Religious and Cultural Propaganda in the
Life of Apollonius of Tyana and the Acts of Thomas

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Abstract

There are many similarities between Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* and the anonymous and apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*: both were written around 220-230 CE, and both revolve around an ascetic holy man who traveled widely (including eastward to India), worked wonders and performed miracles (but who was, nevertheless, *not* an mere magician), and had close ties with kings and emperors. They also share a Syrian connection: the *Life of Apollonius* was commissioned by the Syrian empress Julia Domna, and the *Acts of Thomas* was originally written in Syriac in the city of Edessa. There has been much discussion by scholars about which genre each of these works should be classified into (with the *Acts of Thomas* being grouped as one of the five main Apocryphal Acts), and to what extent they should be considered ‘fictional’ and ‘novelistic’ versus ‘historical’. The main focus of this essay, however, is to examine the overall purpose and intent of these works. In addition to their entertainment value, I intend to show how motifs of ‘travel’, ‘asceticism’, and ‘wonders’ are used by the authors of each work for cultural and religious propaganda. In this regard, the *Life of Apollonius* can be seen as an apology for Hellenism, traditional civic values, and the emerging religious philosophy of Neo-Platonism that drew from Pythagoreanism. The *Acts of Thomas*, on the other hand, represents a denial of Greco-Roman virtues in favor of complete sexual renunciation (specifically pertaining to the Christian Encratite sect in Syria), which they believed would usher in their heavenly kingdom. The comparison of this same set of motifs in such divergent literature offers a glimpse into how competing sectors of society viewed themselves and hoped to present their message to would-be ‘converts’. In this light, we can better understand the forces at work in the Roman world that would embrace Christianity one century later at the expense of the Greek philosophical and pagan tradition.
Table of Contents

Introduction. ................................................................. 4
Summary of the *VA*. ....................................................... 7
  Structure. ................................................................. 9
  Genre. ................................................................. 10
Summary of the *ATH*. ..................................................... 14
  Structure. ............................................................... 16
  Genre. ................................................................. 17
The Motif of Travel
  *VA*. ................................................................. 21
  *ATH*. ................................................................. 29
The Motif of Asceticism
  *VA*. ................................................................. 35
  *ATH*. ................................................................. 40
The Motif of Wonders
  *VA*. ................................................................. 47
  *ATH*. ................................................................. 54
Conclusion. ................................................................. 60
Bibliography ................................................................. 64
Introduction

No one in the early decades of the 3rd century CE, long accustomed to the relative stability of the *Pax Romana*, could have foreseen the turbulence and revolution that would mark the following century. One hundred years before Constantine’s victory at the Milvian bridge in 312\(^1\) ushered in the age of Christian authority in the West, the traditions of Hellenism and paganism dominated culture and religion, and Christians comprised no more than one percent of the total population the Roman empire.\(^2\) It was in these years of the 220s and 230s that two literary works appeared representing each of these radically different, and competing, cultural *milieux*: the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, and the *Acts of Thomas*. The former (also called the *Vita Apollonii*, referred to as *VA* hereafter) was written by Flavius Philostratus (c. 170-250), an Athenian sophist and belletrist from Athens, at the behest of the learned empress Julia Domna, to whose Syrian court he was attached. It was Philostratus who also catalogued and described, in his *Lives of the Sophists*, the period of the Second Sophistic (to which he gave its appellation), a Greek literary and cultural renaissance that flourished from the reign of Nero until the death of Philostratus. The *VA* is an account of the life of a first century ascetic sage and wandering thaumaturge who travelled in Greece, India, Spain, Ethiopia, and everywhere in between dispensing endless wisdom, miracles, and erudition, and interacting with no less than five Roman emperors.

The *Acts of Thomas* (*ATh* hereafter), on the other hand, was the work of an anonymous author probably written around 220-230.\(^3\) It is the last of the five main *Apocryphal Acts of the

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\(^1\) All dates are CE unless stated otherwise.

\(^2\) See Stark (1996) 7; Hopkins (1998) 193; these independent studies both place the Christian population of the empire in the first quarter of the 3rd century at approximately half a million. I presume a minimum total population at this time of 50 million persons (e.g. J.C. Russell (1958) *Late Ancient and Medieval Population*, Philadelphia).

Apostles (AAA), a group of sub-literary fictional narratives all composed between the years 150-230, and following the life and ministry of the eponymous apostle (they are generally reckoned to have been composed in the order of the *Acts of John [AJ]*, the *Acts of Paul [AP]*, the *Acts of Peter [APt]*, the *Acts of Andrew [AAn]*, and the *ATh*). The five AAA undoubtedly all share similar themes and common intertextuality with each other as well as the Greek novels, but the *ATh* is the only complete example, and, as Richard Pervo writes, is the “most outstanding representative by virtue of its literary and intellectual depth.” Though the earliest and only complete manuscript is in Greek, like the other AAA, it was originally composed in Syriac in the rich commercial city of Edessa. Despite the differences, the *ATh* shares with the *VA* not only these temporal and Syrian connections, but an ascetic main character (the apostle Judas Thomas, the twin brother of Jesus) who travels east through Parthia and into India, working wonders and miracles and dispensing his own brand of wisdom. It is my objective in this dissertation to investigate and compare the ways in which propaganda is used in these two works to promulgate a certain religious and cultural perspective to their readers. I employ the term ‘propaganda’ not in the pejorative 20th century sense that implies the deceitful manipulation of a population for

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4 E.g. Shoemaker (2008) 528: “The negative associations of ‘apocrypha’ and ‘apocryphal’ in contemporary usage are considerable, and perhaps a better designation remains to be discovered. But for the time being, ‘apocrypha’, despite its flaws remains the preferred term for this type of Christian literature. The commonly accepted definition given by Éric Junod (1983) 412, (from Shoemaker [2008] 524) for ‘Christian Apocrypha’ is: “Anonymous of pseudepigraphical texts of Christian origin which maintain a connection with the books of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament because they are devoted to events described or mentioned in these books, or because they are devoted to events that take place in the expansion of events described or mentioned in these books, or because their literary genre is related to those of the biblical writings.” This is contra Schneemelcher’s more narrow definition that generally classifies these works as being composed in the first three centuries CE.

5 Bremmer (1998) 162.

6 Bremmer (1998) 174, lists such themes as: shipwrecks, brigands, sale into slavery, putting girls in brothels, unruly crowds, travel around the empire, thinking of suicide, sending messages, corrupting a servant, trials, locking up in tombs, endless journeys, loving couples (Platonic or not).

7 Pervo (1994) 249; cf. however, Thomas (2003) 11: “The *Acts of Andrew* unquestionably represent the highest literary achievement among the earliest five AAA.” The *AAn* employs extensive Attic Greek and complex intertextuality with Homer, as described by MacDonald (1994).

political advantage through various media, but in the more neutral definition put forth by Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”9 I will commence by giving a summary of the narratives of the _VA_ and _ATH_, and discussing the structure and genre considerations of each. I will then discuss, in turn, the following motifs common to both works and how they are used as vehicles of propaganda: travel, asceticism, and wonders.

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Summary, Structure, and Genre of the *Vita Apollonii*

Summary

Philostratus begins his work with a short introduction paying homage to the wisdom and metempsychosis of Pythagoras and Empedocles, philosophical precursors of Apollonius, and mentions that their powers of perception derived not from mere magic, but from clean living and clear thinking. The author then states that his intention is “to remedy the general ignorance and to give an accurate account of the Master” (1.2.3), and he concludes his introduction by listing the sources of his information on the life of Apollonius. The *VA* narrative account opens with the birth of Apollonius in Tyana and various portents that accompanied it; this was followed by his education and adoption of Pythagoreanism, his five-year vow of silence, and the beginning of his journey. Traveling east from his home in Anatolia, he meets Damis in Ninevah, a man who becomes his loyal disciple and the supposed author of a *Life of Apollonius* which was given to Philostratus by Julia Domna and used to write his own *VA*. Apollonius continues to the court of the Parthian king Vardanes in Babylon, where he stays for one year and eight months before leading Damis and his other followers further east. After various digressions and a short visit with the wise Indian king Phraotes, Apollonius meets the Indian sages led by Iarchas. They engage in philosophical discussions for four months on things such as reincarnation, virtue, and the cosmos, which brings to a close the fruitful period of Apollonius’ eastern travels. He leads his contingent back to Ionia and Greece, where he provides advice and assistance, not to mention rebuke, to the Greek cities as required. A few examples of his numerous activities are his revealing the source of plague in Ephesus, lecturing the Athenians on (among other things) their
effeminacy, exposing a vampiric bride in Corinth, and visiting and improving many cultic shrines along the way. The \textit{VA} next describes the visit to Italy and encounters with the regime of Nero. Apollonius is imprisoned by the praetorian prefect Tigellinus for treason, but is quickly released when the incriminating scroll is supernaturally erased. To conclude the first half of the \textit{VA}, Apollonius raises a young woman from the dead, corresponds with the imprisoned philosopher Musonius, and sets out for Hispania.

After discussing a revolt against Nero with the governor of Andalusia, Apollonius proceeds through Sicily, Athens, Rhodes, and Alexandria performing more wonders and predictions. In Alexandria he meets the emperor Vespasian, who seeks advice from the sage. They are later joined by the philosophers Dio Chrysostom and Euphrates. When the emperor asks how he should exercise his authority, only Apollonius answers honestly with a strong defense of the monarchy; Euphrates attacks Pythagoreanism and becomes the nemesis of Apollonius for the remainder of the book. Apollonius and his company move south down the Nile to Ethiopia for an audience with the gymnosophists there. These ‘Naked Ones’, led by Thespesion, had received slanderous information about Apollonius from the agent of Euphrates, and they ultimately prove to be less wise than the Indian sages. A young gymnosophist disciple, Nilus, is converted due to Apollonius’ superior wisdom and joins the group. After returning from Ethiopia, Apollonius meets with Titus, approves of the future emperor, and recommends Demetrius the Cynic as his philosophical advisor. The \textit{VA} recounts several more incidents in the cities of Asia Minor and Syria before the final, dramatic conclusion of the action in Rome. Apollonius was slandered once again by Euphrates to the emperor Domitian, who summons the sage to Rome for trial. After a scene in prison, Apollonius is called to stand before the emperor,
but is quickly acquitted and vanishes into thin air. He meets with Damis and Demetrius south of Rome and sets sail back to Greece and Ionia. In Ephesus he witnesses in real-time the assassination of Domitian, and finally rejects a request from the newly-crowned emperor Nerva to serve as advisor. Philostratus ends the *VA* with a tale of Apollonius’ ascension from a temple on Crete, and his miraculous appearance in a dream to a young student nine months later in Tyana, affirming the immortality of the soul.

**Structure**

The *VA* is divided into eight books, containing on average 45 chapters each. It is a chronological account of the travels of Apollonius around, and outside of, the Roman world. Thus, the geography of his journey helps most readily to assess the structure of the work. It can be seen as two roughly analogous halves, with clearly different emphases in each half. The first half focuses on the early life and development of Apollonius, such as his decision to follow Pythagoreanism and his vow of silence, through his wanderings to the east, where he meets Damis, converses with enlightened kings, and learns from the Indian sages. There are numerous references to Alexander in this part of the journey, most conspicuously the fact that Apollonius had surpassed the furthest limits of the Macedonian king’s conquests, and in his departure from India, it is apparent that Apollonius has nothing left to learn from the world. The *VA* begins to demonstrate, rather than any search for wisdom, the confident benefaction of his limitless wisdom to humanity, especially to the Greek cities and, indeed, any city or person who shows deference to Hellenism. The first half concludes with a conflict, easily resolved, with the ‘bad’ emperor Nero. The second half continues more of his ‘ministry’ of wisdom and Hellenism in the
west, and another journey outside the Roman empire into Ethiopia. This time, unlike with the Indian sages, he is clearly shown to be more enlightened than the ‘Naked Ones’ and, as expected, his superiority is confirmed. There are more interactions with ‘good’ emperors in the form of Vespasian and Titus, before the final great conflict with a more dangerous ‘bad’ emperor, Domitian. While the majority of the VA is comprised of the travels and philosophical dialogues of Apollonius (69%), this last part of his imprisonment, trial, and death (26%) form over a quarter of the work.10 This will become relevant for establishing the propagandistic uses of Philostratus’ work.

Genre

The VA is an unusually long work of 82,000 words11 that requires two full Loeb volumes. In an analysis of later Graeco-Roman βίοι, Richard Burridge has shown that this is well beyond the 5,000-25,000 words that typify a medium range Life (such as Agricola or Plutarch’s Alexander), and compares more closely to such longer works as the philosophical Republic (89,358) and the pseudo-historical /fictional Cyropedia (80,684).12 Ewen Bowie writes that “the scale alone must have puzzled,” and points additionally to the novels and possibly the “Alexander-histories.”13 This length helps to provide context to the VA and, thus, to place it into a suitable genre--is it an historical biography, a complete fiction, or perhaps some combination of the two? The most logical place to commence is the examination of Philostratus’ sources, including, most

11 Ibid. 169.
12 Ibid. 169.
13 Bowie (1994) 187; comparisons with the novels are problematic as there is no standard definition of that literary genre; e.g. Morgan (1993) 222: “The novel has always been the most polyphonic, heteroglossic of genres. Some modern theorists suggest that its success is due to its omnivorous ability to absorb and adapt stimuli from a wide range of literary forms.”
controversially, the supposed ‘notebooks’ or ‘memoirs’ (*deltoi*) of Damis that were given by Julia Domna to Philostratus at the commissioning of the work. Bowie, following Eduard Meyer,\(^\text{14}\) has maintained the most popular view that ‘Damis’ was a fictional device invented by Philostratus for purely literary reasons.\(^\text{15}\) Graham Anderson, following an earlier Italian article,\(^\text{16}\) argued in favor of the potential historicity of Damis, a view which has also been expressed by Jaap-Jan Flinterman.\(^\text{17}\)

In addition to its size and the extent of its truthfulness/fictionality, the *VA* can be classified according to its *topoi*. Bowie points out that, while the scale, the eye-witness testimony of Damis, and the variety of the character’s travels compare favorably with the novels, the obvious differences include a lack of pirates and brigands, no independent sub-plots dealing with secondary characters, and a completely negative view of *eros*.\(^\text{18}\) He also sees parallels with the many *Lives* of philosophers, such as Pythagoras, as well as gospel literature, and states that the *VA* is a “literary hybrid, something *sui generis* that resists reduction to other genres.”\(^\text{19}\) Flinterman classifies it as both a biography and a romance: a *vie romancée*.\(^\text{20}\) Anderson draws comparisons between Christian (the gospels and *Acts*) and pagan (especially Pythagorean tradition) examples of hagiography and how they can utilize recurrent motifs, such as infant prodigies, retreats to the desert, resurrections, conflicts with secular authority, and remarkable deaths.\(^\text{21}\) Peter Brown, Simon Swain, and Garth Fowden have all written about aspects of the

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\(^\text{15}\) Bowie (1978), reconfirmed in (1994).
\(^\text{17}\) Anderson (1986); Flinterman (1995).
\(^\text{18}\) Bowie (1994) 189-190.
\(^\text{19}\) Ibid. 194.
\(^\text{21}\) Anderson (1986) 144-145.
theios aner (holy man) in Greco-Roman society, citing Apollonius as a prime example of the
pagan version whose philosophy is based on Pythagoreanism and Neo-Platonism.22 This role
came into conflict with, and was eventually usurped by, the growing tide of Christianity, as
illustrated by the writings of the Christian thinker Origen against the pagan Celsus,
contemporaries of Philostratus. A century later, the Christian historian and hagiographer
Eusebius writing against the pagan prefect Sossianus Hierocles, who was perhaps the inventor of
the trope comparing Apollonius of Tyana to the gospel accounts of Jesus Christ.23

More recently, some scholars, content that the VA is mostly a unique work in its own
genre (or without one), have begun to investigate the aims of other motifs such as travel (Elsner
1997), its ‘fictional truth’ (Francis 1998), the influence of wonders on the reader (Guez 2009),
and intertextual connections such as folkloric traditions (Anderson 2009), the Emesan Sun-cult
(Morgan 2009), and Pythagorean philosophy in literary structure (Praet 2009). This question of
‘fictional truth’ put forth by Francis, is echoed by J.R. Morgan, who writes that, “‘truth’ in fiction
depends on belief in fiction and ‘belief’ is an important dynamic of the reader’s pleasure.”24
Therefore, to what extent Philostratus (and his readers) intended the VA to be understood as
‘fiction’ is of little importance, and, in a certain sense, anachronistic; it is of more value to
determine how the implicit levels of ‘fictionality’ worked, not only for entertainment, but as a

22 Brown (1971); Fowden (1982) and (2005); Swain (1999).
23 Eusebius, Against Hierocles, probably written in the early third century around the time of the Great Persecution
of Diocletian in reaction to Hierocles, Lover of Truth. Modern scholars have mostly discounted the similarities and
concluded that Philostratus need not have read, let alone reacted against, the gospels. This view was held by
Edward Gibbon (DFRE 3.16, note 139: “when Philostratus composed the life of Apollonius, he had no such
intention [to oppose the miracles of Christ]”; discussed by Anderson (1986) 144: the resemblance between the VA
and the gospels “can no longer be taken to indicate that Philostratus depended on Christian sources…the pattern of
incidents is very near to what is likely to interest a sophist anyway”; and confirmed again by Bowie (1994) 193: “A
Christian reader can of course see many similarities with the gospels, but these are not so close as to require the
supposition that Philostratus knew of and drew upon them.”
vehicle for imparting deeper ‘truths’ about reality. Likewise, the genre and historicity of the VA is not my primary concern in this essay. I will, instead, focus on the purpose of the VA in regards to Philostratus’ use of religious and cultural propaganda as an apology for Hellenism, and the role it played in the wider context of its eventual conflict with Christianity. Hellenism, as we will see repeatedly with Apollonius, is associated with wisdom and paideia, as well as the general love of liberty--anyone not in possession of these virtues is, for Philostratus and his peers, a non-Greek or barbarian.
Summary, Structure, and Genre of the *Acts of Thomas*

Summary

The *ATh* opens with a version of the so-called ‘Apostolic lottery’, in which the remaining eleven apostles (with Judas Iscariot no longer in their company) portion out the regions of the world to begin their evangelism. “By lot India fell to Judas Thomas, also called Didymus” (*ATh* 1); Thomas rejected this fate and begged to go anywhere but to the Indians. To remedy the situation, Jesus appears in the flesh to a merchant named Abban, who was sent by the Indian king Gundaphorus to find carpenters, and sells Thomas as a slave. When asked if Jesus was his master, Thomas had no choice but to answer, “Yes, he is my Lord” (2). This duplicity is made more ironic by the fact that Thomas is represented in the *ATh* and in tradition as the twin brother of Jesus, with Thomas (Aramaic) and Didymus (Greek) both meaning ‘twin’. Abban thus leads Thomas eastward toward India. Along the way, they participate in a royal wedding celebration in the city of Andrapolis, where an appearance by Jesus in the wedding chamber results in the conversion the bride and groom to follow a life of chastity. The bride’s father, the king, hears the news and furiously seeks Thomas ‘the sorcerer’, who has been confused for Jesus since they are, in fact, twins. Thomas had already continued east, however, to India, where he meets King Gundaphorus and receives the commission to build a great palace for the king. Rather than building the palace, Thomas gives the money to the poor; the king hears of this and decides to execute the apostle. The king’s brother, Gad, dies and sees the palace that Thomas had built for the king in heaven, and returns to life where he and the king both begin to follow the teachings of Thomas. The apostle leaves the king to wander other cities in India, where he raises from the
dead a young man killed by a serpent, rides on a talking ass, casts out a demon from a beautiful woman, and resurrects a young woman killed by her lover. This sequence of relatively independent episodes comprises nearly the first half of the \textit{ATH}.

The remainder of the work is devoted to a series of events centered around Thomas’ associations with a certain Indian king Misdaeus and his relatives. The first such encounter begins when Siphor, the captain of the king, hears of the miracles performed by Thomas and approaches him, seeking help from the apostle in exorcising demons from his wife and daughter. Thomas agrees and goes, with the assistance of a group of talking wild asses, to the house of Siphor where he casts out the demons and raises the women who had been killed in the process. In the next encounter, Mygdonia, the wife of Charisius, a close kinsman of the king, hears Thomas speaking to a crowd about chastity and becomes a follower. Charisius becomes upset later when his wife refuses to dine with him and rejects his advances, and he denounces Thomas as an evil sorcerer to the King Misdaeus. Thomas is brought before the king and, after refusing to speak, thrown into prison, where he sings the long ‘Hymn of the Pearl’ (an ambiguous allegory that likely predates the \textit{ATH} and has both Gnostic and Manichean elements).\cite{Drijvers1992} Mygdonia bribes the prison guards to visit the apostle, who appears outside his cell in order to pray with her and baptize her in a nearby stream. Charisius, upon discovering that his wife still refused to obey him, asks the king once more for help in regaining authority over his wife from the teachings of Thomas. The king, however, promptly releases Thomas after listening to the apostle deliver a short speech about his beliefs of honoring God by remaining pure and chaste. Misdaeus tells his wife, Tertia, about the events concerning his kinsman Charisius, enlisting her

\cite{Drijvers1992} 338.
help to go to Mygdonia and convince her to turn away from Thomas and back to her husband. Tertia instead finds Mygdonia praying and decides to listen to the apostle herself; she too, after hearing his preaching at the house of Siphor, immediately converts. She tells her husband, the king, and he angrily re-arrests Thomas. When hot plates are brought to torture the apostle while being questioned by the king, Thomas turns them instead into water which floods the room, and he is sent back to his cell. He is visited there by the king’s son, Vazan, who listens to Thomas and also chooses to follow the teachings of the apostle. Tertia and Mygdonia bribe the jailer to enter the prison where they join Thomas and Vazan, as well as Siphor and his family. Together, they all escape to the house of Vazan, where Thomas performs a baptism and eucharist ceremony and then returns to be imprisoned. King Misdaeus finally condemns him to death, in which he is taken outside the city and, after a long prayer recounting all of his virtues, pierced with spears by four soldiers. He appears after his death to all the major characters; in the end, after his grave is found empty and dust brought from the grave heals the king’s grandson, even the King Misdaeus finally converts to following the god of Thomas.

Structure

The Ath is divided into 13 (sometimes 14) separate praxeis, or ‘acts’, and 170 total chapters.26 Like the VA, it can be read as two roughly analogous halves that reinforce the structural symmetry of an overall message. The first half comprises the first seven acts (chapters 1-81), a series of shorter independent episodes all concerned with the themes of marriage, exorcisms, and

26 Some editions (i.e. Schneemelcher 1992) divide the work into 13 praxeis, while others (e.g. Elliott 1993, following the older translation of M.R. James) separate the episode of the man killed by the serpent and the talking colt into the 3rd and 4th acts, respectively, giving a total of 14 praxeis. I follow the more common 13-act format in this essay.
resurrections. The second half follows with acts eight through thirteen (82-170), in which the former themes appear no more and the action centers around conversions and imprisonments in the apostle’s dealings with King Misdaeus and his court. Both halves contain a hymn (6-7; 108-113), and throughout the work Thomas preaches a strong Enctic message of the opposition between the earthly marriage (which is to be avoided) and the heavenly marriage which leads to salvation (symbolized by total sexual renunciation).

In the Stichometry of Nicephorus, in which a ninth-century Patriarch of Constantinople recorded the length of various Christian texts, the ATh is allocated 1600 lines. This must only refer to a portion of the text since it is about half of the length of the complete surviving manuscript (close to 3200 lines by my calculation). While this is comparable to other AAA such as AP (3600), APt (2750), and AJ (2500), as well as the canonical Acts of the Apostles (3600) and the Gospel of Luke (3300), it is less than one third the length of the much longer VA (whose 82,000 words comprise some 11,000 lines). The ATh and VA do, however, share a highly homogeneous structure in that in both works the travels and acts of the main character comprise a large majority of the text, the imprisonments and legal difficulties make up 26% of the text, and they end with the death of the protagonist and influence after death.

**Genre**

As we have seen similarities of topoi and structure that the ATh shares with the VA (not to mention the connections with dating and Syrian provenance), so we will also see how it shares the same basic genre considerations. The attempts by scholars to locate the five AAA within a...

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27 For VA, see Note 10; for ATh, Pervo (1987) 47.
certain genre have generally shown the closest parallels not with the canonical Acts, but with some combination of the canonical gospels and the Greek novels.\textsuperscript{28} They claim to give accounts of the past using such historiographic devices as scripted speeches to give meaning to events and motivation of the actors, as well as events related in order of cause and effect. Yet they are unlike ancient historiography in that, as one scholar writes, “their authors cite no sources, construct no consistent chronological framework, do not stress eyewitness observation, and give no explicit indications of their purpose in writing about the past--in fact, the authors do not come forward at all as self-conscious personas.”\textsuperscript{29} Also, as opposed to the ongoing debate about the VA (e.g. the testimony of ‘Damis’), the AAA are all unequivocally considered to be wholly fiction. A 1932 study by Rosa Söder first compared the AAA to the Greek novels, on the basis of five common motifs: travel, aretology, wonders, propaganda, and the erotic element.\textsuperscript{30} She concludes that these motifs are ‘novelistic’ features, ultimately rooted deeper in historiography and epic than Greek novels, and, indeed, there has been much criticism on whether such motifs are prescriptive or descriptive of genre types.\textsuperscript{31} Wilhelm Schneemelcher argues that the AAA share similarities to the canonical gospels in their compositional history, take some elements from Praxeis (deeds)\textsuperscript{32} and Periodoi (travel accounts)\textsuperscript{33} literature, and serve to combine entertainment, instruction, and religious propaganda into a new type of writing, which in turn

\textsuperscript{28} So, e.g. Schneemelcher (1992) 82: “The literary model [of the AAA] was not Luke’s Acts--whether it was known to the author or not. Rather, they are connected in various ways with the Hellenistic novel.”

\textsuperscript{29} Thomas (2003) 3.

\textsuperscript{30} R. Söder (1932) Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhafte Literatur der Antike, Stuttgart, from Thomas (2003) 4; other motifs include sale into slavery, persecution, crowds, divine protection, oracles, and dreams.

\textsuperscript{31} See note 12, on problems with assigning the ‘novel’ to a genre.

\textsuperscript{32} E.g.: Augustus’ Res Gestae, Callisthenes’ Acts of Alexander, and parts of Polybius, Cassius Dio, and Xenophon’s Cyropedia.

\textsuperscript{33} E.g.: Odyssey, Herodotus, and Xenophon’s Anabasis.
influenced later hagiography.\textsuperscript{34} Richard Pervo is unique in stressing the relationship between the canonical \textit{Acts} and the \textit{AAA}, as well as the novels, through their mutual aim of entertainment and edification, and considers them to be Christian historical fiction.\textsuperscript{35} He notes that there is indiscriminate borrowing by the \textit{AAA} from such wide-ranging sources as early Jewish and Christian writings, Greek epic, historiography, paradoxography, philosophical biographies, and historical and romantic novels--seemingly anything the authors could lay their hands on!\textsuperscript{36} Pieter Lalleman states that the \textit{AAA} are primarily religious propaganda that use literary motifs foreign to all other Christian writings (e.g. longer homilies, speeches, and monologues, and a Christ in metamorphosis as hero or beautiful young man).\textsuperscript{37} Jan Bremmer concludes that the authors of the \textit{AAA} had at least read the Greek novels and been partially inspired by them, though changing the emphases to include a focus on the final martyrdom, a ‘happy end’ of chastity rather than marriage, and contemporary settings freely featuring the Roman world (unlike the archaizing tendencies typical of the world of the Second Sophistic).\textsuperscript{38} Stephen Shoemaker describes the \textit{AAA} as ‘Christian novelistic literature’ that was written for and appealed to mostly a broader Christian audience than other theological or apologetic treatises (i.e. Tertullian, Origen).\textsuperscript{39}

As with the \textit{VA}, some scholars have more recently begun to investigate other aspects of the \textit{AAA} rather than the indefatigable question of genre and antecedents. Caroline Johnson draws attention to the rituals and prayers in the \textit{ATh} and their effect on the characterization of Thomas

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\textsuperscript{34} Schneemelcher (1992) 82-83.
\textsuperscript{35} Pervo (1987) 121-124.
\textsuperscript{36} Pervo (1994) 244.
\textsuperscript{38} Bremmer (1998) 175.
\textsuperscript{39} Shoemaker (2008) 536.
\end{flushright}
as a *magos*;\textsuperscript{40} Judith Perkins discusses the subversive representation of authority in such spaces as female quarters and prisons;\textsuperscript{41} Christine Thomas has written a convincing study of the *APt* that reexamines the criteria for analyzing the *AAA*. According to Thomas, in addition to the issues surrounding the credibility of the narrative or the actual contents of the text, one must look also at “the treatment of sources, compositional procedures, fluidity or fixity of the texts, chronological orientation, and characterization.”\textsuperscript{42} In the case of narrative fluidity, she concludes that the novels, considered the products of a single author, have less in common with the *AAA* than do such works as the *Alexander Romance*, the anonymous Jewish novellas (i.e. *Tobit*, the Greek *Esther*), and even the *Life of Aesop*, due to the protean nature of the texts over time, and the tradition of multiple redactions and varied translations.\textsuperscript{43}

While this synopsis of genre is cursory, I hope only to elucidate the link that is shared by both the *VA* and the *ATh* in this regard; they both inhabit a mostly fictional world (especially in the case of *ATh*) that masquerades as history or biography, and which could have possibly been read by their readers as any or all of the above. More important than these classifications though, are the messages that the author(s) intended to be understood from the work, and the relationship of those messages to their cultural context. In this way, I will begin to examine the various motifs appearing in both works, and how they can be interpreted as religious and cultural propaganda.

\textsuperscript{40} Johnson (1999).
\textsuperscript{41} Perkins (2002).
\textsuperscript{42} Thomas (2003) 7.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. 80-81; cf. Pervo (1987) 129: “Readers of the *Life of Aesop* and *Alexander Romance* would probably have found the *AAA* to their taste. Christian literature had diversified.”
The Motif of Travel

*Vita Apollonii*

In the first book of the *VA*, on the journey east to India, Apollonius delivers the line, “To a wise man Hellas is everywhere” (1.35), which is itself a notion taken from the ancient Athenian sophist Isocrates. The line is given as a rebuke towards Damis, who had advised Apollonius not to refuse any gifts from the Parthian King Vardanes the next day, since they were in a foreign country and would not to secure supplies also for the return journey. This assertion of the superiority of Hellenism (which can be attained by one’s *paideia* alone, and focuses on a cultural and moral, rather than racial, ideal) can be seen as the dominant recurring theme throughout the *VA*. Philostratus demonstrates Apollonius’ hyper-Greekness at every turn, but emphasizes not only the cultural, but also the religious, aspect of his ‘ministry’ around the world. Thus, he is portrayed as someone who could have easily found a home as one of the larger-than-life characters in Philostratus’ other major work, *Lives of the Sophists*, as well as a revered holy man who could bring salvation to the Greek (and Roman) world by way of his impeccable wisdom and knowledge. Travel is the primary method of reinforcing this image, and provides the central framework by which to understand the *VA*. The broad extent of Apollonius’ travels shown in the *VA* are universally understood to be fiction, embellished from earlier traditions or completely invented by Philostratus. This very fictionality, however, serves not only to provide entertainment, but also to emphasize the very truthfulness of the message intended by the

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44 Isocrates, *Panegyric* 50: “A Greek is he who shares our culture rather than a common nature.”
45 E.g. 1.7: “his Greek was of the Attic kind and his accent was unaffected by the region”; Apollonius was marked for greatness from birth.
author—that Apollonius himself represents the embodiment of a cultural and religious Greekness, with a cultural and religion that was more potent (if not necessarily more ancient) than any other.

After a youthful visit to Antioch, “winning the admiration of people completely without culture” (1.17), Apollonius decides upon a greater journey to visit the Brahmans of India, with consideration that seeing the Magi of Babylon would be an extra dividend along the way. At his first stop, in Old Ninos, Apollonius wins the attention, and lifelong devotion, of the Assyrian Damis after showing “more knowledge about the idol [of Io] than the priests and the prophets” (1.19). Thus, already established are two of the main themes of Apollonius’ travels that: he is wiser and more knowledgeable about any subject than even local experts and traditions; and, this knowledge and wisdom (which derive from his Hellenism) is superior to any other culture, including (obviously, for the Greeks) that of the Romans, both within the Empire and out. During a 20-month stay in Babylon, Apollonius meets often with the kindly, Greek-speaking King Vardanes, who is “eager to take his advice” (1.40) from the sage, which turns out to be such things as having peaceful dealings with the Romans (1.37) and treating well the descendants of a group of Greek Eretrians that were exiled from their land over 500 years earlier by the Persian king Darius (1.36). Here, Apollonius is seen as both protector of Greek heritage, especially given such rich cultural roots as the Persian wars (a Second Sophistic commonplace), as well as willing patron and supporter of Roman ambition—two themes that become more central to the VA in the second half.

In Book Two, as they make their way towards India, Apollonius and Damis spend time conversing about philosophy, as well as paradoxography and ethnography.\footnote{As noted by Jones (2005) 1.14, at this point, moving away from the more familiar areas of Mesopotamia, the geography becomes more spurious and is probably sourced by fantastical tales such as those by Ctesias, or totally invented by Philostratus.} The examples of
philosophical discourse, as it appears throughout the *VA*, are in fact mostly trite platitudes or conventional stock material, such as the assertion by Apollonius as they pass the Caucasus mountains that a pure and blameless soul is more useful for perceiving the Divine than climbing the highest mountain peaks (2.5). As they approach the Indus river, there is a long and detailed discussion of the training, character, and habits of elephants (2.11-16). The *VA* contains countless examples of such wonders, animals, strange objects, arts, and unusual people and habits, which fit into a long-standing literary tradition at least as old as Herodotus, and which serve to emphasize the dichotomy between the ‘normal’ Greek world, and the ‘other’. More important for our purposes, though, are the implicit and explicit allusions to the archetypal Greek travelers to the orient: Dionysus, Heracles, and Alexander. Apollonius at one point adamantly rejects an offer of date wine, not only because of his asceticism, but because they were near to a certain Mount Nysa, “where I believe Dionysus performed many miracles” (2.7). Alexander acts as the inspiration for their entire eastward route, as well as the return journey in which they follow his admiral Nearchus by sea across the Persian gulf back to Babylon (3.51). The exploits and nobility of the Macedonian king are invoked often, and is seen most emphatically at the end of Book Two when Apollonius and company pass huge altars at the Hyphasis River “set up by Alexander to honor the limits of his empire...presumably in order to boast that Alexander had

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48 This is another trope popular in the Second Sophistic world, found in all of the novels, the *Wonders Beyond Thule*, and satirized by Lucian (*A True Story*).

49 Elsner (1997) 29, provides a list of references for each of these. Furthermore, he remarks that: “The large range of *topoi* experienced by the sage suggests the depth and universality of wisdom mastered and equipped to teach.”

50 Other references to Dionysus include: a captured leopard (2.2), discussion about the Greek and Indian legends of the god (2.8-9), Apollonius praying to his shrine (2.9), the invasion of India by Dionysus and Heracles (2.33), and an attack by the pair on the Brahman acropolis (3.13). Heracles is additionally mentioned as the rescuer of Prometheus (2.3) and as the ancestor of Alexander (2.43).
advanced no further” (2.42). Although Apollonius’ journey is fictional, it demonstrates symbolically that he follows in the footsteps of the most prominent travelers in Greek tradition, and he outdoes them all. Philostratus already makes it clear that Apollonius had reached uncharted territory in his travels, and the consummation of his long-awaiting meeting with the Indian sages will shed more light on the author’s propagandistic intent of representing the superiority of Greek culture and religion.

Upon reaching the citadel of the Brahmans, Apollonius begins intense discussions with their leader, Iarchas, on a wide range of topics. They are portrayed (especially Iarchas) throughout the account as the “Eminences who know everything” (3.18) and possess complete wisdom and knowledge, while Apollonius is still in the more uncertain position of a learner or seeker of the truth. When Apollonius asks the Indian his belief about the soul, Iarchas replies, “It is what Pythagoras transmitted to you Greeks, and we to the Egyptians” (3.19). In this way, there is the first conspicuous mention of Apollonius’ mentor, Pythagoras, another traveler to India, where tradition maintains that he himself gained his wisdom from the teachings of the Brahmans. It is notable that, despite the Indians’ antiquity and apparent superiority, the conversation is once again conducted in fluent Attic Greek littered with Homeric references. There follows a long series of question and answer sessions in which “Apollonius and Damis listened greedily, and were amazed at their Eminences’ unlimited wisdom” (3.41); we have already seen that Philostratus was no philosopher, and these discussions are more of the same

51 Other references to Alexander include: dispelling the myth of Alexander’s revel in honor of Dionysus (2.9), passing the crag of Aornos that was captured by Alexander (2.10), a large elephant of Porus that Alexander dedicated to Helios (2.12), murals in Taxila (2.20), Alexander’s praise for his defeated enemy Porus (2.21), statues (2.24); cf., however, Bowie (1994) 195, who states that these references might signal an intent by Philostratus for the /4 to be seen as historical, à la the Alexander Romance, rather than fictional. “In that case he would be developing a fictitious account which did not consistently parade its fictionality by alluding to the novels but dissimulated it by aping historical writing.”
banalities. Apollonius’ four-month stay with the Indian sages is presented as the culmination of his training and his spiritual progress. He gains much religious knowledge, such as the nature of the cosmos and the best cultic practices to follow, which he will freely use in his return to the Greek world and during the remainder of the VA. As John Elsner writes, “after leaving the Brahmans, he has nothing more to learn, but can teach even priests and philosophers.” The whole episode with the Indian sages, more than anything, serves to validate the antiquity and authenticity of Apollonius’ wisdom and knowledge. He goes directly to the source of the oldest philosophical tradition (more so even than the ancient religion of the Egyptians, who also learned from the Indians), which influenced the oldest Greek philosopher, Pythagoras. Most importantly, Apollonius emerges at the end of this visit having confirmed much of what he already knew, rather than developing any outright new ideas, and he becomes no less than an equal of the Brahmans in wisdom and divine nature. Thus, Philostratus can be sure that his Apollonius will be the unquestioned and inexorable personification of Hellenism itself, having a greater mission and assuming more authority and power than all who have come before him.

Book Four is mostly taken up with Apollonius’ tour of Ionia and the Greek mainland, where he exercises his religious and cultural authority at every stop to restore to the poleis a purer strain of Hellenism of which he is the paradigmatic and semi-divine standard-bearer. He is automatically recognized and greeted wherever he goes, and his blessings, pronouncements, and

52 A typical exchange can be seen at 3.34: “‘Am I to consider the universe living?’ asked Apollonius. ‘Yes, if you reason correctly,’ said Iarchas, ‘since itself it gives life to everything.’ ‘Should we then call it female,’ asked Apollonius, ‘or of the contrary, male sex?’ ‘Of both,’ was the answer...”
54 Swain (1999) 162: “If Hellenism was the most attractive system, it had to have the oldest and most secure authority–Pythagoras.”
55 Cf. Ibid. 196: “His message was traditional: if Greeks borrowed, they made the borrowing better. Apollonius had nothing to learn.”
admonitions carry the same weight as if from the gods themselves. In Ephesus, he discovers the source of a plague in the city that he had previously predicted (4.4); he leads the Ephesians to a statue of Heracles and points out a suspicious old beggar sitting at the base. Apollonius directs the locals to kill the man with stones, and it is subsequently discovered that it had been a demon whose corpse changed into a huge dog (4.10). In Athens, he gives religious advice such as the proper use of libations (4.20); during the festival of the Dionysia, he berates the Athenians for the effeminacy of their dancing while wearing clothes “more dainty than Xerxes’ harem” (4.21), which would have appalled their ancestors who fought at Salamis. A new cult to Achilles is reinstated in Thessaly at Apollonius’ urging (4.23), which is inspired by an earlier conversation with the ghost of Achilles at Troy (4.15). He visits and emends Greek shrines at Dodona, Delphi, Abae, Amphiaraus, Trophonius, and Helicon (4.24). After he encounters Spartans “with smooth legs and well oiled hair, not even wearing beards, with soft clothing” (4.27), he sends a corrective letter to the ephors which promptly leads to a revival of the ancient standards (such as the use of wrestling places and common meals). This is followed by a visit to Olympia, where Apollonius disapproves of the author of an encomium of Zeus, and delivers a series of lectures on the correct Greek virtues (4.30).

Throughout this section, Philostratus paints a portrait of Apollonius that could serve nicely as the centerpiece of his Lives of the Sophists—a traveling master-Hellene who lectures entire cities and draws lessons from the Homeric and Classical past. He is also depicted as a

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56 E.g. 4.1, in the sanctuary of Asclepius at Pergamum, “the god advised many of those seeking health to visit Apollonius, that being the god’s own wish and the will of the Fates.”

57 Anderson (1986) 140, speculates that the original victim in the oral tradition of Ephesus had possibly been a Cynic (‘dog’ in Greek).

58 Bowie (1978) 1681, notes that “most of the occasions where Philostratus’ Apollonius attacks Greeks for abandoning their ancestral ways are in fact derived from the letters.” If this is the case, it is because they do not run contrary to Philostratus overall message as propaganda for a revival of Hellenism.
pilgrim to sites sacred to the Greek tradition, much like the accounts of Pausanius, Lucian (De Dea Syria), and Aelius Aristides (Sacred Tales) one generation before Philostratus. However, Elsner points out that Apollonius is no mere pilgrim, but that “he comes not as suppliant but as master, not as client but as expert.”59 Thus, in addition to his role as guardian and patron of Hellenism, Apollonius functions as a model of the holy man, who would be revered (by pagans) or discredited (by Christians) for the next several centuries. Simon Swain describes the importance of the VA in this regard in that, “we have for the first time a celebration and justification for society at large of a Hellenism which is defined primarily through a combination of religion and philosophy, rather than through the general cultural and political inheritance.”60

At the end of Book Four, Apollonius travels to Italy for the first time, where he will come into conflict with Nero. The emperor is suspicious of philosophers and Apollonius receives a cold welcome to Rome. The sage is arrested after criticizing Nero’s singing ability, but quickly extricates himself by mysteriously causing the evidential scroll to be erased (4.44). The emperor follows with a ban on philosophical activity in Rome, and Apollonius and his retinue continue west to Hispania (4.47). This episode marks the first prominent example of Apollonius’ dealings with Rome and its emperors, which will become a central theme for the remainder of his travels.61 The further wanderings across the geography of the Roman Empire in Books Five and Six of the VA seem to show, due to their bulk and unorganized nature, an Apollonius whose travels are so widespread and superfluous that he almost physically represents the Greek world

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59 Elsner (1997) 27; he also compares this mastery of Apollonius in the VA with the apostle Paul in Acts. This will be a useful parallel for the ATh as well.
60 Swain (1999) 158.
61 Minor mentions of Rome already occasioned include: the advice about peaceful dealings given to King Vardanes (1.38), Iarchas’ discussion of the problems of Roman justice (3.25), and Apollonius’ rebuke to those in Smyrna who adopt Roman names (4.5). The last example is especially ironic considering that Philostratus himself used the Roman praenom Flavius.
itself--a place cannot be validated as Hellenistic unless the sage has been there and bestowed his blessing (or his admonition). The long section of his visit to the Gymnosophists of Ethiopia (6.2-28) is used foremost to contrast these ‘Naked Ones’ with the Brahmans. This time, however, there is to be no comparison as the Ethiopians are noticeably inferior to the Indians in matters of wisdom and knowledge, a fact that Apollonius make clear in his discussions with their leader, Thespesion. When the latter slanders the philosophy of the Indians and Greeks, going so far as calling Socrates an “old fool” (6.19), Apollonius makes a long defense of his choice to follow Pythagoras and lists the benefits of his philosophy. He also explains that the Ethiopians derived their own wisdom from the Indians, but decided to abandon it “to worship the gods in the Egyptian way rather than your own” (6.11), and he mocks the “strange and ridiculous shapes for the gods” of Egypt, which he labels as “dumb and worthless animals” (6.19). Apollonius and Thespesion discuss the Greek customs and laws, as well as the idea of justice, and Apollonius’ arguments are so convincing that a promising young Egyptian student, Nilus, is inspired to desert the Naked Ones to join the Greek sage (6.16). This section provides reinforcement and symmetry to the first journey to India and the authority and validation Apollonius obtained there. Like the earlier journey, it also extends, as Bowie comments, “Apollonius’ power and manifest traces of Hellenism even wider than the power of Rome.”

In Book Seven, Apollonius’ final destination, and most important mission, is the return to Rome to face the tyrant Domitian. Elsner explains the geographical implications of this fact that the sage must face his most serious philosophical test at the center of the Roman world affirms

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62 Bowie (1994) 194; he also speculates that “the point of stressing the Ethiopian’s inferiority to the Brahmans might then be to devalue the Ethiopian world created by Heliodorus” (195). It is implausible that Philostratus would have read Heliodorus as it would place the *terminus post quem* of the *Aethiopica* sometime before 238, the *terminus ante quem* of the *VA*. Morgan (1996) 417-421, argues for dating the *Aethiopica* no earlier than 350, on the strength of the resemblance between the fictitious siege of Syene in Book 9 to the historical siege of Nisibis in 350, described in Julian’s panegyrics of Constantius II, the *Orations* 1 and 3.
“his triumph over evil, over the center as well as the periphery, over the emperor in Rome.”63

This central motif of travel in the VA, though undoubtedly fictional, is used rhetorically by Philostratus to demonstrate time and again his protagonist’s authority. This rhetoric is used most of all as propaganda for the author’s idea of the exclusive preeminence and universal applicability of the cultural and religious values of Hellenism.64

The Acts of Thomas

Although the theme of travel is less ubiquitous in the ATh as in the VA, its religious propaganda is applied in a similar manner. The journey of Thomas from Jerusalem through Parthia to India has parallels with Apollonius’ early eastward journey, but that of the apostle, which ends in India and contains few geographic specifics, is more localized and ambiguous than the exploits of the globe-trotting Greek sage. However, the parallels become more apposite when seen from the perspective of Christianity as a whole, and in regards to the ecumenical nature of the apostolic missionary tradition, which is featured in the five AAA as well as the canonical gospels and Acts. Eusebius, quoting Origen, describes the traditional geography of these missions as, “The holy apostles and disciples of our Savior were dispersed about the whole world. Thomas, as the tradition has it, was allotted Parthia, and Andrew Scythia, and John Asia; and here he remained till he died at Ephesus. Peter must have preached in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia and Asia, among the Jews of the dispersion...What need is there to speak of Paul.”65 Therefore, the

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63 Elsner (1997) 34; he also draws a comparison here with Paul’s journey to Rome, which is “the culmination not only of all his travels but also of the whole book of Acts” just as Apollonius’ journey to Rome is “the acme of all Apollonius’ travels” (33).
64 E.g. Elsner (1997) 24: “Such rhetorical uses of travel belong to the armory of regular strategies for epideictic orators and sophists in proving themselves before new audiences.”
65 Eusebius, Church History 3.1.1, quoting from the third book of Origen’s Commentaries on Genesis. Other disciples in this tradition include: Matthias (Ethiopia), Philip (Syria), and Bartholomew (Armenia).
opening of the *ATh* is merely one variation on the theme of the Biblical “Great Commission,” in which Jesus instructs his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The *AAA* commonly use this theme by beginning with what Pervo calls the “apostolic lottery,” in which the apostles decide where they are each destined to carry this injunction to begin their ministry.

The *ATh* opens with a gathering of the 12 disciples in Jerusalem, where they “portioned out the regions of the world, in order that each one of us might go into the region that fell to him by lot, and to the nation to which the Lord had sent him” (1). When Thomas draws India, he refuses to go, saying that “he was not able to travel on account of the weakness of his body” (1). Jesus appears to him in a dream that night, saying, “Fear not, Thomas, go away to India and preach the word there, for my grace is with you” (1). Already we see the source of the authority behind the apostle’s journey: he is on a divine mission enjoined directly by God. In comparison, Apollonius was a man who became semi-divine through his wisdom and knowledge, and traveled as he pleased at his own direction to achieve his purpose (but who draws, nevertheless, from the implicit examples of earlier torchbearers of Greek culture, human and divine). Thomas, on the other hand, must sacrifice his personal desires in order to fulfill a mission that is given to him by another, rather than from within himself and his own learning and wisdom. This distinction is important, and will perhaps help to illustrate how similar themes and uses of propaganda would have vastly different messages for their audiences, one as an apologetic rejuvenation of the values of Hellenism, the other as the suppression and subversion of the physical world and existing order in favor of a new heavenly kingdom to come.

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67 Pervo (1994) 243. The other *AAA* are all incomplete, but examples are found in surviving portions of the *AAn*
Despite the entreaties of Jesus, Thomas continues to resist his calling to India. Jesus, then, is forced to use drastic measures to enforce his command—he sells Thomas into slavery. Abban, a merchant seeking skilled carpenters to work for King Gundaphorus of India, purchases the apostle for three pounds of silver. Thomas, now resigned to his fate, says, “I go wherever you wish, O Lord Jesus, your will be done” (3). Thus we already see, not only the beginning of an entertaining adventure story, but an example of the protagonist humbly accepting the role that was given to him by God, and sacrificing his own personal desires in order to obey. Biblical subtexts in this first Act also provide a hint of the religious message of the author. Thomas, who is also referred to as Judas, is sold by Jesus for silver, just as Judas Iscariot had done the same to Jesus. Likewise, Thomas is sold into slavery by his brother (and twin) Jesus, just as Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt in the book of Exodus. Thomas, like his Biblical precursors, is sent against his will in order that he might save others. His journey gains added weight and moral superiority, which is used throughout the ATh as religious propaganda.

As the story continues, Thomas helps Abban load a boat for their voyage, and “they had a fair wind; and they sailed cheerfully till they came to Andrapolis, a royal city” (3). It is a mystery how they left Jerusalem, which port they sailed from, and where the unknown Andrapolis (Man-city) is located (it must be somewhere on the Persian coast before coming to India proper). The important thing for the author and the readers, neither of whom would like know anything about geography so far to the east (Philostratus, too, made it up), was the journey itself. There is no paradoxography, ethnography, or allusions to the march of Alexander or other Greeks, only a man on a mission to a new land to spread his Christian message. Hans Drijvers points out the relation of Thomas to Jonah, “who did not want to go to Ninevah...at first declines
to go, and then travels by ship.”68 In Andrapolis there is a wedding feast for the prince and princess to which the king has compelled everyone to go. At this feast, Thomas sings a hymn in Hebrew (which only the flute-girl can understand) and is invited by the king to pray for the newly-weds in the marriage chamber. Jesus appears in to the couple after Thomas leaves and convinces them to not consummate the marriage so that they will remain pure to enter heaven. In the morning, the king hears this story and, mistaking Jesus for his mortal twin brother, angrily searches the city for Thomas. The apostle, along with Abban, however, had set sail “to the cities of India,” where the flute-girl and others go to join him (16). This concludes the first praxis, the only one with a setting outside of India. In fleeing the king, Thomas demonstrates the theme, common to the ATh as well as the other AAA, of entering a city, preaching and converting people, and escaping unharmed by the impotent local authorities.69 According to the author, it is his obeisance to Jesus and proclamation of his message that makes him unassailable.

“When the apostle came into the cities of India with Abban the merchant, Abban went away to greet King Gundaphorus and told him about the carpenter whom he had brought with him” (17). So begins the second act, with a conspicuous lack of specificity in its only geographic reference. The travel theme from this point emphasizes no place names (known or unknown) beyond the fact, which is occasionally reconfirmed, that the action takes place in India. The central point of reference shifts instead to a series of an emphasis on shorter travels on roads in and around unnamed cities. For example, when Thomas agrees to build a palace for King Gundaphorus, the king takes him “out of the gates of the city” (18) to show him where the foundation is to be laid. The apostle, however, takes the silver intended for building materials,

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68 Drijvers (1992) 326.
69 A variation of this, which occurs in the second half of the ATh, is the escape from prison. Cf. Paul in Acts.
and goes to “the cities and surrounding villages, distributing to the poor and needy, and bestowing alms” (19). When the king discovers what Thomas is doing, he brings the apostle into the city and throws him into prison. While the king is deciding on the proper punishment, his brother, Gad, dies, goes to heaven and sees the palace awaiting the king there. He is allowed to return to life in order to buy the palace from his brother, who is still unaware of its existence. This, then, is the relevant geography of the ATh—the earth in general (its cities and roads are unimportant except for spreading the Christian message) and heaven itself which is the ultimate goal (as well as, we shall see, hell, which is to be avoided). In the third act, Thomas leaves the city and approaches the second milestone, where he heals a young man who had been killed by a serpent. He leads the young man into the city and preaches to a great multitude. Then he proceeds to another road out of the city where he encounters the talking donkey, which he mounts and rides near to the gates of the city until it collapses and dies. This pattern continues for the remainder of the ATh, so that the apostle can be imagined in a state of constant travel between the many cities and villages of India. While Apollonius constantly moves between every known city and province in and out of the Greco-Roman world almost to the point of excess, the ATh gives no geographical information other than the fact that Thomas is preaching ‘in India’. This is in keeping with the message of the ATh that the present world, with its culture and history and social practices, is unimportant and only a stepping stone into the next, heavenly world. As Pervo writes about Luke’s Acts, “Travel could be used as a metaphor for the ‘journey of life’...with Christianity as a Way, symbolized by Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, on which he taught the meaning of that Way.”

70 Pervo (1987) 54.
theme of ‘travel’ is only important insofar as it helps to give the readers an idea of the universality of the Christian message. Thomas, who was Jesus’ twin brother not only physically but in deeds and earthly authority, is an extension of this mission of spreading the teachings of Jesus ‘to the ends of the earth’, and the readers, while being entertained and inspired by his example, would have no doubt understood this narrative thrust.
The Motif of Asceticism

*Vita Apollonii*

“Pythagoras shunned clothing made from animal skins, and abstained from all food or sacrifices of living creatures, since he never defiled altars with blood; instead honey cakes, frankincense, and hymns were this Master’s offerings to the gods” (1.1); “the practices of Apollonius were very much like this, and he approached wisdom and overcame tyrannies in a more inspired way than Pythagoras” (1.2). From the opening lines of the *VA*, we are thus made to understand clearly the centrality of Pythagorean influence on Apollonius’ life and ministry. As we have seen the ‘travel’ motif used by Philostratus to emphasize Greek culture especially, so the ascetic Pythagoreanism of Apollonius can be seen in an almost wholly religious context. The appearance and behavior of the sage is described in 1.8 as: “he refused the meats of animals as impure and dulling the mind, and lived off dried fruit and vegetables, saying that everything was pure which the earth produced unaided...he made going barefoot his way of dressing up, and wore linen clothes, refusing those made from animals. He also grew his hair long, and lived in the sanctuary.” These accoutrements of asceticism occasionally crop up in secondary anecdotes throughout the *VA*, but generally have no purpose other than establishing Apollonius’ credentials as a Pythagorean. Graham Anderson discusses this at length, concluding that Apollonius is only a ‘superficial’ Pythagorean, whose ‘philosophy’ could have just as readily come from any philosophic journalist.

Some examples include: Apollonius’ refusal of wine, meat, and sweetened fruits from a Babylonian eunuch (1.22); describing his habits to King Vardanes (1.32); being shorn of his “heavenly locks” in Domitian’s prison, which he treats with resignation and uses to deliver a witty rebuke to the tyrant’s agent (7.36).

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71 Some examples include: Apollonius’ refusal of wine, meat, and sweetened fruits from a Babylonian eunuch (1.22); describing his habits to King Vardanes (1.32); being shorn of his “heavenly locks” in Domitian’s prison, which he treats with resignation and uses to deliver a witty rebuke to the tyrant’s agent (7.36).

72 Anderson (1986) 136-137.
in this period, as evidenced by some of the more flamboyant characters in Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists*, as well as satires by Lucian such as *Philosophies for Sale* and *The Dependent Scholar*. It was only important for Philostratus’ readers to understand that Apollonius (the protagonist of the *VA*, if not the actual “historical” personage) lived a pure life modeled on Pythagoras, and that this was partially the provenance of his power.

Likewise, the Pythagorean trope of reincarnation appears as a recurring element, and most recognizable aspect, of that particular philosophy. Pythagoras’ earlier incarnation as Euphorbus is invoked in the first line of the *VA* (1.1), and again during the discussion with Iarchas (3.19); Apollonius tells Iarchas of his own previous life on Pharos, in which he was abducted by Phoenician pirates (3.24); and Apollonius makes a nocturnal visit after his death to confirm to a skeptical young student the truth of the concept of metempsychosis (8.31). Whether the actual Apollonius was a follower of Pythagoras is irrelevant, because Philostratus had a clear purpose in portraying his character as such, regardless of the historicity of the matter. In the previous chapter we saw how Pythagoras served as one of the models for Apollonius’ Indian journey, whence he affirmed and partly derived his cultural authority and imperative. The importance of Pythagoras as a model for Apollonius also stems from his unique position between both philosophical and religious traditions within the Greek world. Simon Swain describes how the *VA* is the first literary example of a new convergence of these two domains as a “justification for society at large of a Hellenism which is defined primarily through a combination of religion and philosophy rather than through the general cultural and political inheritance.” He then notes

\[\text{\textsuperscript{73}}\] Bowie (1994) 190, reads this episode as a parody of the novels.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{74}}\] Other references to the immortality of the soul include: a young disciple of the Brahmans who was formerly Palamedes in the Trojan War (3.22); Apollonius discovering that a strange lion in Alexandria was formerly Amasis, a king of Egypt (5.42); Apollonius exposing a past crime that reflects poorly on the Naked Ones (6.5); healing a dog-bitten boy who had once been Telephus the Mysian (6.43).
that the *VA* often takes the form of an apology for “philosophy as a spiritual system of personal living.”\(^{75}\) Pythagoras was more ancient and divine than Plato, which provided part of the impetus for his growing influence in the development of Middle and Neo-Platonism. Swain has detailed the ways in which Pythagoreanism thus became (by the time of the *VA*) a typical part of mainstream Platonism, which helped ensure its dominance into later antiquity, such as in the schools of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus.\(^{76}\) As pertaining to Philostratus’ adoption of the Pythagorean model, Swain concludes that Apollonius’ Pythagorean asceticism gives him “irreproachable credentials for his own serious role as a champion of a Hellenism which Philostratus was keen to claim as a universal solution.”\(^{77}\) Charles Talbert, in his classification of the types and purposes of ancient biographies, makes the same point, writing that “Neo-Platonism was no less a philosophy than a religion. Such biographies [such as the *VA*, as well as *Lives of Pythagoras*] functioned as instruments of religious propaganda in Mediterranean antiquity.”\(^{78}\) Just as Apollonius’ travels highlighted a largely culturally-oriented propaganda, so Philostratus reminds his readers of the ascetic nature of his sage for religious propaganda.

The final aspect of Apollonius’ asceticism is his sexual renunciation, which, as we shall see, draws close parallels with the *ATh*. A passage in 1.13 tells us, “Now Pythagoras was praised for saying that a man should not approach any woman except his wife, but according to Apollonius Pythagoras had prescribed that for others, but he himself was not going to marry or even have sexual intercourse...Thanks to his virtue and self-mastery, Apollonius was not subject to [sexual desire] even as an adolescent, but despite his youth and physical strength he overcame

\(^{75}\) Swain (1999) 158.
\(^{76}\) Ibid. 159-174. Not coincidentally, Porphyry and Iamblichus each authored a *Live of Pythagoras* that at least notionally drew some inspiration from the *VA*.
\(^{77}\) Ibid. 168.
\(^{78}\) Talbert (1978) 1646.
and “mastered” its rage.” This demonstrates Apollonius’ *sophrosyne*, a word which originally indicated ‘temperance’ or ‘moderation’ (e.g. Socrates in *Symposium*), but which came to denote more specifically by the time of Philostratus the idea of ‘chastity’ or sexual purity’ (e.g. *Gospel of Matthew*, the Greek novels). The *VA* contains many episodes dealing with the topic of *eros*, and in every instance it is represented in a pejorative sense, clearly contrasting with the sage’s sexual abstention. This differs from the depiction of *eros* in popular entertainment such as the novels, in which the protagonists generally remain chaste throughout a series of escapades, until they are united in socially-condoned marriage in the end. Apollonius, before setting off on his first journey, intuits the incestuous relationship of a wealthy Cilician with his step-daughter, and instructs the local priest to reject the man’s offerings at the sanctuary (1.10). In another episode soon thereafter, the Roman governor of Cilicia hears of the youthful beauty of Apollonius and makes lecherous advances against the sage. Apollonius insults the governor and scoffs at his warning, and it is revealed that this same Roman is publicly executed two days later for conspiring against the emperor (1.12). Even the hint of sexual matters in the presence of Apollonius can result in grave consequences. He continues to demonstrate his disgust at *eros* when he frees Menippus, a young Cynic pupil in Corinth, from the seductions of a beautiful and refined Phoenician woman. After Menippus disregards the warnings of the sage and plans to marry the woman regardless, Apollonius appears at the wedding and exposes the bride as a vampire (*lamia*) who is planning to gorge Menippus with pleasures so that she can later feast on his flesh (4.25). A similar dismissal of *eros* occurs later when Apollonius hears of a lovesick man who intends to marry the statue of Aphrodite in Cnidos, an event to which the locals raise

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79 Bowie (1994) 190, explains this as one of the differences between the *VA* and the novelistic genre. It will be even more relevant in section on the *ATH*. 38
no objection. The sage corrects the situation and safeguards the purity of the sanctuary by telling
the man that he would be eternally tortured like a latter-day Ixion if he followed through with his
plan (6.40). Philostratus unequivocally portrays his holy man as an incorruptibly divine soul,
well beyond concern for corporeal needs. Though he could hardly have expected his upper-class
readers to emulate this asceticism, the intended message of his moral superiority and ancient
heritage would have been understood.

The Platonic tradition, following works such as *Phaedrus*, expressed the ideal of using
erotic admiration and desire caused by physical beauty in order to lift the soul into a higher
plane; the object of beauty was generally a young boy, and physical consummation of love was
forbidden. Neither this Platonic emphasis on the elevation of the soul through a more chaste
expression of *eros*, nor its homoerotic overtones are to be found in the *VA*. Apollonius is
described as “handsomer than a young man” (8.29) even at his death, and he is accompanied his
entire life by a small gathering of (presumably) male followers--Damis is most prominent among
them, and there are episodes surrounding enthusiastic young converts such as Nilus and
Timasion. Yet never are these relationships shown to be anything more substantial than the
教学 of pure wisdom from master to his students. A noticeable omission in the *VA* which
further confirms Philostratus’ intent is a local Cilician tradition about an affair between
Apollonius and the mother of Alexander Peloplaton, a sophist from Seleucia. It merited a brief
mention later in Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists*, only to be refuted by referring back to the
*VA* itself.

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80 *VS* 575.
Apollonius’ asceticism is modeled upon that of Pythagoras, whom he upstages; unlike the earlier master, Apollonius never even hints at endorsing the institution of marriage. Philostratus emphasizes this aspect for its religious clout. As Bowie has stated, at the time of Philostratus, Pythagoras was the only model for an ascetic philosopher with divine powers. In order to spread his message of Hellenism, which, in addition to its traditional cultural heritage, was also beginning to coalesce around Pythagorean religion and Platonic philosophy, Philostratus needed to maintain his protagonist’s fierce connection with the figure who united these diverse elements—Pythagoras. While that ancient master was the only available model, he also happened to most conveniently serve the purposes of propaganda for Philostratus.

The Acts of Thomas

The modus operandi of asceticism in the ATh is similar to that of the VA, while at the same time having more prominence and vastly different exegetical implications. Just as the themes of travel and asceticism in the VA emphasized, respectively, a certain cultural and religious concept of Hellenism, so they serve divergent needs in the ATh. The theme of travel attempts to paint for the reader a general picture of Christianity in which it is shown as potent and destined to spread to all parts of the world; the theme of asceticism, however, which is ubiquitous in the ATh and presented mostly through the idea of sexual renunciation, can be seen as the theological raison d’être, and it provides the most important basis for the author(s) religious message. The only thing the reader learns about the tenets of Christianity is that its domain lies not in this world or in the physical body, but in the heavenly world and spiritual existence to come. This message is

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delivered in the form of a condemnation of all forms of *eros*, or sexual love, that symbolizes both the fallen state of the earthly world and the sinful nature of the physical body. The only redemption for readers of the *ATH* is the renunciation of *eros* and the adoption of *sophrosyne*. The character of Jesus Christ in this case is little more than a *deus ex machina*, who sets the action into motion by selling Thomas into slavery and propelling him forcibly into his ministry. In his subsequent preachments, there are no mentions of any of the works, deeds, and sayings of Jesus upon which the gospels and canonical *Acts* depend, and which form the basis of all branches of orthodox Christianity.82

The ascetic emphasis that lies at the heart of the *ATH* can be traced back to the Encratite sect of Christianity which had formed in Syria at least a half-century earlier.83 According to Eusebius, the origin of this ‘heresy’ which outlawed marriage, meat, and wine was to be found in the *Oration to the Greeks* by Tatian, a Syrian theologian (120-180).84 *Enkrateia*, the word from which the sect derived its name, simply means ‘self-control’, but came to denote, as with the similar term *sophrosyne*, the more specific practice of sexual chastity.85 Each episode in the *ATH* reinforces this principle, and the sermons of Thomas invariably lead to the prompt rejection of marriage and embrace of *enkrateia* by his attendants. That Thomas is the twin brother and, thus, the mortal mirror-image of Jesus serves to lend authority to his mission and deeds, and in a sense

82 As Drijvers (1992) 329 writes, there is “no mention of sin, grace, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension. Every man can freely achieve his own redemption by taking knowledge of the truth and renouncing sexuality.” This compares closely with Paul, rather than Jesus; in *Acts* he was propelled into missionary action after being blinded by God, and in his many epistles in the New Testament he also never mentions any biographical information about Jesus found in the gospels.

83 Epiphanius, a bishop of Cyprus writing at the end of the fourth century, first mentions the use of the *ATH* by the Encratites (*Against Heresies* 47.1).

84 Eusebius, *HE* 4.28. It may have been, however, an earlier group of Encratites rebuked by Paul in *1 Timothy* 4.14.

85 Aristotle in *Nichomachean Ethics*, 7, presents a nuanced view of the difference between these two very similar ideas; he regarded the practitioner of *sophrosyne* as superior to that of *enkrateia* because the latter still struggles with unruly desire, even if he subdues it with rationality, whereas the former is completely virtuous.
co-opts the name of Jesus for the purposes of the Encratite sect. For example, in the first praxis after Thomas blesses the wedding of the king’s daughter in Andropolis, Jesus appears to the newly-weds in the marriage-chamber and explains that “if you abandon this filthy intercourse you become holy temples, pure and free from afflictions and pains both manifest and hidden, and you will not be girt about with cares for life and for children, the end of which is destruction” (11). Not only is eros, even in the context of marriage, a wholly negative action, but it leads inevitably to offspring, the majority of which become “robbers and avaricious, people who flay orphans and defraud widows, become unprofitable, possessed by demons...lunatic or consumptive or crippled or deaf or dumb or paralytic or stupid” (11). There can be no doubt that the ascetic renunciation of sexuality, marriage, and procreation are of the utmost importance and centrality in the ATh, and places it firmly in its Syrian Encratite context. When the still-chaste bride explains her current catechesis to her father the next morning, she say that “I have set at naught this man, and this marriage, because I am bound in another marriage. And I have had no intercourse with a short-lived husband, the end of which is remorse and bitterness of soul, because I am yoked with the true man” (14). As Peter Brown succinctly summarizes, “To break the spell of the bed was to break the spell of the world.”

The focus on enkrateia at the expense of eros is a recurring feature in the ATh. In the third act we read about Thomas’ resurrection a young man who had been slain by a talking serpent. The serpent, in his own defense, explains that he slew the man because he was shamelessly kissing and engaging in intercourse with a beautiful woman from the next village, though in fact the serpent also killed the man due to jealousy. Even the serpent, realizes the error

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of this behavior, especially since it was done on the Lord’s day. The apostle commands the serpent to draw out the venom, which restores the man while destroying the serpent, and the sexual symbolism that the serpent represents. The man immediately repents of his sin and becomes a follower of Thomas after hearing a long sermon on the importance of chastity and temperance for salvation. Lucky for the revived man, but the lesson of this episode on the grave consequences of eros cannot be missed. There is a topical reminiscence in such a scene of Apollonius’ sorting out of the episodes involving the ‘vampire bride’ of Corinth and man in love with the statue of Aphrodite.

The acts revolving around the court of King Misdaeus, which serve as the narrative driving force of the second half of the ATh, illustrate the culmination of these conversions to enkrateia. The seventh through thirteenth praxeis demonstrate the gradual process of the entire circle of the king following the teachings of Thomas and embracing the ascetic practices he mandates. Especially central to the action is the series of events following Mygdonia’s sexual rejection of her husband Charisius after her conversion in act nine, which is duplicated with the wife of the king in act eleven. Thomas is eventually martyred because of this, but triumphs even after death when the king himself finally converts. Typically succeeding each conversion scene is a eucharist ceremony given by the apostle in which the new believer is ‘sealed’ with an unction of oil and a water baptism. The eucharist consists only of water and bread, befitting the abstemious En克拉特ite sect (and echoing Apollonius’ Pythagorean avoidance of wine).87

Another theological aspect to consider in the ATh is the ambiguous presence of the ‘Hymn of the Pearl’. It does not directly reflect asceticism, but it connects with and reinforces

87 Drijvers (1992) 333.
the Syrian world of the Encratites tangentially through its underlying Gnostic and Manichean foundation. The hymn is sung by Thomas in the ninth act while in prison (108-113), ostensibly charged with sorcery for turning Mygdonia against Charisius. The hymn tells the story of the son of a powerful eastern king who goes to Egypt to recover a pearl guarded by a serpent. Far from home, the boy forgets his origins and his mission and succumbs to pleasures offered by the Egyptians. When a letter arrives from home, he is reminded of his duty, wrests the pearl from the sleeping serpent, and returns to his father’s house after casting off the filthy and unclean clothing he had received in Egypt. Drijvers has mentioned the parallel to the parable of the prodigal son (*Matthew* 13.4).88 Pervo writes that the Cupid and Psyche allegory in Apuleius’ *Metamorphosis* is an apposite analogy.89 However, it can also be interpreted as a Gnostic view of the human state of being spirits lost in a world of fallen matter, forgetting our true nature. This is philosophically related to the position of the Platonists, who thought that matter was the lowest level of the cosmos and, therefore, existence. In the *ATH*, ‘matter’ is symbolized by sexuality, a flaw to be overcome with the help of a spiritual guide to special knowledge of the truth (i.e. Jesus). In the ‘Hymn of the Pearl’, the protagonist is identified as the younger brother, with the elder brother being the “second in command” and “our double” (110). Interestingly, it appears that the boy equates with Thomas, with the older brother being Jesus (and God, the Father, being the king). The hymn was also preserved in a Manichean book called the “Psalms of Thomas,” written in Coptic in north Africa. The Manicheans also rejected the canonical *Acts* and formed their canon around the five *AAA* (including the *ATH*).90 Manicheanism was, after all,

89 Pervo (1994) 250.
90 This grouping of the *AAA* is first attested in the fourth century by Philaster of Brescia. The author is described by Photius (*Codex* 114) to be Leucius Charinus, who may have been, according to Drijvers (1992) 323, merely a ‘legendary’ author in Manichean circles.
a Gnostic religion that affected strong influence in Syria, as well as a resemblance to the Platonic ideal of the higher status of the immortal soul to the material, corporeal state.

It is important to remember that when the *ATh* was first composed in the first half of the third century, there was no uniform or universal ‘Christianity’, but rather a heterogeneous mix of ‘Christianities’.

Thus, the religious propaganda of the *A Th* makes its case not only in the specific environment of the local Encratite version of Christianity, but for what was believed by the author (and, one imagines, the readers) to be the ‘correct’ Christianity, or the only ‘true’ version, no matter the location or cultural milieu. Successful propaganda could win faithful followers to the vision of *enkrateia* contained in the *A Th*, with its message ideally to be received by the world at large, while also, whether intended or not, asserting itself within the world of the disparate and competing creeds of Christianity. The textual fluidity allowed the message to survive and adapt to different environments in a way that perhaps the *VA* could not. As Drijvers notes, its many recensions and its translations into Latin, Armenian, Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic attest to its popularity in later centuries even in orthodox circles.

For this reason, they need not necessarily be seen as radical as they were able to be used and interpreted in ways that fit the needs of a given community—”generation after generation of Christians read them [AAA] with pleasure and reworked them with gusto,” remarks Peter Brown. Indeed, the *A Th* was not officially declared “heretical” by the Roman Catholic Church until the Council of Trent in 1545. Brown also describes how the severe asceticism of pagan holy men (such as Apollonius) mirrors that of their Christian coevals (such as Thomas), while having a different purpose: pagan

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91 For more on the diversity of early Christian groups and their scriptures, see Ehrman (2003a) and (2003b).
92 Drijvers (1992) 324. For more on textual fluidity and recensions in the *AAA* (though focusing on the *APr*), see Thomas (2003).
philosophers were typically members of the upper class, and only wished “to snatch their charges away from the bustle of the forum, not from the marriage bed.”  

Pervo argues that the conception of chastity had become more popular by the time of the *AAA* in general, and that this idea was used by the authors of the *AAA* as a “destabilizing factor in social life.” The *VA*, with its emphasis on Pythagoreanism and Hellenist cultural values, attempts to fortify society from within by asserting the importance of philosophy and ancient Greek tradition. The *ATH*, however, envisions a radical reworking of society from without, by challenging the institution of marriage itself, in order to usher in a future kingdom in the heavenly world.

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94 Ibid. 180.
95 Pervo (1987) 128; he cites the evolution of the novels from early to late as evidence of the growing importance of chastity, and compares the *AAA’s* rejection of traditional societal and civic values *contra* that of Luke’s *Acts*.
96 Brown (1988) 183, explains the difference by assessing the individualistic, versus societal, focus of pagan philosophers like Porphyry, saying that “He did not think his renunciation would have any social repercussions, beyond a certain distancing from the normal habits of public life. For him, as for most pagan philosophers, human society was a mere sliver in the huge, godlike organism of the universe.”
The Motif of Wonders

_Vita Apollonii_

When Damis first offers his services to Apollonius, saying that he speaks all of the barbarian languages and offering to translate, the sage replies that he knows them all without even needing to learn them—“Do not be surprised if I know all human languages: I also know all that humans keep unspoken” (1.19). This example of Apollonius’ preternatural abilities is one of many, and illustrates a fundamental ambiguity of the sage: do his powers come from his divine nature, his pure lifestyle and devotion to philosophy, or is it simply magic or sorcery? For Philostratus, there is no doubt that the answer lies with the former, that Apollonius was much more than a mere magician. As we shall see, he appropriated the existing local oral traditions about Apollonius, and invented his own anecdotes, in order to shape his version of the sage into a wonder-working super-man and peerless champion of Hellenism.

The Greek understanding of the ideas of a magician or wizard (goēs) versus a wonder-worker (thaumaturge) was significantly different, and the contrast between the two was a relatively common trope in literature by the time of Philostratus. The term ‘goēs’ would be used by one’s enemies in an attempt to discredit or prosecute the person as a practitioner of goēteia, ‘black’ magic or sorcery. Thaumata, on the other hand, are ‘wonders’ or ‘miracles’ that have no necessary association with magic. In addition, thaumazein (“to wonder, marvel, or be

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97 Examples are found in Biblical literature, including all the AAA (e.g. Simon Magus’ contest against Peter in Acts and the APt), as well as with historical figures such as Plutarch, Favorinus, Apuleius, Aelius Aristides, Alexander of Abonoteichus, and Peregrinus ‘Proteus’; regarding such figures, Anderson (1986) 146, has written that, “educated men were quite happy to affect supernatural connections which their opponents could label black magic”.

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shocked at”) bears a rich philosophical heritage from at least as early as Plato and Aristotle.\footnote{In \textit{Theaetetus} 155d, Plato has his teacher Socrates exclaim, “Wonder is the only beginning of philosophy”; Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} 982b: “it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize.” This interpretation has continued to carry intellectual currency, with Martin Heidegger writing in 1955 that “\textit{thaumazein} is the astonishment wherein philosophizing originates” (\textit{What is Philosophy?}).}

Whereas \textit{goēteia} is used almost exclusively in a derogatory sense, \textit{thaumaturgy} describes, more favorably, not only the sort of ‘rational’ wonders uncovered through philosophy, but also was often used in regards to the ability of Christian saints to work miracles. It is the first priority of Philostratus to ‘set the record straight’ and to place his protagonist firmly in the correct ‘camp’, writing at 1.2 that “men know him not because of his true wisdom, which he practiced as sage and sanely, but some men...put his down as a wizard (\textit{goēs})...a sage of an illegitimate kind.” He continues by invoking historical philosophical forebears to Apollonius such as Empedocles, Democritus, Plato, Socrates, Anaxagoras, and Pythagoras. All of them had either consorted with wizards, demonstrated foreknowledge of events, or shown superlative wisdom, yet never “stooped to the black arts” or “passed for wizards” themselves, just as Apollonius’ powers do not justify “imputing to him this kind of wisdom (\textit{goēteia})” (1.2). Philostratus states explicitly that it is the goal of the \textit{VA} to correct the general ignorance about the nature of Apollonius, and how he succeeded in being considered a divine and supernatural being through his “habits and temper of wisdom” (1.2). In order to give at least the appearance of truth, he then lists his sources of information about the life of Apollonius, citing the notes of Damis, the testimony of Apollonius himself, Maximus of Aegeae, and Moeragenes; concerning the last, he writes that “we must not pay attention to Moeragenes, who composed four books about Apollonius, and yet was ignorant of many circumstances of his life” (1.3). Talbert deduces from this statement that this earlier
biography had attacked Apollonius as a magician;\textsuperscript{99} whether or not this is correct, it is clear that Philostratus has incentive enough to shape the image of his version of the sage for his own purposes of propaganda.

The initial eastward journey provides an opportunity to recount some of the various manifestations of Apollonius’ \textit{thaumata}. In addition to his aforementioned omni-lingualism (which, we learn at 1.20, applies even to animals), the sage practices dream divination—he interprets a dream sent by the gods instructing him to help the Greek descendants of the Eritreans (1.23). A rational explanation for this ability is provided in the subsequent book during a discussion with King Phraotes, explaining that his skill at divination comes from his pure lifestyle and avoidance of wine (“the soul detects the truth all the more easily when it is not muddied by wine” 2.37). At 2.4, Apollonius’ party encounters a ‘hobgoblin’ (\textit{empusa}) near the Caucasus, and, naturally, the sage is the only one possessing the knowledge that hurling insults at the creature would drive it away. When King Vardanes seeks Apollonius’ approval for, among other things, a miraculous grotto carved under the Euphrates River and the cyclopean walls of his city of Ecbatana (which are so big that the gods dwell inside them), the sage dismisses them by delivering characteristic \textit{bon mots} (1.38). In a similar incident, Damis marvels aghast at a virtuoso display of archers in the court of King Phraotes, but Apollonius pays them no heed, preferring to discuss the ‘wonders’ of philosophy and the king’s Greekness (2.28). Philostratus makes clear, and the reader can have no doubt, that Apollonius is the arbiter of \textit{thaumata}, and that even in a world filled with such amazing phenomena, the real wonder is Greek philosophy and culture.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{99} Talbert (1978) 1621; cf. Bowie (1994) 188, who says that Philostratus “dismissed with such venom” the work of Moeragenes only in order to supersede it as the standard biography.

\textsuperscript{100} Guez (2009) 247, makes a similar point.
Throughout the *VA*, Apollonius continues to demonstrate diverse wonders, generally falling into classifications such as prophecy or foresight (4.4, 4.18, 5.29, 6.32, 7.8), mastery of demons or spirits (4.10, 4.20, 4.25, 6.27), and healings (4.45, 6.43). At 4.45, Apollonius resurrects a young woman of consular rank in Rome, after which Philostratus speculates that perhaps he saw a spark of life in the deceased, unnoticed by the doctors, or he may have just revived her from the dead *tout court*. “The true explanation of this has proved unfathomable to me no less than to the bystanders,” he writes (4.45). As with many of the ‘miracles’ he reports, Philostratus does not exclude a rational explanation, nor does he feel the need to completely eliminate the wondrous sense of the event, which would remain for the audience and the readers in any case.\(^\text{101}\) Anderson labels this type of incident as ‘popular medicine’, while making the point that miracles in the *VA* can all be explained as part of the literary and rhetorical structure of the work (“clairvoyance is only equivocations or after the fact; advance prophecy is vague, self-fulfilling or both”).\(^\text{102}\) In the end, it results that in no way can Apollonius be seen as a *goēs*, though he is certainly something more than human.

The ability to astonish is a central characteristic of Apollonius in the *VA*. Everywhere he travels, he is greeted with the *thaumazein* of his audience and onlookers. When he enters Ephesus, workers put down their tools to follow him, admiring him even at first sight for his wisdom, clothes, bearing, and beauty (4.1). Everything he says is oracular and all ears strain to hear his pronouncements, with his sheer wisdom itself serving as the most profound ‘wonder’ of all. Jean-Phillipe Guez finds a parallel in this phenomenon in the reception of the narrative by the readers. He explains that there are two types of readers: the ‘good’, who are scientific, adult,
and active; and the ‘bad’, who are emotional, juvenile, and passive. His conclusion, then, is that the *VA* depends on neither the intelligence of the over-critical reader nor a naive one who accepts everything; rather, the text manipulates the reader into suspending both belief and intelligence to ideally accept the fictional contract created by Philostratus.\(^{103}\) When Apollonius mysteriously erases the scroll of Tigellinus (4.44), or amazes Damis by quietly shaking off his fetters in prison (7.38), there is no pretense of historicity, nor is there any attempt at rational explanation. In these cases, as is typical for a pagan holy man,\(^{104}\) Apollonius’ divinity is asserted confidently, but privately. By the end, the limits of the sage’s abilities truly know no bounds: he is able to take money directly from the shrine of Zeus for his travel expenses (8.17). When he is refused access to a shrine of Trophonius by the priests, who accuse him of *goēteia*, he proceeds on his own authority, removes four large obelisks from the entrance, and descends into the cave for seven days (8.19). The miraculous stories of his death are recounted skeptically and are far from fully endorsed by Philostratus;\(^{105}\) even his postmortem appearance to vindicate metempsychosis is only seen by a single young student in a dream—"the ‘doubting Thomas’ theme ‘demanded by hagiography,’” as Anderson describes it.\(^{106}\)

Throughout the travels and wonders of Apollonius, the presence of kings, both Roman and oriental, is a recurring theme. I have already mentioned the how the ‘wonders’ of the east, displayed by the kings Vardanes and Phraotes, pale in comparison to the brilliance of philosophy and ‘Greekness’ itself. Later, Apollonius easily overcomes the threat of Nero with the trick of

\(^{103}\) Guez (2009) 244-250.

\(^{104}\) Fowden (1982) 50.

\(^{105}\) The situation is reminiscent of *The Passing of Peregrinus*, when Lucian (who was conspicuously unmentioned by Philostratus in his *Lives of the Sophists*) cynically tells gullible passers-by of miraculous signs upon the death of Peregrinus (while rationally explaining the truth to educated types).

\(^{106}\) Anderson (1986) 145.
the erased scroll, and ultimately wins the battle by predicting the emperor’s demise, as well as
the succeeding military events of the short regimes of Galba, Vitellius, and Otho (5.13). Upon
arriving in Egypt, he predicts the ascension of Vespasian, a ‘good’ emperor who earns the full
support of the sage. Apollonius demonstrates his superior wisdom over rival philosophers Dio
and Euphrates by vouching for monarchy as the best political system in front of the new
emperor. He subsequently uses his foresight and gifts of prophecy to ‘see’ the destruction of the
temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome the day after it happened (5.29), cryptically predict the
premature death of ‘good’ emperor Titus (6.32), and have awareness of a warrant for his arrest
issued by Domitian, causing him to leave early for Rome (7.8). This final confrontation with the
stereotypical ‘bad’ emperor is the most serious challenge to the sage, one of which he
nevertheless acquits himself with relative ease. After he repudiates the tyrant’s charges of
‘wizardry’ and ‘subversion’, he simply vanishes from the court and appears in front of Damis in
southern Italy the next day (8.7). Once more, revenge is exercised with his prophetic powers
when he halts in mid-speech to describe to an Ephesian crowd the assassination of Domitian in
Rome as it is occurring (8.25). These episodes show Apollonius as no local goēs, but as an
influential wonder-working philosopher on the world stage, who “could humble tyrants and hold
whole cities in his hand.” He is more than willing to lend his wisdom to kings in support of
Hellenism, but he is never beholden to them outright--there is no doubt that for Apollonius,
Roman rule was subservient to Greek culture. This can be seen in his praise for the liberation of
Greece by the otherwise ‘bad’ emperor Nero, and his displeasure of the ‘good’ emperor

107 This incredible episode is one that derives from local Ephesian tradition pre-dating Philostratus, and mentioned
by the serious historian Cassius Dio.
108 Fowden (2005) 161; cf. Bowie (1994) 194. In this respect, he is akin to such redoubtable sophists as Polemo,
Scopelian, and Herodes Atticus in Philostratus’ Lives of the Sophists.
Vespasian for retracting the decree (5.41). In the end, his purpose has been sufficiently achieved, and his power already thoroughly confirmed, that he simply ignores the summons from Nerva, predicting that they both had little time remaining (8.27).\footnote{Elsner (1997) 34.}

Among the educated and upper-class readers of the \textit{VA}, Philostratus’ priority would have been most likely to seek approval from his patrons Septimius Severus and Julia Domna, along with her Syrian court of sophists.\footnote{Cf. however, Burridge (1992) 181, who states that despite the claim of imperial patronage, Philostratus “is still aiming for an audience which likes a story, and the style befits popular narrative.”} Despite the gradual shift towards social marginality of the pagan holy man in later antiquity,\footnote{Fowden (2005) describes this process of decline; he writes, however, how philosophers were still held in respect in the minds of common people even as late as 8\textsuperscript{th} century Constantinople, when “philosophers were rumored to have been privy to the secrets of the mysterious ancient images that adorned the city’s public places” (162).} Philostratus was writing at a time when this archetype still held influence and imagination; indeed, he has no qualms about presenting such a well-crafted and mainstream holy man who unapologetically generates universal \textit{thamazein}. In making his protagonist a paradigm of propaganda for Hellenism, perhaps Philostratus also wanted to convey a sense of cultural and intellectual legitimacy on the regime of the current African emperor and Syrian empress. Swain writes how the Severan dynasty presented problems for Hellenism in the Roman Empire.\footnote{Swain (1999) 159.} The negative reaction to Roman rule typical of Hellenism, especially during the period of the Second Sophistic, had to be mitigated in order to maintain in the stasis in the social order of the empire, which equal benefited the rulers and the cultural elites. The cult of sun-worship in Emesa, the home of Julia Domna, is echoed by Apollonius’ Pythagorean sun-
worship. Perhaps Philostratus, in his apology for Hellenism, wanted also to counter a growing Christian influence in the eastern empire, even within the circle of the empress.\(^{113}\)

With the language he uses and the way he shapes his narrative account of the ‘wonders’ of Apollonius, Philostratus achieves two purposes simultaneously: he creates an impression of truthfulness despite its ‘fictional’ aspects, and he presents Apollonius as a universal, divine sage rather than a local magician. Therefore, the *thaumata* attributed to the sage and the *thaumazein* they produced in the witnesses (and readers) act as a method of propaganda for Philostratus’ greater purpose of fostering and creating an apology for a Greek revival, even in a changing world that no longer necessarily viewed the traditional culture and religion of the elite as sufficient or desirable.

**The Acts of Thomas**

The ‘wonders’ of the *ATh* are generally analogous to those of the *VA*, though, as with the other motifs, they reflect quite different intentions. We find once again the standard *thaumata* of prophecies (8, 78, 142, 150), exorcisms (20, 33, 45, 77), and healings and resurrections (20, 33, 41, 81, 170). The presence of talking animals (33, 41, 78), a motif common even in philosophical circles at this time,\(^{114}\) helps to establish and magnify the overall sense of astonishment for the reader, similar to the Indian paradoxographies in the *VA*. ‘Wonders’ in the Christian context are typically labelled as ‘miracles’; while sharing with ‘marvel’ the same Latin root of *mirabilis*, it nonetheless connotes a more specifically Christian idiom. The distinction

\(^{113}\) Julia Mamaea, the niece of Julia Domna and mother of the emperor Severus Alexander, converted to Christianity; Origen, the Christian theologian, may have also visited the court of the empress. Swain (1999) 185, speculates that Christians were possibly only one of several ‘minor threats’ to be countered.

\(^{114}\) Pervo (1987) 128.
between the implied malevolence of *goēteia* and the more benign *thaumaturgy* also reappears, with Thomas being accused of ‘sorcery’ or ‘black magic’ at every turn, often incarcerated, and ultimately martyred, because of it. Naturally, the strength of his message depends on the attribution of his powers and miracles to Jesus Christ. Thomas is not a goēs, and his *thaumata* occur because of his faith in a divine power outside of himself which demonstrates its mastery over the world. Likewise, there are many forces of evil present in the world, typically represented as demons, which are constantly confronted and cast out of their victims by the apostle. Caroline Johnson describes how the image of Thomas in the *ATH* walks a fine line between goēs (or *magos*, in her translation) and holy miracle-worker, taking the powerful attributes of the former (including using formulaic magical incantations and rituals), while distancing the apostle from its negative and evil connotations. Demons, magicians, and false prophets all act as foils to the true divine ‘wonders’ of Christianity. In this larger conflict, the opponents always seek to portray the other side as ‘evil’, and, in order to be successful, Thomas has to win the battle over terminology with his miracles and his message. Just as Thomas is consistently labelled a ‘sorcerer’ by his adversaries (101, 104, 106, 134, 163), so this same weapon is also used by the apostle against his persecutors (33, 78). In the *ATH*, as well as other early Christian narratives, the apostle or agent of Jesus is invariably the victor in conflicts against other magicians or evil forces, in most cases even after his own martyrdom. This is a powerful form of propaganda, vindicating and clearly demonstrating which side God has favored and selected (and which the readers, too, would understand and be well-served to heed).

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116 This theme is found in other *AAA* such as the *APt* and the *Acts of Philip* 6.1.
117 Other enemies of apostles described as evil include: *Acts* 8.20-23 (Simon Magus), 13.10 (Elymas), *AJ* 63 (Callimachus is an ‘emissary of Satan’), and *APt* 15-16 (Magus is the ‘son of Satan’).
The miracles of Thomas gain additional emphasis through their public display. Public exorcisms or resurrections, while themselves acting as powerful testimony to the power of the apostle, are nevertheless occasions to further attract a large crowd of spectators, who then listen to the post-miracle sermon as a captive audience. These sermons give the apostle the opportunity to proclaim whence he derives such demonstrable power (from Jesus), to discuss how one can partake (practice the ascetic regimen of *enkrateia*, in the case of the *ΑΤﻬ*), and what rewards (heavenly kingdom) or punishments (hell, which is described in chapter 54 in great detail by a woman raised from the dead) will ensue. As Thomas travels and continues his ministry, ‘multitudes’ of listeners and disciples everywhere increase in number and follow him on the roads and to new cities, awaiting new miracles and more teaching. This version of wandering sage and thaumaturge contrasts with that of Apollonius--while the latter occasionally draws enthusiastic new disciples (Timasion at 6.9, Nilus at 6.15), the thrust of his ‘ministry’ focuses more on private philosophical reflection and improvement. Such *thaumata* as the vanishing scroll (4.44) and the breaking of his shackles (7.38) are done quietly, with Tigellinus the only witness for the former, and Damis for the latter. While the Platonism and Pythagoreanism of the *ΒΑ* are inherently individual pursuits, most sects of Christianity, even from the earliest days, maintained a focus on proselytizing. The ubiquitous nature of miracles in all Christian literature attests to the fact that such ‘wonders’ are an effective tool of propaganda, for entertaining and encouraging the faithful, as well as teaching the desired

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118 See Note 96.
message. This is true no matter the sect, and in the case of the *ATH* the Encratite message of ascetic sexual renunciation was the foremost message delivered in post-miracle sermons.

Another occasion of using ‘wonders’ as a vehicle of propaganda is the use of and escape from prisons--a common literary device in its own right. Thomas is imprisoned three times in the *ATH* (21, 106, 140), each time accused of being a wicked *goēs*. In the second half especially, much of the action around the apostle, and his miracles, takes place in the confines of the prison. During his incarcerations, his new, especially female, followers, such as Mygdonia and Tertia, often visit his cell, bribing their way past guards, in order to continue to listen and learn more from the apostle. Thomas greets them by emanating supernatural light that guides them and allows them to see through the darkness (118, 153). Furthermore, he is never physically restricted to his cell--on two occasions he miraculously opens the gates to leave the prison in order to lead a eucharist ceremony (119, 154), only to return to his cell later on his own volition (122, 162). He stays in prison by choice, using it as yet another ideal place to demonstrate *thaumata* and preach his message. Judith Perkins notes how such prison breaks, as well as scenes in female bedrooms, are used to reinforce the message, common to all the *AAA*, of subversion of the social order. The confines of prison walls are representative of secular authority, and their impotence over apostles like Thomas, representatives of the authority of Jesus, is illustrative of the divide between the earthly and heavenly realms. We have already seen how most early Christian sects, including the Encratites, rejected any allegiance to the established social and political order of the Roman Empire, especially through subversion of the

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120 So, Pervo (1987) 126.
121 Pervo (1987) 21, finds at least 30 examples of prison escape scenes in ‘aretalogical literature’, and it is also a stock novelistic feature.
institution of marriage. Here again, we see the tables turned as prison is not to be escaped from, “but redefined as space of instruction and community building” for Christian groups.\textsuperscript{123} This is religious propaganda, fitting Pervo’s description of Luke’s \textit{Acts} that it represents “the triumph of a new religion over all opposition.”\textsuperscript{124}

One final aspect of the ‘wonders’ motif, as with the \textit{VA}, is the presence of kings and royal relations. We have seen how Apollonius approval or rejection of kings is best understood in terms of their acceptance of Greek cultural superiority. In the \textit{ATH}, kings are similarly used as a tool of the author for validating his propagandistic message. Like Apollonius, never do we see Thomas as a servant of more powerful kings, but rather the opposite. Thomas, who is sold into slavery, often imprisoned, and finally martyred, is nevertheless the stronger party and victorious in the end. The conversion of the bride and bridegroom in the first act leads to the king of Andrapolis searching for Thomas, the ‘sorcerer’, unsuccessfully. We can suppose that the future king and queen of that city will also have some success in defending and increasing support for their newfound Christian faith. Likewise, in the second act, Thomas is imprisoned by King Gundaphorus for failing to build the agreed-upon palace. The brother of the king, Gad, vindicates the apostle after his temporary death and heavenly visit, leading to his conversion, and the conversion of the king himself. Another entire temporal realm is hastily Christianized, with little resistance. The final long narrative of the court of King Mysdaeus is more of a challenge, but equally succumbs to a domino-effect of conversions, safely culminating in the last chapter with the king himself. This theme represents not only a symbolic victory of the apostle (as a representative of Christ) over the rulers of the earth, but also describes the upper-classes as being

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid. 125.
\textsuperscript{124} Pervo (1987) 24.
susceptible to and ultimately accepting of the Christian message. Even if such a reality was far from common at the time, the mostly poor and disenfranchised masses that so far incorporated early Christianity could well imagine that their long-term survival depended on eventually winning over aristocrats as well.

The *ATH*, like all the *AAA*, is a popular book whose readers would have been largely uneducated or outside the mainstream of society, as opposed to the intellectual, upper-class readers of the *VA*. Philostratus focused more on philosophical conversion, with the mostly ‘rational’ miracles of Apollonius filling an entertaining, if useful, role in making his point. The *ATH*, on the other hand, likely counted on its readers taking the miracles of the apostle quite literally, and respecting the theological message all the more in light of them. While this allows the *ATH* to convey its encratic message, according to Pervo, the *AAA* need not be seen as primarily theological: “Even if the *AAA* said no more than that Christianity is superior because it produces more miracles, they would still be determined by a way of speaking about God.”

To the readers who were already in the Christian camp, there was no problem; even for the curious pagan reader, there would be little difference between the types of miracles seen in the *ATH* and the ‘wonders’ typical of the novels or even the *VA*. It was the message of the texts themselves, in the form of religious propaganda, that would have made the most impact and determined the reader’s reaction.

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125 Pervo (1987) 123.
Conclusion

In the *Vita Apollonii* and the *Acts of Thomas* we have seen how some narrative techniques and motifs are used by the authors as a method for delivering propaganda, and persuading the readers of the authority and power that lies behind their message. In the case of the *VA*, ‘travel’ is used to represent the centrality and superiority of Greece and Greek culture, with Apollonius being the wanderer to surpass all others (i.e. Dionysus, Heracles, Alexander, and Pythagoras) in the spread of wisdom and *paideia*. From his ‘asceticism’, Apollonius is presented as an archetypal Pythagorean philosopher, thus drawing authority from the antiquity, prestige, and divine credentials of Pythagoras, as well as validating the growing religious and philosophical symbiosis of Middle and Neo-Platonism that was occurring in Philostratus’ day. The motif of ‘wonders’ demonstrates (even symbolically for the rational reader) the extent of the abilities Apollonius derives from his adherence to Greek wisdom, *paideia*, and pure lifestyle--powers to which even Roman emperors are subservient. In the *ATh*, ‘travel’ represents the universality of the Christian message, and its destiny of spreading to the ends of the earth. Thomas’ ‘asceticism’ is the theological foundation of the work, in which the specifically Encratic version of Christianity makes its case for the rejection of this earthly world and society in favor of the future heavenly kingdom to come--the way to gain this reward is total sexual renunciation and avoidance of wine and meat. The ‘wonders’ performed by the apostle are done in the name of Jesus, and show the power and validity of Christ as opposed to evil demons, magicians, and false prophets of the world. Each of these themes fills the narrative not only with entertaining novelistic features, but also represent the authors’ purpose and vision for the world.
The century that succeeded these two works witnessed a rapidly growing number of Christians, as well as more serious philosophical and political attempts to counter the versatile new faith. Philostratus’ *VA* became something of a benchmark for future *Lives* of Pythagoras and more explicitly anti-Christian tracts by such intellectual heavy-weights as Porphyry and Iamblichus. The pagan Hierocles used Apollonius to parallel and discount the life of Christ, but he was rebutted by the Christian historian Eusebius. Christian thinkers also began to wage their own battle for control over the philosophical high ground, with Platonists such as Origen, Basil, and, ultimately Augustine, finding ways to justify and incorporate Greek philosophy for their own purposes of reinforcing Christian theology. This was a long struggle, however, and even after the conversion of Constantine and the inexorable victory of Christianity, older narrative could be used to create new propaganda. In his hagiographical biography of Constantine, Eusebius deliberately casts the new emperor as a sage and wonder-worker in the mold of Apollonius.126 Saints’ *Lives*, such as Anthony, also drew from earlier pagan themes of wisdom and asceticism to portray their protagonists with the same authority as Philostratus endowed his heroic character. Pagan writers continued to push back, with Eunapius writing his own *Lives of the Sophists* in which he exclaims that Apollonius is “not merely a philosopher but a demi-god, half man, half god.”127 His shrine in Tyana, which was established by Severus Alexander, would continue to be revered even by Christians, as evidenced by the Bordeaux Pilgrim in 333 CE.128 Though the *VA* was well-written, more so than the sub-literary *ATH*, and conveyed a strong message that favored the long-established elites of Greek culture (including the Roman

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philhellenes), it was not enough to successful bolster its cause. The decline of Hellenism was gradual and not based on any single factor. Swain speculates that a growing disconnect between the effort and reward of ‘being Greek’, which Christianity capitalized on, especially at a socio-religious level.\footnote{Swain (1999) 173.} This did not mean that philosophers completely disappeared,\footnote{See Note 111.} and Apollonius himself lived on even in the Muslim world as ‘Balinus’, whose talismans protected cities against natural disasters or enemy forces.\footnote{Fowden (2005) 162.} Likewise, the success of Christianity did not mean that all of its disparate sects also survived. The Enratite version of Christianity preached by the $A Th$ helped to lead its followers to the new religion and hasten the weakening of paganism, though it still had ahead of it the conflict over the ‘correct’ Christianity. The adoption of the five $AAA$ by the Manicheans in place of the canonical $Acts$ only meant that these books would lose influence when Manicheanism itself came to be considered ‘heretical’.\footnote{Augustine converted to Christianity from Manichean in 387, around the same time this sect was increasingly persecuted from the reign of Theodosius I. Several forms of Manicheanism continued well into the Medieval period, however.} The $A Th$ remained popular and spread far and wide, as evidenced by its many translations and history of recensions. By the time of the establishment of the ‘orthodox’ canon in 367,\footnote{Ehrman (2003a) 229-246; Athanasius produced in 367 the first New Testament canon that exactly matches the one that would eventually be considered ‘genuine’.} it had lost any hope of remaining valid. It was finally relegated to status as a historical footnote when Augustine, the philosophical patron of western Catholic Christianity, ruled in favor of the social order, in which security depended on the male as head of the household in a sanctioned marriage.\footnote{Augustine, $De Bono Coniugali$ 18.21:388, from: Brown (1988) 404.} The religious and cultural propaganda of the $VA$ and the $A Th$ long maintained
influence in the evolving Greco-Roman world, even if both were ultimately unsuccessful in their immediate aims.
Bibliography


