

**Simulacrum, Paragon, Holy Man.**

**Fundamentalist Perspectives in the Writings of**

**Flavius Philostratus.**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for a PhD degree in Classics,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.

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My first thanks and praise go to the Almighty, who has seen fit to put some of the most wonderful people in my path. Without His constant guidance and protection, all this would quite simply not have been possible.

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### Abstract.

Flavius Philostratus was a Greek author working in the early third century CE, attached to a circle of philosophers and thinkers under the patronage of the Roman Empress Julia Domna. It is he who coined the term that we today use to describe this period in literary history—the Second Sophistic. While it was a time of startling literary productivity, it was also a time of increasing moral decline and confusion for the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. The old beliefs and morality of Graeco-Roman polytheism was fast becoming outmoded in the light of new developments coming out of the East and places like Palaestine in particular. Faiths like Christianity that placed the individual believer and his or her desire for salvation at the heart of the system were challenging the older Olympian style of religion, wherein the *polis* or city-state was all important. Add to this the growing influence of the cult worship of the Roman emperor and upheaval was the only foreseeable outcome, with not even the *mos maiorum* remaining intact as a moral compass for the average citizen.

Flavius Philostratus struck out against this growing tide of moral and religious uncertainty by proposing a solution founded in religious fundamentalist tendencies. He could not do this in an obvious fashion, for fear not only of losing his imperial patroness, but possibly also his life as well for speaking ill of emperor and empire. Instead, Philostratus pretends to submission, while at the very same time suggesting a return to the old ways of Graeco-Roman paganism when the needs of the many outweighed individual desires. He also suggests a way of counteracting the popularity of foreign individualized cults by regenerating the almost forgotten cult of the ancestors, with the hero-cult a particular focus. Indeed, Philostratus' approach addresses every possible concern that may have arisen in his imperial milieu, ranging from philosophy to politics to the rejection of the cult of the emperor.

I have posited a theory of ancient religious fundamentalism as gleaned from the writings of Philostratus by envisioning a modified formulation of the twentieth century notion of religious fundamentalism itself. This new form removes fundamentalist dogma from its apparent reliance on a monotheistic faith and reconfigures it into a 'polyvalent' fundamentalism, wherein it is conceivable for an inhabitant of the Graeco-Roman world like Philostratus to have championed a variegated polytheistic belief system in the face of advancing Eastern influences and emperor worship, choosing to see Graeco-Roman belief as a singular entity under threat. In an effort to conceal his beliefs from those who

might take offence at them, Philostratus makes use of a simulacrum for his ideals. This is the first century sage known as Apollonius of Tyana.

My own approach to this idea has been twofold, with the first half being devoted to analysing the time and place in which Philostratus was working. I assess the literary tensions of the Second Sophistic itself and investigate how this may have impacted upon Philostratus' presentation of his argument. I also look to the figure of Apollonius of Tyana, essential to the whole of the Philostratean fundamentalist 'project', and examine what changes Philostratus may have effected to the existing canon on Apollonius in order to make him useful to his fundamentalist perspective. The second half of my thesis involves the specific analysis of four of the works of Philostratus—the *Vita Apollonii*, *Vitae Sophistarum*, *Heroikos*, and *Nero*. Each is assessed in detail with respect to its representation of a specific aspect of Philostratus' beliefs. The *Vita Apollonii* presents Apollonius of Tyana as the paragon and champion of Philostratus' new belief system, teaching a Pythagorean way of life and personally resisting Roman emperors like Domitian. The *Vitae Sophistarum* provides a catalogue of past sophists and offers up their behaviour as a guide for all good and wise men to follow, while the *Nero* presents Musonius Rufus as the archetypal philosopher battling imperial tyranny. Finally the *Heroikos* is suggested as Philostratus' attempt at reinvigorating the cult of the ancestors as a means of providing an alternative individualized religious tradition to ward off the encroaching Eastern mysteries.

In all it is my contention that Flavius Philostratus deploys his sophistic talents in a manner reflective of his time, as a means of remedying or, at the very least, positing a remedy, for the decline of belief and morality in the Roman Empire. He does this through four great literary works and chiefly through the figure of Apollonius of Tyana, his paragon and simulacrum.

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### *List of Special Abbreviations.*

For the purposes of this dissertation, where possible I have endeavoured to follow the standard abbreviations as set out in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3<sup>rd</sup> Revised Edition). Where this is not the case or has simply not been possible, I have made use of either the abbreviations found in Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*, or Lewis and Short's *Latin-English Lexicon*.

I have also referred to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* for basic definitions. Where this has occurred it has been noted with the abbreviation *OED*.

The *Contra Hieroclem*, written by Eusebius, is abbreviated to *CH*.

The four works of Flavius Philostratus that are referred to throughout this text are abbreviated as follows:

*Vita Apollonii* or *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* : *VA*

*Vitae Sophistarum* : *VS*

*Heroikos* : *Her.*

*Nero*.

## *Preface*

And so it is after more than five years of hard work that I sit down to write this little addendum for my PhD dissertation. My revisions and corrections complete, I have but to include a note of clarification and explanation for those who have pointed out a key deficiency in this work, namely the lack of reference to works in foreign languages.

This dissertation was written by a *South* African—a South African living and working in South Africa. The reader might be wondering why it is that I have emphasized that point some three times over? The answer is twofold: firstly, having been brought up in the South African education system, my learning experience at every level failed to include a foreign language requirement (or for the most part, even the *option* to study a foreign language). This is because in this country, English and our indigenous languages are considered to be the most important. When finally afforded the opportunity to embark upon the study of other languages (once I had reached university) I chose instead to focus on the languages most immediately useful to myself as a young Classicist, and am now one of a handful of new Classics graduates in the country who is fluent in both Latin and Greek. Thus, while I have been able to read and translate every ancient text included in this dissertation myself, I was unable to include works in German, French, and Italian. I do understand that

this has meant that I have excluded a sizeable portion of the scholarship in my field, but it was quite simply unavoidable. However, I do believe that I have compensated for this to a degree through an extensive bibliography of English texts.

Secondly, I must address the relative paucity of resources in this country, particularly where subjects like Classics are concerned. Given the low numbers of students registered for Classics courses and the fact that it is sometimes seen as having no real world or monetary applications, Classics is in part ignored where resource allocation is concerned. This is worsened by the perception of the discipline as elitist and Eurocentric. All of this contributes to the lack of availability of Classics texts in South Africa, especially where the latest tomes are concerned and where the expense of a work published in Europe or the U. S. is extremely prohibitive. Needless to say, this also affects the availability of many European journals which, although common on the shelves of international libraries are all but impossible to obtain in this country. In all, the works available for the study of the Classics are somewhat limited, but it is nonetheless my hope that I have done sufficiently well with what is available to create a work of doctoral calibre.

Mark Kirby-Hirst

March 2011

## Part I.

### Setting the Scene: Truth, Preconceptions, and Sophistry.

## Chapter I

### An Introduction.

*A theory concerning government may become as much a cause of fanaticism as a dogma in religion. (Edmund Burke)<sup>1</sup>*

Since its beginnings in the shadowy mists of mythology, religion has often appeared as little more than a study of perception and has ever been a double-edged sword for humankind. The concept of religion continues to bring with it both positive and negative elements, for while faith can bear many fruits in one's personal life, it can simultaneously lead to a burgeoning fanaticism that is fast becoming the dominant voice in many of today's belief systems. Because of this it is more essential than ever for researchers to make a more careful study of what Malisse Ruthven refers to as the 'f-word', religious fundamentalism.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to formulate a better understanding of the complexities that mark religious fundamentalism, I have chosen to look back into ancient history, to a time somewhat like our own, and shall be concentrating on the works of the author Flavius Philostratus in particular. The first centuries of our common era saw the unprecedented expansion of the Roman Empire—militarily, Rome stood unrivalled among the nations of the known world; politically, it boasted a complex and largely successful administrative system that directed the lives of

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Clarke 2001: 92.

<sup>2</sup> Ruthven 2004: 5.

millions; economically, it brought prosperity to many citizens. It was in the sphere of religion that the Roman Empire was perhaps its most intriguing, with a pantheon filled to bursting of gods and goddesses in all shapes and sizes, inducted from every corner of the Mediterranean, and the notion of the ruler as god taken to a new extreme. The traditional Graeco-Roman belief system centred on the single and apparently universal truth that the gods were manifold and in some way concerned with the lives of mere mortals everywhere in their purview.<sup>3</sup> The pursuit of this truth is an essential element of every religion and philosophy in the Roman Empire, and the single-mindedness with which one engages in this pursuit is what defines one as a fundamentalist. Therefore, it is my contention that Flavius Philostratus was an ancient writer who interpreted the Graeco-Roman world around him in a uniquely fundamentalist manner, and that these tendencies can be observed in his works.

I have begun by using the word 'fundamentalism' as though everyone is fully aware of its definition and origins, and more importantly, how this word can be meshed with the sociopolitical and religious milieu of the second and third century Roman Empire, the time in which Philostratus was most productive. For anyone who has even the most basic understanding of the multiplicity of divinities that existed at this time in the Mediterranean world, it appears

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<sup>3</sup> Unless of course one was an Epicurean, for whom the gods were entirely disinterested parties.

counter-intuitive that any sort of religious fundamentalism could have been present, especially given that pluralism of belief was an accepted commonplace. It is rather the 'fundamental' principles at the core of this structure of beliefs that I believe was under threat, challenged by the infiltration of cults from the Eastern Empire and by the development of the new phenomenon of emperor worship in its peculiarly Roman incarnation. Therefore, as an essential aspect of my argument, I am proposing a redefinition of the term 'fundamentalism' in an effort to shift it from its twentieth century roots (and from its association with terrorism), thus enabling it to be adapted to perform a new function as an analytical framework for the writings of Philostratus.

There are several extant texts ascribed to Philostratus. My primary concern will be with his *Vita Apollonii* or *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. This work in eight books, tells the story of Apollonius, a first century holy man and Pythagorean sage, who travelled as far to the East as India, and as far west as Spain, meeting with some of the archetypal philosophers and practitioners of the magical arts of his day—the Indian Brahmins, Persian Magi, and Egyptian Gymnosophists. At almost every turn, Apollonius attempts to correct the perceived imperfections in Graeco-Roman religion, apparently seeking to return their belief system to the state in which it had existed before any Eastern mysteries, Christianity, and the cult of the emperor had begun to win the hearts and minds of believers. Since this biography by Philostratus was written in the early third century CE,

Apollonius has remained a contentious figure, with some modern scholars even debating his very existence. The Christian writer, Eusebius, sought to refute the life and deeds of Apollonius point by point in his *Contra Hieroclem*, seeing the parallels between Apollonius and another preacher, Jesus of Nazareth, as being far too close for comfort. Conversely, pagans like Eunapius (VS 454) who wrote a *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* to rival Philostratus' own, often perceived Apollonius as some manner of pagan divinity, commenting:

‘But the Lemnian Philostratus completed this in his writing of the books on the life of Apollonius, which he should have called “The Visit of a god to men”’.<sup>4</sup>

ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἐς τοῦτον ὁ Λήμνιος ἐπετέλεσε Φιλόστρατος, βίον ἐπιγράψας Ἀπολλωνίου τὰ βιβλία, δέον Ἐπιδημίαν ἐς ἀνθρώπους θεοῦ καλεῖν.

Other writers, against whom Philostratus as ‘official’ biographer sets himself, are Moeragenes and Maximus of Aegeae. While Moeragenes seeks to cast Apollonius as a glorified worker of wonders and miracles, an approach that earns him the lasting enmity of Philostratus, Maximus concentrates on Apollonius’ brief time spent in the city of Aegeae as a youth, and is a source that Philostratus makes extensive use of. It is with these two authors, as well as with the letters ascribed to Apollonius, that Philostratus was competing when he created his particular portrayal of the Tyanaean Sage.

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.



The second major text that I will investigate is Philostratus' *Vitae Sophistarum* or *Lives of the Sophists*. It is in the opening to this work that Philostratus (VS 481) in fact coins the term used to describe the literary movement taking shape at the time, the 'Second Sophistic'. Through this work Philostratus tells the stories of many of the better-known sophists, as well as discussing their writing and public-speaking styles. Most important in the VS is the manner in which Philostratus conceives of the relationships that these men had with the rulers of their times, in much the same way as he paints the various philosophical movements and their interplay with the imperial Roman authorities. In every case, through the emphasis placed on certain teachings and actions, Philostratus is able to create a picture of a specific style of resistance to tyrannical rule in the same way as he does through the figure of Apollonius of Tyana. This is in fact, as I will argue, a form of resistance through a return to fundamental principles.

Another smaller work that is nonetheless vital to the full picture of Philostratus as a writer with fundamentalist leanings is the *Heroikos*, a dialogue between a Phoenician merchant and the keeper of the gardens at a shrine of the hero Protesilaos near Elaious. This text deals not only with the contrast between Hellene and barbarian, but also engages directly with the steady decline of traditional forms of worship, as symbolized by Protesilaos and the cult of the heroes. The *Heroikos*, in a more concentrated form, brings into stark relief many of the issues that are only briefly highlighted in both the VA and VS,

emphasizing the neglect of the old ways in particular and what this means for the Roman world.

A fourth and final text requiring a more detailed analysis is the *Nero*. Although this work, another dialogue, is originally ascribed to Lucian, there is strong evidence to suggest that it was in fact penned by Philostratus.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it suffices to say that because of its subject matter, a dialogue between two philosophers—Musonius Rufus and Menecrates—this work is essential as a window on the reality in which Philostratus lived and worked, as it provides an intriguing slant on the typical relationship between a philosopher-adviser and his imperial patron.

The work of Philostratus cannot be studied in isolation, as it is my contention that he is not only working within, but also counter to a particular cultural and religious milieu. The debate over the legitimacy of foreign (i.e. non-Roman) religious beliefs in Roman society has a protracted history. Cicero (*Leg.* 2.10.25) comments:

‘And worship of gods, particularly new or foreign, holds confusion for religion and brings unknown ceremonies for our priests.’

[*S<e>o<r>su<m>que*] *deos aut nou<o>s aut alienigenas coli confusionem habet religionum et ignotas caerimonias <nobis sacerdotibus>.*

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<sup>5</sup> The case for Philostratus as author of the *Nero* will be explored in a later chapter.

Roman pragmatism led to foreigners being permitted to practice their own native cults, unless, for example, they offended delicate Roman sensibilities as was the case with the Gallic Druids. Roman citizens were however initially forbidden from participating in these foreign beliefs.<sup>6</sup> The cult of Cybele was, for example, viewed as a 'contagion' and Roman citizens could not become her priests.<sup>7</sup> All that was foreign about her cult was even removed so that, at first, her worship could still be observed but in a Roman way.<sup>8</sup> Despite these conditions, the Romans were generally accepting of other religions, but their approach was never truly *laissez-faire*.<sup>9</sup> According to Scheid this was not polytheism purely because there were many gods, goddesses, daemons, and the like, but rather because its key 'principle lay in the limitation of divine functions', or more simply, believers demarcated particular areas of influence for each and every deity.<sup>10</sup> Just like everything else in Roman experience, the gods had to be useful. The Romans did not see themselves as puny mortals cowering before the whim and caprice of mighty, sometimes benevolent powers, but rather as equal parties engaged in a form of legal contract, with one side both useful to, and to some extent dependent upon the other.<sup>11</sup> Graeco-Roman polytheism was, however, never a great overarching structure or all-

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<sup>6</sup> Guterman 1951: 31-33.

<sup>7</sup> Cumont 1956: 52.

<sup>8</sup> Cumont 1956: 52.

<sup>9</sup> Beard, North, & Price 1998: 91-98, 113, list many examples of traditional practices being defended against foreign cults, all under the auspices of the greater good.

<sup>10</sup> Scheid 2003: 157.

<sup>11</sup> Rives 2007: 24.

embracing system that reached into every facet of one's life like the three great monotheisms of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. This polytheism was compartmentalized in a similar manner to its deities, for the god of one's city might be entirely different from the goddess that was patron of one's profession, with neither being any more or less deserving of worship. What made foreign or new religious ideas a threat to this existing order was the fact that they challenged the social cohesion that these communal celebrations fostered, providing an outlet for religious fervour that was not necessarily sanctioned by (and might in fact be detrimental to) the Roman authorities.

The imperial cult—the worship of a deified (and typically deceased) Roman emperor—was from the perspective of Philostratus yet another of those recent inventions seeking a foothold in Roman hearts.<sup>12</sup> But if the Roman people had historically been such determined opponents of monarchic rule, why would they not only rejoice in the rule of a *dictator* but eventually even turn to the worship of one? Centralization of power is perhaps the most obvious political answer. As the Empire continued its dramatic expansion into every corner of the known world, a form of government that was far less fractious and cumbersome than the old Republican-style senate was essential to seeing diplomatic and military difficulties resolved efficiently in the farthest flung

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<sup>12</sup> MacMullen 1981: 3 states that words like *novus* were often used disparagingly by Romans of certain religious cults.

reaches of the *orbis Romanum*. In addition, in *The Roman Revolution*, Ronald Syme argues that the initial reason behind the principate of Augustus was that he believed he could no longer trust the Roman nobility with political power.<sup>13</sup> Thus it was that Augustus drove the movement toward centralization of power within a single and almost monarchic figure. It is against this background that Rives characterizes the role of emperor as follows:

‘...the emperor was the concrete embodiment of what was otherwise an unimaginable abstraction [i.e. the Roman Empire]. Although it would be accurate to say that the emperor symbolized the unity of the empire, he was in fact much more than a symbol. As the supreme commander of the imperial army and the center of the imperial bureaucracy, he directly controlled those aspects of imperial power that most people were likely to encounter.’<sup>14</sup>

The deification of a deceased ruler, or even the notion of divine kingship itself, was not new to the Mediterranean world. Instead, Nock writes that the ancient world never conceived of ‘god’ and ‘mortal’ as categories in binary opposition.<sup>15</sup> For some, attaining the ‘rank’ of *divus*<sup>16</sup> might have been understood as little more than another rung on the ladder of the *cursus honorum*, an entirely relative position that merely marked the distinction between one mortal and another. In the eyes of the ancients a mortal could, after all, never join the ranks of the true gods and become *deus*. An emperor, already far ‘superior’ to a common man, could, however, come fairly close as a *divus*. Each emperor would use or abuse the imperial cult in his own way, with Augustus, for example, refusing to allow

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<sup>13</sup> Syme 1939: 313-405, 490-524.

<sup>14</sup> Rives 2007: 148-149.

<sup>15</sup> Nock 1928b: 31.

<sup>16</sup> In Greek the term appears as ἡμίθεος.

Roman citizens to worship or build temples in his name, while Caligula and Domitian demanded that they be worshipped as living gods. The majority of imperial rulers tended to hold a more moderate line in terms of religious policy, especially as concerned matters of state cult, and this lent an air of stability to what might have otherwise been an entirely fluid religious organization.

Therefore, it is through the careful examination of the four above-mentioned works, while keeping the sociopolitical and religious context responsible for their genesis foremost in mind that I shall argue for a fundamentalist bias to the ideological outlook of Philostratus. This is not to say that Philostratus was an actual religious fundamentalist. Rather he can be shown to readily make use of the tools and perspective supplied to him by a fundamentalist 'outlook' in a way that allows for him to battle the perceived moral and religious decline of his society. Therefore, the first half of this dissertation sets the scene for the study of the intricacies of Philostratus' works by assessing the cultural and political milieu that shaped his ideology. The second half looks at the four Philostratean works in particular: the *Heroikos* calls for the revivification of the older cult of the heroes; the *Nero* presents the proper behaviour of a philosophically-minded individual before the conforming influence of the Roman Empire; and the *VS* draws upon examples from the cherished past of sophists and learned men who responded to tyrants and those who claimed the mantle of philosopher. It is however Apollonius of Tyana, Philostratus' paragon

that is the figure binding these texts together. He is the perfect expression of Philostratus' social, political, and religious ideals; and is thus a simulacrum of Philostratus' own beliefs, accomplishing everything that he cannot, admonishing those whom he dare not, and pointing the way back to the traditional roots of Graeco-Roman paganism that had become obscured with the passage of time.

## Chapter II

### Hellenising the Concept of Fundamentalism.

*When a man is dying of hunger beside another who is stuffing himself,  
he cannot accept this difference if there is not an authority who tells him:  
'God wishes it so'. (Napoleon Bonaparte)<sup>1</sup>*

Sociological concepts are often notoriously difficult to pin down in reality, with some of the more ephemeral notions of sociological debate being terms like 'magic' and 'belief'. It is my opinion that 'fundamentalism' is just such a term. Although its origins are to be found in early twentieth-century Protestantism, the term's contemporary usage has quite literally exploded into application amongst a jumble of faiths and pantheons. Across the world practically every religion claims (or conceals) a fundamentalist 'wing' or, in the extreme, is completely fundamentalist. Because of this unrestrained proliferation in the term's usage, caution and accuracy are demanded of anyone broaching the subject. What this means is that if I am to construct a viable definition of an 'ancient' Graeco-Roman fundamentalism, I must begin by investigating the word's origins, and then attempt to distil its quintessence into a template that can be sensibly and usefully applied to the writings and opinions of Philostratus. Thus I hope to formulate a model based upon modern parallels, and then apply it to the religious, philosophical, and sociological topography of the world of third century imperial Rome. I shall therefore begin this chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Burleigh 2005: 108.



with the fundamentalist theories of the twentieth century and then gradually proceed to work back to the third century, all the while constructing a paradigm that will function as a guide in my later chapters, and allow for a truthful assessment of the character of the man whose beliefs are at the heart of this thesis—Flavius Philostratus.

Between 1910 and 1915 a series of Christian pamphlets entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth* were published in the United States, making use of the term ‘fundamental’ in a religious context for the very first time.<sup>2</sup> Two brothers named Milton and Lyman Stewart released the pamphlets in an apparent attempt at ‘stopping the erosion of... the “fundamental” beliefs of Protestantism’.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* lists the first published use of the actual word ‘fundamentalism’ as having occurred in 1923 in a Christian, and more specifically, a Protestant context.<sup>4</sup> Thus the word ‘fundamentalism’ has its origins in a peculiarly rigid brand of Christianity, at a very specific moment in the life of Protestantism in America. Therefore, contrary to popular perceptions, the term has nothing to do with the ascendancy of militant Islamism in the late twentieth century, despite its usually being applied almost solely within that context, but was instead the result of a time of booming economic development in the Western World (the

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<sup>2</sup> Barr 1981: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ruthven 2004: 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> *O.E.D. sv.* ‘Fundamentalism’.

so-called Roaring Twenties).<sup>5</sup> The religious fundamentalism that was preached by the Stewart brothers appears to have been a reaction to what they saw as the growing moral turpitude of their society. It is along these lines that Ruthven suggests fundamentalism ‘manifests itself in a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their *distinctive identity as a people or group* in the face of modernity or secularization.’<sup>6</sup> This is exactly what the Stewarts were doing, staking out their specific piece of territory in reaction to the encroachment of the modern world. Furthermore, this mirrors the time in which Philostratus was writing, during which traditional religion and morality appeared to be declining before the relentless onslaught of new theologies emerging in the East.

Before proceeding I should like to briefly address the issue of this moral decline. Throughout his *Olympian Oration*, Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 12) points to the fact that being Greek is not just a matter of language and culture, but of virtue as well.<sup>7</sup> If the conquering Romans, who had in the end forced their empire upon the Greeks, initially possessed neither Greek culture nor language, how could these conquerors be seen as virtuous? I will attempt to answer this

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<sup>5</sup> Chafe 2009: 66-87. Because of the fact that the United States spent a good portion of the First World War as a neutral party, selling supplies to the likes of France and England, they were able to make a fortune post-1918 when the time came to convert from a war to a peacetime economy. As such the period post-war, the Roaring Twenties, was a time of unprecedented financial prosperity and expansion, with the average income increasing by as much as 30 %.

<sup>6</sup> Ruthven 2004: 8 (My italics). In the case of this fundamentalist Protestantism, their identity is one involving rigid adherence to the belief in the complete inerrancy of sacred scripture.

<sup>7</sup> Moles 1995: 190.

question more completely in Chapter IV, wherein I will discuss how the conquerors, instead of learning virtue as the Greeks would see it, chose to reshape the notion of 'Greekness' in their own image so that it reflected badly upon the Greek peoples of the present day, people like Flavius Philostratus, The Romans could then cast themselves as the preservers of a dying Greece that was once the cultural epicentre of the world. Thus from a Greek perspective, virtue was on the decline from the point at which Rome interfered in Greek affairs, and from a Roman perspective, the decline of Greek morality had led to the birth of a generation of Greeks that had abandoned their roots. In both cases, tradition was being threatened, a tradition Philostratus sought to protect.

By using the word 'reaction' in this context of the Stewarts' Protestant fundamentalism, I am by no means describing fundamentalists as being reactionary in the truest sense. Reactionaries tend towards conservative ideologies, and both Armstrong and Ruthven characterize fundamentalism as an intriguingly *innovative* ideology because it must constantly seek out new ways of reinterpreting older traditional ideas.<sup>8</sup> Fundamentalism is always evolving, or perhaps it is almost better to conceive of it as being an offensive (i.e. attacking) form of religion, for while fundamentalist movements seek out progressively diverse ways of approaching the same belief, and thereby retaining their same original and traditional focus, they add a distinctive 'twist'

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<sup>8</sup> Armstrong 2001: x; Ruthven 2004: 202.

to the situation by defining themselves in *response* to a perceived threat, a response necessarily requiring innovation. I think it better to describe fundamentalism as religion on the counter-attack, fighting to gain ground lost to other faiths or even to the secular world at large. At its most basic psychological core however, fundamentalism seems to be about identifying with one specific group and rejecting another, while on a somewhat broader level it is about standing behind a particularly innovative and *revivalist* perspective.

In terms of group religious identity, Mansell Pattison and Ness observe that ‘a religion is to be found where persons take it for granted that their own ethos corresponds to the meaning of the cosmos.’<sup>9</sup> Religious fundamentalism takes this understanding of the divine universe one step further, raising it to the same level of unyielding devotion that is evident in modern day religious cults. ‘Cult’ is often used as a pejorative term today, as a word designating the *other*, something that is perhaps not properly understood or in the mainstream.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the application of the term ‘cult’ bears a striking resemblance in its usage to ‘fundamentalism’, yet as Caplan writes, the term is used both by outsiders and insiders—it is an *etic* as well as an *emic* category<sup>11</sup>—with the notion of fundamentalism being derogatory for some, but a badge of honour for

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<sup>9</sup> Mansell Pattison & Ness 1989: 47.

<sup>10</sup> Tapper and Tapper 1987: 52.

<sup>11</sup> Goodenough 1970: 104-119.

others.<sup>12</sup> Thus while phenomena like ‘cult’ and ‘fundamentalism’ have dramatically negative connotations today, especially in the Western world, and are seen as an aberrant form of behaviour, the ancient world perceived cult activity as part and parcel of the whole that was paganism, something that often provided access to the parts of religious life that were shut off to the commoner, giving a greater feeling of participation and belonging.<sup>13</sup> For example, the Romans only sought to remove the cults that provided for the possibility of anti-government resistance.<sup>14</sup> This is seen in the suppression of the cult of Bacchus by the Roman Senate in 186 BCE, and even the early Christian cult. Moreover, affiliation with a particular religious association did not paint the individual as an outsider but as one of a privileged few, fortunate enough to have received a unique revelation. Nowhere was this truer than in the mystery cult of Demeter and Korē at Eleusis, which regarded secrecy concerning its rites as of paramount importance, so much so that there are no written accounts of their practices. As I noted earlier, group identification is clearly essential to the formation of this sort of religious affiliation.

In *Jesus and the Fundamentalism of His Day*, William Loader presents the example of Christian scriptural fundamentalism:

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<sup>12</sup> Caplan 1987: 3.

<sup>13</sup> Beard, North, Price 1998: 261.

<sup>14</sup> Beard, North, Price 1998: 339.

'... it is a common mistake to assume that fundamentalism is a monolithic system of thought. Many people are fundamentalist in their attitude toward Scripture because that is part of the culture in which they have grown up. They are not ideologically fundamentalist and move easily from an uncritical appreciation of Scripture to a more discerning approach.'<sup>15</sup>

Loader is discussing fundamentalism in the context of a nascent Christianity (as the title of his work suggests). He claims that a fundamentalist reinterpretation of Hebrew scripture is precisely what Jesus was after, and this radicalization continued as a central tenet of the Christian church.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Loader's insight also rings true in other manifestations of fundamentalist belief. There are clearly many forms of religious fundamentalism, but the point that Loader is making is that a specific kind of interpretation is the key aspect of fundamentalism, an interpretation that every person brings to bear on his or her own beliefs. Although this interpretation is guided or shaped by external forces—a charismatic leader for example—it is a choice to be made by the individual alone. This is psychologically dependent upon the peculiar construction of each person's identity. It should be remembered that a human being's identity is a construct, formed by events and desires seen as important to the individual psyche in question. Elliott states that 'it follows from this that the relation between self-identity and modern social processes will be more complex and contradictory than is commonly assumed. For if structures of

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<sup>15</sup> Loader 2001: 8.

<sup>16</sup> Loader 2001: 3. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Jesus' dictum "Love one another...", which he advanced as superseding the earlier Ten Commandments (*Mk. 12: 28-34*), declaring this commandment of love to be the greatest of all.

identity are formed in relation to others... then so too will changes in social relationships affect the nature of self.'<sup>17</sup> The forging of a fundamentalist perspective is truly the redefinition of social relationships taken to the extreme, a redefinition that causes the individual identity to become absorbed by the larger reality portrayed in the fundamentalist struggle. It is because this is such an intense process that psychologists often speak of patients having been 'brainwashed' into joining cult groups.

Two lines of inquiry are relevant to confronting the psychology of fundamentalist movements. Firstly, does a fundamentalist perspective presuppose the existence of, and belief in one great and all-encompassing religious truth? Secondly, is there an obvious monotheistic bias in my first question that may preclude its application in a pluralistic setting? In order to approach these problems, I shall begin by tackling Barr's work on Christian fundamentalism,<sup>18</sup> which can be reformulated into three broad tenets that might be of assistance in studying any manner of fundamentalism: (i) The fundamentalist theology is seen as being completely true and correct; (ii) Hostility is generated towards any reinterpretation of this theology; (iii) Believers are so firmly convinced of the theology that they characterize themselves as the only true believers. Conceiving of oneself as *the* true believer

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<sup>17</sup> Elliott 1994: 14.

<sup>18</sup> Barr 1981: 1.

in an ocean of the faithless is a vital step to creating a fundamentalist understanding of reality.<sup>19</sup>

How is it then that fundamentalists are able to see their position as being absolutely and undeniably true? Before proceeding any further, I would like to discuss the notion of 'authority', given its significance to fundamentalist claims. This is because religious, political, and moral authority provides the foundation from which one is able to assess the state of affairs in one's own society. Questions relating to the spirituality or degeneracy of a people or outlook can only be answered by a person wielding the particular and relevant brand of authority that, in essence, affords them the platform from which to speak. The notion of religious authority is the most important for the purposes of my argument and so it is the one that I will concentrate on. Several forms of religious authority can be said to have existed in the ancient world, given the belief in various forms of holiness (an idea that will be discussed more fully in Chapter V), and so, it can be said that in the religious sphere, everyone from the itinerant preacher to the established priest of a great temple wielded some manner of authority, deriving primarily from their perceived relationship with the deity in question. Plato (*Plt* 290c) informs us

'And what is more, the priests, according to law and custom, have the knowledge with which to give these gifts of ours to the gods through

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<sup>19</sup> Barr 1981: 17.



sacrifice, and to ask for us to acquire good things with prayers; and these things are both a portion of the art of the servant.'

καὶ μὴν καὶ τὸ τῶν ἱερέων αὖ γένος, ὡς τὸ νόμιμόν φησι, παρὰ μὲν ἡμῶν δωρεὰς θεοῖς διὰ θυσιῶν ἐπιστήμῳ ἐστὶ κατὰ νοῦν ἐκείνοις δωρεῖσθαι, παρὰ δὲ ἐκείνων ἡμῖν εὐχαῖς κτήσιν ἀγαθῶν αἰτήσασθαι· ταῦτα δὲ διακόνου τέχνης ἐστὶ πού μορία ἀμφοτέρω.

Thus it is evident that religious authority is founded upon two key factors—knowledge of the divine realm and a relationship with its inhabitants. Additionally, Fowden points out the ancient 'tendency to associate holiness with philosophical learning', a penchant that truly emphasizes the importance of knowledge in this particular paradigm.<sup>20</sup> Miraculous acts were an obvious way of proving that one was in possession of these requisites.<sup>21</sup> For the Graeco-Roman world however, religious authority was extremely circumscribed. As Garland comments of Greek priests,

'The competence of the Greek priest extended no further than the enclosure wall of his sanctuary. He had no religious authority either elsewhere in Athens or in relation to any sacred ritual other than that which had to do with the particular god or goddess whom he individually served.'<sup>22</sup>

This authority was absolute within these very specific limits. However, given that a Greek priest did not even possess the power to change the very rituals that he performed,<sup>23</sup> he held little influence in the secular world. Garland concludes that religious authority was beyond the control of the state and

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<sup>20</sup> Fowden 1982: 5.

<sup>21</sup> Fowden 1982: 50.

<sup>22</sup> Garland 1984: 75-76.

<sup>23</sup> Garland 1984: 77.

instead derived from the divine itself.<sup>24</sup> Thus it is as Isocrates (*Or.* 2.6) argues, that like the kingship, anyone can hold the position of priest, for it requires no schooling or special qualification beyond a relationship with the divine, as expressed through one's knowledge and ability to carry out the god's business.

In Rome of the Republic, the authority of priests and holy men derived initially from the body of the senate which was responsible for, among other things, deciding on the admission of foreign beliefs into Rome, the recognition of various *prodigia*, and the general maintenance of relations between gods and mortals.<sup>25</sup> Likewise a relationship with the divine realm was essential, something referred to by Rüpke as an individual's *sensus numinis*, 'his "nose" of the divine'.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, precedent or *exemplum*, was a vital element of the construction of any form of authority. While Isocrates suggests that anyone can be a priest, religious authority, as indeed with all forms of authority in ancient Rome, was the particular preserve of the elite.<sup>27</sup> And yet it was not the place of the elites to instruct the masses in proper moral behaviour. This was the task of the philosopher.<sup>28</sup> For the Greeks and Romans, moral and religious authority existed in two distinct 'streams', with different origins, expectations, and effects. In this context, the brand of fundamentalism that is espoused by

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<sup>24</sup> Garland 1984: 118.

<sup>25</sup> Beard 1990: 31-32.

<sup>26</sup> Rüpke 1996: 243.

<sup>27</sup> Brunt 1989: 174.

<sup>28</sup> Rives 2007: 52.

Philostratus, provides a further complication, for 'religious tradition is an ultimate value for fundamentalists.'<sup>29</sup> What this means is that a fundamentalist approaches the question of authority from a unique perspective. As I will show, the choice of a Pythagorean like Apollonius of Tyana for his fundamentalist paragon was a carefully reasoned one on the part of Philostratus. The antiquity of a movement like Pythagoreanism, when coupled with the philosophical standing of its founder, bestowed both the moral and religious authority upon the character of Apollonius and the fundamentalist renewal that Philostratus sought to create. And what is more, the personal charisma of a figure like Apollonius is what Taylor identifies as an essential for the formation of a fundamentalist movement.<sup>30</sup> In sum, this provides for all of the requirements necessary to the derivation of religious authority—knowledge of and converse with the divine included (I will discuss the particulars of Apollonius' relationship with the gods in my later chapters). Religious authority is thus what allows a holy man, priest, or philosopher to stake a claim to a certain way of life, and to argue for that lifestyle as being superior to all others. Because Philostratus is no holy man or priest, he must *assume* the authority that he requires to motivate his ancient fundamentalist position through a proxy—Apollonius of Tyana. While he can argue for the moral degeneracy of his age

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<sup>29</sup> Barr 1981: 37.

<sup>30</sup> Taylor 1987: 138.

and can lobby for the necessity of political and religious change, he cannot begin to effect change without the authority of Apollonius.

In a modern fundamentalism however, authority is often claimed through the reliance on religious or holy texts (the Bible, the Koran, etc.). Fundamentalists actually rely on a unique interpretation of these sacred texts, upon which to base their point of view. If such a textual basis is indispensable to fundamentalism, how could such a thing as ancient fundamentalism have existed, especially if, as many commentators contend, there were no holy texts to form the foundation of Graeco-Roman belief? As Rives writes,

‘none of them [ancient sacred texts] in any way constituted the core of Graeco-Roman religious tradition, but simply filled specific and limited functions within it.’<sup>31</sup>

While a sacred text is one of the so-called ‘pillars’ of both Islam and Christianity, Greek and Roman religion tended to rely on tradition and ancient myth for its authority. Thus the position of a sacred text within a religion is only important in so far as the emphasis placed upon the sacred text by the religion. The Romans had the books of the Sibylline Oracles, for example, which could certainly be considered sacred texts, but not *foundational* texts. Because the Bible and the Koran are essential elements of their respective religions, fundamentalists must engage with them in order to legitimize their perspectives. Conversely, in a religious setting that placed no great emphasis on

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<sup>31</sup> Rives 2007: 8.

possessing a textual counterpoint to received tradition, fundamentalism would in no way require a holy text as a basis. If this is indeed the case, then on a broader level, religious fundamentalism cannot be argued to presuppose the existence of a universal truth, but rather, it constructs a parochial truth that must be imposed universally by its adherents. The transference of religious authority from the traditional nodes of power to a newly forged charismatic position is therefore another of the essential conditions for the emergence of a fundamentalist perspective.<sup>32</sup>

In the modern world, the way in which a fundamentalist doctrine positions itself in relation to scientific progress and discovery is crucial in properly defining the phenomenon, but only in this particular context. This is made apparent by the central position that the science/religion dichotomy occupies in a good deal of modern Christian fundamentalist discourse. Because of this it is in fact Barr's contention that fundamentalism cannot be found in a 'prescientific' society.<sup>33</sup> He is however viewing the situation through lenses tempered by the role played by Christianity in forging Western Civilization. Ruthven is more specific, indicating that a certain level of post-Enlightenment thought, and therefore, rational inquiry, is the prerequisite for the establishment

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<sup>32</sup> Taylor 1987: 138.

<sup>33</sup> Barr 1981: 90.

of true fundamentalist doctrine.<sup>34</sup> Yet Max Planck, the father of Quantum Physics, writes

‘we might naturally assume that one of the achievements of science would have been to restrict belief in miracle. But it does not seem to do so. The tendency to believe in the power of mysterious agencies is an outstanding characteristic of our own day... Though the extraordinary results of science are so obvious that they cannot escape the notice of even the most unobservant man in the street, yet educated as well as uneducated people often turn to the dim region of mystery for light on the ordinary problems of life.’<sup>35</sup>

Thus even a scientist can see that, as modes of inquiry into the ineffable, science and religion are somehow linked. Because of the fact that they approach the phenomenon under study in different ways—faith versus the scientific method—they are constantly at loggerheads, due in no small part to the growing impression that the certainty of science has gradually replaced the certainty of faith. This belief that religious faith is under threat forces the growth of a new kind of unwavering fundamentalist certainty. I would contend that although science played an integral part in the birth of modern Christian fundamentalism (the example of the famous ‘Scopes Monkey Trial’ in the U.S. as a locus for religious resistance *vis á vis* the encroachment of the laboratory on the former preserve of the pulpit, is case in point<sup>36</sup>) and the forging of the oppositions that define them, it is not essential to the definition of *all* fundamentalisms. There was obviously scientific endeavour in the Graeco-

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<sup>34</sup> Ruthven 2004: 127.

<sup>35</sup> Planck 1932: 160.

<sup>36</sup> The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes (1925). Scopes, a teacher, was tried under the recently passed Butler Act for teaching the theory of evolution in a science class, something forbidden by the Act. For a full account of the trial see Scopes 1971.

Roman world—the likes of Hippocrates, Archimedes, and Euclid, to name but a few—but science never assumed the centrality that it did in the worldview of mankind following the Age of Enlightenment. This is because of the fact that religion, for the most part, already held this kind of authoritative position. Indeed, ancient religion was simply more formidable than was the notion of scientific enquiry. Nowhere is this clearer than in the way that all manner of superstitions held sway over the minds of the ancients. Dream interpreters, for example, prophesied about the future instead of offering insight into the individual's psyche (see for example, the *Oneirocritica* of Artemidorus), and the oracle at Delphi was supreme in answering questions relating to everything from marriage proposals to the establishment of new colonies.<sup>37</sup> Planck also suggests that the scientist, like the religious person, must have a 'believing spirit' as well. He goes on to say that

'Anybody who has been seriously engaged in scientific work of any kind realizes that over the entrance to the gates of the temple of science are written the words: *Ye must have faith*. It is a quality which scientists cannot dispense with.'<sup>38</sup>

I find it curious that he chooses to couch his metaphor in such a way as to resemble the description of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, certainly bringing to the fore the distinctly complementary nature of these two divergent approaches

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<sup>37</sup> For examples of requests concerning colonization, see Fontenrose 1978: 246, 248-249. For marriage questions see Fontenrose 1978: 275, 355. It should be noted that Fontenrose deals with both historic and mythic examples.

<sup>38</sup> Planck 1932: 214.

to the universe. And what is more, Planck points out that ‘it was not by any accident that the greatest thinkers of all ages were also deeply religious souls.’<sup>39</sup>

In my opinion, what is instead required to create a fundamentalism, particularly in an ancient setting wherein science is not as important, is religious dogmatism, or as Armstrong summarizes, ‘there have always been people, in every age and in each tradition, who have fought *the modernity of their day*.’<sup>40</sup> After all, is not the true essence of fundamentalist thinking the re-evaluation of the traditional in the light of the growing significance of current events? Therefore, in any context, fundamentalism can be described as ‘modern’ because it ‘is always seeking original solutions to new, pressing problems’.<sup>41</sup> It is not modern simply because it must exist in a modern or perhaps twentieth-century context. In this way, Caplan can comment that although

‘fundamentalism is unquestionably an evocative image *in* our time...it is important to counter what seems to be a popular assumption that it is uniquely *of* our time.’<sup>42</sup>

Thus I contend that it is entirely plausible that the concept of fundamentalism can be reformulated in order to make it applicable outside of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, thereby allowing its deployment as an analytical tool to the medium of ancient polytheism.

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<sup>39</sup> Planck 1932: 168-169.

<sup>40</sup> Armstrong 2001: xi (My italics).

<sup>41</sup> Ruthven 2004: 202.

<sup>42</sup> Caplan 1987: 2.



As I have already noted, the 'us' and 'them' mentality is important in the construction of religious or cult society.<sup>43</sup> This is why fundamentalism comes to define itself in very broad strokes, or as Ruthven puts it, 'the play of interests is transcendentalized, subsumed, as it were, into a much grander, Manichaean context, between polarized opposites of absolute good versus evil'.<sup>44</sup> It is because of the amplification of this righteous fervour, developed in favour of their cause that any perceived negativity on the part of society at large produces a much-magnified sense of justification in the mind of the fundamentalist.<sup>45</sup> It is useful at this point to bring in Taylor who offers an expanded analysis (in relation to Barr's) of the characteristics of a fundamentalism as it begins to take the initiative. He begins with (i) a 'challenge' to the fundamentalist authority being discovered and (ii) the believers coming to the decision that there can be no compromising between the two positions. The fundamentalists (iii) make a 'reaffirmation of the ultimacy of the challenged authority', and in turn (iv) declare themselves to oppose any who might challenge it (including their own members who hold differing interpretations of the matter). Often the fundamentalists resort to political means to increase the visibility and influence of their position.<sup>46</sup> What this all means is that the fundamentalists declare their authority, be it a holy text or a charismatic preacher, to have the absolute last

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<sup>43</sup> Armstrong 2001: xi thus refers to fundamentalisms as 'embattled' systems of belief, while Taylor 1987: 143 refers to this as 'the development of a minority consciousness.'

<sup>44</sup> Ruthven 2004: 167.

<sup>45</sup> Levine 1989: 97.

<sup>46</sup> Taylor 1987: 143.

word on any situation. As it is the supreme fundamentalist authority, anyone challenging it can be dismissed as, in the very least misguided, or in the extreme, as a terrible evil worthy of destruction.

The politicizing of an originally religious message is important, and is what, in the modern world at least, leads to many religiously fundamentalist movements being labelled as cults in the pejorative sense of the word. As I noted previously, this is explained by the fact that fundamentalism always has a reactionary element to it, as the case of its initial manifestation suggests. Because the fundamentalist group is reacting to some perceived religious wrong they take on the perspective of an 'embattled' group, as I noted above, an approach that from the outset encourages what is considered a 'cult' mentality. This is quite often the cause of political and occasionally even violent action on the part of a group, given that the believers see this form of action as their only recourse to righting the apparent injustices that they are faced with. Festugière suggests that this brand of 'personal piety, when it is fervent and deep, is a peculiarity, it sets a man apart'.<sup>47</sup> This explains the reasoning behind cults often conceiving of themselves as families,<sup>48</sup> the reason for the importance of words like 'communion' within a cult setting. What is particularly interesting within the scope of my argument is that some manner of psychological distress

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<sup>47</sup> Festugière 1954: 17.

<sup>48</sup> Galanter 1989: 27.

is very often observed within the prospective members of a cult organization,<sup>49</sup> and is an essential element in the selection of such a person for membership of a cult group. This sort of 'problem' person presents the cult with a more malleable member, and thus someone that is easier to condition through a method of behavioural reinforcement known as operant conditioning. It is through these processes that the member is taught that 'closeness and conformity to the group's beliefs and practices leads to the reduction of distress and vulnerability to disruptive life events.'<sup>50</sup> From the perspective of the common man, a member of the urban poor in ancient Rome, the reasons for perhaps participating in one of the so-called mystery cults become clearer. In the ancient world, the possibility of death, enslavement, or any number of other such violent ends was consistently on the border of one's consciousness, and when coupled with a poor man's relative political and economic powerlessness, these phenomena can be shown to create the above-mentioned psychic distress. Membership in a cult allows for this poor man to be part of a 'family', the members of which are all concerned with similar goals, and all worship in an identical manner, and importantly, as I will show later, allows him to participate in a group that is not controlled by or for the elites of the Empire. Furthermore, such a person may experience a phenomenon known as 'cognitive dissonance', whereby their thoughts describing how the world should be

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<sup>49</sup> Galanter 1989: 26.

<sup>50</sup> Kilbourne 1989: 133.

(based upon the picture received from their cult membership) conflict with the actual reality that faces them on a daily basis.<sup>51</sup> This sort of inconsistency is apt to drive the person further into experiencing their cult's beliefs and practices, given the previously mentioned ability of cult membership to resolve such psychic distress in a manner found to be favourable for the individual member. Thus membership in a cult could quite often be understood as a form of 'rebellious attitude against one's family or the dominant culture,'<sup>52</sup> an action that seeks to replace the dominant model with the learned model of the religious cult. I believe that to some degree, the participation of the Roman citizenry in the Eastern mystery cults can be understood in this way—as the disenfranchised sections of society seeking to move away from the elite-dominated circles of Rome to a more equitable dispensation. As one of the *cognoscenti*, this would have been particularly objectionable for Philostratus. He makes a rather unique choice in his approach to buttressing the current political and social dispensation against such cultic assaults, for he seeks to accomplish his ends through placing an emphasis on historically acceptable modes of conduct and worship. At the same time however, he experiences his own form of cognitive dissonance, being an elite representative of the religious system that he perceives as inadequate. I shall investigate this situation more fully in the wider context of the philosophers and writers of the Second Sophistic.

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<sup>51</sup> For a fuller explanation of the phenomenon see Corsini 1994, *sv.* 'Cognitive Dissonance'.

<sup>52</sup> Deutsch 1989: 152.

In constructing an understanding of the operation of fundamentalism in the Graeco-Roman world, the differences that exist between both the function and expression of modern monotheistic and antique polytheistic religions are of paramount importance. This expansive statement can be more specifically formulated as a problem: how is it that a concept, originally engineered in the sterile security of monotheistic dogmatism, can be utilized in the polytheistic, and somewhat *laissez-faire* religious milieu of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean? It must be remembered that what is taking place here is the transplanting of an organ of analysis, from the 'donor' context of a relatively uncomplicated modern monotheism, into a 'recipient' context that is complex, variegated, and characterized by a metaphysical give and take between the faiths of the entire Mediterranean World. Roman religion, for example, can be shown to originate in practices of pantheistic animism, a system that although later distilled and refined, continued to exist in classical Rome, as is evident in continued references to spirit entities like the *lares* and *penates*.<sup>53</sup> Roman religion was never one great edifice of belief, as the phrase 'Roman religion' suggests, but was instead characterized by several changeable and unpredictable elements that were more or less influential at different stages in the Roman past, depending largely upon the people who held sway over the ideologies of the time. Greek religion, before the interventions of Roman imperial authority, was somewhat different, as 'the *polis* anchored, legitimated, and mediated all

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<sup>53</sup> Dumezil 1966: 18-31.

religious activity.’<sup>54</sup> With the individual Greek city assuming a position as the filter of all Hellenic religious practice, it seems to me that the Romans may have acquired their earliest notions of Rome as the heart of all religious belief, be it similarly filtered through the divine personification of Rome or the Emperor himself, from their Greek cousins.

A vital part of religious belief was expressed through the Roman household cult. Here, the gods of the home and the ancestor spirits were key.<sup>55</sup> Roman religion seems to have extended from this very simple foundation, which when yoked to the notion of Rome’s theological centrality, forged a religious system in which

‘the rituals and festivals of Rome provided for Romans and non-Romans at all periods a demonstration of what was most traditional and typical about the history and life of Rome; a demonstration of what counted as *Roman*’.<sup>56</sup>

*Romanitas* could then be said to have been constructed upon a religious pattern which was in turn expressed in social interest and activity. The binding together of Roman society and Roman religious belief is unambiguously voiced in a comment from the historian Polybius (6. 56) who believed that it was because of the fact that Romans held such fear and respect for the gods that they had been so successful in their past activities. The poet Horace (*Carm.* 3. 6) echoes this

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<sup>54</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 2000: 15.

<sup>55</sup> Rives 2007: 117-122.

<sup>56</sup> Beard, North, Price 1998: 113.

sentiment in blaming a perceived decline in Roman religion for the general decline of Roman society. In both Polybius and Horace, it is of course *traditional* Roman religion that is believed to be the operative factor. It was loyalty to this tradition, and not to an ethical or philosophical position, that led the people to choose the gods they worshipped.<sup>57</sup> This choice, like many others in the Roman world, could and often did have a political impact.

The mingling of religion and politics is seen in the example of the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*, published in 186 BCE. This senatorial decree severely curtailed the activities of the steadily growing cult of the god Bacchus.<sup>58</sup> The story as told by Livy (39.8-19) is one of debauchery and moral degradation, and of the Roman senate rising up to return their fellow Romans to their ancestral *religio*. Frank suggests that it is because of the possible influence of Pythagoreanism upon the Bacchic cult that it may have suppressed more severely than was necessary.<sup>59</sup> It must be remembered that at one stage the Pythagorean movement held control of several Italian cities, apparently running them with great efficiency until they were cast down (Iambl. *VP* 248-264) like some philosophical tyrant. I shall return to my discussion of the Pythagoreans and the role of their governmental policies in a later chapter. It is therefore also plausible that it was this foreign manipulation of a Roman sphere

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<sup>57</sup> North 1992: 177.

<sup>58</sup> Frank 1927: 128.

<sup>59</sup> Frank 1927: 132.

of influence that was being attacked by the senate, and not the worship of the wine god itself. Bauman also contributes a comprehensive discussion of the accounts of this religious suppression and makes several useful observations.<sup>60</sup> He notes that the cultists, whom Livy (39.14.8) portrays as having assembled for the purpose of criminal and immoral activity, were all charged with conspiring in activities directed toward the ultimate purpose of enriching the cult,<sup>61</sup> presumably in order to make it easier to acquire further support for their purposes. This was one of the major problems with the cult, along with the general religious upheaval that was foreshadowed by the events of 213 BCE. Bauman argues that the key point about this particular incarnation of Bacchic worship is that 'the rite was no longer performed *more Romano*, which means under the supervision of the Roman government'.<sup>62</sup> Paculla Annia, the cult's leader, had made changes to the cult's structure and initiations but two years previously, that had shifted it away from the traditional Roman interpretation of Dionysus. The ranks of the cult had furthermore been filled with many from the lower orders, including slaves, and the relative freedom that they found within the cult of Bacchus was deeply disturbing to Roman sensibilities.<sup>63</sup> This

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<sup>60</sup> Bauman 1990: 334-348.

<sup>61</sup> Bauman 1990: 342-343. Later, *Dig.* 21.1.1.9-11 deals with the idea of fugitive slaves hiding from prosecution in the midst of established cults. A serious study of the slave's mental well-being is called for in order to discern whether or not the slave actually is a *fanaticus*, one of the inspired. Intriguingly, the *Digest* singles out the cult of Bacchus in this act, which in my opinion, confirms the large presence of slaves in the ranks of legitimate cult believers, and suggests a subversive quality to these cults in that slaves could use them to escape the authority of their masters.

<sup>62</sup> Bauman 1990: 347.

<sup>63</sup> Glover 1975: 24 describes these rites as 'equalizing rich and poor'.



is reflected in the later Eastern mystery rites as well, where one's rank in society was not an important factor in determining one's role in these cults, something that fed the perception (however inaccurate) of an inherent licentiousness in these belief systems for affording slaves the opportunity to consort with nobles and senators. Ultimately it fell to several nobles to craft the *senatus consultum* and carry out an inquest, one of whom, Postumius Albinus, had a vested interest in maintaining Roman *traditio*.<sup>64</sup> It can be argued that it was up to those who had acquired *paideia* to set right the situation and, in essence, to put the plebs back in their place so that a proper state of affairs could be upheld. After all, at least until the advent of the imperial cult, religion was the province of the elites. Following this line of reasoning it becomes clearer as to why Philostratus, himself a member of the Greek elite, would have taken it upon himself to provide an alternative to the sorry state in which the world found itself. Thus even at this time it seems the elites were eager to fight off any foreign influences upon the hearts and minds of their people. Turcan clarifies as follows:

‘In Rome, *religio* (national and authentic) was readily contrasted with *superstitio* (exotic and suspect). Anything that deviated from the ritual taught by the ancestors and legitimized by tradition smacked of *superstitio*...’<sup>65</sup>

Cicero's comments in his *De Legibus* (2. 19) are the basis for Turcan's position, given that Cicero suggests that foreign gods and cults were not to be tolerated unless they had been properly vetted by the senate in order to prevent any

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<sup>64</sup> Bauman 1990: 345.

<sup>65</sup> Turcan 1996: 10.

harm or confusion from coming to the people.<sup>66</sup> North believes there is no reason to suggest that these Bacchic cultists in 186 BCE were actively rebelling against Roman society.<sup>67</sup> Rather it was the level of organization shown by the cult (a cell structure, oath-taking, administration, funding) that was feared by the authorities who chose to act against them as being something that provided a possible kernel around which anti-government agitation might be organized. This is therefore a good example of the deployment of religion to the political arena, as the senate's response to the Bacchists is clearly a fundamentalist one, disregarding the generally inclusive approach that Roman officials typically utilised in dealing with non-Roman belief systems. The senate emphasizes the traditional modes of belief in an effort to fight off the meddling of a new and contradictory authority.

Rome and its great empire were a veritable hodgepodge of religions, philosophies, cults, and associations. From the theriomorphic deities of pharaonic Egypt, to the Celts and their druidic priests, to the mother-goddess Cybele and the gods of Asia Minor, and of course the native cults of Italy—at one time or another in the history of the Roman Empire, almost every god was to be found (or at the very least mentioned) in Rome. An Egyptian goddess like Isis was a favourite among the matrons of Rome, while the cult of the Persian

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<sup>66</sup> *Separatim nemo habessit deos neue nouos neue aduenas nisi publice adscitos...* 'Nor should anyone hold new or arriving gods separately unless known to the state...'

<sup>67</sup> North 1992: 182.

warrior-god Mithras found massive representation among the men of the armed forces. Hopkins describes this situation in his book, *A World Full of Gods*, through the eyes of two time-travellers to ancient Pompeii:

‘My initial impression of Pompeii (and the whole trip confirmed it) was that there were temples and Gods, and humans praying to them, all over the place: at the entrance to the town, at the entrance to the Forum; there were altars at crossroads, Gods in niches as you went along, with passers-by just casually blowing a kiss with their hands to the statue of a God set in a wall. And of course, here in the Forum, the ceremonial centre of the town, there were temples, altars, Gods, heroes, just about every where we looked...’<sup>68</sup>

It is clear that in such a context wherein religion and politics overlap, that ‘religion systematically constructs power’,<sup>69</sup> and that right across the social spectrum, from brotherhoods and societies dedicated to individual powers, to the great public rites in the imperial cult, the obvious stratification of society in terms of political and economic power was mirrored by the less apparent stratification witnessed in the practice of religious rites. This social policy was supposedly for the good of the community at large. In the words of the French Revolutionary writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

‘All of them [Moses, Lycurgus, Numa—the ancient lawgivers] sought bonds that might attach citizens to the fatherland and to one another, and they found them in distinctive practices, in religious ceremonies which by their very nature were always exclusive and national...’<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Hopkins 1999: 12-13.

<sup>69</sup> Edwards 1991: 180.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Burleigh 2005: 79.

What was sought was the overlaying of politics and normal life, 'so that daily activity becomes the realization of these transcendent realities'.<sup>71</sup> Is this the politicizing of religion or perhaps the sanctification of politics, something that we moderns know very little about and understand even less because we cling to the fundamental nature of the ideal of separation of church and state? As Burleigh states quite succinctly in his discussion of later European politics, 'throne and altar in alliance was to be the foundation of legitimate authority.'<sup>72</sup> This was the case with all political authority in the ancient world, as the case of ruler worship indicates.

Similarly, Romans exploited religion to favour almost anything during the Republican era, and the emperors followed suit with the practice of deification. However, Liebeschuetz tells us that the Romans did not think of it as exploitation *per se*, and did not believe that religion was perverted in any way if it came to be used for the advancement of a political agenda.<sup>73</sup> This is true 'political religion'—the negation of the liberal idea of the separation of church and state and the birth of state-sanctioned religion.<sup>74</sup> In Rome, nowhere was this notion more obvious than in the form of the cult of the emperor. Although religion was deployed for political ends both before and during the imperial period, it was not used (or abused) by all sides concerned, and in fact came to

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<sup>71</sup> Bergeson 1977: 222.

<sup>72</sup> Burleigh 2005: 116.

<sup>73</sup> Liebeschuetz 1979: 21.

<sup>74</sup> Burrin 1997: 328.

be utilized to a much greater extent once the imperial cult was firmly entrenched. A most interesting adjunct are the words of Cicero (*Leg.* 2.30) who states that it should be permitted for priests to call upon their authority to put down seditions, and that any truth that is to be found in Rome's ancestral *religio* should not outweigh the religion's practical utility. This 'utilitarian' approach was after all the standard Roman view of all things religious. Even St. Augustine (*De civ D.* 4.27; 6.5) in arguing against Graeco-Roman paganism, declares that of the antiquarian Varro's three forms of religion, 'civil' religion is the most natural candidate for a nationalist rallying point, certainly a ringing endorsement of the religion's truthfulness. Augustine actually employs Varro as the basis of much of his critique of traditional religion because his work was seen as almost being an *apologia* for these ancient pagan rites,<sup>75</sup> and appealed to the elite of Varro's time as a justification for their traditions in the face of an onslaught from all manner of Eastern cults. Varro in fact commends the repurposing of religion in utilitarian and nationalistic interests,<sup>76</sup> to my mind a possible sanction for a fundamentalist use of belief. Ultimately, faith was to serve the needs of the state, for it could indeed be a great honour to serve as a member of certain priesthoods and that honour was always of assistance in one's political aspirations.

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<sup>75</sup> O'Daly 1999: 101.

<sup>76</sup> O'Daly 1999: 103.

Having outlined the theories behind the politics and religion of the Roman Empire, I shall now begin with the task of redefining fundamentalism as a construct fit for application to the beliefs of Philostratus and his third century milieu. The redefinition of a contentious concept in this way is always fraught with problems: there is of course the obvious difficulty of utilizing what many academics would call a twentieth-century term in an ancient Graeco-Roman context. Unfortunately, this concern is not merely a temporal one, but a theological one as well, as a yawning chasm of belief separates the Christological origins of the term 'fundamentalism' from the polytheistic paganism within which I now seek to deploy it. It is perhaps better to begin by approaching this subject in a manner similar to Borg, who chooses to dispense with the confusing notion of fundamentalist groups and refers instead to what he dubs 'religious renewal movements'.<sup>77</sup> In conceiving of fundamentalism in this way he characterizes these movements as being motivated entirely by perception—an understanding and disapproval of how things are, versus an exaggerated appreciation for how they were, and thus how they ought to be. Fundamentalist approaches to belief (and indeed to life in general) have a tendency to react by looking back fondly to 'simpler' times, when articles of faith were always more clearly defined and problems of belief more easily disposed of. For first century Romans these were times when the Old Ways were strongly ingrained in the hearts of all who called themselves citizens,

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<sup>77</sup> Borg 1984: 27.

times when the new cults of the East were little more than oddities. Before the imperial period it was the responsibility of the Senate (with the assistance of the various priesthoods) to mediate between the gods and the Roman people. In fact it was the task of the Senate to decide which new, foreign god or goddess might be accepted into the Graeco-Roman pantheon.<sup>78</sup> This was also the time before the imperial cult was born, and it therefore appears that in this time before the emperor had truly drawn the role of *pontifex maximus* to himself, 'Roman religion' existed in a simpler, stronger, and undiluted form that might very well appeal someone with fundamentalist tendencies like Philostratus.

Gordon offers an alternative way of looking at these new foreign cults, casting the situation in terms of the relations between the different social classes found in Rome:

'...they [the cults] were organized, specialized religious sub-systems of *popular* culture... they provided specialized institutions for the expression of *popular* conceptions of religious goals quite *different from those of the elite*. They should therefore be understood as implicitly *opposed* to elite culture...' <sup>79</sup>

As I have noted, the senate was originally responsible, not only for mediating between mortals and the divine, but also for having the final word on exactly what was divine in the first place. Therefore, by extension it was the upper classes, those who already held political and economic power in Rome that also

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<sup>78</sup> Beard 1990: 31.

<sup>79</sup> Gordon 1990: 248. Italics added.

controlled the power of the gods themselves. They achieved this through their ability to declare which cults were acceptable and which were not, and in this way they opposed the so-called Oriental cults as being 'un-Roman', and thus morally bankrupt. Because these new Eastern forms of worship were quite often willing to accept even slaves into their fellowships, they clearly gave voice to a populist agenda that certainly opposed elite authority. The suppression of the cult of Bacchus is a perfect example of the response to this popular threat, especially when one conceives of the cult's activities along the lines of its Grecian and Dionysiac counterpart, as it seems Livy did. One need only recall the turmoil caused by the appearance of Dionysus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides, and more importantly, the heavy price that the city's elites (as represented by Kadmos) paid for their denial of the cult and its patron (Eur. *Bacch.* 912-1030).

With the advent of the imperial system, the senate's authority gradually devolved towards individuals in what Lieu, North, and Rajak believe was a complete revolution in the very nature of Mediterranean religion:

'This revolution could be defined in terms of movement away from a monopolistic situation, in which citizens shared a common, generally accepted religious adherence, and towards what has been called a 'market-place' in religions, in which religious adherence became a matter of debate, anxiety and doubt.'<sup>80</sup>

It would appear that the Romans were originally a united people who shared one ideal of what it was to be Roman and one conception, mediated by the elites and the senate, of who their gods were. It is the mentality of this

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<sup>80</sup> Lieu, North, & Rajak 1992: 2.



‘civilization of *paideia*’<sup>81</sup> that first evolves into the idea of *Romanitas*, a concept originally rooted in what Brown explains as ‘the overwhelming tendency to find what is exemplary in persons rather than in more general entities’.<sup>82</sup> Until late antiquity and the arrival of the Christian ‘saint’, the educated Roman nobility were the both the gatekeepers and example of how to be Roman.<sup>83</sup> As Brown argues, ‘historical change was palpable to ancient men’,<sup>84</sup> so much so that change could well be a terrifying thing for people whose identity rested entirely upon their grasp of an education that was riddled with old examples of deportment and philosophy. However, the idea of ‘Romanness’ changed with the march of the Empire’s ever-expanding borders, based in no small part on the reshaping of the face of Roman citizenship through the acceptance of many non-Italians into the ranks of the voting public. This naturally brought about the reframing of notions of belief within the boundaries of the Empire, as it became easier for pilgrims of all nations to spread their faiths and practices throughout the *orbis Romanum*. As pagans often also sought to ‘experiment’ with the practices of different cults and foreign religions when they became disillusioned with tradition, the proliferation of beliefs throughout the vastness of the Roman Empire brought forth religious pluralism, a phenomenon that Ruthven refers to as ‘the enemy of fundamentalist certainty’,<sup>85</sup> because for the

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<sup>81</sup> Brown 1983: 1.

<sup>82</sup> Brown 1983: 2.

<sup>83</sup> Brown 1983: 1-5.

<sup>84</sup> Brown 1983: 3.

<sup>85</sup> Ruthven 2004: 26.

fundamentalist believer there is no other way of doing things but his own.<sup>86</sup> As new expressions of religiosity permeated every aspect of life in the Empire it would have become more difficult to point out the truly Roman and the foreign as distinct categories. For the first time a diluted form of religious belief was created that was symbolized by such practices as the imperial cult. Although the paying of divine honours was quite a common means of delineating the relationships between subjects and their rulers in the Mediterranean world, it achieved new heights in the Roman imperial system. The Romans brought their own peculiar twist to this convention, and in the same practical and contractual manner that they described their own obligations to the *dei* (the gods), so too they couched the interplay between themselves and the emperors.<sup>87</sup> In simple terms, the subject or mortal was to provide worship and honour in order to be worthy of the beneficence of the ruler or god. All of this culminated in a form of belief that was no longer recognizable as originally Roman, and this necessitated some manner of fundamentalist reaction in order to restore a purer tradition to its proper place.

Furthermore, Liebeschuetz notes that Roman religion was highly adaptable. In fact, he writes that 'in many situations the Romans behaved as if they thought

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<sup>86</sup> Ruthven 2004: 43.

<sup>87</sup> Gradel 2002: 369.

of the divine as a vast force which was infinitely divisible...'<sup>88</sup> When this perspective is coupled with Scheid's interpretation, suggesting that the average Roman would have participated in several different cults during his or her life, each specific to different aspects of their existence,<sup>89</sup> these cults become yet another manifestation of the great religious force that Liebeschuetz is positing. For the term 'fundamentalism' to be useful in an ancient setting, I believe that this is how the situation needs to be viewed. To explain, one could contend that two varieties of fundamentalism are therefore possible—a 'focused' and a 'polyvalent' form. A Roman soldier who for some or other reason, decided that Mithras was the only true god deserving of worship, might be called a 'focused' fundamentalist, as his fundamentalist predilections are concentrated on striving for the supremacy of one particular faith or cult alone. In a world where, as Gibbon put it, the people held there to be truth in all religions and faiths,<sup>90</sup> this kind of fundamentalism would have been unlikely. However, a fundamentalist who conceived of Graeco-Roman paganism in the abstract might be more plausible. In light of this, I intend to argue that Philostratus was one such 'polyvalent' fundamentalist, who rather than championing a particular cult or interpretation thereof, instead defended the integrity of the entire traditional Graeco-Roman belief system. My interpretation of the phrase 'traditional Graeco-Roman belief system' is very specific, and includes only those cults that

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<sup>88</sup> Liebeschuetz 1979: 177.

<sup>89</sup> Scheid 2003: 189.

<sup>90</sup> Gibbon 1896: 28.

were part of the pre-imperial (largely Olympian) belief system, whilst rejecting any of the later Oriental 'imports' along with the imperial cult itself. This approach can be described as synechdochal,<sup>91</sup> with Philostratus addressing the imperial cult in particular as representative of all that was wrong with belief in the Roman Empire. However, certain rites like the abovementioned cult of Bacchus arrive comparatively early on in Roman history and thus confuse the issue as to precisely what these original beliefs might have been, while others like the worship of Magna Mater were even designated as ancestral Roman traditions, despite their being from the East.<sup>92</sup> Through the use of Bauman's approach<sup>93</sup> I believe that am able to make this distinction unmistakable, as it seems that the Roman's themselves singled out the cult of Bacchus in 186 BCE as no longer being *more Romano*. I shall therefore distinguish between which beliefs were Roman and those that were not, by following which beliefs were permitted by the Romans themselves. I will also consider religious cults known to have existed at that time within the borders of the Empire, not only because they interacted with, and influenced each other, but also, and most importantly, because they interacted with the traditional Graeco-Roman cults themselves.

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<sup>91</sup> For a discussion of this within the context of the ancient novel, see Selden 1994: 39-64.

<sup>92</sup> Beard 1996: 168. Magna Mater seems to originate in Troy, and as such connects to Aeneas and the founding of Rome. Legends like this also recall the Roman propensity for almost 'capturing' (particularly in the religious rituals of warfare) foreign deities that they believed might be useful to Rome.

<sup>93</sup> See pp. 36-37.

The idea of Graeco-Roman cult existing as anything but a modern analytical term might seem strange, but my use of the term is borne out because of its context within my argument and because of my contention that Philostratus was a 'polyvalent' fundamentalist. Given Greece's status as part of the 'Roman Empire', it is my suggestion that Philostratus is writing of the Graeco-Roman world as a singular entity that he seeks to defend. After all, Philostratus can be viewed as being Greek by birth and Roman, particularly through his close affiliation to the imperial household. He essentially straddles two worlds with his fundamentalist perspective and so makes use of the religious foundations of both to put forward his ideas of a new and moral belief system that will be of benefit to all, in both its dispelling of the influence of foreign cults and its reinforcement of the virtue for which the notion of Greekness stood. Following a thorough analysis of the religious aspects of Philostratus' particular expression of fundamentalism in my later chapters, I will also move to investigate its philosophical and political dimensions, as these had their own distinct ramifications in the world around him.

To conclude, I must present a complete version of my concept of fundamentalism in a pagan religious setting, as until now it has only been revealed piecemeal. The fact that the term 'fundamentalism' originates in a twentieth-century Christian context in no way nullifies the possibility of the term's application in a temporal context external to the twentieth century. This

does however mean that the term comes with its own fully developed set of presuppositions that must be reworked or discarded if the concept of 'fundamentalism' is to be successfully applied to the Philostratean context. The first of these presuppositions is that fundamentalism requires a monotheistic setting like that supplied by Christianity or Islam in order to be of use. I have suggested that this need not be the case if one accepts that two variations of fundamentalism can be argued to exist—the 'focused' and 'polyvalent' forms—of which the 'polyvalent' variant is applicable to both the pagan milieu and to Philostratus himself. I will thus argue that the opponents of Philostratus in the third century would have been the imperial cult and any foreign faith attempting to gain a foothold in Roman hearts. This is a totally new approach to belief in the ancient world. But Liebeschuetz suggests, with the example of the relationship between the cult of Isis and more traditional Roman rites, that the uncompetitive existence of both Roman and Eastern rites was possible:

'A man became a worshipper of Isis for life, but Isis worship was not exclusive. Men joined a fellowship of Isis worshippers to satisfy their individual religious needs. Worship of the goddess would then dominate their lives in a way which traditional Roman worship never had done. But there is no reason to suppose that Isis dispensed her worshippers from existing obligations to the gods of their home or of their community. Above all, Isis worshippers formed private religious organizations. They in no way sought to supersede the ancient cults carried out by the community for the community. Isis and Jupiter could coexist indefinitely.'<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Liebeschuetz 1979: 222.

Liebeschuetz therefore makes the case that one could claim membership in a so-called Eastern cult while still retaining and exercising one's old obligations to the *mos maiorum*. It is however my contention that this could never really have been the case, especially when one considers the psychological impact that membership in one of the mystery cults caused. This is a part of my argument to be more fully developed in a later chapter. But if one cult did not preclude another in the Roman religious mindset, why then would a fundamentalist approach have been necessary in the first place? I believe that a fundamentalist point of view was necessary precisely *because* Philostratus sought to exclude other non-Roman religious traditions. He conceived of these other rites as diluting the truly Roman with their pluralist perspective, and therefore, he chose to champion the beliefs and related myths that we have come to call Graeco-Roman religion in an effort to stave off the advance of foreign beliefs. Philostratus elected to accomplish this through his writing, and through the saintly persona of 'Apollonius of Tyana'. In this scenario, I argue that Apollonius ought to be understood after the manner of a Christian saint. As Brown writes:

'In almost all regions of the Mediterranean, from the third century onwards, he [the saint] was far more than an exemplar of a previously well-organized and culturally coherent Christianity: very often, he quite simply was Christianity.'<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Brown 1983: 9.

For Philostratus then, Apollonius is his pagan saint. Given that no citizen could freely express religious and social ideals the likes of which Philostratus sought to voice, without himself becoming a martyr, Philostratus works through the persona of Apollonius of Tyana, an already familiar figure of hagiographical standing, and moulds him into the incarnation of his ideology. Moreover, Brown later notes that the saint's function was essentially to play the 'double role of "Christ carrier" and representative of the "central value system"'.<sup>96</sup> This is found to remain true even when the notion is reconceived to examine the relationship between Philostratus and Apollonius, for in the same manner Apollonius' connection to both the divine world and the value system espoused by Philostratus does indeed allow him to be seen as the saint of Philostratus' renewed Graeco-Roman faith. In employing these particular religious and political strategies, he desired to begin a 'renaissance' in Roman belief and eventually bring about a return to the earlier traditional system of worship. I would suggest that he was following the comments of Horace, and after seeing a decline in Roman society, chose to do something to counteract it.

The psychosocial dynamic of religious fundamentalism has been shown to mirror the psychodynamics inherent in modern religious cult activity. Like these cults, the creation of a fundamentalist religious group requires a particular form of interpersonal relationship. In the cult setting, a peculiar form

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<sup>96</sup> Brown 1983: 15.



of 'bonding' occurs in a manner that is similar to familial imprinting, forming what Galanter calls the 'charismatic group',<sup>97</sup> the basis for fundamentalist interaction. As he explains,

'participants [in such a group] adhere to a consensual belief system, sustain a high level of cohesiveness, are strongly influenced by group behavioral norms, and impute charismatic (or divine) power to its group or leadership.'<sup>98</sup>

Fundamentalisms appear to form based upon a single absolute and 'irrefutable' ideal. The notion of a charismatic leader would, for example, certainly apply to Philostratus' portrayal of Apollonius of Tyana and the group of dedicated disciples that he gathered around himself. Strangely though, the 'itinerant practitioner or charismatic' is described by Burkert as one of the primary manifestations of mystery cults in the ancient world,<sup>99</sup> with the others being the actual religious sanctuary (like Eleusis) or religious associations (the Roman *cultores* for example). Philostratus then, is not the first to deploy a paragon of belief, in his construction of Apollonius, onto the Roman religious landscape. Thus Philostratus' interpretation of fundamentalism appears to subscribe to the same principles found in the formation of modern cult groups, principles which could characterize Philostratus as a man dealing with a deep form of psychological distress that forces him into crafting his reaction to the contemporary Roman world in the manner that he does, championed by the

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<sup>97</sup> Galanter 1989: 25.

<sup>98</sup> Galanter 1989: 25.

<sup>99</sup> Burkert 1987: 31.

perfect personification of Pythagorean *virtus* and circumscribed within the bounds of a religious and political order dominated by the elite. While ‘cult’ is largely an aberrant form of religious expression in the modern world, it served a much more normative function among the ancients, who often joined the so-called ‘mystery’ cults in order to expand their personal religious landscape.<sup>100</sup>

As Burkert comments,

‘In psychological terms [as far as the ‘mystery’ cults were concerned], there must have been an experience of the ‘other’ in a change of consciousness, moving far beyond what could be found in everyday life.’<sup>101</sup>

This ‘othering’ consciousness is a part of any fundamentalist analysis of religion, a consciousness that divides the world into the characteristic believer and infidel duality. And what is more, in order to serve the purposes of the fundamentalist outlook, the believer tends towards exaggerating any kind of interpersonal relationships—polemical or otherwise—to the ethical level of good versus evil. This unique interpretation is therefore key to the construction of a fundamentalist point of view.

Finally I wish to return to the two templates of fundamentalist development provided by Barr<sup>102</sup> and Taylor<sup>103</sup>. As I originally rendered the various points of

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<sup>100</sup> Burkert 1987: 4, 10, indicates that these ‘mysteries’ were only a part of the religious options available to the peoples of the Graeco-Roman world and existed alongside the standard religions.

<sup>101</sup> Burkert 1987: 91.

<sup>102</sup> Barr 1981: 1.

<sup>103</sup> Taylor 1987: 143.

their templates in a very general sense, I shall now relate them to the ancient world and the situation of Philostratus in particular, thereby formulating the theoretical outline of an ancient fundamentalist perspective: The process begins with the fundamentalist's belief that his or her point of view is without error, or more specifically, is the truest representation of a traditional belief. Once the absolute authority of this belief is affirmed, a totally uncompromising viewpoint that is entirely hostile toward any kind of reinterpretation is adopted. This perspective not only opposes challenges to the beliefs of the fundamentalist but any alternatives that might be supplied by possible sympathizers, as the fundamentalist is *the* true believer, and so naturally, no one else could ever be correct. Lastly, there develops a possible political application of the fundamentalist's doctrine. Thus, Philostratus, in perceiving the apparent decline of religious belief amongst the inhabitants of the Roman world, decides that the world was far better off before the interventions of Eastern rites and the growth of the cult of the emperor. The authority that he ascribes to the traditional model of Roman belief comes to be affirmed by the lessons of history (cf. Polyb. 6.56). Philostratus in turn produces several works of a fundamentalist character in order to propagate his belief in the authority of the *mos maiorum*—the *Vita Apollonii*, *Vitae Sophistarum*, the *Heroikos*, and the *Nero*. Through these texts, and in particular, through the example of Apollonius of Tyana, he seeks to encourage a return to the traditional rites that had served Rome so well. In the following chapters this model will be examined more

specifically, and with reference to each of the abovementioned works. These insights shall be juxtaposed with the Philostratean representation of the life and behaviour of Apollonius of Tyana, who to my mind functions as both simulacrum and paragon for Philostratus in his beliefs.

### Chapter III

#### The Historicity of Apollonius of Tyana:

##### Fundamentalist Foundations.

*A fact is a holy thing, and its life should never be laid down on the altar of a generalization. (A. D. Nock)<sup>1</sup>*

In this chapter I set out to assess the nature of the evidence regarding the historical figure of Apollonius of Tyana, with the ultimate goal of establishing which elements of the *Vita Apollonii* can be declared to be the fictional creations of Philostratus, and which elements are based to some extent in fact. This will allow for a better understanding of Philostratus' 'polyvalent' fundamentalism at work because I contend that Apollonius is used by Philostratus as the simulacrum of all of his nascent fundamentalist ideals. It is thus important to dissect the character of Apollonius as he is presented by Philostratus in order to properly discern what Philostratus adds or removes for his own purposes. In his work entitled *Jesus the Magician*, Morton Smith writes:

'Like Jesus, Apollonius is a figure of indubitable historicity. He is referred to and cited by classical and Christian authors; fragments of his treatise on sacrifices and his letters have been preserved; the main outlines of his life... are not seriously questioned in spite of their legendary elements. Whether or not he reached the Brahmins, what ascetics he found in upper Egypt, how he escaped from his trial, and

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<sup>1</sup> Nock 1933: 607.

how he died will always be dubious, but his figure and general career are known.<sup>2</sup>

According to Smith, the major elements of the lives of both of these two men—Jesus and Apollonius—are not in question. It is the aspects of their lives that remain unsupported by evidence that have received the sharpest scrutiny. Perhaps it is because these aspects have come to be mythologized beyond normal comprehension, that they are treated with special suspicion by inquirers. This illustrates the duality of figures like Apollonius of Tyana, one side that is historical and based on the experiences, beliefs, and actions of an actual human being, and a second side making known a figure around whom a web of fact and fantasy has been spun in order to create an impenetrable cocoon, through which the reality of the deeds and opinions of the actual human being may never be completely known. Cyril of Alexandria (*Adv. Iul.* 3) for example, declares that Philostratus ‘endeavouring to make the life of Apollonius grand with drawn out elegances’, desired to raise him up as a complete wonder. (Φιλόστρατος δὲ τὸν Ἀπολλωνίου βίον ἐξελεγμέναις καλλιπερίαις κατασεμύνειν ἐπιχειρῶν καὶ εἰς λῆξιν ἀναφέρων τοῦ παντὸς θαύματος...) Indeed, scholars have been trying to extract the truth of the historical Apollonius (much like the historical Jesus) for almost as long as he has been written about. In the main it is not the cocoon of fiction that concerns us, but rather the reasons behind its creation in the first place—the whys and

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<sup>2</sup> Smith 1978: 85.

wherefores of Philostratus' choices in portraying Apollonius in the specific manner that he does are to be given primacy here. Therefore, I seek to examine the inner workings of Philostratus' creative mind, to discern what he did with the character of Apollonius in order to put forward his religious and political theories. To do this it is essential to first understand what he was working with in terms of the historical tradition surrounding Apollonius of Tyana, whom Philostratus chose to champion his religious beliefs.

I shall briefly attempt to summarize the positions of my predecessors with regard to the historicity of the figure of Apollonius of Tyana. This will be accomplished by working through the available ancient information and the analyses offered by various modern commentators. This process of evaluating the evidence for an historical Apollonius is essential because it will allow me to discern precisely how much of the Apollonius presented in the VA can be ascribed to the mediation of Philostratus. Therefore, I am suggesting that while Philostratus certainly had a propensity for fundamentalist beliefs, he could not readily reveal these tendencies in the context of Roman imperial society for fear of severe repercussions and loss of patronage. To proclaim the necessity of a return to an earlier mode of thinking and believing was to suggest that there was a problem with the way in which the Empire currently operated. Indeed, this was to criticize the efforts of the emperor himself. I am, however, positing that Philostratus chose to make his beliefs felt through the medium of his

writing, and through the vehicle of a fictionalized character, whose life and glorious deeds were still familiar to the pagan peoples of his time. This also has a great deal to do with the nature of the Second Sophistic itself, and is something that I shall investigate at a later stage. Apollonius of Tyana then, was a mystical philosopher and holy man who made the perfect symbol for Philostratus' 'polyvalent' fundamentalist reform and resistance.

No work concerning the figure of Apollonius, barring any of his supposed letters that are considered to be authentic, can be said to be contemporary.<sup>3</sup> Even the events surrounding the death of Apollonius are themselves problematic, as Philostratus (VA 8.29) for example records that it could have taken place anytime over a thirty year period.<sup>4</sup> There is therefore no contemporary biography or hagiography of the Tyanaean philosopher, with the

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<sup>3</sup> A damaged inscription from Mopsouhestia has been uncovered that makes reference to an Apollonius, describing him as ἐκ Τυάνων δέ λάμψας or shining from Tyana (text below supplied from Jones 2006: 130):

[οὔτο]ς Ἀπ[ό]λλω<v>ος μὲν ἐπώνυμος, ἐκ Τυάνων  
 δέ  
 λάμψας ἀνθρώπων ἔσβησεν ἀμπλακίας.  
 [.....]ΦΟΣ Τυάνων, τὸ δ' ἐτήτυμον οὐρανὸς  
 αὐτόν  
 [.....] ὅπως θνητῶν ἐξελάσει πόνους.

Various conjectures (as discussed, for example, by Richardson and Burian 1981: 283-285) have been supplied to fill the lacunae, although it suffices to say that the inscription describes a good and holy man named for the god Apollo. Unfortunately, a single inscription is not proof of anything, although it does suggest that Apollonius was at least influential enough in the region to have been afforded the privilege of being commemorated with a statue, and points out a fact that will become important later in the dissertation, namely that Apollonius was known for his attempts at correcting the perceived 'pains' in the world around him.

<sup>4</sup> Philostratus (VA 8.30.2) also writes of how Apollonius may have ascended to heaven instead of dying.



earliest recorded works concerning him being those of Maximus of Aegeae and Moeragenes. They are both referred to by Philostratus (VA 1.3.2), although he claims to supersede the authority of both authors on account of holding the memoirs of a certain 'Damis', apparently a close friend and disciple of Apollonius who accompanied him on his travels. This claim is of doubtful historical authenticity, and quite possibly even a sophistic literary device employed by Philostratus to provide his account with the ring of authenticity.

I must briefly address the question of the historical veracity of the *Vita Apollonii*. The VA is, after all, a work born of the Second Sophistic, and comes from the pen of a sophist and not a historian, so a lack of historical accuracy, especially when discussing a figure with supposedly supernatural abilities, is to be expected. On the other hand, Morgan is quite certain that Philostratus at least wanted his work to appear believable,<sup>5</sup> an important distinction to make, given my particular argument for Philostratus' strong emphasis on religious reform. In analysing the composition of the VA and its related source material, it will be possible to discern which aspects of Apollonius are the result of fabrication at the hand of Philostratus, and which aspects are at least based upon the sources. This will allow me to ultimately judge the individual pieces of fiction that Philostratus has written to masquerade as fact, and thus grants the ability to

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<sup>5</sup> Morgan 1982: 223-224.

piece together the fundamentalist attitudes of the author from the manner in which he couches this 'creative history'.<sup>6</sup>

### The 'Damis' Problem.

Tim Whitmarsh comments that

'rhetoric does not distort reality, it creates it; or, rather, by intervening in a larger system of competing "realities", it seeks to naturalize certain (necessarily partisan) perspectives.'<sup>7</sup>

It is because of this that the figure of Damis has always proven to be a troubling aspect of the later reception of the *VA*, and it is an aspect of the work that has been hotly debated for over a century. As Flinterman characterizes the circumstances of the debate, three alternatives can logically be developed as formulations of the 'Damis' problem: (i) Damis actually existed and therefore followed someone named Apollonius around as his disciple, all the while recording his words and deeds; (ii) the so-called memoirs of Damis are a second or third century fabrication, a pseudepigraphic text compiled perhaps by Pythagoreans and then attributed to a Damis who may or may not have actually existed; (iii) Damis was invented purely for the sake of narrative fiction.<sup>8</sup> Flinterman believes that the second and third possibilities are more likely than a man named Damis having actually recorded the life of Apollonius

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<sup>6</sup> Morgan 1982: 224.

<sup>7</sup> Whitmarsh 2001b: 90.

<sup>8</sup> Flinterman 1995: 79.

in person.<sup>9</sup> However, Anderson offers a fourth possibility that branches out from the second, namely that Damis was not necessarily a fabrication on the part of Philostratus, but was perhaps a ‘forged intermediate source’ that Philostratus was forced into working with for his *VA*.<sup>10</sup> I am most inclined to believe that Damis was either entirely invented by Philostratus for his own fundamentalist purposes, or that the Damis memoirs were an intermediate source that he has reworked with these objectives in mind. As I already mentioned, it is quite possible that Damis is little more than a fictional device created and inserted into the narrative by Philostratus himself in an effort to provide an apparently factual cloak for his fictional narrative, a shadow behind which he could safely criticize the extant religious practices of the Empire. This masquerade of fiction as truth was a characteristic of several works of sophistry of that period, including, for example, the memoirs of Dictys on the Trojan War. This work, the *Ephemeris Belli Troiani*, was composed sometime between the mid-first and third centuries CE,<sup>11</sup> and purports to be the firsthand descriptions of events at Troy as set down by a Cretan named Dictys, who was under the command of the hero Idomeneus during the war.<sup>12</sup> As Dictys (1.13) comments of his account:

‘Consequently, and following this, concerning the events which took place at Troy, I have most diligently set down that which I have learned

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<sup>9</sup> Flinterman 1995: 85.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson 1986: 156.

<sup>11</sup> Frazer 1966: 11.

<sup>12</sup> Frazer 1966: 5.

from Ulysses, along with the rest. My account will be distinguished from those that follow after, seeing that it will be the truest explanation.'

*eorum ego secutus comitatum ea quidem, quae antea apud Troiam gesta sunt, ab Ulixē cognita quam diligentissime rettuli et reliqua, quae deinceps insecuta sunt, quoniam ipse interfui, quam verissime potero exponam.*

Thus it is apparent that this text, most certainly not a product of the Trojan War, or even the time of Homer, rather stems from a time during which it was common literary practice to pretend to truthfulness through making claims to the antiquity or immediacy (to the subject) of one's sources.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of the modern reception of the figure of Damis, one of the first to advance the position that Damis was little more than creative fiction was Meyer.<sup>14</sup> Since then, the argument has waged between those who, like Grosso,<sup>15</sup> are willing to accept the memoirs of Damis as at the very minimum, containing some truth, and those like Bowie who subscribe to Meyer's utterly disbelieving perspective.<sup>16</sup> Francis appears to stand somewhere in the former camp, and suggests that the 'Damis' materials impart a degree of authority to the third century Philostratean narrative, as Damis was supposedly present at most of the first century events that he reports.<sup>17</sup> It is his actual presence, and often participation in the happenings surrounding Apollonius of Tyana, that Francis

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<sup>13</sup> Regarding the use of the various methods of authentication at the disposal of the ancient writer, see Morgan 1993: 175-229.

<sup>14</sup> Meyer 1917: 371-424.

<sup>15</sup> Grosso 1954: 333-352.

<sup>16</sup> Bowie 1976: 1652-1699.

<sup>17</sup> Francis 1998: 419-441.

believes 'serves to validate Damis as source'. Therefore, any problems with the memoirs of Damis are transferred to the rather flawed character of Damis himself, one of Apollonius' devoted disciples, and are not reflected in the omniscient narrator Damis. In this way Francis suggests that Philostratus has every intention of the *VA* being taken 'seriously' by his audience.<sup>18</sup> But in an odd note of contradiction, he also describes the story of Apollonius as 'the invention of tradition', perhaps indicating that the truth of Apollonius' existence is quite possibly a rhetorical fabrication in the first place, or at the very least, a reformulation predicated upon the historical reality of the existence of an Apollonius, but simply presented in more appealing and useful terms.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Flinterman joins in this sentiment with the rather harsh criticism that the *VA* is 'the product of the creativity of a literary writer who saw absolutely no need to allow the limitations of his source material to frustrate the lofty aspirations of his encomium.'<sup>20</sup> Finally, in an earlier work, Francis references the unpublished dissertation of T.G. Knoles who is noted as admitting that 'the role of Damis as narrator reveals a degree of complexity and intractability that bespeaks Philostratus' working with a difficult source',<sup>21</sup> clearly connoting the existence of Damis as source material and not as fiction. This seems to be in agreement with the general perceptions of Francis, indicating that Philostratus

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<sup>18</sup> Francis 1998: 435.

<sup>19</sup> Francis 1998: 436.

<sup>20</sup> Flinterman 1995: 1.

<sup>21</sup> Francis 1995: 88.

was possibly working with source materials of some kind and not making Damis up on the fly as the mask for his own attitudes.

By contrast, it is Bowie's contention that anyone following in the footsteps of Grosso's earlier work favouring the truthfulness of Damis' memoirs, is basing their arguments upon an approach with 'no formal validity'.<sup>22</sup> From this point of view, because Philostratus would have very well had access to previously recorded histories, he could quite easily have inserted his version of Apollonius into the extant timeline and then utilized Damis as a form of documentation after the fact. Bowie goes on to say that Philostratus' educated readership would have been well used to this sort of novelistic *topos*, which is to say that simply invoking the name of the empress Julia Domna in the explanation of the appearance of the Damis memoirs is not enough to suggest that there might be an air of truth to the whole matter.<sup>23</sup> This despite an obvious Philostratean enthusiasm for pointing to his imperial connections—the *VA* is commissioned by Julia Domna, *Ep. Apol.* 73 is addressed to the very same empress, and the *Vitae Sophistarum* is dedicated to a certain consul named Gordian who might very well have become the Emperor Gordian I.<sup>24</sup> Yet Penella writes in the introduction to his collection of the letters of Apollonius that Damis, although a fabrication, is not in fact the work of Philostratus but an earlier insertion into

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<sup>22</sup> Bowie 1976: 1655.

<sup>23</sup> Bowie 1976: 1665.

<sup>24</sup> I will discuss the dedication of the *VS* in greater detail in Chapter X.

the tradition that surrounded the Tyanaean sage.<sup>25</sup> And what is more, Dzielska references the unpublished work of B.L. Taggart who believes 'Damis' to perhaps be the product of a group of committed Pythagoreans who sought a means of immortalizing their great teacher, again apparently lending credence to the notion that Philostratus was not in fact responsible for 'Damis' but was working with what he saw as earlier source materials.<sup>26</sup> If this is the case, then he cannot be held entirely accountable for the state of the narrative as he presents it, because Philostratus was given rather limited materials to work with in the first place.

A means of evaluating the memoirs of Damis is available through the analysis of Apollonius' travels in India, the mention of which is found solely within the bounds of this dubious tradition. Because of the obviously fantastic nature of much of this travelogue (e.g. dragons (VA 3.6-8) and automated tripods (VA 3.27.2)) a great deal of doubt is cast upon the account as a whole. Schnur attempts to repair the negative perception of the 'Damis' memoirs by explaining, perhaps somewhat naïvely, that in travelling to the East, Damis would have been 'expectant of the marvelous', and therefore wrote about what the Greeks *knew* to exist in the faraway jungles of India.<sup>27</sup> It is a paradox clearly illustrated in the 'Here be Monsters' inscriptions found on many of the early

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<sup>25</sup> Penella 1979: 1 n. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Dzielska 1986: 26.

<sup>27</sup> Schnur 1949: 27.

maps of the world, a phenomenon that colours over the unknown with the fantastical in what Cohen refers to as the 'double narrative' of monsters. These two stories are encapsulated in every case of the expression of what it means to be an outsider, to be 'other', with one tale

'that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing the cultural use the monster serves [or in a more general sense, the use that the application of the fantastic serves for a particular narrative]. The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot-must not-be crossed.'<sup>28</sup>

Monsters and magic thus fill in not only that which is unknown but also that which *cannot* be known for whatever reason. Damis sees India and the East as being outside of what is normal and Greek. He expects to see the same things that travellers before him have described, but probably experiences nothing of the sort. The perspective of Damis would have been skewed still further by the campfire stories of their guides, something that was especially effective 'when the strange noises of the forest and jungle made the fantastic seem credible.'<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless he chooses to write a travelogue similar to those he has a past experience of, and includes tales of dragons, magic gems, and the like. If Damis were found to have been an actual human being and not a literary invention, he would undoubtedly have been a man shaped by the knowledge and experience of his times, moulded by his education and by a sharp Hellenocentrism. Indeed, with the rigid ancient demarcation of culture as belonging quite completely to

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<sup>28</sup> Cohen 1996: 13.

<sup>29</sup> Schnur 1949: 27.



the Greeks, to find a race of people in the Indians who were as ethically and philosophically advanced as the Greeks themselves, if not more so according to the testimony of Apollonius, would undoubtedly have blurred the mental boundary that existed between Hellene and barbarian, leading to Damis' reconstruction of events along the lines indicated by Cohen above—Damis in essence transforms the advanced Indian world into one of monsters and magic, an act that in his mind, diminishes the apparent complexities of this India by reformulating it as mere fantasy, despite the fact that Apollonius himself is revealed to be so enamoured of it.

In taking the 'Damis' problem a little further, Edwards comments on the earlier approach by Anderson<sup>30</sup>, analysing the similarities between Damis, as responsible for the Philostratean narrative, the character of Damis in Lucian's *Iuppiter Tragoedus*, and a Persian folk hero by the name of Dini.<sup>31</sup> He identifies several points of congruence in these representations, including the fact that both the Persian Dini and the Lucianic Damis are magically silenced by powers that exist beyond the ken of mere mortals, yet both men are ultimately triumphant in their struggles, and both base their beliefs upon a philosophical system—Damis upon Epicureanism and Dini upon an intriguingly similar kind of atomism. Furthermore, all three men face daemons, although the

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<sup>30</sup> Anderson 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Edwards 1991: 563-564.

Philostratean Damis does so whilst standing at the side of the apparently superhuman Apollonius. While Dini and the Lucianic Damis appear to be somewhat similar, the Philostratean Damis seems to stand out as unique. What emerges from this evaluation is a useful question that is framed by Edwards, namely that if Philostratus came upon the character of an Epicurean Damis in another source, as Anderson suggests, would he not have ‘stripped him of his philosophy’ and, in the same way as he did with Apollonius’ archrival Euphrates, presented him as Apollonius’ perfect companion, just as the reworked Euphrates was his perfect opponent?<sup>32</sup> If this is indeed the case then Philostratus casts Epicureanism in both a positive and a negative light by giving to the movement not one, but two prominent places in his story as both friend and foe of Apollonius of Tyana. An obvious resolution to this conundrum lies in the fact that Epicureanism can simply be characterized as the official opposition at the time Philostratus was working. What I mean is that the materialistic outlook exemplified in the money-grubbing nature of Euphrates the philosopher, dominated the time and was also a cause of the slow demise of the traditional systems of morality and belief in the Empire, is perfectly encapsulated by the notion that the pursuit of pleasure is the greatest good. Thus the followers of Epicurus are given two places in the *VA*, one as the unyielding opponent of Apollonius, and the other as a convert, a former Epicurean in Damis who elects to follow Apollonius on his more spiritual path

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<sup>32</sup> Edwards 1991: 565.

to enlightenment. If Damis was indeed a professed Epicurean, then his 'conversion' to becoming a dedicated disciple of Apollonius is an illustration of the triumph of a traditional and community-oriented philosophy<sup>33</sup> over the materialism that was corrupting the Roman Empire.

The foregoing discussion has tentatively explored the variety of positions taken on the Damis memoirs. It is now necessary for me to indicate my own opinion, and the perspective that I adopt for this entire thesis. I began this exploration with the four perspectives espoused by Flinterman and Anderson—Damis was a real person and disciple of Apollonius; the Damis memoirs were created by like-minded Pythagoreans and ascribed to a 'Damis'; Philostratus invented the memoirs for the purposes of his own fictional narrative on Apollonius; and the memoirs were a source on Apollonius, created by a third party, that Philostratus was forced to work with in order to assemble his comprehensive picture of the Tyanaean Sage. I am, however, of the view that Damis never actually existed, but I also believe that the evidence is not strong enough to suggest that Philostratus was entirely his inventor. The argument in favour of this position does, after all, stem largely from the fact that the fabrication of source material was common practice in the novelistic genre. My personal preference is for a synthesis of Flinterman's remaining option and Anderson's

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<sup>33</sup> The doctrine of transmigration, a key reason for Pythagorean vegetarianism, also extrapolates to something akin to the 'Golden Rule' of 'Do unto others as you would have done unto you.' Because of the fact that one's soul could move on to another vessel that was human or animal, humane and moral treatment of others is strenuously encouraged.

suggestion, in that I propose a group of Apollonius devotees first set down the memoirs at various stages and in turn ascribed them to a disciple of the sage, whose name may or may not have been Damis. What is important is that this act of claiming an immediate disciple of Apollonius as the author of the memoirs is an attempt at confirming their authenticity through the proximity of their author to Apollonius himself. Thus it is that, as Anderson notes, the sections in which Philostratus must draw on the Damis memoirs have the awkward look of a writer engaging with a difficult and oftentimes uncertain source. While there may or may not have been an actual Damis who took the trouble to keep notes on Apollonius' doings, the accuracy and importance of the work is based upon the perception of immediacy created through this relationship and the relative truthfulness of these records is derived accordingly. In this way, Philostratus can provide material that is at worst forged, and at best painstakingly reworked, to substantiate his own position on the life of Apollonius, and thereby put forward his fundamentalist take on the situation in his society.

#### Moeragenes and Maximus of Aegeae.

Two additional and no less debated sources for Philostratus' depiction of Apollonius of Tyana are the works of Moeragenes and Maximus of Aegeae respectively. Maximus compiled a collection of the *acta* of Apollonius while he lived in the city of Aegeae, or τὰ ἐν Αἰγαῖς Ἀπολλωνίου πάντα as

Philostratus (VA 1.3.2) puts it,<sup>34</sup> and seems to have written primarily of Apollonius' time at the shrine of Asclepius. Initially, Meyer held that the use of Maximus as a source for the VA was pure invention on the part of Philostratus,<sup>35</sup> but this view has recently been rejected and replaced with the opinion that Maximus was indeed a valid source for Philostratus. In fact Maximus' *acta* appear to have formed the bulk of VA 1.7-16, chapters describing the early years of Apollonius' public ministry. Moreover, these very same chapters also put forward the figure of a Pythagorean Apollonius.<sup>36</sup> However, the degree of Maximus' patriotic fervour for his home city of Aegeae, coupled with open hostility towards her rival cities of Tarsus and Antioch, seems to detract from his overall presentation of the activities of Apollonius while in Aegeae. According to Philostratus (VA 1.12), Maximus did serve as *ab epistulis Graecis* to the Roman emperor, a position that would have required him to be eminently sensible regarding Greek affairs and would have left little place for bias while in the Emperor's particular employ.<sup>37</sup> What this leaves then is a highly specific source, detailing the happenings in the life of Apollonius for a brief period of time and in only one city. Although this does lead us to the conclusion that there was some kind of historical Apollonius active around the

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<sup>34</sup> All of the things done by Apollonius in Aegeae.

<sup>35</sup> Meyer 1917: 371-424.

<sup>36</sup> Bowie 1976: 1684.

<sup>37</sup> Although, as Philostratus (VS 627-628) writes of Aspasius of Ravenna, not all who served as *ab epistulis* were sensible. See Chapter X.

region of Aegeae, the testimony of Maximus is too particular to allow for any additional elucidation on events as they are painted by Philostratus.

What can be drawn from the work of Maximus (as it is included in the *VA*) is the figure of an Apollonius who rejects the Platonists, Stoics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans, in favour of Pythagoreanism, a doctrine which he took in by some strange wisdom (ἀρρήτῳ τινὶ σοφίᾳ ξυνέλαβε, *VA* 1.7.2) Maximus shows Apollonius to avoid all manner of material desire, denying himself everything from money and sex, to meat and wine (*VA* 1.8.1-2). He is also given the opportunity for religiously motivated interaction, providing medical cures and advice in the manner of Asclepius and censuring a man for his extravagant offerings (*VA* 1.9-10). Finally, Apollonius states that when people pray before the gods they ought to say ‘O gods, give me what I deserve’, ὦ θεοί, δοίητέ μοι τὰ ὀφειλόμενα. (*VA* 1.10.2) In his brief recourse to the writings of Maximus, Philostratus seeks to emphasize several key points with respect to the character of his Apollonius. First of all, Pythagoreanism appears to be a considered choice on the part of the young Apollonius. It is not any sort of calling or divine election, despite the fact that the events of Apollonius’ birth did in fact mark him out for a life of special significance (*VA* 1.4-5). Thus Philostratus places Pythagoreanism above the other philosophies of his day as it is the particular *choice* for his paragon. Apollonius’ teacher in the philosophy is a man named Euxenus, who professes adherence to the creed but does little in his life to

follow it. Philostratus presents the dealings between Apollonius and his teacher in such a way that Apollonius seems to come out as the master, and reveals to Euxenus what it truly means to be a Pythagorean (VA 1.8.1-2), indicating that not even the example of a corrupt teacher can keep him from his true path. I would suggest that in this way, the dichotomy of a corrupted Roman Empire in the present day and an Empire strong in the *mos maiorum* is established early on in the portrayal of Apollonius through the juxtaposition of the decadent Euxenus and his ascetic pupil. Lastly, Apollonius' early religious activities exhibit his ideological link to the older beliefs and traditions of the Empire, with his criticism of the extravagant sacrifice a particularly poignant expression of disapproval for the state of religious experience in Philostratus' time, especially when considered with the words of his prayer at VA 1.10.2, for as Apollonius proves, the man making such a profligate display of faith surely is undeserving of the boon for which he asks.

The story behind the testimony of Moeragenes is slightly different. It is Bowie's suggestion that the work of Moeragenes in fact told the authoritative version of the life of Apollonius of Tyana at the time Philostratus was writing his own, a sentiment echoed by Raynor.<sup>38</sup> Bowie goes on to argue that the corpus of letters attributed to the Tyanaean sage is in reality completely the work of this same

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<sup>38</sup> Bowie 1976: 1673 ; Raynor 1984: 222.

Moeragenes, a collection of forgeries that he compiled during the 140s CE.<sup>39</sup> Because the version presented by Moeragenes was the standard one at the time of Philostratus, he could then be said to be reformulating the Apollonian ‘canon’ by attempting to marginalize the contribution of Moeragenes through his accusation of being greatly ignorant about the man, *πολλὰ δὲ τῶν περὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ἀγνοήσαντι*, (VA 1.3.2) something mirroring the classic *topos* of correcting the Homeric poet, of which Philostratus’ *Heroikos* is itself an example.

Francis offers another assessment of the situation, believing instead that what motivated Philostratus’ negativity toward Moeragenes was that he praised Apollonius ‘for the wrong reasons’,<sup>40</sup> an argument with which Dzielska is in agreement.<sup>41</sup> What has been conjectured is that Moeragenes was interested in the figure of Apollonius because he was a worker of wonders,<sup>42</sup> and not because of the possibilities for religious and political resistance offered by his Pythagorean philosophy—the perspective favoured by Philostratus. This is an idea that emerges as early as the second century CE, meaning that it cannot therefore be an invention of Philostratus’ imagination alone. As to this notion of Moeragenes emphasizing the magical feats of Apollonius, an idea that does not in fact contradict Bowie’s belief that Moeragenes also championed a

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<sup>39</sup> Bowie 1976: 1676-1678.

<sup>40</sup> Francis 1995: 95.

<sup>41</sup> Dzielska 1986: 91.

<sup>42</sup> Francis 1995: 106.



Pythagorean Apollonius,<sup>43</sup> Bowman writes that ‘from the time of Moeragenes to Bar Hebraeus the name of Apollonius of Tyana was associated with astrology’.<sup>44</sup> In light of this, it should be noted that Moeragenes states that Apollonius was supposed to have written four books on the subject of astrology, books that Bowie names *περὶ μαντείας ἀστέρων*,<sup>45</sup> or concerning astrology, a work that apparently transcended the boundaries of the Graeco-Roman world to appear even in the Arabic tradition under the name Balinas. Yet even Origen (*C. Cels.* 6.41), who notes the subject matter of Moeragenes’ text as being memoirs concerning the magic and philosophy of Apollonius of Tyana (Τῶν Ἀπολλωνίου τοῦ Τυανέως μάγου καὶ φιλοσόφου ἀπομνημονευμάτων.), criticizes his approach to Apollonius, and labels both him and a certain Epicurean philosopher (possibly Damis) as the unfortunate victims of Apollonius’ magical prowess. Perhaps like Damis, the work of Moeragenes was a little too enthusiastic concerning the perceived powers of Apollonius. In general Philostratus (*VA* 1.3; 4.19) exhorts his readers to pay no heed to the comments of Moeragenes, but curiously, in this particular situation he turns to Moeragenes for proof of Apollonius’ astrological writings. Philostratus’ habit of picking out the choicest pieces of information in order to shore up his own case, while simultaneously rejecting all other comment from precisely the same

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<sup>43</sup> Bowie 1976: 1674. Ogden 2008: 75 speaks of the ‘Pythagorean interest in the detachability of the soul’ as being a key issue. He (Ogden 2008: 115) also discusses several related shamanic powers that Pythagoreans supposedly possessed in relation to this, indicating that they were most definitely practitioners of a kind of magic.

<sup>44</sup> Bowman 1950-1952: 4.

<sup>45</sup> Bowie 1976: 1676.

source, brings about what I believe is a confirmation of Bowie's theory that the Moeragenes text was positioned as the gold standard for all writings concerning Apollonius of Tyana before Philostratus set down the VA.<sup>46</sup> While other sources may have expressed an interest in Apollonius' magical qualifications, it still seems safe to conclude that the Pythagoreanism of Apollonius was not an especially innovative inclusion on the part of Philostratus but was instead an aspect of the tradition long before this particular sophist ever entered into the picture. What cannot be conclusively determined however, is whether or not Apollonius was actually a Pythagorean or whether this philosophy was forced upon him by later enthusiasts. Philostratus' motives for utilizing this Pythagoreanism are however clear, as he was seeking to found his specific version of Apollonius on an ancient and somewhat respectable philosophy, which because of its high mythic status and clear descent from figures like Pythagoras and Orpheus, was perfect as the cornerstone of for Philostratus' 'polyvalent' approach to the world of ancient religion, for not only was Pythagoreanism truly old but it sought to serve the old gods as well. Therefore, while Philostratus may not have been innovative in the sense of personally inventing Apollonius' Pythagorean tendencies, he is an innovator in the manner in which he chooses to utilize this belief system as the basis for fundamentalist critique of the current state of affairs.

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<sup>46</sup> Bowie 1976: 1673.

Both Maximus of Aegeae and Moeragenes thus present valid perspectives on Apollonius of Tyana, perspectives that are however mediated by Philostratus. The *acta* of Maximus are only to be found shaping the *VA*'s early chapters, but when taken in tandem, these two earlier sources on Apollonius offer a Pythagorean origin to the tradition, as is hinted at in my prior suggestion of certain later disciples of Apollonius as the inventors of the Damis memoirs. Maximus presents a patently Pythagorean Apollonius, a figure contrasted sharply with his teacher in his actually living up to the ideal of the Philosopher of Samos. It is from anecdotes like this that I believe Philostratus first derives his notion of Apollonius as a Pythagorean paragon. Furthermore, if Moeragenes was, as is suggested, the authoritative treatment of the life of Apollonius at the time Philostratus was writing, then his reinvention of the canon begins with his rejection of the magical Apollonius presented by Moeragenes (a figure that would be entirely in keeping with the mystical proclivities of Pythagoreanism) and culminates in his moulding of an Apollonius that emphasizes the religious and political aspects of his character. Through his selective deployment of these earlier traditions, Philostratus not only points to Apollonius' all-important Pythagorean credentials,<sup>47</sup> but also begins taking his first steps towards crafting the *VA* as an active rejection of the currently accepted tradition on the Tyanaean Sage, and redirecting it for his own purposes.

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<sup>47</sup> The precise nature of Pythagoreanism will be more comprehensively addressed in Chapter IX.

The Letters of Apollonius.

Yet another contentious aspect of the evidence for Apollonius' existence is the collected corpus of letters attributed to him. It seems that to most scholars only a handful of the letters could possibly be genuine, while many are of the opinion that they are entirely fraudulent. Penella assembled the letters attributed to Apollonius into a workable collection of original Greek texts, English translations, and commentary.<sup>48</sup> He opens his work by stating that 'there is no canon of Apollonius' writings of certain authenticity to compare stylistically with the letters.' This inevitably leads to enormous difficulties in performing any sort of attribution of the letters. What is fortunate is that very few of the letters are mediated by the opinions of Philostratus, as the overwhelming majority are to be found in an entirely separate collection or preserved in the writings of Stobaeus.<sup>49</sup> This also means that the letters that are chosen by Philostratus for inclusion in the VA are not only to be viewed with a special degree of scrutiny but can also assume a certain importance as well. Of the letters, Philostratus (VA 1.2) himself writes

'And he [Apollonius] wrote to kings, sophists, philosophers, Eleans, Delphians, Indians, and Egyptians, concerning gods, customs, morals, and laws, putting right whatever had been upended by such people.'

ἐπέστελλε δὲ βασιλεῦσι, σοφισταῖς, φιλοσόφοις, Ἡλείοις, Δελφοῖς, Ἰνδοῖς, Αἰγυπτίοις ὑπὲρ θεῶν, ὑπὲρ ἐθῶν, ὑπὲρ ἡθῶν, ὑπὲρ νόμων, παρ' οἷς ὅ τι ἀνατράποιτο, ἐπηγώρθου.

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<sup>48</sup> Penella 1979. Original Greek texts of the letters are drawn from his collection unless otherwise indicated. Jones 2006 produced his own translation during my writing of this dissertation, and so, special reference has been made to his translation where it may differ from Penella's.

<sup>49</sup> Penella 1979: 26.

Penella explains that it is upon these very contents that we must rely for any assessment of the authenticity of the letters.<sup>50</sup> It is my intention, therefore, to engage with the question of the veracity of an individual letter should it become important to my argument. Penella then goes on to say that because of the manner in which the letters are fortuitously distanced from Philostratus, they can still be said to provide a great deal of information about Apollonius that can be considered alongside the picture evoked by his biographer, Philostratus, as it is only rarely that the two sources are truly at odds with each other.<sup>51</sup>

Bowie is once again in opposition to suggestions that might validate the existence of Apollonius. He comments that the version of Apollonius presented in the Philostratean *VA* stands in stark contrast to the fiery Apollonius of the letters.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, he posits that both the criticism of Roman rule and the accusation that the Greeks of the time of Apollonius are sad degenerate versions of their mighty ancestors (a very sophistic and dare I say, Philostratean notion),<sup>53</sup> are characteristic of the Apollonius of the letters and apparently at variance with the Apollonius portrayed by Philostratus. Furthermore, Bowie theorizes that a certain group of the letters, specifically those written to a range of temples and religious organizations, upbraiding them for perceived

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<sup>50</sup> Penella 1979: 26.

<sup>51</sup> Penella 1979: 26.

<sup>52</sup> Bowie 1976: 1680-1682.

<sup>53</sup> I deal with the problem of the influence of sophistry on the *VA* and on the sophistic milieu of Philostratus itself in two separate chapters, IV and X respectively.

transgressions including straying from traditional practices and allowing the wrong sort of people to seek asylum within temple precincts, are entirely fraudulent, as logically temples would not have retained copies of letters that pointed out their mistakes or wrongdoing, even if Apollonius was as renowned as Philostratus claims.<sup>54</sup> The primary concern with the letters of Apollonius is thus the unknown quantity that they represent. We cannot be certain of what is true and what is not, what was written by Apollonius and what was invented to seem like Apollonius. It is even plausible that the letters were fabricated by later adherents of Apollonius' teachings seeking to 'demonstrate their hero's importance, fame, and true philosophical nature'.<sup>55</sup> Whether actually crafted by the hand of this Pythagorean sage or by later admirers, at the very least the letters offer a window into how people of the time perceived Apollonius. This is a crucial part of my analysis of his Philostratean portrayal, because the position developed by these letters indicates the state of the tradition that Philostratus had to work with, and importantly, points out the places that he diverged from the Apollonius tradition. They are thus suggestive of where exactly Philostratus had to begin, and what he had to work with in constructing his fundamentalist slant on the protagonist of his *VA*. It is my belief that, although not all of them are genuine, the letters still created the persona of a more vigorously censorious Apollonius, allowing Philostratus the luxury of more surreptitious criticism of

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<sup>54</sup> Bowie 1976: 1691. For examples of these criticisms see *Ep. Apol.* 65 and 66.

<sup>55</sup> Penella 1979: 28.

the situation in the Empire, as he was making use of an extant tradition and not putting himself directly into the line of fire.

In addition to addressing his comments to several distinct groups and individuals, including philosophers, emperors, Roman officials, and certain famous cities around the Mediterranean, Apollonius seems to spend a great deal of effort labouring the issue of philosophers selling their integrity for wealth, with the scapegoat for this assault being his arch-rival, Euphrates, and he often suggests that Euphrates should maintain a philosophical (i.e. Pythagorean) lifestyle rather than accept imperial generosity.<sup>56</sup> Apollonius in fact goes so far as to describe his Pythagorean way of life in a letter to Euphrates (*Ep. Apol.* 8),<sup>57</sup> presumably to provide Euphrates with some manner of pattern to follow. In addition to this account of Pythagoreanism, he adds a few other points in two further letters, in which he writes that care of both the body and soul are required for continued well-being (*Ep. Apol.* 23), and that animal sacrifice is a practice of the truly godless, a practice that is in reality spiritually polluting (*Ep. Apol.* 26, 27), especially when considered along the lines of the Pythagorean doctrine of transmigration. Whether these remarks addressed to Euphrates are in fact concealed jibes at the corrupt imperial system of

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<sup>56</sup> Examples in this vein include *Ep. Apol.* 1, 3, 4, 5, 42, 50, 51, 52.

<sup>57</sup> *Ep. Apol.* 58 again illustrates the 'eclectic' nature of these beliefs.

Philostratus' day will be more completely discussed in my later chapter on Philostratus and the interactions between philosophy and religion.

Apollonius also makes several forays into the realm of politics in his letters as well. It is clear that like any good Greek Apollonius views engagement in politics as something of importance, so much so that he even informs Euphrates, his greatest philosophical rival, of the necessity of giving priority to the affairs of one's home city (*Ep. Apol* 11). Yet at the same time, we stumble over the rather contradictory piece of evidence that reveals the non-existence of any real proof of actual engagement in the political life on the part of Apollonius. This is a point to be argued later at greater length. He displays his Hellenic colours in several letters, writing for example to the emperor Vespasian and referring to him as the one who has 'enslaved Greece', Ἐδουλώσω τὴν Ἑλλάδα (*Ep. Apol.* 42 f, 42 h)<sup>58</sup>. This letter followed the reversal of the situation in which Nero had declared Greece free (however theatrically). The other side of Apollonius' pro-Greek enthusiasm is shown in his admonishing the emperor Domitian not to attempt to rule over the barbarians as 'for it is not lawful that the barbarians should be well off', οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτοὺς βαρβάρους ὄντας εὖ πάσχειν (*Ep. Apol.* 21). I would personally prefer to translate the Greek a little more strongly, linking the use of the word θέμις to the divine law that the goddess represented. What this means is that

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<sup>58</sup> These letters can also be found as VA 5.41.2-4.



Apollonius' remark in fact declares it to be a divine injunction that the barbarians should not benefit from the positive aspects of Roman rule as they are entirely unfit for civilization. This is a characteristically 'Greek' thing to say, and is in keeping with the notion expressed earlier by Cohen that there must always be a clear delineation between cultures through the othering of one of them.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, it is also indicative of the sophistic paradigm in which Philostratus is working, as he bases his character of Apollonius upon this obviously biased foundation of the Greek/barbarian dichotomy.

Another letter to the emperor Domitian marks Apollonius' first noticeable attempt in the corpus at advice on good governance. In *Ep. Apol.* 20 he makes the pointed observation (while simultaneously maintaining the veneer of respectability) that the exercise of power requires wisdom with the obvious corollary being that the gift of wisdom requires some form of power for it to be any good to anyone. This must certainly be viewed as an accusation at the lack of good sense displayed in Domitian's rule. In a relatively similar reproach Apollonius suggests that while it is good for someone to seek out higher public office, it is better for that person to first learn the art of self-governance in order to allow them to rule properly (*Ep. Apol.* 58). This opinion is accentuated by *Ep. Apol.* 54, wherein Apollonius criticizes Rome for taking such good care of its public buildings while doing very little to see to the well-being of its people. In

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<sup>59</sup> Cohen 1996: 13.

some of his most scathing criticism, Apollonius (*Ep. Apol.* 65, 73) writes to the people of Ephesus, bemoaning the fact that criminals are abusing the right to asylum granted by certain temples and have turned the famed temple of Artemis in Ephesus into their own safe haven from the law without even an objection from the Ephesians. This letter reveals two aspects to Apollonius' public face, the first shows his concern for political inaction (on the part of the Ephesian authorities) and the unstable situation that it creates, and the second reveals the particular problem that he has with the corruption of religious traditions for largely secular ends—in this case it is ancient right of *asyla* that is being violated through its misuse in shielding criminals and malcontents.

While many of the letters are indeed certainly forgeries, the collection as a whole still grants a rare glimpse at the personality of a man who only seems to exist for us today through the words of the sophist Philostratus. Although some letters may not have been written by the hand of this Pythagorean sage in the time of his first century meanderings, this does not entirely negate the use of this corpus as a form of evidence. Granted that the letters are far too contentious to be useful in proving anything on a factual level, they can, I believe, be employed in constructing a kind of psychological profile of the man to whom they are ascribed. Naturally the letters that are patently spurious cannot be included in such a discussion, but the others are useful in formulating a loose picture of Apollonius' beliefs as they were conceived of by his close

allies and supporters. Because Philostratus had no hand in the creation of the letters they can be argued to offer an alternative view of Apollonius, a view created by his dedicated followers perhaps as little as a few decades after his passing.

There are thus three primary sources for the existence of Apollonius of Tyana that are to a greater or lesser extent mediated by the sophistic influence of Philostratus. The works of Maximus of Aegeae and of Moeragenes are verifiable texts that unfortunately only exist today through excerpt and conjecture. However, their specific influence on the *VA* is undeniable, with Maximus informing almost all of Philostratus' testimony on the events that occurred in Apollonius' youth at Aegeae, and Moeragenes' representation of Apollonius as a γόης, consistently providing a counterpoint to the philosophical and ostensibly respectable perspective presented by Philostratus. In both cases Philostratus is forced to work against the extant material in order to overlay his essentially fundamentalist views on the character that he has constructed in Apollonius, and in this way he represents his own attitudes and the situation that he seeks to remedy in the Roman Empire of his time. By contrast, the letters of Apollonius provide a source, however contested, that has not been interfered with by Philostratus. While the dubious nature of many of the letters provides a massive hurdle to their use as historically validating pieces of hard evidence, they can nonetheless be employed as background

information, as they reveal what other people thought of the man called Apollonius, if indeed the letters were not written by him, and how they saw his comments and teachings concerning the Graeco-Roman world. This then allows us, through extensive examination of the specific texts, to make some inference as to exactly what Philostratus had to do in order to tailor his own view of the Tyanaean. Lastly, the ‘Damis’ memoirs are clearly fraught with difficulties as a source of evidence for Apollonius. To be sure the possibility that they were wholly invented by Philostratus himself as an obvious literary *topos* leaves a sizeable problem with any of the events and teachings that are presented as truth in the VA. Whether or not an ‘Apollonius’ actually existed in the first century CE is less relevant a question than how this ‘Apollonius’ has been represented. It is the tradition surrounding him, the tradition that Philostratus shapes to his own purposes, that is particularly pertinent, for indeed, the ‘historical’ Apollonius bears as much relevance to an ancient ‘polyvalent’ fundamentalist like Philostratus as the ‘historical’ Jesus does a true Christian believer. Beyond proof of concept, little more is to be gained. The manner in which Philostratus reinvents Apollonius by his either accepting or rejecting elements of the extant canon is what allows for my analysis of the Philostratean perspective. Thus, while accepting the authenticity of the ‘Damis’ memoirs—my speculative attribution of the material to a group of Pythagorean disciples aside—Philostratus embraces an immediate and apparently superior impression of Apollonius, and simultaneously rejects the work of Moeragenes,

which in its capacity as the currently accepted authority on Apollonius of Tyana, seems to stand in the way of Philostratus' re-envisioned Apollonius. It is through his careful selection of his sources that we get our first inkling of where the Philostratean fundamentalist project is headed.

## Chapter IV

### Politician or Poet:

#### Philostratus and Apollonius Collide in the Second Sophistic.

*Poetry is a flame in the heart, but rhetoric is flakes of snow.  
How can flame and snow be joined together?  
(Kahlil Gibran)<sup>1</sup>*

It is here that I wish to begin my first exploration of the phenomenon known as the Second Sophistic. It will become equally important to investigate some of its cultural and political ramifications as well, particularly as pertains to the plausibility of a 'polyvalent' fundamentalist perspective being adopted by the author Philostratus in his ancient religious setting. My belief is that this came to pass out of the fractious climate of what can only be viewed as colonial activity, as evident in the relationship between Rome and conquered nation of Greece. Also of interest will be the role that the Second Sophistic, as a cultural movement, took in shaping the literary tendencies of the period in which Philostratus was creating his *Vita Apollonii*, as well as its overarching influence on the sociopolitical atmosphere of the period. The question of whether or not the Second Sophistic, as a primarily elitist movement, was able to have any impact upon Graeco-Roman social, religious, and political relations will also be examined. Once this perspective is

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<sup>1</sup> Gibran 1963: 22.

complete, it will be further enhanced in a later chapter by the addition of a careful study of Philostratus' *Vitae Sophistarum*, in which some of the leading individual proponents of the Second Sophistic will be discussed.

Bowersock declares it to be 'symptomatic of the time' that writers could pretend to be telling the truth while simultaneously creating works of complete fiction,<sup>2</sup> something seen in Philostratus' development of the 'Damis' memoirs as discussed in Chapter III. This somewhat cynical analysis of the era of the Second Sophistic is nonetheless the perfect point of departure from which to initiate a critical analysis of the *Vita Apollonii*. In his book delving into the character of Philostratus, Anderson refers to the man as 'a sophist who wrote the lives of other sophists.'<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is in this role that he remains our most important historical witness for the phenomenon that he himself calls the 'Second Sophistic', a name that he bestows upon this linguistically-oriented cultural movement in one of his most important works, the *Vitae Sophistarum* (481). Philostratus' choice of subject is never an accident. He was a member of the elite—his wife, Aurelia Melitine was of senatorial stock, and one of his sons was himself a senator.<sup>4</sup> Flavius Philostratus was therefore a Greek steeped in the culture and history of his people, but at the

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<sup>2</sup> Bowersock 1994: 6.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson 1986: 2. This is in reference to Philostratus' *Vitae Sophistarum*.

<sup>4</sup> Swain 1991: 152.

same time he was also a Roman citizen, married into the senatorial elite. His outlook is thus decidedly dualistic, with his affiliation to the Roman centre of power, through the senate and the imperial family, often noticeably tugging him away from his Hellenic roots. The friction created by this interaction was not uncommon in the ancient world of this time, with many non-Italians receiving grants of citizenship that would set them at odds with their native associations. It is through his fundamentalist tendencies that Philostratus attempts to unite these two disparate worlds by shaping his Roman present with his Greek past. For a man like this the issues raised in the Second Sophistic would have been of great importance. According to Whitmarsh, Philostratus' use of the term 'Second Sophistic' was identifying a particular 'constellation of luminous performers who specialized in "epideictic" oratory'.<sup>5</sup> This would mean that Philostratus, in defining the Second Sophistic, was concerned with a specific group of people practicing a peculiar style of oratory. Even so, there is much more to it than that, for indeed the effects of the ideals espoused by the exponents of the Second Sophistic were of such import that they were influential in everything from education to jurisprudence. And what is more, the Second Sophistic cannot therefore be said to belong, as some would have us believe, to a definable period of Greek history, although the movement could be said to have reached its zenith during the second

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<sup>5</sup> Whitmarsh 2005: 1.



and third centuries of our era.<sup>6</sup> In an earlier work, Whitmarsh contends that modern scholarly debate has shaped our idea of the Second Sophistic to a far greater extent than has ever been realized, and therefore our understanding of the movement and its impact is weighed down by modern academic baggage that drags this phenomenon away from the original Philostratean concept, inexorably towards the perceptions and preoccupations of modern scholars.<sup>7</sup> Given that the notion of a 'sophistic' is shaped by ancient presuppositions and then reshaped by modern interpretations, can it still prove a useful analytical tool for this discussion? Despite the unfortunately negative implications brought to the term by a variety of commentators, I still believe it to be worthwhile, so long as this influence is recognized and mitigated against. To this end, I have elected to make use of the term 'Second Sophistic' in order to indicate the particular time of cultural production in which Philostratus was operating. It was a time of unique social and religious pressures that gave birth to his peculiarly fundamentalist perspective and forged the works that are being discussed here. I am not referring to a particular style of oratory or practitioners thereof, but a cultural and literary movement, of which Philostratus was at the forefront.

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<sup>6</sup> Whitmarsh 2005: 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Whitmarsh 2001b: 43.

Anderson notes two key elements as being inherent in the expression of the sophistic outlook—a ‘determined Hellenism’ that sought to reinvigorate the Greek present by dramatically emphasizing the achievements of the Greek past; and ‘versatility’, both in terms of the source texts relied upon (i.e. the early Greek canon) as well as in the overall technique that an author might use in assembling them.<sup>8</sup> As it was impossible for the Greeks to found their self-esteem in notions of Greek empire or world domination, given that they had fallen prey to the might of Rome, they were forced to work through something of which they were still the unsurpassed masters—culture.<sup>9</sup> Lucian provides a beautiful description of the raw power of Greek culture in the *Scythian* (5), writing

‘...but she will seize you in such a way, that you will remember neither wife nor children, nor even if you have <them>.

ἀλλὰ μάλα ἐπιλήψεταιί σου, ὥς μήτε γυναικὸς ἔτι μήτε παίδων, εἴ σοι ἤδη εἰσὶ μεμνησθαι.

Because the sophist was the perfect exponent of this Greekness, as well as being its foremost ambassador, he was meant to be ‘all things Greek to all men’.<sup>10</sup> It was the task of the sophist to establish the existence of an apparently idyllic Greek past in a very real and often unhappy present, that while belittling for the educated Hellene, nonetheless offered opportunities for worldly advancement, albeit in a world

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson 1993: 17.

<sup>9</sup> Swain 1996: 89.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson 1993: 17.

dominated by a patently inferior culture—that of Rome. The Greek was thus to recall the former glory of his city-state whilst simultaneously refusing to heed the current circumstances characterized by an enforced political impotence. Likewise for Swain, the Second Sophistic entailed a search for a new source of authority through the idealization of past people and events.<sup>11</sup> There was however always room for the renegotiation of ‘what the past actually was... and to say what authority it conferred on whom...’<sup>12</sup> The past, be it mythical or factual, was the particular playground for proponents of this sophistic movement, but was also employed by others for political advantage. Whether it was the Athenians alleging regional autochthony through the myth of Erechtheus or the fact that an Italian settlement might have originally been founded by colonists from the Greek mainland, history is replete with examples of all manner of individuals attempting to lay claim to political authority by relying on some form of historical foundation for their arguments. The authors and orators of the Second Sophistic were no different, simply more artistic.

For Philostratus the skills professed by the sophists were also a form of art, not merely the best contemporary technique that could be employed by a writer or

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<sup>11</sup> Swain 1996: 7.

<sup>12</sup> Swain 1996: 7.

speaker wishing to enhance his public persona.<sup>13</sup> Yet the art of the sophist had its practical side as well, for a key element in the makeup of this peculiar brand of sophistry was the mode of one's expression, or rather, the language that a speaker or writer employed. One of the core debates of the Second Sophistic was the battle that raged between the opposing forces of Atticism and Asianism.<sup>14</sup> Atticism was a linguistic penchant that stressed a purity of the Greek language founded in the exaggeration of the early Attic Greek of ancient Athens, while concurrently countering the notions of the so-called Asianists, speakers and writers from the Eastern Empire who apparently made use of a far more florid style of presentation. More problematic than Asianism, however, was the decline in linguistic 'purity' brought on by the growing prevalence of the *koinē* and the preference for a Greek tongue that suited everyday interactions. The reason for this battleground mentality is that language is always a key area in which cultures attempt to negotiate definitions of the self. As Swain points out, 'the Greeks had always been highly conscious of their language and the distinctiveness it granted them from non-Greeks...'<sup>15</sup> It is thus perhaps natural that Greek elites would be in the vanguard of a movement that sought a return to a more classical linguistic variant. Bowie notes that this Atticism was also part of a 'wider tendency' that brought the

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<sup>13</sup> Flinterman 1995: 45.

<sup>14</sup> The major work on the subject is Schmid's (1887-1896) *Der Atticismus in seinen Hauptvertretern*.

<sup>15</sup> Swain 1996: 17. The classic Greek versus Barbarian dichotomy refers.

influence of a largely linguistic phenomenon into the broader cultural milieu.<sup>16</sup> Although the exacting prescriptions of Atticism might seem somewhat out of touch in an Hellenic world that was dominated largely by the *koinē* Greek familiar to us from the New Testament,<sup>17</sup> the movement towards embracing an earlier (and ‘purer’) form of the Greek tongue would have had intriguing political implications as well. This traditionalism was a boon for the ruling classes, who by identifying themselves with the noble and legendary leaders and writers of classical Greece were able to augment their own standing in their respective communities.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, because the ‘Romans had been nursed on Greek literature and tradition since long before the inception of the Empire’, they and the Greeks shared a form of cultural cachet that allowed for the negotiation of a ‘common framework of communication’ between Roman rulers and Greek subjects.<sup>19</sup> While for the Roman overlords this could perhaps herald an improvement in relations with Greece, for the Greeks themselves, it was a way of being able to assert their own identity as a group.<sup>20</sup> Although many Greeks had become Romanised and held the citizenship, some like Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 26.90-91) chose to view the Empire not as something imposed upon them, but rather as a ‘commonwealth of cultured

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<sup>16</sup> Bowie 1970: 3.

<sup>17</sup> The affectations of Atticism and Asianism would certainly not have formed part of the Greek spoken by the masses.

<sup>18</sup> Swain 1996: 65.

<sup>19</sup> Swain 1996: 66-67.

<sup>20</sup> Swain 1996: 87.

peoples',<sup>21</sup> over whom the emperor presided *with the aid of the local aristocracy*.<sup>22</sup> They chose to perceive the sharing of power, even when monarchy, probably one of their most hated forms of government, was clearly evident in the unbridled authority of the emperor.

Due to both its emphasis and extent as a movement, the Second Sophistic grew to even reach across cultural boundaries with its influence. This kind of widespread transformation came to be reflected in more than language patterns. It is interesting that Apollonius of Tyana is said to have believed this kind of sophistic rhetoric to be an unimportant subject (Philostr. VA 8.21). However, as we have seen, the archaizing tendency inherent in this movement would have been clearly evident in the day-to-day activities of the local elites—from the public speaking contests into which the practice of law had apparently degenerated, to audiences with the emperor himself, one's social stature was improved immeasurably by knowing just what words to use and in which situations it was proper to employ them. Sophists jockeyed with one another for honour and glory on an almost daily basis in what Anderson terms 'an ethos of pedantic rivalry and reprisal'.<sup>23</sup> They did this by utilizing the tools of their trade, the pre-eminent one among them being

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<sup>21</sup> De Blois 1984: 361.

<sup>22</sup> In aid of this commonwealth, Cassius Dio (52.19), for example, calls for allies of Rome to receive the same respect as Romans and so come to feel as though part of a single community.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson 1986: 45.

*paideia* or education. *Paideia* marshalled many varied elements under its banner, including performing as a capable public speaker, understanding and being able to draw on the example of past Greek speakers and writers, expressing oneself in the highly affected old Attic dialect, and partaking of the same aristocratic lifestyle.<sup>24</sup> Atticism was both the motivation for the exercise of *paideia* and the mode through which it was given voice. In this way linguistic ‘classicism’ became an essential aspect of elite identity and their Greek, be it either spoken or written, was thus able to resist the growing influence of Latin. After all, Greek commingled with Latin was often an indication of one’s lack of a proper education.<sup>25</sup> Lucian (*Somn.* 1) touches on the supreme importance of education to the Graeco-Roman world, due in no small part to the resources and time that had to be allocated to its acquisition. In a sense the right kind of education also proved that one was of a high enough social standing to be taken seriously in the political arena, so much so that Gleason calls *paideia* ‘a form of symbolic capital’<sup>26</sup> that sophists would expend in climbing the ladder of the *cursus honorum*. Because the Roman imperialists ‘rigorously

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<sup>24</sup> Preston 2001: 89-90.

<sup>25</sup> Swain 1996: 27, 41. Horrocks 1997: 72, 73 also writes that because of the exalted status of the Greek language in the Eastern Empire, a programme of Latinization was neither ‘desirable or practicable’. However, because of the necessity of engaging with Latin—governmental officials were almost entirely native speakers of the language—many elements of Latin vocabulary spread into and influenced parts of the Greek language of the period. By contrast, and as I will illustrate in Chapter VI, the notion of hellenizing was not one that was always well received by the Roman elites.

<sup>26</sup> Gleason 1995: xxi.

apportioned culture to the Greeks and power to the Romans',<sup>27</sup> they in essence forced educated Greeks to use their *paideia* as an alternative means of achieving the political influence that they sought. Because of their training, sophists could use their *paideia* to become a vital part of the administration of cities, especially in the eastern parts of the Empire. Their efforts on the part of the bureaucracy resulted in growth and prosperity, and in some cases, the fostering of enhanced diplomatic relations between these cities and the emperor in Rome.<sup>28</sup> Because this diplomatic function brought sophists to the forefront of political life, quarrels and disagreements between rival sophists could assume epic proportions, even dragging their home cities into the fray.<sup>29</sup> This increasing prominence could also count against them, making them the enemies of both philosophers and the powerful. It was their particular assertion to be able to teach men *virtus* that offended both of these groups, causing the sophists to be specially targeted. The fact that, in many cases, a sophistic teacher would not be a native of the city in which he worked, was severely criticized in the political sphere, and was noted as early as Socrates (Pl. *Ti.* 19e), who argues that it was the itinerant nature of sophists that explained their inability to utilize their acquired political cachet.<sup>30</sup> To the ancient mind, and in a political system that oftentimes demanded that a property

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<sup>27</sup> Whitmarsh 2005: 13-14.

<sup>28</sup> Bowersock 1969: 43-44.

<sup>29</sup> Bowersock 1969: 100.

<sup>30</sup> Guthrie 1971: 40.



qualification be met in order to allow for involvement in the political life of a city, not having put down roots in the city that was experiencing a particular problem, made the sophist altogether unqualified to give an opinion on the situation. This was however, far less true of the situation in the later Roman Empire, where the key to wielding political influence was *Roman* citizenship.

The lofty position held by the sophists in the Roman Empire, when further amplified by the renewed interest in classical Greece so distinctive of the Second Sophistic itself,

‘created the conditions within which they [Greeks] could accept Roman rule and could function with unswerving loyalty within that system... without giving up their identity and the self-respect which depended on it.’<sup>31</sup>

Bowie contends that most often the Greeks would emphasize their nation’s prior achievements ‘as an alternative to rather than an explicit reflection on the present’.<sup>32</sup> For a brief and shining moment, the cultural reinterpretation born out of the Second Sophistic diverted attention from the status of the contemporary Greek world as *cliens* to a time of legendary political superiority and cultural refinement.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, we should not use the fact that the Greeks never orchestrated any concerted acts of open rebellion against the Romans as an

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<sup>31</sup> Flinterman 1995: 50.

<sup>32</sup> Bowie 1970: 40-41.

<sup>33</sup> Bowie 1970: 40-41.

indication of some form of 'genuine political integration and harmony',<sup>34</sup> but perhaps rather as being indicative of a little common sense on the part of the Greeks who clearly realized that nothing could be gained from openly resisting the military might of the Roman Empire.

Tim Whitmarsh distinguishes between two modern approaches to the broad debates that surround the Second Sophistic.<sup>35</sup> These perspectives are championed by their own respective academics, most notably Bowersock and Jones on one hand, and Bowie and Swain on the other. The school of thought headed by Bowersock and Jones investigates sophists and sophistry with a view to understanding their significance and relationship with Rome. Their position appears to be a decidedly neutral one with respect to how these sophists may have influenced Rome. Conversely, Bowie and Swain suggest that the Second Sophistic was all part of a concerted Hellenising effort designed to counter the power of the Roman imperial system in the Greek world. Only the scholars following after Bowie and Swain are willing to admit the distinct likelihood that the developments growing out of the Second Sophistic may have been in some part a reaction to growing feelings of political impotence that had seized upon the Greeks because of perceived Roman oppression. I would therefore argue, in following the latter

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<sup>34</sup> Swain 1996: 412.

<sup>35</sup> Whitmarsh 2005: 8.

school of Bowie and Swain, that the emphasis on the Greek language and the Greek past was perhaps a manner in which a modicum of independence and dignity could still be cultivated, as notions of independence could only (thanks to the efficiency of the Roman war machine) be given voice through apparently apolitical means.

Under closer scrutiny, Apollonius of Tyana, whom Francis describes as an 'expert on what is truly Greek', reveals that the stress that the Second Sophistic placed upon the ancient Greek past could have had negative implications as well.<sup>36</sup> The majority of Apollonius' comments regarding the adverse impact of sophistry are to be found in his oft disputed letters, but Bowie goes on to propose that attacks like these and others whereby Apollonius criticizes the Roman control of Greece, are not in keeping with the picture that Philostratus paints of Apollonius.<sup>37</sup> This is not entirely accurate, as there are several occasions on which Apollonius chooses to vilify local authorities, be they nobles or priests. This clearly shows that he was more than willing to engage in the harsh criticism and, where necessary, the correction of those that he believed were in need of it. An excellent example is to be found in his attacks on the Ephesians for allowing the Temple of Artemis to

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<sup>36</sup> Francis 1995: 114. Classifying Apollonius in this way puts him on the same footing as the professional sophists, whom Anderson 1993:17 (see above p. 94) describes in an almost identical manner.

<sup>37</sup> Bowie 1976: 1682.

degenerate into a haven for reprobates of every variety (*Ep. Apol.* 65, 66). Apollonius writes that although the people of Ephesus observe all of the proper religious rituals within the temple, they have allowed the sacred site to deteriorate from its once proud and mythic origins (as reported in *Tac. Ann.* 3. 60) to a situation wherein criminals dwell within the temple precincts in order to escape prosecution by the authorities.<sup>38</sup> As Apollonius comments later (*Ep. Apol.* 66), ‘Give me a place where it is not necessary for me to be cleansed, even though I always remain indoors.’ (δότε μοι τόπον, ἔνθα μὴ καθαρσίῳν δεήσει μοι καίπερ ἔνδον ἀεὶ μένοντι.) I believe that, as Bowie suggests, Philostratus would have had no use for Apollonius in voicing his fundamentalist opinions, if the historical Apollonius had not started out as somewhat pro-Hellenic, as the letters seem to suggest, and would likewise have had no reason to compose a work as intricate as the *VA*.<sup>39</sup> This Hellenic ‘streak’ displayed by Apollonius only rarely developed as negative rhetorical expression, a negativity that he uses to attack the growing immorality of the Greeks as compares to the exalted position of their classical forebears in an argument typical of the Second Sophistic. Apollonius is however clearly critical of the over-importance that the culture of rhetoric has itself assumed in the Graeco-Roman world. He expresses this in the first of the letters (*Ep. Apol.* 1.3-5), wherein

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Dig.* 21.1.1.1 which is in part directed at resolving problems of sale concerning fugitive or wandering slaves.

<sup>39</sup> Bowie 1976: 1680.

Apollonius states that while he remains on good terms with philosophers, he could never have such a relationship with sophists, whom he actually refers to as ἀνθρώπων κακοδαμόνων or wretched men. Apollonius also turns this vitriol upon the Roman authorities (*Ep. Apol.* 30):

‘You begin with the first magistracy [i.e. the quaestorship]. And so, if you understand how to rule, why are our cities’ concerns the worse? But if you do not understand, it is first necessary to learn, then to rule.’

Ἀρχὴν ἄρχετε πρώτην. εἰ μὲν οὖν ἄρχειν ἐπίστασθε, διὰ τί τὸ παρ’ ὑμᾶς χειρὸν ἑαυτῶν αἱ πόλεις ἔχουσιν; εἰ δὲ οὐκ ἐπίστασθε, μαθεῖν ἔδει πρῶτον, εἴτα ἄρχειν.

Penella notes in his commentary on the epistles of Apollonius that as early as the fifth century BCE σοφιστεία or sophistry had acquired a negative aspect, especially as far as the fact that they took money for their services.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the sophist that elected to participate in politics would gather up enemies fairly quickly.<sup>41</sup> Lucian (*Pisc.* 29) describes the corrupt character of the ‘public speaker’ as the force that drove him to choose a life with philosophy:

‘For when I quickly understood how many unpleasant qualities are part of public speakers—cheating and lying and audaciousness and loudness and pushiness and a myriad besides—I fled from these things, as was reasonable, and inclined towards your concerns, Philosophy...’

Ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐπειδὴ τάχιστα συνείδον ὅποσα τοῖς ῥητορεύουσιν ἀναγκαῖον τὰ δυσχερῆ προσεῖναι, ἀπάτην καὶ ψεῦδος καὶ θρασύτητα καὶ βοήν καὶ

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<sup>40</sup> Penella 1979: 90-91.

<sup>41</sup> See my earlier comments regarding Guthrie 1971: 40 above p. 100.

ὠθισμοὺς καὶ μυρία ἄλλα, ταῦτα μὲν, ὥσπερ εἰκὸς ἦν, ἀπέφυγον, ἐπὶ δὲ  
τὰ σά, ὦ Φιλοσοφία...

And yet it was the sophists who were often responsible for the teaching of Greek *paideia* to the Roman world, and therefore, ideologically speaking, they were also responsible for a psychological ‘negation of the Hellenistic period’—the time during which Greece was dominated by the military might of Rome.<sup>42</sup> Flinterman adds that this negation was never expressed in such a way as to be taken for a complete and open disavowal of the current state of affairs in the Greek world, wherein once powerful Greece now lay subdued before an even mightier Rome. However, even if one understands the politics of the Hellenistic world in the simplest terms—as the civilized and cultured Greeks versus the warlike and subjugating Romans—it is still obvious that there was no outright rejection of the situation, or rather, that there was no rejection of the colonial paradigm as it was enforced on the Greek peoples.<sup>43</sup> Edward Said’s insight is valuable at this point, although it must be remembered that he is commenting from the basis of the modern historical paradigm, for although the East / West division is not relevant to the situation of Greece and Rome, the general sentiment behind this description of the interaction between colonizer and colonized most certainly is:

‘Never was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder [i.e. Rome] against a supine or inert non-Western native [i.e.

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<sup>42</sup> Flinterman 1995: 49.

<sup>43</sup> Said 1993: xii.

Greece]; there was *always* some form of active resistance and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out.’<sup>44</sup>

But Preston shows that the reinterpretation of this relationship would take place on both sides, driven primarily by the character and power of *paideia* in the Second Sophistic:

‘The Greeks too could be bellicose and expansionist; they did not necessarily live out the ideas of Greek *paideia*. Indeed a Roman king might more completely embody the Platonic ideal of the philosopher-king. He might even be “more Greek”. This entails an uncomfortable corollary for Greek identity. If to be civilized is to be Greek, then Greek identity might not be the automatic possession of those living in the Greek-speaking East. Rather, it could be claimed by anyone who had acquired Greek *paideia*.’<sup>45</sup>

Romans, therefore civilized by this measure, despite the fact that they could never truly be Greek and would always appear as *barbaroi*, were nonetheless a conundrum for the Greek mind, a colonizer seeking to validate itself through the acquisition of the *paideia* offered by the people they had colonized. Put another way, Roman imperialists sought to impose their idea of what it meant to be Greek on a Greece already in the throes of renegotiating its identity. In the same way, a process was occurring in the opposite direction as well, with Greek cultural imperialists attempting to impose their own vision upon their Roman conquerors. Romans who observed Greek *paideia* in action in the Greek-speaking parts of the Empire were, from that point on, seeking to ‘shape it according to their pre-

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<sup>44</sup> Said 1993: xii.

<sup>45</sup> Preston 2001: 108-109.

existing idea of what Greece was,<sup>46</sup> an idea born of a Roman elite education that was thoroughly immersed in the traditions of the canon of Greek literature, and almost looked down on the production of its own artists with disdain.

The Roman perception and understanding of what it meant to be Greek was what developed and defined *paideia* in the third century in which Philostratus was writing. It was the preconceptions of the colonizer that had in essence rated the importance of Greek education. The similarity to be found in the relationship between any colonial power and the nation that it colonizes, right down to the modern age of which Said speaks, is a striking one. It is my contention therefore, that the relationship between Rome and Greece can in fact be seen in the same light. The Romans saw a decadent and once glorious Greece as welcoming their 'help', in much the same way as the peoples of Africa apparently sought out the civilizing 'gifts' of the European world,<sup>47</sup> but there was nonetheless resistance to this imperialist intervention, resistance on the part of Greeks to being instructed on how they should behave in order to be called Greek.<sup>48</sup> It is notable that one of the more obvious motivations behind colonial or imperialist action is profit. Beyond this is an implicit understanding

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<sup>46</sup> Swain 1996: 66.

<sup>47</sup> Christianity being paramount among them.

<sup>48</sup> The relationship between the colonizing Romans and colonized Greek East shall be examined at greater length in Chapter VI.



‘which, on the one hand, allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples *should* be subjugated, and, on the other, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the *imperium* as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples.’<sup>49</sup>

Swain calls attention to this situation when he explains that Roman governors often pointed out the problem of the assertion of Greek identity in the Roman imperial context when Greek religious festivals fell on a day sacred to the imperial cult or included the presence of Roman divine statuary.<sup>50</sup> Thus in a manner quite often uncharacteristic of the expression of the colonial system, Greece was able to exert a dramatic influence on its Roman colonizers.

It is often the case within the bounds of the colonial relationship that the colonized tries to emulate the colonizer, but this was not the case when Greece was conquered by Rome. Grahame describes Roman selfhood as being ‘emergent’, not something that was already settled when the Greeks and Romans had their first encounter under the banner of imperialism.<sup>51</sup> This necessarily lends itself to the belief that the Greeks could in fact exert influence upon the Romans as Horace (*Epist.* 2.1.156f) suggests, especially since the Romans chose to accept so much of Greek culture as their own. And what is more, when one considers this situation

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<sup>49</sup> Said 1993: 10. Compare the words of Vergil (*Aen.* 6.851-852).

<sup>50</sup> Swain 1996: 68.

<sup>51</sup> Grahame 2001: 175.

from the perspective of individual psychology, it becomes evident that the embryonic self is still quite vulnerable to being shaped by outside influences, or as psychoanalytic theory posits,

‘identity has to be *made* or *created*. In this connection, Freud suggests that ego-formation occurs through the unconscious selecting or screening of objects by identification. Identification is a process in which the human subject “introjects” attributes of other people and transforms them through the unconscious imagination.’<sup>52</sup>

In essence, the individual unconsciously selects elements of others to include within the self, a process which naturally suggests the influence of the already established Greek culture upon the nascent Roman one. But conversely, the pressure upon colonized Greeks to conform their identities to the Roman ideal of Greekness would also have been strong.

Another factor that integrates seamlessly with this psychological interpretation concerns the strength of Greek *paideia* and Greek culture in general. According to Preston the Greeks actually used the possession of *paideia* as a means of separating the elites from the uneducated masses, and in this way, simultaneously fashioned it as a justification for the political authority held by these same elites.<sup>53</sup> Whitmarsh suggests a third psychological interpretation of the relationship between Greek and Roman along the lines of what Freudians refer to as a ‘repetition compulsion’,

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<sup>52</sup> Elliott 1994: 13.

<sup>53</sup> Preston 2001: 89.

which either involves 'neurotically replaying an original trauma' or 'enacting a new scenario in which the victim becomes the master'.<sup>54</sup> Although Whitmarsh believes that the Greek situation as conquered people seeking self-actualization through their own reinvention via the Second Sophistic, is an expression of the second of Freud's two outcomes, my own interpretation views the situation as more of a synthesis of the two. Logically there must be an obsession with the past trauma of Roman subjugation because identity is forged in the fire of external pressures. This meshes well with the theories of other colonial commentators, who see colonized peoples as being shaped by the influences of colonialism, whether they wish it to be so or not. Whitmarsh does however conclude that 'imitative repetition can be (and was for Roman Greeks) a creative, dynamic, articulate *poiēsis* in the present, not simply a neurotic obsession with the past.'<sup>55</sup> This is therefore the synthesis that I am suggesting—never forgetting the past whilst simultaneously looking to a present that is shaped not only by this very same past, but by the influence that those events have had upon the peculiar situation of the individual writer or philosopher. Thus the personality of Philostratus was shaped by the events that the Second Sophistic sought to reproduce, and the rosy view of Greek political and religious antiquity necessarily brings itself to bear in the 'polyvalent' fundamentalism that Philostratus champions.

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<sup>54</sup> Whitmarsh 2001b: 88.

<sup>55</sup> Whitmarsh 2001b: 88.

Swain argues that the Second Sophistic used *paideia* as a 'discursive structure' that allowed for interaction on a largely ideological level between the Greek and Roman worlds, an interaction that had previously been unsuccessful (from the Greek point of view) when it had taken the form of military or diplomatic procedures.<sup>56</sup> Building upon this, Swain goes on to comment:

'Greeks identified with Rome politically because Rome encouraged them and needed them (or their friends and colleagues), because there were solid benefits to be gained from Roman citizenship... But cognitively and spiritually none of this means the Greeks did not remain Greek, whereas there is an enormous amount of evidence to prove that they did.'<sup>57</sup>

It would appear that like *paideia*, Roman citizenship could be conceived of as yet another tool for the Greek seeking to work from within what might be termed the Roman colonial system, in an effort to further advance claims for Greek autonomy. *Paideia*, and therefore by extension, culture, was a form of resistance to the imposition of the Roman imperial system upon Greece.<sup>58</sup> The behaviour of Apollonius of Tyana at the festivities at Eleusis (VA 4.19) is an example of this. Apollonius seeks to be initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries but the presiding priest turns him away, declaring that he will not open the Mysteries to the likes of a charlatan. Apollonius retorts with a prophecy that he will be initiated, but by the

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<sup>56</sup> Swain 1996: 87.

<sup>57</sup> Swain 1996: 88.

<sup>58</sup> Important in comprehending the *paideia* / culture relationship that existed between Greece and Rome is another insight of Said's 1993: xiii, namely that 'the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism...' Greeks could therefore prevent the Roman perception of Greekness from being imposed upon them by enacting their own sophisticated narrative.

priest's successor.<sup>59</sup> The Eleusinian Mysteries form the battleground for this encounter because they were a sacred religious activity that was an essential part of Athenian identity, and thus, for an author like Philostratus, who has invented this narrative of Apollonius at Eleusis, they could be made to represent all *Greek* identity as well.<sup>60</sup> The point is driven home by a remark of Anderson's in which he notes the proclivity of such educated individuals for advancing their 'cultural crusades' onto the enemy's metaphorical home soil.<sup>61</sup> In this way then, the conflict is over 'true' Greek identity, with the presiding priest perhaps representing the Romanised elite denying the Greek people (as exemplified in Apollonius) access to their own selfhood through falsified accusations of past immoral behaviour<sup>62</sup> (Apollonius' apparent chicanery) and the imposition of a perceived inferiority stemming from the fact that the Greeks could not possibly live up to the ideal of what it meant to be Greek *for the Romans*. And yet this priest was almost certainly a

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<sup>59</sup> It is also at this time that Apollonius is reported to have criticized the Athenians for several religious infractions. Firstly, (and perhaps as a means of proving that he was wise in spiritual matters, in contradiction of the hierophant's pronouncement) he gave a major lecture in Athens on the subject of proper religious practice, specifically discussing how and when to make the appropriate sacrifice or prayer demanded of each of the gods (VA 4.19). He then rebuked the Athenians for their increasingly immoral behaviour at festival times (VA 4.21), and finally concentrated on what he couches as human sacrifice to Athene and Dionysus, the gladiatorial killings so enjoyed by the people at the theatre on festival occasions (VA 4.22).

<sup>60</sup> Anderson 1989: 182.

<sup>61</sup> Anderson 1989: 183.

<sup>62</sup> I comment further on this Roman view of the Greeks as immoral in Chapter VI.

Greek himself.<sup>63</sup> In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi states that the 'first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model [i.e. the colonizer] and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him.'<sup>64</sup> This may not seem anything like the sometimes malevolent force that characterized the colonial relationship between Africa and Europe, but force is exactly what it is. Rome forced its notion of Greekness on the Greeks, as is exemplified by this Eleusinian priest, who behaves in such a way as to censure Apollonius and thereby deny his claim to being a true Hellene.<sup>65</sup> Habinek informs us that

'for the Romans, Greek culture, like the Greek population and Greek material wealth, was a colonial resource to be exploited and expropriated; to the extent that Greek culture was admired, it was as much for its potential to augment Roman power as for any immanent qualities or characteristics.'<sup>66</sup>

What this means is that the idea of Greekness forced upon the population of Greece was, instead of being a measure of the lack of Greek moral fibre, a way in which the Romans could point to their own divine favour and superiority in the face of an older and better developed culture. This is indicative of the point that Pratt makes, for

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<sup>63</sup> In the binary logic of religious fundamentalism (see pp. 54-55), which sees those who are not in favour of the fundamentalist cause as opponents, anyone standing in the way of Philostratus' über-Hellene (Apollonius of Tyana) must be an enemy.

<sup>64</sup> Memmi 1974: 120.

<sup>65</sup> It is also true that this episode may be viewed as a comment on the degeneracy of local Greek practices, but it is my opinion that given its place in an entirely pro-Hellenic work, the *VA*, the comment is rather intended as an analysis of Roman influence on the Greek world.

<sup>66</sup> Habinek 1998: 34.

‘while the imperial metropole tends to imagine itself as determining the periphery... it habitually blinds itself to the reverse dynamic, the powers colonies have over their “mother” countries. For instance, empires create in the imperial center of power an obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually. *It becomes dependent on its others to know itself.*’<sup>67</sup>

In my opinion Philostratus is engaging in precisely this manner of exchange, for through his works he crafts the world of Rome as he wishes it to be (a Greek outsider looking in), and seeks to reinvigorate centuries old cult ritual (for example, the cult worship of heroes) as a means of guiding the metropolis to a new and perhaps brighter destiny. It is truly a case of the periphery reshaping the metropolis of Rome because it requires the insight of an ‘other’ to make Rome fully cognisant of its shortcomings.

Therefore, the internalization of the Roman concept of Greekness compels the Greeks to renegotiate their own narrative by reaching back into hallowed antiquity for suitable examples of Greekness to emulate, or as Memmi has it, ‘the colonial relationship... chained the colonizer and the colonized into an implacable dependence, molded their respective characters and dictated their conduct.’<sup>68</sup> As I pointed out earlier, Swain suggests that Greeks Romanised in name only and then often because it was of use to possess the citizenship if one happened to dwell

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<sup>67</sup> Pratt 2008: 4 (my italics).

<sup>68</sup> Memmi 1974: ix.

within the bounds of the Roman Empire.<sup>69</sup> He goes on to write that Greeks did remain thoroughly Greek in spirit, something that contradicts the view of Memmi who writes:

‘The colonized does not seek merely to enrich himself with the colonizer’s virtues. In the name of what he hopes to become, he sets his mind on impoverishing himself, tearing himself away from his true self. The crushing of the colonized is included among the colonizer’s values. As soon as the colonized adopts those values, he similarly adopts his own condemnation.’<sup>70</sup>

It must be remembered that Memmi is writing from the point of view of an Africa that suffered grievously under the yoke of European colonial oppression, but I would still contend that his judgment is entirely valid for Graeco-Roman interactions. It might appear at first glance that the Greeks, whom the Romans wished to emulate culturally, had the upper hand in this relationship, especially if their culture was as commanding as Lucian suggests. However, in any country in which foreign governors are put in control of a native population, the ‘colonizer’ and the ‘colonized’ are forced into stark contrast, even though the cultural attainments of the latter might exceed those of the former. Apollonius (VA 5.41.2) sent the following words to the emperor Vespasian in which he comments on the political situation in Greece:

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<sup>69</sup> Swain 1996: 88.

<sup>70</sup> Memmi 1974: 121.



‘You have enslaved Greece, so they say, and you think you have anything more than Xerxes, but it escapes your notice that you have less than Nero; for Nero though possessing it, still refused it.

Ἐδουλώσω τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ὥς φασί, καὶ πλεον μὲν οἶει τι ἔχειν Ξέρξου, λέληθας δὲ ἔλαττον ἔχων Νέρωνος· Νέρων γὰρ ἔχων αὐτὸ παρητήσατο.

To complement this, Philostratus also writes that Nero at least ‘released the Greeks in jest’, Νέρων τοὺς Ἑλληνας παίζων ἡλευθέρωσε (Philostr. VA 5.41.4). Vespasian however is described as ‘being filled with such hostility toward the Hellenes so as to enslave them while being free’, Διαβεβλημένος οὕτω πρὸς Ἑλληνας, ὥς δουλοῦσθαι αὐτοὺς ἐλευθέρους ὄντας (Philostr. VA 5.41.3). Indeed Pausanias (7.17.4) reports that Vespasian believed the Greek people ‘had forgotten freedom’, ἀπομεμαθηκέναι φήσας τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τὸ Ἑλληνικόν. But if as Swain suggests, the Greeks did not wish to become Roman but only desired to employ Roman institutions to their advantage, could Memmi’s ideas instead be turned around to characterize Rome, the colonizer, herself? This would mean that Rome perhaps engaged in the military conquest of their Greek neighbours in order to bend Greece to the form that they believed it *should* have, all in an effort to assuage their own feelings of cultural inferiority. This is evident in a letter that Apollonius (*Ep. Apol.* 54) penned to certain unnamed Roman officials:

‘Of harbours, dwellings, walls, and walkways, some of you know beforehand, but of children in the cities, or of the youth, or of women, neither do you nor the laws give a care. Or else it would be good to be ruled <by you>.’

Λιμένων καὶ οἰκοδομημάτων καὶ περιβόλων καὶ περιπάτων ἐνίοις ὑμῶν  
 πρόνοια, παίδων δὲ τῶν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἢ νέων ἢ γυναικῶν οὐθ' ὑμῖν  
 οὔτε τοῖς νόμοις φροντίς. ἢ καλὸν ἂν εἴη τὸ ἄρχεσθαι.

Clearly, while Roman officials appear to care for the outward needs of Greece, they display very little interest in the welfare of its people. The relationship between colonized Greek and colonizing Roman would thus always be fraught with dangerous uncertainty. As Memmi later writes,

‘the colonized’s self-assertion, born of a protest, continues to define itself in relation to it. In the midst of revolt, the colonized continues to think, feel and live against and, therefore, in relation to the colonizer and colonization.’<sup>71</sup>

Thus whatever the colonized may try to achieve, he must always work from the position of being *colonized*, a position that is by its very nature inferior to the colonizer. It took something like the Second Sophistic, the new expression of an ancient Hellenic glory, to counter the psychological trauma that the Greeks suffered during their military conquest. This in turn moved Greek thought far enough from the Roman present, back to a time when Greek identity did not define itself either through resistance to Rome or subservience to her, but rather by the deeds and ideals that were considered part of what they knew Greece to be. The existence of a Second Sophistic is what allows Philostratus to comment on the degradation of morals and religious belief in the Empire. It is what allows him to

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<sup>71</sup> Memmi 1974: 139.

reach back to a time in which tradition was properly observed, and it therefore provides the foundation for his fundamentalist project.

## Chapter V

### Can the Truth be Stranger than Fiction?

#### Fact and Fallacy as Tools of Fundamentalist Debate.

*But it is clear from the foregoing that it is not the task of the poet to tell of what happened,  
but of the things that might happen, either according to probability or necessity.  
(Aristotle Poetics 1451a36-38)*

The mere idea of someone like ‘Apollonius of Tyana’ was a threat to the authority of the burgeoning Christian religion of the Roman Empire. This is a fact, clearly evident in the venomous attacks Eusebius, in his *Contra Hieroclem*, made on the work of Sossianus Hierocles—a pagan who likened the teaching and deeds of Apollonius to those of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed such a detailed and focused refutation of the life and deeds of a pagan religious figure had probably never been attempted before this, which begs the question—if the experiences of Apollonius were nowhere near as glorious as the florid prose of Philostratus might suggest, indeed if he was little more than a γοῆς, a cheap conjurer, as Eusebius (CH 5) paints him, why was it necessary for a Christian author to ridicule and dissect the story of the pagan holy man in such exquisite detail? Secondly, was Apollonius truly a ‘holy man’, some sort of travelling prophet or healer, a wise man, or perhaps an example of the classic and rarer θεῖος ἀνὴρ? Most importantly, if

Apollonius was a real figure, just how far was Philostratus willing to stretch the truth in the *VA* (as writers of history were wont to do)? Just how much of the *VA* is fiction for pure entertainment purposes, and how much is the sophistic reconception of an already extant character in order to support the 'polyvalent' fundamentalist ideology of Philostratus? To this end, the precise dimensions of Apollonius' character have been the subject of much debate amongst scholars of the *Vita Apollonii* since Meyer's early work in 1917. Whereas my previous chapter approached the idea of Apollonius as being the result of the Second Sophistic, this chapter will attempt to set aside the possibility of Apollonius being an entirely fictional construct, and will begin instead by analysing him according to the religious standards of his own time, namely the first century of our era.

Philostratus was writing his version of Apollonius during what he called the Second Sophistic, a time of literary reinvigoration, a time when manipulating and even embellishing the truth was accepted literary and historiographical practice. Elsner believes that we must first understand that Philostratus was not composing an entirely factual history, but was instead creating a 'myth-historical justification' for a man that came to be seen by many as a demi-god.<sup>1</sup> What this means is that Apollonius was held in high esteem, and it should also be remembered that

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<sup>1</sup> Elsner 1997: 23.

Philostratus' biography of the man is not completely factual because he seeks to draw attention to and emphasize the virtues of Apollonius that were most useful to his own cause. In his discussion of ancient biographical works seeking to commemorate the lives of philosophers, Talbert begins with Leo's<sup>2</sup> older categorisation of ancient biography. He calls attention to three of these specific categories: (1) *encomium*, (2) biography that attempts to unearth the elements of a man's character by analysing his actions in an effort to inspire through his example, and (3) the Alexandrian biography, which focuses on the chronology of events in a man's life and attempts, in a somewhat simplistic way, to critically assess the available evidence, without a view to moral judgment.<sup>3</sup> However, Talbert does point out that something like the VA doesn't appear to fit into Leo's system,<sup>4</sup> and so he proposes a different five-tiered typology, determined primarily by functionality: (1) biography as a moral exemplar; (2) biography designed to 'dispel a false image of the teacher and to provide a true one to follow'; (3) biography intended to bring a certain teacher into disrepute; (4) biography that points out the 'living voice' or true representative of a movement after the passing of its founder; and (5) biography 'validating and/or providing the hermeneutical

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<sup>2</sup> 1901. As quoted by Talbert 1976: 1619.

<sup>3</sup> Talbert 1976: 1619.

<sup>4</sup> Talbert 1976: 1620.

key for the teacher's doctrine'.<sup>5</sup> Philostratus' *VA* would therefore fall into the second category as a text attempting to revive the image of the long-dead pagan mystic in a time during which interest in magical figures, thanks in some part to the miracles claimed by Christians, was at a peak. It could also conceivably be categorized in the first grouping as a work offering up a lifestyle for people to follow, but for the most part, Apollonius appears to be quite an extremist and his actions are therefore not especially conducive to being patterned by the masses. Hadas and Smith offer this summation of the material that Philostratus presents regarding Apollonius:

'initial reports of the sayings and actions of a man at once magician and philosopher, development of them by folkloristic and especially aretalogical traditions, and reworking of these traditions along with other material by Philostratus himself to suit his notion of what a holy man should be.'<sup>6</sup>

Zimmerman believes that the *VA* reveals several aims as it may have been composed with a more 'performative' function in mind, and was then comprised of several differing elements including both a defence of Apollonius' conduct and an effort to teach the public through his example.<sup>7</sup> All of these pseudo-biographical elements seem to unite through the 'performative' guise of the work and form a document of singular purpose, namely the complete characterization of the life of Apollonius of Tyana as an example for the reading public of the tendency toward

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<sup>5</sup> Talbert 1976: 1620-1623.

<sup>6</sup> Hadas & Smith 1965: 198.

<sup>7</sup> Zimmerman 2002: 86.

fundamentalist revivalism in Philostratus. Biographies of saintly characters like Apollonius were also sometimes constructed ‘as a basis for moral instruction’.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Talbert is quite correct in suggesting that it is clear that a work like the *VA* must have had some definite social function by being both propagandistic and didactic in nature.

The *VA* displays the characteristics of several ancient writing techniques and literary genres, all of which need to be assessed in order to gain a proper comprehension of its overall and integrated function, specifically the manner in which Philostratus employs each of them in furthering his fundamentalist agenda. Indeed, a number of the styles used in constructing the various parts of the *VA* were particularly prevalent at that time in history:

‘the favoured reading of the period included numerous novels of love and adventure, either of idealizing or of comic-realistic character, utopian travel accounts, romantic-fictional biographies as well as aretalogies of prophets and philosophers. These offered the reader something to titillate and thrill: comedy, love stories, sex and crime, excitement, adventure, fantastic tales of the marvellous, exotica and—at least in the romance—in general a Happy Ending.’<sup>9</sup>

One could consider this to have been Philostratus’ competition. If he had wanted his work to be read, his ideas disseminated, certain conventions might well have

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<sup>8</sup> Hadas & Smith 1965: 60.

<sup>9</sup> Huber-Rebenich 1999: 189. For more on the readers of the ancient novel, see Stephens 1994: 405-418, and Bowie 1994b: 435-459. West 2003: 67 also presents the intriguing possibility of the novels being read aloud as entertainment for entire households.



been required of him, not only to capture and hold the attention of his readers, but also to disguise his intent from the possible reprisals of stakeholders in the corrupt system against which he was fighting. Being a member of the circle of philosophers convened by the Empress Julia Domna,<sup>10</sup> Philostratus could not very well bite the hand that was feeding him. Nor could he remain silent about the growing moral degeneration that he was witness to in the Roman Empire. Therefore, the only path open to him would seem to have been to present his criticism as fiction, to create a simulacrum for his ideas from existing portrayals of Apollonius of Tyana. It is also important to remember that Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii* is not entirely fact or fiction, but exists instead in the realm of biography, meaning that it follows a slightly different set of rules to the ancient historians. Nonetheless, the categorical distinction that we moderns make between *real* history and the fictional or between truth and lie is not something that ancient writers seem to have given much credence to.<sup>11</sup> Truth and fiction were quite often entwined, creating a relationship of 'fictional complicity' between writer and reader,<sup>12</sup> of which Walton observes that people 'have psychological attitudes towards merely fictional entities, despite the impossibility of physical interaction.'<sup>13</sup> This means that people have a tendency to invest themselves in the characters that they encounter whilst reading, and

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<sup>10</sup> Bowersock 1969: 108.

<sup>11</sup> Francis 1998: 421.

<sup>12</sup> Morgan 1993: 186-187, 193.

<sup>13</sup> Walton 1978: 5-6.

although the reading public of Philostratus' third century would have no possible means of actually interacting with Apollonius of Tyana, they would nonetheless form attitudes toward his words and deeds as depicted in the VA. If, as I suggest, Apollonius functions as a simulacrum for all of Philostratus' own particular variation of the fundamentalist ideal, then Philostratus was able to win over converts, as it were, to his cause through the reactions that his readers had to his character of Apollonius.

It is perhaps the case that, as the literary phrase suggests ancient readers were simply more willing to suspend their disbelief than we are today. This is not to say that the Greeks and Romans were more credulous than we are, but rather to point out that Philostratus was working within the bounds of the Second Sophistic, a paradigm that has no true parallel in the modern world, and was defined by both an overabundance of rhetoric and a revivalist attitude toward earlier celebrated works. Thus Walton disagrees with this concept of the suspension of disbelief, and in a modern example, claims that similar concepts

strongly suggest that people do not (completely) disbelieve what they read in novels and see on the stage or screen, that, e.g. we somehow accept it as fact that a boy named "Huckleberry Finn" floated down the Mississippi River—at least while we are engrossed in the novel. The normal reader does not accept this as fact, nor should he. Our disbelief is "suspended" only in the sense that it is, in some ways, set aside or ignored. We don't believe that there was a Huck Finn, but what interests us is the fact that *make believedly*

there was one, and that make believedly he floated down the Mississippi River and did various other things.’<sup>14</sup>

This reinforces the situation I described earlier, wherein the ancient author characteristically blurred the line between falsehood, reality, and make-believe, an uncertainty that was constructed by the writers themselves and is something in fact emphasized by the work of Philostratus, as it is in his case that this blurring of fact and fiction is a defence mechanism designed to conceal the more vitriolic of his attacks on the current state of political and religious affairs within the Roman Empire through subscribing to the age old writing technique that saw ancient historians take to inventing monologues for famous characters in order to satisfy the voracious appetite of the public. If one, for example, looks at the comments of Sossianus Hierocles and the literary craftsmanship of the *VA* itself, it becomes clear that, as Bowie contends, they are the end product of a fictional mythology, a story that may even have been told time and again, and that changed according to the whim of the teller with every occasion, before it was eventually reformulated by Philostratus for his own particular purposes. Yet if fiction was even part and parcel of the recording of history, then the greater question is that of what exactly the ancients considered fiction to be? Wood once again provides us with a starting point:

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<sup>14</sup> Walton 1978: 23. Furthermore, Walton 1978: 10-11 posits the existence of two types of fictive belief—imaginary and make-believe. According to Walton, make-believe fictions are less firmly established in the mind than imaginary ones.

‘Fiction is pure invention, any sort of fabrication. It is invention which knows it is invention, or which knows *and says* it is invention; or which, whatever it knows and says, is *known* to be invention. It is permissible or noble lying, licensed under quite specific cultural circumstances, and displays (sometimes) the linguistic or textual marks of its license. It is not lying at all, but exempt from all notions of truth and falsehood, licensed in quite a different way. It is a form of double-think, a game of truth in which we pretend to forget that lies are lies; or in which the ordinary rules of truth and falsehood are both simulated and suspended.’<sup>15</sup>

For the purposes of my argument, the most important part of Wood’s analysis is the categorization of fiction as ‘exempt from all notions of truth and falsehood.’

This means that a work like the *VA* does not exist on the border between the real and the unreal, or of what is historical fact and what is invented, but because of its very nature it never needs to claim citizenship of either domain, playing according to whatever rules its author seeks to make use of. Undoubtedly then, the *VA* has no need to subscribe to the regulations that we have set down as governing fiction, nor does it have to follow those providing for the accurate recording of true historical events.

In further pursuit of a comprehension of the ancient understanding of the ambiguities of literary truth, it is apparent that there were ‘many sorts of truth’ for ancient historiographers.<sup>16</sup> It is useful at this juncture to turn briefly to Lucian’s aptly titled *Quomodo Historia conscribenda sit* in order to further our discussion. He

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<sup>15</sup> Wood 1993: xvi (Author’s italics).

<sup>16</sup> Moles 1993: 90.

(Luc. *Hist. Conscr.* 51) describes the task of the historian as being ‘...to arrange well the things that have gone before and to reveal them as distinctly as possible’, καλὸν διαθέσθαι τὰ πεπραγμένα καὶ εἰς δύναμιν ἐναργέστατα ἐπιδείξει αὐτά. He also writes that the historian should possess the qualities of ‘political understanding’ and ‘power of expression’, σύνεσιν...πολιτικὴν and δύναμιν ἐρμηνευτικὴν, in order to properly report events that occur (Luc. *Hist. Conscr.* 34). I believe that included within the ambit of Lucian’s understanding of ἐρμηνευτικὴν is the requirement of a certain flair for the dramatic, which as we have seen was a part of the writing of history in the ancient world. Moreover, Lucian (*Hist. Conscr.* 34) notes that the imitation of the ancients is an essential part of the repertoire of the historian. He is likely referring to the sophistic penchant for classical allusions, along with the techniques of the Second Sophistic that relied on the earlier accounts and observations of history. Although a comprehension of politics and the means with which to expound it are essential to the ancient historian, he must still employ his talents to manufacture an entertaining representation of what has come to pass for the enjoyment of his reading public. It is the artistic and perhaps fallacious implications that are evident in the Lucianic description of the historian’s function that hold the most difficulties for a modern approach to the nature of the *VA*, as from the perspective of a modern writer of history, events should be recorded in an unbiased and typically unadorned

manner. However, even modern histories which are as the saying goes, written by the victors, are only *typically* unembellished and *supposedly* unbiased. It seems that artistry cannot be separated from the recording of fact, and Moles comments on this as well in metaphorical fashion:

‘You can try to extract factual material from an ancient historiographical text, but ...it is like cutting a vital organ from the body. You may or may not succeed (that depends on your surgical skill and the constitution of the individual body), but it will always be a messy business...’<sup>17</sup>

The truth was manipulated by ancient authors for many reasons, some of which are more familiar to us than others. From its mundane use as a propaganda tool to its value as a form of entertainment,<sup>18</sup> to more numinous reasons like flattering the cult of a certain god or augmenting the teachings of a popular holy man like Apollonius, ‘no serious ancient historian was so tied to specific factual truth that he would not sometimes help general truths along by manipulating, even inventing, facts.’<sup>19</sup> The philosopher Plato (*Rep.* 377e-382e) is particularly concerned with this manipulation of the truth and complains of it in discussing the works of the poets and dramatists of his day. He seems particularly troubled by the possibility that people who attend plays and poetry recitations may take the fictional characters as models upon which to pattern their psychological and social development. As Gill has it, dramatists, according to Plato’s observations, ‘instil falsehoods in the psyche

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<sup>17</sup> Moles 1993: 114-115.

<sup>18</sup> Moles 1993: 115.

<sup>19</sup> Moles 1993: 120.

of their audience',<sup>20</sup> possibly resulting in the situation that ancient philosophy fought against tooth and nail, wherein the people often believed that fictional and mythical characters like the heroes of legend actually existed at some point in time. This returns us to the notion of the suspension of disbelief with respect to the credulity of the ancient reading public.

Based upon the findings that I have presented, I believe that any arguments that scholars have advanced specifically singling out the apparently defective chronology evinced in Philostratus' *VA*, should not be measured by the standards of a truthfully and factually recorded historiography. This work should instead be approached as a manifesto of sorts, an argument for a new way of believing that is revealed through the character of Apollonius, and draped upon the shape of a partially invented and partially historical world. The question of whether the *VA* is a work of truth or fallacy is unimportant, and thus so too are any criticisms of this work of Philostratus that expect a particular level of historicity. I therefore also believe that the *VA* cannot be perceived entirely as a work of fiction, as it is so much more than another ancient novel. Both it and the protagonist Apollonius are one of several means through which Philostratus elects to communicate his theory of a general Graeco-Roman religious and social decline hidden beneath the guise of

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<sup>20</sup> Gill 1993: 45.

a champion of ancient philosophy that was eminently pleasing to his imperial patroness given her philosophical and religious curiosities. Apollonius is ultimately a fictional reformulation of an earlier figure that is placed in an historical setting to lend greater impact to the views that he is portrayed as holding.

I shall now begin working through several ‘templates’ of ancient heroic figures—the prototypical holy man, the philosopher, and the θεῖος ἀνὴρ<sup>21</sup>—in an attempt to properly define the Philostratean construct that is Apollonius of Tyana. Two additional points are relevant: first of all, Anderson poses the question of whether the *VA* was ‘intended as a biography or as a novel—or whether it simply ‘evolved’ as a work in which such distinctions are irrelevant’?<sup>22</sup> This is a vitally important distinction for my position, especially when it comes to the behaviour and teachings of Apollonius as being indicative of fundamentalist tendencies in the mind of the author. Secondly, regardless of what modern theories are brought to bear upon the *VA* and Apollonius, Philostratus must always ‘be seen against the standards of contemporary historiography’.<sup>23</sup> We cannot impose modern

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<sup>21</sup> This Greek phrase is typically translated as ‘divine man’, ‘god man’ or ‘godlike man’. For the purposes of standardization I shall always refer directly to the θεῖος ἀνὴρ, which is the third of my three archetypes, by using this Greek term, rather than an approximate translation which might lead it to be confused with the ‘holy man’ archetype.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson 1986: 227.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson 1986: 228.



requirements of truthfulness and accuracy upon his work because Philostratus was simply not an historian in the full sense of the word. This means that while Apollonius may not have met with a particular emperor on the specific date as suggested by Philostratus, or may not even have met him at all, the point remains that the representation of Apollonius is indicative of a general historical phenomenon, in much the same way as works of the period of the Second Sophistic are indicative of the literary trends of the time. As I suggested in the title to this dissertation, Apollonius is the proxy of Philostratus, the simulacrum of all of his fundamentalist tendencies, and the vehicle through which he seeks to set loose his notion of religious change upon the Graeco-Roman world. One final note concerns the possible portrayal of Apollonius as a hero. Jones comments on this perspective by declaring Apollonius to be something called a 'social' hero, a primarily localized historical personality who would have received some form of heroic honours in death.<sup>24</sup> However, if anything contained in the *VA* is to be believed then Apollonius seems to have been too well known for him to have been a purely localized 'social' hero. What this leaves then is the option of the more typical form of heroized personage like an Achilles or Protesilaos. The evidence of Apollonius' broader impact is apparent outside of the *VA* in the large number of

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<sup>24</sup> Jones 2004: 81.

magical protective items enchanted in his name, some of which were attested to function long after his death,<sup>25</sup> for as Isidore (*Ep.* 148) notes:

‘Some beguiled men with empty words, bringing in Apollonius of Tyana having made many things in many places, it is said for the safety of the household.’

κενοῖς τινες λόγοις τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἠπάτησαν τὸν ἐκ Τυάνων εἰσαγάγοντες Ἀπολλώνιον πολλαχόσε πολλὰ τελεσάμενον, ἐπ’ ἀσφαλείᾳ φησὶ τῆς οἰκήσεως.

Clearly, Apollonius’ perceived power was able to extend far beyond his supposed ἥρωον, the typical boundary of a localized hero’s influence.<sup>26</sup> One might suggest that Apollonius be considered as some sort of Panhellenic hero, given, for example, the breadth of his travels, but I do not believe that a case can be made for his having received cult worship on that sort of grand level, a key element of heroic status.<sup>27</sup> Before moving on to begin my analysis with the two broadest categories—‘philosopher’ and ‘holy man’—I should like to connect the idea of heroization to Philostratus’ mode of thought. Hadas and Smith suggest that

‘it is upon the image rather than the person that reverence is bestowed, whether formally in an organized cult or informally in popular tradition, and it is the cult, formal or informal, that ensures the survival of the image.’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Dzielska 1986: 124.

<sup>26</sup> Burkert 1985: 203. Great heroes like Achilles had a far wider reach in terms of their divine authority.

<sup>27</sup> Please note that I shall explore the notion of Greek hero cult as an important expression of Philostratus’ world view in Chapter VIII.

<sup>28</sup> Hadas & Smith 1965: 4.

It is, after all, the image of Apollonius that ultimately concerns Philostratus, as it is this heroic image that allows him to construct the paragon of his religious principles that is required for his revivification of traditional belief. The near divine status granted by possible heroic honours provides a timelessness to Apollonius,<sup>29</sup> who is otherwise just another first century mystic, and it thereby increases the applicability of the man and the ideology that he represents.

### Archetypes of Holiness: The Philosopher

In his *Theaetetus* (17a-d) Plato articulates the decidedly intriguing desire that philosophers should try to become divine beings, or at least as divine as ordinary humans might allow them to become. A stark contrast to this is seen in Ramsay MacMullen's *Enemies of the Roman Order*, wherein he articulates the Roman view of philosophy with the statement, 'too much philosophy was a bad thing, too much thinking got in the way of doing.'<sup>30</sup> This is demonstrable as the perception shared by many Romans, and is made patently obvious by the number of times that philosophers were ordered expelled from the city of Rome. The layabout who pretended to be a philosopher in order to create some air of respectability for his lack of a profession, and who offered no form of practical application for his

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<sup>29</sup> According to Cassius Dio (77.18.4), and following the argument of Dzielska 1986: 56, the Emperor Caracalla may have made improvements to a hero-cult shrine of Apollonius when he visited Tyana in 215 CE, and turned it into a temple devoted to the worship of the Tyanaean Sage.

<sup>30</sup> MacMullen 1967: 3.

ideologies, must have been perceived as entirely useless among a nation of people who boast solely of their deeds. The words of the poet Vergil (*Aen.* 6.851-852) come to mind, describing action as the particular talent of the Roman people and not what would have been considered more ‘cultural’ pursuits, which were a peculiarly Greek predilection. For the Greeks, the opposite was true—being able to philosophize was the mark of *paideia*, which equated to the possession of sufficient wealth and thus sufficient leisure time (*otium*) to engage in a largely unproductive practice in the first place. Dio Chrysostom (34.52) records similar sentiments:

‘Although it has not escaped my notice that many believe philosophers to be relaxing everything and to be neglecting the earnest pursuit of affairs of consequence, and through this to cause more harm.’

καίτοι με οὐ λέληθεν ὅτι τοὺς φιλοσόφους πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν ἐκλύειν ἅπαντα καὶ ἀνιέναι τὰς ὑπὲρ τῶν πραγμάτων σπουδὰς, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο βλάπτειν μᾶλλον·

So it was apparently a commonly held belief that philosophers served no useful purpose in the Roman Empire unless they worked towards some sort of practical end—the philosopher was a burden upon his community, while the sophists, at least, taught a useful skill. At the time of Apollonius two major schools of philosophy vied for supremacy in the hearts and minds of the Graeco-Roman elite—Stoicism, now in what amounted to its third incarnation, and an ancient philosophy just beginning to recapture new ground, Pythagoreanism.<sup>31</sup> For the

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<sup>31</sup> Anderson 1993: 9.

purposes of this dissertation I shall deal with Stoicism and Pythagoreanism in isolation, Pythagoreanism because Philostratus claims that Apollonius held this very creed, and Stoicism because it was for all intents and purposes the dominant philosophy of the period.

At this time in particular (i.e. the early centuries of imperial rule) Stoicism often had the air of rebellion about it, with recognized Stoics like Thrasea Paetus, Barea Soranus, and even Seneca himself all standing up to imperial tyranny in some way. Having begun as the creation of the Greek philosopher Zeno, Stoicism was originally a largely antisocial movement. The Stoic school eventually transformed itself at Rome into a thoroughly state-supporting and traditionalist movement under the teaching of Panaetius, before becoming introspective and representative of the strivings of the individual good man, as opposed to the role played by that same good man within society, when it animated the quill of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.<sup>32</sup> Philosophers who were seen as associating with emperors, royals and notables could very often be tarred with the same brush as their regal patrons. This is because popular philosophies like Stoicism contained a theoretical justification of monarchic rule, or in the case of Rome, imperial power. Philosophers who closeted themselves off from all forms of public life, choosing not to participate in

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<sup>32</sup> For a comprehensive exposition of the development of ancient Stoicism see Rist 1969.

the government of the day, were viewed as completely irrelevant. Seneca (*Ep.* 73.1) however, writes of those with influence over the powerful who were in turn influenced *by* the powerful:<sup>33</sup>

‘It seems to me to be an error to judge those who are faithfully devoted to philosophy to be obstinate and contentious, contemptuous towards magistrates or kings, towards those who administer public affairs. For on the contrary no-one is so thankful for those opposing them, not undeservedly. For they show to no-one more than those who enjoy tranquillity and leisure.’

*Errare mihi videntur, qui existimant philosophiae fideliter deditos contumaces esse ac refractarios, contemptores magistratuum aut regum eorumque, per quos publica administrantur. Ex contrario enim nulli adversus illos gratiores sunt; nec inmerito. Nullis enim plus praestant quam quibus frui tranquillo otio licet.*

In the mind of Seneca therefore, the philosopher favours the competent and benevolent ruler because it is his policies that create the leisure time that allows for men to philosophize in the first place. Nevertheless, it appears that the philosopher was despised if he withdrew from society—for being of no use—and he was despised if he engaged with society in the political sphere—for often becoming a pawn of an administration that was often perceived as being morally bankrupt. Royals and even nobles, for example, regularly maintained a ‘house’ philosopher or sophist, primarily as yet another ostentation, and not so much as an actual commitment to philosophy. The empress Julia Domna likewise appears to have

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<sup>33</sup> MacMullen 1988: 119 writes that to be powerful and influential in Rome meant that one was owed more *by* others and owed less *to* others. The society was built on structures of dependence, even if one was a philosopher or ruler.

maintained her own circle of philosophers and intellectuals who would have discussed their teachings and ideas in her presence. Among their number was the author of the *VA*, Philostratus, although Bowersock believes that in general, the sort of people who would have chosen to serve at the pleasure of an empress would largely have been lesser philosophers who were unable to find fame through regular means.<sup>34</sup>

The self-image of a true philosopher<sup>35</sup> was based upon three key factors—how he lived, how he chose to act, and therefore, how he put his ideals into practice. This was the true measure of his beliefs. It is therefore as I have already stated that for the Romans, to have a *practical* application for one's beliefs was what was really important. Philostratus (*VA* 7.1) reveals that he is of the same mind when he declares in his authorial voice: 'And I know tyranny, is the best test for wise men', Οἶδα καὶ τὰς τυραννίδας, ὡς ἔστιν ἀρίστη βάσανος ἀνδρῶν φιλοσοφούντων.<sup>36</sup> Maintaining one's philosophical integrity while a tyrannical emperor was on the throne, was a trial by fire for the philosopher, who could face questions that cut to the very heart of his beliefs, especially if his school demanded participation in

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<sup>34</sup> Bowersock 1969: 108.

<sup>35</sup> I shall deal more comprehensively with the place of philosophy under the Roman Empire in Chapter IX.

<sup>36</sup> The implication of torture that is evident in the Greek βάσανος brings an intriguing connotation to this statement, perhaps suggesting that to live under a tyrant is indeed a manner of torture for the true philosopher.

politics. For the Stoics and many others like them who chose to continue their philosophical efforts under imperial rule, putting belief into practice included attempts at moulding the current ruler into the form of a philosopher-king. While some sought renewed autonomy for the Senate after the manner of the old Republic, others clung to apparently democratic ideals. The philosophers desiring the heady days of the old Republic were relatively easy to dispose of—the charge of ‘philosophizing’<sup>37</sup> was certainly a well-worn one (Dio Cass. 67.13), and the accusation of conspiring to cause harm to the emperor’s *maiestas* could result either in exile or death.<sup>38</sup> However, it was only the Stoics who seemed especially interested in turning death into a moralizing and didactic exercise—‘It is an evil thing to live under necessity, but it is not necessary to live under necessity,’ or *malum est in necessitate vivere, sed in necessitate vivere necessitas nulla est* as Seneca (*Ep.* 12.10) would have it. Suicide, albeit for honourable and just reasons, was always an option.

MacMullen contends that philosophy as a whole during the imperial period was extremely fluid, with many choosing a mix-and-match approach rather than

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<sup>37</sup> Musonius Rufus for example, was banished for the ‘crime’ of philosophizing, see Whitmarsh 2001a: 279.

<sup>38</sup> Mead 1966: 7. Interestingly, Suetonius (*Dom.* 21) was able to point to this luckless situation from the imperial perspective of Domitian himself, saying that people only ever believed in the existence of conspiracies against the emperor once he had been struck dead.



adopting and adhering to the tenets of a particular school of thought.<sup>39</sup> A person's philosophical stance was therefore based on 'a harmony with economic interest, political bias, and social custom.' Philosophy, MacMullen continues, had to shape itself according to the requirements of the different classes in Rome, and while the upper classes would have battled over who held claim to imperial authority, the lower classes would have had more immediate concerns in mind. The Stoics however, continued to seek after an enlightened ruler, the proverbial good king. Seneca (*Fr.* 1.3) notes several of his better qualities:

'A good prince rules himself, serves the people, despises the blood of no-one: if it is an enemy's [blood], he might still be able to become a friend, if it is a criminal's, it is still a man's.'

*Bonus princeps sibi dominatur, populo servit, nullius sanguinem contemnit: inimici est, sed eius, qui amicus fieri potest, nocentis est, sed hominis.*

Suetonius (*Aug.* 51.3) adds to this the ability to endure harsh criticism from all quarters, and quotes from a letter to the Emperor Tiberius, stating that the ruler should satisfy himself with the fact that no one has been able to actually bring him harm.<sup>40</sup> Absolute respect was demanded of a ruler for his subjects and from his subjects, an idealistic proposition if there ever was one. Yet the Stoic philosopher sought to guide the ruler along this path, in order to teach the emperor moderation and right judgment. In his *Kingship Orations* (2.26-27) Dio Chrysostom presents a

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<sup>39</sup> MacMullen 1967: 49, 62.

<sup>40</sup> *Satis est enim, si hoc habemus ne quis nobis male facere posit...*

similar picture of the king who studies philosophy not to better himself, but because it is already in accord with his own character, and provides the tools through which he might engineer progress for his community. As I have already noted, Stoicism did not always conform to the morality of the age, and was even somewhat revolutionary in its origins. This is made apparent through the senatorial example of men like Thrasea Paetus who elected to forsake the governmental participation that was both the right and responsibility of their station in favour of silent protest through inaction, thereby returning imperial Stoicism full-circle to its antisocial beginnings.

Before moving to assess the place of the second of my archetypes of holiness, that of the ancient holy man, I should like to make a brief mention of Pythagoreanism and its influence in the first few centuries of imperial Roman rule, given that Pythagorean beliefs are ascribed to Apollonius of Tyana. This is a philosophy far older than Stoicism, and with an equally varied tradition. Several of its major tenets provided for points of contention between its adherents and the government of their day. At the head of these was perhaps the Pythagorean belief in the transmigration of souls which often proved a stumbling block in public cult activities, as Philostratus (VA 1.8: Apollonius' refusal to eat or wear animal products; VA 1.31-32: he makes an offering of incense to the gods but leaves as the

blood sacrifice is about to begin) is keen to point out through Apollonius' refusal to participate in any blood offerings to the gods, a perspective that is based upon this very doctrine. This kind of extreme vegetarianism is a clear contradiction of the *mos maiorum*, given that blood sacrifice was an essential part of the ritual practice of Graeco-Roman religion, and it is thus a cutting criticism of what many saw as the religious foundation of *Romanitas*. Whereas the Philostratean Apollonius would never decree that men should simply not honour the gods because of the corrupt nature of bloody sacrificial rituals, he does come out strongly against excesses that animal sacrifice was sometimes prone to:

‘But to offer sacrifice expensively before receiving something from the gods is not sacrifice, but is itself begging that one not be held responsible for horrid and grievous actions.’

καὶ αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ πρὶν εὐρέσθαι τι παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελῶς θύειν οὐ θύοντός ἐστιν, ἀλλ’ ἐαυτὸν παραιτουμένου σχετλίων τε καὶ χαλεπῶν ἔργων. (VA 1.10.2).

Thus despite the fact that in a perfect world, Apollonius would love nothing more than to see all people preserving the lives of all creatures, even for sacrificial purposes, both he and his biographer seem to realize that this is quite impossible, given the manner in which sacrificial ritual is embedded within the fabric of Graeco-Roman society. He therefore seeks to purify their ritual practices through his teaching and example, and in this way, return his fellow citizens to the basic traditions of their ancestors. And yet Pythagoreanism was never so extreme as to

eliminate it entirely from the popular mindset, as Iamblichus indicates in his *Vita Pythagorica* (248-264), wherein he details the instances of Pythagorean control over the governments of numerous Italian cities. He even notes that they apparently fared rather well at the art of governance, until a rebellion saw Pythagorean rule collapse entirely. Perhaps asceticism was seen as a worthy way of governing one's own life, but is not something that should be held up as the example for all to follow.

#### Archetypes of Holiness: The Holy Man.

Homer (*Od.* 17.485-6) once wrote of the gods assuming human form:

‘And the gods in the guise of foreigners from strange lands,  
Coming forth in all shapes, they visit the cities.’

καί τε θεοὶ ξείνοισιν ἐοικότες ἄλλοδαποῖσι,  
παντοῖσι τελέθοντες, ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόληας.

This can be viewed as true of both the pagan holy man and the much rarer θεῖος ἄνθρωπος, in that they were both in essence vessels for, and champions of the power of the gods. Anderson begins his book, *Sage, Saint and Sophist* by defining the pagan holy man in more general anthropological terms:

‘He has access to some [supernatural] information... He delivers his message in a prominent time and place. He engenders opposition (and belated interest and support, since he is regarded as right); he engages the

attention of the authorities in an indecisive way; and he has a spectacular death.’<sup>41</sup>

Later on in his argument, Anderson adds what he terms the ‘basic necessities of a holy man’s society’.<sup>42</sup> These so-called necessities include ‘friends and enemies, clients and emperors, skills of communication and “superhuman” performance’. All of these relationships and capabilities contributed to the growing popularity and utility (especially as compares to the average philosopher) of holy men across the Empire, which Brown in turn attributes to the general climate of oppression and disorder that became more and more prevalent in later years.<sup>43</sup> The holy man can thus be interpreted as a symptom (or perhaps the cure) of oppressive Roman imperial intervention in the Greek-speaking East.

The pagan notion of the holy man begins in the company of the religious establishment and ends on the periphery of society. As Fowden has it,

‘...a tendency to associate holiness with philosophical learning... determined the essentially urban... and privileged... background of the pagan holy man, and also encouraged his gradual drift to the periphery of society’.<sup>44</sup>

In the ancient world, all manner of learning was coveted and tightly controlled by the ruling class, meaning that the philosophizing preacher would typically have

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<sup>41</sup> Anderson 1994: 1-2.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson 1994: 33.

<sup>43</sup> Brown 1971: 80.

<sup>44</sup> Fowden 1982: 33.

started out in life with a sound fiscal position that would therefore have allowed for the leisure time to devote to the serious study of a school of philosophy. He would have thus been seen as another cog in the machine, so to speak. The relegation of the holy man to the status of outsider envisions a dramatic act of separation (for example, St. Francis of Assisi) that allows the holy man to act against the Establishment while simultaneously having previously benefitted from its structures. This process renders the holy man a 'potent threat' to authority figures because he has experienced both sides of the grand equation of imperial life, from both the centre and the periphery, and has elected to reject one in favour of the other.<sup>45</sup> He is thus a very effective observer and commentator, and his very presence is endowed with a certain degree of 'social relevance' as one who had abandoned the established practices of privilege for a reaffirmation of truly important spiritual matters.<sup>46</sup> Enhancing this relevance to society was the belief that one's personal conduct was an equally important barometer of holiness, an idea that was fed by the legend of figures like Pythagoras.<sup>47</sup> Following this logic, the holy man is a philosopher who serves the gods rather than a particular philosophical school, and is a man who puts his ideals into practice through his own lived experience. Brown believes that the position of the holy man in pagan

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<sup>45</sup> Anderson 1994: 10.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson 1994: 10.

<sup>47</sup> Fowden 1982: 36.

society even allowed him to usurp the place of the oracle as the great mediator of the ancient world, a transformation from outsider to insider that granted to the holy man a unique objectivity founded on the 'habits and expectations of a new, more intensely personal style of society'.<sup>48</sup> The holy man was a reflection of the notion that salvation (particularly in the context of Christianity and other similar Mystery religions) was something personal, a decision that one made for oneself. This is an idea that was completely foreign to the ancient religious context in which the holy man found himself, a context that saw older systems of belief placing the needs of the *polis* ahead of those of the individual. Indeed it is truly a concept that first comes to the fore in the framework of ancient religion with the advent of Christianity, which held that one's own faith and actions were what determined fitness for future reward. This was not a religious doctrine favourable towards the old pagan view of orthopraxy as dictating the acceptability of religious rituals, and in this way it is certainly a rejection of the *polis* religion of Philostratus' day in favour of an individually oriented piety.

Despite having come from within the Establishment, the holy man became a symbol of the other, or the "'stranger" *par excellence*' as Brown calls him.<sup>49</sup> His ascetic and religious lifestyle situates him in a position that allows for commentary

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<sup>48</sup> Brown 1971: 100.

<sup>49</sup> Brown 1971: 91.

on social and religious issues (and sometimes even political ones), as is evident in Apollonius' visits to various Greek sanctuaries in order to set right their teachings (VA 4.24.1) and in his 'king-making' behaviour (he, for example, debates the best form of government in the presence of Vespasian, VA 5.31-40). Not only was the holy man emblematic of the outsider, but he represented the sacred in the world of the profane. Brown describes him as a 'blessed object', something that was meant to stand out or be set apart from the normal in ancient society.<sup>50</sup> This is evident in the way in which Philostratus consistently portrays the actions of Apollonius as setting him apart from the rest of society, with his vows of poverty (he offers his inheritance to his brother, VA 1.13.1-2), chastity (while Pythagoras commits to a monogamous relationship, Apollonius chooses to remain entirely celibate, VA 1.13.3), and years of silence (*Ep. Apol.* 8), being prime examples and to a certain extent mirroring the practices of the early Christian ascetics. The holy man also set himself apart from society through the use of miraculous powers—great attention-grabbing symbolic acts that pointed to the uniqueness and sanctity of the holy man in question. In describing the different forms of magic, Ps-Nonnus (*Adv. Iul.* 1.70) makes mention of the powers of Apollonius of Tyana:

'And magic, they say, was discovered by the Medes and then the Persians, but magic differs from sorcery and sorcery from witchcraft, because magic is the summoning of goodly spirits for some good association, just as the oracles of Apollonius of Tyana exist for good.'

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<sup>50</sup> Brown 1971: 97.



τὴν δὲ μάγειαν φασὶν εὖρον Μῆδοι εἶτα Περσαι, διαφέρει δὲ μαγεία γοητείας καὶ γοητεία φαρμακείας τούτοις, ὅτι ἡ μὲν μαγεία ἐπὶ κλησὶς ἐστὶ δαιμόνων ἀγαθοποιῶν πρὸς ἀγαθοῦ τινος σύστασιν, ὥσπερ τὰ τοῦ Ἀπολλωνίου Τυανέως θεσπίσματα δι' ἀγαθοῦ γεγονόνασι.

Similarly, and in keeping with this idea, Anderson neatly clarifies the perceived difference between miracle and its bastardized brother, magic, with this line: 'Miracle is a term of approval applicable to the work of one's friends, while magic in many but by no means all cases turns out to be the work of one's enemies.'<sup>51</sup> For the pagan, miracles were a symbol of power, a confirmation of the holy man's proximity to the divine, and ultimately revealing of the might of his possibly divine nature.<sup>52</sup> Brown summarizes as follows:

'...just as the miracle demonstrates a hidden intangible nucleus of power, so the miracle story is often no more than a pointer to the many more occasions on which the holy man has already used his position in society. The miracle condenses and validates a situation built up by more discreet means.'<sup>53</sup>

If miracles can be understood as a tool that the holy man employs in order to relate to the outside world, how exactly could one characterize these relations, especially as concerns the religious and political authorities of his time? In the political sphere, the reception of a holy man depends largely upon the position that he takes regarding the use and abuse of governmental power. This was particularly true of the Imperial period and of holy men like Apollonius of Tyana, who were wealthy

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<sup>51</sup> Anderson 1994: 28.

<sup>52</sup> Fowden 1982: 50.

<sup>53</sup> Brown 1971:87.

highborn individuals until they decided to strike out in a new and untried direction of religious belief. It is certainly the case that 'dramatic interventions of holy men in the high politics of the Empire were long remembered', but the more basic relations were directly dependent upon the kind of leader or holy man that was involved in a given situation.<sup>54</sup> Should a holy man ever have come out in favour of a certain king or emperor (e.g. the relationship that Philostratus suggests between Apollonius and Vespasian) he could have expected to be rewarded for his efforts. Opposition, however, could result in a broad range of outcomes from the holy man being politely tolerated, usually as a result of the fact that he is viewed as sacrosanct because of his apparently exceptional nature, to his public vilification or even his being sentenced to exile or death.<sup>55</sup> Nowhere is this clearer than in the often tenuous relationship between philosophers, astrologers, magicians, and the Roman emperors. Seneca for example, was the *de facto* ruler of Rome in the early years of Nero's rule, bringing forth the so-called *quinquennium aureum* until the emperor finally turned on him, and Seneca, in observance of his own words (*Ep.* 12.10), chose suicide over a life that would have been spent at the Emperor's

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<sup>54</sup> Brown 1971: 81.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson 1994: 166.

mercy,<sup>56</sup> an action that Tacitus (e. g. *Ann* 15.59) tends to disprove of as being of no help to anyone but the tyrant himself.

Shifting focus to the holy man's relations with the religious establishment, Fowden contends that he was actually 'compromised' by his closeness to traditional pagan cult practice.<sup>57</sup> Essentially, the holy man came from amongst the very same people who dictated religious practice amongst the Romans—the nobility—granting a tacit sanction to these very beliefs until such time as he openly came out against them. The problem is thus how a holy man is able to both defend and criticize the same cult practices, given that he was born from the traditional paradigm but seeks to shift these practices in a new direction? Anderson explains this strange situation through the Pythagoreans, whose 'tradition laid great emphasis on the sage's duty both to honour the gods himself, and to ensure that the public cults were conducted in a fit and becoming manner.'<sup>58</sup> As a self-proclaimed Pythagorean, this is the approach demonstrated by the Philostratean Apollonius, and in behaviour that is in keeping with this statement of Anderson's, Apollonius

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<sup>56</sup> Rudich 1993: 11. Rudich continues by saying that 'if it had not been Seneca who was regarded as the governing force, those first five years under Nero would be hardly more praised by posterity than the first five years of Claudius' reign. The mere fact that the famous philosopher was running the state gave the period an unprecedented glamour in the eyes of historians.'

<sup>57</sup> Fowden 1982: 52.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson 1994: 52.

engages in what Elsner terms an ‘orgy of temple visiting’.<sup>59</sup> Why might this behaviour have been thought to compromise the moral position of the holy man? Having to champion the existing state of pagan belief in the Roman Empire could well have meant that the holy man had to oppose innovations in Graeco-Roman religion, including the expansion of mystery religions and the imperial cult. While paganism was by its very nature ‘accommodating to anything but the most exclusively monotheist divine manifestation’<sup>60</sup> a champion of paganism, especially as he is portrayed from Philostratus’ own point of view, could not be as forgiving with those who trespassed upon his religious territory. In conclusion then, the holy man is in some instances quite similar to the θεῖος ἀνὴρ (as will now be illustrated) as both are in fact miracle-workers and the foremost proponents of their particular belief systems. However, Brown notes that they derive their power from distinct sources:

‘... while the θεῖος ἀνὴρ continued to draw his powers from a bottomless sense of occult wisdom preserved for him in and by society... the holy man drew his powers from outside the human race...’<sup>61</sup>

The holy man is an exceptional human being, while the θεῖος ἀνὴρ not a mortal human at all, but is in some way divine. The holy man serves a god while the θεῖος ἀνὴρ might very well be one.

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<sup>59</sup> Elsner 1997: 26.

<sup>60</sup> Anderson 1994: 5.

<sup>61</sup> Brown 1971: 92.

Archetypes of Holiness: The θεῖος ἀνὴρ

In modern religious thought the category of pagan holy man is extraordinarily broad, and filled with examples that range from the most mundane of philosophical preachers to the miraculous glories of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ himself.<sup>62</sup> In my opinion the θεῖος ἀνὴρ, or divine man, cannot truly be placed in a discrete category of its own. Instead, the divine man is the most perfect expression and extension of the ancient holy man, so supremely holy that he must be a god, perhaps the product of the union of a pair of deities, or perchance sired by one divine and one mortal parent. In all cases however, he stands completely beyond the realm of normal human experience and comprehension, but his strange blending of human and divine, of mortal and immortal, is indicative of the belief in the immanence of the divine found in the Graeco-Roman religious paradigm from which he is born.<sup>63</sup> It is Philostratus' own apparent obsession with utilizing superlative expressions of religious perfection in his portrayal of Apollonius of Tyana that make the θεῖος ἀνὴρ a worthwhile inclusion in this discussion. I shall return to the issue of perfection and the characterization of Apollonius as a paragon at a later juncture.

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<sup>62</sup> Koskenniemi 1998: 458.

<sup>63</sup> See once again, the remarks of Hopkins 1999: 12-13, quoted in Chapter II.

The notion of the divine man quite possibly originates in Platonic philosophy, particularly with the idea of philosophers assuming divine status by way of their pursuit of ἀρετή. Naturally this is indicative of a Euhemerist line of reasoning. The holy man makes a life-altering choice of separation whilst the θεῖος ἀνὴρ has a birthright to live up to. The holy man decides that he should live his life by different, religiously-based regulations. He gives up his previous existence for an ascetic life of prayer or teaching. Apollonius for example, gives up his familial inheritance (VA 1.13.1) and lives in any temple that will have him (VA 1.16.3). These fairly dramatic acts occur within the context of ancient societal norms and can therefore be taken as evidence of the radical *personal* decision that truly delineates the distinction between the θεῖος ἀνὴρ and the pagan holy man, a personal approach that marks all religious innovations of the time in which Christianity and the mystery religions flourished. Indeed, as the old saying goes, one is born great (the θεῖος ἀνὴρ) while the other has greatness thrust upon him (the holy man).

However, a case can also be made for a certain level of subjectivity being inherent in the θεῖος ἀνὴρ / holy man dichotomy. Being referred to as a θεῖος ἀνὴρ in the ancient world depended largely upon the attitudes of the individual making such

a value judgment.<sup>64</sup> This is in large part due to the fact that, as Flinterman continues, the divine was for the first time being distinguished as a uniquely personal area of experience, and because of this it was constantly being redefined based upon the same factors governing the growth and development taking place within Roman religion itself. The imperial cult is a perfect example of this phenomenon, as it was initially born of the cult of the ruling emperor's (i.e. Augustus) *genius*, and gradually transforms over time into the absolute deification of deceased rulers, and on occasion, of their family members as well.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the incorporation of various Eastern mystery cults within the growing surfeit of belief systems practiced by the Roman people, led to an increasing demand for this new form of personal piety that saw Roman believers shifting away from the traditional cults to find spiritual satisfaction through these innovations. This personalized approach to belief ran counter to the existing trend towards collectivism in Graeco-Roman religion, an element in traditional belief that must be understood as essential, not only to the basis of Roman faith but also to Roman society itself, because of the pivotal position that religious ritual occupied in Roman life. It is Philostratus' decision to argue against this inclination toward individualism by returning to the foundational traditions of the hero cult, thereby encouraging social cohesion as a means of combating the erosion of the religious

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<sup>64</sup> Flinterman 1996: 83. The magic or miracle divide is quite similar in this regard.

<sup>65</sup> My full discussion of Philostratus' engagement with the imperial cult occurs in Chapter VII.

foundations of Roman morality. As a θεῖος ἀνὴρ, Apollonius gives voice to this Philostratean argument by utilizing his divine authority to support the Pythagorean philosophy that shapes his teachings, and in this way he appeals to a tradition more ancient and venerable than any recently established mystery rite.

Brown labels the 'holy man' archetype as the "'stranger" *par excellence*',<sup>66</sup> a designation that is quite possibly equally appropriate to the θεῖος ἀνὴρ, who when he chooses to perform what are recognizably ascetic actions (e.g. Apollonius' five year long vow of silence, VA 1.14.2) truly becomes Brown's 'total stranger',<sup>67</sup> unable to engage with society in all but the most curious of ways, which serves only to further separate him from the mainstream. While a typical holy man can continue to relate to others on a basic human level, even after he has engages in what might perhaps be considered acts of corporal mortification, the θεῖος ἀνὴρ is unable to do this, for he is not entirely human to begin with.

At this point it is best to first assess this θεῖος ἀνὴρ typology by way of comparing it to the more generic life pattern of the typical holy man. Koskenniemi presents the essential elements of the pattern as being (i) a prophesied birth that is (ii) surrounded by miracles. (iii) He teaches and works miracles with authority, even

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<sup>66</sup> Brown 1971: 91.

<sup>67</sup> Brown 1971: 91.



as a young man. (iv) He is either greatly respected for being the offspring of a divine being,<sup>68</sup> or because of his magical / miraculous activities, he is accused of witchcraft or perhaps even of fomenting rebellion, and (v) could very well be put to death. Finally, the θεῖος ἀνὴρ dies. This is often followed by (vi) a resurrection or ascension scene.<sup>69</sup> Importantly, Koskenniemi concludes by pointing out that Apollonius of Tyana and Jesus of Nazareth are the only two ancient miracle workers who actually conform completely to this pattern.<sup>70</sup> If this is indeed the case then there would seem to be no logical reason for retaining a typology that is so specific as to exclude all but two occurrences of the phenomenon. A more useful pattern for the θεῖος ἀνὴρ is therefore necessary if the category is to remain analytically useful.

In pursuance of the re-establishment of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ as a viable analytical tool, I should like to juxtapose it with certain aspects of the tradition surrounding the pagan holy man in hopes of distilling the various aspects of the representation of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ into a more useful and concentrated form. My own typology will

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<sup>68</sup> Alexander of Abonouteichos (Luc. *Alex.*) built up a great cult for his new god, Glycon, by virtue of his being descended from the divine Pythagoras.

<sup>69</sup> Koskenniemi 1998: 461.

<sup>70</sup> Butler 1948: 2-3 refers to a similar pattern as the 'myth of the magus'. Butler augments the requirements for the typology as follows: (i) A supernatural or mysterious origin; (ii) portents seen at birth; (iii) perils during infancy; (iv) an initiation; (v) distant wanderings; (vi) magical contests; (vii) a trial or persecution; (viii) a final scene; (ix) violent or mysterious death; (x) resurrection and/or ascension.

be based upon a simple logical progression—if the θεῖος ἀνὴρ is in fact truly descended from the divine, then he must be able to convince others of this fact for his mission and message to be successful. In order to persuade others of this fact, the θεῖος ἀνὴρ must provide proof, be it either through tangible and largely miraculous means, or through displaying supernatural and often precognitive knowledge. Word of his divinity and power must then spread abroad. In this way, his divine descent must be made apparent through miraculous means that are responsible for bolstering his claim to fame. This elementary breakdown is unfortunately derailed by the existence of men and women who are granted power by the gods that they serve, with the many early Christian missionaries as case in point. While the likes of Paul or Thecla could certainly be categorized as, at the very least, holy men (and women), their inclusion in the category of θεῖος ἀνὴρ is restricted by the requirement of divine descent. Although their fame is increased through their ability to work miracles, they do not do so because of any inherent capability, but rather because of their faith. In terms of this argument, the θεῖος ἀνὴρ does not need to have faith, already being divine. In a similar manner to Koskenniemi, Smith presents a simplified comparison of the attributes of Jesus, Apollonius, and Asclepius.<sup>71</sup> All are healers and miracle workers with divine parentage. They provide moral instruction and are viewed as saviour figures by

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<sup>71</sup> Smith 1971: 186.

their followers, although only Jesus and Asclepius assumed the status of true divinities. The enemies of this trio all accuse them of magical practices, and in the end all three managed to transcend death.

Therefore, with this information in mind a four part typology may be constructed, based upon my suggested progression. Firstly, the working of miracles appears to be an essential part of the arsenal of any θεῖος ἀνὴρ and must therefore be included as an obvious criterion. Secondly, some form of preaching is required on the part of the divine man—Apollonius of Tyana generally preferred speaking only to his closest disciples, Alexander of Abonouteichos used his oracular sanctuary to spread word about the ‘god’ Glycon, and Jesus of Nazareth preached to large crowds in the countryside of Judaea. Thirdly, when discussing the holy man, Anderson emphasizes what he terms the ‘grand tour’ aspect of his career,<sup>72</sup> a point that he shares with Butler<sup>73</sup>, and that is at least evident in the reports on the lives of both Apollonius and Jesus. This ‘grand tour’ refers to the fact that the θεῖος ἀνὴρ travels far and wide in order to maximize the reach of his message and influence. Without the θεῖος ἀνὴρ engaging in travel to this large extent (Apollonius went as far as India for example) he would remain a purely localized phenomenon, a beloved mystic canonized by his home town but utterly irrelevant

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<sup>72</sup> Anderson 1994: 43.

<sup>73</sup> See above footnote 70.

to the rest of the world. This idea of the mystic touring the world around him is best represented by the ancient concept of pilgrimage. In *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece*, Matthew Dillon indicates that the phenomenon of pilgrimage was a commonplace in ancient religion, with people setting out across the known world for reasons ranging from initiation to the seeking of oracular advice, to attending major festivals.<sup>74</sup> The Philostratean Apollonius can be argued to be making two distinct kinds of pilgrimage, with the first a pilgrimage in search of knowledge, one that takes him to the greatest wise men in the ancient world—Magi, Brahmins, and Gymnosophists—and his second pilgrimage leading him in a dutiful visitation of every major Greek religious sanctuary, Elsner's 'orgy of temple visiting',<sup>75</sup> during which he brings his newly acquired knowledge to bear upon the decaying rituals of these once sacred sites. This is of course reminiscent of the classical practice of θεωρία or *theôria*. Rutherford catalogues the possible meanings attributed to the term, with the most important among these definitions being *theôria* as a religious festival or involving a spectator at such an event.<sup>76</sup> Nightingale notes that its most traditional sense is that of 'a civic embassy sent to an oracular center, generally for the purposes of consulting the oracle.'<sup>77</sup> The *theôros*, the ambassador conducting such an embassy, would be charged not only with visiting

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<sup>74</sup> Dillon 1997: xiv-xv.

<sup>75</sup> Elsner 1997: 26.

<sup>76</sup> Rutherford 2000: 134-136.

<sup>77</sup> Nightingale 2001: 29-30.

the sanctuary to obtain the oracular pronouncement, but also with reporting all of the events to the people of his home city. *Theôria* was thus primarily a religious act, the action of witnessing the occurrences of a wondrous festival celebration in honour of a particular deity or of obtaining oracular wisdom as well, but as with all things in the Graeco-Roman world, it could have a political dimension as well. This visiting of temples across the world embodies the idea of movement from the realm of the 'secular' to the 'sacred', and simultaneously elevates religious events to a 'panhellenic space'<sup>78</sup> in which individual interactions take on a greater Greek significance. As Apollonius' travels across the known world suggest, there was an element of encountering the foreign or the other in this religious act of *theôria*, which could plausibly alter the worldview of the traveller. Socrates (Pl. *Rep.* 327a-b) illustrates this when he speaks of an early festival of the Thracian goddess Bendis in Athens, for not only did he attend to make sacrifice to the deity, but also to experience precisely how the Thracians conducted a religious festival. This provides a good point at which to briefly assess the makeup of another form of *theôria*—that of the philosophical variety. For the philosophers, *theôria* was an act of contemplation, closely linked to the religious form because one could be said to travel to a festival in order to contemplate the god or goddess concerned. Nightingale argues that the 'goal of philosophic *theôria* is, first and foremost, to

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<sup>78</sup> Rutherford 1995: 276.

transform the individual soul, conferring upon it a state of wisdom, happiness, and blessedness.<sup>79</sup> This desire for wisdom is of course evident in Apollonius' decision to visit the three most venerable sources of knowledge and wisdom in the ancient world. However, as Aristotle (Fr. 58 Rose) frames the issue, wisdom grants no benefit to those who seek it with some manner of reward in mind. It is the thing in and of itself that is important. Aristotle's definition of wisdom as useless in practical terms, is specifically because of the fact that wisdom is to be chosen entirely for its own sake, as he notes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (10.1-16), and it is in a similar manner that Plato (*Rep.* 487d, 489b) vigorously defends the practice of *theôria* against this label of uselessness. Rather, it is through *theôria* that the philosopher is able to move from *aporia* to a state of wonderment at the universe (Arist. *Meta.* 983a 14-15), and it is wonder, Plato (*Theat.* 155c-d) argues, that is the motivating factor in all philosophical speculations. Thus Apollonius could be argued to engage in his *theôric* pilgrimage, not only to bear witness to the rites of the gods, but also to gain the wisdom and divine authority that is necessary for him to begin the programme of ancient fundamentalist revivification that Philostratus envisions. In the manner of a philosopher, he sets out with no goal other than wisdom in mind, and his wisdom is made complete through his great pilgrimage to the holy sites of the Greek world.

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<sup>79</sup> Nightingale 2001: 38.

Finally, it is important to consider how the divinity of the θεῖος ἀνήρ, or rather his claim of being divine, is received by the general public. After all, should reports of the teachings and deeds of a θεῖος ἀνήρ never spread beyond his home region, then even claiming descent from a god or goddess would be of absolutely no consequence. For the mission of the θεῖος ἀνήρ to succeed he must therefore be able to display the importance of his message in both word and deed. Thus, in my opinion these four points—working miracles, preaching a particular message, wide-ranging travels, and believable divine descent—are what truly define the θεῖος ἀνήρ. Other elements that have been suggested as part of this typology are sometimes far too specific or far too general, with almost every iconic Graeco-Roman hero or heroine attesting some manner of portent at his or her birth, and almost no-one outside of the Judaeo-Christian tradition being able to claim an ascension scene. Even something as apparently outlandish as participation in magical contests (to again draw on Butler’s proposed typology, footnote 70 above) would include the ancient Hebrew prophets as well, who sometimes engaged in such contests to prove the power of Jehovah to non-believers (e.g. 1 Kgs. 18:20-40).

Yet what purpose is served by establishing a more permeable boundary around the θεῖος ἀνήρ typology, and how might this assist in the analysis of Philostratus and his vision of Apollonius of Tyana? The less rigid categorization I suggest

allows for the inclusion of further examples of the type, examples that had previously been excluded from the more demanding specific typologies. Through the addition of more than two examples of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ we can better judge the nature of Apollonius, and equally importantly, assess the material and tradition that Philostratus might have erected his version of Apollonius upon. From the perspective of this new system, it is possible to include the life of a possible Hellenistic θεῖος ἀνὴρ named Eunus. He comes to the fore in about the mid-second century BCE as the prophet of a Syrian goddess, with whom he professes to have a 'special relationship'.<sup>80</sup> In about 135 BCE he leads a large revolt of slaves on the island of Sicily, but was apparently also able to predict the future and even breathe fire on occasion.<sup>81</sup> Thus he claims to possess a divine nature which he attempts to prove through miracle and prophecy, and this allows him to engage in the spread of his story through the political means of a slave revolt. The story of Eunus mirrors that of Apollonius on a very basic level, although Eunus takes specific political action through his slave revolt, something that Apollonius consistently avoids. In conclusion, the θεῖος ἀνὴρ type therefore seems to include aspects of the behaviour of the pagan holy man and the philosopher, all combined to create the perfect blend of divine being with the best of what the ancient sages

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<sup>80</sup> Flinterman 1996: 88.

<sup>81</sup> Flinterman 1996: 88; Smith 1971: 180.



had to offer. The θεῖος ἀνὴρ, of which Apollonius most certainly is a profound example, is thus the paragon of holiness in the ancient world.<sup>82</sup>

Both history, an apparently factual pursuit, and the early novel, a largely fictional creation that ‘is known to be invention’,<sup>83</sup> are two literary forms that manifest themselves in the *Vita Apollonii*. This is a text that, as I have suggested, attempts to masquerade as a biographical work in an effort to suspend the disbelief of the reader, allowing for Philostratus to establish his arguments. But within the pages of the *VA*, Philostratus sought more to teach by example, than to simply record the example of his ‘Pythagorean saint’.<sup>84</sup> We should not therefore begrudge Philostratus some creative reinvention of the Apollonius legend if such techniques were already accepted practice in the writing of history. Nor should we anachronistically expect the level of factual accuracy from Philostratus that we find in modern histories. However, it is still necessary to remain vigilant of the Philostratean tendency toward exaggeration and hyperbole. As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, two of Talbert’s biographical types are evident in the body of the *VA*, namely providing an inspirational example for others to follow

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<sup>82</sup> Bolton 1962: 129, 146 seems to offer the suggestion of another Pythagorean θεῖος ἀνὴρ in Aristeas of Proconnesus. He appears to have possessed magical powers and may have received heroic honours, marking him as a divine and not a mortal being, although his abilities do, to some extent, suggest that he is more akin to an ancient shaman.

<sup>83</sup> Wood 1993: xvi.

<sup>84</sup> Dzielska 1986: 142.

and correcting previously inaccurate portrayals of the ‘master’ so to speak. In the case of the former, Philostratus does indeed seem to be moulding Apollonius into the form of a saviour figure. The latter biographical type is apparent from the outset when Philostratus openly declares that the two other commentators on Apollonius’ existence—Moeragenes and Maximus of Aegeae<sup>85</sup>— have been mistaken in their conclusions and thus it is that he must correct what has gone before. This dual purpose in the *VA*’s construction is made apparent in Philostratus’ lack of emphasis on some areas of Apollonius’ life. For example, although he records many of his miraculous deeds, they seem to have been relegated to a secondary position by both his displays of wisdom and his preaching. This is where the three archetypes of holiness that I have discussed—philosopher, holy man and θεῖος ἀνὴρ—truly come into their own. Philostratus is writing particularly to stress the ‘philosopher’ aspect of his hero, the more rational side of this figure, and as such, chooses to distance himself from Apollonius’ prior portrayal as a θεῖος ἀνὴρ. However, the fact that Philostratus still wishes to canonize Apollonius means that this realignment cannot be completely successful. Although philosophy and didactic preaching are essential elements of the typology of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ, as I showed previously, this figure must still have a clearly demonstrable connection to the divine realm that he in turn reveals to the world

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<sup>85</sup> See for example, Philostr. *VA*. 1.3.

through the display of many miraculous markers. This leaves a curious contradiction in the final analysis, in that Philostratus seeks to establish a more rational Apollonius as his symbol, and as the paragon of his new religious movement, but cannot escape the mythical and magical aspects that define his nature. For Philostratus they are unfortunately one and the same, and thus while Apollonius can present a reasoned argument before the emperor who holds him captive (VA 8.1-8.5), he nonetheless still escapes from this emperor's clutches by mysteriously vanishing from the courtroom (VA 8.5). Philostratus remedies this situation through the judicious application of sophistic 'spin', maintaining Apollonius' dual character as miracle-monger and wizened sage in a manner that also drives home the basis for the fundamentalist point he is making. Apollonius is indeed divine, but is more importantly a descendant of Pythagoras, the founder of a school of philosophy, a decidedly mystical one, but philosophy nonetheless. Apollonius' teachings and actions are thus shown as growing out of this Pythagorean root, declaring them not only to be legitimate in that they are handed down from the gods, but ancient as well, giving them precedence over the existing state of affairs and showing them to supersede perceived aberrations like emperor worship. From the moral high ground of Pythagoreanism, Philostratus is able to prepare his assault on the decadent and morally dissolute society in which he finds himself.

Therefore, although I believe that Philostratus was in fact seeking a representation of Apollonius that was grounded in a philosophical and not a magical identity, he could only move as far as the paradigm of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ would allow—a divine man without proof of his divinity through miracles is, after all, just another philosopher. The Philostratean Apollonius is a middle road, not an extreme. He is the version of Apollonius of Tyana that best suited the ‘polyvalent’ fundamentalist paradigm in which Philostratus was operating, and best allowed him to put forward his arguments from the relative safety accorded to the writer of fiction. The divine connection also proves the truth of Philostratus’ own fundamentalist ‘revelations’, with him as prophet and Apollonius as foremost exponent of the new and enlightened point of view. The remaining chapters of this dissertation investigate the specifics of this position in two distinct ways, through the written work of Philostratus and through the manifestations of real world belief that his work was seeking to undo. This shall be done by examining the other major works of Philostratus alongside the *Vita Apollonii*, namely the *Nero*, the *Heroikos*, and the *Vitae Sophistarum*. It is my intention to analyse these texts against the backdrop of philosophy, sophistry, and religious cult worship in the Roman Empire at the time of Philostratus.

## **Part II.**

### **The Argument for Religious and Fundamentalist Bias.**

## Chapter VI

### Philostratus on Religion:

#### Contextualizing the Fundamentalist Argument.

*Moral crusaders may say that values and behaviour once widely viewed as virtuous and right are now being ignored, and that they still hold to those values and norms and have a desire to see others return to the paths of righteousness...*

Roy Wallis.<sup>1</sup>

Roman claims to religious piety stretch back to their ancient mythic origins in the flight of *pius* Aeneas (Verg. *Aen.* 1.220) from the fires of shattered Ilium, saving the statues of his household gods from the destruction wrought by the Greeks (Verg. *Aen.* 2.717-724). For the ancients, devotion to the sacred was an essential and inescapable aspect of life in the Roman Empire, with one's daily existence dominated by prayers, sacrifices, and ritual practices that sanctified and legitimized the political, the social, the economic, and even the martial spheres, for indeed, all things could have a divine focus.<sup>2</sup> Citizens of the Empire were socialized into an expansive network of religious and ritual obligations that descended from the *mos maiorum*, the great traditions handed down by the ancestors. These obligations took the form of cult worship that was to be conducted in a very specific manner and at particular times, imparting a mystical

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<sup>1</sup> Wallis 1979: 102-103.

<sup>2</sup> Belmont 1982: 11.

rhythm to the whole of ancient life, a rhythm that structured and defined almost every manner of interaction.

Yet it is also true that the people of the imperial period participated in the invention of new traditions. The death of Julius Caesar sparked a form of ruler worship never before witnessed by the Roman people, a religious practice that, once it had reached its fullest expression, came to be known as the cult of the emperor and evolved into unique means of displaying the 'Roman' credentials of an individual or even an entire city. Ancestral *traditio*, the beliefs of the earliest Romans as handed down to the inhabitants of the Empire in Philostratus' day, was for a long time the set of ideals at the heart of *Romanitas*, and governed what it meant to hold Roman citizenship in the Empire, but the expansion of Roman rule into all corners of the known world, brought with it many external cultic influences as well. These were other belief systems that, according to Republican writers like Cicero, would do nothing but corrupt the hearts and minds of the Roman people, were they to be given free rein to spread their poison. Thus it is that he calls for all public beliefs to be carefully monitored by the senate and for private practices to be derived from the traditions of the *mos maiorum* (Cic. *De Leg.* 2.19). My purpose in this chapter is therefore to evaluate this partisan perspective of the so-called Eastern mystery cults, particularly as pertains to the impact that

they may have had on existing forms of Greek and Roman ancestral religious practice. If Philostratus was, as I contend, a 'polyvalent' religious fundamentalist in an ancient setting, then he would have been one of the people to follow this same line of attack. Following this chapter I will analyse the various facets of imperial religion that Philostratus had to engage with in shaping his response to such Eastern practices. In Chapter VII, I will deal specifically with the imperial cult, and will question whether it was a similar manifestation of religious innovation that, because it intruded upon established Graeco-Roman tradition, would also necessitate an ostensibly fundamentalist reaction from Philostratus. Chapter VIII outlines this Philostratean reaction, and in Chapters IX and X I will comment on the role played by both philosophy and sophistry in this interpretation of the relationship between tradition and modernity in the religious beliefs of the Empire.

Doubtless, from the time of her foundation, the gods had blessed Rome with great favour, increasing her territories and showering her with wealth and glory beyond measure. But when the civil war between Antony and Octavian was waged, it was seen as a time during which the old gods had turned their backs on Rome, a despairing situation that, at least in the eyes of the Augustan poets, could not be adequately rectified until Octavian had assumed his rightful place as *princeps* and



thereby returned all things to the proper and divinely sanctioned order. In the words of Horace (*Carm.* 3.6.1-4):

‘Undeservedly, you will pay for the crimes of your ancestors,  
Roman, until you rebuild the temples  
And ruined shrines of the gods and  
The statues fouled with black smoke.’

*Delicta maiorum inmeritus lues,  
Romane, donec templa refeceris  
aedisque labentis deorum et  
foeda nigro simulacra fumo.*

To Dumézil this was a time in which ancestral Roman religion had become both ‘debased and corrupted’.<sup>3</sup> It is later that St. Augustine (*De Civ D.* 6.10), although from the point of view of a Christian apologist, chooses to paraphrase Seneca in illustrating the often curious excesses of Roman paganism:

‘Come to the Capitol, you will be shamed by the universal insanity, because of which vain madness has attributed duties to itself. One places names before the gods, another announces the hours to Jove, another is the bather, another the anointer, which is to say that with empty movements of the arms he imitates anointing. There are women who arrange the hair of Juno and Minerva (standing far from the temple, but not the image, they move the fingers in the manner of hair dressing), there are those who hold the mirror; there are those who call on the gods to provide surety, those who offer them petitions and explain their cause.’

*In Capitolium perveni, pudebit publicatae dementiae, quod sibi vanus furor adtribuit officii. Alius nomina deo subicit, alius horas Iovi nuntiat; alius lutor est, alius unctor, qui vano motu brachiorum imitatur unguentem. Sunt quae Iunoni ac Minervae capillos disponant (longe a templo, non tantum a simulacro stantes digitos movent ornantium modo), sunt quae speculum teneant; sunt qui ad*

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<sup>3</sup> Dumézil 1966: 123.

*vadimonia sua deos advocent, sunt qui libellos offerant et illos causam suam doceant.*

Christianity was in fact one of these Eastern rites infiltrating the hearts of the Roman people. Abounding in crowd-pleasing miracles and founded upon an individually-oriented salvific doctrine, Christianity and religions of a similarly non-Roman bent presented a clear threat to the long-standing traditions of Rome.<sup>4</sup> In a scathing remark against this crowd-pleasing status of the Eastern mysteries, Apollonius declares to the Egyptian Gymnosophists that the god Apollo at Delphi could behave similarly, and indeed although he could perform all manner of miracles when he delivers his prophecies, he knows that he does not need to do so. As Apollonius concludes, εὐτέλεια γὰρ διδάσκαλος μὲν σοφίας, διδάσκαλος δὲ ἀληθείας... ('for the simple is the teacher of wisdom and the teacher of truth...', VA 6.10.4)) I believe that here Philostratus is arguing that the truth of a belief stems not from the charisma of its rites but rather from the tradition of the established practice.

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<sup>4</sup> I would tentatively suggest that Philostratus disparages Christianity still further in painting his scene of the arrival of Apollonius at Ephesus (VA 4.1.1). When Apollonius reaches the city, absolutely everyone is drawn out to greet him—οὐδὲ οἱ βάνανσοι ἔτι πρὸς ταῖς ἑαυτῶν τέχναις ἦσαν ('...not even the craftsmen were still at their crafts...'). By comparison, the craftsmen of Ephesus are explicitly against the Christian mission of Paul in the city, for fear of his interfering in their business interests, particularly in the sale of statues of the goddess Artemis (*Acts* 19: 24-41). Intriguingly, Apollonius is even said to have delivered his first address to the Ephesians upon the steps of the temple of Artemis. There is the likelihood here that Philostratus is singling out Christianity for comparison as a representative of all mystery cults, thereby pointing out these cults as generally destructive to the social cohesion of the empire, while Apollonius, his paragon, remains an entirely unifying force.

With the friction that these foreign cults created, it appeared evident to many that Graeco-Roman paganism had entered into a time of growing dissatisfaction and disillusionment. This can be explained by the previously unconsidered element that peculiar religious innovations like, for example, the cult of the Persian god Mithras, or that of the Syrian goddess, brought into the lives of religious seekers in the Empire, an element that is made clear in two of the distinctions between these divergent forms of paganism, for after all, the mystery cults were still no less pagan than their Roman counterparts. First of all, while Roman traditions, like those of the ancient Greeks, were concerned with the needs of the many and the sanctity of the *polis* as a whole, the new Eastern beliefs centred on an intensely personal religious experience. No longer was the purpose of belief to discover the god or goddess best suited to the defence of the Empire. The focus was now to fall upon the divinity who wished to preserve the individual human being. Secondly, orthodoxy of belief, while decidedly important for a faith like Christianity, was completely eclipsed by orthopraxy in the conduction of the religious rituals of Graeco-Roman paganism. The vast gulf between these approaches to the divine—individualist versus pluralist, orthodoxy versus orthopraxy—is what in essence characterizes the ‘anxiety’ that authors like Dodds<sup>5</sup> have suggested was part and

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<sup>5</sup> Dodds 1965 *passim*. However, Swain 1996: 107-108 believes that this time was not characterized by any more or less anxiety than any time before it, and that the idea of an ‘age of anxiety’ has been projected back onto the time by mid-twentieth century scholars.

parcel of life at that time. Yet for some, these new cults could be understood as completing the religious perspective of the typical Roman believer.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, they might well have added a new experiential dimension to Roman religious belief, and thus, far from ever demolishing traditional forms of worship, they might well have augmented them. The difficulty with Swain's argument is highlighted by the two distinctions that I have already pointed out, namely that the new cults were personal and, although they did indeed have their own unique rituals, their emphasis fell on the expression of true belief rather than on orthopraxis. While the ancestral Roman rites could typically involve the whole family, the household, or even the entire town, but rarely took aim at resolving the needs of the individual believer. Festugière provides this example of the order of precedence in ancient rites: 'Athena is the goddess of Athens, of the Athenians considered as a social entity, before being the goddess of the Athenian as a private individual.'<sup>7</sup> By contrast, the words of Jesus of Nazareth best describe the perspective of the steadily growing Christian religion which battled with the older Greek and Roman rites for adherents:

'But when you pray, go into your chamber and closing the door pray to your Father in that secret place and your Father, the one who sees into that secret place, will reward you.' (*Mt.* 6:6)

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<sup>6</sup> Swain 1996: 161.

<sup>7</sup> Festugière 1954: 6.

σὺ δὲ ὅταν προσεύχῃ, εἴσελθε εἰς τὸ ταμεῖόν σου καὶ κλείσας τὴν θύραν σου πρόσευξαι τῷ Πατρὶ σου τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ· καὶ ὁ Πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι.

It was indeed the case with the vast majority of mystery rites (e.g. Eleusis) that the rituals occurred solely before the eyes of the initiated. As Glover has it, these new cults presented gods that

‘claimed the whole of life, that taught of moral pollutions and of reconciliation, that gave anew the old sacramental value to rituals,<sup>8</sup>—religions of priest and devotee, equalizing rich and poor, save for the cost of holy rites, and giving to women the consciousness of life in touch with the divine.’<sup>9</sup>

And what is more, the raw emotion so often a part of the Eastern mysteries made their rites attractive to people who did not typically encounter anything like the devotion of the frenzied *Galli*.<sup>10</sup>

These cults also provided something only possible for the rare and celebrated individual within the bounds of Graeco-Roman theology—a truly good afterlife. In new systems like Christianity, one’s personal conduct was important; morality was a practice integral to one’s life. A moralizing deity that demanded a certain code of

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<sup>8</sup> In other words, they imparted meaning to ritual activities beyond the physical practice of the ritual itself.

<sup>9</sup> Glover 1975: 24.

<sup>10</sup> The emotional power that characterized the rituals of Magna Mater and the *Galli* stood in stark contrast to the staid practices with which Roman ritual was conducted. Thus while the rites of the *Galli* had been a part of the Roman religious landscape for quite some time (see p. 185) they nonetheless, due to the oftentimes exclusionary nature of their practices (self-mutilation, etc.), still had a shocking character to them.

ethical behaviour over and above the standard ritual requirements of worship was unheard of in the Roman or Greek imagination. While all aspects of society were ‘imbued with religion’,<sup>11</sup> the traditional gods had never handed down a set of moral injunctions to their followers. It was typically up to the individual city to establish the various laws that might pertain to one’s personal conduct. In rare instances a god might take action in order to see a particular law enforced, but that was only ever in situations that might have dire consequences for one of their favoured cities. The gods did however oversee the practice of religious ritual with a far greater degree of care.<sup>12</sup>

To their credit, the mystery cults held other unique attractions as well. The exercise of the rites themselves, their great processions, for example, could perhaps be thought of as powerful advertisements for the cults—in *De Dea Syria* (50-51) for example, Lucian details the marvels that one could expect of such an occasion.<sup>13</sup> The cults also provided the fullest explanations of early cosmogony and the nature of being, thereby functioning as complete and discrete systems of religious interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the appeal created by the fact that all of the mysteries sought to conceal their central revelation from the uninitiated, cannot be

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<sup>11</sup> Belmont 1982: 11.

<sup>12</sup> Liebeschuetz 2000: 1002.

<sup>13</sup> Naturally, St. Augustine (*De civ. D.* 6.10) asks the question ‘Where do they fear the ire of the gods who merit favours of such a kind? (*Ubi iratos deos timent qui sic propitios merentur?*)’

<sup>14</sup> Willoughby 1974: 28.

underestimated.<sup>15</sup> A single example suffices to illustrate both the popularity of mystery cults and their concern over maintaining secrecy amongst initiates: Suetonius (*Aug.* 93) records that the Emperor Augustus was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries,<sup>16</sup> and that later, the emperor sat in judgment of a court case involving evidence from these very mysteries. When he realized this, he immediately dismissed everyone from the courtroom and heard the testimony privately. As Willoughby concludes, ‘the fact that the first citizens of the Roman Empire sought membership in the Eleusinian cult is striking proof of its great influence.’<sup>17</sup> The Mysteries of Eleusis impacted upon ordinary citizens as well, as Plutarch (*Mor.* 81d-e) also suggests. It is curious then that Philostratus (VA 4.18.1) would contend that Apollonius was able even to supersede these ancient rites, stating that he made an appearance at Athens in order to participate in the mysteries,

‘...but many neglected their initiation on account of Apollonius, who stirred them even more than departing as initiates.’

ἀμελήσαντες δὲ οἱ πολλοὶ τοῦ μυεῖσθαι περὶ τὸν Ἀπολλώνιον εἶχον,  
καὶ τοῦτ’ ἐσπούδαζον μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ ἀπελθεῖν τετελεσμένοι.

This is despite the fact that Apollonius was himself present to be initiated. What this incident reveals of the mind of Philostratus bears a double significance. Firstly,

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<sup>15</sup> Hopkins 1999: 16 writes of his two characters observing a sacrifice to the traditional Roman gods, ‘We could be there, without belonging. In the Roman world, only Jews, Christians and mystery cults kept their private religious rites solely for insiders.’

<sup>16</sup> Willoughby 1974: 40.

<sup>17</sup> Willoughby 1974: 40.

the situation points to Apollonius' heightened value as both a religious symbol for Philostratus' cause, and as an example of behaviour and belief to which the people should aspire. Secondly, it hints at one of the key features that these mysteries had in their favour—their specifically individual approach. Essentially, Philostratus shifts the emphasis from one god to one man, and through that one man he is able to point the way back towards Roman tradition.

The personalization of belief did take place, to some extent, within the cultic tradition of the Roman household gods, which could, as Orr suggests, be said to have offered a degree of 'intimacy' to adherents,<sup>18</sup> particularly in their stress on the individual family and its history. However, this emphasis would never fall upon a specific member of the family, beyond the exalting of the *paterfamilias* in his position as family priest. Franz Cumont explains that in order to supersede the appeal of traditional pagan rituals, the mysteries 'had to satisfy the deep wants of the human soul' by not only ensnaring the senses but by speaking to the conscience and the intellect as well.<sup>19</sup> This meant an approach to the divine that was entirely antithetical to the dry and practical contractual perspective that typified Roman traditional belief.

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<sup>18</sup> Orr 1976: 1559.

<sup>19</sup> Cumont 1956: 28.



Rome's traditional cult was exclusive, in much the same way as the citizenship was. Initially, all priesthoods and magistracies were held by those who were the blood of past consuls,<sup>20</sup> with various specific requirements, in addition to being 'a Roman citizen, of free birth, and without bodily defect',<sup>21</sup> severely curtailing the entrance of plebeians into the various colleges. This exclusivity was able to keep existing perceptions of foreign cults more or less constant throughout much of Roman history,<sup>22</sup> at least until the late Republic, and generally forbade citizens from participating in non-Roman forms of worship, in a move that was aimed at maintaining societal cohesion.<sup>23</sup> It also circumscribed the authority of any individual priest to respond to a given religious scenario. As North writes 'priests had very limited authority; they were prevented from belonging to more than one college, and the colleges dealt with defined areas of religious business...'<sup>24</sup> Looking to maintain the religious monopoly, Dio (52.36.1-2) even goes so far as to call for the punishment of those who try to introduce any foreign elements into Rome and her rites. However, this kind of segregating standpoint could only endure for as long as the Eastern mysteries lacked for global popularity. Furthermore, it seems that there were even a number of believers in ancient Rome that could well have been classed as monotheists, given that they 'recognized no other deity but *their*

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<sup>20</sup> Szemler 1971: 103.

<sup>21</sup> Szemler 1971: 115.

<sup>22</sup> Guterman 1951: 13.

<sup>23</sup> Wallis 1979: 92.

<sup>24</sup> North 1986: 257.

god'.<sup>25</sup> For a typical pagan this would have been an unacceptable point of view to cleave to, given that, as MacMullen so perfectly phrases it, 'to have one's own god counted for nothing if one denied the existence of everybody else's'<sup>26</sup>—the problem experienced, for example, by the Jews. Therefore, at least from MacMullen's perspective, Rome had to welcome all beliefs, especially given that as La Piana writes, newly arrived immigrants were a constant feature of life in the Empire, and they always brought with them new foreign traditions that mingled with existing Roman rites or simply grew up alongside them.<sup>27</sup> The existence and exercise of these foreign beliefs offered support to travellers and non-Romans who could be made to feel more at home by being able to worship within the framework of their own indigenous ceremonies,<sup>28</sup> but more specifically they are indicative of what Burkert acknowledges as a wholesale shift in pagan religious sentiments which saw the Roman, for the first time, moving beyond his religious practicality towards a newly transcendent spirituality. In order to express this in a more concrete manner, the words of Sopater of Athens (8.115.1) upon the occasion of his initiation at Eleusis, are appropriate—'...to have come from the temple being a stranger to myself...' (ἐξήειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνακτόρων ἐπ' ἐμαυτῷ ξενιζόμενος...) While Sopater is writing a century after Philostratus, his sentiment nevertheless epitomises the

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<sup>25</sup> Beard, North, & Price 1998: 286.

<sup>26</sup> MacMullen 1981: 2.

<sup>27</sup> La Piana 1927: 197.

<sup>28</sup> Georgi 1976: 36.

general feeling of those involved in the mysteries. Therefore the Romans can be said to have been open-minded concerning an individual's private devotions, so long as political unity was unaffected and the public *mores* were unchallenged.<sup>29</sup> After all, the cult of Mithras, Persian in origin, was to find its greatest support in the imperial army.

In order for these cults to gain acceptance at Rome, the popularity of the various beliefs could not be the sole determining factor. Returning to the previously discussed Bacchic cult, it is notable that the utility of the individual belief system was of equal, if not greater importance,<sup>30</sup> and this is perhaps why this cult was comprehensively rejected in 186 BCE. It was ultimately up to those men who decided Roman laws, that is, the members of the senate, to adjudicate the veracity of a cult's claims,<sup>31</sup> and should that cult challenge the laws and morals of the state, as did the cult of Bacchus, then it would be met with the full force of sociopolitical repression. The harsh suppression of the Celtic druids is one such case of the intervention of the state in what was reputed to be an uncivilized, or rather non-Roman, form of worship.<sup>32</sup> Julius Caesar (*B. Gall.* 6.16) even portrayed them as engaging in human sacrifice, despite the fact that long after he had passed away,

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<sup>29</sup> To this end, Syme 1958: 532 points out Tacitus' deep concern at the homes of the Roman elites being infiltrated by foreign rites.

<sup>30</sup> Dumezil 1966: 126.

<sup>31</sup> Watson 1992: 61. As he says, 'Roman religion is a matter of law.'

<sup>32</sup> Stevenson 1952: 209.

the evidence suggests that the Roman people themselves continued the practice of human sacrifice as late as the third century CE. This was something that certainly did not escape the notice of the early Christians, eager as they were to defend themselves against the very same charge (Minucius Felix. *Oct.* 30.1). A similar occasion saw all Chaldaei expelled from the city of Rome by senatorial decree in the year 139 BCE (Val. Max. 1.3.2). Another decree passed a short time thereafter encouraged the development of the local *Etrusca disciplina*, which in essence assumed the place left open by the recently ejected foreign practitioners.<sup>33</sup> In cases like these, it was a commonplace for literature of the time to represent the offending foreign cult as a foul poison requiring immediate surgical intervention in order to preserve the well-being of the Roman populace.<sup>34</sup>

Yet even the tacit assent of the Roman government in allowing for a particular foreign cult to remain within Rome, was an action predicated upon fostering the continuing cohesion of the society. Szemler argues that by simultaneously permitting the functioning of these new beliefs, and still maintaining the ancestral traditions of the people, the 'essential unity of the community was astutely and consistently maintained.'<sup>35</sup> Unquestionably, this was an extraordinary balancing

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<sup>33</sup> Beard, North, & Price 1998: 113.

<sup>34</sup> Ando 2000: 392.

<sup>35</sup> Szemler 1971: 124-125.

act on the part of the religious authorities, with the integrity of the Roman cult to one side and the growing popularity of the Eastern mystery rites to the other. Cumont illustrates the extent of this by noting that senatorial authorities attempted on no less than five separate occasions over the period 59 to 48 BCE to evict the Alexandrian gods from Rome.<sup>36</sup> The disdain displayed for Egyptian cult in particular is evident in the words of Vergil's *Aeneid* (8.696-706). In a passage that is reminiscent of his Homeric model, Vergil describes the events of Actium as a magnificent theomachy:

'The queen in the middle calls her throng with her fatherland's cymbal,  
not scarcely she glances at the double snake behind.  
And monstrous gods in every shape and baying Anubis  
against Neptune and against Venus and against Minerva  
raise up arms. Mars rages in the middle of the battle  
adorned with iron, and harsh Furies from the aether,  
and Discord in torn robe walks rejoicing,  
how Bellona follows with bloodied whip.  
Actian Apollo perceiving this stretched out his bow  
from above: at that terror all of Egypt and India,  
all Arabs, all Sabaeans turned back.'

*regina in mediis patrio vocat agmina sistro,  
necdum etiam geminos a tergo respicit anguis.  
omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis  
contra Neptunum et Venerem contraque Minervam  
tela tenet. Saevit medio in certamine Mavors  
caelatus ferro, tristesque ex aethere Dirae,  
et scissa gaudens vadit Discordia palla,  
quam cum sanguineo sequitur Bellona flagello.  
Actius haec cernens arcum intendebat Apollo  
desuper: omnis eo terrore Aegyptus et Indi,*

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<sup>36</sup> Cumont 1956: 81.

*omnis Arabs, omnes vertebant terga Sabaei.*

According to Vergil, 'monstrous gods' are arrayed against the traditional powers of Rome in a battle that sees the eventual putting to flight of the barbaric foe. Likewise, Philostratus' (VA 6.19.4) disdain for the gods of Egypt is also revealed when he discusses Apollonius' encounter with the Gymnosophists. As Apollonius comments:

'Men, ... the wisdom of Egypt and Ethiopia has profited you greatly, if a dog, and an ibis, and a goat seem more holy and godlike to you...'

ὦ ἄνθρωποι... μέγала ὑμῖν ἀπολέλανται τῆς Αἰγυπτίων τε καὶ  
Αἰθιοπῶν σοφίας, εἰ σεμνότερον ὑμῶν καὶ θεοειδέστερον κύων δόξει καὶ  
ἴβις καὶ τράγος...<sup>37</sup>

Later, when the Emperor Gaius granted formal permission for the Roman people to worship the Egyptian goddess Isis, his decision was offset by that of the Emperor Claudius, who had in turn granted official status to the cult of Magna Mater, thus harmonizing the religious balance so to speak, in an act that Cumont suggests as having in part diluted popular beliefs by adding an alternative to the Egyptian deity.<sup>38</sup> This is a process that is made quite clear in the writings of Philostratus. In the *Heroikos*, for example, he delineates his attempt at reimagining the more traditional cult of heroes, an action characteristic of his refocusing of belief, especially if one conceives of the *Heroikos* as an active attempt at

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<sup>37</sup> Lucan's (8.831-834) satire bears a similar derision for the theriomorphic powers of the Egyptians. See Chapter VII, pp. 224-225.

<sup>38</sup> Cumont 1956: 55.

repositioning *traditio* in order to combat the influence of the foreign. In arguing for its place in the particular historical context of Roman and Sassanian military disputes under the Emperor Alexander Severus, Bradshaw Aitken posits that the *Heroikos* can be viewed in just the manner that I suggest, or in her words, as ‘promoting a way of life according to a Hellenic, Palamedean ethic as a means of establishing a “healthy” society’ capable of dealing with Persian aggression. It is important to understand why any sort of fundamentalist response on the part of Philostratus would have been necessary to defend the integrity of traditional Roman religion against the Eastern mystery rites. Potter summarizes:

‘A community’s cult represented its historical success in the face of nature, its special relationship with the powers that controlled the earth. The celebration of these cults offered a very clear illustration of propriety and power. Public sacrifice in celebration of these cults was intended to bind the community together; the distribution of food and other gifts on the occasion of these celebrations were meant to reflect the order of the state. The priests of these cults were guardians of tradition and social order.’<sup>39</sup>

Traditional cult drew together all of the varied strands of *Romanitas*, everything that informed the Roman psyche—past and present—and it established the actual parameters around which ordered and civilized society was to function. With all of this in its favour, there was understandably ‘a strong emotional element in religious conservatism’ that saw ‘innovation in itself was not only painful but

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<sup>39</sup> Potter 1994: 7.

bad'.<sup>40</sup> This would certainly make Philostratus' response to the diminution of traditional practice through the acceptance of foreign cult worship both expected and even predictable. His reactionary and fundamentalist tendencies are evident through the characters that he develops in the *Heroikos* and the *VA*, something that I will set about proving in the following chapter. In my opinion Philostratus is able to drive home his point about the spiritual and moral degradation that he perceived among the citizenry of his third century through the stories that he chooses to tell. It is also interesting that Apollonius is described as maintaining his Pythagorean beliefs when involved in similar traditional cult sacrifices, in this case the hero-cult:

'He went often to the tombs of the Achaeans, and made many speeches at them, and many sacrifices of a bloodless and pure kind...'

ἐφοίτησεν ἐπὶ τοὺς τῶν Ἀχαιῶν τάφους, καὶ πολλὰ μὲν εἰπὼν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς, πολλὰ δὲ τῶν ἀναίμων τε καὶ καθαρῶν καθαγίσας... (Philostr. *VA* 4.11.1)

Secondly, the portrayal of Apollonius of Tyana presents a more reasoned and philosophical approach to religious belief, no less perfect, and complementing the individualized and emotive interpretation found in the *Heroikos*. An earlier episode reveals similar revivalist and protectionist tendencies as Philostratus shows Apollonius making a concerted effort at restoring the crumbling tombs of Eretrian settlers before offering the traditional, albeit bloodless, sacrifices of the ancestor

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<sup>40</sup> MacMullen 1981: 3.



cult in their honour (VA 1.24.3). Like VA 4.11.1, this is another unmistakable echo of the *Heroikos* and the drive to re-establish the ancestor cult.<sup>41</sup> It appears that Philostratus believes his cause requires a paragon in order to bolster its claim to possession of the means through which more traditional rites might be exalted over the temptations of the East. As Said later characterizes the relationship between Europe and the East, 'The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty.'<sup>42</sup> The beliefs of the East could be both wondrous and terrifying to the Roman traditionalist. If Philostratus thought that it was necessary to reconstitute religious belief within his society by going back to earlier forms of religion, what must the condition of the Roman world—socially, politically, and religiously—have been like at the time in which he was writing? Because this is undoubtedly a massive question, I shall only address the point most important to my argument (i.e. the religious) in order to illustrate why Philostratus' reaction is so distinctive.

By the third century CE, Graeco-Roman paganism was a religious conglomeration many hundreds of years old, a form of worship that had, to a great extent, become bogged down in its unchanging traditions that in many cases had created a sterile

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<sup>41</sup> Likewise is an incident in VA 4.23 that suggests Apollonius made an appeal to the Thessalian people to resume the practice of their ritual offerings at the tomb of Achilles.

<sup>42</sup> Said 1995: 59.

and often highly politicized structure of belief. It is this politicized nature that made the practice of paganism so important to the Roman elites of the period because it was an essential means of legitimizing the power that they held over the populace.<sup>43</sup> After all, the ruling classes held control over the priesthoods, and so could offer the impression of communicating with the gods for the good of the people, despite the fact that all this rigorous systematization accomplished was to quash any sort of innovation that might conceivably threaten the existing social order. Regardless, Willoughby contends that the old cults of Rome had several things in their favour in terms of being able to oppose the advance of Eastern religious beliefs:

‘There was, first of all, the aesthetic monopoly they held. The most impressive public buildings in the Graeco-Roman world were consecrated as temples to them and the most beautiful statues wrought by Greek artists were their cult images. They were the inspiration of the best literature as of the finest art... The greatest public festivals of the time were celebrated in their honor... Their temples were banks as well as sanctuaries, and the records of dedications and mortgages and sacred manumissions suggest the influence they had in the control of economic processes.’<sup>44</sup>

Tipping the scales against Roman traditional rites was the fact that their influence was limited by ‘their capacity to meet real social needs.’<sup>45</sup> The mystery cults stepped forward to satisfy these needs in a manner that was more attractive and

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<sup>43</sup> Woolf 2003: 41.

<sup>44</sup> Willoughby 1974: 13.

<sup>45</sup> Willoughby 1974: 14.

comprehensive than the existing forms of Roman worship, leaving traditionalists with no real answer for the glamour and efficacy of these Eastern rites.

It is essential then to highlight the misconceptions concerning the state of religion at the time of Philostratus. In the first place, ancient religion was never entirely static, something that is sometimes assumed of the Greek and Roman cults. Despite the fact that certain elements of the system (e.g. some members of the Olympian pantheon) had endured largely unaltered since the time of Homer, smaller additions and modifications to this theology were not entirely uncommon. Nowhere is this clearer than in the gradual acceptance won by the many mystery cults throughout the Empire. Secondly, the use of religion for other than numinous purposes is by no means the invention of modern cynics but was an element of Roman belief,<sup>46</sup> with constant suspicion of the new and the foreign being the order of the day. Tacitus (*Ann.* 11.15; 14.44) for instance, notes a dislike of foreign gods because of the problem they presented in not only weakening the power of the nobility, who commanded the existing state cult, but simultaneously agitating the lower orders through their strange and exotic practices. However, certain non-Roman rites were tolerated with the proviso that they not challenge the existing

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed this sort of opinion is prevalent throughout the Mediterranean world. In 431 BCE, for example, the Athenians elected to welcome the Thracian goddess Bendis into their pantheon, a move recognized as a political contrivance employed in large part to improve relations with the barbarian tribes, Nilsson 1972: 45-46.

establishment, whether sociopolitically or religiously. This was quite probably the case with the cult of Bacchus, against which there was no objection 'in principle'.<sup>47</sup> It also appears to have provoked the ire of the powerful because the cult gathered together so many members of the lower orders that a popular revolt was a distinct likelihood. Anthropologically, the nature of this objection to foreign influence can be attributed to the fact that

'Roman identity was based to an unusual degree on membership of a political and religious community with common values and *mores* (customs, morality and way of life). Cultural change, especially acculturation posed a special threat to a self-definition framed in these terms.'<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, the *pepaideumenoí*, the educated elite who in reality manipulated Roman belief, drew together the existing strands of ancient tradition in such a way as to weave a tapestry that portrayed foreign cults as polluting to the very essence of Roman civilization.<sup>49</sup> The identity of the *pepaideumenoí* was conceived along similar lines, while those who had once been members of the suppressed cult of Bacchus, for example, were just then began to envision themselves as individuals with individual desires for salvation. It was nevertheless to these 'huddled masses', men and women most likely to have originally been of foreign extraction themselves that foreign religious beliefs appealed most strongly. Concerning race and the popularity of the Eastern cults Frank writes:

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<sup>47</sup> Bauman 1990: 347.

<sup>48</sup> Woolf 1994: 120.

<sup>49</sup> Turcan 1996: 555; Schnur 1949: 14.

‘In short, the mystery cults permeated the city [Rome], Italy, and the provinces only to such an extent as the city and Italy and the provinces were permeated by stock that had created those religions.’<sup>50</sup>

Race mixing appears to have been a sensitive issue, most of all for Romans of senatorial lineage. Balsdon illustrates the other side of this coin by revealing what was quite often said of the Romans themselves:

‘The first population of Rome consisted of vagabonds and fugitive criminals who sought asylum on the Capitol and, acting in character, these men secured their wives by rape. You could go further and point to some of their kings, baseborn, foreign, tyrannical rascals...’<sup>51</sup>

Words ascribed to Mithridates by Justin (38.6.7) substantiate this. The speech of the Emperor Claudius on the issue of granting certain nobles from Gallia Comata the right to hold magistracies in Rome provides another window on the race politics amongst the city’s inhabitants as Claudius recounts the less than pure origins of many of the greatest Romans (*CIL* 13.1668):<sup>52</sup>

‘In this way Numa succeeded Romulus, coming from Sabine lands, nearby for certain, but at that time foreign, so Tarquinius Priscus succeeded Ancus Martius, who on account of mixed blood was kept from holding office, after that he migrated to Rome, attaining the kingship. Also between him and his son or grandson, for the authorities disagree concerning this, intervened Servius Tullius, if we follow our <sources>, was a captive Ocreasian by birth...’

*ut Numa Romulo successit ex Sabinis veniens, vicinus quidem sed tunc externus, ut Anco Macio Priscus Tarquinius [. is] propter temeratum sanguinem... cum domi repelleretur a gerendis honoribus, postquam Romam migravit, regnum*

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<sup>50</sup> Frank 1916: 707.

<sup>51</sup> Balsdon 1979: 180.

<sup>52</sup> The speech is also paraphrased by Tacitus (*Ann.* 11.24).

*adeptus est. huic quoque et filio nepotivae eius, nam et hoc inter auctores discrepat, insertus Servius Tullius, si nostros sequimur, captive natus Oeresia...*

Despite the early ideals of racial equality suggested by Claudius' words, it appears that the Greeks were still singled out for special scorn on the part of their Roman masters, for the Greek lifestyle was perceived as a highly dissipated and indulgent one. The term *pergraecari*, 'to play the Greek', was a commonplace of most anti-Greek sentiment,<sup>53</sup> and others like *graeculus*, a diminutive form (see below), reflected a similar disrespect. A common thread running through many of the descriptions deploying derogatory terms like these is the apparent 'softening' of Roman society, thanks to the influence of the decadent Greeks. Horace (*Sat.* 2.2.10-11), for example, suggests that Roman military exercises might prove too tiring to one used to a Greek lifestyle. Stemming from this perspective, he (*Hor. Carm.* 3.2454-58) also comments on the state of the training that the young men of Rome currently receive:

'The boy is so untrained  
That he does not know how to stay upon a horse  
And fears the hunt, he is more skilled at play,  
Whether you tell him to play with a Greek hoop  
Or the dice forbidden by law...'

*Nescit equo rudis  
Haerere ingenuus puer  
Venarique timet, ludere doctior,  
Seu Graeco iubeas trocho  
Seu malis vetita legibus alea...*

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<sup>53</sup> Balsdon 1979: 33.

The Romans in Lucan's *Pharsalia* (7.270-272) are thus completely unconcerned by the threat that an army of Greeks might pose:

'...encountering a Greek army that will be present, being chosen from the gymnasia, and weak from their fondness for the gymnasium, and scarcely carrying their arms...

*...Graia delecta iuventus Gymnasiis aderit studioque ignava palaestrae  
Et vix arma ferens...*

Even the Younger Pliny (*Pan.* 13.5) joins in with a derogatory remark claiming that because of the current obsession with all things Greek, Romans would rather have some unknown Greek (*Graeculus magister*) train them for fighting in the spectacles instead of a proven and battle-hardened Roman.

It is clear that the problems brought to Rome by foreigners were of paramount importance in the minds of the extant commentators.<sup>54</sup> Frank sees this influx of foreigners as resulting in the phenomenon that he labelled as 'race suicide', the steady dilution of the pure blood of Rome until nearly every citizen could conceivably call some slave or foreigner an ancestor.<sup>55</sup> According to Roman perceptions, the Greeks were 'light-weights, unreliable, irresponsible, flighty

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. McKeown 2007: 24-26. He does however note that the abundance of evidence indicating a sizeable population of freedmen (comprised, for example, of ex-slaves) was because of a tendency among them to 'show off their new status', meaning that the problem of an influx of foreigners may be somewhat exaggerated.

<sup>55</sup> Frank 1916: 704.

people',<sup>56</sup> a kind of disapproving analysis that I would contend is in fact a reactionary one, pitted against the age-old Greek-barbarian dichotomy imposed by the Athenian empire on the Mediterranean world centuries before. The Romans, despite the best efforts and arguments of writers like Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1.5, 1.89-90, 7.70-72), would in the minds of the Hellenes, never be classed as their intellectual or cultural equals, and this meant that the Romans would forever fall on the wrong side of this dichotomy as a 'race of upstarts'.<sup>57</sup> The Romans would take their turn to reverse this prejudice upon everything that was not Roman, eventually creating a climate in which any foreigner who sought to stand his ground against Rome was found to be guilty of both *contumacia* ('insolence') and *arrogantia* ('arrogance').<sup>58</sup> So it is with some disgust that Seneca (*ad Helv.* 6) and Juvenal (*Sat.* 3) describe the throngs of provincials that flooded the city of Rome seeking either employment or distraction. The derision with which these immigrants were received can be understood as a manifestation of an 'othering' tendency, something especially common in the colonial paradigm which set up the Roman colonizers as 'better' than the people that they colonized.

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<sup>56</sup> Balsdon 1979: 31.

<sup>57</sup> Balsdon 1979: 161.

<sup>58</sup> Balsdon 1979: 171.



The Roman abuse of the immigrant population may have some distinct parallels in Greece's own fears of a cultural decline. These concerns are to be found in Philostratus' work as he is writing from a Greek mindset that is characterized by the colonial paradigm. This is reflected in his choice of Apollonius of Tyana as the paragon of his religious and moral cause, for the Tyanaean gives voice to many of the opinions held by Philostratus—in particular that some Roman officials are incapable of doing their jobs, and that the behaviour and morals of the current crop of Greek citizens is unacceptable. It should be noted that these are all sentiments expressed indirectly by Philostratus, through his selection of Apollonius as a champion, for they all occur in the more vitriolic of the Apollonius' epistles. This is thus an intriguing way in which Philostratus disguises his true intent and fundamentalist tendencies, as he chooses a paragon for his cause that has already suggested many of the more extreme political notions to which he espouses, affording him the relative safety of a fictional character as a shield against any who might believe him to be propagating revolutionary or anti-imperial ideas.

As I have already noted, these non-Roman immigrants brought with them their own cults and religious ideas, the very same beliefs that were so feared by Tacitus for their ability to entice and subvert. Frank admits that this would not have been a

serious problem, provided that the ancestral cults were conducted by true Roman families, who remained active in their propitiation of the spirits of the ancestors.<sup>59</sup> And yet, the cult of the ancestors would naturally have been subject to precisely the same pressures that the intruding Eastern cults exerted upon the other aspects of imperial Roman society. In addition, the marked decline in the birth rate of the aristocracy, and people of Italian descent in general, was opposed to the steady increase in the population of the lower orders and the constant manumission of slaves.<sup>60</sup> In order for the noble families to be able to attain the political influence that they so craved, wealth was a key requirement. To allow this money to further the family's aspirations as much as possible, the number of offspring had to be limited so as not to dilute a family's monetary resources.<sup>61</sup> This obviously countered the efforts of Augustan marriage legislation because of the fact that the desire for small, and thus politically mobile families, was engrained in attitudes of the elites.<sup>62</sup> In the minds of the Roman nobility, therefore, the world had devolved from being one comprised solely of senate and people, to one that included an ever swelling ocean of freedmen and the progressively more influential *equites*. However, it in fact appears that the number of politically and economically mobile

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<sup>59</sup> Frank 1916: 704.

<sup>60</sup> Frank 1916: 705. Brunt 1971: 9 notes that a major cause of the impoverishment of so many Italian families was this abundance of slaves.

<sup>61</sup> Brunt 1971: 142. Brunt's analysis does however terminate with the end of the rule of Augustus.

<sup>62</sup> Brunt 1971: 154. This legislation was especially unpopular amongst those for whom it was designed. See again Raaflaub and Samons 1990: 434.

freedmen in Roman society has been 'over-represented' for several reasons, including the fact that they may well have desired to 'show off their new status'.<sup>63</sup> Engaging in gratuitous displays of wealth and status was undoubtedly *pergraecari*, or falling under the influence of Eastern enticements. What this nevertheless indicates is that a continually growing number of ex-slaves, particularly those of foreign and Eastern extraction, were gaining both status and influence at Rome in leaps and bounds. Thus it is that Petronius (*Sat.* 57) quips that the easiest way for a provincial to gain the Roman citizenship was through selling himself into slavery.<sup>64</sup>

This decline takes the form of a shift from a formerly deeply spiritual Roman antiquity to a materialistic and eastern-styled present, a perspective also apparent in the work of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (5.60.2, 10.17.6) who contrasts a foreign-born materialism with the nobler elements of Roman social history, men like the legendary Cincinnatus whose deportment and moral fibre highlighted the degeneracy of contemporary Romans. In stark contrast to the behaviour of Cincinnatus, Balsdon also reveals that from as early as 149 BCE it was common to find Roman senators in places of power within provincial administrations making use of their authority to wring money out of every conceivable and often illegal

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<sup>63</sup> McKeown 2007: 24-25.

<sup>64</sup> This was true at least until all freeborn were granted the citizenship in 212 CE, see McKeown 2007: 25.

crevice. The problem became so endemic that eventually an official court was established for trying such offenders in Rome itself.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately for those seeking some measure of justice, the situation was stacked in favour of the returning senator, as he would be defended, prosecuted and judged by fellow senators. The distinction drawn here between a legendary moral fibre of a praiseworthy ancestor of the Roman people in Cincinnatus, and the relative moral turpitude of the politicians of later years is a striking one, clearly not in keeping with the words of Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 26.39), who describes the imperial appeals process as a great equalizer of rich and poor, noble and commoner. Needless to say, it was only in such extreme cases as, for example, that of Cicero's prosecution of Verres, that an unfavourable verdict might result. The power of Greek culture to bend Roman *virtus* into an undesired form was something greatly feared by any anti-Greek commentator, especially Cato the Censor, a man deeply concerned for ancestral Roman *mores* (Plut. *Cat. Ma.* 9.22). Even the Greek geographer, Strabo (3.166; 7.301) seems to have absorbed these very same prejudiced opinions.<sup>66</sup>

But modern research has suggested the view that Greek identity was not a 'monolithic whole', an ideal Hellenic status in which all Greeks shared, meaning that it is possible for the likes of Strabo to have looked disdainfully upon his

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<sup>65</sup> Balsdon 1979: 175.

<sup>66</sup> Hill 1961: 90.

fellows. Rather, as Lomas notes, Greek identity was a complex of 'ethnic and cultural elements... a logical conclusion of the tension between descent-based elements and cultural constructs...'<sup>67</sup> The way in which Lomas conceives of Greekness is particularly relevant in the context of her study of Greeks in the western parts of the Roman Empire, given their interactions with native inhabitants. However, understanding Greekness in this way leads to the notion of Greek identity as 'a mutable and transferable cultural identity',<sup>68</sup> which in turn ultimately requires that one alternatively envision processes like Hellenisation and Romanisation as being 'reciprocal and interactive',<sup>69</sup> as *exchanges* of beliefs, traditions, and ideas which are either accepted or rejected a society. It is not a wholesale reformation of one culture in the image and likeness of another. In light of this, it becomes apparent that the Romans did not accept all of Greek culture as their own but rather only those elements of Greek culture that their own world lacked—philosophy in particular. Hence, the oft quoted words of Horace (*Epist.* 2.1.156), *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis intulit agresti Latio*, ('Captured Greece captured her fierce conqueror and brought the arts into rustic Latium.') may not be entirely accurate from this perspective. The Greek arts may well have brought a degree of civilization to the still 'rustic' Romans that they had not yet

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<sup>67</sup> Lomas 2004a: 1-2.

<sup>68</sup> Lomas 2004a: 2.

<sup>69</sup> Lomas 2004b: 476.

experienced, but this occurred only on a level that the Romans themselves were willing to permit. Regardless of how many foreign immigrants arrived in the city of Rome, there were always men like Cato who were willing to fight against the tide. By contrast, and as noted earlier, the Romans do not appear to have recognized the concept of identity as being based upon a shared language or mythological inheritance, but rather as being founded in a shared value and associational system.<sup>70</sup> This meant that while the Greeks were entirely capable of adopting elements of Roman culture without it creating any foreseeable difficulties for themselves, the Romans were not as able to accomplish this with Greek customs. As Woolf writes,

‘Greeks of all sorts, then, remained Greeks while using Roman things, and seem to have felt none of the threat to their identity that Romans felt when they adopted items of Greek origin.’<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, to introduce a new and foreign belief system into the environment of ancient Rome was to provoke disharmony through the establishment of a new and competing value system that was irreconcilable with existing traditions.<sup>72</sup>

The Greeks themselves had an intriguing way of dealing with this problem of religions becoming comingled, through resorting to their standard Greek-

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<sup>70</sup> Woolf 1994: 120.

<sup>71</sup> Woolf 1994: 128.

<sup>72</sup> North 1986: 253.

barbarian dichotomy, and in this way they could essentially exclude *barbaroi* from participation at certain Greek sanctuaries. In two situations this exclusion was extremely pertinent—cult rites involving oracular pronouncement wherein explanation or revelation on the part of a hierophant was required, and in sanctuaries that boasted actual physical manifestations of the god or goddess concerned.<sup>73</sup> In the former case, the divide is fairly straightforward and is the same as every other division in the Greek world, namely the ability to speak Greek. After all, if one could not understand the revelations, how could one participate in the activities of the cult? Indeed, even the mighty sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi made use of this very restriction, for while anyone from across the Graeco-Roman world could come before the Pythia,<sup>74</sup> their questions still had to be phrased in Greek, and of course they would receive their answer in Greek verse as well.<sup>75</sup> In the latter case of more ‘physical’ divine manifestations, it seems to have been the lack of Greek blood that prohibited a person from approaching a shrine at which a god was known to appear—non-Greeks were forbidden from being in the ‘actual’ presence of the Greek deities,<sup>76</sup> certainly an excellent way of keeping foreign hands from the traditional pantheon. Apollonius of Tyana brings up a similar point in his

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<sup>73</sup> Dillon 1997: 164-165.

<sup>74</sup> There was a strict hierarchy of which Greeks and non-Greeks could approach the Pythia, and in what order they were allowed to ask their questions. Cf. Parke and Wormell 1956: 31.

<sup>75</sup> Parke and Wormell 1956: 33-34.

<sup>76</sup> Dillon 1997:164-165.

visit to the Apolline sanctuary at Daphne. Looking upon the statue of Ladon, he comments on the descent into semi-barbarous rites at the shrine:

‘Not only was your daughter transformed, but you were as well, for it seems you are a barbarian after being a Greek and an Arcadian.’

οὐχ ἡ θυγάτηρ... σοὶ μόνη μετέβαλεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὺ τῷ δόξαι βάρβαρος ἐξ Ἑλληνός τε καὶ Ἀρκάδος. (Philostr. VA 1.16.2)

In a corollary to this argument, the Roman state would often engage in similar protective measures by supporting small flagging gentilitial cults through assuming the duties required for their maintenance.<sup>77</sup> This is because local life had as its bedrock the deeply spiritual and ritualistic foundation of household cult that was governed by the *paterfamilias*, in a manner not unlike the emperor ruling over his Empire, a system that bestowed a religious character upon all imperial political organization from its very outset. This is a quality that eventually even transcended the social dimension, allowing for anti-Roman or slave revolts to sometimes appear like divine missions. Two examples of rebellions with what might be viewed as a religious *casus belli* include the revolt of the self-proclaimed seer, mystic, and former slave, Eunus, who was able to gather a sizeable following through pretending to magical powers.<sup>78</sup> Over a century later, a priest of Dionysus named Vologaesus won over a group of adherents in 11 BCE by abusing his knowledge of the practice of divination (Dio Cass. 51.25, 54.34). Dyson suggests

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<sup>77</sup> Dumezil 1966: 555.

<sup>78</sup> Momigliano 1986: 106.



that many native uprisings of this period hold this religious aspect in common,<sup>79</sup> something that made these rebellions notoriously difficult to suppress, given that they were sustained by a spiritual dynamism that was counterintuitive to the way in which the Romans understood religion. As the Romans perceived it, 'the rites, the precise performance of duties, as the major part of Roman cult, held the masses in awe...'<sup>80</sup> They kept the rabble in their place, as it was only the upper classes who were permitted to perform these grand rituals.<sup>81</sup> Thus the appeal of the Eastern cults can be somewhat explained, given that through their individual emphasis they were able to turn the eye away from the elites and their concerns for the first time in Roman religious history. No more did the plebs have to stand 'in awe' at the acts of the elites, for now the people could do for themselves.

By the third century CE, the old religious cults of Rome had become one of a handful of slowly disappearing activities through which the upper echelons of society could confirm and display their standing.<sup>82</sup> This became especially difficult in a world of everyman religions wherein the individual participated, not as a member of some arbitrary class group, but as a person concerned for his or her own soul. The disintegration of the social order was clearly frightening to the

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<sup>79</sup> Dyson 1975: 170.

<sup>80</sup> Szemler 1971: 129.

<sup>81</sup> The Lex Ogulnia of 300 BCE gave plebeians the right for the very first time to become augurs or pontifex. See Szemler 1971: 103.

<sup>82</sup> De Blois 1998: 3399.

*pepaideumenoι*, and thus Cassius Dio (52.36.1-2) quotes advice given to the Emperor Augustus in saying that a ruler should be concerned with the influx of foreign religious customs, especially given the possible conspiracies against him that could result. This distinction in foreign and Roman belief went so far as to create the situation in Republican Rome whereby only citizens saw to the rites of true Roman worship. The *peregrini* were forbidden from doing this and had only to concern themselves with their own right conduct.<sup>83</sup> Roman *traditio*, therefore, found itself bogged down by an ever-expanding apathy, overburdened by centuries of belief crafted into a theology that, in large part, seemed to ignore the desires of the majority of the population. All the while, religions like Christianity—cults that could excite both the mind and the senses, thereby often winning over even the most dedicated of traditionalists—sought to convince the people to abandon the traditional values of the state in favour of a unique path to salvation.

It appears that Graeco-Roman belief was in need of someone to draw forth the poison that was corrupting it. Perhaps a fundamentalist approach was what was truly required. This is especially germane given that, as per the arguments of North, religion in Rome should be conceived of as part of a greater societal whole,

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<sup>83</sup> Guterman 1951: 44.

not only being influenced by changes in the society, but also changing society.<sup>84</sup>

After all, Philostratus (VA 1.2) informs us that Apollonius wrote many letters to all manner of recipients, dealing with every aspect of society, and commenting on and correcting them where necessary—‘concerning gods, customs, morals, laws, and setting aright whatever had been overthrown.’ (ὕπερ θεῶν, ὕπερ ἔθων, ὕπερ ἡθῶν, ὕπερ νόμων, παρ’ οἷς ὅ τι ἀνατράποιτο, ἐπηνώρθου.) As Apollonius himself states at Olympia:

“‘And by each city,” he said, “I will converse with you, Greek men, at your festivals, processions, mysteries, sacrifices, and libations, because they require urbane men.”’

καὶ κατὰ πόλεις μὲν ἔφη διαλέξομαι ὑμῖν, ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες, ἐν πανηγύρεσιν, ἐν πομπαῖς, ἐν μυστηρίοις, ἐν θυσίαις, ἐν σπονδαῖς, ἀστείου δὲ ἀνδρὸς δέονται· (VA 8.19.1)

Philostratus designed his character of Apollonius in such a way as to correct the imbalance that had caused the scales of religion to topple over in favour of the individualized practices of the Eastern cults. In his first encounter with the Indian Brahmins (VA 3.14.3) this is made especially apparent. These Indian wise men live upon a hilltop not unlike the Athenian acropolis, home of the goddess of wisdom herself. It is here that Apollonius discovers the idols of some of the earliest Greek gods, specifically Athene Polias, the Delian Apollo, Dionysus of the Marshes, and Apollo of Amyclae, all of which are worshipped by the Indians Ἑλληνικοῖς ἡθεσι,

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<sup>84</sup> North 1986: 258.

‘in the customs of the Greeks’. Philostratus’ point is an obvious one—here, where Apollonius is about to meet with the most enlightened men on earth he discovers that they already worship according to the oldest rites in Graeco-Roman religion, rites dating to between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE.<sup>85</sup> Logically this is the example to which the entire world should aspire. In conclusion then, through Apollonius, Philostratus seeks to make this correction on the same personal level that the foreign cults appeal to their adherents. In his *Heroikos*, through a dialogue on the place of the ancestors and heroes, he attempt to shift the focus to what is simultaneously a more personalised and traditional form of belief.

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<sup>85</sup> Jones 2005: 251, n. 14.

## Chapter VII

### *The Philostratean Fundamentalist Perspective:*

### *The Imperial Cult and a Pagan Religious Decline.*

*But believe that you will have glory unsurpassed and worthy of your previous deeds, whenever you should compel the barbarians to be helots of the Greeks, except for those who fought alongside you; and you will make the king now called 'Great' to do whatever you command. For then nothing will still remain except to become a god.*

*(Isocrates Epistle 3.5.3 - 3.5.6)*

The phenomenon of ruler cult is an expression of religiosity found across the length and breadth of the Mediterranean world. The ruler of a state was held to discharge certain functions that saw to the physical and spiritual well-being of his subjects. For this service, he was granted honours on a par with those given to the gods, called ἰσόθεοι τιμαί, which included the offering of religious cult. Fishwick contends that this was 'a token of esteem', typically designed to encourage the ruler to bestow new boons upon his subjects or to praise and thank him for previous blessings.<sup>1</sup>

In its most elementary form the imperial cult can be said to have its Roman roots in the reign of the first emperor, Augustus, although the concept itself is first expressed in the deification of his adoptive father, Julius Caesar. Vergil's

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<sup>1</sup> Fishwick 1987: 11.

(*Ecl.* 1.6-7) excessive praise of Augustus for restoring his farm to him—‘for he will always be a god to me’, *namque erit ille mihi semper deus*—is perhaps the evidence of this in its infancy. Augustus approached the suggestion of ἰσόθεοι τυμαί with the same astuteness that guided him through his entire political career, enshrouding his rule within a ‘religious nimbus’<sup>2</sup> that made use of the idea of ruler cult only where necessary, thereby conjuring two solutions to the very same problem, one for the Empire in the east and another for the west—those who would worship him as true god and those who would merely do him homage as emperor. However, by the time of Philostratus, the cult of the emperor had taken on an entirely different character. The goddess Roma, ever at the side of the emperor, fell away in both artistic representations and actual ritual practice.<sup>3</sup> Even the portrayal of the imperial family came to assume ‘attitudes and gestures reminiscent of individual deities’, and in the extreme, all actions on the part of the emperor were designated as ‘divine’.<sup>4</sup>

The cult of the emperor presents one of the most intriguing expressions of belief to have ever existed in ancient political and religious experience, for it came to infiltrate most major facets of life in the Roman Empire, and its practices influenced even the persecution of the early Christians. Pliny (*Ep.* 10.96-97) for

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<sup>2</sup> Nock 1952: 478.

<sup>3</sup> Fishwick 2002: 203. It should be noted that Fishwick is primarily concerned with manifestations of the imperial cult in the Western Empire.

<sup>4</sup> Fishwick 2002: 198.

example, explains that one of the tests of loyalty that he administered to Christians involved prayers and offerings to the statue of the Emperor Trajan. And yet, despite its broad influence on life in the Empire, the precise attitudes of the cult's adherents are still in some doubt: for example, exactly how much of the participation in the imperial cult, was true, unqualified worship of the *divus*? How much was political expediency? Indeed was the cult little more than politics cloaked in the shadow of belief? In this chapter I shall concentrate on the specifics of the imperial cult and its function in both Graeco-Roman belief and statecraft. Attention will be given to the distinction between the cult as it operated in the eastern and western halves of the Empire and what this meant for its authority across the Roman world as a whole. Of equal importance are the pagan assessments of the imperial cult in the greater context of Graeco-Roman society. Throughout I shall also endeavour to reinforce my interpretation of the 'polyvalent' fundamentalist perspective held by Philostratus, through contrasting the traditional *religio* with the new innovation of the worship of the emperor.

Clifford Ando states that the imperial cult 'existed not as a system of beliefs, although it presupposed one, but as a set of ritual observances.'<sup>5</sup> This does indeed betray the Roman penchant for action over ideology, although ideology

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<sup>5</sup> Ando 2000: 408.

was to certainly play a key role in the processes of deification as they stood in the later years of the cult, with emperors deifying their predecessors in order to ensure a largely unbroken line of divine succession. Furthermore, Fishwick writes that

‘The central act of worship in an ancient cult was the sacrificial offering. That this was true of the worship of the Roman emperor is confirmed, among other testimony, by Gaius’ explicit command that temples should be built and sacrifices offered to him as a god.’<sup>6</sup>

Not only was sacrifice an essential component in the articulation of the imperial cult, but in the same manner as the traditional cults of the Olympians, all of the elements involved in the ceremonial, from the sacrificial altar to the procession and the festival, were included within the ambit of emperor worship,<sup>7</sup> giving the procedure the religious sanction that it sometimes appeared to lack in its more overtly political manifestations.

It is curious to discover the coincidence of the worship of the emperor developing into its most significant form within the borders of the very same Eastern lands whose new rites were threatening the precedence of established Graeco-Roman traditions.<sup>8</sup> The first mention of a cult known as the *Genius Publicus* occurs in about 218 BCE and seems to have been founded in large part

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<sup>6</sup> Fishwick 1991: 501.

<sup>7</sup> Fishwick 1987: 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ferguson 1970: 93. This pattern is also apparent in the provinces of the far western empire as well.



due to the influence of the Greeks. It is out of this earliest manifestation of Roman 'state' cult that the institution of ruler cult evolves in a manner that was more palatable to the Roman people.<sup>9</sup> This particular development is associated with a generalized lack of enforced political transformation in these border provinces of the Empire, with the less 'civilized' regions gaining an imperial cult centre early on in their settlement.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the Eastern Empire had its own pre-existing political machinery in which this cult practice could be explored,<sup>11</sup> while the newly civilized provinces of the west had to start from scratch with the institution of a new ruler cult and its paraphernalia.<sup>12</sup> It therefore appears to have been easier for a new form of 'political religion'<sup>13</sup> like the imperial cult, something in which influence-seekers and nobility alike would freely participate in order to prove their loyalty to their new Roman masters, to take root in soil that had fostered no prior hostility toward the notion of the deification of a ruler (especially given the phenomenon's prevalence in the East), than it would have been for the cult to develop in a region like the heartland of Italy where until recently, the very idea of a *rex* had been anathema.

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<sup>9</sup> Fishwick 1987: 52.

<sup>10</sup> Fishwick 1978: 1208-1209.

<sup>11</sup> According to the work of Arrian (*An.* 4.10-11) Alexander the Great is shown at Bactra to have actively sought out deification, in essence foreshadowing the growth of the imperial cult of Rome. See also Robinson 1943: 286-301.

<sup>12</sup> Fishwick 1987: 93.

<sup>13</sup> Burrin 1997: 321-349.

The growth of the cult at Rome would ‘require careful shaping into structures that would cause the least offence within leading circles of the capital.’<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the introduction of one new and common deity was far easier to manage than the immediate Romanisation of an entire conquered pantheon.<sup>15</sup> As Tertullian (*Apo.* 24) has it, while every province could conceivably have its own gods and goddesses, the god of Rome—namely the Emperor himself—was borne to all parts of the Empire in turn. Likewise Cassius Dio (51.20.7) could write that the imperial cult was a truly universal phenomenon. Drawing on descriptions like this, Beard, North, and Price argue that the imperial cult, because of its diverse nature, was never a singular monolithic entity but was on the contrary, a number of distinct cults electing to hold the emperor in common focus.<sup>16</sup> The pervasive nature of this influence translated into an air of sanctity that every Roman expected to transcend the realm of the religious and to attach itself to each expression of political authority as well.<sup>17</sup> Despite this linking of imperial power with the divine, we nonetheless find most emperors a little reluctant to make use of terms like *θεός* in reference to themselves. The divinization of politics is apparent from the outset, but is concealed beneath the mantle of Augustan subtlety. The first emperor approached the religious affairs of the state in a decisive manner, reorganizing them along the particular lines

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<sup>14</sup> Fishwick 2002: 5.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Roman religion’s identity as a “religion of place”—strongly focussed on the city of Rome—would anyway make unlikely any wholesale direct export’ (Beard, North, and Price 1998: 314).

<sup>16</sup> Beard, North, and Price 1998: 252.

<sup>17</sup> Beard, North, and Price 1998: 359.

that he chose, and presenting Roman *traditio* in his own unique way. Newlands offers this analysis:

‘...through the addition of new meanings to traditional festivals or the creation of new special days, the calendar with its accompanying exegesis contributed to the enormous cultural and ideological impact of Augustus’ program of moral and religious reform by smoothly incorporating the important military, civil, and religious achievements of the emperor and his household. Thus Augustus’ restorations of temples and revivals of lapsed cults and priesthods were complemented by his assertion of his personal place in the calendar alongside the national deities of Rome. With Augustus’ central insertion into Roman time, Roman national identity became bound up with veneration of the imperial family and respect for the values that the family chose to promote.’<sup>18</sup>

The alteration of existing religious belief for imperial purposes can perhaps be seen as a form of counter-current to the increasing Eastern influence within the borders of the Empire, an active and powerfully evocative force for resisting the lure of the mysteries through the processes of ‘universality and syncretism’.<sup>19</sup>

‘Speak, Muses, what is the source of the holy things,  
And from where were they obtained reaching Latin homes?’

*Dicite, Pierides, sacrorum quae sit origo,  
Attigerit Latias unde petita domos...*

Thus speaks the poet Ovid (*Fast.* 2. 269-270) as he pleads on behalf of traditional rites that had long fallen into disuse. Augustus’ programme of moral and religious regeneration was, to a large extent, specifically tailored to the image of *pater patriae* that he wished to present through the significant emphasis that he

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<sup>18</sup> Newlands 1995: 12.

<sup>19</sup> Guthrie 1952: 251.

placed upon his own family. And what is more, his restoration of select cults, coupled with the inclusion of both himself and his own relations at the heart of the calendar, a system of time-keeping largely defined by ritual and cultic practices, literally led to the positioning of the emperor at the centre of Roman belief for all time. Feeney notes that the calendar was thus another means through which the emperor demonstrated his great power, and goes on to quote Plutarch's (*Caes.* 59.3) recording of a witty Ciceronian remark—Cicero is said to have replied to someone's observation of the fact that the constellation of the Lyre would soon be rising with the words, 'Yes, by decree', pointing out the emperor's supposed ability to control even the heavens themselves.<sup>20</sup> With this as the imperial approach to belief, it becomes obvious that anything challenging the supremacy of the emperor in religious matters would immediately be classified as subversive and even as heresy. In addition, Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.72.4) reports that even verbally defaming the *princeps* was held to be an offence against the Roman people, and duly came to be included within the bounds of the *crimen maiestatis populi Romani minutae*. Indeed, the cult of the emperor is indicative of the ends to which a state will go in order to manipulate its people through their religious life. Similarly, the converse is also true, with the canny individual being entirely capable, through knowledge of these very same procedures, of manipulating the state for his or her own purposes with

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<sup>20</sup> Feeney 2007: 196-197.

the judicious application of religion.<sup>21</sup> The Christians would further cloud the issue with their refusal to sacrifice even on behalf of the ruling emperor,<sup>22</sup> and thus it is that Theophilus (*Ad Autol.* 1.11), the bishop of Antioch, expresses the Christian perspective as follows:

‘And so you will say to me, “Why do you not worship the emperor?” Because he was not born for worship, but to be honoured with lawful honour. For he is not a god, but a man, appointed by God, not for the purpose of worship, but to judge justly.’

ἐρεῖς οὖν μοι· Διὰ τί οὐ προσκυνεῖς τὸν βασιλέα; ὅτι οὐκ εἰς τὸ προσκυνεῖσθαι γέγονεν, ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ τιμᾶσθαι τῇ νομίμῳ τιμῇ. θεὸς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ ἄνθρωπος, ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμένος, οὐκ εἰς τὸ προσκυνεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ δικαίως κρίνειν.

Christians were however in the minority to begin with, and far more men and women across the Roman Empire were prepared to worship the emperor than were not. Charlesworth offers this insight as a possible starting point for a definition of the imperial cult:

‘In life, then, the emperor is the minister of the gods upon earth, a man raised to the highest pinnacle of human eminence, but he is not a god and (if wise) he knows it. If he serves the human race well, —if he leaves a good successor also behind him, —his merits will entitle him to be ennobled...by enrolment in the ranks of the gods whom the state worships.’<sup>23</sup>

John Stobaeus (4.7.62) reproduces a comment from the writer Diotogenes, saying, ‘In all these ways...kingship is a thing like godhood’, ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ

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<sup>21</sup> Price 1984b: 16.

<sup>22</sup> Liebeschuetz 1979: 198. Liebeschuetz rates this sacrificial activity as being more significant than the actual worship of the emperor itself.

<sup>23</sup> Charlesworth 1935: 42. This is in keeping with Fishwick’s (1987: 113) statement that ‘the Hellenistic world did not hesitate to set the charismatic individual on the superhuman level by conferring divine honours...’

τούτοις...θεόμιμόν ἐντι πρᾶγμα βασιλεία. From this particular point of view, the emperor is, as Theophilus wrote, chosen by the gods for his station, but only joins the ranks of the true gods by assuming the mantle of divinity once he has passed through death. This position certainly leaves notions like the *dominus et deus* of the Domitianic era out of the equation, with for example, the deification of Julius Caesar only taking place upon his death, originally through a unanimous declaration of consent from the peoples of Asia (Dio Cass. 51.20).

The behaviour of Augustus perhaps best points the way to the proper approach to deification, as he cautiously and precisely delineated the form of homage that he should receive from his people. In the Eastern Empire for example, he allowed Romans the opportunity to worship in temples of 'Roma and the Deified Julius Caesar' (Dio Cass. 51.20; Suet. *Aug.* 52).<sup>24</sup> This occurred comparatively early on in his reign. However, it is only in 12 BCE that we have evidence of an altar being dedicated along these lines in the west of the Empire (Livy *Epit.* 139).<sup>25</sup> A further two years would pass before the physical indicators of cult—temples, priests, and altars—would become apparent upon the Italian peninsula itself.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the cult of the emperor was only offered outside of the boundaries of Italy and took some time to make any inroads

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<sup>24</sup> See also Tac. *Ann.* 4.37 for Tiberius refusing temples after the manner of Augustus.

<sup>25</sup> The altar was dedicated to 'Romae et Augusto' (*CIL* xiii, 1664) at the joining of the Rhône and Saône Rivers, Fishwick 1987: 97.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor 1920: 117.

there, where the citizenry were not initially allowed to offer sacrifice in the name of the Deified Caesar. Throughout his reign Augustus displayed a public abhorrence for the notion of himself as a divine being, but the religious and in many cases, the almost divine language of many of the poets of his time leaves one with the impression that Augustus was quite willing to entertain discussion of his elevation to godhood.<sup>27</sup> It was in his often wary approach that Augustus pursued a religious confirmation of the position of authority he had won through civil war, and Fishwick even contends that this kind of 'personal sacralisation' was vital in the ancient world for delineating the relationship between a ruler and his subjects.<sup>28</sup>

These initial speculations into the invention of ruler cult, as it first began amongst the varied citizenry of the Roman Empire, appear to have generated an impetus in theological enquiries in particular, for the Romans, in their practicality, came to create a clear distinction between the *divus*, a deified emperor, and a *deus*, one of the eternal gods. Talbert suggests that the idea of raising someone to the status of immortal (not quite putting them on the same level as the eternals themselves) is an act that speaks to the 'significance of the individual' and is therefore not an especially religious act.<sup>29</sup> In the Greek East

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<sup>27</sup> Fishwick 1987: 90-91.

<sup>28</sup> Fishwick 1987: 83.

<sup>29</sup> Talbert 1976: 1635.

however, this distinction was almost never maintained.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the Greeks seldom concerned themselves with the emperors that had gone before them, as they preferred to concentrate their religious efforts upon the emperor whose authority impacted upon their lives most immediately.<sup>31</sup> Commenting on this emerging definition of imperial godhood, Cicero (*Phil.* 1.13) wrote the following on the occasion of Caesar's death:

'Do you imagine, Conscript Fathers, that I would support the decree you unwillingly passed, that the sacrifices for the dead be mixed with thanksgivings to the gods, that inexpiable religious practices be introduced to the Republic, that they should decree thanksgivings to the gods for a dead man? ... However, I could not be influenced to join any dead man with the religion of the immortal gods, so that he might receive divine worship publically, while a tomb existed for him where honours for the dead are paid.'

*An me censetis, patres conscripti, quod vos inviti secuti estis, decreturum fuisse, ut parentalia cum supplicationibus miscerentur, ut inexpiabiles religiones in rem publicam inducerentur, ut decernerentur supplicationes mortuo? ... adduci tamen non possem, ut quemquam mortuum coniungerem cum deorum immortalium religione, ut, cuius sepulchrum usquam extet, ubi parentetur, ei publicae supplicetur.*

Progress towards the deification of the first emperor was made incrementally, with a key step being the proclamation of a libation to be poured out for the *genius* of the then Octavian (Dio Cass. 51.19.7). Taylor describes this practice as little more than a 'veiled form of worship',<sup>32</sup> poised to traverse that fine line across which perched the predatory shape of Euhemerism and the eventual worship of a living, breathing emperor, indeed the advent of an absolute

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<sup>30</sup> Price 1984b: 220.

<sup>31</sup> Price 1984a: 85.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor 1931: 190.



political and religious despotism. However, the worship of the imperial *genius* could not take place at the level of open state cult because this would have led to the perception of the members of the senatorial elite as being 'servile *clientes* of the emperor' rather than Augustus being the first among equals. This obeisance paid to the *genius* of the first emperor only included specific cultic practices when conducted outside of Rome, and there as well, its priests came to hold the title of *flamen*.<sup>33</sup> Within the great city itself, the rituals were typically paired with the rites of other deities. Taylor also tells us that the evidence suggests that as many as sixty towns throughout Italy chose to worship Augustus while he yet lived.<sup>34</sup> And yet Gradel believes that in some cases, political pressure had to be applied by government in the early stages to encourage certain towns to take up the worship of *Divus Augustus* at all.<sup>35</sup> This behaviour would have been expected in the East where the deification of rulers was more common<sup>36</sup> but it is nevertheless foreseeable if, as Rudich comments, the bulk of the Roman population was actually 'unconcerned with the tradition of the *mos maiorum*' and would thus have been uninterested in the objections of elite society.<sup>37</sup> This same differentiation even appears in microcosm in the Western Empire where, during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, Gaul

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<sup>33</sup> Taylor 1920: 133. Non-official cults were conducted by the lesser *sacerdos*, Fishwick 1978: 1207.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor 1920: 122.

<sup>35</sup> Gradel 2002: 337.

<sup>36</sup> Nock 1930: 62 does note that deification was not common in the early history of the Greek East as such a measure would surely have fallen within the purview of the religious controls of Delphi.

<sup>37</sup> Rudich 1993: 42.

engaged in the cult worship of Roma and the Emperor Augustus even employing a *sacerdos* to conduct the rites before an altar; while Hispania worshipped *Divus Augustus* directly and had the prestige of carrying out these rituals in temples warded by a *flamen*.<sup>38</sup> Whether or not this displays actual belief or is evidence of attempts at gaining recognition and favour for *provincia* from the emperor is uncertain. Price is able to convincingly argue for the political nature of the imperial cult on the basis of two key points, firstly that the cult was clearly ‘manipulated by the state’, and secondly, that even Rome’s ‘subjects made diplomatic capital out of it’.<sup>39</sup> But Price goes on to write that celebrations surrounding the imperial cult, despite their supposedly dry political implications, were still very much a part of city life with great public sacrifices and festivities.<sup>40</sup> He concludes that the true purpose of the cult was the fabrication of a uniquely Roman reality, a reality underpinned by the cult worship of the emperor.<sup>41</sup> But the question remains, was this constructed reality characterized primarily by religious fervour or political manoeuvring?

In light of this I should like to briefly investigate the peculiarities of the phenomenon of ruler worship in the Greek East before making an assessment of the nature of the imperial ruler cult as a whole, as its seeds do lie in the earlier

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<sup>38</sup> Fishwick 1978: 1214.

<sup>39</sup> Price 1984b: 16.

<sup>40</sup> Price 1984b: 109.

<sup>41</sup> Price 1984b: 248.

manifestations of this form of political religion. The notion of the god-king emerges most powerfully from the empires of conquering nations like ancient Persia and Egypt, with the Pharaoh appearing as Horus-Re, and the King of Persia possessed of supernatural and divine capabilities. Plutarch, in his *Lysander*, tells the story of the Spartan admiral of the same name who defeated the Athenian fleet and managed to secure a favourable outcome in the Peloponnesian War for his homeland. Plutarch (*Lys.* 30.5) also notes that Lysander received many honours after his death, and is in fact believed to be the first Greek man to receive divine honours after his passing.<sup>42</sup> It was his heroic and epic accomplishments that perhaps accorded him the honour of becoming a god in death. However, Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1145a) tells us that for a man to be possessed of overwhelming virtue is in fact sufficient qualification for the proclamation of godhood. He continues this argument in the *Rhetorica* (1361a):

‘But honour is the sign of repute for doing good deeds, and those who have done good are justly and greatly honoured, but the man positioned to do good is not honoured; either for safety and for the many reasons for living, or for wealth, or for any other good things, which are not easily obtainable either altogether or in different circumstances; for many people are honoured for things that seem to be small, but these are based on places and times [i.e. the circumstances]...’

τιμὴ δ' ἐστὶν μὲν σημεῖον εὐεργετικῆς εὐδοξίας, τιμῶνται δὲ δικαίως μὲν καὶ μάλιστα οἱ εὐεργετηκότες, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ τιμᾶται καὶ ὁ δυνάμενος εὐεργετεῖν· εὐεργεσία δὲ ἢ εἰς σωτηρίαν καὶ ὅσα αἴτια τοῦ εἶναι, ἢ εἰς πλοῦτον, ἢ εἰς τι τῶν ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν, ὧν μὴ ῥαδία ἢ

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<sup>42</sup> Hodkinson 1998: *sv.* ‘Lysander’.

κτῆσις ἢ ὅλως ἢ ἐνταῦθα ἢ τότε· πολλοὶ γὰρ διὰ μικρὰ δοκοῦντα τιμῆς τυγχάνουσιν, ἀλλ' οἱ τόποι καὶ οἱ καιροὶ αἴτιοι.

A man's service to the community at large, especially in the case of the ruler who might well perform all of the functions of 'priest, general and judge',<sup>43</sup> won him the right to cultic commemoration. Fishwick simplifies this by noting that 'a man—like a god—was paid cult for what he had done, not for who or what he was; though naturally the former would flow from the latter.'<sup>44</sup> In addition, Gradel contends that there was never an actual division of human and divine, mortal and immortal, in the minds of the ancients, but it was purely a point of status, with one superior to the other in terms of their positions in the chain of being. In sum then, a deified ruler was never truly a god, merely more important than all other humans.<sup>45</sup> As Nock has it, 'θεός does not necessarily imply more than being possessed of greater power than humanity has and immune to death.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Fishwick 1987: 6.

<sup>44</sup> Fishwick 1987: 26.

<sup>45</sup> Gradel 2002: 26, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Nock 1928: 31. Conversely, Seneca's (*Apocol.* 11.4) words are caustic in his satiric portrayal of Claudius' entry into the heavens as deified emperor, and indeed he asks who would worship one such as Claudius, especially if mankind is to contrive any respect at all for the eternal gods (*Hunc deum quis colet? Quis credet? Dum tales deos facitis, nemo vos deos esse credet.*), for writers like Suetonius (*Claud.* 2. 22) set down the various faults of this Emperor, including his lack of physical strength and mental acuity, due to having suffered from several childhood ailments, and his even more disagreeable habits which included drooling, stammering, and nervous tics. Seneca's observation is certainly appropriate to the initial characterization of the Roman imperial cult as abjuring traditional religious perceptions in favour of the aggrandizement of the royal lineage.

In the East ruler cults were generally established by the local populace in order to honour the particular deeds of a king.<sup>47</sup> Any form of the cult that originated with the rulers themselves seems to have been largely ignored.<sup>48</sup> Through the initial institution of these cults the line between 'god' and 'divine ruler' becomes increasingly distorted, for while the Roman notions of *divus* and *deus* kept the two sides clearly defined in the opinion of the religious authorities, no such clarity was possible in the East.<sup>49</sup> The double-edged nature of ruler cult is particularly obvious in the writings of Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 26.32) wherein he notes the necessity of praying not only to the gods for the well-being of the emperor, but that one should pray to the emperor himself for blessings as well. In this regard, Fishwick states that it was a commonly held belief that certain notable *divi*, especially Augustus, Marcus Aurelius and Julian, were able to hear and respond to the prayers of mortals.<sup>50</sup>

The disparity between the operations of the ruler cult in the Eastern and Western Empire is just as obvious. This is especially clear in the distinction between the settled and unsettled (or frontier) *provincia*, a distinction that established how much of an imperial cult centre a town could become. Accompanying this was a process of redefinition that took place in the mind of

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<sup>47</sup> This can be contrasted with the standardized format of Roman deification which was a senatorially sanctioned process.

<sup>48</sup> Price 1984b: 36.

<sup>49</sup> Price 1984b: 220.

<sup>50</sup> Fishwick 1995: 17.

every inhabitant of the Roman Empire, a process whereby the emperor was reconciled with the gods and goddesses of the local existing pantheon. This occurred through 'bureaucratic rituals and ceremonial forms that endowed membership in the Roman community with meaning'.<sup>51</sup> As in the original Eastern manifestations of ruler cult, this imperial cult activity came to both define and express the loyalty of the Roman citizenry to the *imperium Romanum*.<sup>52</sup> Again, Pliny's (*Ep.* 10.96-97) letter to the Emperor Trajan is an example of this, with the sacrifices before the emperor also functioning as a test of loyalty for the early Christians. In general, feeling toward the imperial cult was mixed among the populace. Lucan, for example, working in the first century CE, was rather scathing in his characterization of the cult within the pages of his *Pharsalia* (6. 807-809):

'Hasten to death, proud and noble,  
Descend to the graves, as you will, with humble spirit  
And trample the ghosts of the gods of Rome.'

*Properate mori magnoque superbi  
Quamvis e parvis animo descendite bustis  
Et Romanorum manes calcate deorum.*

The 'gods of Rome' referred to here are of course the deified Caesars. A more powerfully evocative remark occurs in Book 8 (831-837) of Lucan's work:

'Into Roman temples we have received your Isis  
And semi-divine dogs and the rattle that calls for lament  
And Osiris, whom your wailing proves human:  
You Egypt, hold our dead in the dust.

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<sup>51</sup> Ando 2000: 337.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor 1931: 190.

You also, while you have already given temples to the cruel tyrant,  
 Not yet, oh Rome, have you sought out Pompey's ashes;  
 The leader's shade still lies in exile.'

*Nos in templa tuam Romana recepinus Isim  
 Semideosque canes et sistra iubentia luctus  
 Et, quem tu plangens hominem testaris, Osirim:  
 Tu nostros, Aegypte, tenes in pulvere manes.  
 Tu quoque, cum saevo dederis iam templa tyranno,  
 Nondum Pompeii cineres, o Roma, petisti;  
 Exul adhuc iacet umbra ducis.*

The *templa tyranno* that Lucan describes is in fact a temple of the deified Caesar. He receives cult honours while a great servant of Rome, Pompey, is utterly forgotten, left to languish in the manner of Polynices. This clever juxtaposition of 'good' and 'bad' Roman behaviour is emphasized by the fact that *traditio* seems to have been overridden in Rome by what Lucan describes as the semi-divine dogs and the lamented Osiris—Egyptian religious rites representing the foreign, of which even the Cumaean Sibyl is apparently wary (Luc. *Phars.* 8.823-826). What is also important is exactly who is expressing the above sentiments, for it is Cordus, the man responsible for hastily seeing to the rites of death for the fallen Pompey. His attitudes reveal him to be a Republican, a staunch supporter of the old ways, evinced in the fact that he is the one to whom it has fallen to properly see to the eternal peace of the great general. Again, a possible point of coincidence with the tale of Antigone is apparent, for like her, it is Cordus alone who has the willingness to respect the old *traditio* in the face of the horrors of civil war. Finally, if this Cordus has, at the very least, his roots in

the real Cremutius Cordus, then his perspective on events is made quite clear by Tacitus in the *Annals* (4.34):

‘The consulship of Cornelius Cossus and Asinius Agrippa brought charges against Cremutius Cordus for a crime that was new and then heard of for the first time—for the reason that he produced a history and praised M. Brutus and declared C. Cassius the last of the Romans.’

*Cornelius Cosso Asinio Agrippa consulibus Cremutius Cordus postulator, novo ac tunc primum audito crimine, quod editis annalibus laudatoque M. Bruto C. Cassium Romanorum ultimum dixisset.*

It is nevertheless important to realize that Lucan does exaggerate, and thus, while his exposition of the imperial cult strikes a chord with an extremist position, it cannot be taken as commonplace.

Some modern scholars conceive of the worship of the emperor in political terms, or as thanksgiving for imperial benefits,<sup>53</sup> but Gradel believes that to think of the imperial cult in this way is to ‘miss the point’ as ‘absolute and permanent power probably found expression throughout Roman history in divine honours bestowed on men as well as on gods.’<sup>54</sup> Potter concludes this thought in his own investigation, stating that the true purpose of the cult was in reality political communication,<sup>55</sup> a means of placing the emperor before his subjects in a particular context, surrounded by trappings with which they could relate and

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<sup>53</sup> Fishwick 1978: 1252-1253 for example, suggests that the importance of the imperial cult lies in the area of ‘practical government’ because of the way that it affirmed political relations.

<sup>54</sup> Gradel 2002: 53.

<sup>55</sup> Potter 1994: 128.



interact. Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 26.63) in his boundless enthusiasm for all that is Roman, renders the situation in this way:

‘And in self-aggrandizing you have not made it admirable, in giving no-one else a share of it, but you have sought a citizenry worthy of it, and you have made “Roman” no longer related to a city, but as the name of some common race, and this not one out of all of them, but a balance of those left over. For now you do not divide the races into Greeks and barbarians, and you have not made a foolish distinction between them, for you reveal a city more crowded than all of the Greek race, so to speak, but you have separated them into Romans and non-Romans, to such an extent have you broadened the name of the city.’

καὶ οὐκ ἀποσεμνυνάμενοι τούτῳ θαυμαστὴν ἐποιήσατε, τῷ μηδενὶ τῶν ἄλλων αὐτῆς μεταδιδόναι, ἀλλὰ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς ἄξιον ἐζητήσατε, καὶ τὸ Ῥωμαῖον εἶναι ἐποιήσατε οὐ πόλεως, ἀλλὰ γένους ὄνομα κοινῷ τινος, καὶ τούτου οὐχ ἑνὸς τῶν πάντων, ἀλλ’ ἀντιρρόπου πᾶσι τοῖς λοιποῖς. οὐ γὰρ εἰς Ἑλλήνας καὶ βαρβάρους διαιρεῖτε νῦν τὰ γένη, οὐδὲ γελοῖαν τὴν διαίρεσιν ἀπεφήνατε αὐτοῖς πολυανθρωποτέραν τὴν πόλιν παρεχόμενοι ἢ κατὰ πᾶν, ὥς εἰπεῖν, τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν φύλον, ἀλλ’ εἰς Ῥωμαίους τε καὶ οὐ Ῥωμαίους ἀντιδιείλετε, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἐξηγάγετε τὸ τῆς πόλεως ὄνομα.

If this degree of civic recognition and loyalty to Roman authority was the norm, then it calls attention to another observation of Taylor’s, wherein she indicates that in a number of cases it was primarily the lower orders who participated in these specific cult rites.<sup>56</sup> Would the nobility of any conquered region not have been decidedly anxious to display their loyalty to the ruling power through these rituals as well? And what is more, if as commentators like Fishwick suggest, the worship of the emperor brought with it Romanisation through the institutions of the cult itself, why would the average person have been more ready to accept the emperor into his or her pantheon than the elites, especially if

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<sup>56</sup> Taylor 1931: 190.

‘local dignitaries... competed for the privilege of conducting rites’ with equal or greater enthusiasm?<sup>57</sup> One cannot expect theological speculation to have been a high priority in the minds of the working class, particularly when their education ceased after having covered little more than the bare basics of reading and writing. Furthering one’s education by exploring rhetoric and the like was the exclusive preserve of the wealthy. It could be argued then that the deified emperor was yet another god to be inserted into the ever-expanding Graeco-Roman pantheon, a new deity whom the uneducated might choose to favour with their worship and prayers, or not. This is however an overly reductionist perspective, as the personal choice of who or what to worship is a highly complex one.<sup>58</sup> It is better, as I have already pointed out, to conceive of this choice from an understanding of the ancient concept of ἰσόθεοι τιμαί as descriptive of the gulf of difference that existed between commoner and emperor. Because of the absolute authority that the emperor exercised over the life and death of his subjects, he could potentially have the greatest immediate impact of any god upon the individual believer, and thus was most definitely deserving of divine honours and worship. This also accounts for the cults of dead Roman emperors being to a great extent ignored by the peoples of the Greek East—their power and authority were quite simply not as immanent as

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<sup>57</sup> Fishwick 1978: 1209.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter II.

that of the emperor on the throne, although as always, those with Roman citizenship experienced matters quite differently to those without it.<sup>59</sup>

Important imperial cult centres also provided nodes from whence pro-imperial sentiments could be expressed,<sup>60</sup> through which a religiously oriented manifestation of control could be translated into sociopolitical action. This distinction developed because of the manner in which Romans and their subjects, particularly those inhabiting the Eastern Empire, perceived the people who held political power over their lives. In the Western Empire, municipalities initially made use of imperial cult worship primarily among the slaves and freedmen,<sup>61</sup> while it appears that much attention was paid to the less obviously divine cult of the *Genius Augusti* among actual Roman citizens.<sup>62</sup> Despite the early situation, it appears that all Roman citizens gradually countenanced the initially vague notion of an emperor, a notion that, given time, would come to dominate all imperial life. However, enthusiasm for a cult and even the actual use of altars, sacrifices, priests, and the like are all merely outward symbols, none of which can be taken as indicative of any verifiable *belief* in the emperor *as* god.<sup>63</sup> What can be proven more easily is that all this was used in the quest for increased power and political authority, certainly not spiritual objectives in

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<sup>59</sup> See above pp. 217-221.

<sup>60</sup> Stevenson 1952: 209.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor 1931: 214.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor 1931: 190.

<sup>63</sup> Fishwick 1995: 17.

the least. Because of its pervasiveness and its place in proving one's loyalty to the Empire, the imperial cult redefined relationships as they existed between individuals and even between nations. With the mediating influence of the senate reduced to little more than a rubber stamp on the status quo, the emperor came to be the sole arbiter of religious action. Beard, North, and Price confirm this with the example of naturally occurring portents and *prodigia*, which until the imperial period, were reported to and expounded by the senate. As the trio conclude, 'these seemingly random intrusions of divine displeasure must have appeared incongruous in a system where divine favour flowed through the emperor.'<sup>64</sup>

Returning then to the question that I posed at this chapter's outset—can the Roman people truly be said to have engaged in the actual worship of the *princeps*, when so many commentators suggest the possibility that the imperial cult was largely a political exercise? Gradel points out that divine cult worship was a way of drawing attention to 'a maximum status gap between the recipient [of the honours] and the worshippers'.<sup>65</sup> This was a relational distinction that designated the recipient of divine honours as being godly *in relation to* his earthly supporters and not in relation to the eternal gods themselves. To use Nock's formulation, it was a kind of behavioural 'etiquette'

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<sup>64</sup> Beard, North, and Price 1998: 252.

<sup>65</sup> Gradel 2002: 29.

and not an absolute belief.<sup>66</sup> In reality, divinity was something bestowed by the Roman senate upon a deceased emperor, although Plutarch (*Quaest. Rom.* 28.10) does contend that the emperor took over the mantle of godhead ‘not by the law of the people’, οὐ νόμῳι πόλεως. There was no popular assembly, and presumably with the successor of the dead emperor looking on, deification would have been a mere formality. Deification is in fact often characterized as a reward for the ‘well behaved’ emperor, perhaps a spiritual boon bestowed upon his good name and upon his progeny. The men to whom the task of declaring a *divus* fell, were of course nobles whose claim to authority in the imperial period rested entirely with the power of the emperor, a continuously precarious situation that could be said to have forced the wearers of the *toga praetexta* into obviously political and placatory actions like the deification of Nero’s deceased daughter (Tac. *Ann.* 15.23). It was nonetheless politically expedient for a new emperor to maintain an unbroken chain of divine succession with his forebears, and hence, even the most reviled of the imperial house received divine honours.

The imperial cult thus presented Philostratus with several difficulties. Most immediately problematic was the fact that it could create a proliferation of rallying points for pro-imperial apologists. This kind of political cache would

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<sup>66</sup> Nock 1942: 218.

undoubtedly prove an impediment because most ‘new religious movements’ (i.e. fundamentalisms) find themselves eventually drawn to participation in the political sphere in order to expand the power and influence of their ideology within a given society.<sup>67</sup> The worship of the emperor, both as a form of belief entirely alien to the Roman psyche, and as a possible nexus for the conglomeration of resistance elements seeking to maintain the *status quo* of political and religious imperial hegemony, was therefore a vital component of the battleground of fundamentalist debate. The figure of Apollonius of Tyana is most immediately telling in this Philostratean ‘polyvalent’ fundamentalist perspective. Philostratus goes to great lengths in his evocation of the Tyanaean Sage as the perfect example of a teacher and wonder-worker. He emphasizes an extreme position in almost all things—Apollonius is not just any Pythagorean but in fact has a unique relationship with the founder, Pythagoras, himself, making him into the most mystical of mystics. He even rivals Jesus of Nazareth by raising the dead and ascending to heaven. Apollonius travels to the farthest reaches of the known world—Babylon, India, and Egypt—all places steeped in decidedly ancient lore and magic. Not only do his travels reveal the truly universal applicability of his belief system, but they prove the character’s reliance on a solid foundation of archaic and traditional wisdom. Most importantly, Apollonius is described as visiting a multitude of shrines and

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<sup>67</sup> I will grapple with the issue of the political ramifications of Philostratus’ ‘polyvalent’ fundamentalism in Chapters IX and X.

temples in his travels (VA 4.24.1). None of them is ever a sanctuary of the imperial cult, despite the fact that in crossing the known world, and indeed despite his living for much of the first century, he should have encountered at least one. I suggest that this avoidance of imperial cult sanctuaries is emblematic of Philostratus' stance regarding new religious forms, for although Apollonius is shown to engage in direct confrontation with several of the emperors, he nevertheless refrains from visiting the places in which they are worshipped. Instead he chooses to journey to the sanctuaries of the old gods, wherein he stops to correct any practices that have strayed from *traditio*. What is particularly intriguing is that even in the cases of so-called barbarian rites, Apollonius seeks to learn the practices and beliefs of the cult before offering an opinion on how they can be improved, and perhaps reconciled with the traditional Graeco-Roman perspective that he espouses (VA 1.16.3).

Similarly, as I will elaborate on in the following chapter, the *Heroikos* is a dialogue that displays the very same trend in the thinking from its author, as it is here that Philostratus reveals an apparent desire for the renewal of the old cult of the heroes. This is reflected in the VA (4.11-16) as well, in a scene in which Apollonius recounts his discussions with the ghost of Achilles. This scene continues to hint at the same truth that the *Heroikos* does, and has Achilles recounting the 'real' events of the Trojan War in the manner as the vinedresser

does in the *Heroikos*. Importantly, Achilles informs Apollonius that the Thessalian people have forgotten his sacrifices and need to reinstitute them, an expression in keeping with the overall Philostratean tendency to emphasize ancient *traditio*. By contrast, the letters of Apollonius point out the troubles of imperial society through its officialdom, and sometimes even directly address the emperors themselves, but in no case do the letters address the issue of the imperial cult. Several general comments are pertinent, for example Apollonius' words in a letter to the Ephesians, concerning the temple of Artemis (*Ep. Apol.* 65, 66), which accuses the Ephesians of exaggerating the right of asylum with the result that their temple is filled with criminals. This can be likened to the situation created by the extension of asylum to imperial effigies which Tacitus (*Ann.* 3.36) vividly describes:

'That which was kept secret in the intimate complaints of many came out as manifest. For license spread abroad for the inferior to assault the noble with abuse and scorn, slipping away by grasping for images of Caesar; even freedmen and slaves moreover, were feared by patron and owner who directed voices and hands against them.'

*Exim promptum quod multorum intimis questibus tegebatur. incedebat enim deterrimo cuique licentia impune probra et invidiam in bonos excitandi arrepta imagine Caesaris; libertique etiam ac servi, patrono vel domino cum voces, cum manus intentarent, ultro metuebantur.*

The conferring of a previously divine right, a right traditionally held only by the sanctuaries of certain deities, upon the statues of the imperial family, caused serious consternation within Rome. Indeed, this was a natural result of the extension of divine authority to the *divi*, a visible symbol of the decline of



sacred belief into sycophancy, and thus an element of imperial society demanding a reaction from Philostratus. He describes a situation in which an imperial official seeks the protection of a statue of the Emperor at VA 1.15.2:

‘People of all ages, incensed against the magistrate, kindled torches for him, although he cleaved to statues of the emperor, which were even more feared and inviolable than that of Zeus at Olympia, being of Tiberius, of whom it is said that a man was convicted of treason, having struck his own slave whilst he carried a silver drachma emblazoned with Tiberius’ image.’

ἀνηρέθιστο δὴ ἐπὶ τὸν ἄρχοντα ἡλικία πᾶσα καὶ πυρὸς ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἤπτοντο, καίτοι προσκείμενον τοῖς βασιλείοις ἀνδριᾶσιν, οἱ καὶ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ φοβερώτεροι ἦσαν τότε καὶ ἀσυλότεροι, Τιβερίου γε ὄντες, ἐφ’ οὗ λέγεται τις ἀσεβῆσαι δόξαι, τυπτήσας τὸν ἑαυτοῦ δοῦλον φέροντα δραχμὴν ἀργυρᾶν νενομισμένην ἐς Τιβέριον.

This episode at Aspendus can be seen to serve two functions: firstly, Philostratus reveals his own personal views to his readers when he reports the story of Tiberius’ image in the passage introduced by the Greek λέγεται. Here, he mentions the case of this accusation of treason in order to point out the extreme to which the supposed reverence for imperial imagery had been taken. Secondly, the story shows Apollonius bringing corrupt imperial officials to book and ultimately saving the people of the city from famine (VA 1.15.2-3). The episode can therefore perhaps be viewed as Philostratus using his version of Apollonius to bring the imperial corruption of religion and society to light. In the next chapter I will reveal how Philostratus sets up his *Heroikos* primarily as a reaction to this disparaging of tradition, and utilises the cult of heroes as his counter-attack to push aside the cult of the emperor.

## Chapter VIII

### *The Philostratean Fundamentalist Perspective:*

### *Reflections on Religious Tradition in the Heroikos.*

*“One of the main concerns of the ancestors is that customs be kept and the necessary ceremonies be performed.”*

*(M. Vera Buhrmann)<sup>1</sup>*

Working in the first half of the third century, Philostratus was writing at a time in which the gods of the ancients could be said to have been dying out. The earliest notions of divinity, founded upon the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, were gradually being rejected in favour of more personalized rites and philosophies or in steadily growing numbers by conversion to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This chapter analyzes Philostratus’ intentions behind the writing of another of his major works, the *Heroikos*. The reason for this particular investigation is that the juxtaposition of this work with the VA emphasizes the sympathy that Philostratus had for the declining traditional religions of the Graeco-Roman world. I have argued that the hero of the VA—Apollonius of Tyana—carries out a policy of religious renewal across the Greek-speaking world in the course of his philosophical meanderings. This reinvigoration is paralleled in the *Heroikos* by a call to renew the traditional worship of the ancient mythical heroes once more, or

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<sup>1</sup> M. Vera Buhrmann 1987: 442.

rather, at the very least, to take the hero-cult seriously as a viable means of approaching the divine realm.

Two questions arise prior to advancing any inquiry in this area—firstly, why is there a need to examine the practice of hero-cult through the writings of a man that I have characterized as a person with a propensity for fundamentalist belief, and secondly, why concentrate on the peculiarities of the cult of Protesilaos (the centrepiece of the *Heroikos*), especially considering the decidedly sophistic slant given it in Philostratus' portrayal in this work? Concerning my first line of inquiry, archaeological evidence for the religious worship of so-called heroes exists as far back as the first millennium BCE.<sup>2</sup> Epigraphic evidence suggests that hero-cult continued to be very popular during the Hellenistic period but seemed to wane somewhat over time, with the last identifiable remnant of the ancient hero-cult arguably a decree from Arcesine on Amorgos, dating to 242 CE,<sup>3</sup> that declares a certain Aurelius Octavius to be 'holy and decent', ἱερός καὶ εὐπρεπής (I. G. 12. 7, 53 = Syll. 889). Thus the beliefs and rituals of the hero-cult, and the practice of heroization itself (i.e. the creation of heroes), can at the very least be shown to experience a progressive decline before the forces of Christianity, popularized Eastern mystery cults and general indifference, all sweeping processes that would

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<sup>2</sup> Dué & Nagy 2004: 52.

<sup>3</sup> Jones 2001: 146.

have borne witness to a once mighty flood of newly created heroes and heroines drying up to a slow trickle. Hero-cult is therefore an archaic religious form that was falling into disuse in the time during which Philostratus was writing both the *VA* and the *Heroikos*, a form of belief that was essential to the earliest formation of both Greek and Roman identity, particularly as regards notions of autochthony—potential claims not only upon the gods but on the very land itself.

Philostratus presents the ancient practice of hero worship from a unique point of view, a position embedded within the tradition of the Second Sophistic, and thus shaped by both the stylistics of the literary period and his own Atticizing tendencies. Together these give shape to the Hellenism that colours his sociopolitical outlook. Simone Follet believes that much of Philostratus' description of the Eastern Empire is highly realistic, and that the particular brand of realism, and indeed, even his representation of the Roman environment 'is an interesting part of his "Hellenism"'.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the prejudices and beliefs that Philostratus brings to bear upon his subject matter, and the way that he elects to form this through his writing, are what essentially dictated his otherwise peculiar attention to the moribund hero-cult. This was an originally Greek religious practice that had become outmoded in the Roman Empire partly because of the advance of other

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<sup>4</sup> Follet 2004: 235.

theological perspectives and philosophies. It is a practice that should be looked on as one of the building blocks of Graeco-Roman religious belief because it, like the system of Olympian deities, traced its roots back into the canonical mytho-historical works of Hesiod and Homer. This fact held distinct possibilities for a Greek author who was both intrigued by archaic religious forms, and who brought the perspective of the Second Sophistic to bear upon his subject matter. These possibilities could be expressed in both political and religious commentary that functioned in much the same manner as Apollonius of Tyana's rigid Pythagoreanism, a philosophical approach that, for Philostratus, was replete with opportunities for remarking on the decadence of the Roman Empire. Likewise, the ancestral traditions bound up within the complex of the hero-cult also permitted him to point to a golden age of Greek belief, a time immortalized in the achievements of Achilles and Protesilaos, a time in which myth and history intersected, and gods did battle alongside their favourite mortals. Moreover, Fishwick suggests that the ancestor cult held a distinctive position in the development of the earliest forms of emperor worship at Rome. In some of the first expressions of ancestor cult at Rome, specifically in the *divi parentes* or *di manes*, a strong sense of communal participation was fostered through festivals like the Parentalia, during which the community's dead were both propitiated and

remembered.<sup>5</sup> It is this commemoration of the departed that could be seen to form the basis for the establishment of the cult of the emperor, providing room for the argument that the imperial cult is born out of the Roman reverence for the spirits of the deceased, and not from any decided weakness for eastern religious practices.<sup>6</sup> It is this celebration of the power and influence of the emperor as *divus* that creates the worship of the emperor, founded along the same lines as the worship of heroes centuries before. A return to the first motivations of the phenomenon of hero-cult through Homeric epic and the legend of Protesilaos in particular is thus a unique opportunity for Philostratus to provide comment on the steady decline of traditional religion in third century Rome. This explains why Philostratus chooses the cult of Protesilaos as the central theme of his *Heroikos*, and is also the answer to my second question, an answer that I shall now explore in greater detail, beginning with the generics of typical Greek hero-cult and then moving on to integrate this with the Philostratean interpretation of the hero Protesilaos.

As my point of departure I have elected to define the notion of hero-cult using the same broad approach as Pache, who notes that the cult was essentially a

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<sup>5</sup> Fishwick 1987: 51.

<sup>6</sup> Fishwick 2002: 42.

combination of myths and rituals associated with the worship of heroes'.<sup>7</sup> Walter Burkert refines this definition into a more precise form, suggesting that 'the hero is a deceased person who exerts from his grave a power for good or evil and who demands appropriate honour.'<sup>8</sup> It is fitting to begin formulating an understanding of what Burkert and Pache are characterizing by examining the source of many of the tales of the ancient heroes, namely the work of Homer. Two brief examples will suffice to illustrate the perceived difference between the hero and the normal human. Firstly, in battle the Telamonian Aias kills a Trojan by hurling a massive stone at him. As Homer (*Il.* 12.381-383) tells it, the effort made in raising the stone must have been enormous:

'Not easily could a man hold it with both hands himself, by no means being youthful, such as mortals are now...

οὐδέ κέ μιν ῥέα  
χείρεσσ' ἀμφοτέρῃς ἔχοι ἀνὴρ οὐδὲ μάλ' ἡβῶν,  
οἷοι νῦν βροτοί εἰς'.

The second example is similar, but this time it is Aeneas who lifts an immense stone (*Hom. Il.* 20.286-287),

'...and Aeneas took a throwing stone in his hand—a great work—which could not be carried by two men, such as mortals are now...'

ὁ δὲ χειρμάδιον λάβε χειρὶ

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<sup>7</sup> Pache 2004: 4. Realizing that female heroes did in fact exist in the ancient world, I have still elected to utilize the male pronoun alone in order make the constant task of referring to heroes somewhat easier.

<sup>8</sup> Burkert 1985: 203.

Αἰνεΐας, μέγα ἔργον, ὃ οὐ δύο γ' ἄνδρε φέροιεν,  
οἷοι νῦν βροτοί εισ'·

The important phrase for this analysis is 'just as mortals are now', or οἷοι νῦν βροτοί εισ', a description that clearly distinguishes the capabilities of the hero from those of the people of the Homeric poet's generation. It is therefore apparent that the hero is able to accomplish feats that are beyond the purview of the regular human being. Hesiod (*Op.* 159-160) adds the following to the description of the generation of heroes, characterizing them as 'a race of godlike hero-men, who are called demi-gods...' (ἄνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἱ καλέονται ἡμίθεοι...) Hesiod thus adds two essential descriptors to the earliest portrayal of the ancient hero, suggesting that heroes are almost powerful enough to be classed as divine beings, and that they are responsible for enacting great deeds in the age before the time of the Homeric poet. At the very minimum in this early incarnation, heroes are also part god, typically descended from a full-blooded deity. Another point that stems from later in the Hesiodic (*Op.* 170-169b) depiction concerns what is said to happen to a hero, being partially mortal after all, upon his death:

'And they dwelled without care in the islands of the blessed,  
alongside deep-eddying Okeanos, happy heroes,  
for them the bountiful soil bears honey-sweet fruit  
flourishing three times a year.'

καὶ τοὶ μὲν ναίουσιν ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες  
ἐν μακάρων νήσοισι παρ' Ὀκεανὸν βαθυδίνην,  
ὄλβιοι ἥρωες, τοῖσιν μελιηδέα καρπὸν  
τρὶς ἔτεος θάλλοντα φέρει ζεΐδωρος ἄρουρα.



This belief that heroes existed separately from both gods and men is illustrated in a variant of the tale of the passing of Achilles, which has his mother, Thetis, snatch him off of his own burning funeral pyre. She takes him to Leukē, the White Island, where he is made immortal (Arr. *Peripl. M. Eux.* 21). This explains the existence of deceased heroes upon the Islands of the Blessed, as according to the earliest commentators, they were at the very least semi-divine beings and, although they could not join the true Olympian gods in the heavens—only Herakles ever manages to transcend this boundary—they were similarly forbidden from resting with the souls of ordinary mortals in the cold dark of Hades. Because of this they assumed a strangely secondary position in Greek theology, experiencing eternity ‘on the earth-encircling river Okeanos, far from the inhabited portions of the earth’<sup>9</sup> and far from any others who dwelt in the Nether Realms. This kind of geographical depiction in fact plays a key role in demarcating the influence of the hero-cult, as it does in many other aspects of early Greek thinking, including for example, the divisions of the underworld. It is additionally intriguing to find that the White Island of Achilles is in fact a geographical reality, being situated on the Black Sea. In a manner not unlike Achilles the island seems to have held a Panhellenic significance, as the archaeological record suggests.<sup>10</sup> Thus while the

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<sup>9</sup> Hedreen 1991: 320.

<sup>10</sup> Hedreen 1991: 321-322. For example, a statue (dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) honouring a man who rid the area of pirates, bears an Olbian decree that states that they (the Olbians) still care for the area

worship of the Olympians was conducted universally across the Greek world, 'a hero is always confined to a specific locality: he acts in the vicinity of his grave for his family, group or city.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed it is most often around the purported tomb or remains of a hero that a cult first develops, and because of this, Coldstream contends that there is regularly confusion between the archaeology of grave cult and hero-cult.<sup>12</sup> Even though the two forms of religion appear to be similar, grave cult is usually devoted to the propitiation of the spirits of deceased family members, while hero worship was concentrated on a specific, famous, and often mythical individual. However, hero-cults tend to be more stable while grave or ancestor cults will usually die out with a family's memory. And yet, because a hero-cult is almost always founded upon the hero's grave site, Betz is still able to write that 'hero cults are all grave cults, and where there is no grave, a hero cult is hardly conceivable.'<sup>13</sup>

Graeco-Roman myth and religion has always displayed a powerful distinction between Olympian and chthonic cultic ritual. Burkert provides a short description of the key elements involved in the practices of hero-cult, rituals that mark it as a wholly chthonic cult. He lists the following as important:

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according to the requirements of tradition. Additionally, a vast array of coins has been discovered, minted in various locations.

<sup>11</sup> Burkert 1985: 206.

<sup>12</sup> Coldstream 1976: 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Betz 2004: 46.

‘blood sacrifices, food offerings, and libations; the preparation of a bath is often found, and weeping and lamentation are frequently attested. The main event, however, is the cultic feast of the living in the company of, and in honour of, the hero.’<sup>14</sup>

Funerary games were also sometimes part of the remembrance of a hero as the tradition of lamenting Achilles before the opening of the Olympic Games indicates.<sup>15</sup> Pache notes that the specific relationship between worshipper and hero is an ‘individual’ one that is predicated upon the belief in the ‘physical reality of the hero’s presence’.<sup>16</sup> This is because a hero’s power is believed to be most immediately immanent in the area around his shrine or grave site. The specific rituals of the cult bind the worshipper to the hero in a way that can perhaps be likened to the personalized religious perspective that I discussed as being one of the major attractions of the Eastern mystery rites. Therefore, I would argue that this allows Philostratus the opportunity of touting the hero-cult as a perfect counterbalance for the intruding foreign mysteries, in that they offer the possibility of a similar religious experience and grant a reinvigorated form of early Greek cult the precedence that it deserves. Furthermore, of equal relevance is the fact that the ancient heroes were bound to both their mortal bloodlines and homelands, and that to recognize the claim of the geographically specific presence of the hero through the related cultic rites ‘is to affirm the identity of the group, to accept its

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<sup>14</sup> Burkert 1985: 205.

<sup>15</sup> Dué & Nagy 2001: xxxi.

<sup>16</sup> Pache 2004: 9.

rules and hence assure its continuance.’<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the argument can be made that the establishment of a hero-cult in a particular region should in fact be perceived as a claim to a level of autochthony, a claim upon the very land itself, and thus a means of homogenizing not only the local belief systems but political allegiances as well.<sup>18</sup> The group’s claim to a certain area is extremely important in many African tribes for example, and seems to directly impact upon the very souls of the tribe’s members, as is evident in the many recent cases in South Africa of the bones of long-deceased ancestors being returned to the original places in which they lived, a means of finally laying their disquieted spirits to rest. Boonzaier, Malherbe, Smith, and Berens detail the entire saga of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoi woman put on display as a scientific curiosity in Europe, and the battle to have her remains returned and properly interred in her home soil.<sup>19</sup> Incidents like these necessarily points to a second use that hero-cult held for the author of the *Heroikos*, as the archaic ways of the cult could function as justification for the construction of a competing political reality, characterized by the noble and heroic deeds of their mythical ancestors, and therefore, a reality that could perhaps displace the currently unfavourable situation imposed by the Roman colonialist authorities and symbolized by the imposition of the imperial cult. It granted access to a purer and

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<sup>17</sup> Burkert 1985: 190-191.

<sup>18</sup> Whitely 1988: 178-180.

<sup>19</sup> Boonzaier, Malherbe, Smith & Berens 1996: 98-99, 140.

more traditional form of religion that could be employed to arrest the decline of the Graeco-Roman *mos maiorum*.

The basic question surrounding the genesis of Greek hero-cult depends largely upon the importance of the role that one assigns to Homer and early epic. In discussing the myth of Jason and Hypsipyle, Burkert writes that 'the rituals did not enact the myth, the myth did not receive its plot from the rituals.'<sup>20</sup> From this somewhat tautological point of view it would seem that neither myth nor ritual is completely responsible for the evolution of the other. However, in a complete contrast to this statement, Burkert declares in his earlier book *Greek Religion*, that epic poetry most certainly influenced the instigation of hero-cults.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore apparent that Burkert has modified his earlier statement in this particular case by suggesting that there cannot be a singular cause for a theological complex as convoluted as a hero-cult. Developing out of the intricate relationship between the early tales and the heroic rituals, Coldstream is another who argues that the ideas fostered by epic poetry forged some sort of new understanding of the way in which Greece could relate to its past that allowed for the creation of links with the time of heroes,<sup>22</sup> a time that was apparently perceived as being far superior to that

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<sup>20</sup> Burkert 2004: 101.

<sup>21</sup> Burkert 1985: 204.

<sup>22</sup> Coldstream 1977: 9-14.

of Homer's (and Philostratus' for that matter) Greece. Although the later development of the practice of hero worship is revealed as being more symbiotic than its origins, with both the rituals and the mythic tales necessarily playing their part in feeding the growth of the tradition, hero-cult can be suggested to have clearly Hellenocentric political ramifications founded in these very same myths and rituals, providing a theological and mytho-historical underpinning to the argumentation of Philostratus' sophistic perspective.

A final word on an alternative approach to the beginnings of hero-cult offers yet another interesting intersection for analysis. Whitely makes the point that 'if this practice [of hero-cult] was caused by the circulation of Epic, why is it that the cults in Mycenaean tombs appear to be directed towards largely anonymous figures?'<sup>23</sup> The answer to this conundrum is to be found in Burkert's own characterization of the earlier parallel practice of the Greek cult of the dead:

'The cult of the dead seems to presuppose that the deceased is present and active at the place of burial, in the grave beneath the earth [hence the importance assigned to the hero's grave]. The dead drink the pourings and indeed the blood—they are invited to come to the banquet, to the satiation with blood; as the libations sap into the earth, so the dead will send good things up above.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Whitely 1988: 174.

<sup>24</sup> Burkert 1985: 194-195.

And again Burkert makes the suggestion that 'the prominence given to specific graves goes hand in hand with the suppression of the customary cult of the dead.'<sup>25</sup> Hero-cult provides a very specific emphasis to what might otherwise appear as little more than the worship of the ancestors. It is essentially a death cult directed towards the propitiation of a more powerful and influential, but not necessarily blood-related individual whose powers range further than those of the typical ancestor. As such it would appear that hero-cult could be argued to begin as an extension and dramatic repositioning of the emphasis found in the cult of the dead. It is perhaps then the case that certain ritualized practices already existed in order to allow one to honour and propitiate the deceased, practices that would only have needed a little fleshing out through the addition of the mythic tales of the heroes and their exploits.

Where then does the *Heroikos* fit into this scheme of hero-cult development? A brief sketch of the background is required in order to evaluate the representation of hero-cult in the *Heroikos*. It is my contention that the appearance of the *Heroikos* in the Philostratean chronology should be viewed as the one of the first steps in a progression toward the grandiose political and religious statement that is made through the writing of the *VA*. The *Heroikos* marks Philostratus' first complete

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<sup>25</sup> Burkert 1985: 204.

foray into the deeply religious, and as such sets the groundwork for his consistent emphasis on traditional religious practices as opposed to current non-Roman manifestations. To begin with, there is some controversy as to the dating of the *Heroikos*, with the first quarter of the third century CE standing out as the general period in which Philostratus would have committed this story to paper. Yet it seems that it is possible to be somewhat more accurate, for Philostratus (*Her.* 14.4-15.10) mentions an athlete by the name of Helix as coming to the sanctuary of Protesilaos for advice. Dio (80.10.2) tells us that this man's name was in fact Aurelius Helix, and that he was an outstanding physical competitor who won both the wrestling and pancration at the Ludi Capitolini, as well as winning events at the Olympics. In his translation of Cassius Dio, Cary notes his belief that this occurrence can be dated to approximately 219-220 CE.<sup>26</sup> Jones suggests that 217 is a more reasonable *terminus post quem* for the *Heroikos*, with the argument used to substantiate his point being that Helix's Olympic victories were most likely when the competition was held in the years 213 and 217.<sup>27</sup> In all of this uncertainty it is Jones that proffers the most useful comment on the *Heroikos* and its probable date, namely that

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<sup>26</sup> Cary 1969 (originally 1927).

<sup>27</sup> Jones 2001: 143. He bases his opinion on Jüthner 1909. Lane Fox 1987: 144 holds a similar view, as does Bowie 2011: *sv* 'Philostratus'.



‘the dramatic date must be roughly “the present”; that is he [Philostratus] does not differentiate that date from the time of composition and of first publication.’<sup>28</sup>

What this therefore means is that the text is itself set within the lifetime of its author which was a rather peculiar time for the Roman Empire and for literature in general. Caracalla held the imperial throne until 217 and was replaced by Elagabalus in 218. Both were non-Italians and both brought their own peculiar policies to the Empire, especially as regards the world of religion. Caracalla was apparently obsessed with Alexander the Great (Dio Cass. 78.7.1), while Elagabalus decreed *deus sol invictus* as the chief deity of Rome (*Her.* 5.7). Most works penned during this period thus exhibited a certain degree of sophistic rhetorical flair, something that also seemed to include a renewed interest in parochial religious activities and historical curiosities like the hero-cult which is the central idea of the *Heroikos*. The first quarter of the third century thus contributes a unique essence to the definition of the *Heroikos*, for the work purports to be a ‘true’ story whose source is the hero Protesilaos himself—in many respects similar to the diaries with which Dictys attempts to authenticate his work on the Trojan War<sup>29</sup> or the dubious memoirs of Damis in the *Vita Apollonii*. This claim to possessing Protesilaos as a privileged source of information for the composition of the *Heroikos*, coupled with its fairly mundane and contemporary setting, are all indicative of Philostratus’

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<sup>28</sup> Jones 2001: 143.

<sup>29</sup> Bradshaw Aitken 2001: 132-133.

desire to couch his myth as truth,<sup>30</sup> and as I argued in Chapter V, this masquerade of fiction as truth is an important aspect of the 'Greek Renaissance',<sup>31</sup> the rebirth of Greek culture while under the constraints imposed upon it by the conquering Romans as it occurred within the parameters of the Second Sophistic. However, Graham Anderson is not as positive about any kind of religious enthusiasm on the part of Philostratus, stating that any perceived fervour for the cult of heroes that his choice of subject matter might suggest is actually difficult to discern.<sup>32</sup> In my opinion, any perceived interest in hero-cult on the part of Philostratus needs to be understood in the light of what is possibly his greatest sophistic triumph, namely the figure of Apollonius of Tyana, who, I would argue, displays the same kind of zeal for religious reinvigoration that is shown throughout the *Heroikos*. I believe that Philostratus begins his work of religious renewal with the project of the *Heroikos* because it provides a less contentious starting point than the paragon of Apollonius of Tyana. The hero-cult, with all of its inherent possibilities for political and theological comment, is the perfect place to begin his critique of contemporary religion and society, especially given the Panhellenic nature of the hero who epitomizes the tale of the *Heroikos*, Protesilaos.

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<sup>30</sup> Bowie 1994a: 185.

<sup>31</sup> Pache 2004: 5.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson 1986: 247-248.

The *Heroikos* takes the form of a dialogue between the characters of the ‘vinedresser’<sup>33</sup> and a Phoenician merchant. Philostratus (*Her.* 1.1) characterizes the Phoenician as being dressed in the ‘Ionic fashion’, Ἴωνικὸν τῆς στολῆς ἐπιχώριον. He is therefore Hellenised, but still a foreigner, and therefore in the mind of a Greek reader, he is ‘potentially deceitful and treacherous, potentially destructive, and potentially subject to destruction at the hands of Protesilaos’ in his aspect as defender of Greece.<sup>34</sup> This potential should be tempered by an understanding of the third century Roman world in which Philostratus was writing, a world in which Phoenicians—‘the ultimate anti-Romans’<sup>35</sup>—could even become emperor.<sup>36</sup> A Phoenician’s participation in this dialogue is thus a reflection of the political and social realities of Philostratus’ day, as he elects to employ a prototypical outsider as the recipient of his revolutionary ideas concerning cult worship. Perhaps this in itself is a comment on the disdain in which Philostratus held the contemporary religious establishment. Lastly, and in a more literary context, the Phoenician can be viewed as the non-believing foil against which the staunch religious commitment of the vinedresser is tested and ultimately emerges victorious. By contrast, the vinedresser claims not only to have personally met the deceased hero

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<sup>33</sup> I have elected to follow Berenson Maclean and Bradshaw Aitken’s (2001) choice in rendering the Greek term *ampelourgos* as vinedresser.

<sup>34</sup> Bradshaw Aitken 2004: 274.

<sup>35</sup> Although Philostratus is a Greek and is probably writing as a member of the circle of Julia Domna, the Phoenicians were still the prototypical ‘bad guys’, as they had often allied with the enemies of Rome, see Whitmarsh 2004: 278-279.

<sup>36</sup> Bradshaw Aitken 2004: 278-279.

Protesilaos (i.e. experienced a sort of *ξυνουσία*), but has spent time talking with and learning from him. The vinedresser therefore gains his information concerning proper ritual practices and the veracity of the heroic tradition from the original source. By implication then, and through the choice of the richly nuanced word *ampelourgos* to describe the character, Philostratus indicates that his vinedresser is the one who is not only responsible for seeing to the physical well-being of the cult sanctuary, but is also in a metaphorical sense, responsible for the cultivation of the cult of Protesilaos.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the *ξυνουσία* that he speaks of, as well as the entire conversation between vinedresser and Phoenician, are both attempts at portraying a 'personal conversion experience' which seems to shape the cult of Protesilaos<sup>38</sup> in opposition to developing mystery rites like Christianity.<sup>39</sup> I suggest that any Christian echo is most certainly deliberate, and is a direct effort on the part of Philostratus to position the traditions of the hero-cult as a personalized belief system to rival the contending claims of Christianity and the Eastern mystery cults by introducing the Graeco-Roman world to reformulated tradition of hero worship that displays the same personal bond between worshipper and hero that is possible for any follower of Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, Philostratus goes one step further by painting an extraordinary image of the religious decline of the hero-cult

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<sup>37</sup> Dué & Nagy 2001: xliii, n. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Betz 2004: 31.

<sup>39</sup> This sort of personal experience is also recorded by Apuleius in Book 11 of his *Metamorphoses*.

in his day by stressing the dilapidated situation of the shrine of Protesilaos at which this dialogue takes place. At the time of the *Heroikos* all that remains of the once modest sanctuary of Protesilaos are the foundations. Even the cult statue has been worn down by people repeatedly touching it when they take vows (*Her.* 9.1-7). Indeed, Philostratus (*Her.* 3.5) depicts a place that is wild and devoid of civilization, meaning that it has come to be ignored by the civilized world. Bowie believes that the fictional scenario constructed in the *Heroikos* operates on two distinct levels, with the first being found in the participants in the dialogue themselves. The vinedresser and the Phoenician are nameless, generalized figures, as I have pointed out, and therefore cannot be immediately connected with any specific historical person in the real world, despite the dramatic setting of the work being the author's present time. The second level of fictionality is to be found in the very material that comprises the setting and backdrop of the work, as it shows Philostratus to be inventing a new tradition that is removed to some degree from the Homeric canon with which the *Heroikos* claims its initial affinity.<sup>40</sup>

The cult hero, Protesilaos, is described in the following manner by the vinedresser (Philostr. *Her.* 10.2-3):

‘For he is around twenty years old at most, having sailed for Troy at such a young age, he has a full and luxurious beard and smells sweeter than

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<sup>40</sup> Bowie 1994a: 184.

autumn myrtles. Joyful eyebrows are thrown up around his eyes, for he has a friendly, pleasing demeanour. In action he looks intense and zealous, but if we should happen upon him when relaxing, oh how lovely and friendly his eyes appear. And what is more he has blonde hair of moderate length, for it hangs over his forehead rather than falling upon it, and the form of his nose is squared, like a statue's.'

γὰρ ἀμφὶ τὰ εἴκοσί πον μάλιστα ἔτη τηλικόσδε ἐλάσας ἐς Τροίαν, ἀβρῶ δ' ἰούλῳ βρύει καὶ ἀπόζει αὐτοῦ ἥδιον ἢ τοῦ μετοπώρου τῶν μύρτων. φαιδρὰν δὲ ὀφρὺν περὶ τὸ ὄμμα βέβληται, τὸ γὰρ ἐπίχαρι αὐτῷ φίλον. βλέπει δὲ ἐν μὲν ταῖς σπουδαῖς σύντονον καὶ σφοδρὸν, εἰ δὲ ἀνειμένου τύχοιμεν, φεῦ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὡς ἐπαφρόδιτοί τε καὶ φιλικοὶ φαίνονται. καὶ μὴν καὶ κόμης ξανθῆς ἔχει τὸ μέτριον, ἔστι γὰρ ὡς ἐπικρέμασθαι τῷ μετώπῳ μᾶλλον ἢ κατ' αὐτοῦ πίπτειν, καὶ τετράγωνος ἡ ἰδέα τῆς ῥίνος, οἷον ἀγάλματος.

It is curious that Philostratus provides such exquisite detail regarding both the bearing and look of Protesilaos when the Homeric (*Il.* 2.695-710) portrayal of this hero entire involvement in the Trojan War is but a scant fifteen lines long. This is clearly indicative of the importance that Philostratus gives to the character of Protesilaos. It is therefore because he deems Protesilaos to be important to his Hellenising objectives, that Philostratus spends a good amount of time fleshing out this hero's character and appearance. Pausanias (4.2.5) tells us that Protesilaos was the son of Iphikles, and seems to have come from Phulakē in Thessaly. It was his desire to be the first of all the Greeks to attack Troy, but he was slain by a Trojan spear shortly after leaping from his ship. As Homer depicts his death in the *Iliad* (2.701-702): 'a man of Dardanos killed him having leapt from the ship by far the first of the Achaeans,' τὸν δ' ἔκτανε Δάρδανος ἀνὴρ / νηὸς ἀποθρόσκοντα πολὺ

πρώτιστον Ἀχαιῶν. Thus although he fulfilled his wish to be the first Greek on the beaches, he was also the very first to meet his doom. Apollodorus (*Epit.* 3.30) tells the tale slightly differently, and in a manner that I believe explains why Protesilaos might have been a possible candidate for the reception of cult honours in the first place. He writes that in leaping from his ship's prow, Protesilaos slew a large number of Trojan warriors single-handedly and in a truly heroic fashion before Hektor, mightiest of the Trojans, finally killed him. This version of the story is more in keeping with the known statues depicting Protesilaos which generally seem to show him as stabbing at men from the ram of his ship,<sup>41</sup> and the epic styling of his demise in this particular version of the tale gives us more of an indication as to what may have driven his heroization. In whatever manner he may have been slain, Protesilaos nonetheless came to bear the unfortunate distinction of being the very first of the Greeks to fall at the siege of Troy. Perhaps it was because of this absolute commitment to the cause that he became an object of cult worship, with sanctuaries being dedicated to him at Elaious and Phulakē in his homeland. Philostratus' vinedresser does however offer his own opinion as to the theological reasoning that may have operated in favour of Protesilaos becoming a cult hero, despite his dying so early on in the war:

'For such divine and blessed souls, the beginning of life is to be purified of the body; for the gods, whose attendants they are, they understand from

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<sup>41</sup> See for example Richter 1929: 187-200.

then on, not by worshipping statues and suppositions, but by bringing about a manifest communion with them.’ (Philostr. *Her.* 7.3)

ψυχᾷς γὰρ θεαῖς οὕτω καὶ μακαρίαις ἀρχὴ βίου τὸ καθαρεῦσαι τοῦ σώματος· θεοὺς τε γὰρ, ὧν ὁπαδοὶ εἰσι, γινώσκουσι τότε οὐκ ἀγάλματα θεραπεύουσαι καὶ ὑπονοίας, ἀλλὰ ξυνουσίας φανερὰς πρὸς αὐτοὺς ποιούμεναι...

Thus in dying, Protesilaos was transferred to a state of being whereby he was personally able to interact with the eternal gods. This is not only the source of his powers but also from whence he observes all that occurs in the world of the living—hence his extensive knowledge of events that take place long after his death.

According to Pausanias (1.34.2) the entire area around Elaious was in fact dedicated to the cult of Protesilaos. It is furthermore quite intriguing that with Protesilaos and Achilles both being from the same region, they should also end up with cult sites that actually faced each other across the Hellespont—Protesilaos at Elaious and Achilles at Sigeion. The situation of their tombs, more specifically their being ‘positioned on the fulcrum between East and West’,<sup>42</sup> is however in keeping with what several modern commentators identify as being their primary function, namely the protection of Hellas and all things Greek against the Asian and by

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<sup>42</sup> Whitmarsh 2004: 239.



extension foreign world.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Protesilaos and Achilles hold much else in common, including minor details like the relative shortness of their lives and the fact that they both fell in battle with the Trojans. Because of this commonality, at least according to the way in which Philostratus conceives of the situation, they are able to share the duty of defending the Greek world. Protesilaos was also believed to have travelled back from the land of the dead, a story that Lucian characterizes with a great deal of pathos in his *Dialogues of the Dead* (28, 23), for Protesilaos shows such a powerful love for his wife Laodameia that Persephone prevails upon her husband to allow a reprieve of a single day to the deceased Protesilaos. This 'resurrection' story is a typical element of many hero-cults (e.g. the cult of Achilles), something that allows the hero to be 'endowed with a superhuman consciousness' which includes power over the weather and the natural world, as well as granting some form of oracular ability,<sup>44</sup> a situation perhaps paralleled in the nature of the tribal shaman, who also journeys between worlds to acquire his supernatural knowledge. As Kalweit explains,

'Whoever travels in the other world comes back transformed. In the realm of the dead, shamans receive power objects or are at least shown possibilities of what they can find on the earth. Their powers of healing and their paranormal faculties are also acquired in the realm of the dead.'<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> An argument made quite strongly by Rahim Shayegan 2004: 285-315.

<sup>44</sup> Dué & Nagy 2001: xxviii.

<sup>45</sup> Kalweit 1987: 40.

In confirmation of the mantic skills of Protesilaos, Pausanias (1.34) catalogues the cult sanctuary at Elaious along with other renowned sites of oracular pronouncement, among them the sanctuaries of Amphiaraus near Oropos and Trophonios at Lebadea. It is interesting that Dodds believes this kind of shamanic element is paralleled by a general drive toward individual religious experience that was growing in the ancient world, in essence pushing aside the psychic satisfaction gained previously through the practices of cults like that of Dionysus.<sup>46</sup> This is perhaps also connected with the proliferation of individual holy men and women, a development that like Philostratus' version of the hero-cult was partly initiated because of, and in reaction to, the influence of mystery religions. However, this particular type of resurrection is referred to by Rahim Shayegan as becoming a *revenant*.<sup>47</sup> In the Philostratean portrayal, Protesilaos is resurrected as a *revenant* whose very being and actions come to prove that he is indeed the 'avenger of Hellas'.<sup>48</sup> Thus as keeper of the Hellespont, along with Achilles, he is the defender of the gateway that divides the Greeks from the *barbaroi*. The mythology surrounding this protective instinct is recorded in testimony like that provided in Herodotus (9.116-120), who tells the tale of a Persian governor named Artayctes who was given charge of the province in which Protesilaos' shrine was located.

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<sup>46</sup> Dodds 1951: 142.

<sup>47</sup> Rahim Shayegan 2004: 308.

<sup>48</sup> Rahim Shayegan 2004: 309.

Herodotus calls this governor ‘both terrible and wicked’, δεινὸς δὲ καὶ ἀτάσθαλος, and states that he committed many outrages against the shrine, including having intercourse with women within its precincts. Artayctes was eventually captured by the Greeks and crucified, but only after a miraculous portent believed to indicate that Protesilaos would have his revenge upon him.

If we juxtapose the central figures of the *Heroikos* and the VA—Protesilaos and Apollonius—the intent of Philostratus, of which I have merely speculated until now, becomes a good deal clearer. Mestre summarizes the point that I have been making at length:

‘Philostratus is a man of his times, more exactly, a member of the Greek elites under the Roman Empire. For him, the past—the past that emanates above all from Homer, but from other sources in the tradition as well—was a question of identity...’<sup>49</sup>

Protesilaos and the Greek hero-cult, springing from the heroic tales of Homeric epic, are thus a powerful source of this identity, this concept of Greekness as it were. The revisionist slant that Philostratus displays in the *Heroikos* is the ‘new model of reference’ for this Greekness.<sup>50</sup> Whitmarsh refocuses this point of view in his suggestion that the *Heroikos* is indicative of a shift away from the mighty cult sites like Delphi and Athens that once gripped the religious imagination of the

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<sup>49</sup> Mestre 2004: 131.

<sup>50</sup> Mestre 2004: 133.

Greek people, to the smaller and more intimate rural cultic shrines,<sup>51</sup> paralleling the development of cults like Christianity. This is a repositioning which to my mind is not only seeking a return to the earlier mythic age of heroes during which Greece was master of its own destiny, but which also seeks to provide a 'home-grown' alternative to the increasingly influential mystery religions, all of which sought salvation on an individual level and therefore had an emotional appeal that the traditional Olympian pantheon could not account for. The testimony of the vinedresser is clear on this point—he experiences a one-on-one relationship, a *ξυνουσία* with Protesilaos,<sup>52</sup> something that was impossible in traditional *polis*-centred religion wherein the well-being of the *polis* as a whole was all important and not the individual's desire for personal piety. The suggestion that hero-cult is the subject of Philostratus' attempts to provide a metaphysical combatant of the same stature as Christianity or one of the other mystery religions is not as strange as it may first appear. The scene from the VA (4.10-16) in which Apollonius questions the ghost of the hero Achilles can be seen as illustrative of this argument. Through the particulars of this account, Philostratus rationalizes the tales of these heroes,<sup>53</sup> especially as pertains to the story of Palamedes, whom the ghost of Achilles describes as being the

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<sup>51</sup> Whitmarsh 2004: 238.

<sup>52</sup> See p. 254-255 above.

<sup>53</sup> Mestre 2004: 132-133.

‘greatest, and handsomest, youngest, and most warlike, exceeding all in temperance, and contributing many things to the Muses.’ (Philostr. VA 4.16.6).

ὥς μεγίστῳ τε καὶ καλλίστῳ, νεωτάτῳ τε καὶ πολεμικωτάτῳ,  
σωφροσύνῃ τε ὑπερβαλομένῳ πάντας, καὶ πολλὰ ξυμβαλομένῳ ταῖς  
Μούσαις...

This is a depiction that is unlike anything found in Homer, and according to Mestre, in this case, ‘Achilles plays the same role of legitimizing the non-Homeric versions that Protesilaos plays in the *Heroikos*.’<sup>54</sup> Another point at which the VA and the *Heroikos* intersect is in the inclusion of Pythagorean ideology,<sup>55</sup> where as Solmsen notes, the VA (see above, VA 4.16) provides the authority for the Pythagorean doctrine expressed through the atmosphere of the *Heroikos*.<sup>56</sup> As indicated previously, the vinedresser is most certainly a Pythagorean, as is shown by his characteristic refusal to make a blood offering to Protesilaos, especially since this was an accepted form of sacrifice in the chthonic cults. According to Philostratus, Protesilaos apparently called the vinedresser into his service—departing from his life in the city for one of Pythagorean asceticism at the sanctuary of Elaious (*Her.* 4.9-10). Similarly, in both the VA and the *Heroikos*, Philostratus portrays the hero Palamedes as leading an ascetic, noble, and just life, a man who might be viewed as Pythagoras’ ‘prototype’ and thus as a hero fit to be

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<sup>54</sup> Mestre 2004: 132.

<sup>55</sup> Bradshaw Aitken 2001: 133.

<sup>56</sup> Solmsen 1940: 565-566.

emulated.<sup>57</sup> The protagonist of the *VA*, Apollonius of Tyana, is himself a Pythagorean and even claims that the origin of his wisdom is Pythagoras himself. In a manner akin to that of the hero Palamedes, Apollonius is being presented as a paragon, but in this case he is a paragon of philosophical rather than heroic virtue. This allusion to Pythagoreanism makes two points about Philostratus and his apparently fundamentalist approach—firstly that he did indeed have an affinity for archaic religious forms, since Pythagoreanism was as much religion as philosophy. Thus the movement's appearance in two of his works is significant in that I believe it to indicate his desire for the renewal of particularly old forms of traditional belief in the face of the amoral culture in which he is writing. Secondly that Philostratus was searching for examples, saints as it were, that he could hold up as patterns of noble and righteous behaviour in the face of growing disenchantment with the social and religious status quo.<sup>58</sup> In no way should the *Heroikos* be seen as a form of early escapism. Although the ancient novels provided for the desires and titillation of the literate elites of the time, and although the subject material of this dialogue would seem to possibly mark it as close kin to this tradition of entertainment, it is my opinion that the religious, philosophical, and didactic purposes of the dialogue supersede this. Furthermore, Philostratus also

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<sup>57</sup> Bradshaw Aitken 2001: 133.

<sup>58</sup> This appeal to noble patterns of behaviour is also evident in the *Vitae Sophistarum* as I will show in Chapter X.

mentions a statue of Palamedes in the VA (4.13.3). In this incident Apollonius of Tyana returns the statue to its rightful place and makes the following prayer:

‘Palamedes, forget the wrath that at one time raged towards the Achaeans, and grant them many wise men. Yes, Palamedes, through whom there are languages, the Muses, myself.’

Παλάμηδες, ἐκλάθου τῆς μῆνιδος, ἣν ἐν τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς ποτε ἐμήνισας, καὶ δίδου γίγνεσθαι πολλοὺς τε καὶ σοφοὺς ἄνδρας. ναὶ Παλάμηδες, δι’ ὃν λόγοι, δι’ ὃν Μοῦσαι, δι’ ὃν ἐγώ.

In addition to the Pythagorean element that links Apollonius to Palamedes, Philostratus seems to offer a more direct connection between the Tyanaean Sage and the Homeric hero, perhaps in this way emphasizing their status as paragons for ancestral religious practice. Apollonius’ request for ‘wise men’ or ‘true philosophers’ (σοφοὺς ἄνδρας) is then possibly an indictment of the current state of philosophy in the Empire, especially given Apollonius’ own turbulent relationship with men like the Stoic philosopher Euphrates, whom he regularly accused of being willing to sell his philosophical integrity.

Why then does Philostratus take the distinctly distancing tack of emphasizing versions of events that are not a part of the Homeric canon? Philostratus is in fact setting up his own canon that stands in opposition to the Homeric foundation of these stories, a new canon to appeal to the particular sensibilities of the time in which he is working. Most significant is the fact that Philostratus underlines the

fact that while dead, these heroes are still both useful and vitally important to mortals.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the choice to make Palamedes the central figure in Apollonius' interaction with Achilles mirrors the choice of the little known Protesilaos as protagonist of the *Heroikos* because in both instances, by ignoring what is expected of the familiar story types, Philostratus is able to redefine what it means to be a hero,<sup>60</sup> keeping this notion in line with his own understanding of the religious and political realities with which he himself lives and strives against.

Therefore Protesilaos, like Apollonius, is crafted to be a paragon of Hellenism (a point to be discussed further in the following chapter). He is a human representation of the battle against the foreign in Imperial Rome. By shifting the emphasis of a basic element of early Greek belief, namely the cult of heroes, Philostratus is able to reshape his own identity in a manner that is more suited to the exigencies of his time. This is something that allows for his later and more detailed portrayal of Apollonius of Tyana as the consummate Hellenist, and is particularly evident in the manner in which Philostratus recasts Protesilaos as a defender of the Hellenic world. In this light, Rahim Shayegan argues that Protesilaos and his story perhaps also relate to the Persian invasions of the Eastern Roman Empire and the need for some sort of divine defender to come to the aid of

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<sup>59</sup> Mestre 2004: 133-134.

<sup>60</sup> Mestre 2004: 135.



the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>61</sup> Thus it is through his reworking of the tale of Protesilaos that Philostratus creates a hero 'with attributes more fitted to reflect the urgencies of his own time'.<sup>62</sup> His reinterpretation and reinvigoration of the ancient practice of hero-cult allows Philostratus to display his true religious colours, something that is carried through into his decision to emphasize Apollonius as being on a mission of religious renewal. In the mind of Philostratus, Protesilaos and Achilles share the duty of protecting the Hellenistic world against foreign incursion. This duality is evident in the way in which certain incidents in the *VA* pair up with expressions of the hero-cult portrayed in the *Heroikos*, and it thereby becomes apparent that, by extension, Apollonius and Protesilaos could be conceived of as protecting the Graeco-Roman world against the incursion of foreign religions. This links the two heroes in their Philostratean re-presentation, for they are two men who gave their lives for the glory of Greece and now they give up their afterlives as well, nonetheless united in their singular purpose of defining what is Greek and what is not.<sup>63</sup>

It is possible that both the *VA* and the *Heroikos* were being worked on by Philostratus at around the same time, with the death of Julia Domna being a

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<sup>61</sup> Rahim Shayegan 2004: 304-305.

<sup>62</sup> Rahim Shayegan 2004: 309.

<sup>63</sup> Note for example Achilles' displeasure at one of Apollonius' companions, Antisthenes, having Trojan blood (Philostr. *VA* 4. 12).

reasonable *terminus post quem* for the VA in 217 CE. If this was indeed the year of the second of Helix's Olympic victories (Dio Cass. 80.10.2) then the *Heroikos* could be dated to within several years of the VA's completion. This would perhaps explain the level of correspondence in their religious and sociopolitical ideology, with their both drawing attention to the old heroes or to traditional cultic practices. In both the *Heroikos* and the VA, Philostratus is calling attention to the beliefs and behaviours of certain figures that counteract the problems of the time he is working in. By doing this I do not believe that he ever set out to reinvent these figures in their entirety, but is instead employing his rhetoric to empower that which had been lost or ignored for far too long. Solmsen contends that a key factor in Philostratus' decision to write the *Heroikos* was a visit that his patron, the Emperor Caracalla, made to the tomb of Achilles in 215 CE, and that the extravagance of the ritual display would have made a great impression upon him.<sup>64</sup> I would suggest that this would have certainly played a part in his decision to create a work concerning the heroes, but there is an unmistakable Hellenism behind the work as well, something that I believe makes a far greater contribution to its formation. Dué and Nagy note that while the Olympian deities were becoming far less of a factor at this time, hero-cult was still extremely well

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<sup>64</sup> Solmsen 1940: 559.

supported by the populace,<sup>65</sup> and to my mind this makes the cult the perfect platform for Philostratus' arguments. In the *Heroikos*, Philostratus is providing the basis for his fundamentalist tendencies, in that he is reminding the people of his time that an alternative to the allure of the Eastern cults actually existed in the ancient Graeco-Roman tradition of the hero-cult. Two points of congruence thus become apparent through this analysis of the *Heroikos*, particularly in the manner that it relates to the VA. In the first place, this work presents a strong case for Philostratus' use of his brand of 'creative history'<sup>66</sup> as a powerful means of defending his beliefs in a manner that directly opposes the expanding influence of the Eastern mystery rites, a primary point of concern for Philostratus. Secondly, in arguing for the renewal of a suitably ancient form of religious activity, Philostratus accomplishes his sophistic end of accentuating a practice that is not only Greek in its origin, but that is also founded around a Greek canon of mythology, a canon that Philostratus reconfigures in order to answer the existential questions of his age.

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<sup>65</sup> Dué and Nagy 2001: lxxiii.

<sup>66</sup> Morgan 1982: 224.

## Chapter IX

### The Philostratean Fundamentalist Perspective:

#### Philosophy in the Roman Empire.

*Wisdom is brilliant, she never fades.  
By those who love her, she is readily seen,  
By those who seek her, she is readily found.  
(Wisdom 6:12)<sup>1</sup>*

Having explored the relationship between Philostratus and the religious Establishment of his day, the next port of call is the place of philosophy in his view of the Graeco-Roman world. This is especially important given that he chooses to cast his famous character of Apollonius of Tyana, in the mould of the great Pythagoras himself, the philosopher supreme. In the course of this chapter I shall pay special attention to two philosophical schools, namely Stoicism and Pythagoreanism, whose popularity waxed and waned throughout the early centuries of the Roman Empire. Much of Roman belief and behaviour can be couched as broadly 'stoic'—the *mos maiorum* had always defined *Romanitas* along those same lines<sup>2</sup>—and so it is essential to have a sound understanding of the Stoic movement and the impact that it may have had upon the Roman world as a whole. Because this forms the medium in which Philostratus' struggle to revive the old ways occurs, it must be studied for the effects that

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<sup>1</sup> *New Jerusalem Bible.*

<sup>2</sup> This is a point that I will clarify throughout this chapter.

Stoicism would have had on his religious perspective, and especially given how the philosophy dominated much of imperial thought. Pythagoreanism must also be analysed, given that Philostratus not only chooses Apollonius of Tyana as his paragon, a man who apparently lived by the Pythagorean ideal, but also puts forward a Pythagorean ideology in the *Heroikos*. In all, this will afford me the opportunity to contrast Apollonius' worldview with that of the Roman Empire, and thereby infer Philostratus' own opinions through the manner in which he represents these philosophical interactions. Key to this part of my investigation will be the manner in which the adherents of these philosophies related to the Roman Empire itself, and, of equal importance, how the Empire and its representatives related to these philosophers and understood their doctrines. Using this initially descriptive foundation I will construct an argument centred on the ideas presented in two of the works of Philostratus, the *VA* and the *Nero*, and in this way, point to Philostratus' own ideological interactions with the Graeco-Roman world. I will continue with this line of inquiry by looking to his *Vitae Sophistarum* in the following chapter. It should be noted that although the *Nero* was originally ascribed to Lucian, I concur with the position taken by Whitmarsh in assigning the text to Philostratus.<sup>3</sup> In this way I will investigate the Philostratean perspective on philosophy and philosophers in the Empire, particularly as pertains to his fundamentalist

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<sup>3</sup> Whitmarsh (1999: 143) in fact offers three reasons for the contention that Philostratus is the true author: (1) there are several similar mentions of the cutting of the isthmus in the *VA* (e.g. 4.24, 5.7, 5.19); (2) there are a large number of 'Philostratean idiosyncrasies at the linguistic and thematic levels', and (3) the *Suda* (φ 422) attributes the work to one of the Philostrati.

tendencies, and then, by extension, how Philostratus might have understood innovations like the imperial cult that may have proven detrimental to the pre-existing rites of Graeco-Roman religion and thus been objectionable to an ancient thinker and writer with Philostratus' fundamentalist bent.

To begin with, it is evident that a Roman religious practice like the personification of concepts (for example, Concordia) is something that cannot be examined in isolation, for it is the Roman religious context that endows it with a specific meaning.<sup>4</sup> This insight is certainly no less true of the practice of philosophies that either developed in or were modified while under the hegemony of the Roman Empire.<sup>5</sup> The basis of this 'reformation' lies in the eminently practical nature of the ancient Romans, who held that even subjects as esoteric as philosophy or historiography had to have an eventual practical application.<sup>6</sup> The wealthy noblemen of Rome—those who had the leisure time available to them to experiment with philosophy—were the first to construct this practical application, doing so by focussing the esoteric provisions of philosophy on matters that concerned the ruling class, thereby forging for themselves instruments of control and regulation.<sup>7</sup> Thus it is that even from the

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<sup>4</sup> Lind 1973: 108.

<sup>5</sup> Greek philosophies, for example, can be seen to take on a characteristically Roman 'feel' once they are fully absorbed by Roman disciples.

<sup>6</sup> MacMullen 1967: 3. See also Cic. *Fin.* 3.5.17; *Rep.* 2.2.1.

<sup>7</sup> This is not true of every philosopher, for example Plutarch, many of whose works have no immediately practical end in mind.

time of the Republic, philosophy reinforced the existing stratification of Roman society. Curiously, however, 'philosophizing' (Dio 67.13) could easily be construed as an illegal act for which one could be indicted. Furthermore, Whitmarsh argues that because of this, labelling someone a 'philosopher' was tantamount to an act of 'othering' and exclusion.<sup>8</sup> This contrast indicates decisively that for the Romans, philosophy could have its uses, so long as those uses were aligned with the desires and wishes of the powerful. In the words of Peter Brown:

'In the Roman empire, young men of the upper classes were socialized, from childhood up, to reverence ancestral custom, to value solidarity, and to appreciate and use power. To his peers, the philosopher was an invaluable safety-valve. He was a licensed maverick in an otherwise deadly serious class of persons. But his views were scarcely relevant to their own position.'<sup>9</sup>

Philosophers allowed in many cases for the contradiction of the *mos maiorum* and thus everything that the elite stood for, and often being born of the elite themselves, they were the ones who could legitimately criticize the powerful. This is clearly the case with Philostratus' selection of Apollonius of Tyana as his champion. Apollonius is himself described as a wealthy Cappadocian nobleman (Philostr. VA 1.4). His rejection of the status quo is made all the more acute by his embracing the Pythagorean way of life, whose prohibition on blood sacrifice should be seen, in this particular case, as an attack on the religious beliefs of the time. Indeed, the philosopher could do and say whatever he

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<sup>8</sup> Whitmarsh 2001b: 228-229.

<sup>9</sup> Brown 1995: 38.

wanted, and could give much needed expression to ideals like those of Philostratus.

At various times in Roman history, philosophy and philosophers seem to have borne an undeserved stigma, much like the tattered cloak (τρίβων) that many of their number chose to wear as a badge of office. Philosophers were painted as rabble rousers and malcontents, as political agitators who sometimes spoke out against the very system that furnished them with the *otium* they required for their philosophical speculations in the first place. This left the pursuit of philosophy on increasingly shaky ground, especially among a religious population who believed that the growth of the Roman state was entirely dependent upon the favour of the gods. In the manner typical of this ever pragmatic people, it was believed that the right gods, namely the traditional pantheon, had to be worshipped with the proper rites and rituals (orthopraxy) as defined by the *mos maiorum*, in order that the gods would choose to bestow their blessings upon Rome. The extension of this divine favour brought with it civic concord, and led to the propagation of universal concord as well. As Diogenes of Sinope (Diog. Laert. 6.72) said that ‘...the only right government is that which extends to the universe’, μόνην τε ὀρθὴν πολιτείαν εἶναι τὴν ἐν κόσμῳ. In sum then, the harmony of the universe was mirrored by the internal harmony of the Roman Empire and vice versa, or perhaps more strongly, ‘the



religious traditions of early Rome ordered the imperial universe.’<sup>10</sup> The unwelcome interventions of a curious philosopher in the circumstances of Imperial Rome’s social, political, or religious status quo could well be exaggerated to hold a cosmic and even divine significance, often allowing for truly unequivocal action to be taken against an offending philosopher, as is evidenced in the numerous expulsions of their kind *en masse* from the city of Rome.

### Stoicism and Empire

Suicide, sometimes enforced or perhaps strenuously encouraged, provided an alternative for the more ‘virtuous’ of philosophers to a life under the tyranny embodied by the Emperor. The Stoic philosopher Seneca (*Ep.* 14.2) comments that ‘Virtue is worthless indeed, to him whose body is too valuable’ (*honestum ei vile est, cui corpus nimis carum est.*), a sentiment to which Philostratus most assuredly ascribes, as he states that his performance under tyranny is the surest test of a philosopher (Philostr. *VA* 7.1). The notion of virtue (*virtus*) was central to the Stoic conception of reality, and was held to be the only thing of any true value in life. Diogenes Laertius (7.89; 7.127) for example, explains that *virtus* is a path that has to be chosen solely for its own merit and not for any foreseeable reward. Virtue had to be its own reward. Strangely enough, even virtue had a

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<sup>10</sup> Beard, North, and Price 1998: 34.

price, with the ancient sophists often accused of selling instruction in both wisdom and virtue, something entirely unacceptable to a society that placed such value upon the possession of *virtus*.<sup>11</sup> Curiously, the understanding of precisely what it meant to be virtuous would change as the Stoic movement itself evolved. While the Stoicism of Zeno, the movement's founder, argued for the absolute independence of the wise sage from every form of authority beyond that of his own conscience (*SVF* 3.617), the later forms of Stoicism espoused by Panaetius and the philosopher-king, Marcus Aurelius, seem to reverse this position completely in order to reinforce more traditional and Republican moral values. So while in Zeno's day it was in essence up to the individual to define *virtus*, the later Stoics fell back upon traditional *mores* to construct an alternative definition. In this way, the school came to be championed by the Roman state itself because 'it advocated the idea of the state which was akin to the universalist tendencies of the Roman Empire' and even offered a means of attaining the possibility of a ruler moulded as a true philosopher-king.<sup>12</sup> This belief is given full voice in the work of Dio Chrysostom (49.7), who notes that if a ruler did not wish to wear the mantle of both philosopher and moralist, he should, at the very least, appoint a philosopher to serve as his adviser, as it is the place of the true philosopher to rule over men (Dio. Chrys. *Or.* 49.13). The conjoining of philosopher and ruler necessarily

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<sup>11</sup> Kerferd 1984: 25. See also Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.7-8. Although Kerferd does contend that the issue with the sophists was not because of the sale of instruction in virtue, but rather because of its sale to all and sundry.

<sup>12</sup> Dzielska 1986: 48 n. 85.

engendered a great deal of respect for the sage, in terms of the honours that they were to receive from the people. While Homer had placed the ruler in the greatly exalted position of mediator between gods and mortals, even the ruler was to show his respect for the philosopher (Porph. *ad Il.* 1.340). In this vein, King Phraotes says to Apollonius of Tyana, 'Because I think you are superior to me...for wisdom is more kingly', ὅτι σε... βελτίω ἐμαυτοῦ ἡγοῦμαι, τὸ γὰρ βασιλικώτερον σοφία ἔχει (Philostr. *VA* 2.27.2). Unfortunately this kind of respect from the powerful could also create hardships for the philosopher as Murray writes:

'...a philosopher's first concern must be for his own reputation. The danger to him at the court of a tyrant was that, if he did not lose his life for παρρησία [speaking too freely, being outspoken], he gained a reputation for κολακεία [flattery].'<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, for the wise man to take an active part in society, for him to attempt to meaningfully shape imperial policy, he would either run the risk of losing his very life for speaking out against corruption and the abuse of power, or he could be sidelined as yet another sycophant on the emperor's payroll. Apollonius reveals a particular disgust for the latter type of individual in his criticism of the Stoic philosopher Euphrates (*Ep. Apol.* 1; 3; 4).<sup>14</sup> It was indeed the fear of every philosopher to be rendered irrelevant by political circumstances, and as the example of Thrasea Paetus teaches, to make a show of

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<sup>13</sup> Murray 1965: 50.

<sup>14</sup> In an interesting contrast, Pliny (*Ep.* 1.10) writes that he profited from the example of Euphrates.

one's *virtus* in displays of public scorn for the emperor and the political life in general, was tantamount to suicide.

The *Nero* illustrates precisely how this relationship between ruler and advising philosopher could be twisted by imperial tyrants. But why is the political realm and tyranny in particular, relevant to my contention that Philostratus was a man with leanings toward religious fundamentalism? In answering this, I return to my discussion of the basic elements of religious fundamentalism as set forth in Chapter II, wherein I noted that for a typical 'new religious movement' to gain traction for its ideology in the real world, it needs to engage in politics in order to acquire influence. Without attempting to, in some way, politicise its message, religious fundamentalism becomes irrelevant in the broader sense and completely incapable of affecting the societal change that the ideology demands. In seeing the despairing state of the world around him, Philostratus elects to transform his reality through the tools found in religious fundamentalism. He may have observed the growing influence of the 'Eastern' religions and other barbaric creeds upon the Mediterranean world as being the primary source of the dissatisfaction and discontent evident in all strata of Graeco-Roman society. Because Philostratus perceived a malady of the soul, he believed that some manner of spiritual palliative was necessary, and so his response is a religious one, re-emphasizing the old gods and the cult of the ancestors in the face of

foreign superstitions. For there to be any hope of realizing this change, however, Philostratus' religious ideals needed political power to strengthen their impact. Thus we find his habit of associating his works with the powerful, be it factually, by addressing his texts to members of the imperial house, or fictionally, through his deployment of characters like Apollonius of Tyana in support of his position. Therefore, through bestowing a political will upon his religious ideology, Philostratus allows his ostensibly religious perspective the ability to act in and upon the real world.

Because tyranny was the political standard across the Roman world, Philostratus would necessarily have had to engage with the practice in order to properly situate his views for the world at large. In the tradition of the philosopher, he elects to champion the cause of the just and noble tyrant, the philosopher-king. In this way he can be seen to take a stand on the decadence of the current dispensation without opening himself up to accusations of *maiestas*. Philostratus needs to work within a tyranny in order to gain the worldly influence he requires, but simultaneously cannot be seen to capitulate to it if he wishes to remain relevant. To return then to my analysis of the *Nero*, I have previously noted (cf. p. 272) that Whitmarsh believes that the *Nero* is the work of the very same Philostratus responsible for the *VA*, meaning that its insights into the sometimes corrupt relationship between philosopher and emperor may

be added to those garnered from both the VA and the VS.<sup>15</sup> Lutz refers to the major character of the work, Musonius Rufus, as ‘the Roman Socrates’,<sup>16</sup> in that much like Socrates, he chooses the rocky road of παρρησία as opposed to the easier path of sycophancy.<sup>17</sup> His behaviour is noted as being an example of true virtue by many ancient commentators, including Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 31.122),<sup>18</sup> Pliny (*Ep.* 3.11), and Julian (*ad Them* 265d). In his biography of Apollonius of Tyana, even Philostratus (*VA* 4.46) does not fail to mention the man, saying of him: ‘of men you philosophize most perfectly,’ τελεώτατα ἀνθρώπων φιλοσοφῆσαι. There are furthermore, two letters between Apollonius and Musonius that have been preserved independently of Philostratus in the corpus of epistles (*Ep. Apol.* 42d, 42e), both mentioning the trial of Socrates as the yardstick for the behaviour of philosophers under threat. Here, Musonius suggests that while Socrates mounted no formal defence against the accusations brought to bear upon him, he himself has every intention of doing so. It is the contention of Rudich that Musonius was the unfortunate target of imperial reprisals because of his almost iconic stature as the plain-spoken philosopher.<sup>19</sup> Because of his level of notoriety, I believe that in the *Nero*, the character of Musonius Rufus can be taken to represent every free-speaking philosopher who opposes the excesses of tyrants like the dialogue’s eponymous emperor, and he

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<sup>15</sup> The detailed discussion of the VS occurs in the following chapter.

<sup>16</sup> Lutz 1947: *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> Rudich 1993: 126.

<sup>18</sup> Although the philosopher is not named in this particular instance, Cohoon and Crosby (1940: 127 n. 3) note that it is generally held that he is in fact Musonius Rufus.

<sup>19</sup> Rudich 1993: 126.

has thus been punished with exile for his practice of παρρησία.<sup>20</sup> He has been set to work digging the Isthmus of Corinth, and it is this particular inversion of the normal relationship between philosopher and ruler, which in this case, has the work of Musonius' hands, as thought up and guided by the mind of Nero (*Nero* 1), that defines the nature of this discussion of imperial tyranny throughout the *Nero* itself. The juxtaposition of a tyrannical Roman outsider in the form of the Emperor Nero, with philosophical and wise Greece, as symbolized by Musonius, is the idea at the heart of the dialogue. It is given voice through the discussion of three key incidents that clearly delineate the attitude of the undisciplined ruler toward the 'noble' Hellene—hard labour on the Corinthian Isthmus (*Nero* 1-4), the murder of an Epirote actor who was competing with Nero at the Isthmian Games (*Nero* 5-10), and Nero's aggressive stance toward the Oracle of Delphi due to certain unflattering Pythian prophecies (*Nero* 10-11). Whitmarsh approaches these incidents with this metaphorical analysis:

'the Isthmus *is*, in a sense, the "neck" of Greece;<sup>21</sup> Delphi *is* its sacred "mouth"; and the Epirote takes on a highly charged, paradigmatic significance as the vehicle of the "voice" of Greece.'<sup>22</sup> [Author's italics]

The *Nero* thus articulates the ultimate form of oppressive control over the philosophical, and by extension, the Greek world, with philosophy of course

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<sup>20</sup> Whitmarsh 1999: 146.

<sup>21</sup> This is in reference to the ambiguous nature of the Greek word "isthmos", meaning both throat and a "neck" of land.

<sup>22</sup> Whitmarsh 1999: 155.

being perceived as a Greek invention. This is a world that, for the sake of their own continuing well-being, required the philosopher to wear completely different masks in his public and his private life. The psychological phenomenon created by this kind of situation is referred to as cognitive dissonance, a form of psychological distress that I briefly discussed in its relation to the cult context in Chapter II. In his study of the peculiarities of the Neronian literary context, Rudich prefers to utilize the Latin term *dissimulatio* for this phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> As he explains it, the philosopher finds that he experiences a conflict of ideas within his mind, with his strongly held philosophical beliefs, like for example those of Stoicism, dictating that he behave in a virtuous manner. This philosophical core of belief is diametrically opposed to the way that he is forced to conduct himself on a daily basis, should he wish to survive the ministrations of a dictatorial emperor. The conflict of belief and reality that occurs within the mind is thus responsible for this cognitive dissonance, which can be resolved by the philosopher's choice of either of the two paths open to him, be it societal assimilation, should he elect to behave as circumstances dictate, or philosophical exclusion, should he be guided by conscience into withdrawing from the political life, a decision that could quite often result in either exile or death.

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<sup>23</sup> Rudich 1993: xxii.



For the early Stoa of Zeno's day, the very idea of the Roman Empire would have represented the unacceptable position of the strong enslaving the weak.<sup>24</sup> And yet Zeno, himself an advocate of the independence of the wise sage, nonetheless believed in the overriding importance of political contribution to one's homeland as well.<sup>25</sup> It was however, the manner in which the individual philosopher sought to make this contribution, and, perhaps of greater importance, the manner in which it was received by the state and its representatives, that was truly the determining factor. Indeed, if at least from the time of Panaetius, the typical Stoic was expected to participate in his society's political structures (SVF 1.622-623), then any kind of dissent could be taken as an undesirable reaction and in turn painted as 'irrational, antisocial, and inhuman'.<sup>26</sup> In *De Otio* (1.4) Seneca comments that some Stoics believe that

'we will continue to engage in affairs to the very end of life, we will not desist from doing things for the common good, to help individuals, to bring help to enemies even with aged hand. We are those who give no exemption on account of years...'

*usque ad ultimum vitae finem in actu erimus, non desinemus communi bono operam dare, adiuvere singulos, opem ferre etiam inimicis senili manu. Nos sumus, qui nullis annis vacationem damus...*

Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.5.8) too posed the question of whether a wise man should continue to engage in public affairs under the rule of a tyrant, especially if his efforts amounted to nothing in the end. Seneca's (*Ep.* 14.10) reply was a simple

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<sup>24</sup> Francis 1995: 4.

<sup>25</sup> Aalders 1975: 75.

<sup>26</sup> Francis 1995: 51.

one: 'And so let us withdraw...' (*undique nos reducamus...*). In a similar manner Lucan (*Phars.* 8.493-495) writes:

'Leave the court,  
He that would be pious. Virtue and absolute power  
Do not go together...'

*Exeat aula,  
Qui vult esse pius. Virtus et summa potestas  
Non coeunt...*

From the Stoic perspective it was proper for the wise man to remove himself completely from the impossible situation that his experience of *dissimulatio* created, to withdraw from participation in a corrupt system as opposed to remaining involved in a diminished and, most likely, a belittling capacity. After all, the concept of *virtus* was an absolute for the Stoic, governing all of his behaviour, and supposedly making practices like *κολακεία*, practices that would have kept the philosopher alive in the court of a tyrant, almost impossible. Thus it is that we return to the earlier quotation from Seneca, 'Virtue is worthless indeed, to him whose body is too valuable.' Coupled with the notion of withdrawing before the face of imperial tyranny, suicide becomes the supreme expression of the rejection of the status quo for the Stoic philosopher. Seneca (*Ep.* 77.6) later frames the issue as follows:

'It is not a great thing to live; all your slaves live, all animals; it is a great thing to die honourably, wisely, bravely.'

*Non est res magna vivere; omnes servi tui vivunt, omnia animalia; magnum est honeste mori, prudenter, fortiter.*

It was not however that death offered an easy escape from the increasingly untenable position of the philosopher. Epictetus (4.1.60) qualifies the situation in these words:

‘Since no-one fears Caesar himself, but rather death, exile, loss of property, prison, dishonour. Neither does anyone love Caesar, unless he is of some great worth, but rather we love wealth, a tribuneship, a praetorship, a consulship.’

ἐπεὶ τοι οὐδεὶς αὐτὸν τὸν Καίσαρα φοβεῖται, ἀλλὰ θάνατον, φυγὴν, ἀφαίρεσιν τῶν ὄντων, φυλακὴν, ἀτιμίαν. οὐδὲ φιλεῖ τις τὸν Καίσαρα, ἂν μὴ τι ἢ πολλοῦ ἄξιος, ἀλλὰ πλοῦτον φιλοῦμεν, δημαρχίαν, στρατηγίαν, ὑπατείαν.

Stoicism at the time of Philostratus was a philosophical movement in the service of a mighty and progressively more degenerate Roman Empire. As the Roman Empire came to consume the Mediterranean world, it held absolute authority over the lives of its citizens, a power over life and death that brought with it manifold abuses, not the least of which was the swarm of paid accusers and informants that fed upon the imperial legal system. While Epictetus may have been correct in stating that one did not necessarily have to fear those who were the blood of Caesar, the fact that one's possessions, family, and indeed, one's very life could be taken away at his whim, was a thought to be contemplated with a great deal of trepidation. Thus it is that the Stoics, who believed with every fibre of their being that a wise man ought to avail society of his copious talents, sometimes came to withdraw themselves from participation in the realm of political action and intrigue. The experience of *dissimulatio*—of

being forced to function in an environment requiring behaviour that was entirely at odds with their philosophical ideals—left them with little choice. For to remain and thus bear the psychological dissonance that was created, entailed either selling out one's fundamental beliefs or losing one's own life.

### Pythagoreanism and Rome

The often enigmatic followers of the philosopher and mystic, Pythagoras of Samos, lived somewhat different lives to the Roman Stoics, whose focus was largely on the notion of *virtus* and ideals that matched the morality of the Republic. By contrast, Pythagoreans led what was sometimes called Ὀρφικὸς βίος (Pl. *Leg.* 6.782c), the Orphic Life, linking their philosophy with the mysterious musician Orpheus, and describing an existence characterized by asceticism and vegetarianism.<sup>27</sup> Philostratus (VA 4.14) mentions an anecdote concerning the travels of Apollonius and a visit to the shrine of Orpheus at Lesbos. Interestingly, the head of Orpheus was apparently prophesying with such frequency that the people were even ignoring the oracles of Apollo, until such time as Apollo himself castigated the severed head in these words: 'Cease from my business... for indeed I have had enough of your singing.' (πέπαυσο... τῶν ἐμῶν, καὶ γὰρ δὴ ἄδοντά σε ἱκανῶς ἤνεγκα.) This story

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<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Pythagoreanism was acclaimed specifically by Philostratus as the 'best and the purest' of philosophies (ἀρτιωτάτην καὶ καθαρωτάτην) in answer to a question that Apollonius of Tyana posed of Trophonius at Lebadea, when Apollonius emerged from the oracle carrying a book of Pythagorean doctrines (Philostr. VA 8.19).

clearly exaggerates the prophetic power of Orpheus but perhaps instead typifies the general narrative tendencies of Philostratus as displayed throughout the *VA*. In this passage it is Orpheus' mantic ability that transcends even that of the god of prophecy himself, and in a similar manner all of Apollonius' philosophical and religious accomplishments are greatly exaggerated. This is done in an effort to raise Apollonius even above the level of Orpheus as perhaps the ultimate Pythagorean. This trend continues, with the various oracular sanctuaries in Ionia apparently instructing supplicants requiring cures for illnesses to visit Apollonius instead of Asclepius (*VA* 4.1.1). Even the gods are in awe of the abilities of Apollonius, naturally making him the perfect authority to undertake the reorganization of Greek and Roman worship.<sup>28</sup>

Fowden suggests that Pythagoreanism was far more a way of life, as described by Plato, built on a canon of principles handed down from the venerable and legendary Pythagoras himself, than it was a philosophy like Stoicism.<sup>29</sup> As Apollonius (*Ep. Apol.* 79) writes

‘Barley and the philosopher’s cloak are good things, not if being adorned so is one’s custom for love of popularity, but whenever these things are appropriate and worn solemnly.’

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<sup>28</sup> This same passage refers to Apollonius as sharing in the wisdom of various oracular sanctuaries like those at Colophon, Didyma, and Pergamum. At this point he is also described by Philostratus as ‘perfectly wise’ (ἄτεχνῶς σοφὸν).

<sup>29</sup> Fowden 1982: 36.

<Κ>αλὸν μάζα καὶ τρίβων, μὴ κατ' ἐπιτήδευμα δοξοκοπικὸν  
καλλωπιζόμενα, ἀλλ' ὅταν τὰ πράγματα ἄγῃ πρὸς αὐτά, σεμνῶς  
φορούμενα.

If one accepts that Pythagoreanism was actually a 'life choice', as the practice of vegetarianism is viewed today, then the multitude of ancient perspectives on Pythagoreans and their principles becomes easier to explain. From as early as the fourth century BCE the *Pythagoristae* had become the butt of numerous jokes by Attic comedians,<sup>30</sup> who portrayed them as barefoot, never bathing, wearing a consistently serious expression, and leading a typically 'deviant' life in addition to their adhering strictly to vegetarian principles.<sup>31</sup> Conversely we find that Lucian's *Philopseudes* (29), despite its tongue-in-cheek style, presents the image of the archetypal holy man as being that of a Pythagorean:

'After these things Arignotus the Pythagorean came in, the long-haired one, the one with the solemn face, you know the one famous for wisdom, being called holy.'

Ἐπὶ τούτοις ὁ Πυθαγορικὸς Ἀρίγνωτος εἰσῆλθεν, ὁ κομήτης, ὁ σεμνὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου, οἶσθα τὸν αἰδίμῳ ἐπὶ τῇ σοφίᾳ, τὸν ἱερὸν ἐπονομαζόμενον.

In a manner not unlike that of the Roman Stoics, Pythagoreans held that humans should exist in harmony with the world, seeking a life of peace and concord with everyone and everything.<sup>32</sup> This harmony began on the individual and internal level, with the wise man first achieving mastery over himself,

<sup>30</sup> In Aristophanes' *Clouds* (833-837), dated to 423 BCE, the *Pythagoristae* are perhaps referred to by their practices but are not specifically named.

<sup>31</sup> Bremmer 1992: 205.

<sup>32</sup> Schnur 1949: 12.

before being able to carry this out into the world at large. As Iarchus, the leader of the Indian Brahmins says to Apollonius,

‘We know everything, since we know ourselves first of all, for none of us would set out on such philosophy if not first knowing himself.’ (Philostr. VA 3.18)

ἡμεῖς...πάντα γινώσκουμεν, ἐπειδὴ πρώτους ἑαυτοὺς γινώσκουμεν, οὐ γὰρ ἂν προσέλθοι τις ἡμῶν τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ ταύτῃ μὴ πρώτον εἰδὼς ἑαυτόν.

Unlike the early Stoics however, Pythagoreans were encouraged to participate fully in the world’s affairs and in politics in particular, so that their notion of κόσμος could be realized in the universe.<sup>33</sup> Tyranny was an extreme that was counter-intuitive to this ideal of universal harmony and balance, and as such, it was a phenomenon to be striven against to the very best of one’s ability. Similarly, the Pythagorean was to partake in all of the activities of his religion. Not only was he to honour and make obeisance to the old gods, but he was also to ensure that public or state cult was carried out in the manner set forth by the ancestors.<sup>34</sup> Their understanding of the principle of κόσμος and their reverence for the divine merged to form a provocatively Pythagorean approach to governance. Firstly it is important to note that Pythagoreans did in fact have some practical experience at governance—the risings against Pythagorean control as reported, for example, by Iamblichus (*VP* 248-264) are evidence of this fact. It is probably the attitude that their beliefs brought to rulership that

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<sup>33</sup> Schnur 1949: 13.

<sup>34</sup> Fowden 1982: 52.

engendered the thought of rebellion in their citizens, for as Iamblichus (*VP* 174) writes,

‘For authority of this sort is necessary so that we would never think to rise up against it; and the authority born of the god is of such a nature, if indeed the god is such as to be deemed worthy of supreme power.’

δεῖσθαι γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἐπιστατείας τοιαύτης, ἣ κατὰ μηδὲν ἀνταίρειν ἀξιόσομεν· τοιαύτην δ’ εἶναι τὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ γινομένην, εἵπερ ἐστὶ τὸ θεῖον τοιοῦτον <οῖον> ἄξιον εἶναι τῆς τοῦ σύμπαντος ἀρχῆς.

For Pythagoreans, the authority to rule was absolute as it was essentially derived from the gods themselves. This was also a time in which it was seen as necessary for the lower orders to be ruled by a member of the nobler classes, because they required guidance. And who better to provide a steady hand upon the tiller than a Pythagorean? There was however a second aspect to their political theory that conceived of the right to rule as deriving from an early form of ‘social contract’:

‘For authority to exist it is necessary for both to be willing, equally the ruler and the ruled, even as they say that learning occurs correctly when of one’s free will, with both teacher and student wishing it...’

ἀμφοτέρων γὰρ δεῖ βουλομένων τὴν ἐπιστατείαν γίνεσθαι, ὁμοίως τοῦ τε ἀρχοντος καὶ τῶν ἀρχομένων, ὥσπερ καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις τὰς ὀρθῶς γινομένας ἐκουσίως δεῖν ἔφασαν γίνεσθαι, ἀμφοτέρων βουλομένων, τοῦ τε διδάσκοντος καὶ τοῦ μανθάνοντος·

In essence, the people allowed themselves to be ruled for their own good. If the authority for this purpose originated with the gods, then it could be viewed as a divinely sanctioned arrangement—the divine right of kings, an idea that would dominate society as a whole until the French Revolution. Consequently, Apollonius of Tyana comments, ‘...but I do not think the herd of men worthy of



ruin for want of a just and temperate shepherd.’ (τὴν δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀγέλην οὐκ ἀξιῷ φθείρεσθαι χήτει βουκόλου δικαίου τε καὶ σώφρονος, Philostr. VA 5.35.4). The fact that even the great Plato had failed in his efforts to create this ideal philosopher-king, seemed unable to faze both Stoic and Pythagorean in their ongoing quest for what they thought to be the perfect ruler. However, this outlook could be used as justification for the tyranny of imperial rule, barring the fact that the excesses of the Roman emperors tended to disrupt the maintenance of order as understood in the Pythagorean concept of κόσμος. Ultimately, it appears that neither Stoic nor Pythagorean was completely prepared to avail the *demos* of its full rights and privileges, with both philosophies preferring a single shepherd for the flock.

Returning to the issues of vegetarianism and blood sacrifice, especially as portrayed in Philostratus’ *VA* and *Heroikos*, I believe that these practices should be viewed as a yet another manifestation of the traditionalist perspective of the Pythagoreans, because they can be traced as part of this philosophy’s central tenets as far back into myth and history as Pythagoras of Samos himself.<sup>35</sup> It can even be argued that certain tenets like vegetarianism are, in fact, mirrored by the Stoic quest for the purification of the individual soul. As Iamblichus (*VP* 106-107) writes,

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<sup>35</sup> Francis 1995: 164.

‘And he [Pythagoras] advised as much as possible to guard against that which impeded prophecy, or the purity of the soul and chastity, or a permanent state of temperance and virtue. And he condemned things opposed to innocence and those which muddy the purity of the soul in general, and the phantoms of dreams.’

καὶ ὅσα δὲ εἰς μαντικὴν ἐνεπὸδιζεν ἢ πρὸς καθαρότητα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ ἀγνείαν ἢ πρὸς σωφροσύνης καὶ ἀρετῆς ἕξιν, παρήνει φυλάττεσθαι. καὶ τὰ πρὸς εὐάγειαν δὲ ἐναντίως ἔχοντα καὶ ἐπιθολοῦντα τῆς ψυχῆς τάς τε ἄλλας καθαρότητας καὶ τὰ ἐν τοῖς ὕπνοις φαντάσματα παρητεῖτο.

Porphry (De Abst. 2.34.2) echoes this sentiment in a description of the precepts of Pythagorean sacrifices:

‘So then we too will sacrifice, but we will sacrifice as is appropriate, furnishing different sacrifices to different powers, to the supreme god, as a wise man said, nothing perceptible neither being burned nor being named; for there is no raw matter that is not at once impure to the Immaterial One.’

Θύσομεν τοίνυν καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀλλὰ θύσομεν, ὡς προσήκει, διαφόρους τοὺς θυσίας ὡς ἂν διαφόροις δυνάμεσι προσάγοντες, θεῷ μὲν τῷ ἐπὶ πᾶσι, ὡς τις ἀνὴρ σοφὸς ἔφη, μηδὲν τῶν αἰσθητῶν μήτε θυμιῶντες μήτε ἐπονομάζοντες· οὐδὲν γάρ ἐστιν ἔνυλον ὃ μὴ τῷ ἀύλῳ εὐθύς ἐστιν ἀκαθάρτον.

The sanctity of an individual’s soul was essential to the Pythagorean believer.

This was especially true because the doctrine of transmigration held that the human soul was moved into a new vessel once a person died. That vessel could be either human or animal (cf. Sen. Ep. ad Lucilium), explaining the Pythagorean reticence for eating meat of any variety, or even for making blood sacrifices to the gods. And so, Pythagoras apparently sought to foster philanthropic feeling in all men by arguing that because humans and animals are alike in their both

being sentient creatures and being composed of the same basic elements, they should both be accorded a similar level of respect (Iambl. *VP* 168-169). The mystical nature of the movement, and of the teachings of their founder, thus emphasized the unique nature of the relationship between all living organisms and the divine, an advance far beyond the understanding of mere contractual obligations, the manner in which this relationship was conceived of in Roman religion in particular. According to Pythagorean belief, every mortal being possessed a spark of the divine, perhaps akin to the divine fire of Stoic belief, meaning that all were capable of prophecy. It was this kind of added mystical dimension that proved that Pythagoreanism was less acceptable than Stoicism as a set of principles fit to govern the Roman Empire, despite the tacit consent that the Ὀρφικὸς βίος gave to the imperial tyrant in its requirement of a monarch, something even Apollonius shows himself to be in complete agreement with (Philostr. *VA* 5.27-41, see p. 290-292). As even Seneca (*Ep.* 108.17-22) proved in abandoning the practice of vegetarianism, it was ultimately easier for Romans to be made to conform to the practical prescriptions of Stoicism, given that they in large part had already conformed to the old ways of the Republic.

While Bowie and Dzielska contend that Philostratus shows no love of true Pythagoreanism,<sup>36</sup> we find that Philostratus' development of a Pythagorean protagonist in the *VA* nevertheless offers a useful perspective, on both Apollonius' and Philostratus' ideals. Most obvious is Apollonius' claim to have learned his brand of Pythagoreanism from the Master, Pythagoras himself (Philostr. *VA* 1.32.2). It is Eusebius (*CH* 5) who first suggests that Apollonius' Pythagoreanism might be little more than a veneer designed to misdirect the investigator. Granted his approach to the situation is that of a Christian believer battling a perceived defender of paganism, but it nevertheless might conceivably hold true, as several modern commentators, including Anderson and Jones, have tended to agree with him.<sup>37</sup> It is true that Apollonius shows all of the behaviours that can be taken as explicit indicators of his being a follower of the Philosopher of Samos—a vow of silence, an ascetic and monastic lifestyle, vegetarianism, and a love of the traditional gods and their worship (cf. *Ep. Apol.* 8). He does not however, fully ascribe to one of Pythagoreanism's major tenets, namely the requirement that one participate in politics. In fact, both the *VA* and the corpus of letters reveal that although Apollonius was in large part completely willing to comment on political issues (e.g. the political problems experienced in some cities, see *Ep. Apol.* 65 on the misuse of *asylia*) and even states in a letter to the people of Caesarea that although the gods must always

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<sup>36</sup> Bowie 1976: 1672; Dzielska 1986: 136.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson 1986: 136; Jones 2005: 9.

come first, a man should in fact also give priority to the matters of his city (*Ep. Apol.* 11), he was never willing to act upon his beliefs. While the Stoicism of Zeno called for a withdrawal from worldly affairs and the later Stoicism of Seneca's time suggested non-participation as the surest resolution for the *dissimulatio* that a philosopher experienced under imperial tyranny, Pythagoreanism counselled active engagement that even saw groups of Pythagorean philosophers taking up control of entire cities because of it. Why then does Philostratus choose to show Apollonius as being different?

Apollonius' policy of keeping free of political entanglements leaves him a little at odds with the mainstream thinking of his chosen philosophy, meaning that any claim to political or religious activism on the part of his biographer, Philostratus, is rebutted by the observation that Apollonius, although constantly preaching against evil, rarely does anything to combat it directly.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, from the outset, Philostratus (VA 2.3) sets up Apollonius in the role of 'brave martyr resisting an evil tyrant',<sup>39</sup> an element that is undoubtedly carried through to the close of the work, and forms one of its core themes. One of the Tyanaean Sage's greatest opportunities to affect meaningful social or political change comes in the form of his trial before the Emperor Domitian (Philostr. VA 8.1.1-8.7.50), taking place approximately in the year 93 CE—the very same year

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<sup>38</sup> Schnur 1949: 36.

<sup>39</sup> Bowie 2009: 64.

that the emperor expelled all philosophers from the city of Rome, and thus a moment ripe for serious political and social commentary. Much of Book 8 of the VA is curiously dedicated to Philostratus' notion of what Apollonius *would have said* to the emperor, with the book's initial chapters apparently recounting the actual events. The latter stages of the book are therefore worthy of special attention, particularly as they spring from the mind of Philostratus himself, and not from court records or the reports of bystanders. There is also a strange contradiction in the portrayal of Apollonius at this juncture. Philostratus claims that Apollonius was able to escape his imprisonment whenever he so wished, but chose instead to remain and face his accuser (Philostr. VA 7.32). If he had chosen this moment to display his philosophical *virtus*, why does he suddenly teleport to safety whilst under imperial questioning (Philostr. VA 8.5)? Surely even in Apollonius' own estimation—namely that a true philosopher is measured by his behaviour under the attentions of a tyrant—he must fall short, as when he could have perhaps acted in the role of philosopher-adviser to a corrupt ruler, whose excesses were in serious need of correction, he elects not to do so, and instead preserves his own sanctity, as it were, by withdrawing from the political arena in a spectacular manner.

As I have noted, the section dealing with the encounter between Apollonius and the Emperor Domitian occurs in two parts, with the first part (VA 8.1-8.5)

being Philostratus' representation of the actual conversation between the two, and the second part (VA 8.6-8.7.50) a record of the speech that Apollonius would have given, had the emperor not directed what Apollonius was allowed to say through his specific interrogation. I shall begin with the first part of VA 8 which could conceivably have at least some basis in fact, and through which Philostratus sketches, in broad strokes, the events of the trial: Apollonius is brought from the prison by a clerk of the court with whom he converses. He asks the clerk who it is that brings the accusation against him, and who it is that will be his judge. He is in turn informed that the emperor, the reason for his original incarceration, is to sit in judgment. Apollonius responds by arguing that the emperor is doing a great deal of damage to philosophy with his actions, to which the clerk essentially comments 'but why should that matter to him'. Apollonius is quick to point out that although the emperor does not care for philosophy, philosophy is nonetheless concerned for him—"But Philosophy has much [concern] about an emperor, so that he should rule suitably", ἀλλὰ φιλοσοφία πολὺς... βασιλέως, ἵν' ἐπιτηδεύως ἄρχῃ, (Philostr. VA 8.2), states Apollonius. The belief that it was necessary for a philosopher-king to stand as his people's guide is evident in the words ἵν' ἐπιτηδεύως ἄρχῃ, as is the obvious disapproval of the scorn with which Domitian treats the philosophers of Rome.<sup>40</sup> Clearly he has a long way to go before reaching this particular

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<sup>40</sup> This is echoed in Apollonius' (VA 2.7.2) statement asking φιλοσοφία δὲ πῶς ἀνακτητέα τῷ γε ἀτιμάσαντι αὐτὴν καὶ ῥίψαντι; 'But how can Philosophy be recovered by one whom she is

pinnacle of monarchic evolution. Once they reach the courtroom, the confusion over Apollonius' true nature—sage or sorcerer—is brought to light when he is searched before entering, and is deprived of any items that might possibly bear some sort of magical enchantment (VA 8.3), as coming under the influence of a sorcerer is apparently a great fear of the emperor's. Once he stands in the courtroom before the emperor, another point of interest is revealed, namely that Apollonius' accuser is flanked by a freedman in the service of his old enemy, the Stoic philosopher Euphrates. The freedman is present to report on certain speeches that Apollonius made while in Ionia, discourses that are to form the basis of the indictment against him, which despite the many charges, is primarily concerned with any involvement that Apollonius might have had in the recent rebellious activities of Nerva, Orfitus, and Rufus. The freedman also seems to bring a monetary reward for the accuser (VA 8.3).

Apollonius' refusal to look at the emperor provokes the first real point of conflict, and when his accuser demands that he look 'on the god of all men,' ἐς τὸν ἀπάντων ἀνθρώπων θεόν, (VA 8.4) Apollonius turns his eyes toward the heavens instead. Philostratus notes Apollonius as looking up to Zeus—ἐς τὸν Δία—at this moment, which is a curious choice, given his previously



documented preference for the sun god as his chief deity.<sup>41</sup> Zeus can however be argued to offer several unique opportunities for subtext in this instance— firstly, he is supreme among the gods, superseding even the position and authority claimed by the *dominus et deus*; secondly, he is the god of justice, thirdly, as Zeus Eleutherios he is a god of freedom as well, and lastly, as the progenitor of Athene, he is a source of wisdom, a twofold requirement for this situation, given that Apollonius could be seen to require wisdom for his answers and the emperor presumably requires it for the exercise of his office. Given Apollonius' apparently disrespectful approach to the circumstances, the emperor moves quickly to begin the hearing, a procedure that he closely controls by forcing Apollonius to answer his specific questions. The emperor has four primary directions of inquiry: (i) Why Apollonius dresses as he does? (ii) Why do people call Apollonius a 'god'? (iii) How Apollonius knew of the Ephesian plague beforehand? (iv) Whether Apollonius engaged in a certain act of human sacrifice? If there were to be any truth behind this bloody act in particular then Apollonius would be totally discredited as a religious and moral authority, and by association, so would anyone with whom he was believed to have had a previous relationship (VA 8.5.1-8.5.3). Although several of the inquiries into aspects like Apollonius' mode of dress have the appearance of being relatively trite, they should all be viewed as interlaced in a larger plan

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<sup>41</sup> For Apollonius preferring to worship the sun, cf. VA 1.31.2; 2.38. For Apollonius approving of others adopting his habits: cf. VA 2.26.3.

concocted to ensnare the Tyanaean Sage in a manner akin to Jesus and the Pharisees. But with almost the same preternatural awareness, Apollonius answers the four questions precisely, revealing only what is absolutely necessary.

In response to the query concerning his manner of dress, which is described as ‘peculiar and idiosyncratic’ (ιδίαν τε καὶ ἐξάριετον, VA 8.5.1), Apollonius answers as any good Pythagorean would, namely that it is the earth that provides for him. This answer ties into his comments on the third question, which concerns Apollonius’ foreshadowing of the plague in Ephesus. Apollonius replies to the emperor’s inquiry as follows, ‘Enjoying a more delicate regimen...Majesty, I was first in perceiving the danger.’ (λεπτοτέρῳ... ὦ βασιλεῦ, διαίτη χρώμενος πρῶτος τοῦ δεινοῦ ἠσθόμην, Philostr. VA 8.5.1) This is in keeping with my earlier assertion that Pythagoreans believed that a soul purified through proper regimen was capable of prophecy (Iambl. VP 106-107, above p.293-294), an implication that provokes the emperor to move quickly onto another question before Apollonius may be afforded the opportunity of criticizing his previously unjust and often immoral appetites (VA 8.5.2).

The second question asked of Apollonius concerns his apparent godhood. Apollonius once again takes Iarchus the Brahman as his example by replying that gods are merely those people who are thought to be exceedingly good (VA 3.18). Thus it is that Apollonius turns the conversation to the topic of *virtus*, whether it be defined by Stoics or Pythagoreans. The reference to the philosophy of the Indians, the origin of Pythagorean wisdom according to Philostratus, also bears some intriguing consequences for the emperor. As one who claims divinity by virtue of his imperial blood, despite the fact that cult worship in Rome was only intended for the emperors who had passed away, the words of Apollonius suggest that moral qualifications, and not bloodline alone, are what is in fact needed to bear the title of *deus* (or *divus* as the case should be). This view brings the notion of the philosopher-king once more to the fore, as Apollonius explains that power requires philosophical guidance, an especially pointed reference given Domitian's expulsion of philosophers from Rome. This guidance is not only to temper the ruler's baser emotions but indeed also to see that his power is used for the good of all people concerned.

The final problem put to Apollonius of Tyana is that of a human sacrifice that he was rumoured to have performed. The emperor phrases his inquiry in a careful and rhetorical manner, and Apollonius' response could be said to be equally enigmatic, as he states that if he was in the countryside he probably

offered a sacrifice but gives no specifics on his ritual activities.<sup>42</sup> If it is assumed in this instance, as in all others, that he is following the same Pythagorean ideals that he indicated in his first answer, then Apollonius would most definitely not have offered any sort of blood sacrifice, let alone have offered a human being to the gods. His abhorrence for all manner of blood offerings was well known and is pointed out, for example, in his upbraiding of the Egyptian priests for their insistence on this very same practice (VA 5.25). The Tyanaean Sage concludes his answer by pointing out the inadequacy of the Roman legal system, especially given its reliance on paid informers and accusers. The emperor decides to acquit Apollonius of all charges, but before the sage vanishes from the room, he delivers a *coup de grace*:

‘...but on account of these sinful ones, the cities are destroyed, and the islands are full of fugitives, and the mainland of lamentation, and the armies of cowardice, and the senate of suspicion.’ (VA 8.5.3)

διὰ δὲ τοὺς ἀλιτηρίους τούτους ἀπολώλασι μὲν αἱ πόλεις, πλήρεις δ’ αἱ νῆσοι φυγάδων, ἡ δὲ ἡπειρος οἰμωγῆς, τὰ δὲ στρατεύματα δειλίας, ἡ δὲ ξύγκλητος ὑπονοίας.

This is a reference to the calibre of men that have been called to bear witness against him, and specifically the injustice that is brought about by this abuse of the imperial legal system. It is quite likely then that the speech Apollonius would have delivered, which follows these reported events, but with far greater elaboration, is essentially an attempt at rehabilitating his image after he shows

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<sup>42</sup> Somewhat akin to the accusations that Cicero (*Vat.* 14) made against Vatinius—calling up the spirits of the dead and sacrificing young boys while using Pythagoreanism to veil his nefarious practices.

no interest in engaging with the emperor beyond the minimum that was required for his own defence. Whereas a philosopher should have remained with the emperor not only in order to teach him, but also to point out his injustices and excesses, Apollonius retreats after revealing what he believes to be wrong with imperial society through his words in VA 8.5.3 (above). It is possible that Philostratus felt that he could not go quite as far as to have his proxy in Apollonius actually engage with the emperor (even one as universally despised as Domitian) in order to affect some form of societal change. Even in a novelistic context, which the eighth book of the VA seems to mimic, this would have been too unrealistic. His work would have then taken on a utopian character, and that is most certainly not its purpose. In magically removing Apollonius from the situation, Philostratus preserves his work by efficiently shifting the attention of the reader away from the entertaining scenario presented in the philosopher-ruler encounter, refocusing upon the fact that Apollonius was only motivated to attend the hearing in the first place out of fear for his rebellious friends (VA 8.5.4). Thus the move from the dialogue of philosopher and ruler, to the re-emphasis of the principles of Philostratus' brand of 'polyvalent' fundamentalism occurs with the same suddenness of the flash of light that bears Apollonius from the courtroom.

The second element of this discussion is the analysis of the Philostratean representation of the trial through what he claims is a speech written by the hand of Apollonius himself. This is the *apologia* that he would have delivered had he not been constrained by the emperor's questions. As he says to the clerk who asked him how much water he would require to measure his speaking time:

'If the judge concedes for me to speak as much as is demanded, you would not measure out the Tiber beforehand...' (VA 8.2.2)

εἰ μὲν ὅποσα... ἀπαιτεῖ ἡ δίκη ξυγχωρεῖ μοι λέγειν, οὐκ ἂν φθάνοι διαμετρηθεῖς οὐδὲ ὁ Θύμβρις...

Philostratus introduces this speech by way of an apology of his own, in which he explains the unpolished style of the address as being the nature of the Tyanaean Sage, and simultaneously, his remark almost appears as a comment on the mode of expression that characterized his time of the Second Sophistic as a whole:

'I do not think a wise man would soundly expound his own disposition in the practice of equal phrases and antitheses, and sounding his tongue like a rattle, for these things are the manner of public speakers and even they do not need them' (VA 8.6.1).

οὐ μοι δοκεῖ ὁ σοφὸς ὑγιῶς ἂν ὑποκρίνεσθαι τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἦθος πάρισα ἐπιτηδεύων καὶ ἀντίθετα, καὶ κροτάλου δίκην κτυπῶν τῇ γλώττῃ, ῥητορικοῖς μὲν γὰρ πρὸς τρόπον ταῦτα καὶ οὐδὲ ἐκείνοις δεῖ.

Intriguingly this positions the discourse squarely alongside the *Apologia Socratis*, as the words of Socrates himself indicate:

'...but you will hear from me the complete truth. Not however, by Zeus, men of Athens, speeches having been set out in high-minded language...' (Pl. *Ap.* 17b)

ὕμεῖς δ' ἐμοῦ ἀκούσεσθε πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν. οὐ μέντοι μὰ Δία, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, κεκαλλιεπημένους γε λόγους...

While it is indeed strange for a sophist to be defaming their bread and butter techniques, the juxtaposition of Apollonius and Socrates is the more important issue. Indeed, as the letters between Apollonius and Musonius indicate, they ultimately saw Socrates' efforts at changing Athenian society as a failure, because he did not mount an actual defence but instead sought to become a martyr, something that Apollonius particularly avoids. So while this part of the discourse may lack the rhetorical flair of a typical address before the royal court as it would have been constructed by a proficient sophist, it nonetheless speaks to many of the same problems that are identified in the first part of Book 8 but in far greater detail.

Apollonius begins by immediately drawing attention, as he repeatedly does in the 'factual' depiction of the trial, to the emperor's paid informants, whom he calls 'Athene's aegis and the hand of Zeus', αἰγίδα Ἀθηνᾶς καὶ Διὸς χεῖρα (VA 8.7.3), specially as concerns their usefulness in the emperor's crusade against his personal enemies. In the same way as he does at VA 8.5.3, Apollonius complains about 'these pests', τοῖς ἀλιτηρίοις τούτοις (VA 8.7.3), who are the ones responsible for inventing scores of imagined offences against the emperor in order to worm their way into his good graces. This corruption is the result of being entrenched in an imperial legal system that is characterized by

*dissimulatio*, a system which saw men trading their personal *virtus* for continuing freedom and imperial favour. Men of standing and philosophical learning like the Stoic Thrasea Paetus, perceived the flattery, *adulatio*, and constant scheming fomented by ‘these pests’ as symptomatic of an ever-expanding moral degeneracy in Roman society. Of Thrasea Paetus, Rudich writes that he was ‘righteous without being prudish, committed without being a fanatic, courageous without being obstinate, regarded by many as “virtue incarnate”’.<sup>43</sup> In keeping with the Stoic tradition, he eventually chose not to engage in the politics of the morally bankrupt Neronian regime, ultimately provoked to dissociate himself completely from the political world by the growing sycophancy of the senate (Tac. *Ann.* 14.12; Dio 62.15). According to Rudich, it was Thrasea’s leadership potential—the mere possibility of rebellion that his presence created—that led to his eventual demise,<sup>44</sup> and not the way in which he may have snubbed the emperor, although this certainly provided the pretence.

Numerous similarities exist between Thrasea Paetus and Apollonius of Tyana as a symbol for the rebellious and the return to more moral times. Both have the same intolerance for *adulatio* and for generally sycophantic behaviour, for the schemes of *delatores*, and for the abuse of power. Indeed, Rudich’s description

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<sup>43</sup> Rudich 1993: 78.

<sup>44</sup> Rudich 1993: 78.



could conceivably characterize both individuals, along with Thrasea's reported comment, 'Nero can kill me, but he cannot harm me' (Dio Cass. 62.15). It is of course Philostratus' peculiar emphasis that sees Apollonius take the very same sentiments to an extreme when he quotes the *Iliad* (22.13) in saying, 'For you will not kill me, since it is indeed not fated for me.' (οὐ γάρ με κτενέεις, ἐπεὶ οὗτοι μόρσιμός εἰμι.) The responses of these two men are indeed similar in their approach to imperial authority, reiterating perhaps the perspective of Epictetus (4.1.60, see p. 286). Neither man feared death at the hands of the emperor but rather dreaded the death of their own *virtus*, should they yield before the relentlessly conforming pressure of an iniquitous Roman Empire.

It is important that Apollonius also makes mention of Domitian's father, the Emperor Vespasian, and the relationship that he had with him (VA 8.7.5-8.7.11). It is Vespasian, according to Apollonius, who can provide the best testimony in his defence, and he goes on to mention a letter (*Ep. Apol.* 77f) that Vespasian addressed to him, applauding his lifestyle:

'If everyone, Apollonius, wished to philosophize according to your manner, philosophy and poverty would be extremely fortunate, with philosophy being uncorrupted and poverty being voluntary.'

εἰ πάντες, Ἀπολλώνιε, κατὰ ταῦτά σοι φιλοσοφεῖν ἤθελον, σφόδρα ἂν εὐδαιμόνως ἔπραττον φιλοσοφία τε καὶ πενία, φιλοσοφία μὲν ἀδεκάστως ἔχουσα, πενία δὲ αὐθαιρέτως.

This letter is offered as proof that both Apollonius' practice of Pythagoreanism and his general conduct are unimpeachable. As Apollonius states in his undelivered *apologia*:

'But happening upon me with long hair and adorned in this way, he [Vespasian] did not ask one thing about my appearance, thinking well of everything about me...' (VA 8.7.6)

ἐντυχὼν δέ μοι κομῶντί τε καὶ ὥδε ἐσταλμένῳ, οὐδὲ ἤρετο οὐδὲ ἐν περὶ τοῦ σχήματος, ἡγούμενος τὸ ἐν ἐμοὶ πᾶν εὖ ἔχειν...

and

'For he [Vespasian] would not have seemed to me to be suited to rule if he had believed these things of me, or had hunted sovereignty, which he should acquire through virtues, with trickery.' (VA 8.7.7)

οὐ γὰρ ἂν μοι ἐπιτήδειος ἄρχειν ἔδοξεν ἢ ἐμὲ ἡγούμενος ἱκανὸν ταῦτα, ἢ σοφίσμασι θηρεύων ἀρχήν, ἣν ἀρεταῖς ἔδει κατακτᾶσθαι.

Apollonius can therefore be argued to be the reason for Domitian's holding power in the first place, and in this way he uses Domitian's father to validate the very philosophy that is put into question by the trial, an especially pertinent perspective, given that Apollonius also claims to be the driving force behind Vespasian's original ascent to the throne (VA 8.7.6). Finally, the mention of poverty in Vespasian's letter allows for the additional criticism of sorcerers as falsely wise, ψευδόσοφοί, and as being little more than lovers of money or φιλοχρήματοι (VA 8.7.10). This is of course another jibe directed against the philosophers represented by his rival Euphrates, whose freedman has apparently paid off Apollonius' accuser. What is therefore of particular

significance to this section of the discourse is Apollonius' claim to have fostered Vespasian's will to power:

'The intention for him to hold power was greatly strengthened by me, already being removed by others... but I advised that he not feel unworthy of power when it knocked on his door...' (VA 8.7.6)

ἥ τε διάνοια, ἥ ἐς τὸ ἄρχειν ἐχρήτο, ἐρρώσθη αὐτῷ παρ' ἐμοῦ μάλιστα, μεθεστηκυῖα ἤδη ὑφ' ἐτέρων... ἐμοῦ δὲ συμβουλευόντος ἑαυτόν τε μὴ ἀπαξιοῦν ἀρχῆς ἐπὶ θύρας αὐτῷ φοιτώσης...

This extract must be read against the background of VA 5.27-41, the classically-styled 'kingship debate'. Here Philostratus, Dio, Euphrates, and Vespasian debate the best constitution for Rome in time-honoured philosophical tradition. It is ultimately concluded that an enlightened monarch—i.e. either the Stoic or Pythagorean perspective that I have elaborated on previously—presents the best possible government for the Graeco-Roman world, and it is hoped that Vespasian is just such a person. I suggest that the preference for a monarch is at the very least Pythagorean in origin, principally because of the arguments that they offer in justifying rule over others as divinely ordained (Iambl. *VP* 174).

John Moles provides the perfect synopsis of this passage's significance:

'The minimum inference from Philostratus' account of the meeting of Apollonius, Vespasian, Dio and Euphrates is that he was fairly sure that his readers would regard the conjunction of Dio, Euphrates and Vespasian as historically plausible. But in view of the strong possibility that his main interest was to establish the proposition that Apollonius had an international reputation as a philosopher during his own lifetime this may also be the maximum inference: hence Philostratus' evidence may be regarded as consistent with the testimony of Fronto and with the

attested relationship between Musonius, Dio and the Flavians but in all probability not an advance upon them.’<sup>45</sup>

It is an attempt at establishing political credentials for Apollonius, a means of justifying not only Apollonius’ interference in matters of state, but Philostratus’ commentary thereon as well. Yet is Apollonius himself portrayed as being for or against this sort of tyranny? An intriguing parallel in the life of the Emperor Aurelian (*Vit. Aurel.* 24.2-9) describes the long dead Apollonius materializing before the Emperor while he was making an attack on Tyana, saying:

‘Aurelian, if you wish to win, you should not plan to slay my citizens. Aurelian, if you wish to rule, abstain from shedding the blood of innocents. Aurelian, act mercifully if you wish to live.’

*Aureliane, si uis uincere, nihil est quod de ciuium meorum nece cogites. Aureliane, si uis imperare, a cruore innocentium abstine. Aureliane, clementer te age, si uis uiuere.*

This incident paints a picture of Apollonius that is thoroughly in keeping with his king-making tendencies, and points to a general trend advocating the toleration of imperial tyranny in the absence of something better. Tyranny was the status quo in the time that Philostratus was writing, and for better or worse, the corrupt system was all that the Empire had, for it was too large for any realistic democratic overtures to be successful. While religious abuses were something that undoubtedly required immediate attention—hence Apollonius’ constant interference in these matters—the political situation was perhaps irredeemable through direct intervention, as is shown in Philostratus’ choice to

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<sup>45</sup> Moles 1978: 85.

remove Apollonius from the Emperor's presence as opposed to his attempting to act as a philosophical adviser. This is perhaps also pointed to in the involvement of Apollonius in the failed revolt of Vindex (VA 5.10-11, 33). However, if one held that the rule of an imperial tyrant was maintained through divine right, then the political situation could possibly be salvaged through the reorganization of the religious. By reinvigorating the religious traditions of past generations of pious Greeks and Romans, the problems of the present could at the very least be brought out into the light of day. Once this had taken place, the emphasis on the beliefs and morals that characterized the old ways could be used to redirect the efforts of rulers who had perhaps strayed too far into what was perceived as immorality.

## Chapter X

### *The Philostratean Fundamentalist Perspective:*

#### *Sophistry and Religious Orthodoxy.*

*“To be wise is the principle and fount of writing well.”*

(Horace *Ars Poetica* 309)

The final element of my analysis broaches the issue of the importance of the peculiarly sophistic trends evident in the writings of Philostratus and seeks to utilise them as a window on the fundamentalist attitudes of this author, linking specifically with my previous comments on writing and the Second Sophistic in Chapters IV and V. To this end the *Vitae Sophistarum* will assume a special significance as it presents a specifically selected collection of philosophers and sophists that offer unique insight into the mind of Philostratus.

It might seem out-of-place to include a discussion of the *VS*—a work describing the lives of sophists and philosophers—as part of a thesis arguing for the existence of ancient religious fundamentalism, but to my mind this is a myopic point of view. As I suggested in the previous chapter, philosophy played an indispensable role in the formation of the imperial Roman worldview, both in

terms of the direct action taken on the part of the Empire itself, and in terms of the reactions of peoples forced to participate in the processes of this same Empire. While, for example, many of the tenets of Panaetian Stoicism were to find themselves at the very core of individual Roman Republican identity, the ideals espoused by a more mystical Pythagoreanism—despite their venerable antiquity—would be excluded for being unfit for Greek or Roman consumption.<sup>1</sup> If, as I argued previously, the various philosophies of the Roman Empire can be held to have influenced the mindset of the people, even through their opposition to them, then doubtless the foremost exponents of these practices are essential to the study of the circumstances in which Philostratus was writing. Likewise, the fact that Philostratus chooses to chronicle the stories of these specific men (and not others) must bear a significant weight in the analysis. His inclusion of several examples of philosophical resistance to tyrants is also vital, given the imperial context in which he lived and worked. These passages should be understood with the insights gleaned from Chapter IX foremost in mind, namely that despite their many differing tenets, both Stoicism and Pythagoreanism favoured some form of benign monarchy, and that Philostratus sought to grapple with this specific issue through his other works, the *VA* and the *Nero* in particular. I contend that this is because a fundamentalist perspective requires the additional authority found only in the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Seneca (*Ep.* 108.17-22) wherein he claims that he was forced into abandoning Pythagoreanism as it was embarrassing his family.

political arena, in order to ensure both relevance and success in the contemporary world. The *VS* should therefore be seen to complement these other two texts with its manifold biographies. And yet, in this case, Philostratus is employing biographical techniques for a distinct purpose. According to Talbert's categorisation<sup>2</sup> the *VS* is an attempt at presenting a series of moral examples, in pursuit of some didactic objective. While this is not the same objective that Philostratus aims at in the *VA*—he claims to be correcting errors made in previous representation of Apollonius of Tyana, but is, in reality, recasting the Tyanaean Sage for his own unique purposes—it is not entirely incongruous, for the moral teachings displayed in the various lives that Philostratus touches on in his *VS*, in fact complement the moralistic standpoint taken in both the *Nero* and *VA*. Indeed, as I will now show, many of the entries that Philostratus makes in the *VS* can be read as having one of two immediate aims behind them, either to offer the example of some form of resistance to tyranny as being morally justifiable, or to suggest that religious authority must supersede all other forms of temporal power. Thus Philostratus is able to reveal two conclusions concerning his fundamentalist tendencies through the *VS*—that there are many problems and inconsistencies inherent in the current imperial dispensation clearly requiring immediate correction, and that the religious path is the surest one to follow, the path that will return balance and

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<sup>2</sup> Talbert 1976: 1620-1623. See Chapter V, p. 122-123.



order to the Roman Empire. These conclusions are reached primarily through his creation of a near perfect environment for the sophists that he describes:

‘In the world of the *Lives*, the public is universally fascinated by sophists as entertainers, celebrities, benefactors, and political power brokers, but does not exert any influence over them in return. Patrons, especially the emperors, are reduced to mere fans: ardent admirers of the sophistic movement, but with no star-making ability or aspirations of their own.’<sup>3</sup>

Philostratus’ sophists are not influenced by their patrons and fans, but are their own men—their opinions are entirely their own. This in turn points to the religious efforts that he makes through Apollonius of Tyana and through the *Heroikos*. It must be noted that as it would prove an arduous task to analyse each one of the entries in the *VS*, and as not all of them are immediately relevant, I have instead selected certain key examples with which to illustrate my point of view.

Before delving more deeply into the *VS*, the sophistic scene responsible for its birth, must be properly established. It should be noted that several of the points that follow are extensions of my earlier arguments found in Chapters III, IV, and V. Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* is an encyclopaedic work covering almost every nuance of the ancient rhetorical practice. For Quintilian (*Inst Or.* 1.10.7) oratory was a divine gift, for ‘providence gives nothing more excellent to men’,

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<sup>3</sup> Eshelman 2008: 404.

*nihil praestantius homini dedit providentia.* Skill and training in public speaking should therefore be employed for the greater good. As he writes,

‘For I do not only say that he who is an orator, ought to be a virtuous man, but also that he cannot be an orator unless a virtuous man.’

*Neque enim tantum id dico, eum, qui sit orator, virum bonum esse oportere, sed ne futurum quidem oratorem nisi virum bonum.* (Quint. *Inst. Or.* 12.1.3)

If rhetoric is a skill to be practised by good men then it cannot but help be good (*Inst. Or.* 2.16.11). This is because any sort of evil in a man’s heart prevents him from being properly educated (*Inst. Or.* 12.1.4). Beyond his intentions, an orator trained in the sophistic tradition needed to be proficient in many diverse skills. He was, for example, to be knowledgeable about philosophy, a system closely linked with oratory (*Inst. Or.* 1.10.11), and to be schooled in the law and custom of the city in which he worked (*Inst. Or.* 12.3.1). In all, it seems that the ideal orator was set up to be the counterpart of the ideal sage. So it is then that Gleason sums up what might be called the sophistic experience:

‘...the sheer sweat of exertion in projecting an unamplified voice before a large outdoor audience, the demands of managing the heavy folds of the cloak or toga, the exhilarating risks of stumbles and solecisms lying in wait for a moment’s loss of nerve, the vibrant immediacy of a collaborative live audience, ready to explode with jeers or applause. We must imagine the intoxicating sense of power that surged through the performer as he mastered the crowd, overwhelming sceptics and hecklers with the hypnotic charm of a beautiful controlled voice in full spate. We must also try to remember the terror of defeat and public humiliation, the courage required to risk both.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gleason 1995: xx.

Clearly the ancient practice of sophistry had far more to it than merely being able to speak in public. After all, this was a skill praised in all manner of great men, and even formed part of Graeco-Roman higher education. Thus the appraisal of particular sophists by Philostratus is a vitally important part of any discussion of the man's attitudes, as it reflects his understanding both of elite politics and of the essential nature of *paideia* in one's experience of the Graeco-Roman world and vice versa. To this end Preston summarizes *paideia* as being

'...both the formal education of the elite and the wider culture shared by the Greek local elites. This common culture has been taken to include expertise in public speaking; knowledge, and therefore deployment, of a stock of historical paradigms and literary texts... an ability to use a highly artificial, "Atticizing" dialect of Greek; and a common aristocratic ethos.'<sup>5</sup>

To be one of the elite was to be educated, and to be educated was to possess *paideia*—hence the name, *pepaideumenoí*. This was key to any hope of political advancement in a world where, as Gleason notes above, to address an audience for whatever reason was to be presumed capable of plying one's knowledge of the past in order to ensure one's advancement in the future. A sound understanding of history was thus a vital component of *paideia* as it proved to be an important tool at the speaker's disposal, through which he could raise political or moral concerns by reference to various past *exempla*. As Fox explains it, 'rhetoric itself is an inseparable part of any attempt to exercise moral or

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<sup>5</sup> Preston 2001: 89.

political judgment.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately a literate education was what separated the ruling elite from the rest of the Graeco-Roman world, for it was a vital element of every function in the Empire from politics to economics.<sup>7</sup>

To begin my analysis of the Philostratean *VS*, I quote from the later author, Eunapius (*VS* 454), who writes of the work:

‘The Lemnian Philostratus, with charm, spat forth the lives of the best sophists in a simple treatment...’

Φιλόστρατος μὲν ὁ Λήμνιος τοὺς τῶν ἀρίστων σοφιστῶν ἐξ ἐπιδρομῆς μετὰ χάριτος παρέπτυσσε βίους...

Words like ἐπιδρομῆς, ‘a light treatment’ (i.e. superficial), and παρέπτυσσε, ‘spat forth’, are harsh characterizations, but it is entirely plausible that Eunapius wished to create some distance between Philostratus’ earlier treatise and his own treatment of the subject, something that he achieves through his additional use of written biographical sources to rival Philostratus’ use of oral tradition and report alone.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this is very much like the way in which Philostratus distances himself from the work of Moeragenes in the *VA* (1.3.2), by declaring him ‘greatly ignorant’ of Apollonius. Wright notes that Philostratus

‘avoided the conventional style and alphabetical sequence used by grammarians for biographies; for he had no desire to be classed with grammarians. He wrote like a well-bred sophist who wished to preserve

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<sup>6</sup> Fox 2001: 81.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan 1998: 2, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Swain 1991: 155.

for all time a picture of the triumphs of his tribe, when sophists were at the height of their glory.’<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Swain couches the *VS* as ‘a sort of cross between biography and the blend of biography and doxology offered by Seneca (*Controversiae*), Suetonius (*De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus*), Favorinus (*Apomnemoneumata*), and Diogenes Laertius.’ On the whole, he does believe that this sort of tradition generally aims at truthfulness.<sup>10</sup> It is not only the tales that Philostratus tells of these sophists, but the manner in which he approaches their opinions and conduct that allows us, with the aid of my previous investigations into the *Nero*, the *Heroikos*, and the *VA*, to cobble together a now complete picture of Philostratus’ fundamentalist approach. This is especially clear in his portrayal of certain sophists who had the opportunity of interacting with the Roman emperor and his various representatives, something that is also seen in his choice of earlier sophists and their life stories under the tyrants of Greece. Philostratus goes to some lengths in emphasizing the democratic credentials of many of these sophists, as it appears to be his opinion that, in a similar manner to the philosophers of his time, it was likewise the responsibility of the educated sophist to attempt the correction of perceived maladministration in the corridors of power. In understanding why a work on sophistry is important in analysing what might be described as a fundamentalist perspective under the Roman Empire, it must be remembered that Philostratus chose a philosopher in

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<sup>9</sup> Wright 1968: xii.

<sup>10</sup> Swain 1991: 155.

Apollonius, as the central figure of his religious reawakening of the Mediterranean world, and as he, himself, commented (VS 480):

‘It is necessary to believe that ancient sophistic rhetoric philosophizes; for it discusses the things addressed by the philosophers...’

Τὴν ἀρχαίαν σοφιστικὴν ῥητορικὴν ἡγεῖσθαι χρὴ φιλοσοφοῦσαν·  
διαλέγεται μὲν γὰρ ὑπὲρ ὧν οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες...

Moreover, it must be noted that, as Swain suggests, Philostratus aimed at creating a work emblematic of his intellectual milieu.<sup>11</sup> This necessarily leads to his representing his chosen sophists in a very specific way. He elects to render these sophists not as mere public speakers or practitioners of the rhetorical arts, but as men who ‘shared a distinctive set of cultural, social, and political values.’<sup>12</sup> This is an explicit contradiction of Wilamowitz-Möllerndorff’s thesis concerning the sophists in ‘Der Atticismus und Asianismus’,<sup>13</sup> and yet is a useful position, given that the majority of sophists had to, at the very least, come from a wealthy background. This would mean that many of them indeed shared similar values.

Philostratus appears to cast his sophists in the same manner as the philosophers that he mentions in his other works. For instance, he has the words of Favorinus, spoken before the emperor, mirror those found in one of Demosthenes’ (*Or.*

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<sup>11</sup> Swain 1991: 149.

<sup>12</sup> Swain 1991: 149.

<sup>13</sup> Wilamowitz-Möllerndorff 1900: 9-14.

18.205) famous orations when he writes ‘that not only for ourselves, but for the fatherland as well are we born’, ὅτι μὴ ἑαυτοῖς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πατρίσι γεγόναμεν (Philostr. VS 490).<sup>14</sup> This is reminiscent of the political perspective of the later Roman Stoics, particularly in terms of the way in which these philosophers conceived of one’s obligations to society. Stoicism is also reflected in the story that Philostratus (VS 505) relates of Isocrates the sophist, who not unlike Thrasya Paetus, chose to withdraw from public life while still retaining a strong interest in politics (ὅμως δ’ οὐκ ἀπεσπούδαζε τῶν κοινῶν). A third example occurs in the form of Herodes Atticus, whom Philostratus (VS 563) describes as stoically bearing the constant abuse heaped upon him by the Cynic Proteus. Apparently Proteus used to follow Herodes around, barking at him ἡμιβαρβάρῳ γλώττῃ, ‘in a half barbarous tongue’. Herodes’ response is certainly humorous, as he did not upbraid Proteus for speaking ill of him, but rather comments on the poor quality of the man’s Greek, ‘you speak ill of me, so be it, but why in a manner such as this?’ (ἔστω... κακῶς με ἀγορεύεις, πρὸς τί καὶ οὕτως;)

For both sophists and philosophers alike, indeed for any man who considered himself educated, the politics of language was an issue of the utmost importance, something that could be said to encapsulate the very identity of the

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<sup>14</sup> A similar sentiment is expressed in Plato’s *Crito* (51c-51d).

speaker or writer. Speaking the right kind of Greek was thus a matter of great consequence during the Second Sophistic. Horrocks informs us that 'despite the political and economic advantages of Roman rule, many Greeks felt a profound sense of alienation' in the midst of the Roman Empire.<sup>15</sup> The influence of the Greek language was however extremely persistent (Cic. *Arch.* 23), and for the most part, the Romans were content to allow it to remain the dominant mode of expression in the eastern parts of the Empire. Latin also borrowed heavily from Greek, creating not only a new vocabulary, but changing the nature of the relationship between the elite and the common folk.<sup>16</sup> As I have noted, it is Greek *paideia*, a type of symbolic capital possessed by the Roman elite that separates them from the rest of imperial society.<sup>17</sup> Yet Greek literary production was more or less valued depending on the particular point in history. This resulted in the occurrence of a cultural and linguistic disjunction of sorts. To explain, a major part of what it meant to be Roman was the almost missionary zeal with which the civilization's cultural ideals were spread, a propagation that was a clear demonstration of Roman dominance.<sup>18</sup> However, in approaching Greece, these so-called Roman 'missionaries' encountered a

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<sup>15</sup> Horrocks 1997: 78.

<sup>16</sup> Habinek 1998: 60.

<sup>17</sup> Symbolic capital is interesting in this sense in that it both conceals the fact that money is required in order to obtain it (there are no expensive items to put on display), simultaneously flaunting the fact that money is required to obtain it (one must pay for a lengthy education). See Bourdieu 1977: 181-183. It is the honour of having an education in Greek and all that represents that truly confers the prestige.

<sup>18</sup> Horrocks 1997: 78.



society with a fully developed culture and set of spiritual beliefs, founded upon a shared notion of Greekness, as Herodotus (8.144.2) explains:

‘moreover Greekness, which consists in being of the same blood and same tongue, and common temples of the gods and honoured sacrifices, and a similar lifestyle...’

αὐτίς δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, ἐὼν ὁμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον, καὶ θεῶν ἱδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἡθεὰ τε ὁμότροπα...

With this level of cultural interconnectivity and development before them, Roman confidence in the superiority of their own society was shaken. This meant that the Greek peoples had to be re-evaluated in order to differentiate them from their heroic forebears. Greeks in the Empire were viewed from then on as poor shadows, mere imitations of the proud men and women who had given birth to Homer and the ideals of democracy.<sup>19</sup> The ascendancy of Roman power and influence in the Mediterranean necessarily led to Roman ideas and philosophies assuming a position of paramount importance. Reaction from the Greek *pepaideumenoi* took the form of antiquarianism, both literary and cultural, and

‘the sophist soon became the primary symbol of the resilience of the Greek urban aristocracy, and the central component of a literary and cultural renaissance founded in nostalgia for a lost but glorious past.’<sup>20</sup>

Public speakers and teachers had always shared a proud tradition in the Empire, and Bowie tells us that ‘the name of rhetor...was sufficiently grand to appear on sepulchral or honorific inscriptions, but even greater was the name sophist

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<sup>19</sup> Horrocks 1997: 79.

<sup>20</sup> Horrocks 1997: 80.

(σοφιστής).'<sup>21</sup> It is Whitmarsh's contention that when Philostratus describes sophists in the *VS*, he is referring to a certain group of orators and writers who were well schooled in 'epideictic' oratory.<sup>22</sup> Swain is rather more specific, suggesting that instead of merely sharing a type of rhetorical practice, these sophists also shared a single value system,<sup>23</sup> out of which developed something that Rudich terms the 'rhetorized mentality', a peculiar mindset that, on both a conscious and an unconscious level, allows for the individual to interpret the various mechanisms that were part of the performance of sophistic rhetoric.<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, it is certainly true that 'rhetoric does not simply describe reality, but attempts to control how we perceive it'.<sup>25</sup> For imperial society, rhetoric was often the filter engaged in either obscuring or enhancing elite activity. One's Greekness, as indicated by, among other things, one's command of the Greek language, was an essential aspect of this Greek sophistic identity to which Philostratus most assuredly subscribed.

In terms of linguistic expression, the phenomenon of Atticism came to form an essential part of this archaizing trend. Atticists believed that the Attic dialect was the most perfect incarnation of the Greek tongue to have ever existed.

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<sup>21</sup> Bowie 1970: 5.

<sup>22</sup> Whitmarsh 2005: 1.

<sup>23</sup> Swain 1991: 149.

<sup>24</sup> Rudich 1997: 2. These were movements, gestures, and even grammatical forms that conveyed unique and specialized meanings, as is hinted at in Gleason's portrayal of the sophist (see p. 317).

<sup>25</sup> Whitmarsh 2005: 51-52.

Therefore, in both their speaking and writing they strove to emulate the greatest of the Attic orators.<sup>26</sup> Others like Lucian (*Lex.* 20) saw Attic somewhat differently as this sarcastic depiction reveals:

‘And leaving behind we who mingle with him now, he speaks with us from a thousand years ago, twisting the language and making these monstrous combinations, and making himself grave in these matters, like it were some great thing if he should speak as a foreigner and counterfeit the established customs of speech.’

καὶ ἡμᾶς τοὺς νῦν προσομιλοῦντας καταλιπὼν πρὸ χιλίων ἐτῶν ἡμῖν διαλέγεται διαστρέφων τὴν γλῶτταν καὶ ταυτὶ τὰ ἀλλόκοτα συντιθεὶς καὶ σπουδὴν ποιούμενος ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς, ὥς δὴ τι μέγα ὄν, εἴ τι ξενίζον καὶ τὸ καθεστηκὸς νόμισμα τῆς φωνῆς παρακόπτοι.

Atticism could then be argued to be a marker of educated and thus elite identity.<sup>27</sup> Bowie has shown that although early commentators characterize Atticism as an entirely literary project<sup>28</sup> the various manifestations of linguistic archaism are actually reflections, and possibly even by-products of a greater drive toward cultural archaism as evident throughout Greek society while under Roman hegemony.<sup>29</sup> The glories of the Greek past provided an enticing alternative to the unfortunate present in which the Hellenes found themselves—economically dependent on the Roman Empire and yet simultaneously chafing under the yoke of political subordination.<sup>30</sup> Thus

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<sup>26</sup> This contrasts with the freer provisions of Asianism, characteristic of the Eastern Empire and concerned especially with a more flowing and expressive Greek. However, despite the opposition between Asianism and Atticism it is the growth of *koinē* Greek, with its emphasis on spoken simplicity that is the true threat to Atticism.

<sup>27</sup> Whitmarsh 2005: 43.

<sup>28</sup> Bowie 1970: 3.

<sup>29</sup> Bowie 1970: 36-37.

<sup>30</sup> Bowie 1970: 40-41.

Whitmarsh argues that one's selection of a particular dialect of Greek like Attic, revealed 'a calculated choice in the struggle for intellectual self-identity in this fundamentally competitive world.'<sup>31</sup>

It was the sophist who was the primary exponent of this intellectual drive. They sought to redefine themselves by making use of their *paideia* (see especially Chapter IV). Lucian (*Somn.* 1) writes that education was a man's most valuable possession—the way in which an otherwise disenfranchised Greek could gain both influence and acceptance in the Roman world. As Iamblichus (*VP* 44) notes, even the Pythagoreans held this to be true:

'For near enough education causes humans to differ from wild animals, Greeks from barbarians, free from slaves, philosophers from ordinary people...'

σχεδὸν γὰρ ταῖς ἀγωγαῖς διαφέρειν τοὺς μὲν ἀνθρώπους τῶν θηρίων, τοὺς δὲ Ἕλληνας τῶν βαρβάρων, τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους τῶν οἰκετῶν, τοὺς δὲ φιλοσόφους τῶν τυχόντων...

The sophists, therefore, were well-educated members of the upper classes, and for the most part, they were men who shared similar values and were like-minded in terms of their obsession with political power.<sup>32</sup> Atticism, then, was primarily a tool of the sophistic outlook, and by extension, it was employed exclusively by the elite. Sophists not only worked for their own personal advancement—Antipater, for example, was called the teacher of the gods, θεῶν

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<sup>31</sup> Whitmarsh 2005: 49.

<sup>32</sup> Swain 1991: 149.

διδάσκαλον (Philostr. VS 607) because he had risen so far as to become the tutor to the sons of the Emperor Severus—but they also endeavoured to obtain various boons for their home cities,<sup>33</sup> and like philosophers, they could even serve as advisers to the emperor himself.

Another major manifestation of this antiquarian ‘compulsion’, as evidenced in the literary production of the period of the Second Sophistic, took the form of literary *mimēsis*, a process of imitating the more important and influential examples of earlier Greek writing. Whitmarsh reveals that this *imitatio* was not only to be found in literature but philosophy and ethics as well, for

‘the ethical subject, we are told by several writers, fashions his or her (but usually his) personal comportment through continual reference to the virtues (*aretai*) of illustrious forebears.’<sup>34</sup>

Imitation, then, could be said to not only compare but also contrast the past and the present, a notion that Whitmarsh later refines in arguing that *mimēsis* points out any perceived discontinuity with the past just as much as it emphasizes continuity.<sup>35</sup> Thus *mimēsis* was employed in order to forge an alternative to the current Roman dispensation out of the Greek past.<sup>36</sup> As a means of connecting this general discussion of sophists and sophistry to the more concrete examples that Philostratus provides in his VS, I should like to draw attention to the opinion of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who held that the imitation of men like

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<sup>33</sup> Bowersock 1969: 43.

<sup>34</sup> Whitmarsh 2001a: 274.

<sup>35</sup> Whitmarsh 2001a: 88.

<sup>36</sup> Bowie 1970: 40-41.

Isocrates would allow one the best chance of behaving properly in any given political situation.<sup>37</sup> Proper decorum could after all be a lifesaver in the world of the high-powered sophist.

An immigrant Greek intellectual, Dionysius arrived in Rome in about 30 BCE.<sup>38</sup> His most familiar work, the *Antiquitates Romanae*—a history of Rome written by a Greek—is somewhat contentious in that its intended audience is uncertain. Weaire outlines a theory whereby Dionysius’ audience was primarily a Roman one, with the various passages that masquerade as attempts to engage a Greek readership merely an effort to create a work more palatable to Roman elites who simply would not have stood for a Greek intellectual lecturing them on Rome’s history.<sup>39</sup> Dionysius’ masquerade is particularly interesting in the context of my thesis, given the parallels that exist between his approach and that of Philostratus. Indeed Dionysius’ own discussion of the ancient orators is far more detailed and specific than Philostratus’ *VS*, which concerns itself only with the true luminaries of the craft. However, the masquerade that Dionysius adopts in his *Antiquitates Romanae* is intended precisely to conceal the audience that he is addressing. This functions on two levels, with the first being the obvious deception designed to make Roman readers comfortable with the idea of a Greek commenting on their past. The second level assuages Greek concerns

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<sup>37</sup> Swain 1996: 409.

<sup>38</sup> Usher 1974: vii.

<sup>39</sup> Weaire 2005: 246.

by suggesting that everything good about Rome is in fact Greek in origin. As

Schultze concludes:

‘Rome is firmly and authoritatively set within a Greek mythological-genealogical context; conflicts of tradition are cleaned up; the Etruscans are put in their place as autochthonous; and the view that Latin is a Greek dialect is maintained. And it is not a matter of mere origins—the cultural superiority of the Greeks is reinforced by the demonstration that all that is good in Roman society, and all its success, is attributable to Greek ideas and Greek culture, and not to *tuchē*; and that the political development of Rome has followed and in their own age, continues to follow, along the most approved lines of political theory.’<sup>40</sup>

Throughout his *Antiquitates Romanae*, Dionysius is at pains to present the Romans as a people whose behaviour makes them truly worthy of imitation, a perspective clearly shared by Aelius Aristides. Philostratus might also concur with this position, given his insistence on the *mos maiorum* being the golden mean to which society should ascribe. It should be noted that this tradition was ‘the system of constraints and options in which the subject [i.e. Philostratus] is embedded, and the means by which one establishes one’s standing in Roman culture.’<sup>41</sup> Thus for Greeks like Dionysius and Philostratus the *mos maiorum* was what Romanised the Greeks and was what enabled them to advance at Rome as well. Were it not for the unique fundamentalist slant that Philostratus brought to the situation, his championing ancient traditions might well have appeared as little more than the colonized Greek emulating his colonial master in search of reward.

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<sup>40</sup> Schultze 1986: 138-139.

<sup>41</sup> Habinek 1998: 54.

Shifting focus back to the *VS* itself, it is immediately apparent that Philostratus is describing a wide variety of sophists, across a fairly broad time-frame. He himself had experience in serving at the emperor's pleasure, and so it is that he warns others to maintain propriety in discharging their duties.<sup>42</sup> He presents his addressee, a certain consul (ὑπάτος) named Antonius Gordianus, with an intriguing collection of sophists. Furthermore, Gordianus is specifically described as having Herodes Atticus as an ancestor (*VS* 479). At the conclusion of his salutation, Philostratus (*VS* 480) then refers to the very same Gordian as ἄριστε ἀνθυπάτων (the best of proconsuls). The two distinct titles allow for the *VS* to be dated quite precisely, placing it between 237 and 238 CE according to Avotins.<sup>43</sup> His argument—that the addressee is Gordian I—is somewhat convincing and does seem to mesh with Philostratus' penchant for trumpeting his own imperial connections.<sup>44</sup> After all, a work written for imperial consumption would certainly prove more influential than anything intended for a more general circulation. However, Jones has more recently put forward a more appealing theory, and chooses to argue for Gordian III as being the addressee of Philostratus' *VS*.<sup>45</sup> If it is indeed correct that he is the addressee, then Gordian was but a young man of about 18 at the time.<sup>46</sup> In his article, Jones suggests that through both the titular language employed by Philostratus and

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<sup>42</sup> Flinterman 1995: 40.

<sup>43</sup> Avotins 1978: 242-247.

<sup>44</sup> Compare, for example, Philostratus addressing the *VA* to the Empress Julia Domna.

<sup>45</sup> Jones 2002: 759-767.

<sup>46</sup> Jones 2002: 762.



his generally familiar tone point to the young Gordian III who fostered the growth of a culture of panhellenism and deferred to the wisdom of the educated elite of his time,<sup>47</sup> which of course also advances the date of the writing of the *VS* to sometime between 242 and 244 CE. What this means is that the *VS* was born of a time in which Hellenic values were deemed to be important, and were to some extent fostered by the Emperor himself.<sup>48</sup> It is also the time at which the old hero cult is petering out (with, as I noted in Chapter VIII, the last inscription on record demonstrating heroization being dated to 242 CE) and so Philostratus must engage his readers with new heroes. These are carefully culled from the annals of Greek history to offer a catalogue of sophistry that emphasizes the pedagogic nature of the *VS* through presenting a work that, when read with its companion piece, the *VA*, teaches of virtue as a possible means of defeating moral degradation.

The first book of the *VS* begins with a comparison of philosophers and sophists (*VS* 480), contending that while the former is never sure of anything, the latter, at the very least, must pretend to certainty about his subject matter.<sup>49</sup> Philostratus further situates his discussion by remarking that the first Sophistic movement began with the work of Gorgias (cf. Pl. *Menex.* 70b), but he is rather

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<sup>47</sup> Jones 2002: 763-767.

<sup>48</sup> Jones 2002: 767.

<sup>49</sup> 'Sophist' was a title that applied to both philosophers and sophists alike, particularly when a speaker of great eloquence was concerned (*VS* 484).

to be concerned with the second movement which began with Aeschines (Philostr. *VS* 481). By dubbing his movement the Second Sophistic, Philostratus links his collection of sophists and philosophers to the intellectual golden age of Athens, the fifth century BCE, when entrenched values and practices were challenged for the first time by men bearing the title of 'sophist'. He is thus able to grant his chosen sophists an ancient lineage, but is at the same time able to suggest that theirs is a new and more important group.<sup>50</sup> These early itinerant teachers forged links between the various cities of Greece that they visited, giving birth to the earliest notion of a unified Greece, and strengthening the Hellenic identity first developed in the Persian Wars.<sup>51</sup> But not everything was positive in the teachings of the sophists, as Plato for example, saw them as being subversive.<sup>52</sup> Philostratus (*VS* 483) even calls attention to the old claims made against the sophists in these words:

'And the Athenians seeing the natural ability of the sophists shut them out of the courts, for they were strengthening the unjust argument over the just and holding power contrary to justice...'

Δεινότητα δὲ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι περὶ τοὺς σοφιστὰς ὀρῶντες ἐξεῖργον αὐτοὺς τῶν δικαστηρίων, ὥς ἀδίκῳ λόγῳ τοῦ δικαίου κρατοῦντας καὶ ἰσχύοντας παρὰ τὸ εὐθύ...

It seems that the power of an accomplished sophist was apparently so irresistible that the average man required legal protections against them.

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<sup>50</sup> Anderson 1990: 94.

<sup>51</sup> De Romilly 1992: 226.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson 1993: 13.

Perhaps the words of Quintilian (*Inst. Or.* 2.16.2) best reveal the prejudice that the people bore towards those proficient in oratory:

‘It is eloquence, which snatches criminals from punishment, which has the good damned from time to time with deceit, assemblies led astray in wickedness, not only seditions and popular uprisings but wars, certainly inexpiable, are excited; which in short is at its most useful, when it strengthens falsehood over truth.’

*Eloquentiam esse, quae poenis eripiat scelestos, cuius fraude damnentur interim boni, consilia ducantur in peius, nec seditiones modo turbaeque populares sed bella etiam inexpiabilia excitentur; cuius denique tum maximus sit usus, cum pro falsis contra veritatem valet.*

I should now like to attend to the cases of specific sophists, concentrating primarily on how and why Philostratus singles each of them out. The first man of interest is Dias of Ephesus. There is no clear evidence as to precisely who this person was, and it appears that any corroborating details beyond those offered by Philostratus himself simply do not exist.<sup>53</sup> The anecdote that he presents is nevertheless remarkable as it indicates two points that are of use. Firstly, he suggests that Philip was ill-treating his Greek subjects, something to which Dias recommends the solution of an Asian military expedition, with the apparent goal of having the Greek subjects prove their worth to their Macedonian overlord. His conclusion is equally intriguing, for the explanation of Dias’ exhortation to the Greeks is ended with the line ‘for it is a good thing to be enslaved overseas to gain freedom for oneself at home’, καλὸν γὰρ εἶναι καὶ τὸ

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<sup>53</sup> Wright 1968: xxiii.

ἔξω δουλεύειν ἐπὶ τῷ οἴκῳ ἐλευθεροῦσθαι (VS 486). It is thus in the hope of better treatment from their ruler that the Greeks are told to prove themselves by joining with him in war. Nonetheless it is a curious proposition that a philosopher would suggest a form of 'slavery' (i.e. enlisting in the army) as the means by which greater freedom could be won. However, this account is indicative of the influence that a sophist could wield over ruler and populace alike. Finally, Wright notes that the name Dias may well have been a corruption or mistake for Delios of Ephesus, a contemporary of Alexander the Great.<sup>54</sup> With the added dimension of Dias / Delios working at the time of the mighty exploits of Philip's descendant, the evaluation of the exhortation to join Philip in war as a form of slavery is especially poignant, given Alexander's attempt to enslave the known world under his banner of Hellenism.

The next man of note is Dio Chrysostom, whom Philostratus (VS 487-488) portrays as being a friend of both Apollonius of Tyana and of his enemy, Euphrates. He is described as criticizing cities for their unruliness, in much the same manner as Apollonius himself (VS 487). Moles states that Dio's career had both 'a philosophical and sophistic side.'<sup>55</sup> This polarity between sophist and philosopher is exemplified in several comments made by Apollonius of Tyana, among them *Ep. Apol.* 1.3-5:

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<sup>54</sup> Wright 1968: xxiii.

<sup>55</sup> Moles 1978: 87.

‘Philosophers are my friends, however sophists, or teachers, or any other kind of wretched men like these are not now friends, nor will they be anytime in the future.’

Ἐμοὶ πρὸς φιλοσόφους ἐστὶ φιλία, πρὸς μέντοι σοφιστὰς ἢ γραμματιστὰς ἢ τι τοιοῦτο γένος ἕτερον ἀνθρώπων κακοδαιμόνων οὔτε νῦν ἐστὶ φιλία, μήτε ὕστερόν ποτε γένοιτο.

To be a true philosopher was perhaps to be a seeker of truth, while it was the sophist’s task to distort truth for personal gain. Philostratus (VS 488) also relates an informative story of Dio, who, following the assassination of the Emperor Domitian, addressed a disorderly mob of imperial soldiers, convincing them to remain in the service of the people of Rome, after which he rained calumnies down upon the deceased tyrant. However, because Dio was a beloved friend of the Emperor Trajan, he cannot truly be held up as an anti-monarchist, despite his comments about Domitian.<sup>56</sup> It often seems to have been politically expedient to engage in a sort of *damnatio memoriae* where past emperors were concerned. And yet Dio Chrysostom (Or. 13.24), in an allegory that stands as part of his exilic *Thirteenth Oration*, labels the ill-fated subjects of the Emperor Domitian κακοδαίμονες. What this leaves us with is perhaps the picture of a philosopher of convenience, someone who corrects the excessive behaviour of the emperor from the safety of the funeral pyre, certainly not living up to the ideal espoused by Apollonius of Tyana (VA 7.1). Perhaps the anecdote of Dio’s anti-imperial diatribe can be read in conjunction with the ‘Kingship debate’ of VA 5.31-41, as both Dio and Euphrates are among the participants. The fact that

<sup>56</sup> As Philostratus notes, ‘he denounced the tyrant with much spirit’, ἐπὶ μὲν τὴν κατηγορίαν τοῦ τυράννου πολὺς ἔπνευσεν (VS 488).

Yet Dio delivered his attack on the emperor only once he had passed away, gives credence to the criticism that Philostratus (VA 5.40) makes of Dio's philosophy: 'But the philosophy of Dio seemed too rhetorical to Apollonius and was rather prepared for good cheer...' (Ἡ δὲ τοῦ Δίωνος φιλοσοφία ῥητορικωτέρα τῷ Ἀπολλωνίῳ ἐφαίνετο καὶ ἐς τὸ εὐφραῖνον κατεσκευασμένη μᾶλλον...) It would seem that from Philostratus' perspective, Dio sought to remain in the emperor's good graces and was only prepared to denounce his misbehaviour once he could no longer hurt him. Conversely, Berry praises this element of Dio's speechmaking:

'The principal quality of Dio's speeches, and one which makes him worth reading, might be described as his moderation. This moderate tone may seem to some to result in dullness but the adoption of a reasonable, sensible, calm attitude always runs this risk. His political advice... is always reasonable and scrupulously fair; he has a strong sense of justice and fair treatment—of individuals, of minorities.'<sup>57</sup>

Standing in contradiction to this moderate persona is the *prolalia* of the *Olympic Oration*, (Dio Chrys. Or. 12.1-16), in which Dio compares himself to the sophists at some length, ultimately characterizing himself as the 'embodiment of philosophy and ancient wisdom'.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly however, throughout this oration he does also argue that Greek religious beliefs and culture must always supersede any notion of a Roman Empire, especially given that it is the cause of Greece's woes.<sup>59</sup> In another one of his *Orations* (36.58) Dio Chrysostom speaks

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<sup>57</sup> Berry 1983: 72.

<sup>58</sup> Moles 1995: 181.

<sup>59</sup> Moles 1995: 184.

from a typically Stoic perspective, declaring that the next incarnation of the universe will be a vast improvement on how things stand in this present age of Roman domination. Moles argues that Dio should not be seen as 'anti-Roman',<sup>60</sup> a sentiment certainly in agreement with Philostratus' own perceptions of the man. Rather, Dio is against the fact that the Romans appear to meddle in Greek affairs (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 36.17), something which, as the criticisms of Apollonius bear out (see Chapters III and IV), they were not morally equipped to do.

Another contradictory figure is that of Favorinus the philosopher (VS 489-492). Favorinus thought of himself as a 'universal cultural paradigm with a message for Greeks, Romans, and barbarians'.<sup>61</sup> He was able to make use of Greek *paideia* to become a celebrity and in essence transform himself from the unacceptable to a superstar of rhetoric, thus displaying something of the transformative power of Greek culture.<sup>62</sup> Philostratus writes that the Emperor Hadrian was his patron, a relationship not dissimilar to that which Philostratus himself had with the Empress Julia Domna. It is also noted that Favorinus argued with the Emperor, but that he was apparently forgiven (VS 489), perhaps indicative of the esteem in which Favorinus was held. Most interesting however, is the attempt that Favorinus made at removing himself from public service justified by the fact that he was a philosopher and would therefore not have the means with which

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<sup>60</sup> Moles 1995: 192.

<sup>61</sup> Gleason 1995: 16.

<sup>62</sup> Gleason 1995: 17.

to be able to put on the spectacles that the job of priest demanded (VS 490). This situation presents us with a double-edged problem that is if one elects to perceive withdrawal from society as a mode of resistance. To one side we have an acclaimed philosopher who chooses to leave public life, and on the other side we have Philostratus' contention that Favorinus has no complaints about Hadrian's conduct with which to justify his desire to withdraw himself from politics. Favorinus even changes his mind, graciously accepting the appointment as a priest when he observes that the emperor is disinclined to acquiesce to his request. Thus Favorinus shows that philosophers and sophists, although necessary as cogs in the machine of the imperial bureaucracy, could leave public life for reasons far more selfish and mundane than disproving of an emperor's misdeeds and licentiousness. Favorinus appears to be resistant to nothing but his own impoverishment in this case, and could then in an extreme case, be cast as yet another one of the φιλοχρήματοι about whom Apollonius complains (VA 8.7.10). He is however still wise enough to realize that crossing the emperor by continuing on his chosen course is ill-advised, to say the least, especially given the favour that Hadrian had already shown him.

One of the greatest proponents of the First Sophistic, Gorgias of Leontini seems to have epitomized the true sophist. Famously, a golden statue of Gorgias was



dedicated at the temple of Pythian Apollo in Delphi, and in his *Olympian Oration*, he was one of the first men to raise the notion of Greek *homonoia*:

‘For seeing the Greeks divided against themselves, he gave counsel to them, turning them against the barbarians and persuading them not to make one another’s cities the prizes of their arms but the land of the barbarians instead.’ (Philostr. VS 493)

στασιάζουσιν γὰρ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὁρῶν ὁμονοίας ξύμβουλος αὐτοῖς ἐγένετο τρέπων ἐπὶ τοὺς βαρβάρους καὶ πείθων ἄθλας ποιεῖσθαι τῶν ὅπλων μὴ τὰς ἀλλήλων πόλεις, ἀλλὰ τὴν τῶν βαρβάρων χώραν.

Even earlier, the comedian Aristophanes (*Lys.* 1128-1135) voices similar sentiments through his character, Lysistrata, who longs for the Greeks to stop their infighting and concentrate instead upon the real threat, the barbarians beyond Hellas. The earliest sophists believed that *homonoia* was the best state possible for all Greeks and so they sought to prevent friction between the various Greek cities, aspiring to a level of Panhellenism never before seen in the Mediterranean.<sup>63</sup> Thus sophists like Gorgias, in their role as the physical embodiment of all things Greek, also came to personify the dream of Greek unity, something that was little more than a faint hope by the time of the Romans conquests, but something absolutely essential to the arguments for moral and religious renewal that Philostratus was attempting to put forward.

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<sup>63</sup> De Romilly 1992: 227.

Protagoras of Abdera (VS 494) was fortunate enough to be educated by the Persian Magi. Philostratus has this to say of his learning:

‘But when he speaks of uncertainty, as to whether there are gods, or there are not, it seems to me that Protagoras strays because of his Persian education...’

τὸ δὲ ἀπορεῖν φάσκειν, εἴτε εἰσι θεοί, εἴτε οὐκ εἰσί, δοκεῖ μοι Πρωταγόρας ἐκ τῆς Περσικῆς παιδεύσεως παρανομῆσαι (VS 494)

For his agnosticism he was exiled by the Athenians—διὰ μὲν δὴ τοῦτο πάσης γῆς ὑπὸ Ἀθηναίων ἠλάθη, ‘because of this he was driven from all the earth’—and yet his claim to rhetorical repute lies in being the first to charge a fee for his performances (VS 494). What is especially important is that Philostratus elects to present the account of Protagoras’ education and subsequent exile as the overwhelming bulk of his entry dealing with this sophist, undoubtedly pointing to this anecdote as the core of the narrative. I suggest that Philostratus foregrounds this episode in Protagoras’ life because it shows the example of a typical sage, who attempts to introduce new and foreign knowledge into the Hellenic world, thanks to studying with renowned teachers, and reveals this external influence as the cause of Protagoras’ agnosticism.

The Athenian response of exile is directed at maintaining religious orthodoxy, or rather, restoring the dominance of a more traditional mode of thinking. All of these points, though made very succinctly in VS 494, are emphasised elsewhere in the writings of Philostratus, and the VA in particular. Apollonius of Tyana,

for example, seeks to gain knowledge from not only the Magi, but the Indian Brahmins and Egyptian Gymnosophists as well. Iarchus, leader of the Brahmins, answers as follows when Apollonius asks whether they possess true self-knowledge or enlightenment:

‘We know everything, since we know ourselves first of all. For none of us would set out on such philosophy if not first knowing himself.’ (VA 3.18)

πάντα γινώσκομεν, ἐπειδὴ πρώτους ἑαυτοὺς γινώσκομεν, οὐ γὰρ ἂν προσέλθοι τις ἡμῶν τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ ταύτῃ μὴ πρῶτον εἰδὼς ἑαυτόν.

It is wisdom through self-knowledge that he seeks, after the manner of the famed inscription at Delphi. As Philostratus has Apollonius explain at his trial,<sup>64</sup> it is through a purity and understanding of self that he has acquired his apparently magical powers, which are the abilities of a holy man and not a γόης. Likewise, this wisdom leads to the perception of Apollonius as an outsider, as indeed it does for any person who seemingly possesses abilities beyond the range of the ‘normal’. This situation is exemplified in his appearance at Eleusis, where he seeks initiation into the Mysteries. The hierophant refuses this to Apollonius on account of his knowledge of magic, and because he is ‘not pure in spiritual things’, μὴ καθαρῶ τὰ δαιμόνια (VA 4.18.1). Apollonius then reveals the extent of his supernatural knowledge by prophesying that he will eventually be inducted into the Mysteries, but by the hierophant’s successor. This kind of prescience, wisdom or knowledge that appears to be beyond the purview of what is normal and natural, is thus the

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<sup>64</sup> See Chapter IX.

problem in both this case and in the case of Protagoras. The response in both cases is also the same—exclusion. Both men threaten the existing orthodoxy with their presence, a situation that is to be remedied by refusing them access to the people's rites. In both cases, those in control of the extant religious codes are clearly put out by the appearance of someone who has alien (or outsider) knowledge that supersedes their own authority.

It can thus be argued that Philostratus seems to present this anecdote of Protagoras, and tells of the manner of his demise in particular, in an apparent effort at emphasizing the lengths to which people will go in order to maintain religious orthodoxy.<sup>65</sup> This moralistic ending is perhaps then a warning for any who would take supernatural knowledge as surpassing their religious faith. The exception as always is Apollonius of Tyana. His encounter with the Eleusinian hierophant is *successful*, for although he does not immediately gain initiation into the Mysteries, he is able to demonstrate through his power of precognition that he will eventually be initiated. He is able to overcome the current corrupt orthodoxy, thus reconciling the older traditions that he represents<sup>66</sup> with the present of the Roman Empire.<sup>67</sup> This distinction between

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<sup>65</sup> Because of his agnostic viewpoint, Protagoras is forced to flee from all areas of Athenian control, eventually resulting in his own death (VS 494).

<sup>66</sup> His Pythagoreanism represents a venerable tradition of religious faith that, because of its founder, can be seen as superior to any contemporary manifestation of belief.

<sup>67</sup> A parallel exists with Jesus of Nazareth's pronouncement that he came not to destroy the Law (of Moses) but to complete it (Mt. 5.17-18).

the Protagoran and Apollonian encounters with religious orthodoxy can be explained through the Philostratean portrayal of the Tyanaean Sage. In his characterization of Apollonius, Philostratus consistently errs on the side of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ, especially where his mystical powers are concerned. His dismissal of Moeragenes at the outset of the *VA* (1.3.2), which Francis notes as resulting from the prominence given to Apollonius' magical powers in the Moeragenes text,<sup>68</sup> is evidence of this. Apollonius' powers are in essence derived from two sources, firstly his association with Proteus, and secondly resulting from his Pythagorean predilections (cf. *Iamb. VP* 106-107)—a 'delicate regimen', as he claims at his trial before Domitian (*VA* 8.5.1)—and his closeness to Pythagoras himself. In a sense then, he is following a religious orthodoxy far older than that to which the Eleusinian hierophant belongs, and can thus be shown to get the better of him through the mystical means of prophecy.

We next move on to Antiphon of Rhamnus, whom Philostratus notes as highly active in the political sphere (*VS* 498), the trademark of any good philosopher. Following Thucydides (8.68) however, Philostratus paints Antiphon as being responsible for bringing down the democracy of Athens. He also chose to live in Sicily under the tyrant Dionysius, by whom he was put to death, ostensibly for attempting to sway the opinion of the Sicilian people against him.

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<sup>68</sup> Francis 1995: 106. My discussion of the differences between the Maximus of Aegeae, Moeragenes, and Philostratus texts in Chapter III refers.

Philostratus criticizes Antiphon for his double standard—he chose to live as the subject of a tyrant instead of as part of the Athenian democracy, but seeks to free the citizens of Sicily from tyranny whilst preferring an oligarchic government for the Athenians<sup>69</sup>—

‘And Antiphon erred first in quarrelling with the tyrant, under whom he chose to live rather than to live in a democracy at home, thereafter freeing the Sicilians but enslaving the Athenians.’

ἤμαρτε δὲ ὁ Ἀντιφῶν πρῶτον μὲν τυράννῳ προσκρούων, ὑπ’ ᾧ ζῆν ἤρρητο μᾶλλον ἢ οἴκοι δημοκρατεῖσθαι, ἔπειτα Σικελιώτας μὲν ἐλευθερῶν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ δουλόμενος (VS 500).

According to a Greek writer like Philostratus the status of one’s homeland should always take precedence. And what is more, if one examines the arguments presented in the ‘Kingship Debate’ of VA 5.31-41, an enlightened ruler is always preferred to the undisciplined mob that democracy often represented. Conversely, Philostratus’ most intriguing comments in this portion of VS 500 concern the very nature of tyranny and Antiphon’s role in worsening it:

‘And what is more, by driving Dionysius from creating tragedy, he drove him from being easy-tempered, for such pursuits are of an easy temper, and tyrants are preferred more by their subjects relaxed rather than strained, for if they relax, they kill fewer people, and they do less violence and plunder less, but the tyrant applying himself to tragedies is like a sick doctor who heals himself.’

καὶ μὴν καὶ τοῦ τραγωδίαν ποιεῖν ἀπάγων τὸν Διονύσιον ἀπῆγεν αὐτὸν τοῦ ῥαθυμεῖν, αἱ γὰρ τοιαίδε σπουδαὶ ῥαθυμοί, καὶ οἱ τύραννοι δὲ αἰρετώτεροι τοῖς ἀρχομένοις ἀνιέμενοι μᾶλλον ἢ ξυντείνοντες, εἰ γὰρ ἀνήσουσιν, ἥττον μὲν ἀποκτενοῦσιν, ἥττον δὲ βιάσονται τε καὶ

<sup>69</sup> *Thuc.* 8.68 notes that he was charged for his role in bringing about the rule of the 400.

ἀρπάζονται, τύραννος δὲ τραγωδίαις ἐπιτιθέμενος ἰατρῷ εἰκάσθω  
νοσοῦντι μὲν, ἑαυτὸν δὲ θεραπεύοντι·

As Ahl points out, one cannot misinterpret the fact that Philostratus clearly has no time for those who would aspire to tyranny,<sup>70</sup> but in the manner of once bitten, twice shy, Philostratus (VA 500) states that his words should not be viewed as an accusation, and instead suggests: ‘but let us advise everyone not to call out tyrants, neither to provoke their anger or savagery.’ (ἀλλὰ συμβουλίαν ἐς πάντας ἡγώμεθα τοῦ μὴ ἐκκαλεῖσθαι τὰς τυραννίδας, μηδὲ ἐς ὀργὴν ἄγειν ἥθη ὠμά.) Is this perhaps the attitude of one who has been cowed by into submission by his experience of *dissimulatio*? If this is true, then although he believes in a world free of the oppressive government of the unrestrained and autocratic ruler, the reality of Philostratus’ existence, of the need to survive under the hypercritical imperial eye, has blunted his sharp sword of intellectual criticism. In my opinion however, the situation is a little different, for Philostratus hides behind this masquerade, as it were, pretending to the experience of *dissimulatio* in a subterfuge aimed at concealing the fact that he is mounting a vitriolic critique of imperial rule through the parallels that he has drawn in a work that is replete with examples of historical resistance to tyranny. Nowhere is this clearer than in the VA and his deployment of Apollonius of Tyana, who is victorious in his battle of wits with no less than

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<sup>70</sup> Ahl 1984: 201.

two emperors, and is the truest expression of opposition to any form of tyranny that is untempered by the wisdom of the philosopher.

I have already called attention to Isocrates, who, though equipped with the necessary *paideia*, chose not to participate in politics, not only because nature had seen fit not to endow him with a powerful speaking voice, but also because (presumably out of envy) he detested those who had any affinity for oratory beyond the banal (VS 505). Thus while he remained interested in the political life, more for his own amusement than for any other reason, he chose not to participate fully as a wise man should. It will be beneficial to briefly assess some of the arguments made by Isocrates, given his place, in the mind of Dionysius of Halicarnassus at least, as a paradigm of sensible political behaviour. For example, in his *Panegyricus* (Isoc. 4.79) Isocrates writes of the early Greeks:

‘But they were so concerned with state affairs that even in party politics they did not oppose each other to see which of the two could destroy the other and rule the remnant, but which of the two should outdo the other by doing something good for the city; and comrades came together not for the purpose of expediency, but to aid the multitude.’

οὕτω δὲ πολιτικῶς εἶχον, ὥστε καὶ τὰς στάσεις ἐποιοῦντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους οὐχ ὁπότεροι τοὺς ἑτέρους ἀπολέσαντες τῶν λοιπῶν ἄρξουσιν, ἀλλ’ ὁπότεροι φθήσονται τὴν πόλιν ἀγαθόν τι ποιήσαντες· καὶ τὰς ἐταιρείας συνῆγον οὐχ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἰδίᾳ συμφερόντων, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τῇ τοῦ πλήθους ὠφελείᾳ.



His ideal state is much like that which Apollonius envisions, one in which those in power strive to rule with the good of others foremost in their minds. In the same way as the Philostratean Apollonius, he too is disgusted at the behaviour of the demagogues and sycophants<sup>71</sup> who seek to empower themselves by bringing misery to the populace (Isoc. 8.129-131). Isocrates' later comments are equally telling, especially considering Apollonius' own critique of Roman rule which I have already assessed in the previous chapter. In the following passage Isocrates discusses what may be done to rescue the dire political situation:

'The first way that we will set right and improve the city's affairs is to make people advisers on the concerns of the commonwealth who we would have advise us on private matters, and we should stop thinking of sycophants as having democratic leanings, and the moral and good men as oligarchs, understanding that by nature no-one is one or the other, and they wish to set up that government in which each shall be honoured.' (Isoc. 8.133-134)

Ἔστι δ' ἐξ ὧν ἂν ἐπανορθώσασιν τὰ τῆς πόλεως καὶ βελτίω ποιήσασιν, πρῶτον μὲν ἢν συμβούλους ποιῶμεθα τοιούτους περὶ τῶν κοινῶν, οἷους περ ἂν περὶ τῶν ἰδίων ἡμῖν εἶναι βουλευθεῖμεν, καὶ παυσώμεθα δημοτικούς μὲν εἶναι νομίζοντες τοὺς συκοφάντας, ὀλιγαρχικούς δὲ τοὺς καλοὺς καγαθοὺς τῶν ἀνδρῶν, γνόντες ὅτι φύσει μὲν οὐδεὶς οὐδέτερον τούτων ἐστίν, ἐν ᾗ δ' ἂν ἕκαστοι τιμῶνται, ταύτην βούλονται καθεστάναι τὴν πολιτείαν·

Thus it is that Isocrates champions a state in which doing the right thing is of paramount importance. Apollonius preaches a similar philosophy, although it seems that both men are still in favour of one wise man to lead for the good of all. Lastly, in his *Areopagiticus* (Isoc. 7.20-22) Isocrates puts forward the notion of rewarding men based on their ability, a fairly novel idea. Like Plato, he goes so

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<sup>71</sup> The τοῖς ἀλιτηρίοις of which Apollonius complains (VA 8.7.3), see Chapter IX.

far as to suggest the idea of ‘choosing the best and most suitable men for each occupation’, τοὺς βελτίστους καὶ τοὺς ἱκανωτάτους ἐφ’ ἑκάστον τῶν ἔργων προοκρίνοντες (Isoc. 8.22). In other words, those who possess the skill and wisdom should be charged with leading society. By extension then, it is the wise sage who should be tasked with governing, or at the very least, he should advise the person in charge (Isoc. 8.133-135). Thus it falls to men like Philostratus, men of learning and ability, to correct the imbalances created through imperial excess.

Furthermore, the character of Isocrates illuminates the importance of *paideia* in the Graeco-Roman world. It had always been the case that the *pepaideumenoi* had been taught the arts of oratory as part of their schooling, and that this paved the way for their entry into politics,<sup>72</sup> with major military distinction or great wealth being the other means of advancement at a man’s disposal. While Greek citizens had the right of *παρρησία*, the right to stand and address the assembly,<sup>73</sup> training in oratory had become such a specialized and powerful tool that those unacquainted with its many nuances dared not speak before the people to voice their concerns for fear of ridicule. Indeed, concerning this very notion of *παρρησία*, Philostratus (VS 511) writes of Nicetes of Smyrna:

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<sup>72</sup> Preston 2001: 89-90.

<sup>73</sup> The concept of the same name, equating to the ‘crime’ of excessively free speech, is also derived from this word.

‘But receiving the greatest honour from Smyrna which with its shouts left nothing unsaid of him as a remarkable man and orator, he did not come forward often in the assembly, but when the crowd accused him of being afraid, he said “I am afraid of the people when they praise me, rather than when they abuse me.”’

Μεγάλων δ' ἀξιούμενος τῆς Σμύρνης τί οὐκ ἐπ' αὐτῷ βοώσης ὡς ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θαυμασίῳ καὶ ῥήτορι, οὐκ ἐθάμιζεν ἐς τὸν δῆμον, ἀλλ' αἰτίαν παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἔχων φόβου "φοβοῦμαι" ἔφη "δῆμον ἐπαίροντα μᾶλλον ἢ λοιδορούμενον."

In the Roman world of Philostratus, *adulatio* was a large part of the draw of public speaking, but too much of it could be just as dangerous as the ‘crime’ for which Musonius Rufus stood accused, that of excessive *παρρησία*. And so Apollonius of Tyana contends that the acceptance of *adulatio* in any form is not the behaviour of a true wise man (cf. *Ep. Apol.* 1, 3, 4). He is, after all, meant to exist beyond the confines of normal society and a dependence on praise of one’s abilities necessarily negates any independence that a wise man can hope to achieve. This is perhaps why Apollonius is always described as keeping himself separate from the political life of his contemporaries, although he sometimes offers comment on the shortfalls of Roman rule (*Ep. Apol.* 30, 54) without actually ever engaging directly with imperial tyranny. He is instead an unbiased observer, despite the fact that direct action would have made for a more memorable literary character. But then again, this is not Philostratus’ purpose in Apollonius.

Scopelian is the next person of interest, with his entry in the *VS* providing both recognition and reinforcement of the opinions set out in the *Life of Apollonius*. This is because Apollonius holds Scopelian in great esteem, or as Philostratus (*VS* 521) writes, ‘even Apollonius of Tyana, who exceeds human nature in wisdom, ranks Scopelian among those to be admired.’ (καὶ Ἀπολλώνιος δὲ ὁ Τυανεὺς ὑπερενεγκὼν σοφία τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν τὸν Σκοπελιανὸν ἐν θαυμασίοις τάττει.) The indirect praise of Apollonius, through a comment ostensibly concerning the virtues of another, makes a case for Philostratus having invented the entire notion. The manner in which he relates the politically important mission concerning the Edict of the Vines is evidence of this. The background to the situation is that the emperor, due to his belief that wine and drunkenness are possible causes of the rebellions in the Eastern Empire, ordered that all vines in those parts be destroyed and all people forbidden from any further planting of grapes. In his lengthy interpretation of this episode, Philostratus summarizes his own impression of Scopelian—he is the consummate orator, unanimously chosen for this particular embassy to the Emperor Domitian, because of his manifold accomplishments and virtues. The eloquence of Scopelian’s appeal so moves the emperor, that he not only allows planting to begin anew, but even threatens to castigate those who should be remiss in their duty to do so (*VS* 520). Such was the power wielded by a *pepaideumenos*. Philostratus’ portrayal of Scopelian can be understood to characterize him as a paragon of sophistry, in clear parallel to Apollonius, the

supreme philosopher. Scopelian puts his training to good use in his diplomatic overtures and is victorious over Domitian. Likewise, Apollonius is shown to defeat two misguided emperors. Even the very subject of the deputation has a Pythagorean ring to it—wine is portrayed as encouraging revolution, accounting perfectly for the Pythagorean injunction against alcohol as related by both Philostratus (*VA* 1.8) and Iamblichus (*VP* 68, 107). In both cases, wine is clearly identified as confusing the immortal soul of man. However, Scopelian's fight to have grape-growing restored to Asia in no way detracts from the parallel between these two paragons, for Apollonius, although he says he would never drink wine because it dulls psychic perception, is willing to accept that others are unable to follow his ascetic path and therefore, he does permit drinking among others. It is however the resistance of Scopelian to the imperial decree that is worthy of emphasis because Apollonius resists the emperor Domitian in the same way, through his own court appearance, despite the fact that he could have magically fled the scene at any time. The appearance of Apollonius before the emperor in *VA* 8 is required for a reader to be able to pick out the parallel that is constructed between these two men as noble examples of public conduct.

Herodes Atticus has a sizeable portion of the *VS* (545-567) devoted to his life. He boasts an ancient lineage which even includes consuls, as well as a

grandfather who was apparently accused of desiring the tyranny (VS 545-547) and who eventually lost his property as a consequence of this suspicion. Eshelman argues that the essential purpose of the VS is to emphasize the role that Herodes played in shaping the Second Sophistic, thereby pointing to Philostratus himself as one of the most privileged successors of Herodes.<sup>74</sup> Because all of Philostratus' literary choices radiate out from this point, he typically judges the sophists that he discusses, based on their affiliation to the school of Herodes or their imitation thereof,<sup>75</sup> clearly colouring his representations. In no way does this mean that Philostratus holds all other sophists to be worthless. He is instead proving that he possesses the proper literary and rhetorical lineage to be engaging in his ostensibly fundamentalist reworking of belief in the first place. He calls attention to his own teachers and their didactic ancestry, thereby legitimizing his own role in the Second Sophistic, and giving himself the much needed symbolic capital to be able to criticize the moral and religious conditions in imperial Rome. The inclusion of Herodes has political motivations as well, given the possibility that one of his relations may well have been the person to whom the VS was addressed.<sup>76</sup> And what is more, it might have been politically expedient for Philostratus to impress upon the young Emperor Gordian just how necessary the moral regeneration of the Roman Empire was to its continuing success.

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<sup>74</sup> Eshelman 2008: 399.

<sup>75</sup> Eshelman 2008: 401.

<sup>76</sup> See above p. 331-332.

It seems that Herodes encountered a similar difficulty to his ill-starred forebear, when the Athenians claimed that his governmental measures were too oppressive (Ἀθηναῖοι φωνὰς ἀφῆκαν τυραννευομένων πρὸς τὸν Ἡρώδην ἀποσημαίνοντες... VS 559). Herodes responded swiftly with a counterclaim that there was a conspiracy against him, comprised of politicians who disagreed with his opinions. The matter made its way as far as the imperial court, where unfortunately for Herodes, the emperor was not entirely willing to absolve a charge of aspiring to the tyranny, especially after Avidius Cassius had been previously engaged in a similar conspiracy.<sup>77</sup> Herodes made matters worse by bursting into an angry diatribe against the emperor, almost driven mad by grief at the recent loss of his two young wards (VS 560-561). However, the simplicity and emotion that motivated Herodes' verbal assault moved Marcus Aurelius to such an extent that he soon turned upon his Athenian accusers. Philostratus concludes with a suitable appraisal of the situation—'Thus did Marcus treat these things in a philosophical manner', ταῦτα μὲν δὴ ὧδε ἐφιλοσοφεῖτο τῷ Μάρκῳ (VS 561). And what is more, the emperor wrote to Herodes personally following the incident:

'But I wish for you to be healthy and that you would think me well-disposed to you, and not to suppose yourself to be unjustly treated if catching some of your house in a theft, erring I punished them using a means as reasonable as possible.' (VS 562)

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<sup>77</sup> On Avidius Cassius' desire for power see *SHA Avid. Cass.* 1.6, wherein the words *avidus est* are used to describe how greedy he is for the throne.

σοὶ δὲ ὑγιαίνειν τε εὐχομαι καὶ περὶ ἐμοῦ ὥς εὖνου σοι διανοεῖσθαι,  
μηδὲ ἡγεῖσθαι ἀδικεῖσθαι, εἰ καταφωράσας τινὰς τῶν σῶν  
πλημμελοῦντας κολάσει ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἐχρησάμην ὥς οἶόν τε ἐπιεικεῖ.

Despite the apparently unprofessional (in terms of sophistic practice) outburst from Herodes, the emperor accepts what has happened with the benevolence that characterized much of his rule. Herodes' 'resistance', to use the term loosely, is however born of grief as opposed to any obvious political stance. While the friction between him and the people of Athens appears, at least according to the Philostratean version, to have been a consistent part of this sophist's life, it does not appear to have resulted from any actual political considerations as the Athenians contended:

'But when the decree of the Athenians was recited to him, in which they upbraided Herodes openly as winning over the magistrates of Greece with much honeyed [eloquence]... (VS 561)

ἀναγινωσκομένης δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ Ἀθηναίων ἐκκλησίας, ἐν ἣ  
ἐφαίνοντο καθαπτόμενοι τοῦ Ἡρώδου, ὥς τοὺς ἄρχοντας τῆς  
Ἑλλάδος ὑποποιουμένου πολλῷ τῷ μέλιτι...

Doubtless much of the trouble that Herodes experienced is summed up by the greed for a share in his estate after his passing, with every Athenian desperate for their slice of an extremely large pie (VS 549). Herodes' true feelings regarding the emperor are accurately expressed in his missive to Cassius, the governor of the Eastern Provinces, on the occasion of an attempted rebellion, a message which ran simply, 'Herodes to Cassius, You have become mad.'



Ἡρώδης Κασσιῶ· ἐμάνης (VS 563).<sup>78</sup> One can conclude that this brief message is no simple rebuke, but rather evidence of the fact that Herodes chose to defend Marcus Aurelius, instead of vilifying the imperial system that he represented for the rebellions that it caused. Marcus was after all, the closest that Rome ever came to the cherished ideal of the philosopher-king.

Another intriguing anecdote is penned concerning Philiscus the Athenian, of whom nothing else is known beyond that which Philostratus records. Philiscus was also a member of Julia Domna's circle of philosophers, and Philostratus even suggests that it is through her influence that Philiscus attained the chair of rhetoric in Athens (VS 622). Due to the unfortunate disintegration of his relationship with the Emperor Caracalla, his exemption from public service for being a philosopher was revoked. Philostratus records the extraordinary words of the emperor in this case:

‘Neither you... nor any other teacher is free from public burdens; for I will not at any time deprive the cities of men who should perform public service on account of a few wretched speeches.’

οὔτε σὺ...ἀτελὴς οὔτε ἄλλος οὐδεὶς τῶν παιδευόντων· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ποτε διὰ μικρὰ καὶ δύστηνα λογάρια τὰς πόλεις ἀφελοίμην τῶν λειτουργησόντων. (VS 623)

As I stated at the outset of this chapter, because they had acquired *paideia*, sophists were supposed to make use of their talents, not only for self-

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<sup>78</sup> See also Dio Cass. 71.22.

aggrandisement but also, more importantly, for the benefit of their cities and fellow men. Attempting to escape this could not have been perceived as virtuous behaviour, and thus it seems that sometimes imperial intervention was actually necessary to ensure that the talents of sophists and philosophers were put to good use.

The final sophist that I shall mention is also the final sophist to be noted by Philostratus (VS 627-628), a certain Aspasius of Ravenna. Writing of his nephew of the same name, Philostratus states that the man quarrelled with a certain Aspasius, the *ab epistulis* of the time, targeting the epistle entitled 'How to Write Letters' at the poor performance of this man as an imperial secretary.<sup>79</sup> Clearly, Flavius Philostratus believes that Aspasius should have shown greater restraint in the exercise of his office, for he writes (VS 628):

'For the emperor, when he should write a letter ought not to employ devices or proofs, but his judgment, nor should be obscure, since he articulates the laws, and plainness is the law's interpreter.'

αὐτοκράτωρ γὰρ δὴ ὅποτε ἐπιστέλλοι, οὐ δεῖ ἐνθυμημάτων οὐδ' ἐπιχειρημάτων, ἀλλὰ δόξης, οὐδ' αὖ ἀσαφείας, ἐπειδὴ νόμους φθέγγεται, σαφήνεια δὲ ἐρμηνεὺς νόμου.<sup>80</sup>

So it is that Philostratus can be said to close the VS with an example of the behaviour of a true emperor. While it may be a comment on the work of

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<sup>79</sup> Millar 1988: 363.

<sup>80</sup> Epictetus (1.7) writes that all arguments are ultimately aimed at discovering or revealing the truth, and according to Philostratus, this is precisely what Aspasius was obscuring with his writing.

Aspasius as the emperor's proxy, I would argue, particularly given its place as the parting words of the entire *VS*, and its connection on a personal level to the author himself, that Philostratus is instead pointing out that for an emperor, a man who should take rationality and moderation for his watchwords, any excess, even in sophistry, leads to nothing but uncertainty and trouble for the populace.

Philostratus makes use of two sophists as 'bookends' for his discussions in the *VS*. I have already mentioned the concluding entry concerning Aspasius, but have yet to examine Eudoxus of Cnidus. This is the biography with which Philostratus opens the *VS*, but it is relatively uneventful with respect to any opportunity for obvious political commentary. However, the Eudoxus anecdote is nonetheless interesting because of the fact that Philostratus chose him as the very first entry in his *Vitae Sophistarum*. Eudoxus was a philosopher, far more famous for his scientific research, and was also a mathematician of the Platonic Academy.<sup>81</sup> Importantly, he was a student of the Pythagorean Archytas<sup>82</sup> and was apparently revered for his wisdom among the Gymnosophists of Egypt (*VS* 484). His Pythagorean ideals are seen in his cosmology, which advocates that 'the circular motions of the heavenly bodies manifested a moral order'.<sup>83</sup> He

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<sup>81</sup> Baker 1973: 239.

<sup>82</sup> Wright 1968: xxii.

<sup>83</sup> Goldstein & Bowen 1983: 332.

was even a lawmaker for the town of Cnidus, assisting in the drafting of their new constitution and laws (Diog. Laert. 8.88). Finally, this truly versatile individual was ‘honoured with the name of the sophists’, ἡξιούτο τῆς τῶν σοφιστῶν ἐπωνυμίας (VS 484), by several cities in the region. Just as Philostratus draws the *VS* to a close with an exemplum of proper behaviour for the emperor, so he opens the work with a study in proper decorum for the philosopher. Eudoxus is described as having learned from a Pythagorean, and thus, like Apollonius, he is in possession of knowledge far superior to that claimed by the Egyptian Gymnosophists, for it originally comes from India. In similarity to the legendary Numa, Eudoxus is a lawgiver with a Pythagorean education. Furthermore, his teachings are tempered by an association with Plato. The accomplishments and contributions of Eudoxus to the Mediterranean world earned him the vaunted title of ‘sophist’, marking him as a clear measure of sophistic *virtus*. Even his name, the ‘good thinker’, sets him above the ordinary and creates the perfect exemplum of philosopher and sophist with which to begin the *VS*. The famous orator Demosthenes and his politics also felt the influence of Eudoxus, as Baker notes.<sup>84</sup> And what is more, once Eudoxus departs from Athens, it seems that Demosthenes’ very next speech concerning the freedom of the Rhodians ‘made no political impact’ without the aid of Eudoxus.<sup>85</sup> In conclusion then, the *VS* can thus be said to offer a dramatic

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<sup>84</sup> Baker 1973: 242.

<sup>85</sup> Baker 1973: 242.

illustration of the standard to which emperor and philosopher-adviser alike should aspire.

The *Vitae Sophistarum* is therefore as much politicized hagiography that should be read with its companion piece, the *Vita Apollonii*. Whilst the latter points to a ‘Pythagorean saint’<sup>86</sup> as a means of revealing the virtuous path that all men should follow, the former work is a more down-to-earth presentation of real men and their real actions in trying to observe this life of *virtus*. Therefore, through both works, Philostratus can be seen to emphasize the proper conduct of a truly wise man, particularly in the face of a tyrannical ruler. But this is not his only purpose, for he also suggests the correct pattern of behaviour that the wise emperor should emulate, essentially addressing both sides of the equation. And what is more, as a man with fundamentalist leanings, Philostratus is clearly harking back to times when tyranny was rarer and the democracy of the Athenians was the system of government to aspire to. The question that he asks of Antiphon’s conduct—why assist the people of Sicily in overthrowing a tyrant but at the same time, seek to impose tyranny on the Athenians?—is proof of this, and this entry in the *VS* does indicate a Philostratean dislike of tyrants in general. He looks back fondly upon the ideal of the philosopher-king for a model of propriety but is only able to hold up Marcus Aurelius and his

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<sup>86</sup> Dzielska 1986: 142.

interactions with Herodes Atticus as the closest real example of this. In the generally corrupt tyranny of the Roman Empire, philosopher-kings did not exist and philosopher-advisers with the courage of their convictions were few and far between, with Antipater, 'tutor of the gods', the best example that Philostratus records. Although the *VS* has a distinctly Greek slant to its selection of philosophers and sophists, the questions remains: what of Seneca, the Roman philosopher who was tutor to a young emperor, philosophical-adviser and even held the reigns of power for a time? Quite simply, Seneca is the exception that proves the rule, for although the *quinquennium aureum* has been pointed to time and again as an example of a form of philosopher-kingship, the period shows little or no change in established imperial policy, and is really no more than a philosopher in the right place, at the right time, generally maintaining the status quo.<sup>87</sup> I believe that for Philostratus, greater change was not only necessary but essential. From his point of view, the moral corruption of the Roman Empire emanated from its religious decline, from the steady incursion of new or foreign beliefs and the sidelining of the old traditions, all of which was wearing away at the fabric of society. A mere figurehead like Seneca was simply insufficient, for he would never have championed the programme of religious reform that Philostratus was calling for. The *VS* is thus a means of proving this, for through his text Philostratus illustrates that, while some have indeed stood their ground and battled tyrants

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<sup>87</sup> Murray 1965: 54-61.

with their wits or whatever other means were at their disposal, no discernable change, as Philostratus saw things, had been achieved. The *VS* not only shows this but also provides, in a manner typical of works of the Second Sophistic, graphic examples of what the men of Philostratus' day should have been doing to show the ruling powers that they would not stand for the abuse of authority, and to show the rulers what might happen if they ignored the pleas of their subjects for justice.

As I mentioned, the *VS* should be viewed as a companion piece to the *VA*—a presentation of real versus invented examples of good conduct for the wise man. These two works should be read with this link in mind, particularly as concerns, for example, the comment about the virtues of Scopelian. Here Philostratus points to his paragon, Apollonius, as wisely attributing great virtue to the sophist Scopelian, an especially powerful observation, given Apollonius' apparent dislike of sophists in general (*Ep. Apol.* 1). This kind of intertextuality emphasizes the dual nature of both works—*VS* and *VA*—as examples of virtuous behaviour and as attempts by an author with perceptibly fundamentalist tendencies at reinvigorating the dying culture of *virtus* in his time. And yet it is intriguing that Apollonius (*Ep. Apol.* 2) is shown to conceive of the notion of virtue in an extraordinarily (and uncharacteristically) Stoic manner:

‘Virtue [is acquired] through one’s nature, learning, habits, for the sake of it would each of these be called worthy of public approbation.’

Ἡ ἀρετὴ φύσει μαθήσει [κτήσει] χρήσει, δι’ ἡνέκαστον ἂν εἴη τῶν προειρημένων ἀποδοχῆς ἄξιον.

Perhaps then the purpose of both the *VS* and the *VA* is a conjoined and pedagogic one, a blueprint as it were to acquiring the habits of virtue for those in most dire need of it. They are works that show that in the past, when Graeco-Roman religion was at its zenith, so too was virtue in the ascendant. However, at the time when Philostratus has to put forward his fundamentalist project as the solution to his society’s moral degradation, virtue has followed religion in its decline.



## Chapter XI

### Conclusions:

#### *The Philostratean Fundamentalist Revisited.*

*Deorum iniurias dis curae.*<sup>1</sup> (Tacitus *Annals* 1.73)

The words of the Emperor Tiberius (recorded above) still resound to this day in arguments concerning matters of faith. If the gods of Greece and Rome were as powerful as the ancients believed, surely they would strike down a man who forsook an oath or committed some sacrilege? But this was never the case and while cities regulated matters that might impinge on the harmony of the society, the murder of another citizen for example, it was always left to the gods to judge matters of morality and faith. Is this perhaps an early manifestation of moral relativism? I suggest that it was, and that Philostratus seeing the religious situation decaying to such an extent, whereby the gods were increasingly isolated atop Olympus and forced out of human affairs, chose to revivify religious opinion by a return to an earlier paganism and through a rejection of the deification of Roman emperors. He chose to reject the expanding greed and relativism of his age and sought out what he believed were the self-evident truths of Graeco-Roman belief.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Offences against the gods are the care of the gods.'

Many would have us believe that the phenomenon of moral relativism is a new and completely modern problem, and that it is the result of the clash of the three great monotheisms against the background of a largely amoral and scientific world. I hope that my analysis of Philostratus has shown this to be an untruth that clearly privileges our own situation and our own problems over those that others have already experienced. Yet this is in itself a view informed by the arguments of relativism. Furthermore, what the works of Philostratus prove is that the encouragement of an immoral way of life through the example of the most important people in a society (one need think only of the place of the imperial family in ancient Rome, and the desire for godhood of men like Domitian in particular) must necessarily create a situation in which a religious and, more importantly, an ostensibly fundamentalist backlash, is not only probable but inevitable. In the eyes of Philostratus the traditions of the old religion were under threat from no less than the *pontifex maximus*—the emperor himself. Not only was he adding to the confusion by fostering his own personal cult, but he was doing nothing about the growth of foreign superstition among the peoples of the Empire. In this increasingly untenable position, Philostratus wrote the four works upon which I have centred my thesis, arguing for a religious reformation in the light of the growing moral relativism that had reduced the gods to abstractions and parcelled out the powers of true divinity to the blood of the imperial household. Within the pages of these four works—the *VA*, *VS*, *Heroikos*, and *Nero*—the characters of Apollonius of Tyana,

Musonius Rufus, and the vinedresser are the three major protagonists. They all share a patently obvious philosophical bent, with Apollonius being practising Pythagorean, the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis being explained in the *Heroikos*, and Musonius a Stoic philosopher in exile. The *Vitae Sophistarum*, the fourth work that I have analysed, gets to grips with the philosophy of the Second Sophistic itself, namely the practice of sophistry and rhetoric. All of this is born of the mind of Flavius Philostratus and crafted upon the anvil of his own unique brand of ancient religious fundamentalism.

It is through the combination of these texts that Philostratus forges the case for his fundamentalist tendencies as a possible means of saving the Roman Empire from itself. Indeed, it is apparent throughout these works that Philostratus believes his ideals to be the only way that the Empire can be rescued from the degenerate politicians, sycophants, and foreign superstitions that plague it. I should now like to reassess the arguments that I have presented thus far regarding the texts under consideration and their place in the context of Rome during the Second Sophistic. Until now, the many divergent strands of Philostratus' fundamentalist project have been analysed largely in isolation, and so I shall now endeavour to draw everything together into a coherent whole.

I first sought to build a framework around which to study the concept of religious fundamentalism in the context of the ancient Graeco-Roman paganism. This was done by beginning with modern notions of fundamentalism and then working towards a generalised paradigm that could be applied to Philostratus' own belief system. Important features of this early study of fundamentalism included the relationship between fundamentalism and scientific or rational thought, the 'embattled' mindset of the fundamentalist that creates a psychological outlook akin to that of a religious cult (in the modern and pejorative sense of the word), and the fact that political power and authority are inevitably necessary for the furtherance of an agenda comprising certain fundamentalist elements. I also drew the distinction between 'focused' and 'polyvalent' fundamentalism, something essential to my argument, given the polytheistic perspective of ancient belief. This distinction allows for two kinds of fundamentalism—the more familiar monotheistic variety, and a form of fundamentalism that views a complete polytheistic system as a single entity. Philostratus can best be described as a 'polyvalent' fundamentalist, meaning that he sought to protect the entirety of ancient Graeco-Roman traditional belief. To my mind this includes the hero cult, traditional morality, and the Olympian pantheon, to the exclusion of phenomena like the imperial cult and 'imported' foreign beliefs as well. This for Philostratus was his absolute truth, a truth that was challenged by consistent pressure on the part of attractively packaged Eastern rites and from demands for conformity in acknowledging the

divinity of the Roman emperor. It is out of this dynamic that Philostratus' 'polyvalent' approach emerges as a means of counteracting the pressures upon his beliefs. His work is a means of articulating these ideals in a manner that nonetheless manages to keep him safe from imperial reprisals, particularly given that he made use of imperial patronage for some of his publications. Finally, his work provides the political muscle that allows his ideals to gain traction in the real world.

Given both the scope and importance of the *VA* to my perspective on Philostratus, it was necessary to examine the existence of Apollonius of Tyana and the evidence related to his life. This allows one to determine how much of Philostratus' Apollonius is based on the extant tradition and how much is specific to the mind of Philostratus. The Apollonius tradition that Philostratus engages with stems from four key sources—Maximus of Aegeae, Moeragenes (whom Philostratus rejects, clearly marking his *VA* as a more rational approach to the magical figure of Apollonius as portrayed by Moeragenes), the letters ascribed to Apollonius himself, and the memoirs of Damis, apparently a disciple of Apollonius. However, the ultimate significance of this portion of my study is not to prove or disprove the existence of someone named Apollonius of Tyana, as so many scholars have attempted to do before me, but rather to be closer to discerning which aspects of the *VA*'s Apollonius are received from the tradition and which are invented by Philostratus for the purpose of advancing

his own agenda. Having carefully measured this evidence of one of the major characters in the work of Philostratus I then moved on to investigate the influence of the Second Sophistic on the mind of Philostratus and on his literary production in particular.

I engaged specifically with the notion of Philostratus as both a product and producer of the Second Sophistic over the course of several chapters. Considering that the term 'Second Sophistic' is itself an invention of the mind of Philostratus, we find that this period of intellectual activity is coloured by his perspective.<sup>2</sup> The 'determined Hellenism'<sup>3</sup> of which Anderson speaks and the emphasis on Greek writing and Greek oratory brought a decided slant to this period's activities, declaring colonized Greece to be the cultural superpower lording it over the more practically-minded Romans. This was because the militaristic objectives of once mighty imperial powers like Athens could no longer be satisfied, leaving Greeks with the need to find alternative means of reasserting their proud identity. The Greek language and education in Greek culture were two means of achieving this reaffirmation. But the forces of colonialism are never subtle, and economic and political concerns often led to Greek acceptance of a progressively more Roman identity, although this does not seem to have functioned in reverse. Even Dionysius of Halicarnassus,

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson 1986: 2 suggests that 'Philostratus is full of literary and historical preconception...'

<sup>3</sup> Anderson 1993: 17.

throughout his *Antiquitates Romanae*, seems to suggest that Rome can appropriate Greek *paideia* for itself because Roman Italy was once a Greek colony. It is the Second Sophistic then, with its emphasis on past Greek glory and its value as cultural capital unsurpassed in all the Known World that affords Philostratus the opportunity to criticise the moral and religious decline of the Roman Empire.

Because literature and culture are such integral parts of the Second Sophistic, concepts like truth, fiction, and reality take on a special relevance. A brief analysis of the different functions of ancient biography suggests a distinct didactic intention behind much of the work of Philostratus. Undoubtedly he seeks to reveal religious views in this masquerade of teaching through the deeds of a master philosopher like Apollonius. However, in my opinion, the works of Philostratus should not be read for any claim to historical accuracy, especially considering the penchant for warping reality that is evident in the literature of the Second Sophistic. This is why I attempted to classify the image of Apollonius of Tyana that Philostratus utilises—philosopher, holy man, θεῖος ἀνὴρ, or some specifically chosen conglomeration thereof. While all three of these archetypes certainly do represent some part of the personality of the Tyanaean Sage, the philosopher in particular given Philostratus' own proclivities, it is to the ideal of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ that he cleaves in order to explain away Apollonius' magical behaviour. In this exercise, Philostratus discovers

that he can only manipulate the existing tradition to a certain extent before it is no longer recognizable and is thus rendered irrelevant. A link with the divine (through the θεῖος ἀνὴρ archetype) is essential in order to confer legitimacy on Philostratus' religious renewal, granting it the status of an anointed challenger to the current situation in the Roman Empire.

After assessing the place of the writings of Philostratus as literary products of the Second Sophistic, I turned to investigate the religious context of the time by specifically analysing Philostratus' opposition, the imperial cult and Eastern 'mystery' cults in terms of their place in the Roman Empire. The so-called mysteries were described as being very appealing to a citizen who had been brought up in the dry uninspiring ritualism of Graeco-Roman paganism. The cult of the ancestors and the worship of ancient heroes, which provided the best counterpoint to the individualized doctrines of these mystery religions, had all but been forgotten, leaving nothing of truly Roman descent to fill the void, and allowing citizens craving a more personal experience of the divine to experiment with cults like those of Isis and Mithras. The imperial cult appears to have provided little help to the situation. Enforced, rather than faithfully adhered to, the worship of the emperor was a strongly political act meant for the most part as a reward for the good and just emperor, the crown of all his earthly achievements. Many an emperor did not see it in this way and so sought worship while yet living—something that turned the stomach of many religious



people of the time, most notably the Christians and Jews. Perhaps the imperial cult was meant to unite all of the Roman Empire in the practice of one 'faith', a first attempt at monotheistic state religion, but it did not function in this way, for many gave their obeisance to the emperor only when it was required of them. In calling instead for the re-establishment of the cult of the ancestors, Philostratus appears to have been one of this overwhelming majority.

Although I have chosen to concern myself with only four of Philostratus' works, I have dealt with each of them in turn, and began by first looking into the dialogue of the *Heroikos* for the first signs of Philostratus' predisposition towards fundamentalist thinking. The *Heroikos* is an example of the familiar literary tradition of correcting the Homeric poet. Pointing out some or other Homeric inaccuracy allows for an author to weave his own narrative using pre-existing and recognizable characters as his base, but Philostratus makes use of this strategy for another purpose altogether. His reinvigoration of Homeric myth is the means through which he calls for the re-establishment of the primacy of the cult of the ancestors and the worship of the great cult heroes in particular. The *Heroikos* is replete with real life examples of people turning their backs on ancestral religious tradition, and of the horrible vengeance of the slighted power that follows. Philostratus also uses this narrative skeleton as a platform from which to call for the figurative resurrection of the ancestor cult as a more traditional replacement for the worship of the Roman emperor.

Furthermore, the two characters responsible for the dialogue of the *Heroikos*, a Greek vinedresser and a Phoenician (i.e. a foreigner), are of special significance. The Pythagorean traits evidenced in the character of the Vinedresser offer a truly ancient philosophical foundation for the narrative action through the philosophical perspective that he espouses. As I initially pointed out, a philosophical basis for argument is an aspect running through all of the Philostratean works that I have dealt with. Advocating a philosophical approach seems to suggest that Philostratus is presenting his peculiar brand of religious fundamentalism as a sound and well-reasoned alternative to a steadily declining system, and is not proposing the rabid, militant fundamentalist movement with which we moderns are far more familiar. The Phoenician foil to the vinedresser appears to be a little more obvious in his purpose. This foreigner, Whitmarsh's 'ultimate anti-Roman',<sup>4</sup> shows that in the end even a stranger is better equipped to accept the ways of traditional Graeco-Roman religion and is thus better able to accept the truth of the religious programme that Philostratus presents. Additionally, the *ξυνουσία* that is part of belief in the ancestor cult brings its own 'foreign' religious element, for this has a distinctly Christian and Eastern ring to it, and offers the old faith of the ancestors with a more modern appealing twist to attract believers. I believe that in the end, encouraging the resurgence of the ancestor cult was one of

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<sup>4</sup> Whitmarsh 2004: 278-279.

Philostratus' many tactics for launching his assaults on both intrusive Eastern faiths and the progressively more dominant imperial cult.

Philostratus seems to give a fair degree of attention to Pythagorean philosophy, especially given that two of the protagonists my four chosen works are dedicated adherents. This alone contradicts the claims that Philostratus has no true affinity for the movement and instead elects to apply it to his work like so much window-dressing.<sup>5</sup> I have approached the role of philosophy in shaping the fundamentalist aspects of Philostratus' perspective by way of juxtaposing the two major philosophical schools of the day—Pythagoreanism and the more dominant model of Stoicism. Because of the Roman desire for practicality, philosophy, unless directed toward an obvious material goal, was frowned upon as an unnecessary or frivolous pursuit. However, Stoicism had developed into a system that promoted the interests of the Roman state as a means of fostering the happiness and stability of the society as a whole. This general agreement with the Roman outlook led to the movement's widespread acceptance. A philosophy like Pythagoreanism that argued against the cornerstones of Roman imperial society like public blood sacrifice and conspicuous consumption (through its vegetarianism and asceticism) was identified as both outlandish and subversive. Philostratus offers us the view of a true Stoic in his *Nero*, through the exiled Musonius Rufus. This brief dialogue

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<sup>5</sup> Bowie 1976: 1672; Dzielska 1986: 142.

suggests that even the Stoic position as acceptable philosophy could be usurped if one had the audacity to criticise the function of the Roman imperial state. The Philostratean analysis contained within the *Nero* presents but one half of this picture, namely that of the moral decline due to the pursuit of self-aggrandisement and the abandonment of tradition through the increased emphasis on the importance of the imperial cult. The other half of this argument is disclosed through Philostratus' Pythagorean presentations in the *VA* and the *Heroikos* as religious renewal is touted as being superior to foreign innovation. Apollonius' *tete-à-tete* with the Emperor Domitian is illuminating in this regard, for while the brief 'realistic' courtroom scene (*VA* 8.1-8.5) merely preserves Apollonius' hallowed inviolability by having him associate with the emperor no more than is absolutely necessary, the lengthy 'reported' speech (*VA* 8.6-8.7-50) offers far more for the investigator of Philostratus' ideology. The parallels that Philostratus draws between Apollonius and Socrates, and Apollonius and Thrasea Paetus, set the stage for Philostratus' paragon of virtue to struggle with an emperor whose behaviour exemplified all that had gone wrong with the Empire. Although Apollonius opposes Domitian and all his nefarious activities—he even 'encourages' Stephanus in his successful assassination attempt (despite witnessing the whole affair in a vision) by shouting 'Smite the tyrant! Smite [him]!'<sup>6</sup>—he is still, however, very much in favour of the rule of an enlightened monarch, something indicative of

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<sup>6</sup> παῖε τὸν τύραννον, παῖε.

Philostratus' influence in emphasizing the Pythagorean wisdom of Apollonius. It is though the *Heroikos* and *VA* that Philostratus puts forward his idea for the replacement of the imperial cult, namely the cult of the heroes. This is to be coupled with a revived form of the Olympian pantheon, with an emphasis on the older and more traditional powers to the exclusion of the new or the foreign. The idea is to present the state with a core belief structure that is strong, unifying, and thus better equipped to deal with the threats posed by outside interference.

Because of his place as the 'inventor' of the Second Sophistic, the investigation of Philostratus' position on sophistry, as presented through his *VS*, is of particular importance. The public persona was an integral part of the sophistic identity, and the manner in which a sophist or philosopher related to those in power often defined him as a sycophant or a sage for the remainder of his life. One's mastery over the Greek language and whether or not one participates in world affairs to the best of one's ability are the standards by which the Philostratean sophist is judged. The *VS* and its examples of sophistic virtue create the foundation upon which the behaviour of a paragon like Apollonius of Tyana can be evaluated. This is the realistic approach to what the *VA* does only in fiction, providing a down-to-earth counterpoint for the always-too-perfect conduct of the Tyanaean Sage. It is Philostratus' way of showing that even in the corrupt world of imperial politics, virtuous action is still possible. A final

point concerning the *VS* is raised by Eshelman, who argues that it is actually a work that seeks to prove Philostratus' sophistic pedigree.<sup>7</sup> As she notes, barring but a handful of the examples of sophists that Philostratus provides, all of the men are related in some way to the renowned Herodes Atticus and Hadrian of Tyre. The *VS* thus points to the prominence of Philostratus' sophistic and philosophical ancestry, in essence hinting at the importance of Philostratus himself. In terms of this argument the work could then, instead of showing examples of sophistry in the practical application of governance, be suggesting that Philostratus is exactly the man to be making the point about the decline of religion across the Empire, given that he possess such illustrious and wise philosophical forebears.

From the perspective of Flavius Philostratus, and indeed from the point of view of many other contemporaries, the Empire had become but a shadow of what it once was. Immorality and the abuse of power were running rampant, leaving the 'good' citizens at a loss as to what could or should be done. Perhaps like our modern era, this too was a time of moral relativity, a time in which each individual sought after his or her own happiness and religious convictions. In the mind of Philostratus the Empire had not always been like this, for there had been an earlier time in which honourable men worked for the good of the state and its peoples. Men like Apollonius of Tyana and Musonius Rufus were

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<sup>7</sup> Eshelman 2008: 399.

outstanding examples of this moral conviction. But the increasingly egocentric view of the average citizen left little room for this kind of altruism, and so Philostratus needed another explanation for the decline of morality. He found it in his society's rejection of *traditio* and Graeco-Roman religion, and this is why his fundamentalist 'project' took on decidedly traditional and moralistic overtones. He chose the traditional beliefs of Graeco-Roman paganism as his inviolable truth, setting out to defend them against the encroachment of outsiders and emperors through the deployment of virtuous paragons like Apollonius of Tyana whom he imbues with the essence of his ideology. Lastly, Philostratus takes his ideology into the political sphere by arguing against the worship of the emperor and against the malfeasance of the imperial government through Apollonius, Musonius, and the personalities catalogued in his *VS*. Philostratus the religious reformer presents these four works not only as a means of pointing out what is wrong with the Empire, but as a means of providing a roadmap to return the Empire to its former glory. In doing this Philostratus shows us that the modern world, with its similar difficulties and similar conflicts, is not experiencing anything new, but is merely going through problems for which he has already found reasonable and practical solutions.

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