by everyone (in his own perception, at least): τὸ δὴ μετὰ τοῦτο ὅτῳ μὲν φίλος πιστεύειν, πιστευέτω, ὅτῳ δὲ μή, χαιρέτω.[83] Diagoras the Atheist observed that if travellers who died at sea could set up inscriptions, these would vastly outnumber the votive inscriptions that already existed.[84]

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[79] Ibid. 2.37: 'my saviour gave me one day after another; or, rather, even now he is still my saviour'.
[80] Ibid. 1.71.
[81] "There is no sense in which the gods should be seen as all-powerful or irresponsible, with humans as their helpless slaves. But nor could they be reliably controlled or predicted" (Beard, North and Price 1998a:34): they could, however, be *negotiated* with. See also Burkert 1985:189. Bremer highlighted four elements of prayer by which the god could be persuaded to act: *da quia dedi* ('give, for I have given'), *da ut dem* ('give, for I shall give to you'), *da quia dedisti* ('give, for you have previously given'), and *da quia hoc dare tuum est* ('give, for it is in your character to give') (1981:196). It is not clear, however, that these should be identified as four separate claims: they are rather elements of the reciprocal relationship between man and god which reinforce man's inferiority.
[82] Aelius Aristides *Hier. log.* 1.63.
[83] Ibid. 3.40: 'the one that wants to believe after this, let him believe; the one who does not, well, so long!'
[84] The attribution to this remark to Diagoras is disputed by ancient authors: Cicero (*De Nat. Deor.* 3.89) attributes it to Diogoras, but Diogenes Laertius attributes it to the fourth-century BC philosopher Diogenes, although he admits that there is some debate as to the true source (Diog. Laert. 6.59). On the abundance of such inscriptions at shrines, see van Straten 1981:78-9.

3.3.2 *Excursus*: Votive offerings

However, these objections notwithstanding, belief in the material provision of the gods appears to be widespread. We find throughout the empire thousands of votive inscriptions, established either in thanksgiving for a blessing received (often healing), or promising an offering in the event that this blessing will be received. Burkert addressed the widespread nature of these inscriptions, suggesting that "in distress and danger man seeks to find deliverance through a voluntary act of renunciation, one determined and circumscribed by himself. He seeks to master the uncertainties of the future by means of a self-imposed 'if – then'. Any situation of anxiety may present the occasion for a vow: for the individual, sickness or the perils of a sea voyage; for the community, famine, plague, or war."[85] However, as Dijkstra observed, epigraphic evidence may take one of two forms: they may beseech the god for help in exchange for some offering or dedication (*do ut des*), or they may fulfil a vow already made to the god in thanksgiving for help already made (*da ut dem*).[86] This latter category of *ex vota* offerings includes many of the tales of Aelius Aristides, as well as Diagoras's cynical observation noted above. It is clear that in the case of an *ex vota* offering, some specific blessing has been granted, and the dedicator makes his offering to complete his end of the bargain.[87] There is also abundant evidence, both epigraphic and otherwise, of *do ut des* offerings made with no specific blessing in mind. A farmer's prayer to

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[85] Burkert 1985:69. See also MacMullen 1981:51. Versnel observed that the expression of these needs in prayer did not necessarily represent selfishness or egoism: it was simply an acknowledgement of one's dependence upon the god (1981:18).

[86] These form two of the five categories of religious observance which Valerius Maximus describes: man may approach the gods with prayer, when something must be entrusted; a vow, when something is demanded; thanksgiving, when a vow is fulfilled; entreaty, when a sign is begged from the gods (through a variety of means); and sacrifice, when something is accomplished through ritual (Val. Max. 1.1.1a-b). It should be pointed out that the fifth, sacrifice, forms an integral part of the other four, and so highlighting it as a category in its own right may be misleading. For more discussion of this passage, see Ando 2003:1 and 2008:1-2.

[87] However, there is little apparent difference between thanking the gods for a blessing with a fulfilled vow on the one hand, and asking for future blessing on the other: "when ancient man 'thanked' his human or divine benefactor in word or deed he was most reluctant to do so without also ensuring his future" (Versnel 1981:63).

Mars, recorded in Cato's *On Agriculture*, clearly shows this expectation of practical, albeit vague, blessing in response to the sacrifice that was offered.[88] Firstly, the *suovetaurilia*, the most traditional of Roman sacrifices, is offered. The dedicant then prays: '*Mars pater, te precor quaesoque uti sies volens propitius mihi domo familiaeque nostrae, quoius re ergo agrum terram fundumque meum suovitaurilia circumagi iussi, uti tu morbos visos invisosque, viduertatem vastitudinemque, calamitates intemperiasque prohibessis defendas averruncesque; utique tu fruges, frumenta, vineta virgultaque grandire beneque evenire siris, pastores pecuaque salva servassis duisque bonam salutem valetudinemque mihi domo familiaeque nostrae; harumce rerum ergo, fundi terrae agrique mei lustrandi lustrique faciendi ergo, sicuti dixi, macte hisce suovitaurilibus lactentibus inmolandis esto; Mars pater, eiusdem rei ergo macte hisce suovitaurilibus lactentibus esto*'.[89] Two features of this prayer are to be noted. Firstly, unlike Aelius Aristides and the votive inscriptions, there is no evidence that the farmer is concerned about one particular incident of illness: rather, he is praying, it seems, for the general benevolence of Mars, both to protect and prosper his farm. Ando argued that such sacrifices were a matter of trial and error, whereby one measures the success according to the results:[90] it is easier to measure the success of one's sacrifice when one only prays for limited and specific results. Aelius Aristides is able to pronounce his prayers a success because he is released from a specific illness: how is the farmer to measure the more general protection of Mars? Secondly, and an extension of this point, there is no

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[88] Examples such as this one reinforce the point raised in the introduction, that certain features of religious life were universal, and not restricted to 'east' or 'west'.

[89] Cato *Agr.* 141: 'Mars Pater, I pray and beseech you to be favorable and kind to me, my house and our household; for this reason I have ordered a *suovetaurilia* to be driven around my land, ground and farm, that you may prevent, ward off and avert diseases, visible and invisible, dearth and destruction, ruin and storm, and that you permit the crops, corn, vineyards and plantations to grow and flourish, and that you keep safe the shepherds and their sheep, and grant good health and strength to me, my house and our household. In respect of these things, in respect of purifying my farm, ground and land, and performing the purification, as I have said, be honoured by the sacrifice of the suckling victims of this *suovetaurilia*' (tr. Beard, North and Price).

[90] Ando 2008:21.

guarantee that Mars will act: the dedicator 'beseeches' the god and hopes that he will be 'honoured'[91] by the sacrifice, but no more. However, the *suovetaurilia* would not be a cheap offering for an individual, however wealthy the farmer. As a private offering, we cannot imagine that he is under social pressure to make such an impressive oblation: we must, therefore, assume that the farmer has a reasonable expectation that Mars will respond to such a sacrifice in the manner which the farmer has asked.[92]

3.3.3 *'l ḥyy* ('for the life of') in Near Eastern inscriptions

Dijkstra, however, argued that it would be misleading to create a rigid distinction between these models of sacrifice (that is, between votive offerings and dedications which anticipated future blessing), and criticised Burkert for focussing exclusively on votive (that is, *da ut dem*) religion.[93] His extensive study of epigraphic material from Nabataea, Palmyra, Hatra and Dura-Europos clearly shows a far more complicated set of negotiations in practice. These inscriptions ask for σωτηρία, which is often given in bilingual inscriptions as *'l ḥyy*[94] rather than *pwrqn'*, which the Syriac translator of Aristides and the translators of the Peshitta

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[91] As Beard, North and Price note, *macte,* which is common in prayers, is uncertain in its translation, although it is related to *magnus,* 'great' (1998:153).

[92] This point is made extremely convincingly by King (2003:281-282).

[93] Dijkstra 1995:16.

[94] Moralee distinguished between inscriptions asking for σωτηρία and those asking for *'l ḥyy*, on the grounds that "votive offerings to gods for salvation's sake must have developed independently in the Near East and the Greek world" (2004:3): his study of inscriptions from the region is therefore limited to those made ὑπέρ σωτηρία. However, the frequency of bilingual inscriptions suggests that we are not dealing with two independent traditions in this period, but that, as noted in the introduction, individuals could express their identity through Semitic *or* Greek linguistic use (or sometimes both): they are not mutually exclusive. Moralee's study, while useful, is therefore somewhat limited in scope, particularly for the purposes of this study. Although Kaizer agreed with Moralee's approach, in not seeking Semitic influence on the inscriptions, he also acknowledged the limitations, and suggested that a fuller study must pay attention to both σωτηρία and *'l ḥyy* (2005:631).

use for the Greek term;[95] whilst the two may appear synonymous, *pwrqn'* does *not* appear in these inscriptions.

These inscriptions, in Greek, Semitic or bilingual, take a number of forms: both those established *ex vota* and those hoping for some future blessing, specified or otherwise. Dijkstra observed that *ex voto*, *votum solvit libens* or κατ᾽ εὐχήν appear consistently in votive inscriptions, but equivalents are rarely found in inscriptions asking for *'l ḥyy*:[96] these are probably, therefore, to be interpreted as *do ut des* offerings rather than votive in the sense that we have seen above (insofar as the dedicator is asking for *future* blessing, rather than thanking the gods for blessings already received). It is clear, however, that *'l ḥyy* does not correspond to the Christian concept of salvation: like σωτηρία, it has a broad semantic range, which can include life, well-being, safety, health, soundness (of body and mind), welfare, happiness, prosperity, preservation or deliverance. Given the enormous number of inscriptions found throughout the Near East, it is more than likely that the dedicators requested one or more of each of these definitions.[97] However, given that we occasionally find *'l šlm* used apparently synonymously, as in the below inscription, it is likely that *'l ḥyy* broadly means simply prosperity, wellness or blessedness ('well-being', as Dijkstra translates it):

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[95] Klijn performed a study of these words in the New Testament, and concluded that *ḥyyn* was particularly prominent in Old Syriac, whilst derivatives of *prq* featured more regularly in the Peshitta (1952:391). However, in instances where the OT Peshitta uses *prq*, quotations of that passage in the NT tend to use *ḥyyn* (as at *Rom.* 9:27, quoting *Isa.* 10:22).

[96] "This particular Palmyrene class of inscriptions states that *this altar was made in expressing gratitude*, or that *this altar was made as an expression of gratitude*. Although this Aramaic phrase bears resemblance to the Latin and Greek formulae, it should not be conceived as an Aramaic equivalent. In contrast with these, it does not necessarily entail that the dedications in question accomplish so many vows. A sense of gratitude may originate in many different religious experiences and is not restricted to the fulfilment of vows" (Dijkstra 1995:17). See also Kaizer 2002 and Drijvers 1976.

[97] Although Gasparro highlighted the risk in approaching individual cases with too broad a definition of 'salvation', arguing that the dedicator or celebrant would likely be concerned with one specific aspect (1985:xvii).

[dnh] msgd' dy qrb

[y]mlk br mškw ldwš

r' ''r' 'l šlmh

wšlm bnwhy wd'

bywm ḥd bnysn

šnt [42] lh

[prkyh].[98]

Inscriptions such as this one could be interpreted as a public proclamation made as part of social conformity and in keeping with tradition,[99] and the same could be said of *ex vota* inscriptions. Dijkstra clearly demonstrated that a key part of inscriptions featuring the formula *'l ḥyy* is the building and maintaining of social relationships, because very often the dedicator and the beneficiary are not identical.[100] In the vast majority of these inscriptions, there are three parties involved: the dedicator, the divine recipient, and the beneficiary (usually more than one), of whom the dedicator may be named, but is rarely the sole beneficiary.

Inscriptions at Hatra appear to be far vaguer than those at Nabataea in naming the beneficiary, who is at times not identified at all: we find examples of an enigmatic prayer for

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[98] Cantineau 1978b:24: '[this] is the sanctuary (or stele) that Yamlik son of Mashku has offered to Dusares Aara for the well-being of himself and the well-being of his sons. And this on the first day of Nissan of the 42nd year of the Eparchy' (tr. Dijkstra).

[99] Burkert 1985:93: "the pious act of dedication is thereby transformed into an act of public ostentation. One creates one's memorial, *mnema*." See also Dijkstra 1995:19: "rather the stereotyped wording suggests that, whatever the personal religious intentions of the dedicator, the dedication of an object to a particular deity is a matter of custom, implying good manners and culturally prescribed conduct as well as the application of certain standard formulae".

[100] Dijkstra observed that since one's *ḥyy* was the highest blessing one could ask for, it would inevitably advertise the dedicator's affection and loyalty to the benefactor (ibid:30). In a number of cases, this is expressed through requests for the salvation the emperor. Moralee argued those who made such dedications "were tapping the deeply rooted tradition of making dedications for personal salvation, a tradition that in this region stretches back hundreds of years" (2004:19), and that the two types (personal salvation, and the salvation of the emperor) should be treated as part of the same phenomenon.

the life of 'all those who are dear' (sc. to the dedicator), as in this inscription on the northern

gate of courtyard of main sanctuary at Hatra:

> *[byr]ḥ 'yr šnt 449 šwr' w'bwl' dy bn' byt 'lh' nṣr[w] mry' ['l*
>
> *ḥyyhy w'l ḥy'] bnyhy w'ḥyhy*
>
> *w'l ḥy' mn dy lmry' rḥym bn' byt šmš 'lh' rb' [   ] byt š[mš]*
>
> *'lh' tqwm 'n' 'bd'lh' br ṭpsr' br nṣrw bnyt 'l ḥy' nšryhb m[ry] '*
>
> *w'l ḥy' b[nyhy].*[101]

In this case, Dijkstra argued, 'whoever is dear' should be identified as Nasru's clients. These

inscriptions therefore serve to build kinship ties between the beneficiary and dedicator, and

could be interpreted as a response to social pressure rather than religious conviction.[102]

There are also examples of *'l ḥyy* inscriptions used by the dedicator as an act of self-

advertisement or euergetism,[103] which again suggests the construction of self-identity, rather

than the hope of eternal life in any sense. Kaizer questioned whether, in the case of these

dedicators, and particularly those who left posthumous legacies, the possibility of an afterlife,

"as inspired by real religious feelings", should be eliminated, but admitted that it would be

dangerous "to argue from our lack of knowledge about the beliefs of the Palmyrenes".[104]

Notwithstanding difficulties in talking about 'real' religious feelings or 'belief', as

highlighted above, it is clear that, if the dedicator did anticipate an afterlife, they left little

evidence of it in the inscriptions. Instead, they focus on the link between *'l ḥyy* and

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[101] H272: 'In the month Iyyar of the year 449 (=138 AD). The wall and the gate which lord Nasru has built in the house of the gods for the life of himself and the life of his sons and brothers and for the life of whoever is dear to the lord. The builder of the house of Shamash, the great god [   ] am I, Abdullah son of Tapsarra son of Nasru. I have built it for the life of lord Neshryahb and for the life of his sons' (tr. Dijkstra).

[102] See also Moralee 2004:76.

[103] Euergetism was defined by Kaizer in this context as "the contributions which the rich members of cities or other communities not only were expected to make but did make to the public expenses, above all to *voluptates* and *opera publica*" (2002:243; see also Veyne 1976:20, who provided the foundation for Kaizer's definition).

[104] Kaizer 2002:244. For fuller discussion of the relationship between these inscriptions and funerary inscriptions, see ibid:242-256 and Kaizer 2010.

benefactions, as this inscription found on the lintel of the main entrance of the temple of Nabu in Hatra clearly shows:

> *[lṭ]b dkyr šmš'qb br ḥnyn' 'rdkl' dbn'*
>
> *['r]z' hdyn lnbw 'lh' 'l ḥy' bn[yhy   ]klhn.*[105]

In Hatra, at least, the semantic range of *'l ḥyy* appears to have broadened and may even include 'for the honour of': we find it inscribed on a number of statues with no cult connection or iconography apparent.[106]

However, it is clear, as in the prayer to Mars quoted above, that social pressure and conformity is an inadequate explanation. In order to justify a sacrifice of any form, particularly an expensive one, there must be a certain expectation that the god will respond to the dedicator's prayer. A bilingual inscription from Diocletian's Camp at Palmyra demonstrates this:

> [Διὶ ὑ]ψίστῳ καὶ ἐπηκόῳ Μανναίος Ἀμμαθου
>
> [τοῦ Ἀδδ]ουδανου τοῦ Φιρμωνος ὑπὲρ σωτη
>
> [ρίας αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶ]ν τέκνων μηνὶ Περειτίῳ
>
> [   ]
>
> *lb'lšmn rb' w[r]ḥmn' 'l[t]' dh wsmk' 'bd*
>
> *[m'ny br] 'mt br ḥdw[dn pr]mw[n] 'l ḥywhy wḥyy*
>
> *bnwhy byrḥ šbṭ šnt 4[   ].*[107]

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[105] H403: 'May Shamashaqab son of Hanina, the architect, be remembered for good, for he has built this temple for the god Nabu for the life of his sons [   ] all of them' (tr. Dijkstra).

[106] "Indeed, the religious dimension appears to have been dispensed with completely. As a result the formula should not be explained as the evocation of a divine recipient for the bestowal of 'life' on one or more beneficiaries. The idea may waver at the back of the dedicator's mind, but it is not explicitly expressed. Instead, dedicators and beneficiaries are simply presented in their social relationship, creating serious problems about the exact nature of the dedication" (Dijkstra 1995:219).

[107] Cantineau 1930:11:
Gk: 'To the highest and answering Zeus. Mannaios Ammathos son of Haddudan son of Firmon for the well-being of himself and of his children. In the month Pereitios [   ]'.
Palm: 'For Baalshamin, the Great and Merciful, Maanai son of Amat son of Haddudan Firmon has made this

'Highest and answering Zeus' is here identified with 'Baalshamin the great and merciful'. In both cases the epithet implies an expectation on the part of the dedicator that their prayer will be answered, but also a recognition that the power to answer, or not, lies in the hands of the god. Similarly, inscriptions are often dedicated to the 'good and rewarding' god: Baalshamin[108] and Nabu[109] are both given this epithet (*'lh' tb' wskr'*). These epithets do not help to build social ties, but must reflect on the expectation that the god will live up to the name given to him by the dedicator, namely by delivering *ḥyyn* to the dedicator and the beneficiaries.

Dijkstra argued that epithets like 'the Merciful' are reserved for specifying the Anonymous God.[110] This deity, under the alias *bryk šmh l'lm'* ('he whose name is blessed forever')[111] appears in a number of Palmyrene inscriptions, such as this one from Diocletian's Camp:

> *bryk šmh l'lm' ṭb'*
> *wrḥmn' 'bd wmwd'*
> *l'lm' whblt br tymr*
> *ṣw br mlkw 'l ḥywhy wḥ*
> *y' bnwhy byrḥ nysn ywm 20*
> *šnt 547.*[112]

---

altar and the hall of banquets, for the life of himself and the life of his sons. In the month Shebeth of the year 4[ ] (February ? AD)' (tr. Dijkstra).

[108] Cantineau 1930:21.

[109] Bounni and Saliby 1965:127.

[110] Although he also noted that Baalshamin is occasionally described in this way. So too is Zeus Tourmasgada in Dura-Europos: Διὶ Ἡλίῳ Μίθρᾳ ἁγίῳ ὑψίστῳ ἐπηκόῳ Τουρμασγάδη ('Zeus Helios Mithras, (the) Holy, (the) Highest, (the) Answering Tourmasgada', *TEAD* 9.3, no. 974, with an abbreviated form of the title appearing in *TEAD* 9, 3, no. 973). (Dijkstra 1995:139, esp. no. 66).

[111] Teixidor suggested that this formula was most probably cultic and as such could be applied to this or that deity even thought that the inscriptions seem to refer to one particular god" (1979:116).

[112] *RSP* 135: 'He whose name is blessed forever, the Great and the Merciful. Wahballat son of Taimarsu son of Malku has made in order to do honour in eternity for the life of himself and the life of his sons. In the month Nissan, the 20th day, of the year 547 (=20th April 236 AD), tr. Dijkstra.

Although the divine recipient is left unnamed, the identification of them as *ṭb' wrḥmn'*

('Great (in the sense of Good) and Merciful') surely requires an understanding of the

beneficience of the divine, as the epithets cannot simply be part of a cultic forumula which is

repeated for form's sake.[113] It is therefore likely that inscriptions which identify the

Anonymous God in such terms were set up with reasonable expectation of the giving of *ḥyyn*,

or, possibly, in response to a blessing already received. However, as Dijkstra noted, of the

multitude of Anonymous God inscriptions, only three have any explicit motive,[114] and only

one of these definitely employs *'l ḥyy*,[115] giving further support to Dijkstra's argument that "a

sharp distinction should be made between texts with the formula *'l ḥyy* and those without".[116]

Dedications asking the Anonymous God for *'l ḥyy* must therefore be seen as a request for a

fairly non-specific future blessing ('well-being' is enormously vague), and yet one which the

dedicator assumed had a reasonable chance of being bestowed in response to the dedication.

However, although the term σωτηρία appears frequently in epigraphic evidence, it can

also be applied to humans:[117] for instance, Augustus is referred to as σωτήρ in a calendar

from Priene (dated to 9 BC).[118] In what way was Augustus viewed as a 'saviour'? It may be

in the sense that he brings peace and security to his people, or it may be related to their

prosperity. It is unlikely to have any more specific field of reference than this, and certainly

does not imply that he is able to deliver the dedicator from death: as I shall discuss later, it is

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[113] Teixidor argued that this formula was by no means an indication of monotheistic preference on the part of the
worshipper, but was possibly a "spiritualized" used to designate Baalshamin (1979:115). Invocations to
'unknown' or 'nameless' gods were discussed above: 1.7.4. In cases like these it is clear that people knew
more or less what sort of deity they needed, but they left it up to him to decide whether the chosen name (or
which of the chosen names) was best" (Versnel 1981:14; see also 2011:43-58). Ogilvie argued that the gods,
"like dogs, will only answer to their names" (1969:24; see also Ando 2008:130); the invocation to the
Anonymous God is therefore probably, in part, an attempt to get around this.

[114] Despite the enormous popularity of the Anonymous God at Palmyra: see Teixidor 1979:115-9.

[115] *CIS* 2:4058.

[116] Dijkstra 1995:141.

[117] Notwithstanding the above-cited instance in which Aelius Aristides is referred to as such by his ship-mates
(above, 3.3.1). For more on the relationship between the emperor and the divine, see below, 5.2.3.

[118] *OGIS* 458.

not clear whether people would pray directly to an emperor in the hope of receiving some benefit (such as healing), and assuming that they did, such prayers would belong in private contexts, not on civic calendars. It is probable that Augustus is described as σωτήρ retrospectively: he is being thanked for the blessings that he has brought to the empire, rather than beseeched for future blessings (although there is no doubt the hope that he will continue to provide peace, security and prosperity). For more specific blessings, the traditional gods perhaps proved more efficacious. Nevertheless, there are suggestions of a broader range of powers available to the honoured benefactor, as this fragmentary inscription from el-Hubta demonstrates:

> *[   ]' dy ' [   ]*
> *[w]brh [d]y [mn] qbyt' hw w[   ] '[b]d'lg'*
> *br 'bd'lg' dy [m]n swdy w[   ] wbnwhy*
> *[w]whb'lhy wrb'l w[   ] wwhb'lhy*
> *[w]bn[w]h[y l] 'lh ṣ'bw 'lh' dy [b] 'ṣl ḥbt' 'l ḥy[y]*
> *[r]b'l [m]lk' mlk nbṭw dy 'ḥyy wš[y]zb '[m]h [w']l ḥyy gmlt whgrw*
> *'ḥwt[h m]lkt nbṭw bny mlkw*
> *[mlk]' mlk nbṭw br ḥrtt mlk nbṭw rḥm 'mh*
> *[w'l ḥy]y qšm'l wš'[w]dt 'ḥwth mlkt nbṭw w'[l]*
> *[ḥyy   m]lk[w] bn[y] rb'l wgmlt whgrw [   ]*
> *[m]lkt nb[ṭw w'l ḥ]yy qšm'[l]*
> *[rb'l mlk n]bṭw dy '[ḥ]yy wšyzb*
> *['mh].*[119]

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[119] Cantineau 1978b:9: '[   ] that [   ] and his son who originate from Qabita, he and [   ] Abdalga son of Abdalga who originate from Soueida (?) and [   ] and his sons, and Wehbellahai and Rabbel and [   ] and Wahbellahai and his sons for the god Saabu, the god who resides in [   ] of Hubta for the life of king Rabbel, king of the Nabataeans, who brings life and deliverance to his people, and for the life of Gamilate and Hagiru, his sisters, princesses of the Nabataeans, the children of king Malichos, the king of the Nabataeans, son of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans, who loves his people, and for the life of Qoshmail and Shaudat, his sisters, princesses of the Nabataeans, and for the life of [   ] Malichos, the children of Rabbel

Rabbel, the king, is not specifically referred to in any term that is directly equivalent to σωτήρ, but he is able to bring 'life and deliverance' (*'ḥyy wšyzb*) to his people. We might well read into this the same ideas expressed in the above-cited reference to Augustus, that he is able to provide peace and prosperity to those under his rule. A second, very similar, inscription from Iram employs the same formula, again of Rabbel:

> [   ] *dy b'rm '[l ḥyy rb'l mlk ' mkl nbṭw]*
>
> *[dy 'ḥyy w]šyzb 'mh w'l ḥyy gmlt wh[gyrw] w[   ]š['ḥwth]*
>
> *mlkwt nbṭw w'l ḥyy ḥrtt wš[   ] bnwhy w'l ḥyy ḥldw [   ]*
>
> *[   ]rw w'l ḥyy qšm'l wš'wdt 'ḥwth byrḥ 'yr šnt [17]*
>
> *lrb'l mlk' mlk nbṭw dy 'ḥyy wšyzb 'mh.*[120]

Despite the huge variety in the uses of σωτηρία or *'l ḥyy* seen above, in only a few do we find any reference to an afterlife, with the sense found throughout the New Testament and used of Jesus Christ. It may feature in this inscription from Taima in the Hejaz:

> *ḥgr' dy qrb 'ḥbwl whw pny ḥtm*
>
> *h lmnwh 'lht 'lht' lḥyy npšh wnp*
>
> *š 'ḥrth l'lm.*[121]

Associating this inscription with an afterlife depends on Dijkstra's translation of *npš* as 'soul'.[122] Whilst it can stand for the soul, and is roughly synonymous with the Greek ψυχή, it can also range from a breathing being to the seat of one's emotions. Like ψυχή, it can simply

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and Gamilat and Hagiru [   ] princesses of the Nabataeans, and for the life of Qoshmail [   ] king Rabbel, king of the Nabataeans, who brings life and deliverance to his people' (tr. Dijkstra).

[120] Savignac 1933:408; Starcky 1966:979: '[   ] that is in Iram for [the life of king Rabbel, the king of the Nabataeans, who brings life and] deliverance to his people and for the life of Gamilat and Ha[giru] and [his sisters], princesses of the Nabataeans, and for the life of Aretas and [   ] his children and for the life of Huldu [   ] and for the life of Qoshmael and Shaudat, his sisters. In the month Ayyir of the [17th] year of king Rabbel, the king of the Nabataeans, who brings life and deliverance to his people' (tr. Dijkstra).

[121] Beyer and Livingstone 1987:291: 'the dedication that Ahibol has offered, who is a protege of Hatamah, to the highest goddess Manawah for the life of his soul and the soul of his offspring in eternity' (tr. Dijkstra).

[122] Moralee heavily criticized Séjourné's 1892 translations, which, for example, asked for the soul of one Sophronia: in Moralee's view, Séjourné' "introduced a blatantly Christian reading of the text that invoked the future salvation brought through Christ's forgiveness of sin" (2004:20).

stand as a synonym for 'person', 'individual' or simply 'self'.[123] This makes it impossible to give a concrete definition. However, the same phrase appears in the Syriac translation of Aristides and is used of the ability (or, rather, the lack thereof) of the gods to save themselves: *'n hw hkyl d'lhyhwn mḥylyn lpwrqn' dnpšhwn 'ykn' nprnswn lbnynš' pwrqn'.*[124] In this instance, Aristides clearly does not intend *npš* in any way to refer to the 'soul' of the god, and it could either be translated 'to save one's life', or, as I have done, 'to save oneself'.[125] However, it is unlikely that *ḥyy npš* here means simply 'to save himself' (i.e. the dedicator), where *npš* is used instead of repeating his own name, since there would be no need to repeat the phrase for his children. It is possible that it carries the same meaning as at, for example, *Matthew* 10:28 (καὶ μὴ φοβηθῆτε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποκτενόντων τὸ σῶμα, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν μὴ δυναμένων ἀποκτεῖναι· φοβήθητε δὲ μᾶλλον τὸν δυνάμενον καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα ἀπολέσαι ἐν γεέννῃ),[126] and *l'lm* ('for eternity') certainly makes it plausible that more than simply 'personality' or 'breath' is involved here, but the inscription offers little further evidence with which to interpret this peculiar usage.

Another possible reference to 'eternal' salvation may be found at Jebel Muntar (South-West of Palmyra):

lblḥmwn 'bdw mn kyshwn mqymw br mqymw br zbdbwl 'rym

wyrḥbwl' br mlkw br lšmš br ḥnbl ''by hykl' dnh w'sṭw'

dy šyš' dy qdmwhy w'sṭw' dy l'lmnh wṭṭlyl' klh wtr'why wšrgb'

---

[123] Dijkstra defines it as "a creature's essence, a person's individuality or personality" (1995:74). Kaizer, however, preferred to use *lnpš* as a reflexive pronoun, the equivalent of the Greek ἑαυτῷ (2010:25)

[124] Aristides 5.2: 'if it is the case, therefore, that their gods are too weak to (deliver) their own salvation how is it that they might (deliver) salvation to mankind?'

[125] This is also Rendel Harris' translation, and is probably correct given that Aristides' point is to draw out the contrast between the god saving *himself* and saving *the worshipper*. The same phrase appears also in his attack on iconolatry (20.2-3). Since these statues can have no souls which they might save, *npš* must be reflexive and refer to the self.

[126] *Mt.* 10:28: 'have no fear of those who can destroy the body but cannot destroy the soul. Rather, fear the one who has the power to destroy both body and soul in Hell'.

dy nḥš' w'p qrbw hykl' dy mnwt w'sṭwwhy wtṣbyth

klh 'l ḥyyhwn wḥyy bnyhwn w'ḥyhw[n] l'lm' byrḥ 'yr šnt 400.[127]

Although this may appear explicit, we have no evidence to tell us exactly what the dedicator hoped for in praying *'l ḥyyhwn wḥyy bnyhwn w'ḥyhw[n] l'lm'* ('for the life of themselves and the life of their sons and their brothers for ever'). There is certainly nothing suggesting that 'forever' must imply an afterlife. Funerary inscriptions at Palmyra similarly attest to a 'house of eternity' (*byt 'lm'*), but Kaizer doubted that this referred to the continued existence of the soul: instead, he suggested, this should be interpreted as eternal *remembrance*.[128] Either way, such inscriptions may hint at the concept of eternal deliverance, but they are extremely scarce and can in no way be used to argue for a widespread belief in σωτηρία in this sense, but must be regarded as the (potentially unusual) views of the occasional individual expressed in a far more familiar form and context.[129]

3.3.4   *Excursus:* σωτηρία in mystery cults.

However, the distinction between material salvation and the blessings of eternal life is far less clear in some of the 'mystery cults' which we find throughout the empire, and which were particularly prominent in this period. I acknowledge that this is a dangerous and controversial area: numerous scholars have argued that seeking a precursor or parallel to Christianity in any of the cults of the Roman Empire has hugely misleading consequences.[130]

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[127] Gawlikowski 1973:16f: 'for Belhammon Moqaimu son of Moqaimu son of Zabdibol Arima and Yarhibola son of Malku son of Lishamsh son of Hannibel Aabai have made from their own pockets this temple as well as the marble portico in front of it and the portico on top of it and the entire roof and its gate and the bronze *šrgb*. And also they have offered the temple of Manawat and its porticoes and all its ornamentations for the life of themselves and the life of their sons and their brothers for ever. In the month Iyyar of the year 400 (=May 89 AD)' (tr. Dijkstra).

[128] Kaizer 2010:25: the phrase appearse in bilingual inscriptions as μνημεῖον (εἰς) αἰώνιον.

[129] There is "no good evidence to support the notion of a deeply rooted belief in an afterlife at Palmyra" (Kaizer 2010:28).

[130] "The constant use of Christianity as a reference system when dealing with the so-called mystery religions leads to distortions as well as partial clarification, obscuring the often radical differences between the two"

However, I am interested only in the concept of salvation and its significance within these cults, and on these grounds a comparison is justified; I do not intend to look at *how* salvation is delivered, or the role of faith within these cults. I will briefly examine the role of σωτηρία and the aims, or aspirations, of participants in some of these cults: specifically, the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter, and the cults of Isis, Mithras and Dionysus. Could the polemic of Meliton and the Syriac translation of Aristides against the 'salvation' delivered (or not) by gentile gods be directed against these cults? These cults are, according to Burkert, stereotyped in three ways: that they are late; that they are 'oriental'; and that they are spiritual in nature and goal.[131] He convincingly dismissed each of these stereotypes, and demonstrated that these mystery cults are not to be treated as religions in the way that we might understand them.[132] Instead, they should be understood as strictly optional practice within polytheistic religion as a whole,[133] rather than as a closed or exclusive system in their own right.[134] Burkert further argued that the third of these stereotypes, the spiritual goal of these cults, obscures the most obvious aim of these cults: that of votive religion, which, as he noted, is "elementary, widespread, and quite down-to-earth".[135]

(Burkert 1987:3). See also Ando 2008:3. Similarly, Smith observed that a comparison is often drawn between early, 'pure' Christianity, and later forms which were 'polluted' by mystery cults (2003:30). See also Gasparro 1985:xiii.

[131] Burkert 1987:2-3.

[132] Ibid:3-4: "initiations at Eleusis or worship of Isis or Mithras does not constitute adherence to a religion in the sense we are familiar with, being confronted with mutually exclusive religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam". However, just because they were options outside the construct of traditional religious practice does now mean that these cults were at odds with it (Rives 2007:180).

[133] It is in a large part the characterisation of the mystery cults as 'alternatives' to traditional cult practice that has led scholars to group them together, and in turn led to the approach of Cumont in comparing them to Christianity (Ando 2008:102; Beard, North and Price 1998a:212). See e.g. Woolf: "as the autonomy and integrity of *poleis* were weakened by those same imperialisms there was a marked growth in alternative forms of religion – Bacchic cult, Judaism, Mithraism, Christianity among others – which paid less respect to *polis* boundaries and the social order" (2003:41). On the problems with discussing 'alternative' (as opposed to 'official') cults, see Beard, North and Price 1998a:261.

[134] Similarly, mystery cults should be treated on an individual basis, rather than as a unified group (Gasparro 1985:xiv).

[135] Burkert 1987:12. Similarly, Rives argued that mystery cults could provide a "more intense religious experience" than could be found in traditional cult (2007:172).

3.3.4.1 <u>Eleusis</u>

That salvation even in these mystery cults can have a more 'down-to-earth' meaning is seen in the dual blessings promised to the initiates at Eleusis: Demeter would bestow upon them "the mysteries that held the promise of "better hopes" for a happy afterlife" (which are, it would seem, exclusive to Eleusis),[136] but also the promise of abundant grain, thus meeting peoples' everyday needs.

What of the 'blessings' of a happy afterlife? We must be careful in writing about the promises made by the cult: the diversity of sources is too great, and too many are written by outsiders, to be definitive.[137] However, we do find a number of consistent themes in these sources, and in these cases we may comfortably assume that these claims were commonly understood. The *Homeric hymn to Demeter*[138] offers tantalising hints: it tells of Demeter's promises, whilst disguised as a nursemaid in Eleusis, to make Metaneira's son 'deathless and unaging':

ἀθάνατόν κέν τοι καὶ ἀγήραον ἤματα πάντα

παῖδα φίλον ποίησα καὶ ἄφθιτον ὤπασα τιμήν.[139]

In a second passage we read:

ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων:

ὃς δ' ἀτελὴς ἱερῶν ὅς τ' ἄμμορος, οὔποθ' ὁμοίων

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[136] Burkert 1987:5.

[137] Burkert 1983:294. Furthermore, much of the written evidence which attests to the cult is considerably older than the sources used up to this point: It was noted in the introduction that it is legitimate to use much older sources in this context, albeit with due caution: as will be seen, the attitudes we find in these older sources are consistent with those in later texts, which strongly implies that such attitudes have not changed over time. The same observation applies to the use of Aristophanes below, and of the Homeric texts and Plato elsewhere in this thesis.

[138] It was noted in the introduction that it is legitimate to use much older sources in this context, albeit with due caution: as will be seen, the attitudes we find in these older sources are consistent with those in later texts, which strongly implies that such attitudes have not changed over time. The same observation applies to the use of Aristophanes below, and of the Homeric texts and Plato elsewhere in this thesis.

[139] *Hymn. Hom. Dem.* 260-1: 'I would have made your son deathless and unaging for all his days, and given him eternal honour'.

αἶσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἠερόεντι.[140]

There are hints that this aspect of the Eleusinian cult was a popular understanding,[141] as this excerpt from Aristophanes' *Frogs* demonstrates. Herakles is describing the journey through the underworld:

Ἡρακλῆς
ἐνεῦθεν αὐλῶν τίς σε περίεισιν πνοή,
ὄψει τε φῶς κάλλιστον ὥσπερ ἐνθάδε,

καὶ μυρρινῶνας καὶ θιάσους εὐδαίμονας
ἀνδρῶν γυναικῶν καὶ κρότον χειρῶν πολύν.

Διόνυσις
οὗτοι δὲ δὴ τίνες εἰσίν;

Ἡρακλῆς
οἱ μεμυημένοι.[142]

The happy fate of the celebrants is thus contrasted with that of wrongdoers, who are tormented by snakes and wild beasts.

A fragmentary Pindaric work suggests a similar distinction between the fate of the followers of Eleusis and those who scorn her rites:

ὄλβιος ὅστις ἰδὼν ἐκεῖνα

κοίλαν εἶσιν ὑπὸ χθόνα·

οἶδεν μὲν βιοτου τελευτὰν

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[140] Ibid. 480-2: 'blessed is he among men on earth who has seen these mysteries; but he who is not intitiated and who has no part in them, he never has the same kind of good fortune when he has died and is down in the murky gloom'.
[141] See Rives 2007:174.
[142] Ar. *Ran.* 154-158:
Herakles: 'next, the blowing of pipes will surround you, and you will see happy *thiasoi* of men and women together clapping their hands'.
Dionysus: 'who are these?'
Herakles: 'these are the Mystic celebrants'.

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οἶδεν δὲ διόδοτον ἀρχάν.[143]

Later material displays a remarkably similar interpretation. We find in Cicero's *On the Laws*, for example, a discussion of the mysteries: *nam mihi cum multa eximia divinaque videantur Athenae tuae peperisse atque in vitam hominum attulisse, tum nihil melius illis mysteriis, quibus ex agresti immanique vita exculti ad humanitatem et mitigati sumus, initiaque, ut appellantur, ita re vera principia vitae cognovimus, neque solum cum laetitia vivendi rationem accepimus, sed etiam cum spe meliore moriendi.*[144]

These texts all appear to indicate that, for the initiate, Demeter *was* able to provide a blessed existence after death, and that this was true at numerous points in time; at the same time, the fate of the uninitiate is one of suffering and darkness.[145] We should not, however, read resurrection symbolism into these blessings: the evidence for such symbolism is, as Burkert demonstrated, extremely scarce.[146] Instead, since initiation marks a change of status, this may be reflected in a change of status after death rather than anything else – it certainly does not appear to offer eternal life in any respect, and immortality is rarely mentioned in the context of the Eleusinian rites.[147] It is true that in the *Homeric hymn*, Demeter tells Metaneira

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[143] *Fr.* 137: 'blessed is the one who has seen these things [sc. the mysteries] before he goes beneath the earth, for he knows the end of life, and the beginning of [life] given by the gods'.

[144] Cic. *Leg.* 2.36: 'for of those many extraordinary (or even divine) things which your Athens has produced and contributed to human existence, it seems to me that none is better than those mysteries, by which we have, from our backwards and barbarous lifestyle, been refined and civilised to a state of humanity; just as the rites are named initiations, so in truth we have learned the origins of life; not only have we received the ability to live in joy, but even to die with better hope'.

[145] Odysseus' encounter with Achilles' ghost in the underworld, in which Achilles claims that he would rather be a slave on earth than a king amongst the dead, demonstrates the perception of suffering after death (Hom. *Od.* 11.488-491). Plato also hints at the possibility of suffering in the afterlife as punishment for one's deeds in this world (*Leg.* 870d-e).

[146] Burkert 1987:23. MacMullen argued that even in cases where the god was understood to rise from the dead it should not be taken for granted that the worshippers envisaged such a reward for themselves (1981:55). Similarly, Gasparro argued that true eschatological significance can only be understood through analogy, if at all (1985:104).

[147] Burkert 1985:289. See also Rives: "to a large extent, such promises seem simply to have been an extension of the more important promise of heightened divine favour during life" (2007:174). However, we should be careful in assuming that Christian ideas of salvation were necessarily 'better' than those offered by such

that, because of her intervention, her son will no longer be able to escape death and the Fates,[148] which might suggest promises of immortality to the obedient, but it is clear that, whether or not this was Demeter's intention towards the boy, such promises are not offered to the initiates of the cult which she establishes at Eleusis. As Gasparro argued, we cannot deny a certain soteriological aspect to these rites, "and yet the rites of Eleusis do not imply an "escape" from the normal conditions of existence".[149]

3.3.4.2 <u>Isis</u>

The same, it seems, is true of the cult of Isis. Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* tells the tale of the inquisitive Lucius, who pays for his curiosity by being transformed into an ass. After a series of adventures stretching from murder, looting, witchcraft and bestiality, the ass-Lucius encounters a statue of an unknown deity and addresses it in desperation.[150] He is greeted by the apparition of Isis, who addresses herself as *rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina, saeculorum progenies initialis, summa numinum, regina manium, prima caelitum, deorum dearumque facies uniformis*[151] and says that she has been moved to action by Lucius' prayers (*commota...precibus*).[152] Isis offers to restore Lucius to his former anthropomorphic state: the word *salus* is repeatedly used by both Isis and the author to describe this

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cults: "only a Christian perspective finds bodily resurrection self-evidently superior to the different versions of after-life (or not) within traditional Roman thought, or to the Isiac model of immortality, or to the gradual ascension of the soul of the Mithraic initiate" (Beard, North and Price 1998a:291). The fact that death remained inevitable did not make the promises of Eleusis any less appealing to the initiate.

[148] *Hymn. Hom. Dem.* 262: νῦν δ' οὐκ ἔσθ' ὥς κεν θάνατον καὶ κῆρας ἀλύξαι ('now he will no longer be able to avoid death and the Fates').

[149] Gasparro 1985:xxi.

[150] Apul. *Met.* 11.2: *quoquo nomine, quoquo ritu, quaqua facie te fas est invocare* ('by whatever name, whatever rite, and whatever appearance it is right to call upon you').

[151] Ibid. 11.5: 'mother of the natural world, mistress of all the elements, and firstborn of the ages; greatest of the divine powers, queen of the dead, and foremost of heavenly beings; my one person manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses'. Compare the Isis aretalogy found at Kyme, which is the longest and best-known form: ἡ τύραννος πάσης χώρας (3a) ('the mistress of every land'). The text can be found in Grandjean 1975:25-27. See also Versnel 2011:283.

[152] Apul. *Met.* 11.5.

restoration,[153] which is the Latin equivalent of the Greek σωτηρία, as bilingual inscriptions testify.[154] In this context, then, *salus* clearly refers to a literal rescue. This rescue depends upon Lucius' immediate initiation into the rites of Isis and his wholehearted obedience to her commands (the command to celibacy in particular causing the philandering Lucius some distress). It is clear that Isis' power allows a *postponement* of death and the extension of life: *quippe cum transactis vitae temporibus iam in ipso finitae lucis limine constitutos, quis tamen tuto possint magna religionis committi silentia, numen deae soleat elicere et sua providentia quodam modo renatos ad novae reponere rursus salutis curricula.*[155] The Isis aretalogy found at Kyme suggests something similar:

Ἐγὼ τὸ ἱμαρμένον νικῶ.

Ἐμοῦ τὸ εἱμαρμένον ἀκούει.[156]

As Versnel noted, "the two lines can be understood as comprehensive formulas in which Isis' supremacy over life and death, including sickness, perils and disaster, is proclaimed".[157] Only rarely, however, do either Isis or Lucius suggest that this initiation will have an effect beyond death: *vives autem beatus, vives in mea tutela gloriosus, et cum spatium saeculi tui permensus ad inferos demearis, ibi quoque in ipso subterraneo semirotundo me, quam vides, Acherontis tenebris interlucentem Stygiisque penetralibus regnantem, campos Elysios incolens ipse, tibi propitiam frequens adorabis. quod si sedulis obsequiis et religiosis*

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[153] Ibid. 11.5: *iam tibi providential mea illucescit dies salutaris* ('now, by my grace, the day of your salvation is dawning'). The word *salus* also appears in 11.12 and 11.22. Apuleius twice uses the word *renatus* ('reborn'), at 11.16 and 11.21: on the basis of this, Gwyn Griffiths suggested that the Isaic worshipper "identified his death and rebirth with those of Osiris" (1975:52).

[154] On the identification of *salus* and σωτηρία, see Moralee 2004:2.

[155] Apul. *Met.* 11.21: 'indeed, those for whom the span of life was done, and even now stand on the threshold at the edge of the light itself, if they were able to be entrusted safely with the great secrets of the cult, the power of the goddess often drew them through, and by her grace were reborn after a fashion, and placed on the track of a new deliverance'. See Versnel 2000:135.

[156] 'I conquer Fate; Fate hearkens to me' (55-56). See also Gwyn Griffiths 1975:166.

[157] Versnel 2011:285. Versnel also noted whilst this is "certainly not an assurance of blissful immortality in the netherworld, it definitely exalts Isis above the ranks of other, and in particular the Greek gods", (ibid:286) since challenging Fate is normally beyond even a god.

ministeriis et tenacibus castimoniis numeri nostrum promerueris, scies ultra statuta fato tum spatia vitam quoque tibi prorogare mihi tantum licere.[158] In a similar manner to the Eleusinian mysteries, what is promised here is not 'salvation' in the sense of deliverance from death, but in a more blessed existence *after* death, or a temporary extension of the present life: death itself remains inevitable.[159] We find a similar thought expressed in a more ambiguous statement: *nam et inferum claustra et salutis tutelam in deae manu posita, ipsamque traditionem ad instar voluntariae mortis et precariae salutis celebrari.*[160] This is the only occasion in the text in which *salus* is used with a sense which may stretch beyond the strictly material; however, this passage is immediately followed by the one quoted above in which Isis promises an extension of life even at death's door. *inferum claustra* must therefore be understood to have this sense, and not in any way suggest that Isis is able to prevent death in the sense of Christian soteriology; despite Gwyn Griffiths' claims that Apuleius' use of *salus* "approaches the sense familiar in the usage of the Church, as in *O salutaris hostia*",[161] it is clear that this has not addressed the difference between a blessed existence *after* death and the *removal* of death. As such this comparison is inappropriate and misleading.

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[158] Apul. *Met.* 11.6: 'you will lead a blessed life, you will live gloriously under my protection. When the cycle of your life is spent and you travel down to the dead, there too you will find me, whom you see now, in the subterranean hemisphere, shining amongst the shades of Acheron, and reigning in the innermost parts of the Styx: whilst you dwell in the Elysian fields, you will constantly worship me as I favour you. If, by wholehearted obedience, dedicated service and persevering celibacy you earn our divine blessing, you will know that I alone am able to prolong the span of your life beyond that determined by Fate'. Gwyn Griffiths argued that the second adjective ('*gloriosus*') implies that we cannot read '*beatus*' with a more general sense of happiness, but must interpret religious significance (1975:164).

[159] Beard, North and Price argued that Isis offers Lucius a 'solution' to death, which is not strictly true: she offers him an alternative (and better) existence, but this is no solution to death itself. Beard, North and Price did, however, recognise that the primary focus of Isis' blessings is an extension of *this* life (1998a:289-90). Cf. Burkert 1983:295.

[160] Apul. *Met.* 11.21: 'the gates of death and the protection of salvation were placed in the hands of the goddess, and the tradition itself was celebrated in the manner of voluntary death and salvation through prayer'. Gwyn Griffiths argued that *salus* here has a spiritual as well as physical sense (175:280).

[161] Ibid:157.

3.3.4.3 <u>Dionysus</u>

A similar development may be seen in the Bacchic mysteries.[162] There are numerous hints in literary works about the potential benefits of the rites in the afterlife, and the sufferings to which the uninitiate would be exposed, beginning with Plato.[163] Another fragment of Pindar highlights the blessings available to one of the *teletai*:

...ὀλβίᾳ δραπόντες αἶσα λυσίπονον τελετάν

καὶ σῶμα μὲν πάντων ἕπεται θανάτῳ περισθενεῖ,

ζωὸν δ᾽ ἔτι λείπεται αἰῶνος εἴδωλον· τὸ γάρ ἐστι

     μόνον

ἐκ θεῶν·[164]

This is clearly true of the later rites, too, for similar suggestion is made by Plutarch: καὶ μὴν ἃ τῶν ἄλλων ἀκούεις, οἳ πείθουσι πολλοὺς λέγοντες ὡς οὐδὲν οὐδαμῇ τῷ διαλυθέντι κακὸν οὐδὲ λυπηρόν ἐστιν, οἶδ᾽ ὅτι κωλύει σε πιστεύειν ὁ πάτριος λόγος καὶ τὰ μυστικὰ σύμβολα τῶν περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον ὀργιασμῶν, ἃ σύνισμεν, ἀλλήλοις οἱ κοινωνοῦντες. ὡς οὖν ἄφθαρτον οὖσαν τὴν ψυχὴν διανοοῦ ταὐτὸ ταῖς ἁλισκομέναις ὄρνισι πάσχειν.[165] Given the sorrowful context of this passage, written to his wife after the death of their daughter, it is likely that this is something Plutarch took extremely seriously.

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[162] Burkert observed that "scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge this dimension of Dionysiac worship, on the assumption that concern about the afterlife should be seen to have developed in later epochs" (1987:21).

[163] Pl. *Resp.* 364e-365a. It should be noted that Plato wrote as an outsider to the rites: as with the discussion of the Eleusinian mysteries, this raises further issues, in addition to the chronological difference.

[164] *Fr.* 131: '... having, by a happy fate, grasped the initiation which puts an end to suffering. For everyone's body is subject to overpowering death; a likeness of life remains alive, for it alone comes from the gods'.

[165] Plut. *Mor.* 611d-e: 'as for what you hear from others, those who persuade the crowds by saying that in no way, and in no place, is there evil or suffering for that which is torn away [sc. the soul], I know that you believe the words of our ancestors and the gatherings that celebrate the mysteries, which are familiar to those of us who have a part [in the mysteries]. Keep in mind that the soul is immortal, and endures as birds that are captured'.

In one inscription, there is a possible reference to a Bacchic 'paradise' where Bacchants invite the child to their dances as a Satyr.[166] However, it would be "an inadmissible generalisation to claim that all bacchic *teletai* were concerned exclusively or even primarily with the afterlife".[167] As with both Eleusis and Isis, the salvation offered here serves a practical role, even in the hopes of the afterlife.[168] Even in the case of Plutarch, who suggests that the soul is immortal, the fact remains that his daughter has died; the concept of resurrection or immortality in a Christian sense is entirely absent.

3.3.4.4 <u>Mithras</u>

It is extremely difficult to talk with any certainty about the hopes of Mithraic initiates, because source material is particularly scarce. There are certainly no parallels to the texts of Apuleius or the *Homeric Hymns*, and as such I do not intend to deal with the cult in as much detail. However, it does not appear that Mithraic cult offered anything different in respect of σωτηρία to the other three mystery cults discussed above. The Mithraic steps or grades might suggest some form of progression towards an ascendancy, and iconographical parallels with Iranian Zoroastrianism, for which the immortality of the soul was a key concept, could encourage us to think in these terms, but Burkert strongly argued that this was not the case: "it has generally been assumed, as a result of our ideas of what a "mystery religion" should be like, that Mithras should guarantee his followers some kind of transcendent salvation – immortality, ascend to heaven from the "cave" which is the cosmos. Clear evidence, however, is lacking. This is all the more surprising because spiritual life, the immortality of

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[166] *CIL* 3:686. Burkert argued that "this is just an imaginative possibility" (1987:23).
[167] Burkert 1985:295.
[168] Burkert 1987:23.

the soul, and the ascent of the righteous to heaven are such well-established ideas in Iranian, Zoroastrian tradition. But this is not so with Mithras".[169]

3.3.4   Salvation and deliverance in the Syriac translation of Aristides

It does not appear, then, that any cult promises to provide its followers with σωτηρία in the sense of deliverance from death. Although the cult of Demeter at Eleusis promised a blessed afterlife, death was nevertheless an accepted reality. This is clearly not the same as the *ḥy' dl'lm dl' mytyn*[170] or *pwrqn'*. Christianity, by contrast, must have appeared a morbid religion, with an obsession with death and the tomb.[171] Does this help us to understand Aristides' use of the word *pwrqn'*? If we understand *pwrqn'* in the sense of 'to save one's life', this is reasonably common in gentile religious epigraphy and literature (as Aelius clearly shows); it could therefore be treated as a realistic attack on gentile cult. If *pwrqn'* is understood to be equivalent to the New Testament usage of σωτηρία, in the sense of deliverance from death and life everlasting, then this deviates wildly from the expectation and understanding of gentiles, even those involved in mystery cults. Either would be an acceptable conclusion; it was noted in the previous chapter that Aristides and Tatian are both more accurate than Meliton in their presentation of gentile iconolatry, and it may be that the same is true of Aristides' understanding of *pwrqn'*.

With one exception, however, *pwrqn'* appears only in Aristides' attacks against the barbarians[172] and against the Egyptians,[173] and not at all in Meliton's text. The sole exception

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[169] Ibid:27.
[170] Meliton 4.8: 'life for eternity and which does not die'.
[171] Burkert 1987:28.
[172] Aristides 4.7-5.2.
[173] Ibid, 19.5.

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comes in Aristides' attack on Greek iconolatry: *wkd 'tqyn wmn ngyrwt' dzbn' mwpyn. wkd mtnskyn wkd mtdqqyn. 'ykn' ky l' 'stklw 'lyhwn dl' 'ytyhwn 'lh': whlyn dpwrqn' dnpšhwn l' 'tmṣyw. 'ykn' yṣypwt' dbny 'nš' mškḥyn dn'bdwn.*[174] I do not think that Aristides is suggesting that the statues are in any way associated with the ability to provide *pwrqn'*: the passage in question follows immediately on from the attack on Egyptian *pwrqn'*, and it is probable that he intended it to form an explicit contrast with Egyptian cult. Other than these instances, the word is barely used. More frequently, however, Aristides criticises the failure of the gods to 'help' mankind (usually because the god in question is dead, tied up, or has suffered some similar misfortune), which is expressed not by *pwrqn'* but as *'dr*.[175] Here, Aristides may be attacking the gentile concept of σωτηρία, but this is most likely σωτηρία in the sense of 'saving one's earthly life', and therefore must refer to promises of healing, prosperity or protection; it certainly does not imply deliverance from death in any but the most basic sense. Given the context with which Aristides uses the terms *pwrqn'* and *'dr*, and given that *pwrqn'* is used exclusively of barbarians and Egyptians, then it is likely that *pwrqn'* refers specifically to mystery cults (which, as Burkert observed, were usually stereotyped as foreign, despite the fact that in a number of instances this is clearly not the case).[176] If this is true, then *pwrqn'* may well carry New Testament soteriological connotations and refer to 'deliverance from death' (even though this is not quite accurate to the promises made by such cults, as far as we are aware). This would also explain why the Syriac translator of Aristides has used *pwrqn'* as an equivalent for σωτηρία, rather than *'l*

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[174] Ibid. 20.3: 'and when they age and comes to an end by the passing of time, and when they are melted down and broken into pieces, how do they not understand regarding them that they are not gods? And those which are not capable of the salvation of their own lives, how are they able to guard men?'

[175] Ibid.16.6: *'n hkyl 'prwdyṭ 'lht' 'ytyh. wl' 'škḥt dt'drywhy lrḥmh bmwth. 'ykn' mṣy' dl'ḥrn' t'dr* ('if, then, Aphrodite is a goddess but was not able to help her lover in his death, how can she help others?').

[176] Burkert 1987:2-3.

ḥyy, which, as demonstrated above, lacks such connotations; where *'l ḥyy* appears in votive inscriptions, it lacks any of the sense with which Aristides uses *pwrqn'*.[177]

Augustine attacks the association between the Galli and the afterlife, and specifically their failure to fulfil these promises,[178] which may suggest that, at least by this late stage, Christians identified such promises of immortality with mystery cults, but that does not necessarily mean that the same is true of the late second century. It is worth noting that not all Christian evidence explicitly maintains the focus on σωτηρία as deliverance from death. Some Christian epigraphy uses σωτηρία of worldly peace and prosperity, as an inscription from Hama shows: ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς καὶ σωτηρίας Ἰωάννου κ(αὶ) Θωμᾶ καὶ Μάννου τῶν Θεοφίλου.[179] Dijkstra argued that, such was the similarity with the non-Christian epigraphic format, σωτηρία should be interpreted in a much more limited, earthly sense.[180] The Syriac translator of Aristides has not done so, and this may explain his choice of terminology.

3.4   <u>Near Eastern Christian attitudes to the dependence of the divine</u>

Regardless of the precise relationship involved and the benefits gained, all our authors, both gentile and Christian, clearly understand the reciprocal nature of sacrifice, whether this is expressed as *do ut des* or *da ut dem*. Since this is a two-way issue, we must now consider the second aspect of this relationship: what exactly do the gods benefit from the sacrifices and offerings made to them by their worshippers?

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[177] This is perhaps not surprising. Klijn argued that while Syriac terms for 'life' were originally far broader than the Greek σωτηρία, and would appear in inscriptions with the semantic range demonstrated above, prq in particular was increasingly assimilated to the Greek term as found in the NT (1952:396-397). Therefore, by the time Aristides' *Apology* was translated into Syriac, it is likely that *pwrqn'* had been given a firmer definition in Syriac theology (that is, life for eternity and which is preceded by death (ibid. 395).

[178] August. *De civ. D.* 7.24-26.

[179] *IGLS* 2027: 'by way of a vow and for the well-being of John and Thomas and Mannos, (sons) of Theophilus' (tr. Dijkstra). See also *IGLS* 252.

[180] Dijkstra 1995:286.

3.4.1 The Syriac translation of Aristides

The Syriac translator of Aristides clearly interprets sacrifices in terms of the needs of the gentile gods: *'mr 'n' dyn d'lh' 'ytwhy l' ylyd'. l' 'byd'. kyn' 'myn' dl' šwry wdl' šwlm. l' mywt'. mšmly' wl' mtdrkn'. mšmly' dyn d'mrt hd' hy. dlyt bh bṣyrwt'. wl' snyq 'l mdm. klmdm dyn 'lwhy snyq.*[181] The same point is repeated shortly afterwards: *l' š'l dbḥt' wnwqy'. 'p l' ḥd' mn 'ylyn dmtḥzyn. mn 'nš mdm l' š'l. kl npšn dyn mnh š'ln.*[182] Admittedly, neither of these points explicitly states that the gentile gods are in need. Instead, they highlight the fact that God is *not* in need; the gods are implicitly contrasted to God's self-sufficiency, and Aristides highlights the fact that gentilic sacrifices expresses entirely the wrong position, since we need the divine, and not vice versa.[183] We do find more explicit discussion of the neediness of gods in Aristides' discussion of the mythological stories of the gods, beginning with Hephaistos: *wtwb m'lyn 'lh' 'ḥrn' 'psṭws. w'mryn 'lwhy d'ytwhy ḥgyr' wsym qwb'' bryš. wlbyk b'ydh klbt' wqwrns': wplḥ qynywt': 'yk dmnh nškḥ ḥšḥt' dsybrth. 'r' ky klh hn': snyq 'lh' hn': hd' dl' mškḥ' d'lh' nhw' snyq' 'w ḥgyr'. w'n dyn l' sgy mḥyl'.*[184] It is not clear what 'nourishment' is here: however, his role as a blacksmith appears to imply that Aristides considers this to be Hephaistos' means of earning a living, and therefore stands for sustenance. Similar treatment is given to Asklepios: *wmn btr hn' m'lyn 'lh' 'ḥrn': l'sqlyps w'mryn d'ytwhy 'sy'. wmtqn smmn' w'splynwt' mṭl dnml' ḥšḥt' dsybrth. 'r' ky snyq' 'ytwhy*

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[181] Aristides 2.2-2.3: 'but I say that God was not born and not made, a nature that is permanent, which has no beginning and no conclusion; undying, perfect and incomprehensible. But by 'perfect' I say this: that He has no deficiency, that He does not need anything; but everything needs Him'.

[182] Ibid. 2.7: 'He does not ask for sacrifice or libation; none at all from those things which are visible. He does not ask anything from men; but all (living things?) ask from Him'.

[183] As Palmer observed, 'negative theology' ('the gods are not X') is used frequently by the early apologists, but for different purposes; Aristides uses it to distinguish true and false god, whilst Justin uses it only as part of a defence against atheism (1983:240-1).

[184] Aristides 13.5-6: 'again, they introduce another god, Hephaistos. And they say of him that he is lame and wears a cap on his head, and holds in his hand tongs and a hammer; he works as a blacksmith, so that from this he may find his necessary nourishment. Now then, is this god so needy? It is not possible that a god should be needy or lame, for otherwise he is very weak'.

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'lh' hn'.[185] Both Hephaistos and Asklepios are in need of nourishment, and in both instances, they appear to derive this nourishment from their respective 'jobs'. However, according to Aristides, Asklepios' neediness is also associated with the fact that he was struck by lightning.[186] *snyq'* ('needy') must therefore be connected with both the dependence and the vulnerability of the gods. The vulnerability of the divine is a broad theme which is very apparent in Aristides, and to which I shall return shortly; here, however, it is important to note the connection between weakness, dependence and the folly of worship which Aristides emphasises: just as it is folly to worship a god who cannot hope to deliver his worshippers, it would be foolish, as those in need, to ask from a being which is itself in need, because they are in no better position than their worshippers.

Apart from the dependence of gods on sacrifice, the reciprocal nature of gentile ritual is interpreted by the Syriac translator of Aristides in a second polemical way: the greed (or mercenary nature) of the gods. This is usually presented in terms of bribes: *wmn btr hn' m'lyn 'lh' 'ḥrn'. wqryn lh 'plwn. w'mryn 'lwhy d'ytwhy ṭnn' wmštḥlpn' wbzbn lbyk qšt' wqt'rq'. bzbn dyn qytr'. wnqwš'. wqṣm qṣm' lbny 'nš': 'yk dnsb mnhwn 'gr'. 'r' ky: 'l 'gr' snyq hn' 'lh'.*[187] This serves three polemical purposes simultaneously. Firstly, it allows Aristides to attack the idea of the gentile gods and their blessings, as discussed above: these blessings are not a gift but a purchase. Secondly, it allows him to portray the gods in morally compromising terms.[188] Finally, and crucially, it emphasises their need: a god who is wholly self-sufficient and self-sustaining, as the Christian God is, has no need for bribes, as Apollo

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[185] Ibid. 14.3: 'after him they introduce another god, Asklepios. They say that he is a physician, and he prepares medicines and bandages so that he may satisfy his need of nourishment. Is this god needy, then?' See Pouderon and Pierre 2003:351-2.

[186] Aristides 14.4-5.

[187] Ibid. 15.6: 'after him they introduce another god, and call him Apollo. They say of him that he is jealous and changeable; at times he holds a bow and quiver, but at times a lyre and plectrum. He prophesies oracles to the sons of men, so that he may receive from them a reward. Does this god, then, need a reward?'

[188] For more on this see below, 4.2.1.

does in this instance. The association between bribery or reward and the neediness of Apollo is emphasised by the repetition of *snq* ('to need'). The very fact that the gods accept bribes emphasises that they are *not* entirely self-sufficient, and they thus depend on these bribes to sustain them.

3.4.2   Meliton

Meliton appears to be explicit in expressing a similar attitude: *dʿ dyn dryš ʿbdyk ṭbʾ hnw. dlʾlhʾ tdʿ. wlh tplwḥ. wdʿ dmdm lʾ šʾl lk. ʾl mdm lʾ snyq.*[189] At first glance, this is an attack on the needs of gentile gods (albeit one made by means of a contrast with the true God). However, in this section Meliton is discussing the importance of understanding God's true place, and the place of the images and carvings simply as images and carvings. In this context, it is likely that the statement that 'God does not need us' is intended to highlight man's position in respect to God; this is emphasised by the command to serve him. Meliton's point emphasises our subservience to God, rather than attacking the needs of the gods, although this may fulfil a secondary, polemical purpose of the passage implicitly. The claim that God 'needs' nothing is repeated again: *ʾyt ʾlhʾ dsnyq.*[190] Here, however, the contrast with gentile gods is quite clear: Meliton simultaneously denies that God can be bought (or, rather, His blessings and goodwill). This, presumably, is a repetition of Aristides' point that the gods are vulnerable to bribes), or that He could be stolen or destroyed by vandals. In this context, God's needing nothing is equated with his invulnerability; the gods, by contrast, are dependent for their survival on gentile offerings, which strongly suggests that, in Meliton's

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[189] Meliton 5.4: 'but know that the chief of your good works is this: that you know God and serve Him. And know that He does not ask anything of you: He needs nothing'.
[190] Ibid. 7.6: 'is God that which is in need?'

perception, gentiles imagine their offerings as sustenance for the gods. The dependence of the gods, however, greatly limits their ability to benefit the worshipper, and makes sacrifice an essentially contradictory excercise: *'ykn' š'l 'nt lh dntl lk 'yk dl'tyr': wyhb 'nt lh 'yk dlmskn'*.[191] Only here is this contradiction made explicit, but the idea behind it, that the gods are in fact in no better position than us, lies at the foundation of all three authors and their respective interpretations of gentile gods and their needs.

3.4.3 Tatian

Tatian, too, emphasises both of these aspects of reciprocal sacrifice: ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τὸν ἀνωνόμαστον θεὸν δωροδοκητέον· ὁ γὰρ πάντων ἀνενδεὴς οὐ διαβλητέος ὑφ' ἡμῶν ὡς ἐνδεής. φανερώτερον δὲ ἐκθήσομαι τὰ ἡμέτερα.[192] Like Aristides, he draws an implicit contrast between God, who is entirely self-sufficient and self-sustaining, and the gentile gods, who are needy and dependent. The greed of these gods, and their vulnerability to bribes, is a theme which I have already highlighted, and it finds further emphasis in Tatian's *Address*: τί μοι σέβειν θεοὺς δωρολήπτας καὶ ὀργιζομένους ἂν μή λάβωσιν.[193] This is the most explicit attack on the greed of the gods found in our three authors. However, Tatian does not go further in exploring the need of the gods: the emphasis is clearly on their greed. The fact that the gods are in need is therefore less abhorrent than the immorality which the gods demonstrate. Again, as with the blessings of the gods, it is their moral attributes, and not their powerlessness, which is the focus of Tatian's attack: this approach greatly differs from those of both Meliton and Aristides.

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[191] Ibid. 7.6: 'how do you ask him to give to you, as one who is rich, and give to him as one who is poor?'

[192] Tatian *Or.* 4.3: 'nor is the ineffable God to be bribed, for he is entirely free of needs and must not be represented by us as in need of anything'. This is one of the most common aspects of negative theology, even when the apologists do not spell out the implications that god is invisible, intangible and all-powerful (Palmer 1983:238).

[193] Tatian *Or.* 10.1: 'why should I reverence gods who take bribes and are angry if they do not get them?'

3.4.4   Other Christian texts

Christian literature commonly emphasises the Θεὸς ἀνενδεής – the God who is not in need.[194] Although Tatian does not use this phrase exactly, the underlying idea is evident, as demonstrated above. Athenagoras, also writing in the late second century, uses the idea more fully than Tatian: ὁ τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς δημιουργὸς καὶ πατὴρ οὐ δεῖται αἵματος οὐδὲ κνίσης οὐδὲ τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθῶν καὶ θυμιαμάτων εὐωδίας, αὐτὸς ὢν ἡ τελεία εὐωδία, ἀνενδεὴς καὶ ἀπροσδεής.[195] Nor is this polemic directed solely at gentile religious life: Justin Martyr argues that God demanded sacrifice in the Levitical code not because of His desire for sacrifice, but because such sacrifice was needed for the sins of the Jews.[196] Jesus' sacrifice removed the need for such sacrifices, because (as the Son of God) only he was able to perfectly satisfy this wrath.[197] The *Epistle to Diognetus* similarly compares Judaism with gentile rituals based on the supposed idolatry of sacrifice in itself: οἱ δέ γε θυσίας αὐτῷ δι' αἵματος καὶ κνίσης καὶ ὁλοκαυτωμάτων ἐπιτελεῖν οἰόμενοι καὶ ταύταις ταῖς τιμαῖς αὐτὴν ἐνδεικνυμένων φιλοτιμίαν· τῶν μὲν μὴ δυναμένοις τῆς τιμῆς μεταλαμβάνειν, τῶν δὲ δοκούντων παρέχειν τῷ μηδενὸς προσδεομένῳ.[198] This implies that there is something inherently wrong with the concept of sacrifice as a whole, and not just with sacrifices to the

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[194] Petropolou argued that this position "constitutes the kernel of the Christian perception of the divine" (2008:250).

[195] Athenagoras *Leg.* 13.1-2: 'the Designer and Father of all things does not need blood or fat, or the fragrance of flowers and incense. He himself is the perfect fragrance and has absolutely no want of anything'. The notion also appears in the writings of Tatian's mentor, Justin (*1 Apol.* 10.1).

[196] Justin *Dial. Tryph.* 22.1: καὶ ὅτι διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ ὑμῶν καὶ διὰ τὰς εἰδωλολατρίας, ἀλλ' οὐ διὰ τὸ ἐνδεὴς εἶναι τῶν τοιούτων προσφορῶν, ἐνετείλατο ὁμοίως ταῦτα γίνεσθαι, ἀκουσατε πῶς περὶ τούτων λέγει διὰ Ἀμὼς ('so that you may know that it was because of the sins of your people and because of their idolatries, and not because there was a need of such offerings, that they were commanded thus, listen to how He spoke of these things through Amos'). See also Tertullian *Against Marcion* 2.18. Petropolou argued that, according to Justin, the introduction of Jewish sacrifice was intended to keep the people of God away from gentile gods (2008:249-50): however, this interpretation ignores the essential cleansing role of the sacrifice.

[197] As expressed e.g. *Hebrews* 10:11-14. See Petropolou 2008:271-274 for the emergence of the idea that Jesus' sacrifice made animal sacrifice redundant.

[198] *Ep. Diog.* 3: 'for those who think that they are offering sacrifices to him by blood and burnt fat, and whole burnt offerings, and that they are reverencing him by these honours, seem to me to be in no way better than those who show the same respect to deaf images. For it seems that the one offer to those who cannot partake of the honour, and the other to him who is does not need anything'. See Palmer 1983:238.

gods; this attitude appears to be reflected in our Near Eastern Christian sources in their repeated emphasis that God needs nothing.

3.5   Non-Christian sources

We can therefore identify the need of the gods as an important aspect of Near Eastern Christian attitudes. How does this compare with the approach of non-Christian sources? We find a considerable amount of discussion dedicated to this very theme. Plato characterises sacrifice as a gift, δῶρον.[199] However, this characterisation raises problems with the fact that the gods receive only the 'unwanted' parts of the offering. Hesiod provides the most familiar explanation of the tradition: Prometheus deceives Zeus by offering him a choice of the sacrificial meat.[200] Burkert claimed that the Greeks marvelled at the Semitic idea of the holocaust, the whole burnt offering, because this total surrender of the animal to the god contrasted with their own model.[201] However, problems with this characterisation only occur in the case of meat offerings; in the case of libation or incense burning, which would have been the most basic and fundamental form,[202] there is not a problem, which suggests that the Promethean model of sacrifice was, as Petropolou pointed out, a way of combining the vertical and horizontal axes (that is, between man and god, and between fellow men) simultaneously.[203]

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[199] *Euthryphr*. 14c; the same terminology is found in *Mt*. 5.23.

[200] Hes. *Theo*. 545-558. Burkert questioned whether the god represented more than simply an excuse for the sacrificial feast (1983:7). Klauck suggested that this represented a 'guilt culture', which may be true, but does not explain the practice itself (2000:18). For the interpretation of this myth, see Vernant 1977, in which he highlights the story as part of a wider narrative which reinforces the distinction between men and gods, rather than explaining this odd feature of sacrifice; because man must eat flesh to sustain himself (temporarily), it emphasises his mortality (Vernant 1980:53-5). See also Beard, North and Price 1998a:37.

[201] Burkert 1985:63, although he does point out instances of Greek holocaust, notably in the cult of the dead.

[202] Kaizer 2008b:189; invocation and prayer, however, remained inseperable from these cultic forms (Burkert 1985:71).

[203] Petropolou 2008:28. See also Vernant 1980:53 and van Straten 1981:67.

3.5.1 Lucian

Although, then, this aspect of sacrificial practice may have been commonly accepted by ancient sources, their reaction to it was not always positive. Lucian's *On Sacrifices* brutally satirises those who offer such sacrifices on the understanding that the gods 'require' something: οἵ γε οὕτω ταπεινὸν καὶ ἀγεννὲς τὸ θεῖον ὑπειλήφασιν ὥστε εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἐνδεὲς καὶ κολακευόμενον ἥδεσθαι καὶ ἀγανακτεῖν ἀμελούμενον.[204] He also attacks the greed of the gods in accepting bribes, and that one is therefore able to buy blessings from them, in very similar terms to those seen in Aristides and Tatian: ἔνεστι τρίασθαι παρ' αὐτῶν τὸ μὲν ὑγιαίνειν, εἰ τύχοι, βοϊδίου, τὸ δὲ πλουτεῖν βοῶν τεττάρων, τὸ δὲ βασιλεύειν ἑκατόμβης, τὸ δὲ σῶον ἐπανελθεῖν ἐξ Ἰλίου εἰς Πύλον ταύρων ἐννέα, καὶ τὸ ἐκ τῆς Αὐλίδος εἰς Ἴλιον διαπλεῦσαι παρθένου βασιλικῆς.[205] On one level, this reflects the *do ut des* and *da ut dem* mechanisms through which sacrifice functioned (see above). Lucian's characterisation, however, presents the gods as greedy and mercenary, in need of the offerings which are presented. This might suggest that the attitude of Aristides and Tatian accurately reflects the reality of religious practice. However, we must be extremely cautious in our handling of Lucian's text; we cannot necessarily suppose that Lucian wholeheartedly endorsed the attitudes found in his satirical works. However, as satire, they are effective only if the attitudes they criticise are common, and we must therefore assume that these ideas (namely, that the gods could benefit from sacrifice and that they responded by bestowing blessings) were otherwise widespread. Secondly, the majority of his satire is directed at epic tropes, such as the story of Apollo and Poseidon building the walls of Troy, which Lucian uses to

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[204] Luc. *De sacr.* 1: 'they assume that the gods are so lowly and mean that they are in need of men, and that they enjoy being flattered and are angry when they are neglected'.

[205] Ibid. 2: 'one can buy from them health, it may be, for a calf, riches for four oxen, a kingship for a hecatomb, a safe return from Troy to Pylos for nine bulls, and passage from Aulis to Troy for a king's daughter'. Macleod (1991:277) discussed the sacrifice, and observed that Lucian misquoted *Od.* 3.8, in which nine times nine bulls, rather than nine, are offered to Poseidon.

highlight their poverty.[206] As noted previously, we must be careful in negotiating the relationship between mythic stories and ritual practice: we have no idea how far such stories would have influenced a worshipper's mind as he or she went about their sacrifice. In this light, it is difficult to use *On Sacrifices* to highlight the reality of religious life, either in the Near East or elsewhere. At most, we may conclude that Aristides and Tatian have identified a common topic of discussion and have applied it to their arguments, but this does not mean that this discussion was understood to reflect actual practice.

3.5.2   Other sources

The comic playwright Aristophanes also mocks the suggestion that the gods may be in need:

θύει γὰρ οὐδεὶς οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπων ἔτι

θεοῖσιν, οὐδὲ κνῖσα μηρίων ἄπο

ἀνῆλθεν ὡς ἡμᾶς ἀπ' ἐκείνου τοῦ χρόνου,

ἀλλ' ὥσπερεὶ Θεσμοφορίοις νηστεύομεν

ἄνευ θυηλῶν: οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι θεοὶ

πεινῶντες ὥσπερ Ἰλλυριοὶ κεκριγότες

ἐπιστρατεύσειν φάσ' ἄνωθεν τῷ Διί,

εἰ μὴ παρέξει τἀμπόρι' ἀνεῳημένα,

ἵν' εἰσάγοιτο σπλάγχνα κατατετμημένα. [207]

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[206] Luc. *De sacr.* 4.

[207] Ar. *Av.* 1516-24: 'there is no man who still sacrifices to the gods; the smoke from the thigh-bones has not reached us since that time. We fast as though it were the Thesmophoria, without any sacrifices. The barbarian gods, who are starving, holler as if they were Illyrians, and are threatening to charge on Zeus if he does not open up the markets where parts of the sacrificial victims are sold'.

This displays a very similar attitude to the writings of Lucian, which suggests a comic tradition of mocking these epic tropes. Whilst we should treat neither the *Birds* nor Lucian's *On Sacrifices* as characteristic of gentile religious life, the comedy would be ineffective if it mocked assumptions that were not commonly held. It is also possible that such texts strongly influenced Christian polemicists in their approach: the overlap between Lucian and Tatian, and in particular in their attacks on the venial nature of the gods, may suggest that the apologist was at least aware of the work of his contemporary and adopted elements of it in his own.

3.6   Feeding the gods[208]

It is not entirely clear, however, in what way the gods do benefit from these sacrifices. Lucian is more explicit than most textual sources: namely that they offer a welcome alternative to nectar and ambrosia: κἂν μὲν θύῃ τις, εὐωχοῦνται τάντης ἐπικεχηνότες τῷ καπνῷ καὶ τὸ αἷμα πίνοντες τοῖς βωμοῖς προσχεόμενον ὥσπερ αἱ μυῖαι· ἢν δὲ οἰκοσιτῶσιν, νέκταρ καὶ ἀμβροσία τὸ δεῖπνον.[209] The Homeric epics[210] are particularly inconsistent on this subject: the gods are repeatedly described as feasting, particularly with the Ethiopians.[211] Elsewhere, however, it is made explicit that the gods do *not* consume food or wine: this is

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[208] For fuller discussion of this topic, see Weddle 2010.

[209] Luc. *De sacr.* 9: 'if anybody sacrifices, they all feast, hungering for the smoke and drinking the blood that is spilt at the altars, just like flies; but if they eat at home, their meal is nectar and ambrosia.'

[210] Many of the accounts of wounded gods come from myth, and, as we have already noted, there appears to be a distinction between myth and cult. Are we justified in relying on the Homeric epics for information? Like other texts used in this chapter, they are far older, but given that they remained in continuous use, their age does not represent a barrier. Their genre may also provide an issue; Kearns was correct to observe that the difference between, for example, Herodotus' depiction of the divine and that of the epics could hardly be greater (Kearns 2004:60; see also Buffière 1956). It is worth noting, however, that many of the stories found in Aristides in particular, as well as Lucian's satire, are drawn from epic. As a result, as long as the distinction between myth and cult (or indeed myth and history, as Kearns showed) is maintained, it would be problematic to avoid them on the grounds of difficulty.

[211] Zeus and the other Olympians feast with the Ethiopians in *Il.* 1.423-5, and Poseidon in *Od.* 5.282. See below for fuller discussion of the use of the Homeric epics in this context.

given as the reason for the fact that the gods produce ichor rather than blood in *Iliad* 5:340, and in *Odyssey* 5.195 Odysseus and Calypso share a meal, with the mortal consuming food and wine and the goddess nectar and ambrosia. Zeus suggests that the sacrifices offered to the gods (in this case, by the Trojans) are pleasing because they are a due honour, expressed both as a royal gift (γέρας) and an allotted portion (λαγχάνω):

οὐ γάρ μοί ποτε βωμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς ἐΐσης

λοιβῆς τε κνίσης τε: τὸ γὰρ λάχομεν γέρας ἡμεῖς.[212]

There is no evidence here that the gods *consume* the offerings in any sense. This inconsistency is apparent, too, in far later authors, which suggests that this attitude did not change over time: Julian, for example, suggests on one occasion that the fumes nourished the gods directly, but elsewhere that, although the fumes were pleasing to the gods, they did not need them for sustenance.[213]

The most explicit ritual demonstration of the ambiguity of understanding is found in the practice of θεοξένια, or its Latin counterpart, *lectisternia.*[214] It is not certain that images of the gods were necessarily involved,[215] but it is at least certain that the rituals involved inviting the gods to dine. This is familiar from myth: as noted above, Zeus and the other

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[212] *Il.* 24.69-70: 'my altar never lacked in an equal feast, the libation or the burnt offerings, the honour which is our portion'. In the case of the prayer to Mars found in Cato and quoted above, this is the most likely interpretation of *macte*. If this is the case, Mars' advantage from the sacrifice would be in the honour he receives, and not in eating it.

[213] Julian *Caes.* 333d/ *Letters* 293c-d.

[214] There are differences between the two: "whilst theoxenia could describe a number of different large scale rituals in the Greek world, Roman lectisternia were mainly a specific city-wide celebration, dedicated to a collection of Olympian deities, which took place in individual homes as well as part of a large-scale public ritual" (Weddle 2010:232).

[215] Livy 40.59.7-8 is the only explicit evidence we have in this respect; Weddle argued that the presence of the gods at these banquets was felt but not seen, and that images were specifically absent, thus affirming at least some of the distinction between man and god (2010:235). Other than this, the fellowship between god and man was at most implicit (Klauck 2000:21), although Ando argued that the *sellisternia*, which were parades of explicitly *empty* seats, stood in direct contrast to the *lectisternia* (2008:23).

Olympians are noted as guests of the Ethiopians and sharing in their feast.[216] If, as Petropolou demonstrated, sacrificial banquets were a form of expression for the horizontal axis of sacrifice (that is, forming bonds between human participants), then the θεοξένια and *lectisternia* provided a means of simultaneously emphasising the vertical axis (between god and worshipper).[217] Inviting a deity to a meal was also an evident feature of religious life in the Roman Near East, as the large number of dining rooms in temple enclosures testifies,[218] although it is less clear than in the Greek world whether or not the worshippers shared in these banquets *with* the deity.[219] Religious banquets were ubiquitous in the region, at least in Palmyra, and, as in the Greek world, served a social function, whilst religious elements (particularly incense burning and libation) allowed worshippers to "express a sense of subordination to the divine world",[220] thus functioning on both the horizontal and vertical axes, in Petropolou's formulation. With this in mind, it is hard to see what function would be served by inviting a god to dine without worshippers playing at least some part in the meal. Again, it is not clear in what way the god benefitted from the meal; the apocryphal story of Bel and the dragon suggests that the deity is understood to consume the meal in some way, until the prophet Daniel reveals to the king of Babylon that the priests and their families have been secretly consuming the food.[221] If worshippers were *not* present at the meal, then this

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[216] Lucian's *On Sacrifices* also satirises this understanding by quoting the incident in which Artemis was not invited to the feast on Oenus, and sat at home sulking (Luc. *De sacr.* 1).

[217] Petropolou 2008:28.

[218] For a fuller discussion of this feature of religious life in Palmyra, see Kaizer 2008b.

[219] Ibid. 187.

[220] Ibid. 189.

[221] The story is part of the apocryphal *Daniel* 14, found only in the LXX. "No matter how we approach this evocative apocryphal story, it is clear that Bel of Babylon was believed by many to have enjoyed his meals in seclusion" (Kaizer 2008b:187).

would agree with Weddle's suggestion that food may have been left at the feet of statues in order to avoid asking difficult question such as 'how does it eat?'[222]

Although this suggestion of Weddle's is plausible, these questions may not actually have caused the worshippers discomfort. Returning to the passage in *1 Corinthians* in which Paul discusses 'idol offerings', he forbids Christians to eat the meat which was offered: τί οὖν φημί; ὅτι εἴδωλον τί ἐστιν ἢ ὅτι εἰδωλόθυτον τί ἐστιν ἀλλ᾽ ὅτι ἃ θύει τὰ ἔθνη, δαιμονίοις θύει καὶ οὐ Θεῷ· οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι.[223] The key word is εἰδωλόθυτον; this clearly does not involve participation in a communal sacrificial meal (which Paul forbids in the following verse), for only part of the animal was offered to the god; the rest was not offered, and thus consumed by the worshippers. It would appear that he envisions the consumption of the food which had been placed in front of the image: inevitably, the statue has failed to eat its portion, and it must be disposed of. One cannot imagine that the Christians were sneaking into a temple after the rite in search of a snack, and that the fact that the god failed to eat its portion was commonly accepted and caused no great theological distress amongst its worshippers.

Part of the problem in our understanding, as Weddle highlighted, lies in the fact that Greek and Roman ritual is not directly comparable, although there is overlap: it is therefore difficult to use Hesiodic theory to account for Roman religious practice, for example.[224] There might be similarities between θεοξένια and *lectisternia* in terms of practice, but we should be cautious in assuming that they explicitly served the same purpose. Nevertheless, it

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[222] Weddle 2010:226. Although people knew that the priest really ate the food, "they had no difficulty in imagining that the gods themselves partook of the gifts" (van Straten 1981:86).

[223] *1 Cor.* 10:19-20: 'what, then, should I say? That an idol is anything, or that idol food is anything? Those things which the gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not wish you to become partners with demons'. As Horrell observed, Paul does not make it clear at what point eating idol food becomes identified with idolatry (2007:124).

[224] Weddle 2010:207.

appears in some way that the gods were understood to benefit from the offerings made to them, in these offerings and in sacrificial practice in general: whether this brought them sustenance or honour appears to be unclear, and since there is no universal theory of sacrifice in the ancient world,[225] it would be misleading to look for a conclusive answer. The idea that the gods could benefit from sacrifice does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that they depend upon it; this conclusion is drawn, as shown, by satire and is then elaborated upon by Christian polemic, and thus comes to form an important, though not entirely accurate, part of Near Eastern Christian attitudes to religious life.

3.7   Near Eastern Christian attitudes to the vulnerability of the divine

For Christian authors, the natural extension of the dependence of the divine is the vulnerability of the gods, particularly to death and damage. This point was made explicitly above in the discussion of Meliton, who associated God's lack of need with his invulnerability. For Aristides and Tatian, it is an almost inevitable conclusion: if the gods are in need of sacrifice (whether for sustenance or anything else), it follows that, in its absence, they suffer. From this, it naturally follows that the gods are vulnerable. This line of thought is not found explicitly in any of our three authors, but we find numerous different aspects of the argument emphasised repeatedly, as we shall see.

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[225] Ibid. 211.

3.7.1 Meliton

Meliton, for example, questions: *w'n lqys' hlyn dmwqdynn. w'n lk'p' hlyn dmtbryn ḥnn. 'ykn' hkyl hlyn 'lh' 'nwn*,[226] making it clear that a 'god' cannot be broken, and that anything which *is* broken is, therefore, not a god by definition. The same idea is repeatedly emphasised elsewhere: *whkn' 'tyd bzbn' 'ḥry': dnhw' mmwl' dnwr': wt'qd 'r'' 'm ṭwryh. wn'qdwn bnynš' 'm ṣlm' d'bdw: w'm glyp' dsgdw lhwn.*[227] The victims of God's judgement here are the wicked and the images they worship. Since the *ṣlm'* is to be explicitly associated with the gentile gods (see above), it is clear that these gods are also vulnerable to the judgement of God, and are therefore not immortal. They are vulnerable, too, to human agency: *'ykn' sbr 'nt 'lwhy dnzkyk bqrb'. dh' m' dzk'wk b'ldbbyk 'p lh qlpyn lh.*[228] The vulnerability of the divine here is closely associated with the inability of the gods to benefit their worshippers, since the inability to protect themselves makes them unable to protect those who trust in them. In fact, the reverse is also true: the survival of the gods depends on the success of their followers in war. Meliton's ironic statement emphasises what is, for him, the sheer irrationality and self-contradiction of the gentiles' position.

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[226] Meliton 2.4: 'and if these pieces of wood which we burn, and these stones which we shatter, how are these things gods?'

[227] Ibid. 9.8: 'so will it be in the last times: there will be a flood of fire, and the earth will be burnt up, together with its mountains and the people will be burnt up together with the images which they made, and the carvings which they worshipped'.

[228] Ibid. 7.6: 'how do you suppose about him that he will give you victory in war? When your enemies conquer you, they strip him too'. Ando argued that the defeat of gods in war would be particularly troubling to gentile worshippers: "when Rome itself was sacked, it must have been hard to deny that "the gods in Rome" – the *numina victa* – had failed once again to protect not only their city, but even themselves" (2008:138). Because the gods had such an impact in the running of the state, their defeat in battle would be of huge significance (Beard, North and Price 1998a:41-3). It is therefore suprising that this is the only reference to such a phenomenon in Meliton, Tatian or the Syriac translator of Aristides; although Aristides mocks the fighting of the gods amongst one another, he does not dwell on their defeat and what significance this might have (Aristides 21.3).

3.7.1.1 *Excursus:* the destruction of images

Beyond this, however, there is little explicit discussion of the vulnerability of the divine. This almost certainly stems from the association of ṣlm and god, as seen in the passage just quoted. If the gods are no more than physical images, then it is self-evident that they are vulnerable to theft and destruction.[229] Such practices were far from unheard of in the ancient world, although never approved of.[230] Occasionally, we find instances where desecration is simply not explained.[231] In other instances, we are given the reasons behind the destruction: occasionally the desecration is motivated by simple greed,[232] whilst elsewhere it is attributed to the failure of the gods to answer prayers and offerings.[233] The logic behind such desecration is easy to follow: through their deafness or refusal to help, the deity has revealed themselves either to be not a deity, or powerless, or unfriendly.[234] Destroying their statues would, in the first two cases, have no repercussions, and in the third case, it is possible that the culprit imagined he might be harming the god through harming their image.[235] It is certainly true that the gods were understood to take such acts of vandalism as tantamount to an assault on themselves, particularly since the way that one treats a cult statue could be seen as symptomatic of one's attitude towards the gods:[236] "damaging a cult statue *does* literally damage a god. In one sense, the destruction of an image could be taken to suggest a lack of power in the divine, or a lack of interest on the part of gods in how their images were

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[229] Discussion of the practice is also found in Justin *Apol.* 1.9 and *Ep. Diog.* 2.

[230] "That mortals could harm the images of the gods was a grave cause of concern in the Roman world, and retribution for these acts was generally assumed to be forthcoming" (Weddle 2010:182). See Weddle 2010: 188-194 for detailed discussion of the practice.

[231] Suet. *Nero* 56, in which the emperor urinates on a statue of Atargatis. See also *SHA Caracalla* 5.7 for similar practice.

[232] According to Cicero, this is clearly the case in Verres' ransacking of the temples on Sicily. See e.g. *In Ver.* 1.1.11, 12, 14, 2.4.95.

[233] As e.g. in Artemidorus 2.33, 4.78.

[234] Weddle 2010:189. See also Versnel 1981:37-42.

[235] Weddle 2010:192.

[236] Ibid. 65.

treated".[237] In Dio, for example, we find the observation that Zeus destroyed with lightning the ship transporting his stolen image away from Olympia.[238] Christian authors occasionally advocated destruction of such images to show that gods were nothing but wood and stone,[239] but there is no evidence that gentile authors saw such destruction in these terms: Julian argued that the destruction of images was, conversely, an argument *for* the existence and power of the gods, since the culprit was usually caught and punished.[240]

3.7.2   The Syriac translation of Aristides

Aristides' position, as with the neediness of the gods, largely depends on the interpretation of myth, which is used to emphasise mortality of the gods and their vulnerability to harm: *wmnhwn mmt mytw. wmnhwn byd brq' 'tmḥyw. wmnhwn 'p lbny 'nš' 'št'bdw. wmnhwn b'rwqy' šnyw. wmnhwn byd bny 'nš' 'tgnbw.*[241] Beginning with the castration of Kronos, Aristides explores a number of stories in which the gods suffer, drawing the inevitable conclusion: *rb' hkyl ṭ'ywt' wbzḥ' d''lw ywny' 'l ryš' d'lhyhwn. bhy dklhyn hlyn 'mrw 'lwhy. 'w mlk'. l' mškḥ' d'lh' ntpkr 'w ntpsq. w'n dyn l' sgy dw'.*[242] These stories include: Asklepios,[243] Dionysus,[244] Adonis-Tammuz,[245] Kore,[246] and Osiris.[247] Finally,

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[237] Ibid. 203, notwithstanding instances when no culprit is evident, and the destruction is therefore understood in terms of an ill omen, of which occurrence we find numerous examples: see e.g. Dio 37.9.1-2, 19.2 and Livy 40.1-2. See also Weddle 2010:194-5. Furstenberg argued that, in Rabbinic and Christian thought, the destruction of images was intended not only to highlight the powerless of the god but actively to harm the gods themselves (2010:340-1). He compared this process of nullification to the *damnatio memoriae* of certain emperors (ibid:345).

[238] Dio 59.28.4

[239] Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 2.45, 4.23, 4.25.

[240] Jul. *Ep.* 295. The same sentiment is attributed by Origen to Celsus (*C. Cels.* 8.41).

[241] Aristides 10.2-10.3: 'some of them were slain outright, some of them struck by lightning. Some of them were even made subject to the sons of men. Some of them departed in flight, and some of them were stolen by the hands of men'. See Pouderon and Pierre 2003:345-7.

[242] Aristides 12.1: 'great, therefore, is the error and the mockery which the Greeks introduce regarding the head of their gods, in that they have said all of these things about him, o King. It is not possible for a god to be bound or amputated, or else it is a great sorrow'.

[243] Ibid. 14.5.

Aristides concludes this section by observing: *wl' mrgšyn dwy': bklhyn hlyn dlw mdm 'nwn. kd klywm ḥyryn b'lhyhwn dmt'klyn w'bdyn mn bny 'nš'. 'p mn knwthwn wmnhwn kd yqdyn. wmnhwn kd mytyn wmtmsyn whwyn zbl'. wl' mstklyn d'bdyn bzny' sgy''.*[248] It is worth noting that in not all these instances are the gods explicitly described as being killed: Kore, for example, is simply snatched off by Pluto: this may be a metaphor for death, but Aristides does not actually emphasise this, saying only *'lh' gyr dmtḥṭp sgy mḥyl.*[249] In a number of other instances, too, the weakness of the gods is emphasised by being captured or bound rather than being slain: only Asklepios, Dionysus, Osiris and Tammuz are explicitly killed. For Meliton, the vulnerability of the divine was demonstrated through their susceptibility to death (or, rather, demolition, since Meliton does not admit that they ever existed in the first place). For Aristides, death is a feature of the vulnerability of the divine, but the true weakness is expressed in their inability to help themselves, whether that is to save themselves from death or free themselves from capture. This emphasises again the close connection between the vulnerability and the dependence of the gods as perceived by Aristides.

Although the Syriac translator of Aristides differs greatly from Meliton in his association of god and image, he too, like Meliton, observes that the images of the gods are vulnerable to damage: *wkd 'tqyn wmn ngyrwt' dzbn' mwpyn. wkd mtnskyn wkd mtdqqyn. 'ykn' ky l' 'stklw 'lyhwn dl' 'ytyhwn 'lh': whlyn dpwrqn' dnpšhwn l' 'tmṣyw. 'ykn' yṣypwt'*

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[244] Ibid. 15.3. Selene is given as Dionysus' mother rather than Semele, which Pouderon and Pierre attributed to scribal error, rather than misunderstanding by the author (2003:211).

[245] Aristides 16.7.

[246] Ibid. 17.4.

[247] Ibid. 18.6.

[248] Ibid. 19.4: 'the wretches do not perceive that in all of these things they are nothing, while every day they look upon their gods, which are eaten and are destroyed by man, or even by their own kind, and (look upon) some of them being burned and some of them while they die and decay and become manure, and they do not understand that they perish in many different ways'.

[249] Ibid. 17.4: 'for a god who is snatched off is very weak'.

dbny 'nš' mškḥyn dn'bdwn.[250] This passage forms part of an attack on philosophers, and is therefore to be understood as an attempt to harness Greek philosophical iconoclastic ideas, particularly those found in Xenophanes.[251] Unlike Meliton, however, Aristides does not emphasise human agency in the destruction of these images. For Meliton, the destruction of images (by human agency) emphasises their place in relation to mankind and the true God (since both man and God can destroy these images). Aristides does not discuss the relationship between man and image (largely because gentile gods are not limited to their images, as they are for Meliton). His point is simply that *all* forms of such gods are vulnerable to decay and destruction.

3.7.2.1 The death of Adonis-Tammuz

At this juncture it is worth focussing on the myth of Adonis-Tammuz, given that it is discussed by both Meliton and Aristides. The myth is also found in Lucian, which allows us to examine its significance in both gentile and Christian contexts. Meliton gives a brief account in discussing the origin of the worship of Balthi in Phoenicia: *sgdw bny pwnyq' lblty mlkt' dqwprws. mṭwl drḥmt ltmwz' br kwtr mlk' dpwnyqy': wšbqt mlkwth w'tt 'mrt bgbl krk' dpwnyqy'. wbh bzbn' š'bdt lklhwn kprwn' lkwtr mlk'. mṭl dmn qdm tmwz': rḥmt hwt l'rws. wgrt bh. w'ḥdh hwpsṭs b'lh wṭn bh. w't' qṭl ltmwz' blbnn ṭwr': kd 'bd ḥzyr' bwrz'. wmnh mn zbn' qwyt blty bgbl. wmytt b'pq' mdynt'. 'tr dqbyr tmwz'.*[252] The account found in the Syriac

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[250] Ibid. 20.3: 'and when they age and come to an end by the length of time, and when they are melted down and broken into pieces, how do they not understand regarding them that they are not gods? And those which are not capable of the salvation of their own lives, how are they able to guard men?' Cf. 4.7, for the theft of these images by looters. See also Rendel Harris 1893:56.

[251] See above, 2.3.2.1.

[252] Meliton 4.1-4.2: 'the sons of Phoenicia worshipped Balthi, the queen of Cyprus, because she loved Tamuz, the son of Cuthar, king of the Phoenicians. She left her kingdom and she went and dwelt in Gebel, a walled city fortress of the Phoenicians, and at that time she made all the Cyprians subject to Cuthar the King; because before Tamuz she loved Ares, and committed adultery with him, and Hephaistos, her husband, caught her, and was jealous of her. He came and killed Tamuz in Mount Lebanon, while he was hunting

translation of Aristides is somewhat less detailed: *wtwb 'mryn 'l tmwz' d'ytwhy 'lh'. w'ytwhy lm ṣyd' wgyr'. w'mryn dhw hn' 'tqṭl mn mḥwt' dḥzyr br'. wl' škḥ dn'dr lnpšh. w'n lnpšh l' 'škḥ dn'dr: 'ykn' lgns' 'nšy' mškḥ dnprns. whd': l' mškḥ' d'lh' gyr' 'w ṣyd' 'w m't b'šwmy' nhw'.*[253] Elsewhere, he is mentioned as the occasional lover of Aphrodite,[254] but this short account represents the only details we are given as to the death itself. Aristides' account lacks much of the detail found in Meliton's: all Aristides tells us is that he was a hunter who was killed by a boar, and from it draws the conclusion that he can offer no help to his worshippers.[255] Meliton's account differs in one respect: namely, that Tammuz was killed not by a boar but by a jealous Hephaistos.[256] Regardless, however, both accounts are explicit: Tammuz *was* killed, and, despite the efforts of Aphrodite (in the Aristides version) to free him from Hades, he remained that way. Meliton does not mention this, but simply observes that Tammuz is buried in Aphiki.

Lucian's account, although it contains many of the same details as those found in Meliton, is dramatically different in emphasis. For a start, it is very clear that Adonis is not dead, at least in the understanding of the worshippers at Byblos: ἐπεὰν δὲ ἀποτύψωνταί τε καὶ ἀποκλαύσωνται, πρῶτα μὲν καταγίζουσι τῷ Ἀδώνιδι ὅκως ἐόντι νέκυϊ, μετὰ δὲ τῇ ἑτέρῃ ζώωιν τέ μιν μυθολογέουσι καὶ ἐς τὸν ἠέρα πέμπουσι.[257] Even if we understand that

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boars. And from then on Balthi remained in Gebel, and she died in the city of Aphiki, where Tamuz was buried'.

[253] Aristides 16.7-17.1: 'again, they say of Tammuz that he is a god and is indeed a hunter and an adulterer. They say that he himself was killed by a blow from a wild boar, and was not able to help himself. If he is not able to help himself, how is he able to oversee the human race? It is not possible that a god should be an adulterer or hunter or that he should die of violence'.

[254] Ibid. 16.4.

[255] Pouderon and Pierre give little coverage to the myth except to note the importance of the rites (2003:356).

[256] Given that Aristides elsewhere ridicules the idea of fighting between the gods, it is perhaps surprising that he has not used the same version of the myth as Meliton.

[257] Luc. *Syr. D.* 6: 'after they have finished beating their breasts and lamenting, they first make offerings to Adonis *as to the dead* (my italics) and afterwards, on the next day, they claim that he lives and send him into the air' (tr. Lightfoot). For more on this passage, see Lightfoot 2003:305-328; for a fuller discussion of the

μψθολογέουσι ('they claim') implies a certain dubiousness on Lucian's part, the claim that he might be dead in any sense is reported with equal caution: sacrifices are offered ὅκως ἐόντι νέκυϊ ('*as if he were* dead'). A few lines later, Lucian reports the unusual phenomenon of the river Adonis, running from Mt. Lebanon into the sea. Once a year, the river turns red: μυθέονται δὲ ὅτι ταύτησι τῇσι ἡμέρῃσιν ὁ Ἄδωνις ἀνὰ τὸν Λίβανον τιτρώσκεται, καὶ τὸ αἷμα ἐς τὸ ὕδωρ ἐρχόμενον ἀλλάσσει τὸν ποταμὸν καὶ τῷ ῥόῳ τὴν ἐπωνυμίην διδοῖ.[258] Although Lucian clearly expresses doubts about this particular story, it is clear that it is accepted by most of those involved. What is crucial here is that according to this account, Adonis is not dead as Meliton or Aristides claim: the present τιτρώσκεται suggests that he remains alive and is wounded again and again on an annual basis. Lucian's account suggests that, in the view of both himself and many of the worshippers of Adonis, the god is not dead; however, it is equally clear that he can be wounded, perhaps seriously.

3.7.3   Tatian

In dealing with the vulnerability of the gods, Tatian adopts an almost identical approach to that of the Syriac translator of Aristides, using myth as the basis of his attacks. As well as the Cretan tomb of Zeus,[259] he discusses the rule of Kronos: πῶς τε ὁ πεδηθεὶς Κρόνος καὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἔκβλητος γενόμενος τῆς εἱμαρμένης οἰκονόμος καθίσταται; πῶς τε βασιλείας ὁ μηκέτι βασιλεύων δίδωσιν;[260] Unlike Aristides, however, Tatian does not explicitly associate Kronos' captivity with weakness, and therefore with his being unworthy of worship. The focus here is on his inability to provide laws, since he has no kingdom

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relationship between this passage and the one found in Meliton and the significance in understanding local cult practice, see Lightfoot 2007:86-91.

[258] Ibid. 8: 'the story is that on these days Adonis is wounded on Lebanon, and the blood that reaches the water changes the colour of the river and gives the stream its name' (tr. Lightfoot).

[259] Tatian *Or.* 27.1-2; for more on the tomb of Zeus, see below.

[260] Ibid. 9.3: 'how did Kronos, bound in fetters and driven out of his kingdom, become established as the one who allots command of the home? How can one who has no kingdom himself give out kingdoms?'

himself. The focus, once again, is moral, rather than religious. There are instances in which Tatian does attack the mortality of the gods, but he rather surprisingly admits that they do not die easily: οἳ θνῄσκουσι μὲν οὐ ῥᾳδίως, σαρκὸς γὰρ ἀμοιροῦσι· ζῶντες δὲ θανάτου πράττουσιν ἐπιτηδεύματα τοσαυτάκις καὶ αὐτοὶ θνῄσκοντες ὁσάκις ἂν τοὺς ἑπομένους αὐτοῖς τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἐκπαιδεύσωσιν.[261] Notice, again, the explicit association between the character of the gods and their moral impact on the worshipper; it is what they teach that is so harmful, and not necessarily the worship which they receive. Although the above statement by Tatian allows that the gods can die, it is nevertheless completely at odds with the attitude of both Meliton and Aristides, who focus on the link between vulnerability and powerlessness, and therefore emphasise the extent to which the gods can suffer and die. Why does Tatian, then, claim that the gods do not die easily? The answer must lie in the distinction between flesh and the spirit. Here, Tatian tells us that the demons are not made of flesh (σαρκὸς γὰρ ἀμοιροῦσι); elsewhere, he tells us that they are spiritual (δαίμονες δὲ πάντες σαρκίον μὲν οὐ κέκτηναι, πνευματικὴ δέ ἐστιν αὐτοις ἡ σύμπηξις).[262] Despite this, the spirit from which the demons are made is different, and inferior, to the spirit from which the true God is made, which is itself the constructor of material spirits.[263] We have here a suggestion of a hierarchy of beings, with man at the bottom, the demons (or false gods) above them, and God above them. Tatian's admission that the demons do not die easily is therefore not a grudging admission that they have at least some strength, but rather an attempt to highlight their position with respect to both man and God: this would also explain his constant use of δαίμονες, rather than οἱ θεοί, to describe the gods: they are as different from God as they are from men.

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[261] Ibid. 14.1: 'they do not die easily, for they have no part in the flesh. While they are alive, they follow the practices of death, and die themselves as often as they teach sins to their followers'.

[262] Ibid. 15.3: 'none of the demons are at all composed of flesh, but their construction is spiritual'.

[263] Ibid. 4.2.

3.8 Non-Christian sources

3.8.1 The Homeric poems

It appears, then, that a consistent feature of Near Eastern Christian attitudes to religious life is that the gods of the gentiles are vulnerable in some form or another. What do non-Christian sources make of the 'vulnerability' of their gods? We find numerous pointers in the Homeric poems. On numerous occasions in the *Iliad*, a god is wounded: most famously, Aphrodite by Diomedes (with the help of Athena): the poem emphasises her pain and distress, so it is clear that she has been greatly affected.[264] Nor should we understand that she is wounded only by Athena's help; in comforting Aphrodite, Dione narrates the other instances in which gods have been wounded or caused suffering at the hands of mortals:

> πολλοὶ γὰρ δὴ τλῆμεν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες
>
> ἐξ ἀνδρῶν χαλέπ' ἄλγε' ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι τιθέντες.
>
> τλῆ μὲν Ἄρης ὅτε μιν Ὦτος κρατερός τ' Ἐφιάλτης
>
> παῖδες Ἀλωῆος, δῆσαν κρατερῷ ἐνὶ δεσμῷ:
>
> χαλκέῳ δ' ἐν κεράμῳ δέδετο τρισκαίδεκα μῆνας:
>
> καί νύ κεν ἔνθ' ἀπόλοιτο Ἄρης ἆτος πολέμοιο,
>
> εἰ μὴ μητρυιὴ περικαλλὴς Ἠερίβοια
>
> Ἑρμέα ἐξήγγειλεν.[265]

This last passage is particularly extreme as it gives the impression that the gods could, given a particularly unusual set of circumstances, even die. Elsewhere, however, this is clearly not

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[264] *Il.* 5.335-40.

[265] Ibid. 5.383-90: 'many of us who live on Olympus have suffered at the hand of men, who bring grievous pains one upon another. Ares suffered when Otus and mighty Ephialtes, the sons of Aleous, bound him in stout chains. He was bound in a bronze jar for 13 months, and there Ares the war-glutton would have perished, if the stepmother [of Otus and Ephialtes], the most beautiful Eeriboea, had not informed Hermes'.

the case, as we see when Athena strikes Ares with a stone and 'slackened his limbs' (λῦσε δὲ γυῖα). [266] This circumlocution, used here and again a few lines later when Athena deals the same treatment to Aphrodite, is used throughout the *Iliad*, and usually to describe the death of a mortal. That Ares and Aphrodite leave the field, wounded but alive, demonstrates that it does not always have this sense, but perhaps that is the point: even these blows from Athena, powerful enough to kill any mortal, could not kill a god. This may reflect the same sense seen in Lucian's account of the myth of Adonis: the god may be wounded, but not killed. Seemingly the most explicit statement is given by Apollo to Achilles, whilst the latter is pursuing the god: Apollo tells Achilles that it is impossible for the mortal to kill him,[267] to which Achilles responds by saying that he would punish Apollo if he were able.[268] However, this statement does not necessarily claim that Apollo cannot be killed. It may simply suggest that he is not fated to die by Achilles' hand, in which case Achilles' reply would suggest that he lacks the power to change his fate: a tempting conclusion, given the role of Achilles' fate in the *Iliad* as a whole. Either way, it highlights a slightly ambiguous attitude throughout the epic towards the vulnerability of the gods.

3.8.2 Lucian and the tomb of Zeus

Problems with using the Homeric epics in this context were raised above; however, it is clear that Lucian (as well as Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides) rely on myth, and Homer in particular, for some of their critiques, as I shall show. One of the more famous demonstrations of the ambiguous nature of divine vulnerability, and one which Lucian

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[266] Ibid. 21.400-407.

[267] Ibid. 22.13: οὐ μέν με κτενέεις, ἐπεὶ οὔ τοι μόρσιμός εἰμι ('you will never kill me – I am not subject to Fate').

[268] Ibid. 22.20: ἦ σ' ἂν τισαίμην, εἴ μοι δύναμίς γε παρείη ('I would have vengeance upon you, if only I had the power').

focusses upon, is found in the attitude towards the so-called 'tomb of Zeus.' Euhemerus suggested that Zeus had once been a mortal and was now buried on Crete.[269] The suggestion found extremely vocal opponents: Callimachus famously wrote:

'Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται·' καὶ γὰρ τάφον, ὦ ἄνα, σεῖο

Κρῆτες ἐτεκτήναντο· σὺ δ' οὐ θάνες, ἐσσὶ γὰρ αἰεί.[270]

Lucian sarcastically thanks the Cretans for the revelation: the Greeks were mistaken to attribute thunder and rain to Zeus, because (if they had only known it!) he had actually been buried in Crete the whole time![271] The widespread ridicule towards the tomb of Zeus would suggest that the death of the gods was in fact considered impossible, even for Lucian.

Nor is Lucian's ridicule simply limited to the death of gods. In particular, he attacks the myths surrounding Hephaistos as a cripple: he must have seemed a natural target (and, as Aristides demonstrated, this was certainly the case with Christian polemic). The very fact that he *is* a cripple highlights Lucian's satire, for if the gods were invulnerable, he would not have hurt himself in his fall from heaven.[272] Even though he mocks the Cretans for supposing that Zeus could die, he suggests that this could have been true for Hephaistos: καὶ εἴ γε μὴ οἱ Λήμνιοι καλῶς ποιοῦντες ἔτι φερόμενον αὐτὸν ὑπεδέξαντο, κἂν ἐτεθνήκει ἡμῖν ὁ Ἥφαιστος ὥσπερ ὁ Ἀστυάναξ ἀπὸ τοῦ πύργου καταπεσών.[273] However, the satire is not directed at Hephaistos himself; the strongly sarcastic tone suggests that such a death may not have been a possibility. His attack is reserved for the myths which surround the gods, and which appear to emphasise their vulnerability. Unlike Aristides, however, this does not undermine the

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[269] *FGrH* 63. See also Spyridakis 1968.

[270] Callim. *Hymn 1* 9-10: 'Cretans always lie; for they built a tomb for you, o Lord; but you are not dead, and you exist forever.' The suggestion that Cretans were liars became commonplace: it is even found in the New Testament (*Tit.* 1:12).

[271] Luc. *De sac.* 10.

[272] Ibid. 6.

[273] Ibid. 6: 'if the Lemnians had not kindly caught him while he was falling, then our Hephaistos would have been killed just like Astyanax when he fell from the walls'.

practice of sacrifice, but rather encourages the reader to examine their perspective on the gods to whom those sacrifices are offered. Here we see more clearly the relationship between Homeric myth and religious discussion: Lucian acknowledges, and ridicules, the limitations of the former, whilst simultaneously relying on it for source material. We are therefore justified in adopting a similar approach: the epics must be treated with considerable caution, but, since our sources engage in detail with them, it would be a mistake to ignore them.

3.8.3   Philo of Byblos

Philo of Byblos relies on the approach of Euhemerus for his interpretation of the gods: that is, they were once mortals who were posthumously treated as gods in recognition of their services to mankind. As such, with this approach, it is not only possible for gods to die, but *essential* that they do so. Aeon and Protogonos, and the children of Genos, their son, are all identified explicitly as θνητούς, 'mortal', and several of the stories state quite clearly that the characters (or 'gods') in question died, such as Fire and Wind,[274] Kronos,[275] and Ouranos.[276] However, he appears to identify two different categories of gods: one set are immortal (the sun, the moon, the planets and the elements), and others are mortal (which he goes on to elaborate by giving Euhemeristic accounts of their lives.[277] Is there a distinction between gods who can die and gods who cannot? If so, it is certainly not one that the three Christian authors recognise; although Aristides does not explicitly state that *all* the gods of whom the stories are told die, he does not suggest that the ones who do perish are in anyway different to the others.

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[274] Quoted in Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 1.10.10.
[275] Ibid. 1.10.15.
[276] Ibid. 1.10.29.
[277] Ibid. 1.9.28.

3.9   Olympic or Chthonic?

This interpretation of Philo of Byblos raises an interesting question: is it possible that a distinction is to be drawn between Olympian and Chthonic deities, the former being immortal and invulnerable and the later not so?[278] Baumgarten asserted that Melqart "emerges as a god who controls property through his role as a chthonic deity",[279] and that he was thus different from the gods of the heavens. Melqart, or his Greek equivalent Herakles, is the archetypal Euhemeristic god: and yet, he remains distinct from the gods of Olympus. This also appears to be true of other mortals who 'become' gods: Asklepios, for instance, initially appears to be worshipped as a ἥρως, not as a θεός.[280] The Greeks invariably regarded dead gods, such as Adonis, as foreign,[281] which may have helped to identify strict categories, and it is certainly true that the Olympians appear to show a marked aversion to the dead,[282] with the exception of Hermes, who guides the souls to their rest. In *Il.* 20:61-5, Poseidon's rage

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[278] Diodorus Siculus attributed just such a suggestion to Euhemerus (6.1.2): as Baumgarten observed, it was the category of mortal gods, rather than the immortal, 'natural' gods, which attracted the most attention in antiquity (1996:92). Burkert noted that the cult of the gods was usually regarded as being in direct opposition to the cult of the dead and of Chthonic beings (1985:199-203): he highlighted a series of direct contrasts in the manner of cult practice between the two, but this does not necessarily mean that the Chthonic beings are identified as being more vulnerable than the Olympians. As Burkert admitted, certain figures, such as Herakles, appear to cross the divide (ibid:208). Petropolou has highlighted a tendency to distinguish sacrificial terminology involving the two groups: εναγίζειν, rather than θυέιν, being used of heroic or Chthonic sacrifice (as in Herodotus 2.44; Petropolou 2008:35). Although she demonstrated that there are insufficient differences in sacrificial practice to maintain this distinction fully, Petropolou highlighted some characteristics of the victim in a classic 'Chthonic' sacrifice: the victim was black, slaughtered at night with its head facing down; the blood was poured on the ground, and the libation was not of wine (2008:35-36). As Petropolou argued, then, we may accept the classification of 'Chthonic' with reservations, but must not push the distinction too far. It is certainly insufficient to suggest that the recipient of such a sacrifice was explicitly mortal.

[279] Baumgarten 1981:210.

[280] Pindar describes him with this term (*Pyth.* 3.7). However, grave markers played no role in his cult, and he was ultimately worshipped as a θεός (Burkert 1985:214).

[281] Ibid. 201.

[282] Harrington (2001:174) attributes this to matters of cultic purity, and highlights Artemis' aversion to the dead in *Hippolytus* 1437ff as an example. She compared this practice to the Levitical commands regarding the purification of corpses (which is impossible) and of those who encounter them (as e.g. Nb. 6:6). Similarly, Burkert argued that the indestructability of the gods marked their true separation from men (1985:188): their actions lack the significance of those who are can perish.

threatens to crack open the earth and reveal the dead to the Olympians, to whom Hades'
dwelling is repulsive in the extreme.[283]

However, the two categories, if they may be so called, are not entirely independent:
"the opposition between Olympian and Chthonic constitutes a polarity in which one pole
cannot exist without the other and in which each pole only receives its full meaning from the
other".[284] Although Hades and Persephone, as well as other, lesser beings such as the Erinyes,
are regarded as Chthonic, they nevertheless form a key part of the mythical interpretation of
the divine structuring of the universe. Philo of Byblos' observation that some gods are mortal
and others immortal cannot be used to create separate categories of gods. Instead, it must be
regarded as an attempt to explain the continued existence, and worship, of certain celestial
entities like the sun within a Euhemeristic narrative in which the gods are only worshipped
after death and in return for their services to mankind. In any case, Christian sources do not
engage with this debate on any level: as we have seen, they group all gods together with no
distinction, and *all* gods are vulnerable

3.10   Concluding remarks

As observed at the start of this chapter, the themes of powerlessness, dependence and
vulnerability are very closely interconnected. Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of
Aristides all emphasise each of these ideas, often in conjunction with each other. Aristides in
particular connects the three strands very closely through his interpretation of myth: the gods
depend on men for their food, which means that they are vulnerable; since they are vulnerable
and needy, they can offer nothing to mankind. Ultimately, the three arguments depend upon

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[283] *Il.* 20:61-5.
[284] Burkert 1985:202.

the identification of the gods as 'dead' or 'senseless', and the main purpose is to ridicule gentile notions of sacrifice. Many of these arguments are made by comparison rather than explicitly: this is particularly seen in the emphasis on Θεὸς ἀνενδεής, but it is clear that in a comparison with the true God, gentile gods come off second best. It is therefore possible to highlight these three areas as key features of Near Eastern Christian attitudes (as far as our evidence goes). Beyond this, however, further clarification is impossible: the manner in which Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides express their disgust at these features varies to such an extent that we cannot highlight a single Near Eastern Christian approach to the subject. Tatian, in particular, focusses primarily on the *moral* implications of divine weakness, rather than its cultic significance. The next chapter will examine these moral issues in further detail.

Chapter Four: 'The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh' (*Gal.* 5:17): Near Eastern Christianity, ethics and moral religion.

4.1   Introduction

In the previous chapter it was seen that, for all three authors, there was a considerable overlap between the powerless worship of powerless gods and the immoral worship of immoral gods.[1] Tatian's polemic in particular clearly associates the two; we saw how the weakness of the gods is expressed through both their immorality and the immorality to which they lead their worshippers. For the Syriac translator of Aristides, too, mythic stories place the immorality, the vulnerability and the weakness of the divine alongside one another. This chapter will explore the idea of 'immoral gods' and their relationship to cult. It will then examine the effect that this has on the worshippers' own lives, and the relationship of religion, philosophy and ethics both at a public and private level.

The immorality of the gentiles is a key element of New Testament theology; immorality, and particularly sexual immorality, is a key element of the discussion which defines Christian and Jewish identity, and marks the gentiles as 'other'.[2] In the majority of cases it is contrasted explicitly with the lifestyle of Christians, in order to establish these boundaries: ὡς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ εὐσχημόνως περιπατήσωμεν, μὴ κώμοις καὶ μέθαις, μὴ κοίταις καὶ ἀσελγείαις, μὴ ἔριδι καὶ ζήλῳ.[3] Paul's use of τὰ πάθημα[4] has been widely discussed;[5] on

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[1] Nor is this solely true of Christian thought. For Rabbinic Judaism, idolatry was held as the opposite to holiness, because it held back the working of holiness, as the extension of God's will, in the world: it was thus considered the ultimate act of holiness to give up one's life rather than commit idolatry (in the form either of false worship or of immoral practice) (Harrington 2001:16-28).

[2] Lieu 2004:133. The other marker is given as idolatry, which, in Lieu's understanding, is primarily the worship of images (ibid:118), but must also include the discussion of powerless gods in the previous chapter.

[3] *Rom.* 13:13: 'let us walk decently, as if in the daytime, not in feasting and drinking-parties, not in fornication and sensuality, not in arguing and jealousy'. See also *1 Cor.* 5:1, 11; *Gal.* 5.19-21, *1 Th.* 4:5, *1 Pet.* 4:3.

numerous occasions it is used explicitly in connection with 'the flesh', usually sexual immorality.[6] This identification is closely connected with Paul's wider understanding of idolatry as a whole, of which τὰ πάθημα are merely a feature.[7]

With this in mind, it is important to look again at Varro's tripartite theology. We have briefly looked at the connection between civic and mythic gods, and although the connection cannot be entirely dismissed, it is not nearly as strong as the Christian authors emphasise. This chapter will require us to look at the third of the categories, the natural or physical gods of the philosophers. It will conclude by examining in more detail the relationship between Meliton, Aristides and Tatian and particular philosophical groups, particularly the writers of the Stoa.[8]

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[4] This word is notoriously difficult to translate; see Fitzgerald 2008:1-4 for some of the common options. Here I prefer to translate it as 'emotions', as this captures some of the sense of the irrational associated with the word.

[5] I do not intent to discuss Pauline approaches to Christian sanctification, as this tells us nothing about the religious context. For discussion of moral progress in Paul, see e.g. Harrington 2001, Aune 2008, Engberg-Pederson 2008, Ware 2008.

[6] As at *Rom*. 1:26, 7:5, *1 Thess*. 4:5, *Gal*. 5:24. Vöglte argued that this association specifically with sexual sin was derived from Jewish theology rather than Hellenistic philosophy (1939:206). Similarly, Bonhöffer (1911:125) argued the same point of Paul's association of πάθημα with the broader notion of 'sin'. On Paul's approach to sexual immorality, and particularly his treatment of Aphrodite, see Garrison 1997:30-9.

[7] "Paul's negative characterization of these passions fits within a larger complex of issues, including idolatry, impurity, and various sexual practices" (Aune 2008:226). See also Barton 2007b.

[8] As I shall explain below, the availability of our sources makes it extremely difficult to concentrate on Near Eastern philosophical life; furthermore, these authors appear to engage primarily with western philosophical schools.

4.2   Near Eastern Christian attitudes to the morality of the divine

4.2.1   The Syriac translation of Aristides

The first aspect to be considered is the moral conduct of the gods. The most explicit of the three Christian authors in this respect is the Syriac translator of Aristides: *wmnhwn smw dkrʾ wlmnhwn nqbtʾ: wdʾyk dmnhwn mn ʾlhyhwn ʾštkḥw dgyryn wqṭlyn wṭʿyn wḥsmyn wrgzyn wmtḥmtyn. wqṭlyn lʾbhyhwn. wgnbyn wḥṭpyn.*[9] The mythic stories which he explored to emphasise their weakness, need and vulnerability are simultaneously used to emphasise less-than-appealing aspects of their characters. Many of these are familiar, with Zeus' many adulteries a particular target: *wʾmryn ʿlwhy dʾštḥlp lbʿyrʾ wlmdm ʾḥryn: ʾyknʾ dngyr lnšʾ mywttʾ wnqym lh mnhyn bnyʾ. kd bzbn ʾmryn dʾštḥlp lʾzbrkʾ. mṭl rḥmth dʾwrpʾ wdpsypʾ. wtwb ʾštḥlp ldmwtʾ ddhbʾ mṭl rḥmth ddnʾʾ. wlqwqnws mṭl rḥmth dlʾdʾ. wlgbrʾ mṭl rḥmth dʾnṭywpʾ. wlbrqʾ mṭl rḥmtʾ dshrʾ. ʾyknʾ dmn ʾylyn ʾwld bnyʾ sgyʾʾ mn ʾnṭywpʾ gyr ʾmryn dʾwld ztws wʾmpywnʾ. wmn shrʾ ldynwsws. mn ʾlqmyʾ lhrqlws. wmn lṭw: lʾplwn wlʾrṭmys. wmn dnʾʾ prsʾʾ. wmn ldʾ qsṭwr wpldwqyws. wʾlʾʾ wplwdws. wmn pnmsws ʾwld tšʿ bntʾ: hlyn dmwss šmh ʾnyn. wmn ʾwrwpʾ: mynwʾʾ wqrdmwnʾ wsrpdwnʾ. lḥrtʾ dyn ʾštḥlp ldmwtʾ dnšrʾ: mṭl rḥmth dgnwdmws rʿyʾ.*[10] The conclusion which Aristides draws is inevitable: *lʾ gyr mškḥʾ dʾlhʾ ngyr*

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[9] Aristides 9.4-10.1: 'some of these they portray as male and some female, and so some of their gods were found to be adulterers and murderers, mistaken, jealous, wrathful, furious, patricides, thieves and plunderers'. It is unsurprising that moral attacks on the gods form such an important part of his polemic: Pouderon and Pierre argued that moral theology is at the very heart of his entire work (2003:69). However, I shall show that, although immorality is indeed vital to Aristides' argument, it is not necessarily his main focus.

[10] Aristides 12.2-13.1: 'they say about him that he was transformed into cattle and into anything else in order that he might commit adultery with mortal women, and that he might raise for himself sons from them. Since at one time they say that he was transformed into a bull on account of his passion for Europa and Pasiphae; and again he was transformed into the form of gold on account of his passion for Danae; and into a swan on account of his passion for Leda; and into a man on account of his passion for Antiope; and into lightning on account of his passion for the Moon: so that from these he fathered many children. For from Antiope, they say, he fathered Zethus and Amphion; from the Moon, Dionysus; from Alcmene, Herakles; from Leto, Apollo and Artemis; from Danae, Perseus; from Leda, Castor, Polydeuces and Helen; from Mnemosyne he fathered nine daughters, those who are called Muses; from Europa, Minos, Rhadamanthus and Sarpedon. But finally he was transformed into the form of an eagle on account of his passion for Ganymede the shepherd'. For fuller discussion of this passage, see Pouderon and Pierre 2003:345-7. Rendel Harris compared this section to Justin's polemic on adultery in *1 Apol.* 21, but the two passages do not make the

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ʾw nzn ʾ: ʾw ntqrb lmdmkʾ dʿm dkrʾ. ʾw dnqṭwl lʾbhwhy. wʾn dyn lʾ sgy byš mnh ddywʾ mḥblnʾ.[11] In addition to Zeus' adultery, his incest and homosexual practices are also attacked, but it is clear that adultery is one of the key issues in Aristides' polemic: the same charge is brought against Ares[12] and Aphrodite.[13] In both these cases, their immoral conduct invalidates their claim to be considered as gods.

It is not just the sexual ethics of the gods which he brings into question. The drunkenness of Herakles[14] and Dionysus[15] is attacked, as are the greed and trickery of Hermes: *wtwb mʿlyn ʾlhʾ ʾḥrnʾ: wqryn lh hrmys. wʾmryn dʾytwhy gbrʾ rḥm yʾnwtʾ wrʾg ywtrnʾ. wmgwšʾ wpšygʾ wdrrʾ. wmpšqnʾ dmlʾ. hdʾ dlʾ mškḥ dʾlhʾ nhwʾ mgwšʾ ʾw yʿnʾ ʾw pšygʾ: ʾw rʾg mdm dlʾ dylh. ʾw dʾrrʾ. wʾn dyn lʾ mštkḥ ʾytwhy dlʾ ḥšḥw.*[16] Nor is explicitly immoral conduct the sole focus. Aristides also attacks Artemis, not because she is immoral as such, but because her conduct is 'unbecoming': *wbtrh mʿlyn ʾrṭmys ʾlhʾ ḥtʾ dʾplw. wʾmryn dʾytyh hwt ṣydtʾ. why hdʾ: ṭʾynʾ hwt qštʾ wgʾrʾ. wmtkrkʾ hwt bṭwrʾ. kd dbyrʾ klbʾ. ʾw dtṣwd ʾylʾ ʾw ḥzyry brʾ. hy dmškrʾ dṭlyt btwlt blḥwdyh ttkrk bṭwrʾ. wtṣwd ṣydʾ dḥywtʾ. wmṭl hdʾ lʾ mškḥ dʾrṭmys ʾlhʾ thwʾ.*[17] In none of these cases is the polemic as vitriolic as we might

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same point: whilst Aristides is critical of the *moral* aspects of the gods, for Justin, the fornication of the gods is placed in contrast to Christ, who was produced *without* sexual union (Rendel Harris 1893:58-9).

[11] Aristides 13.4: 'for it is not possible that a god should commit adultery or fornication or to draw near to sleep with males, or to kill his father. Otherwise he is more wicked than a destructive demon'.

[12] Ibid. 14.7.

[13] Ibid. 16.4-6.

[14] Ibid. 15.5.

[15] Ibid. 15.2. "Il est bien plus probable que, lorsqu'il parle d'enlèvement, Aristide fasse allusion au délire qui s'emparait des femmes dans le rituel du dieu" (Pouderon and Pierre 2003:353).

[16] Aristides 13.6-14.2: 'again they introduce another god, and they call him Hermes. They say that he is a man loving avarice and lusting after profit, a *magus* and maimed and a wrestler and one who interprets. But it is not possible that a god should be a *magus*, or avaricious, or maimed, or coveting whatever is not his, or an athlete. For if it is found otherwise then he is no benefit'. See Pouderon and Pierre 2003:351. On the more human aspects of Hermes, see Versnel 1990:213-251, esp. 223, and 2011:40-42.

[17] Aristides 16.2-3: 'after him they introduce Artemis as a goddess, the sister of Apollo. They say that she is a huntress and she carries a bow and arrows, and wanders around on mountains while leading dogs, either to hunt deer or wild boar. But it is disgraceful that a virgin should wander about on mountains by herself, and hunt the trail of beasts. Because of this it is not possible that Artemis should be a goddess'. Rutherford

expect, despite the extent to which Aristides focusses upon these aspects, but it is perfectly possible to establish a reason for this. It is significant that the number of gods whose moral conduct is attacked is surprisingly limited: those quoted above represent the only ones attacked in these terms, namely Zeus, Ares, Hermes, Dionysus, Aphrodite, Herakles and Artemis (if one considers the attack on her impropriety comparable to the attacks on greed, adultery and so on). When one considers the number of gods whom Aristides attacks in general (the total is sixteen), it becomes clear that the moral conduct is not actually the focus of Aristides' polemic. This is especially clear when one considers that a far greater number of gods are attacked for their powerlessness, dependence or vulnerability. Immortality, rather than immorality, is the focus of his polemic.

Although it is repeatedly emphasised that these types of conduct (particularly adultery and greed) make it impossible for the character in question to be a god, the logic underlying this argument is not entirely clear. For the powerlessness, vulnerability and dependence of the gods, the argument was explicit: how could they be expected to assist their worshippers when they cannot defend themselves? In the attack on Hermes, we find a similar statement: the immoral conduct of the gods means that they are unable to help their worshippers (*wʾn dyn lʾ mštkḥ ʾytwhy dlʾ ḥšḥw*).[18] Firstly, this emphasises the close connection already observed between the moral conduct of the gods and their powerlessness; it also recognises once again the importance of the efficacy of the divine in worship. However, Aristides does not explain why Hermes' greed means that he is incapable of helping mankind. The logic of this argument must be drawn from elsewhere. As with the polemic on powerlessness, Aristides relies on implicit attacks on the gods by emphasising the positive qualities of the true God:

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argued that 'proper' social behaviour, such as tact and etiquette, was a key part of moral theology (1989:97): Aristides' attacks on Artemis show this to be the case.

[18] Aristides 14.2: 'for if it is found to be otherwise, then he is no benefit'.

wmṭl hdʾ. lʾ mškḥ ʾ dbr ʾnš ʾ mn kynʾ nsymywhy dʾlhʾ. lhnʾ dbzbn kd mskʾ lḥdwtʾ gdšʾ lh ʿqtʾ. wlgwḥkʾ wgdš lh bkyʾ. hnʾ dʾytwhy ḥmtnʾ wṭnnʾ. wḥswmtnʾ wmttwynʾ. ʿm šrkʾ dbwṣrʾ ʾḥrnʾ. wbznyʾ sgyʾʾ mtḥbl mnhwn dʾsṭwksʾ. wʾp mn ḥywtʾ.[19] We might therefore conclude that the immorality of the deities listed means that they are not gods because their conduct marks them out as dramatically different to the true God: God is defined *as* God on the basis of his character, and because the gentile gods do not match this character, they *cannot* be defined as god.

When he explores the consequences of the gods' immorality, however, Aristides does offer some more explicit interpretation in this respect, namely that the gods do not offer good role models to their worshippers: *wmkʾ nsbw bny ʾnš ʿlltʾ ʾyk dngwrwn. wnznwn. wnḥṭpwn. wdnsʿrwn kl dbyš wsnʾ wndyd. ʾn gyr hlyn dmtqryn ʾlhyhwn: klhyn hlyn dktybn mn lʿl sʿrw: kmʾ ytyrʾyt nsʿrwn ʾnyn bny ʾnš: ʾylyn dbhwn bhlyn mhymnyn dsʿrw hlyn.*[20] It now becomes further apparent that the immorality of the gods is not Aristides' chief focus: he is primarily interested in their conduct not because of its connection to their divinity, but because belief in the stories about the gods leads their human worshippers to act in similar ways. The point is emphasised slightly differently again, to demonstrate its importance to Aristides' argument: *hʾ gyr kd smw ywnyʾ nmwsʾ: lʾ ʾstklw dbnmwsyhwn lʾlhyhwn mḥybyn. ʾn gyr kʾnyn nmwsyhwn ʿwlyn ʾlhyhwn. dʾbdw ʿbr nmwsʾ: kd mqṭlyn lḥddʾ wsʿryn ḥršwtʾ: wgyryn wḥṭpyn*

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[19] Ibid. 9.2: 'because of this, it is not possible that we should depict as God him who is by his nature man, to whom at times, when he searches for happiness, grief arises; he searches for laughter, and mourning befalls him; one who is wrathful and jealous, envious and regretful, together with the rest of the other faults, and in many ways corrupted more than the elements and the beasts'.

[20] Ibid. 11.1: 'from this men took the opportunity to commit adultery and fornication, and to plunder and to do everything evil, hateful and abominable. For if those who are called their gods have done all these things which I have written above, how much more will men do them, those who believe that they [sc. the gods] have done these things!'

wgnbyn: wdmkyn ʿm dkrʾ: ʿm šrkʾ dswʿrnyhwn ʾḥrnʾ.[21] This emphasises the inconsistency, in

his view, of Greek theology: if the Greeks disown the gods' conduct, then they worship

dishonourable beings, but if they do not, then they (and their laws) are equally morally

corrupt. The idea that the divine should provide a moral exemplar is no doubt rooted in one of

the most important verses in scripture: *ky ʾnʾ yhwh ʾlhykm whtqdštm whyytm qdšym ky qdwš*

ʾny.[22] For Aristides, therefore, although the conduct of the gods may disqualify them from

being gods (because they fail to match the moral excellence which defines God), its true

significance is in the negative impact it has on the lives of worshippers.

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[21] Ibid. 21.6-22.2: 'for see! While the Greeks establish laws, they do not understand that by their laws they are condemning their own gods. For if their laws are just, their gods are unrighteous, for they committed a transgression of the law, since they kill one another and performed enchantments and committed adultery, plundered, stole, slept with males, together with the rest of their other deeds. But if their gods are beautiful/fine and, like they say, did all these things, the laws of the Greeks are unrighteous, and are not established according to the will of their gods, and in this the entire world has erred'.

[22] *Lev.* 11:44: 'I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves; be holy because I am holy'; see also ibid. 19:2 and 20:26. Scholarship tends to focus on *qdš* ('holy') as a term of separation: the term literally means 'to separate' or 'to set aside' (see Milgrom 1991, 2004). However, Harrington demonstrated that Rabbinic holiness also contained elements of moral goodness: as the Holy One, God is not only separated from all imperfection and weakness, but he is also "Other" because he embodies within Himself all goodness, including justice, mercy and life itself" (2001:12). She also argued that this understanding of holiness was in contrast to the Greek concept of ἱερός, which appears only rarely in the Septuagint: it is used of ram's horn trumpets which are blown before the Ark, and therefore in themselves have only minor cultic significance (*Jos.* 6:8). In preferring to use ἅγιος to translate *qdš*, the writers of the Septuagint "made an implicit distinction between the nature of the Jewish God and the gods of the pagan world" (Harrington 2001:15); Rives, in contrast, argued that ἱερός and ἅγιος were by and large synonymous (2007:13), while Burkert argued that ἅγιος "lacks the juridical factor; it does not point to objective demarcation but to an attitude or feeling of looking upward in awe and fascination" (1985:270). The command highlighted above separates Israel from the nations not only in matters of diet and ritual practice, but in ethical living: in *Lev.* 19:2, the command is followed by a number of largely ethical concerns, such as the command to honour one's parents. Thus, holiness "signals utter withdrawal from what is morally evil. As one separates from impurity and immorality, one emulates God himself, who by nature is distinguished from all other entities, and who is especially separated from evil" (Harrington 2001:16). Nor is the association of holiness and morality limited to Rabbinic thought: *Mt.* 5:48 repeats the command of *Leviticus* but replaces ἅγιος with τέλειός ('perfect'), which shows the close association of morality and holiness in Christian thought. Paul is explicit on the subject in *2 Cor.* 7:1 and *Eph.* 5:27: in both these instances, to be ἅγιος means to remove every blemish or spot of improper conduct from one's life. See also *Mt.* 19:21, *Col.* 1:28, *Phil.* 3:12.

4.2.2 Tatian

Tatian is less explicit in his attacks on the moral conduct of gods, particularly individual gods: as noted in the previous chapter, individual, named gods do not feature very frequently in the text. The polemic is largely targeted at the gods in general, rather than specific, named ones: οἱ γὰρ τοὺς μονομαχοῦντας βλέποντες καὶ θάτερος θατέρῳ σπουδάζων καὶ ὁ γαμῶν καὶ παιδοφθορῶν καὶ μοιχεύων γελῶν τε καὶ ὀργιζόμενος.[23] Tatian has drawn an identical conclusion to the Syriac translator of Aristides: the behaviour of the gods somehow disqualifies them from being gods. It is not clear how this should be, but the gods are portrayed in such frivolous fashion in this passage that we may assume that it places them in stark contrast to the majesty of God. The target of this polemic is οἱ δαίμονες, and is not narrowed down any further. There are a few instances in which the conduct of individual gods is discussed, such as Zeus' seduction of Kore,[24] or the Dioskouri's rape of the daughters of Leukippus[25]; Kronos is criticised for consuming his sons, and Zeus for eating Metis.[26] However, in the only section in which individual gods are discussed extensively, it is the contradictory nature of their roles, rather than the immorality of their conduct, which is the focus of Tatian's attack: Cybele promotes castration, while Aphrodite encourages love-making and childbirth; Asklepios and Apollo heal, while Athena and Artemis destroy.[27] Like Aristides, Tatian emphasises the connection between the moral conduct of the gods and their

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[23] Tatian *Or.* 8.1-2: 'those who watch single combat, and cheer on one or the other; who marry, seduce boys, or commit adultery; who laugh, or are angry; who flee and are wounded: how are we not to think of all these as being mortal?'. Grant (1954:64) offered this passage as justification for Irenaeus' condemnation of Tatian as a heretic for his rejection of marriage (see above, 1.4.3); however, Hawthorne (1964:166) pointed out that marriage is not *identified with* pederasty or adultery, but rather placed alongside them as an example of the kind of practices which must be regarded as mortal.

[24] Tatian *Or.* 8.4.

[25] Ibid. 10.2.

[26] Ibid. 25.3. This passage is in fact intended to act as apologetic in its true sense; for more on this, see below, 5.3.1.

[27] Tatian *Or.* 8.2. However, Burkert argued that a polytheistic system *required* opposition on some level in giving order to the world: the chaste Artemis requires Aphrodite as her counterpart (1985:248).

powerlessness (here expressed through their materiality and vulnerability): τούτους δέ, ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες, προσκυνεῖτε γεγονότας μὲν ἐξ ὕλης, μακρὰν δὲ τῆς εὐταξίας εὑρεθέντας.[28] The immorality of the gods is clearly secondary to the fact that, for a variety of reasons, worshipping them is irrational: the gods, like everyone else, will be judged for their conduct.

Like the Syriac translator of Aristides, Tatian emphasises the negative impact of mythic tales of the gods: δι' ὧν γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς ὁποῖοί τινες πεφύκασι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πεφανερώκασι, διὰ τούτων τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἐπὶ τὰ ὅμοια προὐτρέψαντο.[29] This is found immediately after the attack discussed above on the frivolous conduct of the Homeric gods in general; Tatian makes it explicit that it is Homer's depiction which is under attack.[30] He claims that it was for this reason alone that poetry was created: ποιητικὴν δέ, μάχας ἵνα συντάσσητε καὶ θεῶν ἔρωτας καὶ ψυχῆς διαφθοράν.[31] The gods are not the sole target of Tatian's polemic, either: he attacks Zeno's tales for glorifying the morally corrupt. Although he acknowledges that there are a few good men in these tales (such as Herakles and Socrates), the wicked vastly outnumber them.[32] As well as poetry, drama is attacked for the negative exemplars that it portrays; Tatian says of an actor he watched: ἕνα κατήγορον πάντων τῶν θεῶν, δεισιδαιμονίας ἐπιτομήν, διάβολον ἡρωϊκῶν πράξεων, φόνων ὑποκριτήν, μοιχείας ὑπομνηματιστήν, θησαυρὸν μανίας, κιναίδων παιδευτήν, καταδικαζομένων

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[28] Ibid. 12.4: 'these, men of Greece, are the ones you worship, even though they were made from matter, and far from orderly in their behaviour'. Hunt argued that both inappropriate conduct and weakness described in the myths served to emphasise the powerlessness of the gods (2003:59).

[29] Ibid. 8.2: 'by the way in which they revealed their nature to men, they urged their audience to do the same things'. This is unsurprising: "l'idée que les mythes servent de prétexte aux hommes pour justifier leurs méfaits est fréquente dans l'apologétique" (Pouderon and Pierre 2003:347). Similarly, Hunt argued that Tatian's approach to the mythological conduct of the gods is nothing more than "the standard approach used in this kind of apologetic material" (2003:64).

[30] Tatian Or. 8.1: παρ' οἷς, ὥς φησιν Ὅμηρος, "ἄσβεστος δ' ἄρ' ἐνῶρτο γέλως μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν" ('as Homer says, 'unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods'': this is a quotation from either Il. 1.599 or Od. 8.326).

[31] Tatian Or. 1.3: 'you concocted poetry in order to tell of the battles and the affairs of the gods, and the corruption of the soul'.

[32] Ibid. 3.2.

ἀφορμὴν καὶ τὸν τοιοῦτον ὑπὸ πάντων ἐπαινούμενον.[33] Like Aristides, Tatian does not spend much time attacking the moral conduct of the gods; at best, it would serve to emphasise that worship of the gods is irrational, which he has already demonstrated. Instead, he uses it to emphasise the *danger* in their worship by highlighting the negative effect it has on mankind.

4.2.3   Meliton

Meliton, in contrast, adopts a completely different approach from either Aristides or Tatian towards the conduct of the gods. In the central Euhemeristic section, he describes the origin of local cults by discussing the lives of numerous men who were later treated as gods: these accounts range from Athena and Zeus in the Greek world to Nebo in Hierapolis-Mabog. It is largely on the basis of this section, and the lack of polemical tone, that Lightfoot suggested that the *historiolae* might have been a later interpolation.[34] It is certainly true that not many of the *historiolae* include moral polemic, and what polemic there is revolves entirely around sexual ethics: Herakles is accused of multiple rape and excessive lust, as is *zwrdy prsyʾ rḥmh* ('Zurdi the Persian, his companion');[35] Athena is attacked for adultery with Hephaistos to produce Ericthippus;[36] Zeus is accused of adultery with Alcmene to produce Herakles;[37] and Balthi (Aphrodite) of adultery with Tammuz.[38] Other common charges are ignored: although Dionysus is credited with introducing wine, the natural extension of this, drunkenness,[39] is completely ignored. However, I argued above that discussing the conduct of

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[33] Ibid. 22.1: 'single accuser of all the gods, an epitome of superstition, one who slanders heroic deeds, who acts out murders, who explains adulteries, a store-house of madness, a teacher of lechers, a starting-point for the condemned. Such a man was praised by all'.

[34] Lightfoot 2007:73. This claim is discussed in much more detail above: 3.2.1.

[35] Meliton 3.5. Zurdi is probably to be identified with Theseus (Lightfoot 2007:76), although Cureton preferred Zaradas, "the author of the abominable law of the Persians" (1855:88).

[36] Meliton 3.8.

[37] Ibid. 4.1.

[38] Ibid. 4.1.

[39] As seen in Aristides 15.2.

the gods would mean admitting their existence in a form other than that of the image: Meliton absolutely refuses to do so, and as such, the Euhemeristic *historiolae* are entirely in keeping with the approach of the rest of the *Oration*. However, this does mean that Meliton offers very little discussion on the moral conduct of the gods, particularly when compared to Tatian or the Syriac translator of Aristides; in Meliton's eyes, the gods cannot misbehave because they do not exist.

4.3   Non-Christian sources on the morality of gods

We have seen, then, that the morality of the gods plays an important, if relatively minor, part in the polemic of all three authors. In part, the polemic of Tatian, Aristides and Meliton depends upon the association of the mythic and the religious. It was observed in the previous chapter that Varro's tripartite theology distinguishes between poetic and civic religion; Most argued that this division served to protect the poets and their depictions of the gods from precisely the sort of discussion which Aristides and Tatian rely on.[40] However, I observed that it was unlikely that people could offer sacrifices to a god without being at least mindful of the stories told of them, and I suggest that this will be equally true of the moral conduct. It is surely impossible that these stories would not occur to the worshipper, particularly if they offered sacrifices in a temple surrounded by familiar imagery and iconography of the god, even if the sacrifice is not consciously made to, for example, Zeus *as* adulterer and the stories do not play an active part in their understanding of Zeus the god. In

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[40] Most 2003:308: "in practice it served to establish a clear division of labour between three separate forms of religiosity, thereby immunizing not only the great poets of the past, Homer and Hesiod above all, but also the institutions of the city, in their political and religious complicity, against any corrosive impact which might otherwise have derived from philosophical speculation about the true nature of divinity". It was also seen that Aristides appeared to recognise a clear distinction between the *mtlʾ* ('parables'), *kynytʾ* ('the physical') and *zmyrtʾ wqyntʾ* ('hymns and songs'), which must parallel the mythical, physical and civic branches of Varro's theology. For fuller discussion on the origins and use of the tripartite theology in this context, see above, 3.2.3).

any case, the accusations made by the Christian authors, and by the Syriac translator of Aristides in particular, again appear lacking in foundation: they intend these arguments to invalidate sacrificial practice, but the connection between the conduct of the gods and the sacrifices they receive is tenuous at best.

4.3.1   Philo of Byblos

We have also seen the notion that the divine should act as moral exemplars to mankind, largely founded on the Levitical code.[41] Let us now examine how far the attitude of these Near Eastern Christian authors matches the perception of non-Christian sources. Firstly, how strong is the connection between the morality (or otherwise) of the gods, and their worship? Philo of Byblos' euhemeristic account, although it deals at great length with the stories of the gods, rarely mentions anything untoward in their conduct: he tells of Ouranos' rape of Ge, and his subsequent attempts to murder his children;[42] similarly, Kronos murders his own son, Sadidos.[43] However, in neither of these cases is there any evident criticism of either Ouranos or Kronos. The absence of moral criticism is perhaps not surprising in this account; Philo's euhemeristic approach is based on the understanding that the 'gods' became so because of their services to man; their immoralities have little place for discussion in this context.

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[41] Fitzgerald (2008:12-14) argued that aetiological myth often had a strong moral centre (as with the declining morals of the five races of men in Hes. *Op.* (106-201), and that such myths were intended to encourage moral contemplation and the development of a good way of life (2008:15). However, his analysis is based on the cultural and moral development of mankind: this may reinforce the association between *myth* and moral exemplar, but says nothing about the role of the gods in this context.

[42] Quoted in Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 1.10.17. Baumgarten suggested that, since the infanticide did not feature in Hesiod's account of the Cosmogony, Philo's was probably a rationalising account (1981:191), which might also help explain the lack of critical comment.

[43] Quoted in Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 1.10.21.

We find more discussion in the various works of Lucian. Whilst describing the construction of the temple at Hierapolis, he mentions the rape of Europa by Zeus (in the form of a bull).[44] Again, however, the story is reported in a matter-of-fact way with no implied criticism of Zeus; it is simply one of the various accounts of the foundation of the temple given by the priests, and Lucian's real concern is with finding the most accurate one. It is immediately apparent that this myth has nothing to do with religious life at Hierapolis. It is also worth remembering that much of this account depends on the use of Herodotus; Lightfoot suggested that Lucian had deliberately inverted the Herodotean model, by "placing the vulgate version of the myth, which Herodotus does not even mention, in the mouths of the very Phoenicians least likely to articulate it in this way".[45] As such, it is entirely to be expected that Lucian's account reveals little of his attitude towards the immoral conduct of the gods.

In some of Lucian's comic works, however, we do find more criticism of the gods' activities: Prometheus bemoans the fact that there is just as much misbehaviour amongst the gods as amongst mortals,[46] and Zeus attacks Dionysus for his drunkenness and womanly character.[47] More frequently, Zeus appears to be criticised for his adultery.[48] Nor is he alone in this rebuke: Rhea is criticised for her adulteries despite her age.[49] Only occasionally,[50]

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[44] Luc. *Syr. D.* 4.

[45] Lightfoot 2003:299. On the passage, see ibid. 297-301.

[46] Luc. *Prom.* 16.

[47] Luc. *Deor. conc.* 4. For commentary on this passage, see Macleod 1991:255-7.

[48] Such as Luc. *De sacr.* 5, which tells of his various transformations. For fuller discussion of the mythological allusions, see Macleod 1991:277-8. An identical sentiment is expressed by Momus in *Deor. conc.* 7, who goes on to say that Zeus' example has inspired the other gods and, even worse, the goddesses to commit adultery (ibid. 8), although Oliver suggested that it was Dionysus' attendants to whom Momus primarily took objection (1980:306).

[49] Luc. *De sacr.* 7.

[50] Despite this, Petropolou argued that *On Sacrifices* represents one of the most complete texts on the practice (2008:42); this is only true if we fail to observe that Lucian's focus is myth, not ritual.

however, is there any suggestion that these stories are in any way linked to the worship of the gods through cult practice and sacrifice: Zeus, in rebuking Dionysus, questions εἶτα θαυμάζομεν εἰ καταφρονοῦσιν ἡμῶν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὁρῶντες οὕτω γελοίους θεοὺς καὶ τεραστίους;[51] Similarly, the priest of Kronos at the Saturnalia angers the god by repeating the stories of his binding (which, it seems, are mistaken) during a prayer.[52] Elsewhere, however, the stories are explicitly connected with mythic tales of the poets: ἢ γὰρ οὐ ταῦτα σεμνολογοῦσιν οἱ ποιηταὶ περὶ τῶν θεῶν.[53] Lucian frequently makes it clear that the stories the poets tell of the gods are not to be trusted; Tychiades, in *The Lover of Lies*, for example, says of the poets that they are ἀοιδίμους ἄνδρας, ἐγγράφῳ τῷ ψεύσματι κεχρημένους, ὡς μὴ μόνους ἐξαπατᾶν τοὺς τότε ἀκούοντας σφῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μέχρις ἡμῶν διικνεῖσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος ἐκ διαδοχῆς ἐν καλλίστοις ἔπεσι καὶ μέτροις φυλαττόμενον.[54] Significantly, however, Philocles' opponent Tychiades also suggests that these tales of the gods are so widespread that anyone who doubts them is considered a sacrilegious fool.[55] Some defence is made of the poets; Hesiod is made to claim that he expressed poetic license,[56] whilst Philocles suggests that the stories of the gods are designed to delight rather than to instruct.[57] Whatever Lucian's true thoughts on the value of the poetic stories of the gods, it is evident that they have nothing at all to do with religious life expressed through ritual and sacrifice. To this extent, we must

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[51] Luc. *Deor. conc*. 5: 'how are we to be surprised that men despise us when they see such laughable and bizarre gods?' The criticism is made in the context of the half-human herd of satyrs and the like that accompany Dionysus. We may strongly suspect that καταφρονέω has cultic connotations: if one despises the gods, one will not continue to make offerings.

[52] Luc. *Sat.* 5. Kronos responds by saying that Homer and Hesiod could have had no definite knowledge of him (ibid. 6).

[53] Luc. *De sacr.* 5: 'do the poets not gravely tell these things about the gods?''.

[54] Luc. *Philops.* 2: 'famous men who employed written lies, so that they not only deceived those who listen to them then, but transmitted the lie through succeeding generations right down to us, encased in the finest words and metre'. A similar sentiment is expressed in *Ver. hist.* 1.3 and *Iupp. trag.* 39.

[55] Luc. *Philops.* 3: ἀσεβὴς οὗτος γε καὶ ἀνόητος αὐτοῖς ἔδοξεν οὕτω προδήλοις καὶ ἀληθέσι πράγμασιν ἀπιστῶν· εἰς τοσοῦτον ἐπικρατεῖ τὸ ψεῦδος ('they think him impious and senseless for not believing in such evident and genuine facts, to such an extent does the lie dominate').

[56] Luc. *Hes.* 5.

[57] Luc. *Philops.* 4.

support the distinction made by Varro's tripartite theology. Aristides and Tatian are clearly mistaken to associate the stories on which their arguments are based with the cult of the gods which they are attempting to undermine. Here we see a clear difference between Christian attitudes and those of non-Christians, both in the Near East and elsewhere in the Graeco-Roman world.

4.4   *Excursus:* the tripartite theology: philosophy, myth and the dangers of poetry

This point is clearly demonstrated by the volume of material criticising the poets for their presentation of the gods, and accusing them of lying. This was noted above in the works of Lucian; the argument existed as early as Xenophanes.[58] The most famous use of this argument is found in Plato's *Republic*. Plato does not particularly have anything against poetry in itself;[59] however, he clearly objects to the fact that the poets spoke at a third remove from their subjects.[60] Whilst this undermines their authority on the subject matter, and therefore makes them unable to act as suitable teachers, it is not clear how Plato connects this

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[58] *KRS* 166; Lesher argued that Xenophanes' scepticism was primarily focussed on *Homeric* religious attitudes (1978:1). See also Most 2003:309. The widespread use of such objections shows that they may have been commonly accepted, but that does not mean that everybody did so without reservation: "it is hard to imagine many others beside Plato having a use for the idea of poetry as *exclusively* a tool for education and the formation of character" (Rowe 1984:146; see also Rives 2007:38). It was observed in the previous chapter that Aristides grouped authors and poets together, almost certainly to highlight tension between the two (Aristides 20.6-21.1; see above, 3.2.3), which would also suggest that such discussion was relatively commonplace.

[59] Asmis defended Plato against accusations that he lacked an understanding of poetry as a form of emotional expression (1992:346). Similarly, Rowe argued: "that Plato adopts this narrow and restrictive attitude to the products of art is not because he is unaware of the pleasure it arouses; rather it is because of his awareness of it. Art sinks deep into the soul, and we inevitably carry away with us whatever character it presents to us" (1984:145; Pl. *Resp.* 595b). O'Connor has highlighted considerable poetic influence in the *Republic*, and argued that Socrates was simultaneously presented as both Odysseus and Teiresias in order to act as both adventurer and guide (2007:59-63). It is clear that Plato's objections are not made on the grounds of taste, for Socrates comes to the decision to expel poets "with a sense of loss and an almost embarrassed reluctance" (ibid. 56).

[60] Pl. *Resp.* 599d. The issue of poetic inspiration is also raised at length in *Ion*. See Asmis 1992, Nussbaum 2003:226-228, Rowe 1984:149.

with the issue of active ethical harm. [61] Instead, the speaker, Socrates, argues that poets

should be excluded from the ideal state because of their corrupting influence on the young:

the young, he says, are incapable of distinguishing between what is the underlying meaning

(ὑπόνοια) and what is not.[62] As a result, they do not understand that much of what the poets

say is false.[63] However, it is not the fact that these tales are false that is the problem: οὐδ' ἂν

εἰ ἦν ἀληθῆ ὤμην δεῖν ῥαδίως οὕτως λέγεσθαι πρὸς ἄφρωνάς τε καὶ νέους.[64] The fact that

the depiction of the gods is false is secondary in importance, in Plato's view, to the fact that

these stories are held up in such a way that inevitably encourages imitation.[65] In particular,

the speaker observes that, if the gods fight among themselves, as in *Iliad* 20, how can we

expect the guardians of the state to work together to the benefit of all?[66] Similarly, if a man

were to harm his father, he would simply be following the example of Zeus, who imprisoned

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[61] "Plato certainly never spells out the connection between the metaphysics of imitation and the charge of ethical harm" (Moss 2007:415). Moss argued that poetry corrupted simply *because* it was imitation (ibid. 429); the appearance is ontologically distinct from the object (not the Form), and that by copying the appearance (of a bed, in this instance), the object itself is *not* copied (ibid. 418ff). A realistic painting which captures the *appearance* rather than the *reality* has great power to deceive, and this is also true (to a far greater extent) of poetry (ibid. 422). However, it seems that Plato is "less concerned with the factual or literal veracity of myth than with its value as a means of conveying ethical or religious truths" (Murray 1996:135). I do not deal in any great length here with the issue of the Forms, and that of poetic inspiration, as it has no significant bearing on the issue of morality, either of the divine or of human worshippers. For discussion of Forms in this context, see Moss 2007, Rowe 1984 and 2003, Sedley 2003.

[62] Pl. *Resp.* 378d: ὁ γὰρ νέος οὐχ οἷός τε κρίνειν ὅτι τε ὑπόνοια καὶ ὁ μή ('for the young are not able to judge what is the underlying meaning and what is not'; my thanks to Dr. Phil Horky for suggesting this translation). Elsewhere, Plato argues that λώβη ἔοικεν εἶναι πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα τῆς τῶν ἀκουόντων διανοίας, ὅσοι μὴ ἔχουσι φάρμακον τὸ εἰδέναι αὐτὰ οἷα τυγχάνει ὄντα ("it is a corruption of the minds of all those who hear it, those who do not have as a remedy the knowledge of how these things really are") (ibid. 595b). The effect of allegorical interpretation was that it "served to make other modes of thinking about the divine subordinate to philosophy; the underlying assumption was that only philosophy revealed the true significance of traditional myth, art, and cult" (Rives 2007:39). See also Murray 1996:140. See also Plut. *Mor.* 355c-d: οὕτω δὴ τὰ περὶ θεῶν ἀκούσασα καὶ δεχομένη παρὰ τῶν ἐξηγουμένων τὸν μῦθον ὁσίως καὶ φιλοσόφως, καὶ δρῶσα μὲν ἀεὶ καὶ διαφυλάττουσα τῶν ἱερῶν τὰ νενομισμένα, τοῦ δ' ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἔχειν περὶ θεῶν μηδὲν οἰομένη μᾶλλον αὐτοῖς μήτε θύσειν μήτε ποιήσειν κεχαρισμένον, οὐδὲν ἔλαττον ἀποφεύξῃ κακὸν ἀθεότητος δεισιδαιμονίαν ('if, then, you listen to the stories about the gods in this way, accepting them from those who interpret the story reverently and philosophically, and if you always perform and observe the established rites of worship, and believe that no sacrifice that you can offer, no deed that you may do will be more likely to find favour with the gods than your belief in their true nature, you may avoid superstition which is no less an evil than atheism').

[63] Pl. *Resp.* 377a. See also 377e, in which the speaker criticises fables for bearing no resemblance to their subjects (sc. the gods).

[64] Ibid. 378a: 'even if they were true, we should not be so quick to tell them to the young and the senseless'.

[65] See also Pl. *Prtg.* 325e-326a.

[66] Pl. *Resp.* 378c.

Kronos,[67] and a god who changes his form will only encourage mankind to be deceitful.[68] All three of these arguments are used by the Syriac translator of Aristides in his attack on the moral example of the gods; it is plausible that his argument is based on this section of the *Republic*, and that he is relying on Plato's own arguments.

However, Plato's assessment that the gods are a poor moral example (which Meijer described as a "decency criterion")[69] is not actually the point that he is making. Far more damaging is the fact that it leads us to a misleading understanding of the divine, in particular in relation to the notion of justice.[70] The poets[71] present the relationship between mortals and their allotted fate in a manner of which Plato strongly disapproves. He rejects the suggestion that the divine gives both good and *undeserved* evil:[72] god is entirely good and must always be spoken of as such.[73] He cannot, therefore, be presented as dispensing arbitrary justice: the only evil to come from god is just punishment, and this cannot truly be called evil: λεκτέον

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[67] Ibid. 378b. For detailed analysis of this passage, see Murray 1996:139.

[68] Pl. *Resp.* 380d-382e. O'Connor, however, emphasises the fact that Socrates has inversed this idea: the gods have no need to lie, whilst mankind occasionally must ("humans may lie, or disguise themselves, for protection from enemies, or to help friends who cannot be reformed simply by unadorned arguments, say", 2007:81-2). Needless to say, when Aristides adopts the deceit of the gods for his polemic, he does not use this interpretation.

[69] Meijer 1981:221.

[70] This also appears to be true of the Homeric description of the underworld, which Plato attacks in 386a-d "not so much because it is false, but because it undermines the courage and patriotism of the city's soldiers" (O'Connor 2007:58, 386a-d). Plato refers to *Od.* 11.489-91; he uses the same passage in Book 7 of the *Republic* (516d-e) to undermine the connection of a man to the city. See O'Connor 2007:58ff for fuller discussion of this passage.

[71] Nussbaum (2003:216) argued that the tragedians and comic poets are the primary focus of this section, and that "Plato treats Homer as, basically, one among the tragic poets, though he is well aware of the distinction between direct representation and narration" (ibid. 215).

[72] Pl. *Resp* 379d. See, for example, *Il.* 24.527-8, 24.530, 24.532. Murray discussed the differences between Plato's quotation and the transmitted version of the Homeric text (1996:143). See also Versnel 2011:157-8.

[73] Pl. *Resp.* 379b. This must be the difference between appearance and reality which the poets as imitators fail to observe and which causes such damage (Moss 2007:429). See also Murray 1996:142.

ὡς ὁ μὲν θεὸς δίκαιά τε καὶ ἀγαθὰ ἠργάζετο, οἱ δὲ ὠνίναντο κολαζόμενοι.[74] Occasionally, the error of the poets is explicit, as in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*:

> Μοῦσαι μέν θ᾽ ἅμα πᾶσαι ἀμειβόμεναι ὀπὶ καλῇ
>
> ὑμνεῦσίν ῥα θεῶν δῶρ᾽ ἄμβροτα ἠδ᾽ ἀνθρώπων
>
> τλημοσύνας, ὅσ᾽ ἔχοντες ὑπ᾽ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι
>
> ζώουσ᾽ ἀφραδέες καὶ ἀμήχανοι, οὐδὲ δύνανται
>
> εὑρέμεναι θανάτοιό τ᾽ ἄκος καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ:[75]

The Muses, and through them the poets, encourage mankind to regard their sufferings as the works of the gods, and this leads to despair. The wise man is self-sufficient: in aiming to become god-like, we aim to make ourselves stable, secure and immune to the slings and arrows of the world.[76] The problem with the poets, seemingly, is that "the grandiose aspiration to self-sufficiency is repeatedly punctured":[77] if the gods dispense arbitrary justice, then no-one can be truly self-sufficient, because we are all subject to the whims of the divine. To this extent, Schopenhauer's interpretation of tragedy, that the tragedians remind us of our vulnerability in an unpredictable world and encourage a life of pessimistic contemplation,[78] is entirely at odds with Plato's view that we should strive for self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the

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[74] Pl. *Resp.* 380b: 'they must say that God does only just and good works, and that they benefitted from the correction'. See also *Prtg.* 324b, *Gorg.* 476-7. Poets "should not say that god makes men miserable by punishing them; rather that the wicked are wretched because they need punishment, which god supplies in order to benefit them" (Murray 1996:145). See also Meijer 1981:261-2, Mackenzie 1981; MacMullen argued that this was the role of demons (1981:82).

[75] *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 189-93: 'all the Muses together, answering voice with beautiful voice, sing of the immortal gifts of the gods, and of the despair of men, all that they receive from the undying gods; how they live senselessly and helplessly, and can find no defence against death or old age'.

[76] Morgan argued that this position was a compromise between two existing positions: that man could become god, and that absolute limits existed to the life of man, held by 'alternative cults' and 'traditional religion' respectively (1992:231). It has already been argued that it is inappropriate to drawn such distinctions between alternative and traditional cult (above, 3.3.4), but Morgan is correct to highlight two opposing perspectives on man's relationship with the gods.

[77] Nussbaum 2003:224. See also Versnel 2011:152-70.

[78] For a helpful summary of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Hegel on tragedy, see Nussbaum 2003:222.

heroes of poetry react in unseemly fashion: we are not to grieve over our fortune, because it is not allotted to us arbitrarily.[79] Poetry is dangerous, then, not simply because it may encourage morally aberrant behaviour, but because it endorses an attitude towards the divine that will prevent us from becoming god-like.[80]

Other authors are also critical of poetic notions of the gods: Plutarch, for example, accuses them of δεισιδαιμονία,[81] and accuses them of a contradictory attitude: σκόπει δ' ὅτι τῷ θεῷ καλὰς μὲν ἐπικλήσεις ἀεὶ καὶ φιλανθρώπους, ἄγρια δ' ἔργα καὶ βάρβαρα καὶ Γαλατικὰ προστίθησιν.[82] Unlike Plato, however, Plutarch does not focus on the *examples* set by the gods: like Aristides,[83] he appears to argue that the conduct attributed to the gods would (*if it were true*, and this is the fundamental distinction between Plutarch and Aristides) invalidate their status as gods.

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[79] "The ethical objection raised against tragedy is that it shows good people encountering reversals in fortune and grieving as if these had great significance" (ibid:226). Cf. Asmis 1992:347. Moss (2007:432) argued that the object of imitation "is human action, and in particular *excellent* human action"; it is true that this is a major problem for Plato, but does not account for the worries found in the stories about the gods.

[80] "Socrates has shown that Homer and the others have nothing but a semblance of wisdom. Now he shows that this semblance is a corruption of the soul. By revealing the moral ugliness of traditional poetry and its power to corrupt even the best citizens, he reduces it to the lowest level of abomination, so that it must surely be purged" (Asmis 1992:357).

[81] Plut. *Mor.* 1051e.

[82] Ibid. 1049b: 'consider how he always attributes to God good and benevolent names, but cruel, barbarous and Galatian deeds'. Russell argued that Plutarch's οἱ δαίμονες, like Plato's, were created to fill the gap between the divine and punishment (1968:135).

[83] Although Plutarch emphasises the importance of ἀπάθεια: this is not indifference but imperturbability through the domestication of τὰ πάθημα (Krentz 2008:130; see also Wright 2008:140).

4.5 Near Eastern Christian attitudes to the morality of man

4.5.1 The Syriac translator of Aristides

This leads us to the second key aspect of morality that our Christian authors attack: that of the individual worshipper. The title of this chapter demonstrates the importance of an ethical way of life to Christianity: the point is emphasised repeatedly throughout the New Testament, encouraging Christians away from gentile lifestyles which are characterised particularly by drunkenness, greed and sexual immorality, as noted in the introduction to this chapter. For the Syriac translator of Aristides in particular, the importance of the mythic stories of the gods was that they led mankind astray, and he concludes his apology by discussing the moral practices of Jews, Christians and gentiles.[84] His treatment of gentile morality is uncompromisingly brutal: *ywnyʾ dyn ʾw mlkʾ. mṭl dsʿryn ṣbwtʾ mškrtʾ bmdmkʾ dʿm dkrʾ: wdʿm ʾmʾ wḥtʾ wbrtʾ: gwḥkʾ dṭnpwthwn ʿl krsṭynʾ mhpkyn lh. krsṭynʾ dyn. kʾnyn wḥsyn*.[85] The similarity with the moral tales of the gods once again emphasises his view that the gods acts as poor models for their worshippers. Surprisingly, however, this is the only real attack on gentile morality in the *Apology*. Its purpose, however, is abundantly clear: it is intended to act as a plea for conversion, away from ignorance: *wytyrʾyt ḥysyn ʿlyhwn. ʾyk nšʾ dḥsyryn mn ydʿtʾ. wḥlpyhwn mqrbyn ṣlwtʾ ʾyk dntwbwn mn ṭʿywthwn. mʾ dyn dgdš wtb ḥd mnhwn. mtkḥd mn krsṭynʾ: mn swʿrnʾ dsʿyryn lh. wmwdʾ lʾlhʾ kd ʾmr: ddlʾ bʾydʿtʾ hlyn sʿrt. wmdkʾ lbh wmštbqyn lh ḥṭhwhy. mṭl ddlʾ bʾydʿtʾ sʿr ʾnwn. bzbnʾ qdmyʾ: kd mgdp hwʾ wmṣḥʾ*

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[84] It is this section which O'Ceallaigh suggested was a later Christian interpolation into a Jewish text (1958:227-30; see above, 1.4.2). However, similarities with the rest of the text make this unlikely. In particular, Aristides emphasises the divine as a moral exemplar: *wmtdmyn bʾlhʾ: byd rḥmt ʾnšʾ dʾyt lhwn* ('they imitate God by the power of the love of man which they have', 22.6). This is clearly consistent with the mythic stories which Aristides explores elsewhere. His discussion of pagan morality, and sexual ethics in particular, is also very consistent. Although I do not intend to deal with Jewish morality in any great length here, as it has no bearing on the question at hand, it is worth noting that Aristides' attitude is markedly ambiguous: at times, he is very positive, whilst elsewhere he claims that their worship is directed towards angels rather than to God (23.1).

[85] Ibid. 27.2: 'but the Greeks, o King, because they practice obscene things in sleeping with males, and with mother and sister and daughter, turn the ridicule of their defilement upon the Christians; but the Christians are upright and holy'.

hwᵓ lᵓydᶜthwn šryrtᵓ dkrsṭynᵓ.[86] By confessing his sins, the gentile's heart is able to be

cleansed, and he is redeemed. Conversion appears to be a matter of changing one's way of

life; however, the logic of Aristides' argument also makes the need for a change of God

implicitly evident. Worship of gentile gods leads to an immoral lifestyle, whilst worship of

the true God leads to a blessed one. Rejection of sins can therefore only be accomplished by

ceasing to worship the false gods who lead one astray. This is rarely made explicit, which is

somewhat surprising: Aristides has spent so long ridiculing the gods for their weaknesses that

one would expect a more concrete command to reject them and to follow the true God.[87]

The connection between one's God and one's ethical lifestyle to Aristides' apologetic

is made clear in the far more extensive section which is dedicated to the lives of Christians.[88]

Their way of life is determined by the *pwqdnᵓ* ('commandments')[89] that are handed down by

God: again, the divine acts as the moral exemplar. The results of these commandments are

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[86] Ibid. 27.3-27.4: 'all the more abundantly do they pity them as men who are lacking in knowledge, and on their behalf offer up prayers in order that they might turn from their error. And when it happens that one of them turns they are ashamed before the Christians of the deeds that have been done by him. He confesses to God when he says 'I did these things without knowledge' [i.e. in ignorance], and he cleanses his heart and he is forgiven his sins, because he committed them without knowledge previously, when he was blaspheming and cursing the true knowledge of the Christians'. See also Pouderon and Pierre. 2003:69. So prominent is the connection between ethics and morality that Pouderon and Pierre suggested that Aristides himself had been converted by seeing the moral conduct of other Christians (2003:80); Aristides himself says nothing of his own conversion, however.

[87] The suggestion appears only once in the discussion: *pqḥᵓ hy lhwn gyr dnsgdwn lᵓlhᵓ šryrᵓ: ytyr mn dnsgdwn lzmm dlᵓ pwršn* ('it is better for them to worship the true God than to worship a buzzing which is without intelligence', 28.1). On the connection between the rejection of God and morality, cf. Pouderon and Pierre 2003:70: "c'est pour ignorer le vrai Dieu que Grecs et barbares se livrent à mille turpitudes".

[88] Rendel Harris discussed the relationship between this section of the *Apology* and the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*; although there are similarities in the description of Christian ethics, he argued that Aristides' presentation is "vastly superior", and that his treatment "can only be paralleled for beauty and spirituality in the pages of Tertullian" (1893:63).

[89] This word is repeatedly emphasised in this section: 23.3, 24.6, 25.4, 26.2. In 25.4, it is made clear that the commandments are received from *mšyḥᵓ* ('Christ'), which suggests that it is not the Levitical commandments which Aristides has in mind, but rather Jesus' teachings: possibly, given the emphasis placed in the text on caring for one's neighbours, he is thinking specifically of the command in *John* 13:34: ἐντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἠγάπασα ὑμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους ('I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another: just as I loved you, so should you love one another'). See also *1 John* 2:7-8. Pouderon and Pierre discussed the distinction which Aristides makes between Jesus' teachings and the Torah: "juifs et chrétiens n'en puisent pas l'inspiration aux mêmes sources" (2003:65).

clear: where the gentiles are incestuous and adulterous, the Christians *lʾ gyryn wlʾ mznyn*;[90] in particular, their wives are *dkyn ʾyk btwltʾ* ('pure like virgins') and their daughters *knykn* ('modest'),[91] in distinct contrast to Aphrodite, for example. While the gentile gods (and, by extension, the gentiles themselves) are greedy and mercenary, the Christians *lʾ kymyn ʿl gwʿlnʾ. wlʾ rgyn dlʾ dylhwn*.[92] While gentile gods fought amongst themselves and murdered other family members, the Christians *lʾbʾ wlʾmʾ myqryn. wlʾylyn dqrybyn lhwn mṭʾbyn*.[93] Aristides repeatedly emphasises their humility[94] and charity;[95] there is no explicit contrast drawn with gentile ethics by these virtues, but it is once again clear that they live in this way because *pqd ʾnwn mryʾ ʾlhhwn*.[96] Aristides' attempts at conversion, so clear in the attack on gentile morality, are evident here, too. The Christians live in this admirable manner not simply because they have been commanded, but because they will be rewarded: *mlyhwn dyn wpwqdnyhwn ʾw mlkʾ. wšwbhrʾ dpwlḥnhwn. wswky ʾgrʾ dpwrʿnhwn: ʾyk swʿrnh dḥd ḥd mnhwn: dmskyn lh bʿlmʾ ʾḥrnʾ*.[97] Admittedly, Aristides does not talk explicitly about judgement which awaits the unrighteous, but here the reward of the Christians is surely intended to stand in contrast to the stumbling and ignorance of gentile life.

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[90] Aristides 23.4: 'do not commit adultery and do not fornicate'.
[91] Ibid. 24.1.
[92] Ibid. 23.4: 'do not conceal a deposit (or something held in trust); they do not covet that which is not theirs'.
[93] Ibid. 23.4: 'honour their father and mother, and do good to those who are their neighbours'.
[94] Ibid. 24.3.
[95] Ibid. 24.3,4,5, 25.6.
[96] Ibid. 25.1: 'the Lord their God commanded them'.
[97] Ibid. 26.2: 'their words and commandments, o King, and the glory of their labours and the expectation of the reward of repayment, according to the deeds of each one of them, which they expect in another world'. See also 24.1. Pouderon and Pierre suggested that Aristides may have been converted because of the attraction of the Christian moral lifestyle, and that this would explain the prominence of morality in the text (2003:70). This is a particularly tempting suggestion, and would explain why there is less emphasis on the saving work of Christ. Cf. Justin *2 Apol.* 12.1. However, Pouderon and Pierre also observed that a large part of the theological justification for conversion, which appears in the Greek of *Barlaam and Josaphat* (15.1-2), is absent from the Syriac (2003:382-5). If this passage was part of the original apology, then the Syriac translator has omitted it to emphasise his moral focus at the expense of faith and grace; for more on the relationship between the Syriac translation and the text of *Barlaam and Josaphat*, see above, 1.4.1.

Conversion is not the sole aim of this section, however. This becomes clear in the very final section, when Aristides writes: *nšttqwn mkyl lšnywhn dmmllyn sryqwtʾ wʿšqy lkrsṭyn'. wnmllwn mkyl šrrʾ.*[98] This is apologetic in its true sense, intended to defend against accusations of immorality. In the concluding part of this thesis, I shall address the reasons for Christian persecution, but one possibility, raised by Sherwin-White, is that the Christians suffered because of their perceived immoralitites, or *flagitia*, most prominently incest and cannibalism (prompted by a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper and the Christian practice of calling one another brother and sister).[99] This may provide evidence for Sherwin-White's theory, insofar as the Syriac translator of Aristides felt it necessary to justify the moral standard of Christian practice. The length of the apologetic in this section might suggest that this is a key goal of Aristides; however, in the vast majority of cases, as demonstrated above, Christian conduct is explicitly contrasted with that of the gentiles, suggesting that true apologetic remains a less important aim than conversion.[100]

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[98] Aristides 27.6-28.1: 'now let the tongues of those speaking emptiness who slander the Christians be silenced, and let them now speak the truth'. Pouderon and Pierre argued that, in fact, this entire section should not be considered "une exhortation à la conversion" but "un appel à la tolerance" (2003:394-5).

[99] Sherwin-White 1964:23-5; Beard, North and Price suggested alternative reasons for the charges: namely that heretical cults actually practiced incest and cannibalism, or that they were rhetorical exaggerations familiar to the presentation of any barbarian group (1998a:226). It is possible that the references to incest (27.2) are an attempt to divert just such accusations away from the Christians; see below (5.3.1) for further discussion.

[100] As argued above, the two are clearly not mutually exclusive, however. Palmer highlighted the same approach in the second-century apologist Theophilius (1983:250).

4.5.2 <u>Tatian</u>

Tatian, too, is far more concerned with the morality of man than of the gods. His *Address* is specifically written as an answer to Greek philosophy with its moral concerns. He describes how he sought out wisdom, and experimented with different cults, but was so appalled at the immorality he experienced in some of them that he immediately abandoned them in favour of Christianity.[101] He immediately begins with a fierce attack on the moral corruption of famous Greek philosophers. Diogenes, he says, was greedy and died of over-eating raw octopus;[102] Aristippus ἐν πορφυρίδι περιπατῶν ἀξιοπίστως ἠσωτεύσατο;[103] Plato was a glutton;[104] Aristotle ἀμαθῶς ὅρον τῇ προνοίᾳ θεὶς καὶ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν ἐν οἷς ηρέσκετο περιγράψας, λίαν ἀπαιδεύτως Ἀλέξανδρον τὸ μεμηνὸς μειράκιον ἐκολάκευεν.[105] I shall deal with Tatian's attacks on philosophy itself later in the chapter; however, it is very clear that these codes lead one away from, rather than towards, an upright life.[106] Surprisingly, however, he does not attack individual areas of morality in any great length: only greed is particularly targeted.[107] Tatian's main argument in this respect is that the moral values of gentiles are revealed by those whom they honour: in honouring Polyneices and Eteocles, for example, they demonstrate their high regard for fratricide.[108] Similarly, by honouring 'debauched' poets like Sappho, they honour lust and sexual immorality.[109] Unlike the Syriac translator of Aristides, however, who attacked gentile immorality (with no distinction between barbarian and Greek, such as we find elsewhere in the text), Tatian acknowledges

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[101] Tatian *Or.* 29.1. He specifically identifies cults led by ἀνδρογύνων συνισταμένας ('effeminate associates'), presumably the rites of Cybele, and those involving unnecessary ritual slaughter.

[102] Ibid. 2.1.

[103] Ibid. 2.1: 'walking round in a purple cloak, debauched himself most respectably'.

[104] Ibid. 2.1.

[105] Ibid. 2.1-2: 'having stupidly established a limit to foresight and defined happiness as those things which he enjoyed, used to flatter that wild lad Alexander in a most uneducated manner'.

[106] There are exceptions: he acknowledges Socrates as one of the few good men (3.2).

[107] He argues that greed is needless, since everyone is equal in death (11.1-2). Tatian was later accused of extreme asceticism, but such tendencies are scarcely noticeable in the *Address* (Hunt 2003:64).

[108] Tatian *Or.* 34.1.

[109] Ibid. 33.2.

that there are different values and practices amongst different peoples: νομίζουσιν γοῦν Ἕλληνες φευκτὸν εἶναι τὸ συγγενέσθαι μητρί, κάλλιστον δὲ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐστιν ἐπιτήδευμα παρὰ τοῖς Περσῶν μάγοις· καὶ παιδεραστία μὲν ὑπὸ βαρβάρων διώκεται, προνομίας δὲ ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων ἠξίωται, παίδων ἀγέλας ὥσπερ ἵππων φορβάδων συναγείρειν αὐτῶν πειρωμένων.[110] It does not appear, however, that one group is any less prone to vice than any other: it is simply that they prefer different kinds of vice.

Tatian does, however, agree with the Syriac translator of Aristides in emphasising the connection between morality and judgement. He argues that mankind was given free will so that their acts might be judged accordingly: ὅπως ὁ μὲν φαῦλος δικαίως κολάζηται δι’ αὐτὸν γεγονὼς μοχθηρός, ὁ δὲ δίκαιος χάριν τῶν ἀνδραγαθημάτων ἀξίως ἐπαινῆται κατὰ τὸ αὐτεξούσοιν τοῦ θεοῦ μὴ παραβὰς τὸ βούλημα.[111] Tatian elsewhere criticises gentile notions of judgement, by arguing that mankind are judged by God, and not by Minos and Rhadamanthus, the judges of souls in the Classical underworld.[112] It is possible, he says, for the spirit to escape death, but this spirit belongs only to those who live uprightly.[113] Although not stated explicitly, the consequences for the one who does not live uprightly are clear: such a life will lead to death. However, for Tatian, conversion is based on the recognition of the

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[110] Ibid. 28.1: 'for the Greeks think that intercourse with one's mother is to be avoided, but such a practice is highly regarded among the Persian magi. Paedophilia is condemned by barbarians, but considered a privilege by the Romans, who try to gather herds of boys as if they were horses in pasture'. This is one of the only occasions in the text in which the Romans are identified as a distinct group from the Greeks, presumably to emphasise the sheer variety of immoral practice. Hawthorne has highlighted similarities between this passage and other gentile authors, such as Dio Chrysostom (*Euboikos* 133), and argued that Tatian is doing nothing more than "showing his sympathy for certain pagan writers" (1964:180; see also Puech 1903:42).

[111] Tatian *Or.* 7.1-2: 'this is so that the bad might be justly punished, since he has become wretched through his own fault, and the just man might be rightly praised for his good deeds, since in his free will he did not violate the will of God'. Unlike the apostle Paul, however, Tatian does not appear to embrace man's total depravity: the soul retains ἔναυσμα τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ ('a spark of its own power, 13.2) which can be misdirected. See also Hawthorne 1964:173 and Hunt 2003:65.

[112] Tatian *Or.* 6.1. Minos and Rhadamanthus also appear in Aristides' work, but no mention is made of their judgements.

[113] Ibid. 13.1,3. He also suggests that man's failure to reach heaven is due, in part, to the malevolent rage of demons or gods (16.1): again, we see the prominence of the divine in their influence on mankind's morality. Here, however, it is a little more direct than as a simple moral exemplar.

true God, rather than the changing of one's lifestyle: whilst the two are connected, he emphasises the need for faith in God considerably more than Aristides.[114]

Like the Syriac translator of Aristides, Tatian also focusses on the ethical practices of Christians in order to provide a defence against accusations of immorality. Here we see far more explicitly the charges of cannibalism and incest that were raised against Christians: τί βλάπτομεν ὑμᾶς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες; τί δὲ τοὺς λόγῳ θεοῦ κατακολουθοῦντας καθάπερ μιαρωτάτους μεμισήκατε; παρ᾽ ἡμῖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνθρωποφαγία· ψευδομάρτυρες οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι γεγόνατε· παρ᾽ ὑμῖν δὲ Πέλοψ δεῖπνον τῶν θεῶν γίνεται κἂν Ποσειδῶνος ἐρώμενος, καί Κρόνος τοὺς υἱοὺς αναλίσκει, καί ὁ Ζεὺς τὴν Μῆτιν καταπίνει.[115] Notice again the close correlation between true apologetic and hostile polemic in this passage. Tatian also seems to defend social practice, by affirming that they obey the laws, honour the emperor and serve (possibly in the army).[116] The idea that the good conduct of the Christians will not only defend them against their accusers, but win converts in the process because of the attractive nature of their way of life is one which features in the New Testament;[117] the way in which Tatian turns these accusations against the accusers suggests that he has a very similar aim in mind.

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[114] "Tatian's theory of salvation revolves entirely around the prophetic revelation of knowledge of God (or the truth) and the consequent bestowal of the divine spirit. His theory has nothing whatsoever to do with possession of a divine spark; without direct aid from the spirit, men incline down towards matter, presumably with the divine spark in tow" (Hunt 2003:71).

[115] Ibid. 25.3: 'what harm do we do to you, men of Greece? Why are you disgusted by those who follow the word of God as if they were the most defiled of all? There is no cannibalism amongst us - you educated folk created this false tale. According to you, however, Pelops became the gods' meal, although he was loved by Poseidon; Kronos, too, consumed his sons and Zeus swallowed Metis'.

[116] Ibid. 14.1.

[117] *1 Peter* 2:12-15. See also Alexander 1999:39.

4.5.3 Meliton

Let us now look at the third of our authors. On the surface, Meliton is extremely concerned with morality. At the very beginning of his text, he announces his intention: *lʾ hwʾ bʿgl pšyq lmytyw lʾwrḥʾ tryṣtʾ lbr ʾnšʾ: ʾyn ʾ dnwgrʾ sgyʾʾ qdm ʾtthd bṭwʿyy.*[118] *ṭwʿyy* ('error') and *sklwtʾ* ('transgression' or 'foolishness', and largely synonymous with *ṭwʿyy*), as well as *ḥṭytʾ* ('sin') and *byštʾ* ('evil'), appear frequently in the text.[119] This would appear to suggest that Meliton is advocating a change of lifestyle, rejecting the immoralities of the gentile world. However, it quickly becomes apparent that this is not the case, because Meliton gives clear definitions of what he means by 'error': *mn ṭwʿyy hw gyr hwyn hlyn klhyn byštʾ. ryšʾ dyn dṭwyy hdʾ hy. dkd lʾlhʾ ʾnš lʾ nhwʾ ydʿ: wḥlp ʾlhʾ lmdm dlʾ hwʾ ʾlhʾ nhwʾ sgd.*[120] The synonymous *sklwtʾ* is given a very similar definition*: sklwtʾ dyn hdʾ hy dʾmr ʾnʾ. dʾn ʾnš nšbwq lmdm dšryrʾyt ʾytwhy: wnplwḥ lmdm dšryrʾyt lʾ ʾytwhy. ʾytwhy dyn mdm dšryrʾyt ʾytwhy wmtqrʾ ʾlhʾ. wšryrʾyt ʾytwhy. wkl mdm bḥylh qʾm.*[121] Both *ṭwʿyy* and *sklwtʾ* describe the worship of a false or non-existent god in place of the true God, rather than acting as terms of moral invective. He also defines *ḥṭytʾ* ('sin'): *ʾyknʾ lʾ nštkḥwn bḥṭynʾ rbʾ: ʾylyn dmḥlpyn lʾlhʾ rbʾ bmlthwn: bhlyn ṣbwtʾ dbpwqdnʾ qymyn kmʾ dqymyn.*[122] Although he does not explicitly define *byštʾ* ('evil'), Meliton gives us a clear indication as to what constitutes it: *whdʾ hy byštʾ dʿlmʾ: dʾylyn dsgdyn wdḥlyn lmʾ dlʾ mrgš.*[123] The same idea is repeated again and again: rather that dealing with the way of life of the gentile, and criticising their greed,

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[118] Meliton 1.2: 'it is not easy to quickly bring a man to an upright way, the sort who was previously held for many years in error'.

[119] Unsurprisingly so: as Halbertal and Margalit demonstrated, 'error' was understood to be the root of idolatry in philosophical approaches to the subject (1992a:2).

[120] Meliton 8.4: 'for from error arise all of those evils, but the chief of the errors is this, when a man does not know God, and instead of God worships that which is not God'

[121] Ibid. 1.6: 'but the error which I speak of is this: when a man leaves whatever truly exists and worships whatever does not truly exist. But there is that which truly exists; it is called God, and he truly exists; everything exists in his strength'.

[122] Ibid. 2.4: 'how will they not be found in great sinfulness, those who exchange the great God in their words for those possessions which continue to exist according to the commandment as long as they exist?'.

[123] Ibid. 3.4: 'for such is the evil of the world of those who worship and fear that which does not feel'.

lust and so on, all of these concepts are essentially synonymous and attack the failure to recognise God, and to worship that which does not exist, namely the *ṣlm ʾ* or image, in his place. For the Syriac translator of Aristides, in contrast, the sins of the gentiles by which they were condemned were immoral acts, particularly incest and adultery. For Meliton, these acts are not the issue: far more important is the rejection of the true God. Spiritual error, rather than a moral one, is the key element here.

This is perhaps the strongest argument available for treating Meliton as a Christian author. It is clear that one's deliverance depends not on one's way of life but upon the recognition and worship of God: *sm qdmyk kwlhyn ṣbwt ʾ. wmḥw ʾ lk. d ʾn btr byšt ʾ t ʾzl ttḥyb b ʿbd ʾ byš ʾ. w ʾn btr ṭybwt ʾ. twbl mnh ṭbt ʾ sgy ʾt ʾ. ʿm ḥy ʾ dl ʿlm dl ʾ mytyn.*[124] Since 'evil' is the failure to recognise God, it is by this criterion that the gentile will be condemned, and not by their way of life (despite the emphasis on 'evil deeds'). The use of *ṭybwt ʾ* makes this even more explicit: althouth I have translated it 'goodness' because of the contrast with *byšt ʾ* ('evil'), *ṭybwt ʾ* is used in the Peshitta to render χάρις, and could easily be translated as 'grace'.[125] Although Jesus himself claims μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας· οὐχ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι, ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι,[126] salvation in the New Testament is achieved by faith in God (and in his Son) and not by a morally upright life (represented by the Law). Paul makes this abundantly clear in the book of *Romans*: he begins by observing that οὐχ ἔστι δίκαιος οὐδὲ εἷς,[127] and that both Jew and Greek are condemned by the terms of the Law: διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ· διὰ γὰρ νόμου

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[124] Ibid. 7.3: 'He set before you all these possessions, and demonstrated to you that if you follow after evil, you will be condemned by your evil deeds, but if after good you will receive from Him many good things, with life for ever which does not fail'.

[125] In keeping with Payne Smith (1903): she also suggests 'kindness', 'benefit' or 'favour'.

[126] *Mt.* 5:17: 'do not think that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets: I did not come to do away with them but to fulfil them'.

[127] *Rom.* 3:10: 'there is no-one upright, not one', quoting from *Ps.* 14:3 and 53:3 (with some minor differences, *Ps.* 14:1-6 and 53:1-6 are identical). For the translation of δίκαιος as 'upright', and particularly its use in the writings of Plato in this sense, see Annas 1981:11-13.

ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας.[128] In contrast, justification is given as a gift through faith in Christ,[129] which is set in contrast to the law: διὰ ποίου νόμου; τῶν ἔργων; οὐχί, ἀλλὰ διὰ νόμου πίστεως. λογιζόμεθα οὖν πίστει δικαιοῦσθαι ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου.[130] Meliton, rather more than the Syriac translator of Aristides, emphasises the importance of faith as the basis of conversion: Aristides *implies*, rather than *commands*, the need for faith in God and not in false gods.[131] Tatian, too, failed to emphasise grace: just as man chose wickedness of his own free will, so too is he able to reject it.[132] For Meliton, one is judged on the basis of one's faith in God (or lack thereof), and not one's deeds: it is for this reason that morality is not emphasised in his work.

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[128] *Rom*. 3:20: 'for from the works of the law no human will be justified in His sight. For through the law comes knowledge of sin'.

[129] Ibid. 3.24.

[130] Ibid. 3.27-28: 'through what law? That of works? No, but through a law of faith. For we consider that man is justified by faith, separately from a law of works'. Note, however, that Paul does not advocate ignoring the Law, but fulfilling it: it is simply that the means of doing so are based in faith and not in works (ibid. 3:28).

[131] As Pouderon and Pierre observed, morality is the primary basis for avoiding the coming judgement (2003:71). However, it is clear that this morality is a consequence of conversion (see above: 5.3.1), and therefore conversion remains necessary.

[132] Tatian *Or*. 7.1-2. As Hawthorne emphasised, this stance is almost the reverse of that seen in the Pauline epistles: for Paul, we are in need of Christ's salvation because of our inability to choose good over evil (*Eph*. 2:1-9). In Tatian, man *is* able to choose to reject wickedness and thus embrace God: the need for Jesus appears to become secondary to *our* need to choose God (1964:172-3). In contrast, Grant argued that Tatian's doctrine relied most heavily on Paul (1954:64): elsewhere, this is certainly the case, but here Tatian's emphasis on the need for *man* to choose *God*, and not vice versa, is at odds with the apostle.

4.6   Non-Christian sources on the morality of man

We may take it for granted that our Christian sources exaggerate gentile immorality for rhetorical purposes, and that the practices of which they are accused are considerably less common than Tatian, Meliton and the Syriac translator of Aristides would have us believe. How does this Christian attitude compare with that of Near Eastern gentile authors?

All three Christian authors, and Aristides in particular, emphasise the connection between salvation and morality.[133] Is there any evidence in gentile sources for a connection between human immorality and divine retribution? We have already seen from Plato's *Republic* a concern that the gods are represented as just, and particularly that the life of a just and virtuous man brings reward from the gods: οὐ γὰρ δὴ ὑπό γε θεῶν ποτε ἀμελεῖται ὃς ἂν προθυμεῖσθαι ἐθέλη δίκαιος γίγνεσθαι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῷ.[134] It is not entirely clear what Plato means that men will not be neglected: however, given the discussion in Books 2 and 3 of the justice of the gods, it is very likely to imply that the gods do not allow undeserved suffering to occur to the righteous. This theme is repeated: Plato emphasises the blessings (again, however, unspecified, but probably referring to peace and self-sufficiency) which the gods bestow on the righteous.[135]

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[133] Salvation, or σωτηρία, in a gentile context, was discussed in the last chapter; here I adopt those conclusions, and regard it as well-being in this life, with the possibility of well-being after death: in no way should it be regarded as deliverance or resurrection in the way that Aristides, Meliton and Tatian mean it.

[134] Pl. *Resp.* 613a-b: 'he will never be abandoned by the gods, the one who wishes and is eager to become upright, and to become like God by the pursuit of goodness (as far as it is in man's power)'. For the power of philosophy to make one like the gods, see below, 5.5.3.

[135] Ibid. 612c, 613b.

4.6.1   Lucian

Lucian appears to display a particularly ambiguous attitude towards the relationship between morality and punishment. In discussing the origin of the temple at Hierapolis, he is told the story of Deucalion: ἐκείνων δὲ πέρι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τάδε μυθέονται· ὑβρισταὶ κάρτα ἔοντες ἀθέμιστα ἔργα ἔπρασσον, οὔτε γὰρ ὅρκια ἐφύλασσον οὔτε ξείνους ἐδέχοντο οὔτε ἱκετέων ἠνείχοντο, ἀνθ᾽ ὧν σφίσιν ἡ μεγάλη συμφορὴ ἀπίκετο αὐτίκα ἡ γῆ πολλὸν ὕδωρ ἐκδιδοῖ καὶ ὄμβροι μεγάλοι ἐγένοντο καὶ οἱ ποταμοὶ κατέβησαν μέζονες καὶ ἡ θάλασσα ἐπὶ πολλὸν ἀνέβη, ἐς ὃ πάντα ὕδωρ ἐγένοντο καὶ πάντες ὤλοντο, Δευκαλίων δὲ μοῦνος ἀνθρώπων ἐλίπετο ἐς γενεὴν δευτέρην εὐβουλίης τε καὶ τοῦ εὐσεβέος εἵνεκα.[136] The episode reveals an understanding that the gods punish the immoral and reward the good man. Again, however, we must remember that Lucian is here following a Herodotean model, by giving a 'Greek' account followed by the local tradition. Despite this, however, Lightfoot notes that the whole passage is "very un-Greek",[137] and has more in common with the story in *Genesis* 6, which might allow us to conclude that Lucian is here relying less on Herodotus for his interpretation; it is possible, therefore, that this passage reflects a little of Lucian's own perspective.

However, we are forced to question the role that this story, and its implications, has within religious life at the temple. The answer, it seems, is very little; Lucian does not rely on the story for anything but its aetiological significance. He is clearly treating it as a myth, even insofar as it deals primarily with man rather than the gods. Nevertheless, a second story with

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[136] Luc. *Syr. D.* 12: 'of those first men, it is said that they were great sinners and did wrongful deeds, for they did not abide by oaths, nor welcome foreigners, nor receive suppliants, and in requital for this the great calamity overtook them. The earth gave forth a great flood: there were torrents of rain, the rivers flowed down to the sea in spate and the sea rose up until everything became water and all people perished. Deucalion was the only human being to survive to the next generation because of his good counsel and piety' (tr. Lightfoot). Lightfoot linked this passage to the story of Nebo and Simi in Meliton (4.6): for the relationship, see Lightfoot 2003:336-8.
[137] Ibid:339.

a heavily moral leaning is told of the founding of the cult, of Combabos and Stratonice, wife of the king.[138] Stratonice attempts to sleep with Combabos, who has been sent to escort her, and, upon being rejected, she reports to the king that Combabos attempted to rape her. Combabos is able to prove his innocence on the grounds that he had himself castrated before the journey began, and his genitals placed in storage. Here we see a clear overlap between a story with moral implications and cult practice (namely, the origin of the *galli*). However, while Lucian does not approve of the attempted adultery, that is clearly not the focus of the story. Rather, it serves to explain the origin of an unusual cult feature.[139] In neither of these instances, then, can we say that immorality is explicitly connected with cult practice, or with the divine.

Some of Lucian's other works, however, reveal a greater concern with the relationship between immorality and divine punishment. This is particularly clear in his *Saturnalia*. In a conversation with Kronos¸ his priest Kronosolon convinces the god to act against the rich and greedy, who are abusing the poor.[140] Kronos agrees, and writes to the rich, rebuking them for their treatment of the poor. The rich respond, claiming that Zeus takes no notice of the complaints of the poor (and therefore Kronos should leave them alone).[141] A complaint frequently found in Lucian's work is that the guilty do not suffer, and the good do not receive the blessings to which they should be entitled. For example, Lucian has Timon suggesting that the wicked do not need to fear Zeus' thunderbolt, and accuses the god of being blind and deaf to wickedness.[142] The same point is made by the philosopher Damis,[143] to which his

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[138] Luc. *Syr. D.*19-25.

[139] For fuller discussion of this passage, and particularly its Herodotean parallels, see Lightfoot 2003:384-411.

[140] The conversation, and the dialogue with the rich that results, is found in *Sat.* 26-36.

[141] Luc. *Sat.* 36.

[142] Luc. *Tim.* 2. Timon also suggests that the fact that Zeus fails to punish the guilty or reward the innocent is evidence that he is either sleeping or dead (ibid. 6). Chaniotis questioned how prevalent this attitude might be: "neither the disbelief nor the resignation of alert observers of human society uprooted the idea that the

opponent Timocles responds that ἀκούουσι, καί σε μετίασί ποτε χρόνῳ,[144] presumably

referring to punishment in the afterlife. Equally, however, there are some suggestions that

wickedness is punished, either in this life or the next. The tyrant Megapenthes descends to the

underworld to be judged by Rhadamanthus, who explains that a man's wickedness leaves

scars which enable him to be judged: ὁπόσα ἄν τις ὑμῶν πονηρὰ ἐργάστηται παρὰ τὸν βίον,

καθ' ἕκαστον αὐτῶν ἀφανῆ στίγματα εἰ τῆς ψυχῆς περιφέρει.[145] The philosopher Cyniscus

has cleansed his scars, and is therefore permitted to travel to the Isle of the Blest. For those

with considerable scarring, however, such as Megapenthes, torment awaits.[146] During the

author's fictional journey to the Isle of the Blest in *True Account*, he encounters all the gods

except for the lesser Ajax, who is being punished in the place of the wicked.[147]

It also appears that the guilty can be punished in this life, in keeping with the more

immediate definition of σωτηρία discussed above:[148] during the conversation with his priest

in the *Saturnalia*, Kronos observes that the greedy and indulgent do suffer, in the form of

hangovers, dropsy or early death.[149] It is not at all clear how much credence Lucian gives

these ideas; all of these observations come from texts written in satirical manner. However,

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gods – as superior powers, and not as human constructs – did not neglect crime and wrongdoing" (2004:2).
We shall see below, however, that the relationship between divine punishment and wrongdoing is far from
clear.

[143] Luc. *Iupp. trag.* 21.36.

[144] Ibid. 36: 'they hear (you), and one day they will unleash their vengeance'. Zeus himself makes the same
point to the philosopher Cyniscus (*Iupp. conf.* 17). Chaniotis argued that this attitude was far from
uncommon, and helped counter the accusations we see here and elsewhere in Lucian: "faith that divine
punishment awaits him (sc. the evildoer) in a life after death reduced the frustration of the just" (2004:2).
See also Sourvinou-Inwood: from the very earliest testimonies, the depiction of the fate of the wicked
"furnished a paradigm on which was modelled the punishment in the afterlife of ordinary impious and unjust
people" (1995:70).

[145] Luc. *Cat.* 24: 'as many wicked deeds as any one of you commits during his life, for each one he carries an
invisible mark on his soul'.

[146] Ibid. 28.

[147] Luc. *Ver. hist.* 2.17. His crime varies, from dragging a suppliant from Athena's temple to the rape of
Cassandra.

[148] Above, 3.3.

[149] Luc. *Sat.* 28.

such satire would lose its force if it did not engage with ideas that were commonly accepted, or at least commonly known.

4.6.2 Apuleius

The relationship between an upright life and a blessed existence after death is also apparent in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. In return for delivering Lucius' salvation, Isis commands: *plane memineris et penita mente conditum semper tenebis mihi reliqua vitae tuae curricula ad usque terminus ultimi spiritus vadata. nec iniurium, cuius beneficio redieris ad homines, ei totum debere quod vives.*[150] Quite what it means that Lucius' life should be pledged to Isis is unclear: however, it appears to be closely connected with obedience to Isis and her commands,[151] and almost certainly suggests that Lucius is to serve her as a priest. These commands vary in form; however, it is clear that Lucius' *salus* in this life and his blessed existence in the next depend, at least in part, upon his moral uprightness, and in particular his celibacy: *quodsi sedulis obsequiis et religiosis ministeriis et tenacibus castimoniis numeri nostrum promueris, scies ultra statuta fato tum spatia vitam quoque tibi prorogare mihi tantum licere*;[152] Lucius later reveals that he is hesitant to be initiated because of the strenuous rules of abstinence and celibacy.[153] The consequences if Lucius fails to adhere to these rules of celibacy are not made clear, for this marks the end of Isis' speech, but

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[150] Apul. *Met.* 11.6: 'you should clearly remember and always hold hidden deep in your mind that the remaining path of your life, up to the final passage of your breath, is mine. Nor is it unjust if you owe the entirely of your life to the one by whose kindness you return to the world of men'. See Gwyn Griffiths 1975:163-4.

[151] Ibid.11.5: *ergo igitur imperiis istis meis animum intende sollicitum* ('so, therefore, pay careful attention to these commands of mine'.

[152] Ibid. 11.6: 'if, by wholehearted obedience, dedicated service and persevering celibacy you earn our divine blessing, you will know that I alone am able to prolong the span of your life beyond that determined by Fate'.

[153] Ibid. 11.19: *at ego quamquam cupienti voluntate praeditus, tamen religiosa formidine retardabar, quod enim sedulo percontaveram difficile religionis obsequium et castimoniorum abstinentiam satis arduam, cautoque circumspectu vitam, quae multis casibus subiacet, esse muniendam* ('although I was eager and willing, I was hindered by a reverent fear, because I found through diligent enquiries that the observance of her cult was difficult, that chaste abstinence was extremely difficult, and that life, which was subject to so many misfortunes, needed to be fortified by careful circumspection').

one may safely assume that the promised blessings – notably an extension of one's life in this world, and a more blessed existence in the next – will be withheld if he does not keep to his end of the bargain. Later in the text, worshippers marvel at Lucius' return to human form: *felix hercule et ter beatus, qui vitae scilicet praecedentis innocentia fideque meruerit tam praeclarum de caelo patrocinium, ut renatus quodam modo statim sacrorum obsequio desponderetur.*[154] This indicates a clear expectation that an upright, innocent life will be rewarded. Again, however, these rewards appear in the form of σωτηρία defined above: there is no eschatological significance to these blessings.

4.6.4   Philo of Byblos

Unfortunately, Philo of Byblos has little to offer to this debate, or, at least, as far as we know from the fragments preserved in Eusebius. In Philo's account, man exists as the beneficiary of the gods' good works, and as the one who bestows divinity upon the deity as a reward. The morality of man therefore plays no part in the text.

4.7   Immorality or impiety?

The situation is complicated, however, by the relationship between moral and religious purity. Polybius narrates the story of the Macedonian general Dikaiarchus, who was in the habit of establishing altars to ἀσέβεια ('ungodliness') and παρανομία ('lawlessness'). His punishment was swift, and the hand of the divine was clear to see, to the delight of all.[155] However, it is not clear which of ἀσέβεια and παρανομία led to Dikaiarchus' downfall: was

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[154] *Ibid.* 11.16: 'by Hercules! He is fortunate and blessed three times over, who, by the preeminent innocence and trustworthiness of his life has deserved such a distinguished favour from heaven, that he is reborn after a fashion, and is immediately pledged to the obedience of the rights'. Gwyn Griffiths observed that applying the adjective *innocentia* to Lucius' *fides* is rather striking, given his conduct throughout the book, beginning with the curiosity which caused his transformation; Gwyn Griffiths further suggested that this might either refer to his conduct *before* the transformation, or to the expectation of cleansing and forgiveness (1975:275).

[155] Polybius 15.54. For a fuller discussion of the story, see Meijer 1981:216.

he punished because of his impiety, or because he was immoral?[156] Such a question is not incompatible with Jewish thought, at least: a number of Old Testament episodes reveal the wrath of God against incorrectly conducted ritual practice, rather than against the immoral.[157]

4.7.1 Confession inscriptions[158]

In the previous chapter, it was seen that the 'confession inscriptions' from Phrygia and Lydia expressed a popular belief in a relationship between one's conduct and divine wrath, which followed a set pattern: the conduct of the believer angered the god(s), who expressed this anger by punishing the culprit (although sometimes the nature of crime and punishment was left unclear). The culprit appeased the anger of the gods through some form of sacrifice, and established a stele as testimony to the power of the divine.[159] At times, however, it is not clear whether the crime committed is moral or cultic one. For example:

Ἔτους τκ, μη(νὸς) Πανήμου βι'.   1
κατὰ τὸ ἐφρενωθεὶς
ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν, ὑπὸ τοῦ
Διὸς κὲ τοῦ (Μηνὸς) μεγάλου Ἀρτεμι-
δώρου· ἐκολασόμην τὰ ὄματα τὸν   5
Θεόδωρον κατὰ τὰ ἀμαρτίας, ἃς

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[156] Not everyone recognised an abrupt distinction: Marcus Aurelius observed that ὁ ἀδικῶν ἀσεβεῖ ('injustice is impiety', *Med.* 9.1) on the grounds that ill-treating other human beings contradicted the supreme law of Nature, and was therefore impiety against this most venerable deity.

[157] Such as the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, in *Lev.* 10:1-2; *Nb.* 20:8-12, in which Moses and Aaron are punished for striking the rock of Meribah with the staff rather than waving at it, shows the consequences of failure to obey God's commands to the letter. Geller compared such instances to the *ira deum*, although he does not attribute it to malice on the part of YHWH (2000:279-80).

[158] For more on the nature of these inscriptions, see above, 3.2.2.1.

[159] For more on this pattern, and the terminology of the inscriptions, see Pleket 1981. Note that appeasing the gods did not necessarily equate to healing: in some instances, the offender was already dead. In addition, despite the fact that blindness was was often interpreted as a sign of divine vengeance (Versnel 1981:35; Schnabel 2003:163), "none of the confession inscriptions that refer to an eye ailment, presumably often blindness, mention healing after the forgiveness of sins" (ibid:176). Presumably the appeasement simply meant that no future repercussions were to be expected, even if the punishment already inflicted remained permanent. See also Rostad 2002:146.

ἐπύησεν. Συνεγενόμην τῇ πε-

δίσχῃ τῷ Ἀπλοκόμα, τῇ Τροφίμῃ, τῇ γυ-

ναικὶ τῇ Εὐτύχηδος εἰς τὸ πλετώ-

ριν· ἀπαίρι τὴν πρώτην ἁμαρτίαν προβά-   10

τῳ[ν], πέρδεικι, ἀσφάλακι. Δευτέρα

ἁμαρτία· ἀλλὰ δοῦλος ὢν τῶν θεῶν τῶν

ἐν Νονου συνεγενόμην τῇ Ἀριάγνῃ τῇ

μοναυλίᾳ· ’παίρι χύρῳ, θείννῳ ἐχθύει. Τῇ

τρίτῃ ἁμαρτίᾳ συνεγενόμην Ἀρεθούσῃ   15

μοναυλίᾳ· ’παίρι ὄρνειθει, στρουθῷ, περισ-

τερᾷ, κύ(πρῳ) κρειθοπύρων, πρό(χῳ) οἴνου· κύ(προν) πυρῶν

καθαρὸς τοῖς εἱεροῖς, πρό(χον) α’. Ἔσχα παράκλητον

τὸν Δείαν· εἶδαι, κατὰ τὰ πυήματα πεπηρώκιν,

νῦν δὲ εἱλαζομένου αὐτοῦ τοὺς θεοὺς κὲ στη-   20

λογραφοῦντος ἀνερύσετον τὰς ἁμαρτίας.

Ἠρωτημαίνος ὑπὸ τῆς συνκλήτου· εἴλεος εἶ-

μαι ἀναστανομένης τῆς στήλλην μου,

ᾗ ἡμέρᾳ ὥρισα· ἀνύξαις τὴν φυλακήν, ἐξαφίω

τὸν κατάδικον διὰ ἐνιαυτοῦ κὲ μηνῶν ι’ περι-   25

πατούντων.[160]

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[160] *BIWK* 5 (235/6 AD):

In the year 320, in the month of Panemos.

Sinner	Because I have been enlightened by the gods, by Zeus and the great (Men) Artemidorus.
God	I have punished Theodorus on his eyes because of the sins which he has committed.
Sinner	I committed intercourse with Trophime, the slave of Happlokomas, the wife of Eutyches, in the *praetorium* [for which see Petzl 1994:8-9].
God	He took away the first sin with a sheep, a partridge and a mole.
Sinner	The second sin: when I was a slave of the gods of Nonnos, I committed intercourse with the flutegirl Ariagne.
God	He took away the second sin with a piglet and a tuna.
Sinner	The third sin: I committed intercourse with the flutegirl Aretousa.
God	He took away the third sin with a chicken, a sparrow and a pigeon, a *kypros* of grain, a *prochus* of wine, and a *kypros* of clean wheat for the priests.

This text clearly highlights the pattern discussed above: the crime, followed by the anger of the god[161] (expressed through the blinding of the culprit) and then the necessary appeasement, are all emphasised. At first glance, the crimes might appear to be moral ones: the culprit, Theodorus, sleeps with three separate women.[162] However, in the first instance, the issue appears to be that this took place in an area with sacred significance (τὸ πλετώριν). In the second and third instances, the women involved are both flutegirls (ὁ μόναυλος), and Theodorus a servant of the god himself (δοῦλος ὢν τῶν θεῶν).[163] It is highly likely that these two women served a religious function, probably within the temple; it is even possible that the intercourse took place within the sacred place, as was the case with the first instance. The fact that at least two of the women had a religious function makes it clear that the god's anger is not directed at Theodorus' philandering, but at his pollution of laws of ritual purity. There are a few examples where the offence may be a moral one (for example, non-payment of debts,[164] disrespecting one's mother,[165] cheating orphans,[166] or theft[167]). However, the vast

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| *Sinner* | I called upon Zeus as an advisor [possibly the priest of Men Artemidorus: see Schnabel 2003:165]. |
| *God* | See! I blinded him on account of his sins. But he has appeased the gods: he established the stele and took away his sins. Asked by the council, I answer that I am merciful, if he establishes my stele on the day I commanded. Open the prison: I release the convict after one year and ten months. |

[161] Petzl argued that "es spricht nur *ein* Gott, möglicherwise Zeus" (1994:9). Given that it is the help specifically of Zeus that is asked for, this is the most likely interpretation, although Schnabel suggested that it might be Men Artemidorus who is εἵλεος ('merciful') in line 22.

[162] This inscription follows the same patterns as collections of 'serial stelae', which appear to demonstrate a continuing cycle of offence, punishment, appeasement and restoration: "Man erhält dadurch immerhin auch einen Eindruck von der Intensität und Beharrlichkeit, mit der diese einfache Landbevölkerung sich unter Umstänted von ihren strengen Gottheiten verfolgt fühlte" (Hermann and Varinlioğlu 1984:9). Leaving aside the condescension of these 'simple villagers', we see a pattern which clearly expresses a firm belief in the continuing power, and therefore ability to punish, of the god in question. See also Schnabel 2003:165 and Petzl 1994:28.

[163] See also Petzl 1994:10. Schnabel understood ὁ μόναυλος as 'single', and therefore 'unmarried' (2003:172), but there is no evidence to prefer this over the more usual translation.

[164] *BIWK* 17-18; *SEG* 34.1212-1213.

[165] *BIWK* 47.

[166] *BIWK* 35; *TAM* 5.1.231.

[167] Theft could include money (*BIWK* 46) or animals from the sanctuary (*BIWK* 68). Drew-Bear argued that in these cases, the punishment "was directed not against the actual offences, themselves relatively minor, but

majority of inscriptions (at least, where the offence is recorded) are in some way connected to cult practice: some, like Theodorus, sleep with temple attendants, while others fail to turn up to temple duty,[168] or illegally graze their flocks on temple property.[169]

In places, it is even more explicit that the punishment was directed at impiety and not immorality:

> Διεὶ Πειζηνῷ Διογένη[ς]   1
> εὐξαμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ
> βοὸς κὲ μὴ ἀποδούς,
> ἐκολάσθη αὐτοῦ ἡ θυ-
> γάτηρ Τατιανὴ ἰς τοὺς   5
> ὀφθαλμούς. Νῦν οὖν
> εἰλασάμενοι ἀνέθη-
>   καν.[170]

There may be a question mark as to whether the failure to keep his word indicates a moral failing on Diogenes' part; however, the major concern appears to be the failure to fulfil the vowed offering.[171] The strictness of these purity rules is clearly demanding:

> Ἀντωνία Ἀντωνίου Ἀπόλ-   1
> λωνι θεῷ Βοζηνῷ διὰ τὸ ἀ-
> ναβεβηκένε με ἐπὶ τὸν χο-

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rather against the perjury in the name of the divinity which followed (sc. in denying responsibility)" (1976:265); cf. Cameron 1939:158. It is clear, then, that even in cases such as theft, which appear strictly 'moral' issues, there may be an element of impiety involved to which the god primarily objected. Rives, in contrast, argued that these stelae strongly support a connection between morality and the gods (2007:62), but, as shown, the majority of them relate to cult practice in some manner: "it is offence against the deity that causes the punishment, not stealth, fraud or any other conflicts between humans in itself. The gods will not intervene in human conflicts unless they are urged to do so by a curse or perjury" (Rostad 2002:161).

[168] *BIWK* 16; *SEG* 33.1210.

[169] *BIWK* 7.

[170] *BIWK* 45: 'because Diogenes vowed a cow to Zeus Peizenos but did not give it, his daughter Tatiane was punished with blindness. But the god has been appeased, and this [stele] has been established'. Blindness, as in the case of Theodorus, quoted above, was often interpreted as a sign of divine vengeance (Versnel 1981:35; Schnabel 2003:163).

[171] The importance of votive offerings was discussed in the previous chapter: see above, 3.3.2.

ρὸν ἐν ῥυπαρῷ ἐπενδύτῃ,

κολασθίσα δὲ ἐξωμολο-   5

γησάμην κὲ ἀνέθηκα εὐλο-

γίαν, ὅτι ἐγενόην ὁλόκ[λ]-

ηρος.[172]

In the previous two instances, there may be a question of a moral issue; here, however, there is no such question. Antonia's only crime is wearing incorrect clothing into the cult site.[173] The anger of the gods is unambiguously prompted by her impiety. What is clear from all three of these inscriptions is that the relationship between impiety and divine anger was a crucial part of private religious life in Lydia and Phrygia; we cannot imagine, particularly in Antonia's inscription, that they were simply established in response to social pressures.[174]

Inscriptions from Hatra provide an additional perspective on these issues. Five separate inscriptions have been found referring to capital punishment for a variety of offences,[175] such as theft (including the theft of building tools from a temple site), and temple musicians abandoning their position. At times, the offence is clearly an issue directly affecting the deity (such as the the theft of tools from Bar-Maren's building site), but elsewhere it appears to have little to do with the god:

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[172] *BIWK* 43: 'I, Antonia, daughter of Antonius, [established this stele] to the god Apollo Bozenos, because I entered into his sanctuary wearing unclean clothing. I was punished, and then I confessed and lifted up praises, because I was made whole again'.

[173] "Antonia hatte in unreinem Gewand die heilige Stätte betreten" (Petzl 1994:53).

[174] Although Schnabel suggested that pressure from the community or priest may have played a part, and in particular may explain why the name of the offender often appears to have been added later (2003:165). Pleket discussed in detail the motivation of worshippers: "the subjection of the worshipper is suitably attended by the feeling that he is always running the risk of committing (material and/or spiritual) *sins* and that the almighty god and/or goddess of his village will then mete out suitable punishments (in the shape of illness or worse)" (1981:178).

[175] The inscriptions in question are H281, H336, H342, H343, H344.

byrh knwn d4 x 100 + 20 + 20 + 20 +1 + 1+ 1 bmlk' dy

'lh' 'ṣṭbw šmšbrk rbyt'

wḥṭry' qšyš' wdrdq' w'rby'

klhwn wkwl dy 'mr bḥṭr' whkyn psq<w>

dy kwl dlgnwb lgw mn ml' hdyn

wlgw mn šwr' bry' 'yn gbr'

hw gwy' lqṭyl bmwt' dy

'h' w' gbr' hw bry'

lrgym.[176]

Despite the fact that the offence is apparently not a religious one, action is taken 'on the advice of the gods'. Similarly, in the case of the disappearing musicians, Nergal is attributed a leading role in the institution of the inscription.[177] In this latter instance, it would be plausible to suggest that Nergal is taking a proprietary interest, except that the temple slaves in question actually belong to Maren, Marten and Bar-Maren. Do these inscriptions, then, suggest that the gods take a more active interest in the moral conduct of the inhabitants of Hatra than we have seen elsewhere?

This is unlikely. A more plausible solution may be sought in the fact that, as Kaizer observed, the inscriptions distinguish between those inside and those outside Hatra:[178] in the case of the inscription quoted above, this affected the punishment which was to be inflicted upon them. It may well be that these inscriptions were a way of forming and defining Hatrene civic identity. This suggestion is reinforced when once considers the gods who are named in

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[176] H343: "in the month of Kanun of 463, on the advice of the gods, Shamashbarak the administrator and the Hatrans old and young and the inhabitants of 'Arab, all of them, and all who live in Hatra agreed and thus decided, that anyone who steals within this entrance-ramp and within the outer wall, if he is a native he will be killed by the death of the gods and if he is an outsider he will be stoned" (tr. Healey). H336 is almost identical. The 'death of the gods' as a means of execution is unclear: as Kaizer observed, the only thing we can say with any confidence is that it is *not* stoning, since stoning is listed as a separate punishment (2010:149); it also appears to be reserved for inhabitants of Hatra.

[177] H342.

[178] Kaizer 2006a:152.

the inscriptions: Nergal, who is often associated with Herakles as the "pre-eminent protector",[179] and the divine family of Maren, Marten and Bar-Maren. In the latter case, as Kaizer observed, "he fact that the triad appears not only in a legal text which was set up in the central temenos, but also in one which was erected in one of the city gates, confirms its importance for the city as a whole".[180] It may well be, then, that the appearance of the gods in these inscriptions has more to do with the creation of a communal identity at Hatra than the perception that the gods punished moral wrong-doing.

There are serious questions, however, as to how far we should consider these confession inscriptions as characteristic of religious life in the wider Graeco-Roman world. Pleket argued that the awareness of sin to which the Lydian and Phrygian inscriptions attest is exclusive to that area, and should be regarded as a "contribution of Oriental religiosity":[181] he highlighted the fact that the inscriptions found at the Asklepion at Epidauros rarely referred to sickness as a divine punishment,[182] and that the mechanism of confession and reconciliation is not prominent in these inscriptions.[183] Dandamayev pointed out the scarcity of documentary evidence for the punishment of religious crimes in the Roman Near East, and argued that this was symptomatic of the lack of moral focus to be found in polytheistic religion;[184] as a result, he argued that it was questionable whether religious crimes even existed or were punishable.[185] We have seen at Hatra that such crimes *did* exist,[186] but even in

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[179] Ibid. 146.

[180] Ibid. 146.

[181] Pleket 1981:156.

[182] Ibid. 180: Asklepios, in these inscriptions, is "is very mild and remains far removed from the tough, punishing gods of Asia Minor".

[183] Pleket 1981:181.

[184] Dandamayev 1996:44.

[185] Similarly, MacMullen argued that most offences were against human, rather than divine, law (1981:58).

[186] One might also consider the so-called 'Sacred Laws' of Palmyra, which cover offences such as theft from temples (*PAT* 0991) and the spilling of blood inside the sanctuary (*PAT* 1122), which once again imply cultic rather than moral legislation. However, as Kaizer observed, so scanty is the evidence that it is difficult

this instance it is not clear how significant a role the gods were understood to play in the punishment of the criminal.

We find important hints as to the relationship between impiety and punishment in both Latin and Greek literature, which suggests that this relationship was widespread. In the case of Apuleius' Lucius, his *salus* depends not solely upon his celibacy but upon his *religiosis ministeriis*. This command relates not to moral uprightness but to piety and ritual purity; it is even possible that the commandment to celibacy is also a matter of purity rather than morality.[187] We see elsewhere that Isis' commands (*imperii*) relate not necessarily to morality but to the correct manner of initiation,[188] and Lucius is given specific ritual requirements (such as what food may or may not be eaten).[189] Although there is, as we have seen, evidence linking immorality and punishment, there is considerably more to suggest a relationship between σωτηρία and impiety and ungodliness. For the Christian authors, immorality and impiety are closely linked, because the commandments to moral uprightness are given directly by the divine. For the gentile, there may be a considerable gap between the two, because laws, whether written or not, are not bestowed by the divine (or, at least, not very often, as we have seen at Hatra).[190] In discussing the *ira deum* in the previous chapter, it was observed that sacrifices must be made to avoid the wrath of the gods, and that this was

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to come to any firm conclusions about the inscriptions as a group (2002:167). For fuller discussion, see ibid.167-177.

[187] Compare, for example, the relationship between intercourse and imputity in *Leviticus* 15; for the relationship between sexuality and cult in both the Graeco-Roman world and in the Levitical code, see Harrington 2001:190-201. In Apuleius' account, however, there is no indication that this command is restricted to Lucius' temple service, but it is to be applied to his life as a whole. As a result, there is probably a moral element to the command in addition to the concern for ritual purity. For discussion of the extent of commitment to Isis and similar cults, see Beard, North and Price 1998a:292ff; for some, temple service marked their primary (or indeed only) role (such as the castration of the Galli).

[188] Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 11.19.

[189] Ibid. 11.22, 23.

[190] Cumont argued that this was a fundamental weakness of traditional Roman religious practice: that the just man would not be rewarded, and the immoral punished, was, in Cumont's view, a fundamental factor behind the popularity of 'mystery cults' (1911:37). However, Cumont failed to sufficiently recognise a distinction between *immorality* and *impiety*.

commonly accepted: we may assume that the same is true of impiety. Impiety can cover

many forms, and could range from reverence and sacrifice to the gods[191] to ritual purity. For

example, Plutarch criticises the ambiguous attitude of the Romans towards human sacrifice,

after they killed and buried two Gauls and two Germans in the forum; however, this is

presented not as a matter of immorality, as we might expect, but of impiety, because it

belongs to the world of the gods.[192]

4.7.2   Lucian

We see in Lucian that there is a much greater concern with impiety than with

immorality on a religious level. *On the Syrian Goddess* provides us with numerous cultic

regulations applied to the priests. If they see a corpse, for example, they must purify

themselves before entering the temple;[193] there are also ritual laws for the offering and for the

shaving of one's head, clothing and so on.[194] These are not moral restrictions, but relate to

cultic purity: any infringement of them is considered an act of impiety, although Lucian does

not elaborate as to the consequences. Lucian also demonstrates in his comic works that

impiety is considered a serious offence. For instance, Hermes suggests that for men to hate

one another is perfectly reasonable, but for them to hate the gods is unacceptable,[195] which

suggests a clear distinction between immorality and impiety. It is clear from Lucian's works

that impiety could take many forms. In *Philaris*, it is decided not to return a statue offered as

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[191] For more on this, see below, 5.2.5.

[192] Plut. *Mor*. 283f. This is one of the few occasions on which Livy criticises the response of the *decemviri* to a prodigy, not because the act is immoral, but because the gods have failed to be placated (22.57.2-7; see Davies 2004:68). Beard, North and Price argued that such practices were characteristic of dark magic, as a "monstrous perversion of legitimate animal sacrifice" (1998a:234), which reinforces the impiety, rather than the immorality, of the act. The same distinction is apparent in Plutarch's discussion of the punishment of Vestal Virgins for breaking their chastity rules (Plut. *Mor*. 285e-f).

[193] Luc. *Syr. D*. 53.

[194] Ibid.54-6.

[195] Luc. *Tim.* 35.

a gift to the god, because this would cause considerable offence;[196] during the conversation between Damis and Timocles mentioned above, Herakles and Poseidon decide to kill Damis for his impiety, expressed as atheism, until Zeus intervenes and rebukes them for being rash.[197] Zeus himself takes offence at the insolence of the Epicureans, who denied the gods' sovereignty and control, and determines to wipe them out.[198] Another issue raised by Lucian is the desecration of the gods' statues:[199] it is clear that temple-looters did not always receive the punishment that was thought fit.[200]

4.8   *Excursus:* the tripartite theology: religion, philosophy and ethics

The key to understanding this issue may be found, once again, in Varro's tripartite theology. I have already discussed the relationship between myth and cultic religion,[201] and concluded that although the distinction may not be an absolute one, there is nevertheless some necessary separation between the two fields. In addition, it was seen in Plato's arguments against poetry that the relationship between philosophy and myth is equally tenuous. This leaves us with the final relationship, that between cultic religion and philosophy. A brief analysis of this relationship may help to put into context the distinction between immorality and impiety highlighted above. The force of this distinction is immediately apparent in the works of numerous philosophers. Plato is particularly critical of certain forms of religious life;[202] Epicurus did the same in order to remove mankind from

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[196] Luc. *Phil.* 2.1-2.
[197] Luc. *Iupp. trag.* 24.
[198] Lucian *Icar.* 32-3.
[199] For more on this practice, see above, 3.7.1.1.
[200] The issue is raised in Luc. *Iupp. conf.* 9 and *Iupp. trag.* 19.
[201] Above, 3.2.3.1.
[202] Plato "demonstrated by unremittingly philosophical analysis the weaknesses of traditional notions of Greek piety, of the inherited myths about the gods and heroes, and of established views about the nature of the gods" (Most 2003:306). See also Hunt 2003:74. However, this criticism is not necessarily intended to undermine religion itself, but rather to bring it onto a higher level (Meijer 1981:221). Meijer suggested that

slavish fear of the gods.[203] Seneca, too, is particularly critical of traditional religion, with the mechanics of *do ut des* within sacrificial cult a particular target, and reinterpreted traditional prayers, which he regarded as base, to ask for sound mind and health.[204] Not only are traditional prayers base, according to Seneca, but they are actively harmful: *et si esse vis felix, deos ora, ne quid tibi ex his, quae optantur, eveniat. non sunt ista bona, quae in te isti volunt congeri; unum bonum est, quod beatae vitae causa et firmamentum est, sibi fidere.*[205] This is seemingly because our real needs are easily met by nature, and it is the lesser needs (those which we ask from the gods) that cause us distress.[206] It is worth remembering that the distinction between philosophy and religion only holds for *civic* religious life: as Most observed, ancient philosophers tended not to object to religion itself, but were more concerned with the form this took, and concerned themselves with determining a form of religion which would hold up to rational examination.[207] Nor did all philosophers reject traditional religion in such vitriolic terms: Marcus Aurelius frequently exhorts himself to

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Plato took prayer itself extremely seriously, although it does not necessarily follow, as he argued, that he had encountered a "profound devotional experience" (ibid. 240).

[203] "For Epicurus, physics, which includes theology since the gods exist as part of nature, serves the function of freeing men from their fear of such false terrors as divine intervention (which does not exist) and death (which is nothing to us)" (ibid. 314). Piety and religiosity are not a problem for Epicurus: however, expressing these through sacrificial cult is, because this encourages unnecessary religious fear.

[204] Seneca *Ep.* 10.4. See also ibid. 41.1. He elsewhere notes that the best way to worship the gods is not through sacrifice but by acknowledging first their existence, and then their majesty (ibid. 95.50). See also *De ben.* 1.6.3 on the reinterpretation of traditional offerings.

[205] Ibid. 31.2-3: 'if you wish to be happy, pray to the gods that what they hope for you would not happen. They are not good things, which they wish to be bestowed upon you: there is one good, which is the cause and the foundation of a blessed life, which is to trust yourself'. He may be referring to magic, and particularly prayers for harm, rather than blessing: among these are so-called 'revenge prayers'. These called upon the divine to exact retribution on a known, or, more commonly, unknown wrongdoer. Epicurus is said to have remarked that, if all man's prayers were granted, mankind would be wiped from the face of the earth, such is the extent of their malice (Usener 1887:259, n.388). For a discussion of these harmful prayers, and the reasons behind them, see Versnel 1976,1981:19-23 and 1991:75-79. Although Burkert argued that "success and honour for one is usually inseparable from humiliation and destruction for another" (1985:73-4; cf. Versnel 1981:25), and that harm is therefore a part of most prayer, this is not the same as a prayer which focusses *exclusively* on the cursing of another. See also Chaniotis 2007:23.

[206] Epictetus 4.10-11, 25.4.

[207] Most 2003:306: "the fundamental tendency of the vast majority of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers is not at all to debunk religion, but to reinforce religiosity". Goar argued that Cicero considered religion and morality indistinguishable (1978:54), but this is only true because Goar has failed to distinguish Cicero's *philosophical* reflections and his assessment of cult: this is exactly the kind of distinction which I emphasise here and which must be made in this context.

worship the gods (although it is not clear what form this would take; elsewhere he suggests that the gods require nothing more of us than upright living),[208] whilst Epictetus acknowledges the importance of thanking the gods for their gifts through sacrifice.[209]

Seneca makes it clear that morality was one amongst several areas for reflection, amongst which action and practice were the key elements: *philosophiae tres partes esse dixerunt et maximi et plurimi auctores: moralem, naturalem, rationalem. prima conponit animum. secunda rerum naturam scrutatur. tertia proprietates verborum exigit.*[210] This distinction is equally apparent in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*: on a number of occasions he emphasises the dual importance of living well in respect to both God *and* man[211] (that is, religion and ethics), but the fact that both are repeatedly emphasised strongly suggests that the two are not to be directly associated: morality, in Marcus Aurelius' thought, functions *parallel* to religion, and whilst both are crucial, they do not appear to overlap.[212] This becomes still more apparent if we look at the conduct of priesthoods: Plutarch emphasises that the restrictions placed on priests revolve around cultic purity and not around their moral

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[208] M.Aur. *Med.* 2.5.

[209] Epictetus 1.4.32.

[210] Seneca *Ep.* 89.9: 'the majority of authors, and the greatest ones, say that philosophy is divided into three parts: the moral, the physical and the rational. The first consists of the soul; the second considers the universe; the third examines the meanings of words'. Gill argued that this three-part curriculum was considered one of the defining features of the school (2003:37); Seneca notes that this separation is not universally accepted: the Peripatetics added the civic branch, whilst the Epicureans did away with the rational (ibid. 89.10-11). The same distinction between branches is found in Plutarch and attributed to Chrysippus (*Moralia* 1035a). Algra demonstrated that the contemplation of God belonged to the natural (or physical) branch because the Stoic notion of God was to be understood as the governing principle of the universe (2003:153). Seneca goes on to separate between three further areas of the moral branch: the speculative (which assigns a function and worth to everything), the impulsive, and the action (which brings one's actions and impulses into harmony): this last is the culmination of moral philosophy (ibid. 89.14). For the importance of harmonising one's words and actions see also ibid. 20.2 and Plut. *Mor.* 1033a-c (in which the Stoics are criticised for their failure to do exactly this). This division of the moral branch is also used by Epictetus, albeit in a slightly different form: the first branch is that of desires and aversions, whilst the impulsive branch focusses on controlling these. Gill argued that such typologies were subdivisions of ethics rather than a parallel to the tripartite division of philosophy itself (2003:43). See also Inwood 2003:3, Klauck 2000:365 and Schofield 2003:254.

[211] M.Aur. *Med.* 3.9, 5.32, 6.30, 7.31.

[212] Although Ando argued that there was far more place for consideration of practical, ethical *religio* in one's private life, and that this accounted, in part, for some of the tension between public and private religion (2008:106). However, this distinction is less clear than Ando claims: see above, 3.2.3.1.

uprightness,[213] and we see the same concept in the writings of Valerius Maximus.[214] This is in keeping with Lucian's observation in *On the Syrian Goddess*, noted above, that the only rules of the temple were cultic, not ethical.

Crucially, Plato demonstrates that morality not only does not, but *cannot* belong to the religious world based on sacrificial cult: εἰ δ᾽ οὖν πειστέον, ἀδικητέον καὶ θυτέον ἀπὸ τῶν ἀδικημάτων.[215] If morality were connected with religion, then we could commit sin and prosper with no consequences because we could simply appease the gods by offering them sacrifice. This is not to say that God does not punish wrong-doing: we saw above that Plato emphasised the distinction between *correctional* suffering (which is a good) and *arbitrary* suffering.[216] However, this just retribution cannot be averted with sacrifice, and the idea that it could be is incompatible with Plato's vision of the good man who aspires to virtue and to become godlike by being satisfied in his situation.

Ware argued that Stoicism showed a "markedly increased religiosity"[217] over other philosophical groups: "in relating moral progress to God, the Stoic view was markedly different from contemporary philosophical movements for whom moral development generally was regarded as a human achievement in which the divine played no appreciable

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[213] Plut. *Mor.* 274a-e. See also the restrictions placed on the *flamen dialis* (289e-f).

[214] He narrates the story of Quintus Sulpicius, whose *apex* slipped from his head during sacrifice, and as a result was stripped of office (Val.Max. 1.1.5); similarly, a number of different *flamines* were removed from office because entrails had been taken to the altars of the gods *parum curiose* ('with insufficient care', 1.1.4). Ando began his 2008 work by quoting Val.Max. 1.1.1 (2008:2) and highlighted the importance which the passage, and Maximus' work as a whole, placed on orthopraxy, or the correctness of ritual practice. See also Mueller 2002 and Beard, North and Price 1998:32.

[215] Pl. *Resp.* 365e-366a: 'but if we believe in this, one should do wrong, and then sacrifice after the wrongs'. See Meijer 1981:249. See also Xen. *An.* 5.7.32: εἰ δὲ μή, πρὸς Διὸς πῶς ἢ θεοῖς θύσομεν ἡδέως ποιοῦντες ἔργα ἀσεβῆ; ('how, by Zeus, are we to sacrifice to the gods while we continue to commit impious deeds?'). The emphasis on sacrifice suggests that ἔργα ἀσεβῆ may have moral, as well as cultic, implications: the needs of piety have presumably been satisfied through the sacrifice.

[216] Pl. *Resp.* 380d. To think that "the gods are determined to spite him and (he) can only protect himself with the utmost caution" is characteristic of δεισιδαιμονία or *superstitio* (Meijer 1981:259). See below, 5.2.5.1.

[217] Ware 2008:268. See also Harrington 2001:188-90.

role".[218] He highlighted Seneca, *Moral Epistle* 41 as the clearest example of this. However, it is clear from other letters that this relates not to God in any common sense but to the divine as the rational soul.[219] Ware himself admitted that Seneca's perception of the divine as an internal, rational divine spirit clearly distinguished the Stoic from the role of the external, personal Holy Spirit in sanctification as found in Paul.[220] Despite Ware's claims, it is clear that this internal spirit is distinct from the understanding of the gods as found in *civic* religion, and belongs to philosophical reflection and practice.[221]

The fact that ethical discussion clearly belongs to the field of philosophy and not of civic religion clearly explains the distinction between immorality and impiety discussed above. It also explains why Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess*, which is primarily concerned with ritual practice and its origins, contains so little ethical or moral discussion.[222] None of our three Christian authors appear to acknowledge this distinction, and thus focus heavily on the morality (or lack of it) of their opponents: even Meliton, who largely ignores this area, does so because he is concerned primarily with spiritual error (and therefore grace), rather than because he recognises the separation of morality and religion.

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[218] Ibid. 268.

[219] Seneca *Ep.* 66.12, 73.16.

[220] Ware 2008:278.

[221] That is not to say that religious life had no place at all for reflection: I cannot entirely agree with Long, who argued that the "poverty of Roman religion as a context for ethics and spirituality" helps to explain the flourishing of philosophy (2003:186). As argued before, there may well have been space for this kind of thought in *private* cult.

[222] Although we must also remember that *On the Syrian Goddess* is modelled on the writings of Herodotus. Is the absence of ethical discussion to be attributed to this stylistic imitation? Herodotus is not averse to ethical discussion in its place, and so the root cause of the absence should be understood as the distinction between moral considerations and religious practice.

4.9   Christianity and Stoicism

This discussion leads us to the final object of this chapter, namely the relationship between these Christian authors and mainstream philosophical and moral thought.[223] As noted, Tatian begins his work from the perspective of a convert from the Greek wisdom (σοφία),[224] whilst Aristides also attacks gentile philosophers directly on a number of occasions. Whilst there are no such explicit attacks to be found in Meliton, he does focus heavily on philosophical issues like *šrrʾ* ('truth') and *ṭwʿyy* ('error'), and he is referred to as a *pylswpʾ* in the opening and closing paragraphs. This focus in itself is no revelation: Lightfoot observed that both Meliton and Aristides derived their interpretation of error in particular from the Stoic Epictetus.[225] This is not strictly true: as observed above, Aristides and Meliton differ considerably in their interpretation of error. Nevertheless, there are key parallels that must be drawn. A number of scholars have identified close links between the doctrines of Christianity and Stoicism:[226] both are strongly theistic, for a start.[227] This section will focus on two Stoic authors in addition to Epictetus:[228] the Roman author Seneca,[229] and the writings

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[223] I do not intend to go into vast detail here, as the role of philosophy has less relevance for the religious life of the Near East than topics discussed above, although there is limited evidence: I quoted above a fragmentary inscription from Apamea recording Aurelios Bel Philippos (1.5.2; see Rey-Coquais 1973:66ff), who was a priest of Bel and simultaneously the leader of the local Epicureans. Similarly, we know of a number of philosophical authors who hailed from the Near East (such as Maximus of Tyre); however, it is unclear how far their works should be considered of specific relevance to the Near East.

[224] Tatian *Or.* 1.3.

[225] Lightfoot 2007:66. Pouderon and Pierre, however, observed that the opposition of truth and error in this way was a commonplace of early apologetic literature (2003:322).

[226] See e.g. Ware 2008; Engberg-Pederson 2008; Malherbe 1987; Pohlenz 1949; Klauck 2000. Long (2003:210) discussed the dependence of Lactantius and Tertullian on Stoic works, and Cicero in particular.

[227] Although, as Algra noted, 'god' and 'gods' were often interchangeable, since it was recognised that different attributes of god were sometimes given names (2003:165-6). For a brief summary of Stoic arguments for the existence of god, see Algra 2003:159-165. For the opposing argument that it is in fact Middle Platonism which bears the most resemblance to Christianity, see Hunt 2003:104, who argued that by the time Tatian was writing, Stoicism was on the wane (ibid. 97-8).

[228] For the relationship between Epictetus and New Testament writings, see Bonhoffer 1911. Similarly, Hunt focussed on Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus in her comparison of Tatian and the Stoics (2003:93).

[229] As Inwood observed, we must exercise caution in assessing Seneca's true position: "Seneca's own deepest motivations lie hidden behind a façade constructed, paradoxically, largely of his own philosophical convictions" (2005:10). Whether or not Seneca genuinely 'believed' these things, however, is largely unimportant: the fact remains that he wrote them, and intended them to be a statement of a Stoic position.

of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. In the case of Seneca, his similarity to Christianity was such

that on occasions he was even considered to have been a Christian: Tertullian, for instance,

refers to him as *saepe noster*.[230] This perceived connection may make it easier to identify

common ground between the two schools of thought, and also to assess the degree of Stoic

influence on our three authors. The reasons for focussing on Marcus Aurelius are less

straightforward. There is no conceivable way in which the text to which we have access,

which was written by Marcus to himself, could have been available to any of our authors.

However, they form an important contrast with the writings of Seneca, which were designed

for public consumption:[231] Marcus' *Meditations* represent his own private considerations, and

may help to balance the rhetoric of the Latin philosopher.[232] However, there is a final

consideration: I argued in the introduction that Meliton's text was probably addressed to

Antoninus Pius rather than Marcus Aurelius, but this is not definite, and in either case Marcus

is addressed in the letter (either as ʾnṭwnynws qsr, 'Antoninus Caesar', or as one of his sons).

It is possible, then, that at the very least Meliton's text was intended to have some direct

relevance to the Stoic emperor. Tatian, too, was an almost exact contemporary of Marcus

Aurelius: Tatian lived 120-180 AD, Marcus Aurelius 121-180 AD. It is uncertain when the

Address to the Greeks was composed, as noted in the introduction, but that too may have

been intended to have specific relevance to Marcus Aurelius as emperor: even if neither

Meliton nor Tatian had access to his own writings, it is possible that his Stoic views would

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[230] Tert. *De anim.* 20: 'often one of us'.

[231] Long argued that the two are very similar in tone, being "highly rhetorical, sententious, and artfully constructed" (2003:192). However, the addressees, and thus the purpose of the texts, must be understood as being quite different.

[232] The *Meditations*, written in Greek, "serves as a type of philosophical diary, in which the emperor drew on (largely) Stoic principles to construct a framework to meet the challenges of human life as he experienced it" (Gill 2003:35-6). Gill points out that although the *Meditations* themselves make an explicit claim of allegiance to Stoicism, Marcus Aurelius' style includes a mix of Heraclitean, Platonic and Cynic elements (ibid. 49). Given the claims made in the introduction to the work, however, I shall treat the text as being reflective of Stoic thought. On the rhetoric of the *Meditations*, see Rutherford 1989.

have been well enough known for a direct philosophical appeal to make good sense. It should

be noted that this section is *not* a direct comparison of Stoicism and Christianity; that would

be an endless task that would ultimately not benefit the questions this thesis poses. Instead, it

is searching for instances that may or may not be direct reference to certain elements of

Stoicism, and to Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius in particular.

4.9.1   Meliton

Meliton never refers explicitly to philosophy, despite being described as a *pylswpʾ*;

his attacks are limited to the worship of images and the error this causes. Nevertheless,

certain points show remarkable similarity to Stoicism in general and to Seneca's work in

particular. The idea of a coming judgement is a constant one in Christian literature (both

Tatian and Aristides refer to it, but not in any great detail): what makes Meliton's account

unusual is the description of a great fire, which consumes the world. This discussion is found

in the context of God's original judgement on the world, in the form of the great flood: *hnwn*

ʾnwn mškḥyn dlʾ nʾqdwn. ʾmty dʾtʾ mmwlʾ dnwrʾ ʿl kwlh ʿlmʾ. dbḥd gyr zbnʾ hwʾ hwʾ mmwlʾ.

wrwḥʾ wʾṭrbw gbrʾ gbyʾ bgrbyʾ ḥsyntʾ. wʾštbqw zdyqʾ ltḥwyt dšrrʾ. twb dyn bzbnʾ ʾḥrnʾ hwʾ

hwʾ mmwlʾ dmyʾ. wʾbdw klhwn bnynšʾ wḥywtʾ. bswgʾʾ dmyʾ. wʾtnṭrw zdyqʾ bkwylʾ dqysʾ. mn

pwqdnʾ dʾlhʾ. whknʾ ʿtyd bzbnʾ ʾḥryʾ: dnhwʾ mmwlʾ dnwrʾ: wtʾqd ʾrʾʾ ʿm ṭwryh. wnʾqdwn

bnynšʾ ʿm ṣlmʾ dʿbdw: wʾm glypʾ dsgdw lhwn. wnʾqd ymʾ ʿm gzrth. wntnṭrwn zdyqʾ mn

rwgzʾ.[233] The association of the fire with the great flood immediately suggests parallels with

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[233] Meliton 9.7-8: 'these people (sc. the Christians) are able to escape destruction when the flood of fire comes upon the whole world. For there was once a flood and a wind, and the chosen men were destroyed by a mighty north-wind, but the righteous were left as a demonstration of truth. But again, at another time, there was a flood of water, and all men and animals perished in a multitude of waters. But the just were saved in an ark of wood by the command of God. So will it be in the last times: there will be a flood of fire, and the earth will be burnt up, together with its mountains and the people will be burnt up together with the images which they made, and the carvings which they worshipped; the sea will be burnt up together with its islands;

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Stoic ideas about the cyclical ἐκπύρωσις and the flood: *dicimus enim ignem esse qui occupet mundum et in se cuncta convertat; hunc evanidum languentemque considere et nihil relinqui aliud in rerum nature igne restincto quam umorem; in hoc futuri mundi spem latere. ita ignis exitus mundi est, umor promordium.*[234] Both fire and flood are explicitly connected on numerous occasions in Seneca's work,[235] as they are in Meliton's. Even if Meliton is not attacking Seneca himself, the direct association of flood and fire in his account, in a manner which does not feature in the New Testament, suggest that he may be indirectly targeting Stoic theory, even while he relies on the text of *2 Peter*.

There are a number of rhetorical similarities between Meliton's *Oration* and Stoic works. In one instance, Meliton addresses his readers as those *bk hw wlbr mnk hw wl'l mnk hw*.[236] This bears a remarkable resemblance to Seneca: *prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est*.[237] This, in turn, resembles Epictetus: σὺ ἀπόσπασμα εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ. ἔξεις τι ἐν σεαυτῷ μερος ἐκείνου.[238] This similarity may give weight to Lightfoot's argument that Meliton relied heavily on Epictetus. However, the context of the phrase in Meliton suggests that this is not the case: he makes this point as part of his argument against mistaking the created object for the creator God. In Seneca, by contrast, the phrase forms part of his argument against the necessity of prayer and ritual: we do not need to constantly pray to external gods, because

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but the just will be guarded from wrath'. There are striking similarities with *2 Peter* 3:10-12 in the imagery of this passage: see Cureton 1855:95, who was certain that Meliton was directly referring to the epistle.

[234] Seneca *Q Nat.* 3.13.2-3: 'we say that it is fire which takes hold of world and transforms everything into itself. This becomes feeble, fades and settles, and, when the fire has been put out, nothing remains in the natural world but water: in this lies the hope of the world to come. Thus fire is the end of the world, and water its beginning'. For the understanding of the ἐκπύρωσις as the act of a benevolent rather than a destructive God, see Algra 2003:170-3. See also Hunt 2003:92-3 and Klauck 2000:354.

[235] See also *Q Nat.* 3 Pref.5, 3.28.7, 3.29.5-8, 3.30.6. For an extended discussion of the mechanics of the flood, see ibid. 3.27.4-15. See also Inwood 2005:170-3.

[236] Meliton 8.6: 'in whom He is, and outside of whom He is, and above whom He is'.

[237] Seneca *Ep.* 41.1; 'God is near you, he is with you and within you'. As noted above, this refers not to any external conception of God, but to the rational spirit, which is a part of the divine. See also ibid. 66.12, 73.16.

[238] Epictetus 2.8.11: 'you are a fragment of god; you have a piece of him within you'.

god is always with us. This is an entirely different usage to that of Meliton.[239] Again, the context is different in Epictetus: the fact that we carry a part of the divine within us is used to distinguish us from irrational animals. It is, therefore, extremely unlikely to be a direct reference to either author, and is almost certain a coincidence based on theological similarity in this area.

A second similarity is seen in the use of the truth as a whip or goad: *šrrʾ dyn: mtḥšḥ bmltʾ ʾyk dbʿwqsʾ. wmḥ ʾ lʾylyn ddmkyn. wmʿyr lhwn. wʾmty dmtʿyryn. bh bšrrʾ ḥyryn. ʾp mstklyn. wšmʿyn wpršyn mdm dʾytwhy. mn mdm dlʾ ʾytwhy.*[240] Epictetus similarly highlights the role of truth and reason as a whip: the Spartans accept the whip as being entirely compatible with reason, and so should we.[241] However, again, the context is so different that the similarity must be entirely coincidental. For Meliton, the truth is used to rebuke a man and change his path; Epictetus uses the image in order to encourage us not to bemoan our sufferings, but to accept them with rationality.

4.9.2   The Syriac translator of Aristides

The Syriac translator of Aristides is more explicit than Meliton in his attacks on philosophers (*pylswpʾ*). This appears four times in the text, always in derogatory terms: this is particularly surprising, given that he identifies himself as *pylswpʾ* (unlike Meliton who is only identified in this manner in the introduction). It will become apparent that Aristides' aim is to present Christianity as a superior practice to that of the gentile *pylswpʾ*. However,

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[239] This is hardly surprising: Meliton is the least likely of the three Near Eastern Christian authors to have read a Latin philosophical work (assuming that we include the Greek writer of the original of Aristides' *Apology*).

[240] Meliton 1.4: 'but truth uses the word like a goad and strikes those who sleeping and awakens them. And when they wake they look at the truth and understand it; they hear it and distinguish that which is from that which is not'. As Cureton pointed out, *šntʾ* can mean 'madness' as well as sleep, but the metaphor of 'awakening' suggests that the translation 'sleep' remains preferable (1855:85)

[241] Epictetus 1.2.1-2.

Aristides does not identify any one group, but simply attacks the class of philosophers.[242] It was noted in the previous chapter that Aristides associates them with authors (*sywmʾ*); he also attacks the philosophical worship of the *ʾsṭwksʾ*.[243] I suggest that the reason Aristides groups philosophers and artists together in this attack is because he is concerned about the depiction of God given by both groups (that is, of immoral, vulnerable beings by the artists, and senseless elements by the philosophers).[244] Neither of these corresponds to Aristides' understanding of a loving and personal God, and as such they are both mistaken. It is clearly not philosophy itself that is a problem for Aristides: indeed, he is happy to borrow philosophical concepts and draw on other authors to serve his own ends (such as Xenophanes on image worship and Plato on the example set by the gods): it is partly for this reason that Aristides identifies himself as *pylswpʾ*. It is the philosophical understanding of the divine, rather than the philosophical process, which is Aristides' target: as such, it is not surprising that we find little which we might compare directly with Epictetus, Seneca or Marcus Aurelius.

4.9.3 Tatian

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[242] Pouderon and Pierre argued that this was due in part to Aristides' theological approach, and it was impossible for him to avoid using terms loaded with Platonic or Stoic significance: "le Dieu d'Aristide, ce n'est pas seulement le Dieu de Jésus-Christ, c'est aussi, d'une certaine façon, le Dieu des philosophes" (2003:65). However, this does not necessarily constitute an active, conscious engagement with these groups, which is the purpose of this section of the investigation.

[243] Aristides 20.4, 21.1. The *pylswpʾ* are also mentioned at 5.3 and 5.4, in which Aristides attacks them for introducing the elements (*ʾsṭwksʾ*). As argued above (2.3.2), although *ʾsṭwksʾ* is a transliteration of the Greek τὰ στοιχεῖα, the association with the barbarians rather than the Greeks makes it unlikely that we should interpreted them as the First Principle: nowhere in the text are the *ʾsṭwksʾ* explicitly idenfitifed with Greek philosophers. Pouderon and Pierre suggested that here the *pylswpʾ* should be identified with astronomers, particularly since they are here associated with the barbarians (Chaldeans in the Greek of *Barlaam and Josaphat*) (2003:332-3).

[244] Pouderon and Pierre 2003:365.

In Tatian, by contrast, we find more evidence to this end. As noted, his apology begins by rejecting contemporary Greek wisdom (σοφία).[245] He is clearly hostile to philosophy in general: he contrasts philosophising with a serious search for truth, which presumably is the path of Christianity,[246] without specifying any one philosophical school. In one passage, as noted above, Tatian attacks the unseemly deaths of a number of famous philosophers;[247] this bears a remarkable resemblance to a similar observation by Marcus Aurelius.[248] Although it is impossible that Tatian is directly referring to that passage, it may show an awareness of popular Stoic thought. Tatian simply follows this thought to its conclusion and suggests that their deaths highlight the moral laxity of their lives.[249]

Tatian's attack on Graeco-Roman σοφία is also significant: it may well refer to the rational mind, which, according to Seneca, is the definition of God and which we carry within us.[250] On occasion, Tatian adopts philosophical arguments without much hostility: for example, he argues that mankind resembles God only when he ceases to act as an irrational animal.[251] This argument is found in almost identical form in the writings of Epictetus: it is

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[245] Tatian *Or.* 1.3.

[246] Ibid. 3.3. On Tatian as philosopher first and foremost, see Elze 1960. See also Grant 1960:355-6.

[247] Tatian *Address* 2.1-2. See above, 5.3.2.

[248] M.Aur. *Med.* 3.3. In this account, Hippocrates died of illness, unable to cure himself; Heraclitus filled up with water and died covered in dung; and Democritus and Socrates were both killed by vermin. The parallels between these two accounts were also highlighted by Rutherford (1989:146), but he does not discuss them at any length.

[249] Tatian also attacks philosophers as a group, accusing them of wasting time growing beards (*Or.* 19.1): cf. ibid. 25.1. On the same accusation, see Luc. *Hermot.* 18 and Sen. *Ep.* 64.3. Epictetus defends against this preconception, which must indicate that it was popular (4.8.10).

[250] *quid est deus? mens universi. quid est deus? quod vides totum et quod non vides totum* ('what is God? The mind of the universe. What is God? Everything which you see, and everything which you do not', Seneca *Q Nat* 1 Pref. 13). See also 1 Pref. 14 (*totus est ratio*) and Epictetus 1.1.

[251] Tatian *Or.* 15.2. This is a reference to man as the εἰκών of God in *Genesis* 1:26: see above, 2.3.1.

only the rational nature (which is what transforms us into the likeness of the divine) that separates us from the irrational beasts.[252]

None of Tatian's points here are necessarily limited to Stoicism. However, on two occasions, Tatian attacks Stoic thought directly and explicitly. Firstly, he ridicules the notion of cyclic regeneration: καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ σωμάτων ἀνάστασιν ἔσεσθαι πεπιστεύκαμεν μετὰ τὴν τῶν ὅλων συντέλειαν, οὐχ ὡς οἱ Στωϊκοὶ δογματίζουσι κατά τινας κύκλων περιόδους γινομένων ἀεὶ καὶ ἀπογινομένων τῶν αὐτῶν οὐκ ἐπί τι χρήσιμον.[253] This is the only occasion in any of the three apologies when a specific philosophical group is identified by name, which may suggest that the Stoics are a particular target for Tatian; the fact that he refers to a particular doctrine indicates a close familiarity with the Stoics.[254] Secondly, he suggests that the soul (ἡ ψυχὴ) can be saved from death by living uprightly and according to wisdom;[255] this is probably a reference to the Stoic conception of the soul or reason that lives within us and is trained by just living to make us more and more like the divine.[256] Seneca repeatedly

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[252] Epictetus 2.9.2; see also 2.10.2. I do not suggest that this idea was exclusive to Stoicism: as Rowe pointed out, Plato relies on the idea that man can become godlike, remain human, or become an animal depending upon his use of philosophy (2003:113).

[253] Tatian *Or.* 6.1: 'for this reason we believe that there will be a resurrection of the body after the ending of the world: not, as the Stoics teach, going round in circles, being born and dying in an endless cycle, with no benefit to them'. This is presumably in contrast to the Christian resurrection, which is once for all time, and with a specific purpose (namely the glory of God). Marcus Aurelius discusses cyclic regeneration in some detail (*Med.* 2.14), while Epictetus thinks in terms of 'cosmic recycling': one has an existence, but not a personal one (3.24.94). See Hunt 2003:93 and Klauck 2000:358-61.

[254] Hawthorne argued that Tatian displays an "unconscious sympathy for them and an affinity with some of their principles" (1964:177), and that this is most evident in his discussion of the soul. He also highlights Tatian's attitude towards the disturbances of the world, which appear to show Stoic tendencies (*Or.* 11.1; Hawthorne 1964:188). As I have shown, Hawthorne's point is a valid one; I do not go into more detail on the similarity of their teachings where these similarities are unconscious, because these instances do not *intend* to engage with Stoicism. It is sufficient here to observe deliberate reference. For a fuller discussion of these similarities, see ibid. 177-178. In contrast, Hunt suggested that, since it is the Middle Platonists who receive the least brutal treatment from Tatian, he is more likely to be influenced by them, along with his mentor Justin (2003:104). However, Stoicism remains the only philosophical school to be *explicitly* attacked. For a summary of Tatian's philosophical allusions, see Hunt 2003:74-109 and Hawthorne 1964:178-9.

[255] Tatian *Or.* 13.1-3.

[256] Admittedly, this is not exclusively true to Stoicism: the view ultimately derived from Plato, as shown above, and "it was in fact commonly agreed in the imperial period that the ultimate goal of philosophy was to become like the divine" (Rives 2007:41) by using the divine as a model. See above, 5.2.5. See also Hunt 2003:68. Hawthorne argued that Tatian's division of two kinds of spirit (the divine, of which God is

emphasises that the goal of philosophical living is freedom, and that only philosophy can give us that freedom: *ad hanc te confer, si vis salvus esse, si securus, si beatus, denique si vis esse, quod est maximum, liber*.[257] This freedom is freedom from fear, from want and from worry, and it is this freedom that makes us like the divine: *hoc enim est, quod mihi philosophia promittit, ut parem deo faciat*.[258] It should be noted, however, that this does not make us immortal, but merely secure and blessed: Seneca elsewhere notes that the only difference between the wise man and the gods is that the gods live longer.[259] Marcus Aurelius, similarly, notes that the role of philosophy is to keep the inner δαίμων pure.[260] Obedience to this δαίμων, which is expressed through satisfaction with our lot,[261] elevates us to a godlike state: συζῇ δὲ θεοῖς ὁ συνεχῶς δεικνὺς αὐτοῖς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν ἀρεσκομένην μὲν τοῖς ἀπονεμομένοις, ποιοῦσαν δέ, ὅσα βούλεται ὁ δαίμων.[262] The same principle (that this freedom makes us godlike) is found in Epictetus: ἔδει δὲ μόνον μένοντα ἡσυχίαν καλεῖν αὐτὸ

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constituted, and the material, of which the demons are constituted) in *Or.* 12.1 should be considered a "frontal attack on the Stoics" (1964:167). However, as observed in the previous chapter, this should probably be considered an attempt to construct a hierarchy of nature (3.7.3), with God at the top, followed by the demons, mortals and beasts respectively. There is nothing to suggest that such an attack is directed against the Stoics necessarily.

[257] Seneca *Ep.* 37.3: 'take yourself to this, if you wish to be saved, if you wish to be secure, or blessed, and if you wish to be that which is the greatest of all – free'. See also 8.7, 14.11.

[258] Ibid. 41.8: 'it is this, which philosophy promises to me: that it will make me equal to God'. See also 31.8.11, 41.4, 75.18, 92.29 and *Q Nat.* 1 Pref. 6.

[259] Seneca *Ep.* 53.11. It would be misleading to suggest that Seneca had hopes of reincarnation or immortality (Klauck 2000:357; cf. Rutherford 1989:180); however, rationality did offer the Stoics true happiness in the association with the divine through freedom from worry (Inwood 2005:249).

[260] M.Aur. *Med.* 2.17.

[261] It was seen above that satisfaction, rather than grumbling at the gods and Fate, was the mark of the good man in Plato, and hence the danger posed by the poets. Epictetus strongly endorses this position, and argues that it is the hallmark of the true Stoic: ψυχὴν δειξάτω τις ὑμῶν ἀνθρώπου θέλοντος ὁμογνωμονῆσαι τῷ θεῷ καὶ μηκέτι μήτε θεόν ἄνθρωπον μέμφεσθαι, μὴ ἀποτυχεῖν τινος, μὴ περιπεσεῖν τινι, μὴ ὀργισθῆναι, μὴ φθονῆσαι, μὴ ζηλοτυπῆσαι (Epictetus 2.19.26-7:'let one of you show me the soul of a man which wishes to think in the same way as God, and never to blame either God or man, nor to miss anything, nor to be harmed by anything, nor to be angry, nor envious, nor jealous').

[262] M.Aur. *Med.* 5.27: 'he dwells with the gods, the one who shows them his soul, satisfied with its lot and doing whatever the δαίμων wishes'. As for Seneca, this is not a guarantee of immortality: "this imagined flight remains strictly hypothetical, rather than a foreshadowing of the soul's future fate" (Rutherford 1989:158).

καὶ ἐλευθερίαν καὶ ὅμοιον τοῖς θεοῖς ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτόν.[263] However, Tatian has already established at the beginning of his apology that philosophical schooling is *not* wisdom: the only wisdom belongs to the path of Christianity, and Stoic teaching is therefore unable to give us the kind of soul that survives death. He does not necessarily reject the Stoic conception of the soul, but does reject the fact that Stoic notions of just living can have any effect on it: Christianity, in a sense, accomplishes what Stoicism could not.[264] This is made explicit in his account of his own conversion: διόπερ χαίρειν εἰπὼν καὶ τῇ Ῥωμαίων μεγαλαυχίᾳ καὶ τῇ Ἀθηναίων ψυχρολογίᾳ δόγμασιν ἀσυναρτήτοις, τῆς καθ᾽ ὑμᾶς βαρβάρου φιλοσοφίας ἀντεποιησάμην.[265] The contrast between Greek and Roman philosophy and Christian philosophy, in the failure of one and the success of the other, is made quite clear.

4.10   Concluding remarks

Of our three authors, then, Tatian shows the most direct reference to Stoic philosophy: on a number of occasions, as highlighted, he appears to borrow from Seneca. This is not unexpected; we already know that he has experimented with various forms of philosophy, and, although Tatian does not explicitly tell us that this included the teachings of the Stoa, given their popularity this is not unlikely. It is not clear, however, whether the points made above indicated direct influence (that is, that Tatian read the works of Seneca and Epictetus)

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[263] Epictetus 1.12.21: 'whenever you are alone, you should call this 'rest' and 'freedom', and consider yourself akin to the gods'. See also 2.1.21, 2.18.19. Elsewhere, the ability to restrain one's πάθημα is given as the definition of true virtue (ibid. 3.22.13). See Krentz 2008:128-130 for more on ἀπάθεια in Epictetus.

[264] Tatian establishes elsewhere that Christianity is a philosophy (*Address to the Greeks* 31.1), which makes it comparable to the failed philosophies he elsewhere attacks. See also 25.1: τί μέγα καὶ θαυμαστὸν οἱ παρ᾽ ὑμῖν ἐργάζονται φιλόσοφοι; ('what great or astounding thing are your philosophers accomplishing?'). The context makes it clear that the philosophers are set in contrast to the success of Christianity, for they fail to achieve any knowledge of God. For Tatian's view of Christianity as a philosophy to rival Graeco-Roman schools, see Hunt 2003:109 and 110-143. Not all Christians saw it this way, however, for Tertullian asked: *quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?* ('what have Athens and Jerusalem (sc. Christianity) got to do with one another?', *De praescr. haeret.* 7.9).

[265] Tatian *Or.* 35.1: 'having said farewell both to Roman arrogance and Athenian cold logic (both incoherent teachings), I sought out the philosophy which you consider to be barbarous'.

or simply an awareness of common Stoic thought. However, it shows a clear interaction with, and aggressive rejection of, gentile philosophy and literature of the period. The final chapter of this dissertation will examine exactly what impact this rejection might have had.

Chapter Five: 'Bless those who persecute you' (*Rom.* 12:14): Christian persecution and the motivation of hostility

5.1   Introduction

The preceding chapters have clearly highlighted three conclusions that can be drawn about Near Eastern Christian attitudes to gentile religious life. Firstly, talking about 'Near Eastern Christian attitudes' in itself presents a problem: there is such variation in the approach and attitude of Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides that it is very difficult indeed to point to a given perception of an issue and describe it as '*the* Near Eastern Christian attitude'. Nowhere is this clearer than in the treatment of iconolatry: although all three authors are hostile to it, their attitudes vary hugely, from Tatian, for whom iconolatry is secondary to the moral problems raised by idolatry as a whole, to Meliton, for whom the worship of images is the sum total of gentile cultic practice. Secondly, we can observe that these attitudes, although varying in detail, are universally hostile towards gentile religious life, and towards the gentiles who practice it. Thirdly, the presentation given by these sources is often, although not always, an inaccurate picture, particularly when we compare it with the picture given by gentiles themselves in literature and epigraphy.

These conclusions are hardly surprising; in calling for a rejection of one's former existence and committing oneself exclusively to Christ, a hostile attitude to the former way of life is inevitable. Equally, there is no particular pressure on Christian authors to present an accurate depiction of gentile religious life:[1] rhetorical exaggeration would serve very well to undermine the basis of that religious life and associated conduct.

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[1] Clark made a similar point: she argued that while Livy might present an account of Hannibal's speech before the Battle of Zama, for instance (however inaccurate), there was no reason for Christians to record the view of their opponents (2004:17). Nor is this point limited to the depiction of gentile religious life: Hunt observed that part of the problem in discussed heresy in this period is that the views of heretics are not recorded, for there was no reason for Christians to do so (2003:5). For more on the relationship between internal and external text, see above, 1.4.

However, these conclusions raise a further question: namely, what role did this attitude, particularly as expressed through Christian literature, play in motivating hostility and persecution in the Near East? Is it possible that hostility and inaccuracy in Christian presentation of gentile religious life may have generated such resentment in their non-Christian neighbours that this contributed to the persecutions which were so prominent in the second and third centuries? As I have said, the conclusions noted above are not revolutionary in themselves, which makes it all the more surprising that little scholarship has been done on this area: these concluding remarks will attempt to address the possibility a little more fully.

The application of this question to the Near East offers both a challenge and an opportunity. We are so greatly limited in our source material from the Near East that it is very difficult to identify exactly what gentiles in the area thought of their Christian neighbours (as we shall see, Lucian refers to them, explicitly at least, on only a single occasion). On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter One, Christianity is a Near Eastern cult in its origin: we have an opportunity to study the impact of the Christian attitudes such as we find in Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides close to that point of origin.

5.2   Theories of opposition

The scholarly debate surrounding the motivation behind the persecution of early Christians is most clearly epitomised by the dialogue regarding Pliny *Letters* 10.96-97 between de Ste. Croix and Sherwin-White.[2] This discussion has created a number of 'theories of opposition' by which to explain the hostility demonstrated towards Christianity,

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[2] De Ste. Croix 1963 and 1964; Sherwin-White 1964. See also Walsh 1991.

particularly in the second century.[3] The arguments of these scholars, by and large, depend upon the works of Tacitus and Pliny the Younger; Tacitus' *Annals* 15.44 discusses the persecution of Christians in the context of the great fire of 64, whilst Pliny wrote to Trajan to enquire after the correct judicial practice relating to Christians whilst governor of Bithynia. It will be argued that these Latin sources have little relevance to Near Eastern Christians and their literary output: Edwards et al. argued that there was a considerable difference in attitude towards Christianity in the West and the East, and suggested that the latter was more 'tolerant'.[4] However, as I have demonstrated in the dissertation thus far, there is sufficient overlap between religious life in the East and West to mean that what was considered inappropriate conduct in Rome would likely be considered equally inappropriate in Dura-Europos on the Euphrates, or at Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall. In addition, we are sadly limited in our choice of material: the number of gentile literary sources on Christianity in the East from this period (that is, the first two centuries) is even more limited than those dealing with religious life in general. Our only useful source in this respect is a passage in Lucian's *Peregrinus*, which is not used in the debate between de Ste. Croix and Sherwin-White. Because of the limited availability of source material, I intend to evaluate these Latin passages (namely Tacitus and Pliny), but also to assess the understanding of Lucian's *Peregrinus*. As will be seen, Lucian's attitude is hostile, but the reasons for that hostility are less clear. The passage is too extensive to quote in full, but I shall refer to key parts of it.[5]

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[3] Engberg (2007:26) attempted to distinguish between 'motives' and 'causes': the former, he said, are superficial and easily identified, whilst the latter may be more individual, more profound and perhaps even unconscious. Almost certainly some incentives were deeply personal and perhaps unrecognised, but they certainly could not be identified in the sources. It is more useful, therefore, to talk of 'motives' rather than 'causes', even if Engberg's distinction is accepted.

[4] Edwards et al. 1999:2. For more on tolerance in this context, see below, 5.2.5.

[5] The relevant passage is found in Luc. *De mort. Peregr.* 11-13. Edwards defended Lucian's text on the grounds that it provides a believable, albeit satirical, presentation of Peregrinus as the antitype of a Cynic (1989). See also Engberg 2007:22-8.

The relevant Tacitus passage reads: *sed non ope humana, non largitionibus principis aut deum placamentis decedebat infamia quin iussum incendium crederetur. ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Chrestianos*[6] *appellabat. auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat; repressaque in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursum erumpebat, non modo per Iudaeam, originem eius mali, sed per urbem etiam quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque.*[7] Pliny's letter *(Letters* 10.96) and Trajan's reply (10.97) are too extensive to be quoted in full here, and will be quoted in part when relevant. Finally, Hadrian's rescript to the governor of Asia, Minucius Fundanus, will be quoted.[8] However, unlike Trajan's reply to Pliny, we do not have the questions that

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[6] Manuscript M has *Chrestianos*; Miller (1994:xxix-xxx) preferred *Christianos*, on the grounds that suggestions of a group of Jewish zealots called the *Chrestiani* ('good men') is stretching credibility. However, Woodman suggested that a later scribe changed it to *Christianos* based on the introduction of the name *Christus* in the following sentence (2004:325). This interpretation is almost certainly the correct one. He further suggested that it is possible that two forms of the name did exist, and that Tacitus "would be drawing a muted contrast between the common (i.e., pagan) name for the sect, evidently attributed to the Christians through a confusion with the Greek word *chrēstos* ('good', 'honorable'), and the true origin of the name" (2004:325). The suggestion that a second form of the name did exist is reinforced by Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4: *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit* ('he drove out from Rome the Jews, who were rioting at the urging of Chrestus'). Engberg (2007:100) presented three possibilities for the interpretation of this line: that there was a local troublemaker by the name of Chrestus; that a would-be messiah had proclaimed himself Chrestus; and that the new cult was causing unrest amongst the Jews in Rome. Whilst he admitted that we cannot be certain of this last interpretation (2007:90), it seems the most likely: if Tacitus understood that Christ was the *auctor* of the new cult, it seems reasonable to suppose that Suetonius would also have been aware of this. The implication of the form *Chresto*, however, is that contemporary classical authors were not certain either how to identify to followers of the new cult, or of the etymology of their name (hence the confusion between 'follower of Christ' and 'good man'). On the etymology of Christians and *Chrestiani*, see also Pouderon and Pierre 328-9; on Christ as the founder of the cult, see also Luc. *De mort. Peregr.* 11.

[7] Tac. *Ann.* 15.44.1-3. 'But neither human effort, nor the generosity of the princeps, nor the appeasement of the gods could get rid of the rumour that the fire had been ordered. Therefore in order to get rid of this rumour, Nero supplied defendants and afflicted with the choicest punishments those whom the crowds called 'Christians', hated for their immoralities. The founder of this name was Christ, who, whilst Tiberius was Emperor, was afflicted with punishment by the procurator Pontius Pilate. This deadly *superstitio* was suppressed for the moment, but soon burst out again, not only in Judaea, the origin of this evil, but even through the City, where all hateful and shameful practices flock and are celebrated'.

[8] The rescript survives (in Greek) at the conclusion of Justin's *First Apology* and in Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 4.9.1-3. However, both of these are written in Greek and must therefore be a translation of the Latin (notwithstanding Hadrian's philhellenism, a letter addressed to the (Roman) governor of Asia would be written in Latin, not Greek), which raises further complications in using the rescript for the purpose of direct comparison. As discussed above (1.4.1), Pouderon and Pierre highlighted the *Rescript* as a major obstacle to the understanding that Aristides delivered the *Apology* in person to Hadrian (2003:41-2).

prompted Hadrian's response (which is quoted by Justin at the end of his *First Apology*, and again, presumably with Justin as the source, in Eusebius' *Church History*), and therefore we must be careful not to take it out of context.

5.2.1   The *flagitia* (or 'immorality') theory

Let us begin, then, with an overview of the basic theories of opposition and their connection to the works of Tacitus and Pliny. Sherwin-White and Walsh favoured the 'immorality theory'.[9] According to this theory, hatred of Christians was based on the rumours of evil practice, most notably ritualistic incest and cannibalism (based, no doubt, on a misinterpretation of the consumption of 'the body and blood of Christ' during the Lord's Supper, and the Christian practice of calling one another 'brother' and 'sister'); they were therefore punished for these *flagitia*. This theory depends upon the fact that both Tacitus and Pliny highlight the *flagitia* with which Christians are connected. Tacitus notes that Christians are those *quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Chrestianos appellabat*. Pliny writes: *nec mediocriter haesitavi, sitne aliquod discrimen aetatum, an quamlibet teneri nihil a robustioribus differant; detur paenitentiae venia, an ei, qui omnino Christianus fuit, desisse non prosit; nomen ipsum, si flagitiis careat, an flagitia cohaerentia nomini puniantur.*[10] Like Tacitus, therefore, Pliny also criticises the *flagitia* associated with the Christians. The repetition of the term *flagitia* certainly seems to reinforce Sherwin-White's argument. It is also extremely significant that both Tacitus and Pliny strongly connect these *flagitia* with the

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[9] Sherwin-White 1964; Walsh 1991; their arguments are well summarised by Enberg 2007:71-76. A similar approach was adopted by Guterman, who argued that cults were occasionally repressed because they were disorderly or immoral, rather than because they were foreign" (1951:11).

[10] Plin. *Ep*. 10.96.2: 'I am more than a little uncertain as to whether a distinction ought to be made on the grounds of age, or whether the feeble and the more sturdy ought to differ [in the punishment they receive]; whether a pardon ought to be granted to the penitent, or, if someone has been a Christian once, he should not benefit by ceasing to be one; whether it is the name itself, or the immoralities which adhere to the name, which are to be punished'.

name of Christianity, a fact that Sherwin-White surprisingly fails to highlight. In Tacitus'

case, the Christians are so named in connection with the immoralities; Pliny suggests that

they somehow 'cling' to the name (*cohaerentia nomini*). It is clear that the name 'Christian'

was punishable in its own right; Trajan responds to Pliny that simply being a Christian is

enough to warrant a death sentence,[11] and no other charges are necessary.[12] The most

important point in Sherwin-White's argument is that Pliny clearly expects to find some

unspecified *flagitia* connected with the Christian name, and confesses himself frankly baffled

not to have done so. Hence his query to Trajan as to whether evidence of the *flagitia* is

actually necessary: *nomen ipsum, si flagitiis careat, an flagitia cohaerentia nomini puniantur*.

Accusations of immorality frequently appear in attacks upon Christianity – or, at least,

refutation of such accusations are a key part of Christian apologetic, so it may be safely

assumed that they were considered a dangerous part of gentile rhetoric.[13]

Lucian does not appear to have anything negative to say about the Christians; quite

the reverse, in fact. When Peregrinus was thrown in prison (and rightly so, in Lucian's view),

the Christians demonstrate a genuine humanitarian concern for him, bringing him both

money and moral support.[14] In Lucian's view, the Christians are foolish, misguided (for they

treat Peregrinus as a god), and child-like (for Peregrinus' knowledge of their lore makes them

all appear childish), but the satirist appears to have only positive things to say about their

moral conduct. If the Christians were opposed for their *flagitia*, then it is not a charge that

Lucian thought important to reflect in his account.

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[11] Ibid. 10.97.2. *si deferantur et arguantur, puniendi sunt* ('if they are brought before you and proven (to be Christian), they must be punished').

[12] Sherwin-White 1964:25.

[13] Justin, for example, attempted to deflect these accusations by blaming them on Gnostic heresy (*1 Apol.* 1.26.7).

[14] Luc. *De mort. Peregr.* 12-13.

De Ste. Croix vigorously opposed the position of Sherwin-White on the centrality of *flagitia*, arguing that it was clear that both Pliny and Trajan regarded it as essential to acquit repentant Christians. Pliny questions *an ei*, *qui omnino Christianus fuit, desisse non prosit*, whilst in reply Trajan confirms that *qui negaverit se Christianum esse... veniam ex paenitentia impetret*.[15] De Ste. Croix suggested that this in itself invalidates the 'immorality theory': "if you take charges of cannibalism seriously, you do not pardon the cannibal simply because they tear up their membership cards of the Cannibal's Club".[16] Furthermore, if the charge were based on immorality, then Pliny's failure to find evidence of *flagitia* would be enough to throw the accusation out. We know from other sources that the potential repercussions against would-be prosecutors bringing false charges could be extreme: in his rescript to Minucius Fundanus, Hadrian gives the governor explicit instructions: εἴ τις συκοφαντίας χάρις τοῦτο προτείνοι, διαλάμβανε ὑπὲρ τῆς δεινότητος καὶ φρόντιζε ὅπως ἂν ἐκδικήσειας.[17] The *delatores* must therefore have been fairly sure that Pliny would prosecute even in the absence of absolute evidence; de Ste. Croix argued that Trajan's confirmation of this attitude implies that there is something inherently wrong with Christianity itself, quite apart from any related *flagitia*.[18] He does admit that *flagitia* may have played a part, even if not a substantial one: "there is not the least suggestion in Pliny's letter or in Trajan's reply

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[15] Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.2: '(I am uncertain) whether, if anyone was once a Christian, he should not benefit by ceasing to be one'; 10.97.2: 'If anyone denies that he is a Christian... pardon is to be granted as a result of his repentance'. This seems to be confirmed by the Syriac *Martyr Acts*, which suggest that, if the defendants confess and repent, they are to be acquitted (*Mart. Sham. Gur.* 42). See also *Mar Mari* 26.

[16] De Ste. Croix 1964:31. See also Engberg 2007:317.

[17] 'If anyone brings the matter forward for the purpose of blackmail, investigate strenuously and be careful to inflict penalties adequate to the crime' (tr. Loeb). Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 4.9.3. "Under such circumstances, the accuser would have to be quite certain of the accused's devotion before daring to make any such accusation" (Engberg's 2007:208-9). Trajan's reply to Pliny is a stern warning against anonymous charges; with this in mind *delatores* would be unlikely to press fabricated or unlikely charges. For repercussions against prosecutors in criminal trials, see e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 3.37.1, which describes how two equestrians, Considius Aequus and Caelius Cursor, were punished by the Senate in AD 21 for bringing false charges against the praetor Magius Caecilianus.

[18] De Ste. Croix 1964:30.

that on this occasion the "flagitia" were actually the *ground* of persecution, although Pliny was prepared to regard persecution for "flagitia" as a theoretical possibility".[19]

How does this theory fit with the evidence of our Near Eastern Christian sources? Meliton is little use here; morality is not a concern to him, since, as observed above, 'sin' and 'error' are spiritual rather than ethical. However, both Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides defend Christian moral practice vigorously against gentile accusers. Aristides writes: *nšttqwn mkyl lšnyhwn dmmllyn sryqwtʾ wʿšqy lkrsṭynʾ. wnmllwn mkyl šrrʾ*;[20] he goes on to show that Christian conduct is exemplary, in contrast to that of their accusers.[21] Tatian adopts a very similar approach, and is even more explicit in his engagement with cannibalism, discussing the stories of Kronos, Zeus and Pelops.[22] On the surface, both of these passages appear to engage with exactly the debate that Sherwin-White favours, namely, the supposition that Christians were perceived as wicked or immoral. However, I argued above, in the case of Aristides, that this sort of apologetic is not his main aim: demonstration of the moral superiority of Christian practice is intended to convince gentiles to recognise their own sin and to convert. Although Aristides is concerned with these accusations (as highlighted in the passage above), the main aim of this section is quite clearly missionary. Tatian is more explicitly concerned with these accusations of *flagitia*: τί βλάπτομεν ὑμᾶς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες; τί δὲ τοὺς λόγῳ θεοῦ κατακολουθοῦντας καθάπερ μιαρωτάτους μεμισήκατε;[23] This is clearly intended to convince gentiles that the Christians are *not* wicked

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[19] Ibid:30.

[20] Aristides 27.6-28.1: 'now let the tongues of those speaking emptiness who slander the Christians be silenced, and let them now speak the truth'.

[21] See above, 4.5.1.

[22] Ibid. 25.3. For the passage, see above, 4.5.3.

[23] Tatian *Or.* 25.3: 'what harm do we do to you, men of Greece? Why are you disgusted by those who follow the word of God as if they were the most defiled of all?'.

or immoral; we can only conclude, therefore, that Tatian *was* aware of such accusations.[24]

However, as with Aristides, this is not his major aim. Tatian's defence of Christianity is based on a rational exploration which sets it alongside Classical philosophy,[25] and moral apologetic is merely a part of this. For both Tatian and Aristides, then, it is clear that accusations of immorality, and particularly incest and cannibalism, were part of the dialogue with gentiles, but they were not prominent enough to be considered a major threat. We may therefore discard the *flagitia* theory as the primary cause of Christian persecution in the Near East.

5.2.2   The *contumacia* (or 'obstinacy') theory.

The second option, again proposed by Sherwin-White, is the 'obstinacy theory'.[26] He once again demonstrated this in Pliny's *Letters* 10.96; he argued that once Pliny discovers that the charges of *flagitia* are unfounded, his anger is instead directed at the obstinacy of those Christians who refuse to repent. Pliny writes: *neque enim dubitam, qualecumque esset quod faterentur, pertinaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniri. fuerunt alii similis amentiae,[27] quos, quia cives Romani erant, adnotavi in urbem remittendos.*[28] This

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[24] Unfortunately, we have nothing to tell us the grounds on which Tatian's mentor, Justin, was put to death, as it is possible that it was on the grounds of *flagitia* and that Tatian therefore hopes to refute similar accusations. However, as Hunt convincingly argued, the *Address* probably dates to before Justin's martyrdom (2003:3). See above, 1.4.3.

[25] See above, 4.9.

[26] Sherwin-White 1964.

[27] There may be a parallel between the use of *amentia* in Pliny and the insanity of the Bacchanalia in 186 BC. The charge features in a number of other instances: Saturninus, in *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, suggests that Christians can be pardoned if they abandon their *amentia* (1). Lucian was extremely critical of the naivete of the Christians in welcoming Peregrinus (*Peregrinus* 11-12); see Engberg 2007:227. It may well be that weakness of mind was a feature of charges raised against Christians, but it can hardly be the basis of any legal charge.

[28] Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.3-4: 'nor do I doubt that their stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished, whatever they confess to. There were also similar raving individuals whom, because they were Roman citizens, I have added to the list to be sent to Rome'. Considerable scholarship has been done in comparing the treatment of Christianity with the persecution of the Bacchanalia; Nagy argued that for Pliny and other Roman elites, "le Christianisme évoquait sans aucun doute le souvenir de Bacchanales" (2002:191). See also

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theory would account for his willingness to acquit those who do repent. He further justifies his argument by highlighting an inscription from Roman Sardinia;[29] this records how the governor is clearly more concerned with the threat posed by *contumacia* and *seditio* than with the actual border dispute that prompted it.[30] Lucian says nothing on this subject; the Christians are astoundingly naïve,[31] but do not oppose authority in any sense. At most, one

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Grant 1981:161. However, Nagy is guilty of putting a Plinian spin on the events of 186. It seems to me unreasonable to assume that, after a gap of nearly three hundred years, the precedent of the Bacchic cult would necessarily occur to Pliny: it is certainly misleading to suggest that such a precedent actively shaped Pliny's account, as Nagy suggested. As with the case of Christianity, the majority of the debate focusses on the cause of this persecution: while Livy's account, found in 39.8-19, focusses heavily on the immoral practices of the participants, we also have the *senatus consultum* recording the Senate's response (*ILS* 18; see Beard, North and Price 1998b:288-291 for an account of these parallel sources), which appears to ignore such practices altogether: "le texte épigraphique de Tiriolo ne recourt à aucun de ces griefs; il se content de menacer ceux qui auraient appartenu à une des associations bachiques interdites, et dont le «crime» serait précisément de se soustraire à cette interdiction, se révélant ainsi comme des ennemis de la *res publica*" (Pailler 1988:140). However, this does not mean that immoral practices were irrelevant to the *senatus consultum*, but simply that legislation already existed for dealing with such practices, and that therefore the *senatus consultum* did not need to concern itself with them. Other readings focussed more on the interpretation of the Bacchanalia as either a political threat or as a *superstitio*: Davies, for example, argued that the danger of the cult was that it lay outside accepted religious structures, and therefore jeopardised the *res publica* (2004:81); Nagy insisted that the internal organisation of the cult posed a real threat to the state (2002:181). See also Guterman 1951:37. In contrast, Pailler suggested that the reaction of the authorities epitomised the climate of religious panic which pervaded at the end of the Punic Wars: he highlights the sacrifice of two Gauls and two Greeks, discovered in the forum (discussed by Plutarch above), as an example of this (1988:156; see also Goar 1978:21). It is worth observing that Livy's account follows exactly the same pattern as the discovery of a prodigy: some previously unknown occurrence, breaking natural or moral boundaries, is reported to the Senate, who vote, consult the Sybilline books when necessary, and take action. We see the same procedure in the discovery, description and punishment of the cult in Livy's account. It is possible that Livy therefore interpreted the cult as a prodigy (and therefore associated it explicitly with divine anger): as Davies argued, this pattern is essential to understanding Livy's interpretation of religion and his explanation of events (2004:29). However, it lacks any of the technical terminology which Livy usually applies to prodigies (such as *nuntiatum est*; see Davies 2004:32-41). However, even if we are to interpret this as the treatment of the Bacchanalia as a *superstitio*, there is no other evidence in the text to reinforce this, although, as Janssen pointed out, "die Feier der Bacchanalien zwar nicht expressis verbis als eine Form von superstitio bezeichnet, aber sämtliche Voraussetzungen sind da, um sie als solche zu kennzeichnen" (1975:153). Furthermore, there is no evidence in the *senatus consultum* to suggest the same: the likely conclusion, in agreement with Nagy and Davies, is that the Bacchanalia represented a *coniuratio*, and was therefore punished for different reasons for those applied to Christianity three centuries later.

[29] Sherwin-White 1964:26; see *ILS* 5947, which is a composite text recording the decisions of governors between AD 66 and 69.

[30] Sherwin-White also argued that we should translate Marcus Aurelius' famous objection to Christian martyrdom κατὰ ψιλὴν παράταξιν as *ob meram contumaciam* (1964:26, M.Aur. *Meditations* 11.3); however, this is a somewhat hypothetical justification, and in any case, Marcus Aurelius' strictly philosophical (and personal) musings, while they offer insight into the attitudes of Stoicism, have no place in a strictly legal context.

[31] Engberg 2007:227.

could accuse them of supporting a man jailed by the authorities, but Lucian does not suggest that this is in any way reprehensible.

Of the Near Eastern Christian authors, only Tatian engages with the issue explicitly. One might argue that Meliton's description of the emperor as a *skl'* ('fool')[32] displays extreme *contumacia*; however, if we are assuming, with Lightfoot, that the text never reached any emperor,[33] one must question how valid this assumption would be. Tatian, on the other hand, clearly attempts to defend Christians against accusations that they were uncooperative: προστάττει φόρους τελεῖν ὁ βασιλεύς, ἕτοιμος παρέχειν. δουλεύειν ὁ δεσπότης καὶ ὑπηρετεῖν, τὴν δουλείαν γινώσκω.[34] Again, we must conclude that Tatian was aware of these charges, and tried to defend against them. The fact that this line of defence is limited to this passage, and that it does not appear in either Meliton or Aristides, however, suggests that such accusations were not particularly prominent in gentile attitudes to Christianity in the Near East.

It is worth noting that, in the (much later) *Martyrdoms* of Habbib and of Shamuna and Guria, the governors presiding at their respective trials are clearly concerned with the resistance of the defendants to authority. In the *Martyrdom of Habbib*, the governor is angered by the lack of respect that Habbib shows him, for instance.[35] More tellingly, in both accounts, the governor repeatedly threatens the defendant(s) with death if they do not comply with the emperors' will (*ṣbyn' mlk'*). This phrase is continually repeated, particularly in the

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[32] Meliton 7.6.

[33] Lightfoot 2007:62. See above, 1.4.2.

[34] Tatian *Or.* 4.1: 'the emperor orders me to pay taxes; I am prepared to pay. Lords order us to serve and to service [possibly in the army]'; I recognise the service'. Early Christian thought often interpreted the Roman empire as part of God's will for the world (Clark 2004:8), probably based on the observation that the Christian should obey earthly rulers (*1 Pe.* 2:13; *Rom.* 13:1). Such suggestions probably find their origin in Jesus' instruction to ἀπόδοτε οὖν τὰ Καίσαρος Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῷ Θεῷ ('give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's', *Mt.* 22:21).

[35] *Mart. Hab.* 12.

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Martyrdom of Shamuna and Guria: on eight different occasions, the Christians' resistance to the will of the emperors is highlighted in a manner that suggests that this is a key element of the charge.[36] However, closer attention reveals that the 'will of the emperors' is in fact equated with the need to sacrifice to the gods, and to Zeus in particular:[37] the obstinacy of the Christians was apparently not an issue in its own right.

Furthermore, Engberg pointed out that, while it does have its attractions, the *contumacia* theory is severely limited; if anger at Christians were prompted by their obstinacy, then there would be no reason to charge them with an offence that only becomes apparent during the trial itself.[38] De Ste. Croix raised further objections: first and foremost, he observed that the word *contumacia* is not used once in our available material: Pliny uses *pertinacia* and *obstinatio*, which are not such politically loaded terms;[39] and secondly, Pliny's 'sacrifice test' was imposed only upon those Christians who repented in order to test their sincerity, and not upon those who obstinately refuse to repent.[40] Also, the 'obstinacy theory' fails to account for the fact that Christians are clearly charged for the name itself, that is, for no other offence than for being Christian. Obstinacy almost certainly made the situation worse, but cannot have provoked the charge in the first place.

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[36] *Mart. Sham. Gur.* 7, 11, 19, 21, 28, 36, 42, 46.
[37] Ibid. 2; *Mart. Hab.* 1.
[38] Engberg 2007:192. Janssen questioned whether we might broaden the definition of *contumacia* to include a refusal to sacrifice to the gods (1979:132): this would remove Engberg's objection, but requires us to abandon the legal charge of *contumacia*.
[39] De Ste. Croix 1963:18; Sherwin-White, countering, observed that such a "prosaic lawyer's word" (1964:26) has no place in a strictly literary context.
[40] Engberg 2007:192.

5.2.3 The *coniuratio* (or 'political') theory.

Sherwin-White's association of *contumacia* and *seditio* does provide a third option: the 'political theory'. The motives behind such persecution are, according to de Ste. Croix, numerous. The Christians were known to worship a convicted political criminal; their loyalty to the empire was called into question by their refusal to swear by the emperor's *genius*; they repeatedly threatened the imminent end of the world; they had a barely veiled hatred of Rome most evident in the *Revelation* of John; and their secretive nature led to suspicion of political conspiracy.[41] This theory has its attractions; firstly, the accusation of political conspiracy may also be seen in the suspicion of the secretive nature of the Bacchic cults that led to their repression in 186 BC.[42] Secondly, it seems to find some support in our sources; Tacitus explicitly names Christ as a convicted criminal in order to cast doubt on the political legitimacy of Christianity, whilst Suetonius identifies them as frequent troublemakers.[43]

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[41] De Ste. Croix 1963:16. Clark highlighted a number of features of Christianity which could contribute to this understanding: they often met under the cover of darkness, shared food, and, significantly, shared oaths; she also argued that the cell network which Christianity relied upon was typical of conspiracy (2004:19-20). Cf. Johnson 2009:8.

[42] See below for discussion of 'sedition' in the supression of the cult.

[43] This interpretation was noted in the discussion of the etymology of the name, as was Suetonius' association of the new cult with a group of troublemakers (Suet. *Claud.* 25.4). Laupot (2000:233-247) has argued that Tacitus *Fr.* 2 (surviving in Sulp. Sev. *Chron.* 2.30.6-7) demonstrates that *Christiani* were identified explicitly as a group of Jewish troublemakers known as 'Nazareans' distinct from Pauline Christians; that we should therefore identify the *Chrestianos* of *Ann.* 15.44 with this group; and that Tacitus attacks them for their troublemaking and association with riots. Most scholars believe the authorship to be genuine, based on certain features of style and phraseology (the use of *quippe* instead of *nam*, and the "typically Tacitean" *at contra* (Laupot 2000:237), for example). Laupot therefore argued that the use of *stirps* ('branch' or 'descendant') to identify Christians is a genuinely Tacitean survival and is based on the fact that *stirps* translates the Hebrew *nśr* (as in the Vulgate of *Isa* 14:19), which in turn transliterates to Ναζωραῖος/Ναζαρηνός (identified with Christians in *Acts* 11.26). Laupot argued that it was coincidence, and that Severus (and his authorship) would not have been aware of the connection; he further argued that Severus could not have redacted the account sufficiently without exposing himself to his peers (2000:243). As a result, he suggested, the usage reflects a close identification of the 'Christians' and 'Nazareans', a group who is explicitly associated with the Jewish revolt; this group is in turn to be identified with the victims of *Annals* 15.44, and the destruction of the temple should be seen as an extension of the punishments inflicted on them by Nero (245). However, there are problems with this interpretation; Laupot himself admitted that the use of *religiones* (2.30.7) in place of the more familiar *superstitiones* (as *Annals* 15.44) is a Severan redaction (2000:234); it would surely be more plausible to suggest that the use of *stirps* is similarly a Christian interpolation, especially since Paul uses the connection in *Rom.* 11:16-24 (using the Greek κλάδος). This means that Tacitus' identification of the *Chrestiani* and a group of rioters known as 'Nazareans' cannot be taken for granted. Secondly, he suggests that *Ann.* 15.44 refers "unmistakeably"

However, two major objections remain. One is methodological: it is a misleading approach to separate the political from the religious in the ancient world (and we may therefore dismiss Sherwin-White's claim that "the Roman official is indifferent to the religious aspects in the known cases, provided that the Christian sheds his *contumacia*")[44]: such a dichotomy is a clear anachronism. The second problem with the 'political' theory lies in the fact that Pliny is clearly happy to acquit repentant Christians, as noted above. No governor in his right mind would risk acquitting a potential traitor simply because he claimed to have repented.[45]

There is no evidence in the texts to suggest that Near Eastern Christians felt that they were considered a political threat. However, one point raised in this discussion requires further exploration, namely the Christian refusal to swear by the emperor's *genius*.[46] I have not discussed Near Eastern Christian attitudes to emperor-worship[47] in this thesis, nor do I intend to do so extensively here. In a large part, this is due to the scarcity of material, since Tatian, Aristides and Meliton barely dwell on it. Also, emperor-worship is one area in which there may be a substantial difference between the Greek East and the Latin West.[48] In Italy, worship of the emperor was restricted to his *genius* while he was alive; after death (assuming the Senate took steps to deify him), temples might be erected to him as a *divus*. In the East,

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[44] Sherwin-White 1952:211.

(2000:233) to *Christiani* – but, as demonstrated above, there is indecision over whether to read *Christianos* or *Chrestianos*. As a result, the groups referred to in the two passages cannot be explicitly identified. Laupot's argument challenges the interpretation of Tacitus' passage, but relies too heavily on troublesome suppositions.

[45] Nagy (2002:178) attempted to maintain "cette distinction subtile entre *coniurationes* ordinaire et *coniurationes* d'origine religieuse", and that this distinction accounts for the relative tolerance of the imperial authorities until the third century. However, there is little evidence that the authorities would have perceived such a distinction, or if they did, that it affected their treatment in any meaningful way.

[46] Gradel observed that all men possessed a *genius*, and "its cultivation did not therefore impute divinity, or rather divine status, to its 'owner', as did the 'heavenly honours' (*caelestes honores*)' (2002:7). I have in mind the worship of an emperor's *genius* which places it beyond the norm.

[47] I avoid the phrase 'imperial cult', because it implies a structured set of processes, often viewed as part of a restoration of religion in the early empire; rather, it should be viewed as the *restructuring* of religion, "drawing on the longstanding traditions of Rome, though increasingly focussing on the person of the emperor himself" (Beard, North and Price 1998a:169; see also Gradel 2002:7).

[48] On these differences, and on the functioning of emperor-worship in the western world, see esp. Gradel, who felt uncomfortable maintaining this dichotomy (2002:13) and Fishwick 1987.

however, such steps were often taken *before* death. Emperors tried to discourage this sort of

practice, but with limited success: it seems to have been an accepted part of the running of

religious life in the Eastern half of the empire.[49] In Pliny, it appears that offering sacrifices to

the emperor was part of displaying their loyalty to him, and therefore to the empire at large.[50]

What evidence is there in Meliton, Aristides and Tatian to suggest that the failure to

participate in emperor-worship was an accusation levelled at Christians in the Near East?

Only Meliton appears to engage with the subject. At the beginning of the Euhemeristic

historiolae, he observes: *'n' dyn 'mr 'n'. d'p swl' 'mrt 'lyhwn dlšlm' hw dmlk' dmytw sgdyn.*

whd' pšyq' lmd'h. h' gyr 'p hš'. lṣlm' hw dqsryn' sgdyn wmyqryn: ytyr mn dlhnwn qdmy'.[51]

Indeed, the entire section appears to be an expansion of this principle:[52] the gods are

worshipped on exactly the same basis as the emperor, namely as recognition of the benefits

which they offer mankind.[53] However, Meliton is surprisingly neutral on the subject; he does

not expose the worship of emperors to polemic in the same way as he does the worship of

images. The absence of polemic in all three authors is somewhat surprising, particularly

given the prominence of ruler-cult in the Near East. However, it also reflects a similar lack of

discussion in New Testament material: on the only occasions in which the emperor appears,

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[49] Wissowa 2003:348. This was due in no small part to the legacy of Hellenistic ruler-cult, although Millar argued that in numerous areas the impact of Hellenism could be considered relatively slight (2006:23). For more on the influence of this practice in the development of imperial cult, particularly in the East, see esp. Sartre 2001; see also Beard, North and Price 1998a:145-7, Chankowski 2011, esp. 4-5, and Price 1984.

[50] I do not suggest that such sacrifices were 'merely' a statement of loyalty: there is, as in all sacrifices, a religious significance. I intend here to show the purpose which Pliny appears to assign to them (in contrast to sacrifices to the Roman gods as a whole). Butcher argued that it was largely due to this statement of loyalty that Christianity encountered more opposition from the 'imperial cult' than from any other cult (2003:370), at least in its early stages: as I shall show, however, this interpretation is a little too simplistic.

[51] Meliton 3.2: 'but I say also that the Sybil said about them that they worship the images of dead kings. It is easy to understand, for even now they worship the images of the Caesars even more than their former gods'.

[52] I argued above (3.2.1) that the *historiolae* were included as part of the discussion of emperor-worship in order to make the text more relevant to a supposedly imperial readership.

[53] As Gradel pointed out, the divine world functioned as a form of 'spectrum' without fixed boundaries, in which it was possible for an individual to be 'more' divine because of his actions. As a result, we should abandon traditional dichotomies of 'man' vs. 'god' (2002:27-9). See also Beard, North and Price 1998a:141, Versnel 2000:105 and Chaniotis 2011:173-6.

the attitude that is promoted is that of subservience and obedience.[54] The worship of the emperor, at first glance, stands hugely at odds with both Christian and Jewish theology:[55] it is worship not just of the man-made, but of man himself, in the place of God the Creator. Why, then, is there such little attention paid to it, either in the New Testament or in our Near Eastern sources? The answer may be quite simple: polemic against the worship of the emperors could very easily have been seen as sedition,[56] as Pliny's use of sacrifice as a test of loyalty clearly demonstrates.[57] Meliton, Aristides and Tatian have shown no reluctance to risk offending their neighbours, as I shall further demonstrate below; however, that is an entirely different matter to getting on the wrong side of the authorities. Since persecutions in the first and second centuries were led by individuals, rather than by local government, it would be good sense for the Christians to try and avoid angering the authorities as well: the consequences of government involvement in persecution becomes clear in the third century, with the consequences of Decius' decree.[58]

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[54] *Rom.* 13.1. This attitude is promoted on the basis that the emperor (and, indeed, all authorities) are installed by the will of God, and rule according to that will. See above, 5.2.2.

[55] Although Pollini argued that later reverence for the Christian emperors indicated that the problem was not with imperial cult in itself, but with the fact that the emperors represented polytheism (2008:181).

[56] Caligula's response to the destruction of his statues in Jerusalem is probably to be attributed to concerns over *seditio* rather than megalomania (ibid:192-3).

[57] Hekster argued that it was under Trajan that the deified emperors became some kind of 'set'. If this is the case, then Pliny's sacrifice test is designed to ensure loyalty not just to the ruling emperor but to the imperial house and the empire at large (2007:108).

[58] It seems unlikely that Decius' decree was specifically targeted at Christians; see esp. Rives, who argued that the effects on Christianity were only part of a wider set of innovative religious reforms (1999:135). Similarly, Green argued that it was aimed at uniting all citizens (which was, by now, everyone) and should therefore not be considered to be specifically focussed at Christians (2010:143). In contrast, Gradel argued that no emperor could be unawae of the consequence of his actions on Christians, and that it must have been a calculated manoeuvre (2002:368). Beard, North and Price observed that by the third century, governors were expected to hunt down brigands, thieves, and the sacreligious, and argued that Decius' decree formed a deliberate part of this change in policy (1998a:238-9). Engberg suggested that this debate is in itself misleading, and that the treatment of Christianity before and after 250 should not be as clearly separated as is traditionally done (2007:21).

5.2.4 The *civitas* (or 'citizenship') theory

A second 'political', or perhaps more accurately 'socio-political', theory was suggested by Rives; he argued that since religious authority and political authority were inherently intertwined (notably in the fact that the priesthoods were held almost universally by magistrates, at least in traditional cult),[59] the authorities would inevitably feel challenged by rival claims to religious knowledge and authority; this, in his view, is the reason for Roman attitudes to self-proclaimed 'holy men' such as Jesus of Nazareth and Apollonius of Tyana.[60] Whilst the priests did not hold a monopoly on religious interpretation (which, even in public cult, was an inherently private business),[61] religious knowledge was supposed to be derived within the structures of 'traditional' cult, based around prodigy, expiation, sacrifice and oracular utterances. Suspicion of those who sought religious knowledge elsewhere is best demonstrated by the threat posed by magic, which offered dangerous means to aims which could (in theory) be achieved along more traditional lines.[62]

Green expanded on this theory, arguing argued that the problem with Christianity was that it was a "religion without any national identity or laws".[63] Christianity was not, therefore, inherently tied up with the survival of the state, and Christians could not be classed as 'true' citizens.[64] Green demonstrates at length the difficulty that Christians had in claiming 'citizenship', given their reluctance to participate in games, festivals, or even sign written

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[59] Rives 2007:44, although he did not name it as such: the idea of the *civitas* theory is my own creation, to help it sit alongside the theories discussed by de Ste. Croix, Engberg and Sherwin-White. For detailed discussion of the political role of priests, see Beard, North and Price 1998:23-30 and Gordon 1990.

[60] Rives 2007:166. On the phenomenon of these individuals, see Georgi 1976.

[61] Rives 2007:45. No single religious group claimed to have absolute authority over interactions with the gods (Beard, North and Price 1998:21).

[62] Rives suggested that erotic love, so often the focus of magical enchantments, could be attained through prayer and sacrifice to Venus/Aphrodite (2007:172). See Davies' discussion of Livy's presentation of Scipio Africanus' unorthodox approach to the divine (2004:127-30).

[63] Green 2010:124.

[64] Guterman, who argued that the failure to honour the traditional gods represented alliance to a different state, and therefore put one at odds with the Roman people (1951:21-3).

contracts (which required an oath to the gods):[65] their social involvement in the life of the state would have been very limited. This argument is much more convincing than the 'sedition' theory: Christianity's 'separateness' from the life of the state may have been considered harmful without necessarily accusing them of sedition, simply assuming that Christians were not 'good citizens'; in a society which relied upon community and unification, emphasised through social contracts such as patronage, this would have been considered repulsive and made persecution almost inevitable.[66]

We might suggest that the distinction of mankind into Greeks, Barbarians, Jews and Christians found in the Syriac translation of Aristides reflects just such a concern:[67] firstly, it appears to remove Christians as a social group from the world around them, and secondly, it clearly derives their *religious* authority as a group from Christ. Christians are therefore established not simply as a separate ethnic group, with their own concerns, but as a separate priesthood.[68] However, Aristides does not make a great deal of this distinction: he simply uses it to characterise the different religious and moral practices of different groups. Taken together with the fact that there is no such discussion in either Meliton or Tatian, this suggests that this was not a major feature of the dialogue with gentiles in the Near East.

It should be noted that labelling these as 'political' theories is somewhat misleading; they seem to have more to do with society or religion than politics. However, it is very difficult, and very dangerous, to distinguish between the religious and the secular in the ancient world – largely because, as observed above, the magistrates and priests were the same people. A challenge to religious authority, then, also constituted a challenge to political

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[65] Green 2010:125.
[66] Ibid:132.
[67] Aristides 3.2.
[68] See e..g. *1 Pet.* 2:9, quoting *Exod.* 19:6.

authority: it can be labelled a 'political' theory in this sense, but caution must be exercised in such a distinction.

5.2.5 The *superstitio* (or 'ungodliness') theory

This leaves the fifth option: the 'ungodliness' theory favoured by de Ste. Croix and Engberg.[69] Scholars often object to this theory on the grounds that polytheistic religion is assumed to be more tolerant than monotheistic cult;[70] however, this represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of tolerance in the ancient world: indeed, Pollini argued that the very ideas of 'tolerance' or 'intolerance' could not be appropriately applied to polytheistic religious life in the Near East:[71] a willingness to accept foreign gods did not imply a willingness to accept foreign *practices*.[72] If Christians are convicted for 'ungodliness', then this accounts for Pliny's willingness to acquit the repentant; it also accounts for the fact that Christians are clearly charged on the basis of their *nomen.* Christianity is clearly understood to be explicitly associated with some abhorrence.[73] It must be noted that Tacitus, Pliny and Suetonius, although their accounts are otherwise distinct, all describe Christianity as a

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[69] De Ste. Croix (1963/4) did not explicitly label his preference as such; the term 'ungodliness theory' is derived from Engberg's excellent assessment of de Ste. Croix's debate with Sherwin-White (2007:76). Engberg used 'ungodliness' rather than 'atheism' because the word atheist, ἄθευς, does not have the same negative connotations as in modern understanding (ibid:197).

[70] As e.g. Berlin: "the tolerance of ancient polytheistic societies for both internal and external religious diversity stands in marked contrast to the exclusivity that is the hallmark of monotheistic religions" (1996a:4); cf. Wissowa 2003:336, who argued that tolerance was "characteristic of all polytheism" (2003:336). See also MacMullen 1981:2. Guterman argued that tolerance was selective rather than assimilative with regards to foreign cults (1951:27); however, as we have seen, his claim that the Roman state had a largely *laissez-faire* policy is misleading (ibid:119): as we saw in the letters between Pliny and Trajan, it is impossible to talk about a 'policy' of tolerance in any sense.

[71] Pollini 2008:186. Beard, North and Price argued that the concept of tolerance was inapplicable to religious life in the Graeco-Roman world as a whole (1998a:212).

[72] Davies observed of Livy that, whilst the historian was accepting of foreign gods, he was far less so on their rites (2004:81). For more on the understanding of tolerance in this context, particularly in the Near East, see e.g. Sartre: the openness of Syrian Hellenism "does not authorize us to imagine a society of universal tolerance and harmony" (2008:48).

[73] De Ste. Croix 1964:25.

superstitio.[74] Although Tacitus does criticize Christianity's wickedness, as noted above, the context makes it clear that an altogether greater issue is at stake. He mentions Christianity in the context of what is a perfectly legitimate process of attempting to propitiate the gods by means of sacrifice in order to alleviate the effects of the fire.[75] This is immediately followed by Tacitus' attack upon this 'deadly *superstitio*'. The implication is clear: the Christians represent a disruption of the *pax deorum*, and it is they who must be eradicated in order to restore it. This interpretation is confirmed by his later note which criticises Nero for his brutality, but adds that the Christians did indeed deserve to be punished.[76] Since he does not discuss immoral conduct, we must conclude that the threat is posed not by incest or cannibalism but by some form of improper religious conduct.

We note this also in Lucian's text. He writes: πεπείκασι γὰρ αὑτοὺς οἱ κακοδαίμονες τὸ μὲν ὅλον ἀθάνατοι ἔσεσθαι καὶ βιώσεσθαι τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον.[77] If Lucian's tone should encourage us to think he is sympathetic (as the Loeb translation 'poor wretches' implies), then the term of reproach, οἱ κακοδαίμονες, should force us to think again. Whilst it can simply mean 'wretched', it is used consistently in tragedy to describe to plight of the lead character, and is often associated with abandonment by the gods; LSJ even suggest that it could imply being possessed by an evil spirit.[78] If Lucian, as is likely, wishes to present the Christians in a tragic sense, then he does not intend us to feel sympathy for them, but to understand that they have brought their fate upon themselves. The Christians' conduct, and

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[74] Suetonius describes the Christians as *genus hominum superstitionis novae ac maleficae,* 'a race of men of a new and wicked *superstitio*' (*Nero* 16.2).

[75] For discussion of this process in Livy and Tacitus, see above, 3.2.2.1, and Davies 2004.

[76] Tac. *Ann.* 15.44.4: *novissima exempla meritos* ('deserving of being made new examples'). On the above understanding, Christians were to blame for the fire, but only in the sense that they provoked the divine anger by their *superstitio* – they were, in a sense, 'indirectly' responsible. Engberg (2007:225) suggests that Tacitus himself did not believe this, but that it was an accurate reflection of the prevailing opinion of his times. However, see Davies' comments (above) on Tacitus' 'belief'.

[77] Luc. *De mort. Peregr.* 13: 'those poor wretches think that they will be immortal and live for all time' (tr. Loeb).

[78] LSJ *s.v.* κακόδαιμων, citing *Antipho* 5.43.

particularly their claim to have knowledge that will make them immortal, not only leaves them in this desperate (and apparently deserved) position, but also influences their conduct in the world. Lucian, it seems, is in full agreement with Pliny and Tacitus in opposing Christians on the basis of their religion.[79]

5.2.5.1 Defining *superstitio*

Is it possible to form a clearer definition of *superstitio* that could be applied to Christianity? *Superstitio* is far more serious than the English translation 'superstition' would imply; as noted above, Tacitus describes it as *exitiabilis* ('deadly').[80] Rives identified two potential strands which might constitute the 'ungodliness' of Christians:[81] the first, which he labelled as atheism, does not describe the failure to 'believe' in the divine, but rather to honour the divine in a correct way.[82] The second strand is that of *superstitio*, which he described as an incorrect or 'excessive' religiosity.[83] We might then distinguish between a 'positive' and 'negative' criticism: one focuses on what the Christians fail to do, one describes what they do. Tertullian acknowledged that gentile hostility is founded upon Christian rejection of traditional cult;[84] it is the 'negativism' of Christianity, and not its 'positivism', that is most frequently attacked. This seems to be true for the most part; the governor of Egypt, for example, asks Dionysus, Bishop of Alexandria: τίς γὰρ ὑμᾶς κωλύει

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[79] Engberg 2007:227.

[80] Tac. *Ann*. 15.44; see also Scheid 1984:24-5 and Janssen 1979:133. Horace described *superstitio* as a *morbus mentis* (*Sat.* 2.3.79-80), emphasising its seriousness.

[81] Rives 2007:183.

[82] Walsh argued that atheism is not a problem in Roman eyes: he suggested that whilst some *may* have been irritated or considered it a threat to the *pax deorum*, "most would not have cared as long as conditions were generally peaceful" (1991:256). However, this does Romans a great disservice by suggesting that they did not take such attacks on the *pax deorum* extremely seriously.

[83] Rives 2007:184.

[84] Tert. *Apol.* 24.1.

καὶ τοῦτον, εἴπερ ἐστὶν θεός, μετὰ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν θεῶν προσκυνεῖν.[85] De Ste. Croix argued that this is the case: "it was not so much the positive beliefs and practices of the Christians which aroused gentile hostility, but above all the negative elements in their religion: their total refusal to worship any god but their own".[86] Rives was correct to observe two elements to the criticism of Christianity, but it is not at all clear that they should be so firmly distinguished. Tacitus charges both Egyptian and Jewish rituals with *superstitio*; he calls the Egyptians *dedita superstitionibus gens*,[87] and the grounds for this charge are that they worship Serapis *above all other deities*. The Jews are described in very similar terms: they are a *gens superstitioni obnoxia, religionibus adversa*.[88] Charges made against the Jews are based not on incorrect performance of their rites (they, at least, were happy to offer sacrifice to their God, unlike the Christians), but rather on their 'excessive' religion – that is, their single-minded commitment to a single deity at the expense of other gods (and thereby endangering the *pax deorum*).[89] If *superstitio* can be understood in this sense, then atheism is

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[85] Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 7.11.9: 'who prevents you from worshipping this god, if he is a god, along with the natural gods?' Significantly, the governor, Aemilianus, allows worship of the Christian God *as long as* he is only one amongst others. The emperor Severus Alexander was reported to have sacred images of the deified emperors – and added to these images of Christ and Abraham (*SHA Sev. Alex.* 29.2).

[86] De Ste. Croix 1963:24.

[87] Tac. *Hist.* 4.81.2: 'a race given over to *superstitio*'. Beard, North and Price argued that by Tacitus' period, *superstitio* comes to be used as an easy means of referring to foreign religion ('foreign' in the sense of different or bizarre rather than simply 'from another land'), and that therefore the application to Jews and Egyptians is not as specific as suggested here (1998a:222); see also Lieu 2004:274. However, whether or not the charge is specifically aimed at Jewish and Egyptian rites in particular, the fact remains that some features of these rites were considered bizarre and therefore *superstitio*. It should be noted that Tacitus is not critical of all other religious systems (ibid:222), and this is in keeping with other classical authors: Pliny the Elder, for example, applauds a fire-walking cult of Apollo (*HN* 7.19).

[88] Tac. *Hist.* 5.13.1: 'a race prone to *superstitio* and hostile to correct religious practice'. He does, however, have a grudging respect for the antiquity of their cult: *hi ritus quoquo modo inducti antiquitate defenduntur* ('these rites, whatever their origin, are sanctioned by their antiquity', ibid. 5.5). This is in distinct contrast to the Christians, as the historian notes explicitly that their cult was founded only during the reign of Tiberius: they do not even have the validation of antiquity to support the supposed supremacy of their cult. On the antiquity of the Jews and other reasons for the concessions made to Judaism, see Guterman 1951:103-5; Clark 2004:6; Beard, North and Price 1998a:223.

[89] The Jews are criticised for abhorrent practices, but these (which are notably circumcision and the refusal to eat pork, as well as 'ritual characteristics' such as excessive lust and xenophobia) are not located within a ritual context. Unless their critics understood these practices to be a part of their ritual life, it seems unlikely that they would be counted amongst the charges of *superstitio*.

a part of the charge of *superstitio* and not an alternative to it.[90]

Janssen has added an extra level of understanding, based on the Ciceronian definition of the abstract noun *superstitio,*[91] which Cicero understands as being derived from the Latin noun *superstes*, meaning a 'survivor': that is, one who prays day and night that his or her children might survive. This leads to the understanding of Rives, Walsh and others that *superstitio* must be considered an 'excessive' form of *religio*; however, Janssen also suggested that *superstitio* is opposed to *religio* not just in degree but because it sought the preservation of the individual rather than the *res publica Romana.*[92] This is an ingenious theory which could certainly be applied to Christian eschatology, which did emphasise the salvation of the few and the destruction of the whole (and especially of Rome); however, it is uncertain that all three of Tacitus, Suetonius and Pliny would have become aware of Christian eschatological doctrine by their time of writing. Furthermore, there is not a hint of this

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[90] Walsh disagreed: he argued that atheism was *not* included in the charge of *superstitio*, which was primarily concerned with foreign or excessive cults (1991:260). We may find some support for this position in Plutarch (*De superst.* 6.167d), who observes that the atheist (ἄθεος) is far less dangerous than the one with δεισιδαιμονία ('fear of the divine') because this latter involves a wrong understanding of the divine: οἱ μὲν οὐχ ὁρῶσι τοὺς θεοὺς τὸ παράπαν, οἱ δὲ κακοὺς ὑπάρχειν νομίζουσιν ('the former think that they do not exist, the latter that they exist and do evil'). Russell argued that the weak mind tended towards δεισιδαιμονία and the headstrong towards atheism (1968:134). However, in this sense, δεισιδαιμονία is only a partial translation of *superstitio:* according to the definitions given above, δεισιδαιμονία is closer to a violation of *pietas* than of *religio,* whereas *superstitio* clearly includes the incorrect conduct of rite. However, Plutarch's understanding of δεισιδαιμονία does highlight that it was possible to have both 'correct' and 'incorrect' interpretations of the divine: the huge number of inscriptions across the empire highlighting the benevolence of the gods emphasises this 'correct' attitude (Rives 2007:98). This is reinforced by Cicero, who also claims that *superstitio* is a *timor inanis deorum* ('pointless fear of the gods', *Nat. D.* 2.42): that is, an incorrect understanding of the divine. Solmsen highlighted three means of interpretation in Cicero's text: the *ratio civilis*, the *ratio fabularis* and the *ratio physica* (1944:59; see Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.70-2, although Solmsen noted that these terms are not used explicitly). Adoption of the wrong interpretation (and therefore understanding) of the divine leads to *superstitio*. We must be cautious in assuming that Cicero's works necessarily represent genuine religious sentiment, although this is more vital in his speeches than his philosophical works (Heibges 1969:304).

[91] Cicero *Nat. D.* 2.28. Janssen noted that Plautus uses *superstitiosus* to mean 'clairvoyant' (*Curcilio* 3.1.28), but claims that Cicero's is the original understanding (1979:139). See also Janssen 1975: "dann ein besonders wichtiger formaler Zusammenhang zwischen *superstes* und *superstitiosus* hergestellt worden" (140). He also discussed, and dismissed, the connection between *superstitio* and various Greek terms, particularly ἔχστασις: "weil er bei Plautus und Ennius für *superstitiosus* die Bedeutung 'wahrsagend' 'weisagericht' vorfand... der ursprünglich Wortsinn von *superstitio* sei 'Darüberstehen' – 'Hinauftreten' und das Wahrsagen sei zu verstehen als eine römische Version der griechischen ἔχστασις ψυχῆς" (137); "lässt sich nun keine Verbindung zwischen *superstitio* und ἔχστασις herstellen" (138).

[92] Janssen 1979:142.

meaning in the use of *superstitio* of Jews and Egyptians. Jews were recognised as troublemakers, but no more than that, whilst the Egyptians, although once the enemy, were no longer. The idea of personal rather than public salvation may have some weight, but it is unlikely and certainly cannot be proven. The main weight of *superstitio* lies in features of Christian ritual, together with their rejection of the Roman gods.

De Ste. Croix was adamant that we should adopt the 'ungodliness' theory. He argued that "the reproaches of *flagitia* seem to have been essentially appendages of some more real complaint";[93] this is certainly reflected in the account of Tacitus, and also in that of Pliny, once he discovers that such accusations have no ground: he writes '*nihil aliud inveni quam superstionem pravam, immodicam*'.[94] The fourth century apologist Lactantius provides the final word in this respect; he claims that *nimirum religio ueri cultus est, superstitio falsi.* Lactantius' inversion of the terminology here would only make sense if Christianity was commonly identified as a *superstitio* and treated as such.[95]

As will have been seen thus far in the thesis, Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides focus almost entirely on religious matters. This takes different forms: Meliton is concerned with the practice of image-worship, Aristides with the powerlessness and immorality of gentile gods, and Tatian with the superiority of Christianity as a philosophy. However, it is clear that Near Eastern Christianity viewed issues surrounding the gods and religious practice as the key area in their dialogue with their gentile neighbours. This focus on

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[93] De Ste. Croix 1963:21.

[94] Plin. *Ep.* 10.96.8: 'I found nothing except a depraved and unrestrained *superstitio*'. Nagy argued that we should consider this a form of acquittal: "d'habitude, on considère cette constatation de Pline comme une sorte d'acquittement, comme l'expression de sa conviction que les Chrétiens ne sont pas coupables de crimes de droit commun" (2002:189). However, this ignores the fact that the guilty Christians were punished nonetheless. Nagy may well be right to observe that Christianity was more than an ordinary *superstitio* (ibid:178), but Pliny's comment implies that the fact of the *superstitio* was the fundamental offence: with no other charges attached, they were condemned to death on the strength of this charge alone.

[95] Lactant. *Div. inst.* 4.28.11: '*religio* is the worship of the true God, *superstitio* of the false'. See Beard, North and Price 1998a:215 for discussion of the contrasting elements in this passage.

the religious, rather than the moral or political, is not entirely surprising: all three advocate a change in deity, not in lifestyle or citizenship (or, at least, not exclusively, and not literally), and therefore religious debate inevitably takes centre stage. However, it strongly suggests that Near Eastern Christianity was more likely to be opposed as a *superstitio* than as a *coniuratio* or because of its *flagitia*. This is also seen in the *Martyrdoms* of Habbib and of Shamuna and Guria: although, as noted above, they are required to obey the emperor's will (*ṣbyn' mlk'*), this takes the form of sacrifice to the gods, and to Zeus in particular. It is the fact that Christians fail to sacrifice to the gods that led to the charges against the martyrs, and it is therefore on these grounds that Christianity in the Near East was primarily opposed.

5.3   <u>The evolution of hostility</u>

Sherwin-White did not deny that by Lactantius' time the battle certainly was fought over 'ungodliness';[96] however, he pointed out, rightly, that de Ste. Croix's methodology begins late and works backwards. As a result, he argued, we should consider a situation whereby the 'immorality theory' developed into the 'obstinacy theory', finally becoming the 'ungodliness theory' at some point in the late second century; as proof, he pointed out that the last time *flagitia* is used seriously as a charge is in the events at Lyons in AD 177.[97] By the time Origen replied to Celsus in the fourth century, he did not feel sufficiently threatened by allegations of immorality to defend against them.

It is almost certain that the theories should not be separated as clearly as I have done above: there are clearly overlaps between, for example, the denial of the gods and one's

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[96] Sherwin-White 1964:25.
[97] Ibid. See also Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 4.7.14.

political and social life.[98] Sherwin-White's suggestion that we should talk of an 'evolution' of gentile attitudes certainly has attractions in this respect; however, it does not account for the clear fact that all of our classical authors take objection to some *religious* feature of Christianity: otherwise they would not so consistently stress that Christianity was an unwelcome *superstitio*.[99]

4.3.1 Chimerical, xenophobic and realistic hatred

Engberg provided a theory that may help to resolve this issue. Building on the approach of Langmuir in his study of medieval anti-Semitism, Engberg identified three separate forms of hatred or hostility: the realistic, whereby hatred of an external group is motivated by careful consideration of a wide range of information; the xenophobic, whereby hatred of an external group is motivated with some, but by no means all, evidence; and the chimerical, whereby hatred of an external group is motivated by judgements based on little or no evidence at all.[100] Engberg associated the different theories of opposition with these three forms of hatred,[101] which can be accepted with some limitations; accusations of incest and cannibalism are motivated by chimerical hatred; once one gains some knowledge of

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[98] As we see in Tert. *Apol.* 10.1. Given the close relationship between politics, society and religion, this is hardly surprising. See Green 2010:120-7. Indeed, Lieu argued that there is no need to concern ourselves with the precise reason for the charges made against Christians (2004:254), but this ignores the fact that Pliny demonstrates a clear determination to bring the correct legal charge; it also undermines our assessment of the relationship between Christians and their gentile neighbours. Furthermore, Beard, North and Price argued that accusations of *superstitio* also included elements of political subversion (as in the attack on the Jews), and was primarily concerned with the threat that 'irregular' religious practice posed (1998a:220-2); rejection of *superstitio* therefore provided political unity amongst the elite (ibid:299).

[99] It is true that Tacitus' attitude says more of his own time than of the reality under Nero in the middle of the first century. As Engberg (2007:217) observed, the historian's chief concern is to make sure that the motives are recognisable (and plausible) to his readership. As such, it may be accepted that Tacitus' presentation is accurate for the beginning of the first century. Sherwin-White suggested that we must not accept it for the middle of the first century, but it seems unlikely that matters would have changed as rapidly as would be necessary for the total change of attitude Sherwin-White favours.

[100] Langmuir 1990:325-328; Engberg (2007:30-1).

[101] Surprisingly, however, he limited his discussion to the 'immorality' and 'ungodliness' theories. As a result, his account of how a chimerical hostility might eventually be replaced by a realistic one is somewhat vague; a fuller examination of the different theories in this context would have been more useful.

Christianity (as we see with Pliny in his letter to Trajan), these claims cannot be supported by the evidence, but the impression of some more 'general' immorality remains, which represents a xenophobic hostility; the suspicion of treason might also be classed as a xenophobic hostility. Finally, when one understands more about Christianity, one realises that the true threat is their refusal to worship or sacrifice to the traditional gods, thus putting the *pax deorum*, and thereby the Roman state, in jeopardy. Whilst this may seem 'unrealistic' to us, it is entirely compatible with ancient modes of thought, especially as expressed by the ancient authors, and must therefore be accepted as realistic hostility.[102] This development is most notable in Pliny: he begins with a chimerical hatred, assuming some foul ritual practice such as cannibalism or incest; when this is proved by his interrogations to be false, he adopts a xenophobic hostility, assuming some more general immorality connected with the name of 'Christian'; finally, a fuller study leads to a realistic hostility, in which he recognises the true threat of Christianity, in its failure to acknowledge the gods. This would explain the fact that Celsus does not appear to charge Christianity as immoral (at least, in the surviving evidence): he had clearly studied the teachings of Christianity in order to attack it, and his considerable knowledge of Christian doctrine made it unrealistic to accuse them of cannibalism or incest.[103] Thus, it seems possible that all the above theories are 'correct' from an early period, and that each individual's motivation depended upon the degree to which he was aware of the nature of Christianity: this will certainly have increased over time, as Sherwin-White argued, but also allows for the fact that gentiles in the late first and early second centuries may have had a realistic hostility of Christianity based on its status as a *superstitio*.

It seems that it is difficult to separate the different motivating factors in the response

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[102] Engberg 2007:201.

[103] Cameron highlighted Celsus as an excellent example of this process: by the end of the second century, gentile authors were much better informed about Christianity, albeit no more sympathetic (1991:44).

to Christianity. Walsh, quite correctly, suggested that such an attempt is always going to fail:[104] the vast majority of people operate with a wide variety of motives rather than just one. Indeed, there are others not mentioned here, such as financial motivation.[105] Indeed, Engberg argued that immorality and ungodliness are inherently intertwined.[106] However, this is an oversimplification: as was seen in the previous chapter, morality is not an inherent part of religious life in the ancient world. Engberg also argued that obstinacy is a symptom of ungodliness: "when an individual no longer honoured and respected the gods, the logical outcome would be, according to the Roman mind, clashes with authorities and vice versa".[107] However, whilst both Jewish and Bacchic *superstitio* is associated with opposition to Roman authority, Egyptian *superstitio* is not.

It is, however, misleading to try and identify the sole motivating factor. Given the close association between religious and politics, a clear separation is in many cases impossible: certain features of the 'political' theory would almost certainly be termed *superstitio* (such as seeking religious knowledge and power through magical or other non-traditional means).[108] It is highly unlikely that Pliny would have noted a difference between being 'politically' and 'religiously' motivated. On the other hand, it is clear that the charges of immorality do not stand up under examination, and it seems unlikely that a solely 'political' theory would have been treated with the relaxed attitude we see from the authorities: indeed, prosecutions were initiated by private individuals, and one fails to see how they were affected by Christianity's 'antisocial' behaviour. The core of the issue

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[104] Walsh 1991:268.

[105] As in the story in *Acts* 19:24-41, where the silversmiths of Ephesus riot because, seemingly, they will be put out of a job. On the apologetic role of this passage, see Fiorenza 1976:17-8 and Alexander 1999.

[106] Engberg 2007:161.

[107] Ibid:202.

[108] Tacitus, for example, claims that Vitellius turned to *superstitio* after the failure of his coup d'état – that is, *superstitio* as an alternative source of knowledge and/or power (*Hist.* 3.58.3).

therefore must be the fact that Christianity is recognised as a *superstitio*.

5.4 The βλασφημία (or 'slander') theory

There is one further element which de Ste. Croix mentioned in passing, but which deserves more attention than he gave it, as it may help to answer the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: namely the role that Near Eastern Christian texts could have played in the development of persecution. It is clear that Christian doctrine and ritual practice were considered dangerous to the *pax deorum*; however, de Ste. Croix suggested that so-called 'voluntary martyrs' may have had a considerable role to play in motivating hostility.[109] He noted that "if even a few Christians of the late first and early second centuries had a similar craving for martyrdom (as so many others certainly did later), and gave practical expression to it, *especially if they did so by insulting pagan cults*, it would be even easier to understand how persecution quickly became endemic in many parts of the Roman world".[110] Similarly, Green noted that Minucius Felix displays in *Octavius* "a frighteningly provocative assault on *Romanitas*",[111] but did not elaborate on just how this was 'provocative'. A feature of Christian 'ungodliness' was surely their active attacks on gentile religious life, in literature or practice. That this in itself was considered a threat is made explicit in both Origen's *Against Celsus* and the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*. Origen defends against suggestions that Christians 'blaspheme' the 'manifest' god,[112] while in the *Acts* the governor Saturninus

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[109] These 'voluntary martyrs' can be seen in considerable numbers from the Antonine period onwards; for an excellent example, see Tert. *Ad Scap.* 5.1. On this phenomenon, see also Green 2010:132.

[110] De Ste. Croix 1963:24, my italics.

[111] Green 2010:131. The hostility of Minucius' characters strongly recalls similar hostility between Cicero's protagonists in *Nat. D.*

[112] Origen *C.Cels.* 7.36: τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους, τοὺς δεικνυμένους θεούς, ὡς εἴδωλα βλασφημοῦντες ('blaspheming those others, those gods which are made manifest, as idols'). Celsus (at least in Origen's account) uses the word βλασφημέω/βλασφημία several times in the text: see also 6.42, 8.38, 8.41. Even if Celsus did not originally use the word, the fact remains that Origen understood that βλασφημία was a key part of Christian rhetoric.

similarly claims that the Scillitan martyrs speak *mala de sacris nostris*.[113] It is not clear at all what we are to make of Celsus' use of the word βλασφημία; it was defined by LSJ as, amongst other things, 'blasphemy', 'irreverence', and 'slander'.[114] The idea of 'blasphemy' in gentile religious life is, on the surface, a fanciful one; as Ando argued, that religious life is based on empirical knowledge and not on faith,[115] and without faith, how can one blaspheme? However, some of this difficulty can be dealt with by distinguishing between concepts of βλασφημία and heresy.[116] Heresy requires a core central doctrine and/or authority, whose religious teachings are contravened.[117] βλασφημία requires only that a figure, mortal or divine, is slandered: even without central religious authority, the possibility of βλασφημία is entirely plausible.[118] We saw in Chapters 3 and 4 that, using this definition of βλασφημία, the three Near Eastern Christian authors repeatedly blasphemed both human and divine figures.[119] Similarly, it was observed in Chapter 1 that 'faith' (implying a personal conviction

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[113] *Scill. mart.:* '[speak] evil of our sacred rites'. The Greek has: πονηρὰ λέγειν κατὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἱερέων.

[114] LSJ s.v. βλασφημία, citing Dem. 141.2, 257.22.

[115] Ando 2008:ix.

[116] The word 'blasphemy' still maintains troublesome connotations. As a result, I leave βλασφημία untranslated, albeit with the understood meanings highlighted above.

[117] The Jews were regarded as unique in the ancient world for having a central set of religious scriptures. Furthermore, religious authorities in Rome (such as the *pontifex maximus*) had authority over the proper conduct of rite, not the proper interpretation (Rives 2007:116). The lack of such doctrine is one reason for scholarly assumptions that polytheistic religion was universally tolerant: "dogmatism and intolerance toward the beliefs of others was alien to ancient religions, since the complete absence of the concept of false faith or of any forms of heresy were typical of them" (Dandamayev 1996:40).

[118] As noted above, Plutarch is critical of δεισιδαιμονία, which involves an incorrect assessment of or attitude to the divine, which he regards as more dangerous than failure to acknowledge the gods at all. Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods* shows the hostility that could be provoked by what is seen as an incorrect perception of the gods: Velleius, the Epicurean, refers to other doctrines as *delirantium somnia* ('the dreams of madmen', Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.15), whilst Cotta, the Academic, claims that Velleius' doctrines are not even compatible with common sense (1.22). I do not believe that βλασφημία is a technical term, and therefore we cannot necessarily identify such attitudes as explicitly 'blasphemous' as one might identify a *superstitio*; however, the sense of wrong attitude to the divine, whether explicitly diagnosed as such or not, is clearly a problem. Cicero is commonly understood as a sceptic (see e.g. Burriss 1924:101, 1926:536 and Heibges 1969:304) but, as Davies argued for Livy and Tacitus, this word has no frame of reference in this context (2004:2). Nevertheless, we must be cautious in assuming that Cicero's works necessarily represent his own beliefs, although this caution is more vital in his speeches than his philosophical works (Heibges 1969:304).

[119] Dandamayev argued that the concept of blasphemy did exist in the Near East, but was exclusively limited to "reproaching gods for their indifference to the sufferings of human beings and for ungratefulness for the sacrifices offered to them" (1996:44); this is the same charge which Plato lays against the poets (see above, 4.4). However, Dandamayev does not deal at all with the potential repercussions of blasphemy in this sense.

and possible a significant relationship with the deity) should be distinguished from 'belief' (which is simply something one holds to be true); it is entirely possible to blaspheme one's beliefs without even approaching an understanding of faith in gentile religious life. One does not need to be passionately, even 'faithfully', committed to a belief for the challenging of that belief to be considered offensive (or even 'blasphemous', if we dare use the word). It seems reasonable to assume that βλασφημία was considered a part of the problem posed by Christianity, although it may have been indistinguishable from other areas of their religious conduct.

We see this particularly in the much later *Acts of Mar Mari the Apostle*, which details the miracles performed by one of the disciples of Addai. During his journeys, he occasionally faces opposition from the gentile inhabitants of the cities that he visits. In Erbil, for instance, the inhabitants are angry because Mar Mari tore down their statues and insulted their gods;[120] this shows exactly the kind of reaction such conduct might be expected to provoke. Similarly, Mar Mari incurs the wrath of the ruler of Shahqirt, somewhere east of Kirkuk, when he accuses him of worshipping demons;[121] when he makes a similar claim to the priests of an (unspecified) temple in Seleucia, they become equally irate.[122] Although the text itself was written much later than the period with which I am concerned, the *Acts of Mar Mari* clearly shows an awareness that Christian attitudes towards gentile religious life could cause grave insult.

Given the level of hostility we see in Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides, combined with their often inaccurate presentations of local religious life, it would

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[120] *Mar Mari* 7-8.
[121] Ibid. 13.
[122] Ibid. 25.

in fact be very surprising if their gentile neighbours did not take offence:[123] even if they did

not encounter the texts themselves directly,[124] it is unlikely that the attitudes we see in these

three authors were not reflected in Christian treatment of their neighbours. This is made even

more plausible when we consider the Near Eastern Christian attitudes towards the morality of

the gentiles themselves: although not always specific or extensive, the three authors discussed

in this thesis are universally hostile. In this instance, the βλασφημία is directed not at the

beliefs of the gentiles but at the gentiles themselves: if this attitude was reflected to any

degree in daily life, I find it impossible to believe that the gentiles would not react extremely

badly.[125]

That is not to say that Christians could not live alongside others without huge

resentment;[126] archaeological excavations at Dura-Europos, for instance, show that a

Christian house church lay just at the foot of a Roman watch tower.[127] This building may

have particular relevance to this thesis, since a Greek fragment of gospel harmony found

there is largely assumed to be a witness to Tatian's *Diatessaron*.[128] I do not intend to focus on

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[123] This agrees with Pollini's definition of 'reactive' intolerance: "polytheistic peoples tended to react negatively if their gods and sacred places came under attack or if their political system, ancestral mores, or family values were threatened by foreign religious practices" (2008:186).

[124] On which, see above, 1.3.1.

[125] Walsh conceded that some gentiles *may* have been irritated by Christian attitudes (1991:256), but denied that it was a significant factor. It seems to me that this greatly underestimates the impact such hostility could have on local conditions.

[126] Vittinghoff argued that persecution was an inevitable result of the conditions in which Christians found themselves living alongside non-Christians, but, as I shall show, this is not necessarily the case (1984:332). As Engberg pointed out, a moderate attitude to Christianity may well have existed in the majority of cases, but there is no reason to record a *lack* of any incident (2007:19).

[127] The excavation was published in Kraeling 1967. On the history of the building, see Mell 2010:79-86; on the community who lived there, see ibid. 100-106.

[128] The fragment was published by Kraeling 1935, who attributed it to Tatian. Parker, Taylor and Goodacre attempted to reconstruct elements of Tatian's *Diatessaron* from a variety of witnesses and showed that key elements of the Dura fragment diverged, coming to the conclusion that "the bulk of evidence is strongly against the fragment's being part of Tatian's Diatesseron" (1999:225). In response, Joosten demonstrated that the description of Joseph of Arimathea, which accounts for over half of the Dura fragment, matched the pattern set by other Diatesseron witnesses too closely to be attributed to coincidence, and that we should therefore conclude that it was Tatianic (2003:166-70).

the relationship between Tatian and the house church,[129] but the connection serves to emphasise the importance that Tatian's work has for this region.

Assuming that local gentiles were aware that the house belonged to Christians, then hostility and persecution cannot have been as frequent as authors like Tacitus and Pliny might make it appear, at least in the Near East: the house church was evidently in use for a long period,[130] and this would not have been the case had they caused such offence to their neighbours, either by their attitude or their conduct. We may make a similar conclusion from the paintings in the baptistery: in contrast with those found in the adjacent Synagogue, which explicitly emphasise "the superiority of Judaism over other religions",[131] these paintings show little interest in engaging with local religious life, let alone in a hostile manner. They are largely images from the life of Jesus, or gospel metaphors.[132] Such imagery "evokes as space in initiate mythology";[133] it is internal and has little engagement with the world around it.[134] In only two instances do we find imagery that deals at all with their non-Christian neighbours: the battle between David and Goliath,[135] and a woman who may be the

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[129] For which see Mell 2010:205-260, esp. 257-9. Dirven suggested that the appearance of Adam in the painting of the Good Shepherd fitted with Tatian's arguments over Adam's lost divinity, and argued that "it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Christian community at Dura resembled the Christian groups that were strongly influenced by Tatian's doctrine and practised an austere sexual asceticism" (2004:16); if Dirven is correct in this assumption, and the Dura community was largely encratite, then this would help explain the apparent lack of interaction between the Christians and Jews in the city (Kraeling 1967:107-9, Dirven 2004:8), since Encratites, unlike the followers of Marcion or Mani, held little hostility towards the Jews (ibid. 16)

[130] Lieu demonstrated that the city was deserted after the Sassanian siege in (probably) 256 AD (2007:59); see also Ammianus Marcellinus 23.5.7.

[131] Dirven 2004:6. The contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal (*1 Kgs.* 18) and the toppling of the statue of Dagon are two images which explicitly highlight such conflict (*1 Sam.* 5). See also Rajak 2011, Noy 2007, Dirven 2011, Millar 2008.

[132] Mell argued that resurrection symbolism (and its connection with baptism) was the most significant aspect of the baptistery paintings (2010:115, 258). See also DeLeeuw 2011:195.

[133] Elsner 2001:280.

[134] "The Christian *domus ecclesiae* ignores the other religions of the Durene context (except in its reference to Jewish scripture)" (Elsner 2001:281).

[135] Kraeling 1967: pl. 40.

Samaritan whom Jesus encountered at the well.[136] Kraeling suggested that the depiction of David is "something of a surprise, especially considering the fact that the episode portrayed shows the decapitation of the Philistine giant";[137] he interpreted the image as an explicit depiction of the victory of Christ over Satan on the cross, and suggested that Christians should draw confidence from this in their conflict with their non-Christian neighbours.[138] Korol and Rieckesmann, however, argued that the ordinary Christian would not immediately make this association.[139] Whether or not this image was intended to highlight conflict with the gentile world, it is evident that such conflict was not an important part of the imagery of baptistery: one may therefore question how prominent such conflict was in the day-to-day lives of the Christians who worshipped there.

Admittedly, the Dura-Europos house church is a unique example before the fourth century AD,[140] but this does not imply that others did not exist,[141] or that religious conditions in Dura-Europos were dramatically different to elsewhere in the empire. If it is correct that Christians and gentiles *could* live alongside one another without regular antagonism, then this may be another reason for suggesting that Christian βλασφημία may have been a significant factor in motivating gentile resentment. If gentiles took objection to Christianity solely because of *flagitia*, *coniuratio* or *superstitio*, then one would expect hostility to be far more consistent. However, if instances of Christian βλασφημία were part of the problem, then hostility and persecution would only arise in response to instances of this attitude. One cannot

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[136] Ibid. pl. 41. The association with the Samaritan woman is disputed: Korol and Rieckesmann were adamant that this was the interpretation which should be applied (2011:1645-6), while Peppard suggested that there were a variety of interpretations, of which the Virgin Mary is the most plausible, and that the scene depicted the annunciation (2012:545-556).

[137] Kraeling 1967:188.

[138] Ibid. 189.

[139] Korol and Rieckesmann 2011:1647.

[140] That is, of a house church in plain view (Beard, North and Price 1998a:267).

[141] By the middle of the third century, churches were prominent enough for Valerian to order confiscation (ibid:267); they could not have grown to such prominence if hostility were continuous at this period.

imagine that Christians dealt with their neighbours in as consistently a hostile a manner as Meliton, Tatian and the Syriac translator of Aristides display (in a rhetorical context), but such attitudes must have surfaced occasionally. I suggest that these instances may have provoked great resentment, which, in turn, would have led to a vicious cycle of increasing resentment and hostility on both sides.

5.5   Concluding remarks

Such is the scarcity of literary sources in the Near East in particular, and in the Roman world at large, on the subject that one cannot provide a conclusive answer to this point, and I do not for a moment suggest that βλασφημία was the sole, or even the primary, cause, but we may consider that βλασφημία was a *feature* of Christian *superstitio*,[142] and was part of a much bigger dialogue. During this thesis, however, it has become apparent that Near Eastern Christian attitudes, as far as we can judge from the limited evidence available, were both inaccurate and unnecessarily aggressive, both against the gentiles themselves and against their beliefs, although it is difficult to characterise such attitudes in more specific terms: in light of this, it would be surprising if these attitudes did not play a bigger role in the dialogue with gentile religious life than has previously been acknowledged.

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[142] As we see in the *Martyrdom of Habbib*: the governor is angry with Habbib for insulting Zeus, but it becomes clear that this insult is the refusal to sacrifice to the god.

Appendix A: Translation of the Syriac *Oration of Meliton the Philosopher*

Please note that all chapter numbers are my own insertion to facilitate referencing. This translation uses Cureton's 1855 edition.

<1.1> The speech of Meliton the Philosopher who in the presence of Antoninus Caesar, and he spoke to Caesar, that he might know God, and show him the way of truth, and he began to speak as follows:

<1.2> Melito said "It is not easy to quickly bring a man[143] to an upright way, the sort of man who was previously held for many years in error. Nevertheless, it may happen: the mention of truth is acceptable to the man who has come back from error, even if just a little. *<1.3>* For just as when a cloud parts just a little and there is fair weather, in the same way, when a man turns towards God, immediately the dark cloud of error which restrains him from seeing the truth is removed from his faith. For error, like sickness and sleep, seizes for a long time those who are under it. *<1.4>* But truth uses the word like a goad and strikes those who are sleeping and awakens them. And when they wake they look at the truth and understand it; they hear it and distinguish that which is from that which is not. *<1.5>* For there are men who call unrighteousness uprightness; they believe that it is righteousness when one man strays together with many others. But I say that it is not a good reason that a man should stray with many. For it if only one should go astray, his transgression is great; how much greater will be the transgression when many stray!

<1.6> But the error that I speak of is this: when a man leaves whatever truly exists and worships whatever does not truly exist. But there is that which truly exists: it is called God, and He truly exists; everything exists in His strength. *<1.7>* He was not made in any way and neither did He come into being. He existed from the beginning of the age, and He will exist to the end of the age. He is not changed, and everything else is changed. Sight is not able to see him; the mind is not able to comprehend him; words are not able to explain him. *<2.1>* And those who love Him call him 'the Father and God of truth'. Therefore, if a man leaves the light and says that another god exists, from what he says it is clear that what he calls 'god' is something from those things that are created. *<2.2>* For if a man should call fire 'god', it is not God, because it is fire; if a man will call water 'god', it is not God because it is water. *<2.3>* And this earth which we tread upon, and these heavens which we see, and the sun and the moon and one of these stars which run along according to divine will and do not stop, not journeying by their own will; and if a man calls gold or silver 'gods', which we use as we wish, these things are not (God). *<2.4>* And these pieces of wood which we burn, and these stones which we shatter, how are these things gods? For they are useful for men. Those who exchange in their words the great God for those possessions which continue to exist according to divine will as long as they exist – how will these people not be found to be in great sinfulness?

<2.5> But nevertheless, I say that as long as a man does not hear, does not distinguish, and does not understand there is a Lord for these creatures, he should perhaps not be blamed, because no man blames a blind man, even though he may walk extremely badly. *<2.6>* For men also, while they were seeking God, stumbled on rocks and on wood, and those who were rich stumbled upon gold and silver, and were hindered in their stumblings from that which they were seeking.

<2.7> But now a voice has been heard in all the earth, saying that there is a God of truth. An eye has been given to every man that he might see with it. There is no excuse for the spirit of those who are

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[143] The literal translation, 'son of man', is a common Semitic metaphor for man; it has none of the Jesus connotations found in the Gospels, or apocalyptic connotations in *Daniel* 7.

ashamed of the multitude who stray with them, but wish to travel on the righteous path. For those ashamed to be saved must perish. <2.8> Because of this I advise them to open their eyes and see, for light that does not envy is given to everyone that they might see by it. But if, when light has dawned on us, a man shuts his eyes so that he will not see, he must go to the pit!

<2.9> But why is a man ashamed of those who stray along with himself? It is better for him to persuade them to follow him, and, if they are not persuaded by him, save himself from their company. For there are men who, are not able to rise from the earth, their mother, and because of this, they also make gods that which is the earth, their mother. <3.1> They are condemned in the judgements of truth, for they apply the name of Him who is not changed to those objects which are changed, and do not fear to call 'gods' anything which is made by the hands of men, and dare to make an image for God whom they have not seen.

<3.2> But I say also that the Sybil said about them that they worship the images of dead kings. It is easy to understand, for even now they worship the images of the Caesars even more than their former gods. For from these former gods both tribute and produce are paid to Caesar, as for one greater than this. <3.3> Because of this, those who resent them and diminish Caesar's revenues are put to death. For it is determined how much the worshippers will give to the treasuries of kings in various places, and how many bags of water from the sea they will give. <3.4> For such is the wickedness of the world of those who worship and fear that which does not feel. Many of these, who are crafty either for the sake of gain or because of empty splendour, or power over the masses, both worship that which does not feel, and encouraging those without understanding to do the same.

<3.5> I will write and show, according to what I know, how and for what reasons images are made for kings and tyrants, and they became like gods. The sons of Argos made an image for Herakles, because he was an inhabitant of their city and he was strong, and in his strength he killed evil beasts, and especially because they feared him. For he was violent, and he seized the wives of many people. For his lust was plentiful, like that of Zurdi the Persian, his companion. <3.6> Again, the sons of Acte worshipped Dionysus the king, because he introduced the vineyard into their country. <3.7> The Egyptians worshipped Joseph the Hebrew, who was called Serapis, because he provided them with corn in the years of the famine. <3.8> The Athenians worship Athena, the daughter of Zeus, the king of the island of Crete, because she built the town of Athens, and she made Ericthippus her son the king there, who was born to her from adultery with Hephaistos, the son of a wife of her father. She was always making partnership[144] with Herakles because he was her brother from her father. <3.9> For Zeus the king loved Alcmene, the wife of Electyron, who was from Argos. <4.1> She committed adultery with him, and game birth to Herakles. The sons of Phoenicia worshipped Balthi, the queen of Cyprus, because she loved Tamuz, the son of Cuthar, king of the Phoenicians. She left her kingdom and she went and dwelt in Gebel, a walled city fortress of the Phoenicians, and at that time she made all the Cyprians subject to Cuthar the King; because before Tammuz she loved Ares, and committed adultery with him, and Hephaistos, her husband, caught her, and was jealous of her. <4.2> He came and killed Tammuz in Mount Lebanon, while he was hunting boars. And from then on, Balthi remained in Gebel, and she died in the city of Aphiki, where Tammuz was buried. <4.3> The Elamites worship Nuh, daughter of the king of Elam. And when her enemies took her captive, her father made an image for her, and a temple in Shushan, a palace which is in Elam. <4.4> The Syrians worship Athi, a Hadibite, who sent the daughter of Belat, a nurse. She healed Simi, the daughter of Hadad, the king of Syria, and after some time, when Hadad had leprosy, Athi entreated Elisha the Hebrew; he came and he healed him from his leprosy. <4.5> The people of Mesopotamia also worship Cuthbi, a Hebrew woman, who delivered Bakru, the father of Edessa, from his enemies. <4.6> But about Nebo, who is worshipped in Mabog, what can I write to you? For all the priests who are in Mabog know that

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[144] It is by no means certain that Meliton implies lovemaking by this: the Syriac *ḥbrwt'* can simply mean 'companionship' or 'friendship'.

it is an image of Orpheus, a Thracian *magus*. Hadran is the image of Zaradusht, a Persian *magus*. Both these *magi* used enchantments at a well that was in a grove in Mabog, in which was an unclean spirit. It harassed and assaulted against everyone who passed by, in the whole place in which was situated the fortress of Mabog. <*4.7*> These *magi* commanded Simi the daughter of Hadad to draw water from the sea and pour the water into the well, so that the spirit would not come up and attack, according to that which is a mystery in their Magianism. In the same way, mankind persists and makes images for their kings and worship them: I will not write further on this.

<*4.8*> But you, a man of free mind, and experienced in the truth, if you will consider these things, discuss with yourself, and if they form womanly clothing for you, remember that you are a man. Believe in Him who is truly God. Open your mind to Him, and entrust your life to Him. He is able to give you life for eternity and which does not die. <*5.1*> For everything is in His hands. Reckon all other things according to what they are: images as images, and carvings as carvings. <*5.2*> And whatever is made, do not put it in the place of that which is not made. But let Him, the God who lives forever, be readily in your mind. For your mind itself is His form. It is not seen and is not touched and not to be painted. By its will the whole body is moved. <*5.3*> Know, therefore that if at all times you serve Him who is not moved, then, just like Him who exists forever, likewise, you will stand before Him forever, when you have set aside the visible and corruptible, when you live and know <Him>. Your works will be infinite riches and unfailing wealth for you. <*5.4*> But know that the greatest of your good works is this: that you know God and serve Him. And know that He does not ask anything of you: He needs nothing. Who is this God? He who is truth, and His word is truth. But what is truth? That which is not fashioned, and not made, and not painted: that which has not been brought to into being is called truth. Therefore, if a man worships something that he has made with his hands, he does not worship the truth, nor the word of truth.

<*5.5*> But I also have much to say on this subject. I am ashamed for those who do not perceive that they are superior to the work of their hands, and do not perceive how they give gold to the craftsmen who make gods for them, and give them silver for their decoration and honour; they move their possessions from place to place and worship them. <*5.6*> And what wickedness is greater than this: that a man should worship his riches and abandon the one who gave the riches to him? That he should dishonour man and worship the image of man? That he should kill a beast, and worship the image of a beast? <*5.7*> It is clear that they worship the skills of their companions. For they do not worship the treasures while they are in the money-bag, but once the craftsmen fashion images from them they worship them. They do not worship the property of gold or silver, but once the engravers have sculpted them, they worship them. <*5.8*> You who lacks in understanding, what has been added to gold that you now worship it? If it is because it resembles a winged beast, why do you not worship the winged beast? If it is because it resembles a beast of prey, the beast of prey itself is before you. <*6.1*> And if the craftsmanship itself is beautiful to you, let the workmanship of God be beautiful to you, who made everything, and in His likeness made the workmen, who strive to do like Him but are not like Him.

<*6.2*> But perhaps you might say: 'Why did God not make me that I might serve Him but not images?'. When you say this sort of thing, you seek to become a useless tool, and not a living man. For God made you so beautiful, according to what was beautiful to Him. He has given to you a free mind. <*6.3*> He set before you possessions in great number so that you might distinguish everything, and that you might choose for yourself what is beautiful. He set before you the heavens, and put in them stars; He put before you the sun and the moon, and every day they too run their course in it. He set before you the multitude of the waters and restrained them by His word. He set before you the wide earth, when it is still and continues before you in one manner, so that you should not trust that it continues by the nature of its own existence: He causes it to quake as often as He wishes. <*6.4*> He put before you the clouds, which bring waters from on high and gives the earth sustenance at His commandment, in order that from these you may understand that He who moves these things is

greater than all of them: you may receive thankfully from Him who gave to you a mind by which you may distinguish these things.

<6.5> Because of this I encourage you to know yourself, and to know God. You must understand how there exists within you that which is called a life. By it, the eye sees; by it the ear hears; by it the mouth speaks. See how it uses the whole body, how He is pleased to remove the life from the body, and it falls and is corrupted. *<6.6>* Therefore, from this, which exists in you and is not seen, understand how God also moves the whole world in His power, just like the body, and that whenever He wishes to withdraw His power, the whole world also, like the body, falls and is corrupted.

<6.7> But why the world was made, and to what end it passes, and why the body exists, and why it falls, and why it continues, you cannot discover unless you raise up your head from this sleep into which you have sunk, and opened your eyes and seen that there is one God, the Lord of all, and serve Him from your whole heart. *<6.8>* Then He permits you to know His will. For everything which is far from the living God is dead and buried in the body. Because of this you roll on the ground before evil spirits and shadows and you ask empty petitions from that which has nothing to give. *<7.1>* But you, raise yourself from those who lie upon the ground and kiss stones, giving their food as sustenance for the fire, and offering their clothes to images. Although they are sentient, they wish to serve whatever is not sentient. *<7.2>* Ask petitions that do not waste away from the God who does not waste away for your soul, which is imperishable. Your freedom will be seen sufficiently: be careful of it. Praise God who made you, and gave you a free-born mind, that you might act just as you wish. *<7.3>* He set before you all these possessions, and demonstrated to you that if you follow evil, you will be condemned by your evil deeds, but if you follow goodness you will receive from Him many good things, with life forever and which does not fail.

<7.4> Therefore there is nothing which will hinder you from overturning your evil way of life, because you are a free man, or from seeking and finding out who is the Lord of all, and serving Him from your whole heart, because in Him there is no reluctance to give knowledge of Himself to those who seek it, according to their ability to understand Him.

<7.5> Let it be the prime concern for you, that you should not deceive yourself. For if you say about that which is not God, 'this is God', you are deceiving your soul, and you sin before the God of truth. *<7.6>* Fool, can God be bought? Is God that which is in need? Does God need to be guarded? How do you buy God like a slave, and serve Him like a lord? How do you ask Him to give to you, as one who is rich, and give to Him as one who is poor? How do you suppose about Him that He will give you victory in war? When your enemies conquer you, they would strip Him too.

<7.7> Maybe one who is a king will say: 'I am not able to act well because I am a king; it is for me to do the will of the masses'. The one who speaks thus really deserves ridicule: for why does the king not lead the way to all good things, and persuade the people who obey him: to act in purity and to know God in truth, and set for them in his own life examples of all fine deeds, which is fitting for him? *<7.8>* For it is disgraceful when a king acts very badly, yet he judges and condemns those who stray. But I believe that a kingdom is able to be governed in peace in this way: when the king knows the God of truth, and is prevented by fear of Him *<8.1>* from harming those men who obey him, judging everything with uprightness, as a man who knows that he also is ready to be judged before God. At the same time, those who are under his authority and are prevented by the fear of God from straying against their king, they are prevented by the same fear from straying one against another. *<8.2>* By this knowledge of God, and fear of Him, all evil can be removed from the kingdom. For if the king will not stray against those who are in his hand, and they do not stray against him, or one against the other, it is evident that the whole country dwells in peace. *<8.3>* There will be many blessings there, that amongst everyone the name of God is glorified. For what blessing is greater than this: that the king will redeem from error all who are under his hand, and by this good deed make

himself pleasing to God? <8.4> For from error arise all of those evils, but the greatest of the evils is this: when a man does not know God, and instead of God worships that which is not God.

<8.5> But there are men who say 'for the honour of God we make the image, that we may worship the image of the God who is concealed'. But they do not know that God is in every land and every place and is never absent, and there is nothing which has been made and He does not know it. <8.6> But you, feeble man, in whom He is, and outside of whom He is, and above whom He is, have gone and bought for yourself wood from the carpenter, and it was carved and made into an image which is insulting to God. You offer sacrifices to this, and do not know that the eye that sees everything sees you, and that the word of truth rebukes you, and says to you: 'how can the God who is not seen be sculpted?' <8.7> Rather you make the form of yourself, and worship it. Because the wood has been sculpted, do you not perceive that it is still wood, or that it is stone? <8.8> The craftsmen takes gold according to its weight in the balance; and what you have made into an image, why do you weigh it? Therefore you are a lover of gold, and not a lover of God. <8.9> Are you not ashamed, in case it is not enough to demand of the maker as to why he stole from it? Though you have eyes, do you not see? And though you have a mind, do you not understand? Why do you roll on the ground and offer supplication to things that do not feel? Fear the one who moves the Earth and causes Heaven to revolve, and tosses the sea, and moves the mountain from its place and who is able to make Himself into a fire and consume everything. <9.1> If you are not able to clear yourself of guilt, do not add to your sin, and if you are not able to know God, be able to know that He exists.

<9.2> But again, there are people who say: 'whatever our fathers have left to us we revere'. Therefore those whose fathers left them poverty strive to gain riches! Those whose fathers did not instruct them desire to be instructed, and to learn what their fathers did not know. <9.3> And why do the children of the blind see, and the children of the lame walk? For it is not good to follow one's predecessors, those whose way of life was very wicked; rather, turn away from their way of life, lest that which befell your predecessors also happens to you. <9.4> Because of this, find out whether your father led a good way of life; if so, follow after him; but if your father led a very evil way of life, let your way of life be good, and let it be so for your children after you. <9.5> But grieve for your father, who lives an evil way of life, so long as your grief is able to help him. But speak to your children thus: 'there is a God, the Father of all, who did not come into being, and neither was He in any way made, and by His will everything exists. <9.6> He made the light, that His works might see one another. He conceals Himself in His power from all of His works. It is not permitted for anything changeable to see Him who is not changeable. But those who remember His words, and enter into that covenant which is not changeable, see God as far as they are able to see Him. <9.7> These people are able to escape destruction when the flood of fire comes upon the whole world'. For there was once a flood and a wind, and the chosen men were destroyed by a mighty north-wind, but the righteous were left as a demonstration of truth. But again, at another time, there was a flood of water, and all men and animals perished in a multitude of waters. But the just were saved in an ark of wood by the command of God. <9.8> So will it be in the last times: there will be a flood of fire, and the earth will be burnt up, together with its mountains and the people will be burnt up together with the images which they made, and the carvings which they worshipped; the sea will be burnt up together with its islands; but the just will be guarded from wrath, like their companions of the ark were from the waters of the flood. Then those who do not know God, and those who made images for themselves, will groan for themselves; when they see their images being burnt up along with themselves, <10.1> and no-one is found to help them.

<10.2> But when you become informed about these things, Antoninus Caesar, and also your children together with you, you will leave for them an inheritance which is for eternity and which does not fade away; you will deliver your soul, and also the souls of your children, from what will come to pass for all the world, in the judgement of truth and righteousness. <10.3> Just as you acknowledge Him here, He acknowledges you there. But if you reckon Him to be superfluous, He will not reckon

you amongst those who acknowledge and confess Him. These (facts) may be sufficient for your Majesty; if they are too many, still accept them.

<10.4> Melito ended here.

Appendix B: Translation of the Syriac *Apology* of Aristides

Please note that all chapter numbers are my own insertion to facilitate referencing. This translation uses Rendel Harris' 1893 edition.

<1.1> Again, an apology which Aristides the philosopher made before Hadrian the king about the worship of God.

<1.2> 'To Caesar Titus Hadrian Antoninus Augustus Pius. From Marcianus Aristides, a philosopher of Athens.

<1.3> I, O King, came into this world by the grace of God. When I considered the heavens and the earth and the seas, and looked upon the sun and the rest of creation, I marvelled at the arrangement of the world. *<1.4>* I understood that the world and all that is in it is moved by the will of another, and I understood that the one who moves them is God, who is concealed in them and hides from them. *<1.5>* This is well known, that the one who moves is more powerful than the one who is moved. It is apparent to me that I should investigate concerning him who is the mover of all, what sort of thing He is or how He exists, for He is not comprehensible in His nature; but it is not good for me that I should argue about the steadfastness of His rulership so that I might comprehend it fully. *<1.6>* For no man is able to perfectly comprehend it. But I say about the One who moves the world, the He is God of all, who made all on account of man. *<2.1>* It is apparent to me that it is beneficial that men fear God and not offend man.

<2.2> But I say that God was not born and was not made, and has a nature that is continuous, which has no beginning and no conclusion; undying, perfect and incomprehensible. *<2.3>* By 'perfect' I say this: that He has no deficiency, that He does not need anything; but everything needs Him. And that I say that He has no beginning: that everything that has a beginning also has an end, and that which has an end is vulnerable to dissolution. *<2.4>* He has no name, for whatever has a name is associated with created things. He has no likeness, and is not composed bodily parts. But he who possesses (such a composition) is associated with things that are fashioned. He is not male, nor is He female. The heavens do not contain Him; but the heavens, and everything which is both visible and invisible, are contained in Him. *<2.5>* He has no enemy, for there is no man who is more powerful than He. He does not possess fury or anger, for there is nothing that is able to stand against Him. *<2.6>* Forgetfulness and carelessness are not in His nature, for He is wisdom and understanding, and in Him exists everything which does exist. *<2.7>* He does not ask for sacrifice or libation; none at all from those things that are visible. He does not ask anything from men; but all things ask from him.

<2.8> Because these things have been spoken to you by us regarding God, *<3.1>* as far as our minds our able to reason about him, let us come now to the race of men, in order that we may know which of them hold a portion of the that truth which we have spoken about, and which err.

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<3.2> This is obvious to you, o King, that there are four races of men in this world: Barbarians and Greeks, Jews and Christians.

<3.3> The Barbarians thus calculate head of the race of their religion from Kronos and from Rhea and the family of their gods; but the Greeks calculate from Helenus, who was said to be from Zeus. But from Helenus was born Aeolus and Xythus, and the family that was brought forth from Inachus and from Phoroneus, but finally from Danaus the Egyptian and from Cadmus and from Dionysus.

<3.4> But the Jews calculate the head of their race from Abraham, who begat Isaac. And from him was born Jacob, who begat twelve sons who left from Syria to Egypt, and they were called the race of Hebrews by their lawgiver. But finally, they were named Jews.

<3.5> The Christians, then, calculate the beginning of their religion from Jesus Christ, and he is named the Son of God Most High, and it is said that God came down from Heaven, and from a Hebrew Virgin took and assumed flesh, and in a daughter of Man lived *<4.1>* the Son of God. This is taught from the Gospel (which recently was said among them that it was preached): if you will read it, you will understand the power *that is in it.* *<4.2>* This Jesus was born from the family of Hebrews; but he had twelve disciples so that some dispensation of his of his might be fulfilled. *<4.3>* He was pierced by the Jews, and he died and was buried, and they say that after three days he rose and ascended to heaven. Then these twelve disciples went out into the known parts of the world and taught about his greatness with all humility and modesty. *<4.4>* And because of this, those who to this day believe in this teaching are called Christians, who are renowned. There are these four races of men, just like I said before: Barbarians and Greeks, Jews and Christians.

Wind, then, serves God, and fire serves angels, but water serves evil spirits and earth serves man.

<4.5> Let us begin from the Barbarians, and gradually let us proceed to the rest of the genealogies of the nations, so that we might understand which from them hold the truth regarding God and which from them err. *<4.6>* The Barbarians, then, because they did not comprehend God, erred with the elements[145] and began to serve created things in place of their Creator, and because of this they made likenesses and shut them up in temples. 4.7 And behold! They worship them when they guard them with great care, that their gods may not be stolen by looters. And the Barbarians did not understand <5.1> that everything that watches is greater than that which is watched, and anything which creates is greater than that which is created. <5.2> If it is the case, therefore, that their gods are too weak to deliver their own salvation, how is it that they might deliver salvation to mankind? The Barbarians have therefore erred with a great error, that they worship dead images that are not of benefit to them.

<5.3> It occurs to me to wonder, o King, regarding their philosophers, how they have also erred and named 'gods' those likenesses which are made for the honour of the elements, and the wise men do not understand that also these elements are corruptible and dissoluble. <5.4> For if a small part of the element is dissolved or corrupted, all of it is dissolved or corrupted. If, then these elements are dissolved or corrupted and are compelled to serve another which is harder than it, and they are not by their nature gods, how indeed can they call 'gods' those likenesses which are made in their honour? Great, therefore, is this error that the philosophers bring upon their audience.

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[145] On the translation of the Syriac *'sṭwks'*, see above, 2.3.2.

<5.5> Let us therefore turn, o King, to those elements themselves, in order that we may show regarding them that they are not gods, but creations which are corruptible and changeable, which is in the likeness of man. But God is incorruptible *<6.1>* and unchangeable and invisible, whilst He sees and overturns and changes all things.

<6.2> Therefore those who suppose regarding the earth that it is a god, they have already erred in this, since it is broken and planted and delved; and since it receives the foulness of the waste of mankind and animals and of cattle; and since at times it becomes useless, for if it is burned it becomes dead; for from baked clay there springs up nothing. *<6.3>* Again, if water is collected on it, it is corrupted together with the produce; and see! it is trampled by men and by cattle, and it receives the impurity of the blood of the slain; it is dug and filled with the dead and it becomes a grave for bodies. *<6.4>* A holy, venerable, blessed and incorruptible nature cannot accept this (impurity). Therefore, it is apparent to us that the earth is not a god, but a creation of God.

<6.5> In a similar way, again, they err who suppose regarding water that it is a god. For water was created for the use of man, and in many respects was made subject to him. *<6.6>* For it is changed, and it receives dirt and is corrupted and loses its own nature, when it is boiled with many things, and it receives colours which are not its own; also, it is hardened by cold, and it is mixed with the waste of men and of cattle and with the blood of the slain it is mingled and mixed; and by workers it is forced by means *<7.1>* of the straits of the streams to flow and to be drawn, which is not its own will, and to go into gardens and into other places in order that it might be cleanse and carry out the waste of mankind, and to cleanse in it the defilement and to supply the use of man of itself. Because of this it is not possible that water should be a god, but it is a word of God and a part of the world.

<7.2> Furthermore, those who suppose that fire is a god err greatly; because also it was created for the use of mankind, and in many respects it was made subject to them, and in the service of food and for the preparation of ornaments and the remaining (things), those which your majesty is familiar with, whilst in many respects it is extinguished and consumed.

<7.3> And again, those who supposed that a breeze of wind is a god also err in this. This is known to us: that these winds are made subject to one another, since at times they are increased; and at times they diminish and cease, according to the commandment of Him who makes them subject. *<7.4>* For, since they were created by God for the sake of men, so that they might fulfil the need of the trees and of the fruits and of the seeds, that they might transport ships on the sea, those which bring essential goods to men, from a place where they are found to a place where they are not found, and they endow different parts of the world. Since, then, the wind is at times increased and at times it is diminished, *<8.1>* there is one place where it does good and another where it does harm, according to the will of Him who rules; also, men are able, by means of well-known tools, to capture it and to compel it so that it might fulfil the needs which they demand of it. *<8.2>* Over its own life it has no power at all. Because of this it is not possible that the winds should be called gods, but a work of God.

<8.3> Likewise also those who suppose that the sun is a god err. For look! We see it, that by the necessity of another is moved and rotated and runs its course, and it goes from step to step, when each day it rises and sets, so that it may warm the shoots of plants and vegetation and may bring forth, in the air which mixed in it, every herb which is upon the earth. *<8.4>* And there is a role for it in calculation (of time), together with the rest of the stars in its course. And although it is one in its nature, it is mixed with many parts, according to the benefit of the needs of men – and not by its own

will but by the will of Him who rules it. <8.5> Because of this it is not possible that the sun should be a god, but a work of God, and in the same way the moon and stars.

<8.6> But those who suppose regarding the men of old that some of them are gods: these have erred greatly, as you (yes, even you!) o King, are aware of, that man consists of four elements and of <9.1> life and of spirit. Because of this he is even called 'the World', and without one of these parts he does not exist. He has beginning and end; he is born and he is also subject to decay. <9.2> But God, as I said, has none of these things in His nature. He is not made and He is not corruptible. And because of this, it is not possible that we should represent as God one who is by his nature man, to whom at times, when he searches for happiness, grief happens; for laughter, and mourning befalls him; one who is wrathful and jealous, envious and regretful, together with the rest of the other faults, and in many ways corrupted more than the elements and the beasts.

<9.3> From this, o King, it is right for us to understand the error of the Barbarians, in that they did not investigate concerning the true God, they fell away from the truth, and they went after the desires of their own minds when they served elements, which are subject to dissolution, and dead images; on account of their error they did not perceive what was the true God.

<9.4> Let us now return to the Greeks in order that we might know what idea they have regarding the true God. The Greeks, then, because they are wiser than the Barbarians, have erred even more than the Barbarians, since they have introduced many manufactured gods. Some of these they represented as male and some female, and so that some from <10.1> their gods were found to be adulterers and murderers, mistaken, jealous, wrathful, furious, patricides, thieves and plunderers. <10.2> Some of them, they say, were lame and injured; some of them were sorcerers, and some of them were totally insane. Some of them played the harp, and some of them wandered on mountains. Some of them were slain outright, some of them struck by lightning. <10.3> Some of them were even made subject to men. Some of them fled, and some of them were stolen by then hands of men. <10.4> See! Some of them were wept over and grieved for by the sons of men; some, they say, descended to Sheol (Hades); some of them were badly wounded; some were transformed into the form of beasts so that they might commit adultery with the race of mortal women. <10.5> Some of them were accused for intercourse with males; some, they say, were married to their mothers and sisters and daughters; they say of their gods that they committed adultery with the daughters of men, and from them was born a certain race which was also mortal. <10.6> And about some of the goddesses they say that they competed regarding their beauty, and came for judgement before a man. Therefore, o King, the Greeks have brought forward wicked, ridiculous and foolish ideas regarding their gods and regarding themselves, in that they call such kind of people 'gods' who are not gods at all. <11.1> From this men took the opportunity that they might commit adultery and fornication, and to plunder and to commit everything evil, detestable and abominable. For if those who are called their gods have committed all these things which I have written above, how much more will men commit them, those who believe that they (sc. the gods) have done these things! <11.2> From the impiety of this error – see! men have been afflicted with frequent wars and great famines, bitter captivity, bereavement of all things; and see! they are enduring. All of these things affect them from one cause alone: when they endure them, they do not perceive in their minds that because of their error these things happen to them.

<11.3> Now let us come to the account of these, who are their gods, in order that we may demonstrate accurately about all these things which we said above. From before anything else the

Greeks introduce as a god Kronos, who is interpreted as Chiun. *<11.4>* The worshippers of this god sacrifice to him their children, and some of them they burn while they are still living. About him they say that he took as a wife Rhea, from whom he fathered many sons. *<11.5>* From her he also father Dios, who is called Zeus. Finally he went mad and, out of fear of an oracle that was spoken to him, began to eat his children. Zeus was stolen away from him and he did not realise it. *<11.6>* Finally Zeus bound him and cut off his manhood, and cast it into the sea, from where, as they say in the story, Aphrodite was born, *<12.1>* who is called Astera. And he cast Kronos, while he was bound, into the darkness. Great, therefore, is the error and the mockery which the Greeks introduce regarding the head of their gods, in that they have said all of these things about him, o King. It is not possible for a god to be bound or amputated, or it is great misfortune.

<12.2> After Kronos they introduce another god, Zeus. They say about this one that he received authority and became king of all the gods. They say about him that he was transformed into cattle and into anything else in order that he might commit adultery with mortal women, and that he might raise for himself sons from them. *<12.3>* Since at one time they say that he was transformed into a bull on account of his passion for Europa and Pasiphae; and again we was transformed into the form of gold on account of his passion for Danae; and into a swan on account of his passion for Leda; and into a man on account of his passion for Antiope; and into lightning on account of his passion for the Moon: so that from these he fathered many children. *<12.4>* For from Antiope, they say, he fathered Zethus and Amphion; from the Moon, Dionysus; from Alcmene, Herakles; from Leto, Apollo and Artemis; from Danae, Perseus; from Leda, Castor, Polydeuces and Helen; and from Mnemosyne he fathered nine daughters, those who are called Muses; *<13.1>* from Europa, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Sarpedon. But finally he was transformed into the form of an eagle on account of his passion for Ganymede the shepherd.

<13.2> Because of these stories, o King, great evil has befallen the men who live during this present time, since they imitate their gods, and commit adultery and are defiled with their mothers and their sisters, and in sleeping with males, and some of them dare even to kill their fathers. *<13.3>* For if he who is said to be the head and king of their gods does these things, how much more will his worshippers imitate him? Great is the madness which the Greeks introduced into their stories about him! *<13.4>* For it is not possible that a god should commit adultery or fornication or to draw near to sleep with males, or to kill his father. Otherwise he is more wicked than a destructive demon.

<13.5> Again, they introduce another god, Hephaistos. And they say of him that he is lame and wears a cap on his head, and holds in his hand tongs and a hammer; he works as a blacksmith, so that from this he may find his necessary nourishment. Now then, is this god so needy? It is not possible that a god should be needy or lame, for otherwise he is very weak.

<13.6> Again they introduce another god, and they call him Hermes. *<14.1>* They say that he is a man who loves avarice and lusts after profit, a *magus* and that he is maimed and an athlete and one who translates words. *<14.2>* But it is not possible that a god should be a *magus*, or avaricious, or maimed, or coveting whatever is not his, or an athlete. For if it is found otherwise, then he is no use.

<14.3> After him they introduce another god, Asklepios. They said that he is a physician, and he prepares medicines and bandages so that he may satisfy his need of nourishment. Is this god needy, then? *<14.4>* Finally he was struck by lightning from Zeus on account of Tyndareus the Lacedaimonian, and so he died. If, then, Asclepius was a god and yet when he was struck by lightning

was not able to help himself, therefore how is he able to help others? <14.5> It is not possible that the divine nature should be in need, or that it should be struck by lightning.

<14.6> Again, they introduce another god, and call him Ares. They say of him that he is a warrior and is jealous, coveting sheep and things that are not his, and obtains possessions through arms. <14.7> He is the one whom they say at last committed adultery with Aphrodite, and was bound by a small boy, Eros, and by Hephaistos the husband of Aphrodite. <15.1> But it is not possible that a god should be a warrior or a prisoner or an adulterer.

<15.2> Again, they say of Dionysus that he is indeed a god who celebrates festivals in the night and teaches drunkenness. He snatches off women who are not his; finally they say that he went made and left his female attendants and fled into the wilderness; in his madness he ate snakes, and finally he was killed by Titan. <15.3> If, therefore, Dionysus was a god, and when he was slain was not able to help himself, how is he able to help others?

<15.4> They introduce Herakles, too, and says of him that he is a god, who hates the hateful, a ruler and a warrior, and slayer of the wicked. Of him, they say that in the end he went mad and killed his children and threw himself into the fire and died. <15.5> If, then, Herakles is a god, and in all of these evils was not able to stand up for himself, why do others ask for help from him? It is not possible that a god should be mad, or drunk, or a killer of his children, or destroyed by fire.

<15.6> After him they introduce another god, and call him Apollo. They say of him that he is jealous and changeable; at times he holds a bow and quiver, but at times a lyre and plectrum. He prophesies oracles to men, so that he may receive from them a reward. Does this god, then, need a reward? <16.1> It is disgraceful that all of these things should be found in a god.

<16.2> After him they introduce Artemis as a goddess, the sister of Apollo. They say that she is a huntress and she carries a bow and arrows, and wandered around on mountains while leading dogs, either to hunt deer or wild boar. <16.3> But it is disgraceful that a virgin should wander about on mountains by herself, and hunt the trail of beasts. Because of this it is not possible that Artemis should be a goddess.

<16.4> Again, they say of Aphrodite that she is indeed a goddess. Sometimes, indeed, she dwells with the gods; but sometimes she commits adultery with men. Sometimes she has Ares as a lover, but sometimes Adonis, who is Tammuz. <16.5> Sometimes, indeed, Aphrodite grieves and mourns for the death of Tammuz. They say that she descended to Sheol in order to ransom Adonis from Persephone, who was the daughter of Sheol. <16.6> If, then, Aphrodite is a goddess but was not able to help her lover in his death, how can she help others? This is not possible to listen to, that the divine nature should come to mourning and grieving and adultery.

<16.7> Again, they say of Tammuz that he is a god, and is indeed a hunter and an adulterer. They say that he himself was killed by a blow from a wild boar, and was not able to help <17.1> himself. If he is not able to help himself, how is he able to oversee the human race? It is not possible that a god should be an adulterer or hunter, or that he should die of violence.

<17.2> Again, they say of Rhea that she is indeed the mother of the gods. They say of her that she had at one time a lover, Attis, and that she took joy in corruptible men. But finally she established lamentations, and grieved for Attis, her lover. If, then, the mother of the gods was not able to help her

lover and to rescue him from death, how is she able to help another? *<17.3>* It is disgraceful, therefore, that a goddess should lament and weep, or that she should have joy over corruptible beings.

<17.4> Again, they bring forward Kore and say that she is a goddess, and she was snatched away by Pluto and was not able to help herself. If, therefore, she is a goddess and is not able to help herself, how is she able to help others? For a god who is snatched off is very weak.

<17.5> O King, the Greeks have introduced all these things regarding their gods, and have devised and said (these things) concerning them. From this all men have taken the opportunity to do all wickedness and all impiety: in this way, the whole earth has been corrupted.

<18.1> But the Egyptians, because they are more evil and ignorant than all of the peoples who are upon the earth, they have erred more than anyone. For the idolatry of the Barbarians and Greeks was not enough for them, but they also introduced the nature of beasts, and said about it that they were gods. *<18.2>* Also, of the creeping things which are found on dry land and in the sea, and of the plants and of the grass, they said of them that some of them are gods. They have been corrupted in all madness and impiety, more than all the nations that are upon the earth. *<18.3>* From ancient times they served Isis, and said that she was indeed a goddess. Indeed, she had a husband, Osiris, her brother. But when, indeed, Osiris was killed by his brother Typhon (i.e. Set), Isis fled with her son Horus to Byblos in Syria, and stayed there for a time until her son was grown. *<18.4>* He fought with his uncle Typhon and killed him. Then Isis returned and wandered about with Horus her son, and she sought the corpse of her husband Osiris, and bitterly lamented his death. If, therefore, Isis is a goddess and was not able to help Osiris her brother and husband, how is she able to help others? *<18.5>* It is not possible that the divine nature should be afraid and flee, or to weep and wail. Otherwise it is great misfortune. *<18.6>* But of Osiris, they say that he is a beneficent god. He was killed by Typhon and was not able to help himself, and it is known that this cannot be said about God.

<18.7> Again, they say of Typhon, his brother, that he is *<19.1>* a god, killer of his brother, and was killed by the son of his brother and by his wife, since he was not able to help himself. How can one who is not able to help himself be god?

<19.2> Because the Egyptians are more ignorant than the rest of the nations, these and similar gods were not enough for them. But also, they place the name of 'god' upon beasts which are merely lifeless. *<19.3>* For some men among them worship sheep, but others the calf, and some of them the pig, and others a river-fish; some of them the crocodile or the hawk, or the sea-fish, or the kite, or the vulture, or the eagle, or the raven. Some of them worship the cat, and others the fish Shibbutha; some of them worship the dog, and some of them the serpent, and some of them the asp; others the lion, and others garlic and onions and thorns, and others the leopard, or anything which is like them. *<19.4>* The wretches do not perceive that in all of these things they are nothing, while every day they look upon their gods, which are eaten and are destroyed by man, even by their companions, and (look upon) some of them being burned and some of them while they die and decay and become manure, and they do not understand that they perish in many different ways.

<19.5> Therefore the Egyptians do not understand that things like these are not gods, for their salvation is not within their own hands. If they are too weak for the salvation of themselves, then, concerning the salvation of their worshippers, how will they have the strength to help them? Therefore with a great error *<20.1>* have the Egyptians erred, more than all of the nations who are

upon the face of the earth. *<20.2>* But it is a wondrous thing, o King, concerning the Greeks: that although they are greater than the rest of all the nations in their reasoning and in their rhetoric, that they should err after dead idols and images which are not alive, while they see their gods, which are sawn and polished by their makers, and shortened and cut and burned and shaped and transformed into every shape by them. *<20.3>* And when they age and come to an end by the length of time, and when they are melted down and broken into pieces, how do they not understand regarding them that they are not gods? And those which are not capable of the salvation of their own lives, how are they able to protect men? *<20.4>* But even the authors and philosophers among them who have erred introduce regarding them that they are gods, things like this which are made for the honour of God Almighty. *<20.5>* Being in error, they compare them to God; no man has seen to whom He is similar. Nor is man able to see Him, and in these things they introduce ideas regarding the divine as if deficiency were found in Him, in that they say that He receives sacrifice and demands offerings and libations and slayings of men and temples. *<20.6>* But God is not needy, and He does not seek for any of these things. It is known that men are in error in these things that they suppose. But their authors *<21.1>* and philosophers introduce (this idea), and say that the nature of all of their gods is one. But they have not understood God, our Lord, that while He is one He is in all. They are in error, then, for if the body of man were of many parts, one part of the body does not fear its companion; but whilst it is a composite body, all is equal with all. *<21.2>* Therefore so also God, who is one in His nature, has one essence which is fitting for Him, since He is equal in His nature and His essence, nor does he fear Himself. *<21.3>* If, therefore, the nature of gods is one, it is not right that a god should persecute a god, nor kill him, nor do to him what is evil.

<21.4> If, therefore, gods were persecuted or stabbed by gods, and some of them were snatched away and some of them struck by lightning, it is known that the nature of their gods is not one. From this it is clear, o King, that it is an error to speculate on the nature of their gods, and that they reduce them to a single nature. *<21.5>* If, then, it is right that we should marvel at a god who is visible and does not see, how much more worthy of marvel is this, that men should believe in a nature which is invisible and sees all! Again, if it is fitting that men investigate the works of craftsmen, how much more fitting that man should praise the maker of the craftsmen!

<21.6> For see! while the Greeks establish laws, they do not understand that by their laws they are condemning their own gods. For if *<22.1>* their laws are just, their gods are unrighteous, who violated the law, since they kill one another and performed enchantments and committed adultery, plundered, stole, slept with males, together with the rest of their other deeds. *<22.2>* But if their gods are beautiful and, like they say, did all these things, then the laws of the Greeks are unrighteous, and are not established according to the will of their gods, and in this the entire world has erred.

<22.3> As for the stories of the gods, some of them are parables, some of them are physical, some of them hymns and songs. These hymns and songs, therefore, are empty sayings and noises. But as to the physical, if they were done like they say, they are not gods, because they have done these things, and suffered and endured these things. And these parables are meaningless words, which have no power at all in them.

<22.4> Let us now come, o King, to the histories of the Jews, and let us see what sort of idea they have about God. The Jews, then, say that God is one, Creator of all and Almighty, and that it is not fitting that we should worship anything else, except if it is this God alone. *<22.5>* In this they appear

to be nearer to the truth than all of the nations, in that they worship God exceedingly, and not His creations. <22.6> They imitate God by the power of the love of man which they have, since they are indeed compassionate towards the poor, and they ransom the captive, and bury the dead, and do things which are similar to these, things which are acceptable before God and attractive to men, these things which they received from their fathers formerly. <23.1> But they too have strayed from accurate knowledge, and they suppose in their minds that they worship God, but in the manner of their actions, their worship is to angels and not to God, since they observe Sabbaths and new moons and the Passover and the great fast, and circumcision and purity of food. Even these things they have not perfectly observed.

<23.2> But the Christians, o King, since they wander about and, in seekingm have found the truth, just as we comprehended from their writing, are closer to the truth and to correct knowledge than the rest of the nations. <23.3> For they know and believe in God, the maker of the heavens and the earth, in whom are all things, and all things are from Him. He does not have another god as a companion. They received from Him these commandments that they have engraved upon their minds, which they observed in trust and expectation of the world to which is to come. <23.4> Because of this they do not commit adultery and do not fornicate, they do not bear false witness, they do not conceal something held in trust, and they do not covet that which is not theirs. They honour their father and the mother, and do good to those who are their neighbours. When they are judges, they judge justly, and do not worship idols which are in the image of man. <23.5> Whatever they do not wish another to do to them, they do not do to others. They do not eat from the food that is the sacrifice of idols, for they are pure. Those who harm them <24.1> they comfort and make them their friends and they do good to their enemies. Their wives are pure like virgins, o King, and their daughters are modest. Their men restrain from all unlawful copulation, and from all impurity, in the hope of reward which is to come in another world. <24.2> But the servants and handmaidens, or their children if any of them have any, they convince to become Christians because of the love which they have towards them, and when they have become Christians, they call them with no distinctions 'brothers'. <24.3> They do not worship foreign gods, and they walk in all humility and kindness, and deceit is not found amongst them, and they love one another. They do not turn their gaze away from widows, and the orphan they set free from him who harms him with violence. <24.4> The one who has gives without grudging to the one who has not. When they see a stranger, they bring him to their homes and rejoice in him like in a true brother. For they do not call 'brother' those who are in the flesh but 'brothers' who are in the spirit and are in God. But when one of their poor passes from the world, and any one of them sees him, according to his wealth he attends to his funeral. <24.5> If they heard that one of them is imprisoned or oppressed because of the name of their Christ, all of them attend to his needs, and if it is possible that he should be freed, they free him. If there is among them a man who is poor or needy, and they do not have the necessities in abundance, they fast for two or three days so that they might supply the needy with their necessities of food. <24.6> They observe the commandments of their Messiah with great caution; they live uprightly and chastely, like <25.1> the Lord their God commanded them. Every morning and at every hour, on account of the graces of God towards them they praise and glorify him. Over their food and over their drink they give thanks. If any righteous person of them passes from the world, they rejoice and give thanks to God. <25.2> They accompany his corpse as if he were journeying from one place to another. When a baby is born to one of them, they praise God, and again, if it happens that it dies in its infancy, they praise God greatly, as for one who passed from the world and was not a sinner. <25.3> Again, if they see that one of them has died

in his wickedness or in his sins, about this one they lament bitterly and sigh, as for one who is ready to go to punishment.

<25.4> This is the commandment, the law of the Christians, o King, and their way of life. As men who know God, they ask from Him petitions which are fitting for him to give and for them to receive. In this way they fulfil the course of their lives. <25.5> And because they know the graces of God towards them, see! Because of these comes the beauty that is in the world. It is true that they are those who have found the truth, since they wander around and search for it, and from what we have understood, we know that they alone are near to the knowledge of the truth. <25.6> But the kindnesses that they do, they do not announce in the ears of the masses, and they take care that nobody should be aware of them, and they conceal their gift, as one who has found a treasure <26.1> and hides it. They toil to become righteous as one who expects to see their Messiah and to receive from him promises that were made to them of great glory. <26.2> But their words and commandments, o King, and the glory of their labours and the expectation of the reward of repayment, according to the deeds of each one of them, which they expect in another world: you are able to know these things from their writings. It is enough for us that we have briefly informed your Majesty regarding the way of life and the truth of the Christians. <26.3> For, truly, their teaching is great and wonderful to the one who wishes to examine and to understand it. Truly this is a new people, and the divine is mingled in it. Therefore, take the writings and read them, and see! you will find that I do not bring forth these things from myself, nor do I speak as their defendant, but as I read in their writings I speak these things truly, and (I speak truly about) those things which are to come. <26.4> On account of this I was compelled to demonstrate the truth to those who wish it, and who seek the world that is to come. I have no doubt that the earth exists because of the intercession of Christians. <26.5> But the rest of the nations are deceived and deceivers, since they kneel before the elements of the world, just as the gaze of their understanding is not willing to pass them by, and they grope as if in darkness, because they are not willing to know the truth; like drunkards, they stumble, shove one another and fall over.

<26.6> Up to this point, o King, I have spoken. For as regards, the remainder, as <27.1> was said above, there are found in their other writings sayings which are difficult to speak, or that someone should repeat them, these things that are not only spoken but actually done.

<27.2> But the Greeks, o King, because they practice obscene things in sleeping with males, and with mother and sister and daughter, turn the ridicule of their defilement upon the Christians; but the Christians are upright and holy. The truth is set before their eyes, and their spirits are long-suffering. Because of this while they know their error and are buffeted by them, they endure and bear them. <27.3> All the more abundantly do they pity them as men who are lacking in knowledge, and on their behalf offer up prayers in order that they might turn from their error. And when it happens that one of them turns, they are ashamed before the Christians of the deeds that have been done by him. <27.4> He confesses to God when he says 'I did these things without knowledge' (i.e. in ignorance), and he cleanses his heart and he is forgiven his sins, because he committed them without knowledge previously, when he was blaspheming and cursing the true knowledge of the Christians. <27.5> The race of Christians is truly blessed, more so than all of the men who are upon the face of the earth.

<27.6> Now let the tongues of those speaking emptiness who slander the Christians be silenced, <28.1> and let them now speak the truth. For it is better for them to worship the true God than to

worship a buzzing which is without intelligence. *<28.2>* For the truly divine is whatever is spoken by the mouths of the Christians. Their teaching is the gateway of light. Therefore let all of those who do not know God approach Him and receive from Him words which are not corruptible, those which are everlasting and from eternity. *<28.3>* Let them anticipate, then, the judgement of power which is to come by the power of Jesus the Messiah upon the whole race of men.

<28.4> The apology of Aristides the philosopher ended here.

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